QUESTION FORMATION, QUESTION TAGS AND SHORT ANSWERS: A CONSTRUCTIVE WAY TO ENHANCE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE



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Annotation

The present paper focus on some of the common errors our students make while using English, particularly in their speech. The major error is seen in the use of question forms and tag questions. The reason for this can be seen in their transferring the ideas from their mother tongue and translating it ad verbatim into English. This causes a genuine problem for the teacher and the paper introduces a few activities that can help us remedy this situation in our classrooms.

Keywords: Question forms, Tag questions, Communicative Competence.

Introduction:

When the learners are asked to participate in any discussion or to take part in any role in English, they are unable to ask a question that is properly structured. They frame questions without making use of the subject-verb inversion rule for example, they say: "why you are late?" instead of "why are you late?" They often fail to use "Do-forms" or "Have-forms" to frame question. They say "anyone has two pens?" instead of asking "has anyone two pens?" or "does anyone have two pens?" Similarly, instead of asking "do you have two pens?" they say "you have two pens?" comfortably by using a rising tone. The researcher has also observed that the invigilators asking the students, "anyone want additional?" It is just because of the influence of the mother tongue. Such conversations continue due to lack of guidance. The teacher has to pick such sentences and write on the board in the classroom and discuss each one of them. Students may not tacitly be interested in improving their language proficiency in their early schooling years. According to research conducted by Gardner and Lambert, motivation was considered to be more important in a formal learning environment (Ellis 1997). M.J Benson says learners' "interest, aptitude and motivation for learning English and the chances of success in a foreign language […] depend to a large extent on the favorable attitude towards the English language" (202).

Learners should be encouraged to participate in different roles where they can use proper questions, short answers, and question tags. "Motivation […] plays an effective role in academic achievement among 28 The Journal of English Language Teaching (India) LVIII/6, 2016 students, especially with learning English" (Abdelrahim, I 2012). Motivation and classroom interaction help the learners to acquire language skills. The present article focuses on the teaching of question tags, short answers, and framing of questions in particular through group activities and quizzes.

Background of the Study:

The researcher feels that the purpose of teaching question tags has become meaningless as it is confined to the classroom only. S/he hesitates to say, but reveals that even some of the well-experienced teachers of English who have prolific knowledge use "right?" or "no?" as question tags in their general conversation. So, how do they train rather correct their learners' English? The researcher knows that the usage of "no" as question tag is due to the influence of one's mother tongue and has experimented with the learners from their conversation by asking them which "no?" Is it "No" or "Know" and the meaning of their sentence; and has made them practice using the right question tags. It is difficult, but possible.

Objectives of the Study:

• The first objective is to make the learners understand the difference between statements and questions and how to ask various questions using helping verbs, do-forms and have-forms.

• The second objective is to train them how to give short answers.

• The third objective is to get rid of the influence of the mother tongue and use appropriate question tags.

Methodology and Design of the Study:

The present research was designed to help the learners to improve their efficiency in using structures through group activity and quiz. During the activity the learners were given set of instructions to teach question tags or short answers or framing questions. The teacher had to decide to teach any of the two topics or all the three topics based on the availability of time and the competence of the learners. One of the factors influencing the learners in learning L2 depends on one's motivation (Tuan, L. 2012). The researcher has experimented this, in the classes of Computer Science Engineering (CSE), Electronics and Electrical Engineering (EEE) and Information Technology (IT) branches in an Engineering college, Hyderabad and has succeeded in enhancing their competence in English. The teacher has to choose the topic to be taught. If s/he has to teach framing of questions, the learner has to give appropriate questions to the given statements. For example, to the statement "I finished my homework" the question should be "Did you finish your homework?" taking care of the tense and verb. If s/he has to teach short answers, the learner has to give two short answers; positive and negative. For example, to the question "Do you like ice-cream," the answers should be, "yes I do" or "no I do not" similarly, if s/he has to teach question tags, the learner has to give the right question tag for the given statement. The Journal of English Language Teaching (India) LVIII/6, 2016 29

Participants and Duration:

A class of thirty learners for a one-hour forty-minute period (lab) is ideal and if there are sixty learners, the number of chances given to each learner will be reduced. Here the researcher has taken an extra hour to make the learners better in a slow learners' classroom.

Materials used:

The study requires chalkboard; audio player and cassette; and handouts. The cassette should have the recorded conversation of the topic to be taught and the handouts with print versions of the conversation.

Procedure:

The learners are given a set of instructions on the topic to be taught. They are divided into four or five groups and care is taken so that there are advanced learners in each group.

Trial quiz:

The teacher should give instructions and ask first group to give a short answer or add a question tag. Each question is weighted and points scored are written on the board. If the first group answers, they get points or the question passes to the second group and so on. The weight of the question decreases gradually, as the question passes from one group to the next.

Real quiz:

After two rounds of trial quiz, a set of instructions are given to the learners for the real quiz. There are two stages in the quiz. Stage-I focuses on the group when the learners can discuss and can give their answer within a specified time limit. Stage II focuses on the individual learner, where there is no chance to discuss the answer. The learner identified has to give the right answer within the time limit. Once the instructions are given, the learners should be given five minutes of time between the stages, this procedure makes the slow learners involve in the game and better learning takes place with peer group discussion.

Stage-I:

One of the learners from first group asks a question to the second group and if they give correct answer they get the points or the question passes to the third group and so on similar to the trial quiz. If the last group fails to answer, the question should be answered by the first group and they get bonus points. If they fail to give correct answer they get negative points. The second question starts with the second group and the cycle continues.

Stage-II:

In this stage the first group should select a learner from the second group to answer their question if the learner answers correctly, the group gets the points. If s/ he fails to give correct answer, the first group should select a learner from the next group every time to get the answer. If s/ he answers, the group gets points or the question passes to the next group. If the learner from

the last group fails to give the correct answer, the first group has to give the answer with explanation to get points. If the first group also fails to give the correct answer they get negative points. Here the teacher should help the learners to make them understand in a better way. The second question starts with the second group, where they select a learner from every group to get answer and the cycle continues.

Evaluation:

Handouts are given to the learners with the instructions. They will listen to the audio text played back and underline the wrong questions and correct them; or circle the wrong question tags and correct them in the handouts. Most of the learners give appropriate response, which shows enhancement in their learning. The audio text helps them to listen and frame the questions correctly and also utter them with proper intonation. Thus the activity improves their pronunciation as well as knowledge of the structure of a question.

Result:

The learners were able to grasp the learning point very quickly and learnt to use appropriate question tags in their conversation. They also have enjoyed the activity and learnt to give correct short answers and frame questions properly.

Limitations:

• Time may not be enough to evaluate all the learners.

• All the three topics may not be taught in a slow learners' classroom. In such case topics should be split into two classes.

Conclusion

1. Effective learning takes place and learners enjoy learning by participating actively in the quizzes, when the teacher plans his/ her class as per the competence of the learners and the availability of time.

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