

DIALOGUE DELIGHTS

English teachers have been using dialogues as a teaching technique for centuries. There are four main uses to which they are usually put:

1 They can provide a **model for real-life interaction**, incorporating language that learners may need in order to communicate more effectively in their everyday lives. Here's one from the sixteenth century:

The Poulterer: What doe you buye?

Ralf: Show me a coupell of good, and fatte Rabettes.

The Poulterer: Here be they, that be very good and fat.

Ralf: They be very stale.

The Poulterer: Truely, they be very new.

Ralf: How sell you them? How much?

The Poulterer: Ten pence the couple.

Ralf: It is too much, you are too deare. They be not worth so much. They be worth but a grote.

The Poulterer: They be not mine for that price. They coast me more.

Jacques Bellot *Familiar Dialogues*, published in 1586¹.

2 They can provide a context for **language input** in which to present grammar and functional expressions.

A: *What shall we do tonight?*

B: Oh, I don't know. *How about staying in?*

A: Maybe. But I really *fancy meeting up with some people.*

B: Well, *what about asking some friends round for dinner, then?*

A: OK, *that sounds like a good idea. What shall we cook?*

B: *How about pasta?*

A Oh, *I don't really fancy pasta again. How about a stir fry?*

B *I'm not so keen on Chinese food. Why don't we just get some takeaways?*

3 In communicative language teaching, there has been a move towards using more authentic language rather than contrived dialogues. Nowadays authentic language can be recorded and transcribed easily, and can be used for teaching purposes where learners are encouraged to **notice naturally-occurring language** and then to incorporate it into their own speech.

¹ Quoted in Nick Bilborough *Dialogue Activities* (2007) Cambridge University Press. This is an excellent book and a source for several of the suggestions in this article.

The short extract below² (... called *At the hairdresser's*) displays a variety of these features, such as hesitation devices (*ermm* – line 13), *binomials* (*nice and short* – line 14), discourse markers (*you know* – lines 15 and 24, *like* – line 23 and *so, right, yeah* – line 26), backchannels (*yeah*), ellipsis (*so wispy there* – line 20), heads (*this back bit do you tend to have that bit clipped?* – line 22), false starts (... *I have, I tend to have ...* - line 23), informal language (*cos* – line 27) and vague language (*kind of* – line 24 and *side-ish* line 28)

At the hairdresser's (S01 = Speaker 1. S02 = Speaker 2)

12 (S01) How much do you want off?

13 (S02) *Ermm* [2 secs] Well I like to keep the top quite long (S01)

14 *yeah*] *ermm*, but I like the back *nice and short* and the sides

15 (S02) nice and short. It's just got a bit, *you know*, a bit grown out of shape.

16 (S01) Too heavy



17 (S02) *Yeah*

18 (S01) Do you have your sides feathered?

19 (S02) *Yeah, yeah.*

20 (S01) *So wispy there*

21 (S02) *Yeah.*

22 (S01) Now, *this back bit do you intend to have that bit clipped?*

23 (S02) *Yeah*, and *I have, I tend to have it like* graduated at the back, right at

24 the bottom really short and then *kind of* graduated up, *you know*

25 not like a line as such. Just [(S 01) Right] graded up

26 (S01) *So, right yeah ...*

27 (S 02) And I generally style it, but it's *cos* it's got so, I generally have like a

28 maybe side, *side-ish* parting

4 Dialogues are also used as a means of **reviewing and practising language features and situations** which have been inputted and explored earlier in a course.

² The extract is from Carter and McCarthy's *Exploring Spoken English* (C.U.P.,1997)

5 Another common use of dialogues is to work on features of pronunciation, stress and intonation.

Here are some suggestions for exploiting dialogues in your classes.

A Scrambled lines

Write a dialogue including the features you want to focus on (or revise), or use the one in your coursebook. If the language features are new, this is an effective way of raising learners' awareness (getting them to **notice**) the features.

Scramble the order and ask learners to work together in pairs or small groups to reconstruct the dialogue in the right order (they can number or re-write the lines). Here's an example:

A: *What shall we do tonight?*

B *I'm not so keen on Chinese food. Why don't we just get some takeaways?*

A: Maybe. But I really *fancy meeting up* with some people.

B: *How about pasta?*

A: OK, *that sounds like a good idea*. *What shall we cook?*

B: Well, *what about asking* some friends round for dinner, then.

B: Oh, I don't know. *How about staying in?*

A Oh, *I don't really fancy pasta again*. *How about a stir fry?*

Then read out the dialogue (or play it if it's recorded) and learners check if they were right. Then 'pull out' the features by asking questions e.g. how many ways in the dialogue can you find of (i) 'making a suggestion'?(ii) responding to a suggestion? (iii) saying what you want/don't want to do?

Variation: Divide the learners into groups. Give each learner one of the lines of the dialogue. They have to memorise their line and walk around saying it to the others in the group. They then have to stand in the right order.

B Scrambled Words

- 1 Write the following dialogue onto a transparency (or Power Point). Alternatively write the dialogue on the board before learners come in and conceal each line with strips of paper. Then reveal each line (see 4) by taking off the strip of paper.
- 2 Organise the students into groups of about three. Ask each group to decide on a name for their team.
- 3 Explain that they are going to have to unscramble the words of the sentences you reveal to them and to say them in the correct order. Tell them that you will accept the answer from the first person to shout out his or her team's name, and that you will award two points for a correct answer and take away one point for an incorrect answer. Explain that a point will also be deducted if there is too much of a delay between shouting the team's name and providing an answer.
- 4 Go through the sentences, pulling down a piece of paper on the transparency to reveal one sentence for them to unjumble. Play the relevant bit of the tape as a way of feeding back to learners before revealing the correct version of the sentence below.

Do you do what so? [So ... what do you do?]

Student I'm oh a. [Oh, I'm a student.]

Yes oh. Study do you what? [Oh yes. What do you study?]

Music classical. [Classical music.]

Really? Music a I'm teacher. [Really? I'm a music teacher.]

Really are you? Where then do you work? [Are you really? Where do you work, then?]

School at a Cambridge oh in. [Oh, at a school in Cambridge.]

Really? Cambridge live you do in? [Really? Do you live in Cambridge?]

Yes. Do I yes. Where do live you why? [Yes. Yes I do. Why, where do you live?]

Cambridge. Live I too in Cambridge. [Cambridge. I live in Cambridge too]

Really? Where? [Really? Where?]

Street in bridge – have I flat a Bridge in Street.[In Bridge Street – I have a flat in Bridge Street.]

Amazing that's no ...[No, that's amazing ...]

C *Dialogue Dictogloss*

Alice: My new French student arrived yesterday

Bonnie: Oh yes? What's her name?

Alice: Marianne.

Bonnie: What a pretty name. What's she like?

Alice: Really nice. I'm sure we'll get on really well. We seem to have a lot in common.

Bonnie: Oh really? What does she like doing?

Alice: Well, for a start she likes playing tennis, just like me. Art house films, and the beach of course.

Bonnie: Oh, wait a minute! I saw you with someone this morning. That might have been her. What does she look like?

Alice: Oh, quite tall, with long dark hair.

Bonnie: Oh, that can't have been her, then. She was blond.

Alice: That must have been my niece. I was giving her a lift.

Bonnie: Oh yes, I remember you saying she was ill. How is she?

Alice: She's on the mend, thank goodness.



Procedure

- 1 Contextualise the dialogue (in the example, two Maltese women talk about a foreign visitor).
- 2 Play the recording (or read it out at natural speed) and ask the students in pairs to discuss what they understood. [You may want to divide the dialogue into two halves if the length is daunting. If you do, then follow steps 1-4 for each half and then move on to step 5]

- 3 Ask the students to copy down the dialogue frame, with just the names of the speakers down the side. Play the tape again (or read it out) and ask the students to write down what they can understand for each person's line as they hear it. At this stage there will only be time to write down a few words at the most, and they will probably be able to complete more from the beginning than the end of the dialogue. Allow them sufficient time at the end of the recording to continue making notes if they wish to.
- 4 Encourage students to compare and discuss what they've written down after they've listened, and then play the tape (or read it out again). Keep repeating the process until you feel that they've done as much as they can. Three times is usually enough to keep motivation up. Too many times will affect motivation negatively.
- 5 Give them the complete dialogue and allow them to listen again.
- 6 Get them to discuss in pairs or small groups what they've 'noticed' i.e. what they couldn't get (perhaps they didn't know the word, or recognize the pronunciation), or what they find strange, unfamiliar, odd or simply interesting. Do they have any questions?
- 7 If there's anything you particularly want to focus on, you can reformulate and ask them if they remember without looking at the text what the original version was (and thereby guide the noticing). For example:
How were the following expressed in the dialogue?:

- a) We'll have a good relationship
- b) We share a lot of interests
- c) What kind of person is she?
- d) What is her physical appearance?
- e) Possibly it was her.
- f) It is impossible that it was her.
- g) I suppose that it was my niece.
- h) I remember that you said she was ill.
- i) What is the state of her health?
- j) She's getting better (informal)

D ***Reduced Dialogues***

- 1 Write up the dialogue to be reviewed on the board so that each utterance is represented by just one or two words. [The dialogue below is especially designed to incorporate features of tense use that learners often have difficulty with.]
- 2 Elicit from the class what they think each of the words represents from the dialogue.
- 3 Write in the missing words. Ask the class to memorise the dialogue.
- 4 Rub out the added words. Re-elicite them.
- 5 Ask pairs to perform the dialogue together, using the words on the board as prompts.
- 6 Swap the roles around
- 7 Rub out the prompts on the board so there's nothing left and ask the pairs to try out the dialogue without them.

The original version

A: Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?

B: Not at all. Go ahead,

A: How long are you in Malta for?

B: Two weeks in all.

A: And how long have you been here, so far?

B: Eight days.

A: I see. When do you go back to Germany?

B: At the end of the week, in five days' time.

A: Yes of course! Anyway, thanks for your time.

B: You're welcome. Anytime.

Adapted from T.73 *New Headway Intermediate* (OUP)

The reduced version

A: mind ... askquestions?

B: all. Go

A: Howarein Malta ...?

B: Two all.

A: ... howhere, so ...?

B: Eight

A: I Whento Germany?

B: Atweek, ... five

A:course!, thanks
..... time.

B: You're

E Key Word Dialogues

- 1 Build a short context
- 2 Write two columns on board, one headed A the other B
- 3 Tell class that *Mario* went on holiday to *Italy* in *June*, stayed *with family friends* and went for *two weeks*. Put these prompts on the board in the B column.
- 4 Elicit the questions that produce the prompts in B e.g. *Where did you go on holiday? When did you go? Who did you stay with?? How long did you spend/stay/go for?*
- 5 Establish main stresses, do choral and individual drills and write up the dialogue on the board.

A

Where did you **go** on **holiday**?

When did you **go**?

Who did you **stay** with?

How **long** did you **go for**?

B

To Italy

In June

With my family

For two weeks

- 6 Ask the students to try and memorise the dialogue (to test themselves).
- 7 From the A column, delete everything except the stressed words (in bold). To make it more challenging, delete the question words too. Learners will be able to work them out by looking at the answers to the questions.

8

A

___ ___ *you go* ___ *holiday?*

___ ___ *you go?*

___ ___ *you stay* ___?

___ *long* ___ *you stay* ___?

B

To Italy

In June

With my family

For two weeks

9 Do a whole class drill. You (the teacher) are A, and the class in chorus is B.

10 Repeat, but the class is A and you are B

11 Divide the class in two. One half in chorus is A, the other half is B.

12 Do the drill in pairs, simultaneously.

13 Ask one or two pairs to demonstrate.

Another dialogue with the same technique:

What do you do? I'm a footballer

Where do you work? In Madrid

What time do you get up? At 6

What time do you go to bed? At 10

Alan Marsh