

Scaffolding for Receptive Skills

(Handout)

This session examines strategies for providing language support a) for receptive skills and b) by considering how task design can embed language support through the task procedure. Within a), the focus is principally on help for learners as they listen to the teacher, since this is such a vital channel of content instruction. In b), we see how the dynamics of a task can reinforce aspects of language use if it is interactive, demanding collaboration through the CLIL language in order to achieve a content objective. This session also revises the notions of hard and soft CLIL.

Receptive Skills

The word 'receptive' suggests a rather passive role for the learner when listening or reading, but this is certainly not the case. Understanding a text, written or spoken, relies heavily on the learner's **previous knowledge** – of the world, of the topic, and of the CLIL language. In the real world, we come to a text with **awareness, expectations, a purpose and possibly a strategy for getting the information** we want. The steps the teacher follows when using (e.g.) a video in class should try to accommodate these features of authentic listening or reading.

Classroom Procedure

1. Engage the learners – excite interest in the topic with visuals, connecting it to their out-of-school lives, if possible.
2. Set a simple, clear task, the purpose of which is to check basic comprehension.
3. Allow some prediction: what does the class think is the answer, what do they believe is going to happen, etc. If at this point it appears as if some vocabulary in the text is going to cause problems *in the completion of the task* – not in general – then this vocabulary will need to be taught / checked before listening.
4. Learners listen/read and do the task.
5. They compare answers with a partner
6. Plenary feedback

At this point it should be clear to the teacher how well the learners are coping with comprehension of the text.

The language support in this procedure comes from the engagement of the learner so that expectations and interest are raised. Topics are anticipated, a visual dimension may be added, previous learning is briefly revisited, all so that the new text they are about to watch or listen to is not scary or difficult.

Teacher Talk

When the teacher is talking to her class in order to explain, exemplify, or revise a concept, then she has at her fingertips all the features of non-verbal communication to help her both convey her message and discover how well it has been understood. This 'live' listening, which can include many of the features of normal conversational, can be much more interactive.

As the teacher talks, she may use any of the following strategies to make what she is saying easier to understand:

- Repeat key words or phrases in slightly different contexts
- Use synonyms
- Paraphrase, use sandwich method
- Gesture
- Use a range of facial expressions
- Pause at key moments
- Vary the speed, pitch, and volume of her voice

Task Design

Scaffolding is not confined to the teacher finding ways of assisting a learner with a task. The use of activities which demand collaboration (through the CLIL language) in order to achieve an outcome – rather than a learner working alone – can be vital for both cognitive and linguistic development.

A common task-type which requires collaboration is the information gap, jigsaw reading or KWL technique. However, the teacher needs to be conscious of the extent to which such a task is being employed, because it forces linguistic interaction and therefore has a primarily language objective, or because it will deepen understanding of the topic and ensure the content objectives are met.

The biggest problem may be to keep the learners using the CLIL language as they become involved in the task. The value of the information gap is that it mimics real-life conversation: A is uncertain what B will ask, and therefore whether or not he will understand it. If he can, he then has to be able to formulate a sentence, recall appropriate vocabulary and use intelligible pronunciation in order to respond.

Jigsaw reading / listening

Groupwork – students work in “expert” groups on the text divided into several parts. It can be also used for grading the task/text difficulty to meet the needs for inclusive teaching.

Regroup students – new group will have different experts - from each expert group. At this stage, give a clear instruction for sharing the outcomes / information within the groups.

KWL technique

K – Know

Before listening or reading the text, ask students: What do you know about the topic? At this stage, the teacher elicits and activates the students’ background knowledge, they also learn from each other. It should raise the awareness and interest in the topic.

W – Want (What do you want to know)?

Students formulate (write) their questions about the topic asking for new additional information they would like to get.

L – Learn

Students work with the text and find (at least some) the answers for their questions. This technique compels the students’ engagement with the text, critical thinking, it also develops higher reading literacy skills.