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A Brief Collection for Contextual Activities for Language Instruction

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> The unknown is an abstraction; the known a desert, but what is half-known is the breeding ground for imagination. Juan Jose Saer (1990)

Rather than recommend a particular instructional methodology for the L2 classroom we consider students in the class best as a family of learners, one in which beliefs and relationships vary greatly. Accordingly, motivations for learning a new language also vary. It takes only a brief perusal of L2 literature to recognize that the growth and salience of work in motivational and contextual-based methods but also a proliferation of varied approaches to contextual-based methodologies (Dornyei, 2001) profoundly affects student learning. The activities that I propose rely on sound pedagogical principles that originate in disciplines of education and the social sciences. The activities and concrete recommendations that are offered in this section can provide new insights that would enhance language instruction and pedagogy. In organizing instruction about ideas rather than information I reflected upon and built the course around a set of questions that merged language instruction with humanities instruction (Shorris, 1997): A humanities seminar is an ideal gateway to the life of the mind. But it also raises critical questions about how we can best serve adults in the classroom.

What if we engage ideas instead of information?

What if we prioritize texts that allow people to set their own lives in a larger context? What if we emphasize the importance of intellectual community?

What if we create an environment where the students' earned wisdom is honored as essential to the conversation?

Fifteen activities for developing contextual understanding:

Arguably, we accept that shared conventions are necessary for communication, if only because authors and readers who had no shared conventions would speak different languages. Conversationalists and students of language can come to share conventions with an author where they study the relevant linguistic context.

[Annie Besant and 4 religions example] The activities that I describe are ones suitable for the mix of students in my classes in Cyprus, students were predominantly Turkish speakers there were a number of native Arabic speakers, many Russian speakers, some Swedish, Germans and few French. Since the class population was multilingual it was helpful to include activities that at times referenced any of the languages native to certain individuals.

Activity 1 Cosmic Egg activity launches introductory discussion on how the students were helped to reflect within their personal views of knowledge about language and social world, a description is given of the "cosmic egg," a teaching tool developed to aid critical reflection by emphasizing the interrelatedness of all dimensions of an educational issue as any issue relates to one's self (Noffke & Brennan, 1997). The cosmic egg activity begins by asking students to situate themselves within a circle of people and social situations that influenced their own language awareness and learning. Each student

constructs a diagram with the thought of "myself" at the centre, then, in the rings [or ellipses] that surround the self they show subsequent actors or situations that formed their language as it developed in the course of their life. Every student will have a different explanation and class discussion will mark the differences of social, familial and educational experiences influence (d) their learning of English.

Activity 2 etymology of grammar; The term grammar is very important in the study of language and is highly problematic especially across Indo-European languages because 'knowledge' of grammar is often taken as signifying knowing a language, and because study of grammar can be treated as drill and practice. This activity explores the word grammar from its origins and charts the chain of significations for us to imagine and employ in our practical uses of English. First, Margel shows a linkage of grammar with Scots *glama*. The term Glama is introduced in English and literary language by Walter Scott in *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (Margel, 2012). I challenged students to carefully read through the poem and find where the poet used the word glama. This activity was assigned out of class and a number of students found the reference in the poem. Scott uses the word to describe a magic event or spell used to confuse another. Historically, the poem tells of an incursion into Scotland by English and how locals used their language to confuse invaders or newcomers. Margel goes on to advise us that grammar in Medieval Latin denotes what is unintelligible. An activity with etymology exposes students to chains of meaning that are sometimes intelligible and other times unintelligible across languages and related vocabulary. Grammar is rich in meaning as are other terms that relate to it.

As a class we listed the following terms and discussed the relation of each to grammar:

Gramoir Fr. – a mysterious book of magic;
Grima Fr. – a mask as in a grimace;
Грим Rus – theatrical makeup;
Grimm haben Ger.—to be angry;
Grimmig gucken Ger. – to look with rage
(Margel, ibid).

Activity 3 Loan words; Loan words is a particularly important activity for teaching English language instruction since it's use is so prevalent in technology in consumer affairs, in medicine and other scientific matters for example in Northern Cyprus one can always find a competent English speaker in an *eczane* or pharmacy since many pharmacists are educated in English speaking countries. In introducing the loan words activity students are asked to enumerate a list of all the foreign words that typically are used throughout every day discourse. We can imagine from the previous activity that every word potentially has its original meaning and signifies other words with which it relates.

Loan words also denote an imaginary sense of language that suggests an idea of fiction and of unintelligibility. As more and more people cross borders they bring remnants of their native lands and languages that somehow assimilate and enrich the cultures that accept newcomers. Pedagogically we can examine vocabulary that endures and eventually becomes part of a new language. This modification and evolution of language from immigrants and visitors has certainly been a feature of the evolution of American English. Indeed this also occurred in the greater Hellenic region since the Byzantine era. Zavagno writes about the importance of Greek language at various sites in the Ionian and Aegean regions (Zavagno, 2011). Drawing upon the work of Terkourafi we can infer that a major language of instruction in Byzantine time was Koine Greek. Koine Greek was not only the language of the New Testament but also served as a vehicular language. Sabir, was the spoken language of trade at the same time as Koine Greek was used in script and among the learned. Sabir re-emerges in the play of Moliere *The Bourgieoise Gentleman*. Sabir was widely used as a language of commerce and politics in the Mediterranean region between the 12th and 19th centuries and was understood and employed by Berbers and the mercantile classes from Morocco to Palestine (Terkourafi, 2014).

Activity 4 Quick Fiction accounts

Quick fictions are inspired by the work of Professor Nicholas Royle of the University of Sussex. According to Royle, Quick Fictions are concerned with the question of how to write—inventively, thoughtfully and memorably—in the age of the short attention span (Royle, 2014) that is, in the age of internet and social media. For students learning English they give a safe venue for experimenting with writing that is not too judgmental.

Quick fiction is a short extemporaneous writing activity in which the writer without preparation gives an "off the cuff" account of an event. My students enjoyed this opportunity greatly. They were to imagine walking unseen into a room where they listened to their mother describe them to a friend or relation? What did she say? Was it accurate?

A one page essay handed in the same day..

A second topic for quick fiction involving self reflection *qua* the cosmic egg activity: When no one is watching you, outside of the university, what do you do to be great that is only for you and that no one else will ever see?

Activity 5 Blanchot dialogue and dialectic

In this lesson activity we discuss the classic dialectic format of thesis—antithesis—synthesis as we imagine it might relate to dialogue or conversation. The activity shows language learning as comparative, that is one thought is asserted and a second related thought contrasts leading to a new thought.

The argument is that students would pair up and say, one thing or idea and record it, next their partner responds and records the response. Third the two consider first statement and response then imagine a new understanding that might be drawn from the first two statements. Is dialogue dialectic always or potentially? (Abriagi, 2008).

Activity 6 Eavesdropping: Our class is in a university on the island Cyprus. Students were assigned to go into the community and seat themselves near a conversation that was ongoing in English. They were to eavesdrop {listen in) record enough of the conversation to answer question; What it concerned in the spoken conversation? Who was conversing? When did the conversation occur? What feelings were noted in the conversation? How could they relate evident feeling or emotion to meaning?

Activity 7 Talk Radio is now a world-wide phenomena where one can become informed, entertained and persuaded. In this activity students are assigned to listen to a talk radio show and record in English the intent of the show in English, what it actually says in their opinion and the degree to which the show is interactive in English. An extension of this listening activity in context is to explore how meanings are constructed where interaction is only heard or where listeners are permitted to 'call in' their opinions.

Activity 8 Language Composites including tense and other figures of speech

In this activity students choose or are assigned one language composite from the list:

1. tense
2. aspect of language
3. syntax
4. intonation
5. phonology
6. physics of speech
7. child language
8. language formation
9. mood & modality

In the activity used right after the midterm students research the particular composite prepare and present a lesson that they would teach to make the idea clear. Presentations would be 5-7 minutes followed by Questions & Answers.

In particular, most students in my class struggled with understanding future tense. A lecture was given about different groups in the world who think of and use future tense in singular ways. For example, future tense see Yupno people of Papua New Guinea (Nunez, 2015) and Aymara of Bolivian uplands; (2006) think and imagine future tense spatially where the Aymara reverse the past and future that Westerners take for granted, in Aymara for example past is future and future past. For the Yupno tense is thought of as a slope, with future up-slope and past down slope (Nunez, 2012). Nunez conjectures the idea of the slope emerges from early settlers of Borneo who first appeared on the shore of the island and then traveled up into the highlands where they formed permanent settlements.

Activity 9 Polysemy

The activity discussed polysemy as the coexistence of many possible meanings for a word or phrase in different languages. Students were asked to find examples in their native language and in English. We discussed the prevalence of polysemy and its influence on learning another language {Cuyckens and Zawada, 1997}. In the ATINER conference (2016), Professor Thanasoula discussed polsemy as a matter of interaction in verbs of perception among East African Bantu speakers (Thanasoula,2016).

An example of an English word with rich polysemy is the word "get." The OED lists about 32 different definitions while dictionary (английский русскийlists, Wiley 1984) gives about 83 definitions for get in Russian and in Turkish, are 54 definitions of get (Sözlük İngilizce Türkçe ,Oxford, 1998). So in language instruction it is useful to discuss and instruct and compare the multiple meanings of many words in context for in such instruction we uncover the nuances of linguistic meanings.

Activity 10 Translating spoken language. Activity 10 is a spur from the eavesdropping activity.

Barbara Cassin writes that Translation is almost never a straightforward conversion. This is why it is such a fertile subject for philosophy and I would add Language instruction, all of which supports establishment for language instruction in context (Cassin, 2015). When we listen to language in our own native tongue or in other tongues we hear more than words, this activity directs students to separate words and their meanings from apparent emotions, local or idiomatic senses or colloquial expressions. This activity urged students to separate what they understood as feelings from ordinary meanings or established meanings taken from dictionaries.

Activity 11 Symbols in L2 learning

This activity is completed at home or in a study place with the use of the internet, Students are directed to find a site that tell about a current event in the world. Then they sort through the site and take not of various symbols that make or enhance language and meanings in the story that the site conveys.

Activity 12 In the Bazaar

On the island of Cyprus is a weekly event known as the Wednesday Bazaar. The bazaar is an open-air market place where communication takes place in many forms. The bazaar is loud with sellers hawking their goods and shouting to other sellers and customers. In the activity students are directed to visit the bazaar and participate socially with people who they meet. They will draw a map of the bazaar and note where certain types of communication occur. The map ought to contain a legend that sorts out the nature of language that is used in English (Pakdel, 2010)

Activity 13 At the Restaurant

In this activity students will go for a meal in a local restaurant with several classmates

They are directed to record the entire experience graphically and in language using descriptive prose, this activity is based upon the art project by American artist Judy Chicago, that is called the *Dinner Party* (1974-79), In

reporting on their dinner party experience they will imagine how the social act of eating together affects meaning and making meaning in language according to who sits where, what they order and eat, and how wait staff is engaged. In a restaurant often are menus that give a set instruction for communication about food, comparison, and taste in terms of verbal preferences.

   Activity 14. This activity relates with the cosmic egg activity done earlier and directs students to record language learning biographically. The students are encouraged to contact other family members to construct a narrative of language in their family development. How did I learn to speak, write or listen as I do? Was the experience similar for siblings and parents? Was reading a significant part of everyday life from reading for pleasure, to reading to be informs, to reading to get through ordinary affairs? What types of things were routinely read and how did reading relate to daily life?

   Activity 15 Malapropisms

   Students are directed to pay close attention to 'proper' use or misuse of language socially or in the media. (this did not seem to be at all an arcane topic for students). First students were encouraged to look at references to malapropism and most found references to Yogi Berra and to Sheridan's play *The Rivals* and the eponymous character, Mrs Malaprop. They also found reference in Shakespeare's play *As you like it* and the character Dogberry.

   Then students were directed to find examples in the media and try to sort frequency or purposes for malapropism in public speaking.

   Students are directed to pay close attention to 'proper' use or misuse of language socially or in the media. Many students opined that language used in a mal-appropriate way was often used with purpose to gain attention to the speaker.

   One Turkish student gave this example:

Malapropisms in Turkish

Wrong words	true ones

1. Ahçı   Aşçı
There is not any   (meaning chef, cook)
Meaning in this word
But people always tell
. Ahçı   instead of Aşçı

2. püskev, püskvit   bisküvi

    pisküvi   (meaning : biscuit, cookie)

3. kirbit   kibrit

no meaning   (meaning match, safety match

4. şöför   soför

In Turkey, people often use   (meaning: driver)
this wrong word. Because   this is the correct term in Turkish
of this, they are thinking
this is the true expression.

5. yanlız   yalnız

Afterthought: Why such a Set of Activities in a University in Northern Cyprus?

   Many colleagues with whom I worked in Cyprus questioned why teach such "high level" knowledge to students who are less than adequately prepared than students whom I had taught in American and Canadian universities. I was shocked to hear such questions, and thought of my background as a teacher and the literature that addresses such attitudes. One theorist/practitioner who I referenced was Earl Shorris who developed the Clemente teaching initiative for disadvantaged students in America: Shorris stated that the idea should be to teach what he considered the ultimate skills: reflection and critical thinking, as taught by the humanities. "If the multigenerational poor are to make the leap out of poverty, it will require a new kind of thinking — reflection," he wrote in 1997. "And that is a beginning." It also describes my first activity called the cosmic egg activity that situates the student at the centre of learning in the course. The study of the humanities, he said, is "in itself a redistribution of

wealth." A redistribution of wealth and I believe also a redistribution of opportunity and of personal knowledge. The activities that you just have read about are all way beyond ordinary understanding so students need to study lessons that have "right answers," or that follow recipes for knowledge acquisition. The activities that I assembled and taught are based on my premise that the ideas and concepts belong to all of us and through processes of reflective learning and imaginative thinking that students might construct their own understanding of language through contextual study. A second theorist whom I reference and who guides my thinking is Jerome Bruner who famously declared that any knowledge or idea can be taught to any group of students regardless of their age or background if we can teach the knowledge in an intellectually honest manner. Each of the 15 activities serves that purpose well. The problem is with taking the time to convey the idea of the activity and appealing to the better and curious nature of students Shorris, 1997; Bruner, 1960).

As I reflect on my motivation for designing the activities outlined above I realize the influence of John Dewey in his book *Schools of Tomorrow* where Dewey reminds us: that education should be based on student's interests and that those interests would motivate students to learn rather then rewards and punishments We see this in our own classrooms...students are a lot more engaged when a topic interests them! There aren't enough tests and threats of tests in the world to motivate a student to learn unless he wants to! "Overly bookish education" (Dewey, 1915)

Classrooms,   even   university   classroom   are   to   be   places   for experimentation and imagination where students produce knowledge rather than having it poured into them.

Language instructors can think of our language instruction classroom as a laboratory where we test out new hypotheses and ideas that identify problems that are meaningful for our students. The classroom as a laboratory for working out ideas led me to another more routine activity that we used at the beginning of each course meeting. At the outset of each class students were required to write a question about learning or teaching language. At the conclusion of each class we would discuss questions that students asked. In such a way students participated in forming discussion and the content of the course (Dewey, 1915; Shorris, 1995; King, 1970).

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