

Master in Advanced English Studies:
Languages and Cultures in Contact

- **Final Paper:** Discourse Analysis and its Methodological Applications: Friends. A Case Study.
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The One Where Underdog Gets Away

(Episode 9, Season 1)

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(Ross comes back to the couch.)

Ross: (to Monica) Well, you were right. How can they do this to us, huh? It's Thanksgiving.

Monica: Ok, I'll tell you what. How about I cook dinner at my place? I'll make it just like Mom's.

Ross: Will you make the mashed potatoes with the lumps?

Monica: You know, they're not actually supposed to have... (Ross looks at her sheepishly) I'll work on the lumps. Joey, you're going home, right?

Joey: Yeah.

Monica: And I assume, Chandler, you are still boycotting all the pilgrim holidays.

Chandler: Yes, every single one of them.

Monica: Phoebe, you're gonna be with your grandma?

Phoebe: Yes, and her boyfriend. But we're celebrating Thanksgiving in December 'cause he is lunar.

Monica: So you're free Thursday, then.

Phoebe: Yeah. Oh, can I come?

Monica: Yeah. Rach, are you thinking you're gonna make it to Vail?

Rachel: Absolutely. Shoop, shoop, shoop. Only a hundred and two dollars to go.

Chandler: I thought it was \$98.50.

Rachel: Yeah, well it was. I, I broke a cup.

Ross: Well, I'm off to Carol's.

Phoebe: Ooh, ooh! Why don't we invite her?

Ross: (mimicking) Ooh, ooh. Because she's my ex-wife, and will probably want to bring her, ooh, ooh, lesbian life partner.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

This is an extract from the script of a TV series, *Friends*, one of the most famous American TV series of all times. Sometimes we use films in the classroom. Despite its advantages, we need several lessons to exploit a film. TV series offer a wide range of advantages to a Language class, because they share many characteristics with films and they are short, easy to get and wonderful to work with in just one or two lessons. This is one of the reasons I have chosen an episode from a TV series to work with. Furthermore, situations are easy to understand, American culture can be easily analysed and characters are familiar to the students.

Despite *Friends* is not a new TV series, it has been broadcasted now and then and children of all ages are familiar with them and have seen many of their episodes in their mother tongue. That's why we can work with this piece of script with students from an early stage in High School, about thirteen and fourteen years old.

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages provides clear standards to be attained at successive stages of learning and for evaluating outcomes in an internationally comparable manner. This document provides a basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications, thus facilitating educational and occupational mobility. A European Union Council Resolution (November 2001) recommended the use of this Council of Europe instrument in setting up systems of validation of language competences. The CEFR is a document which describes in a comprehensive manner:

- The competences necessary for communication.
- The related knowledge and skills.
- The situations and domains of communication.

The CEFR also defines levels of attainment in different aspects of its descriptive scheme with illustrative descriptors scale. The Common European Framework divides learners into three broad divisions which can be divided into six levels:

A) Basic User

A1 Breakthrough

A2 Waystage

B) Independent User

B1 Threshold

B2 Vantage

C) Proficient User

C1) Effective Operational

C1 Proficiency

C2 Mastery

The illustrative descriptor scales related to the pupils are settled between the following levels:

		B1	B2
Understanding	Listening	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.
	Reading	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.
Speaking	Spoken Interaction	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.
	Spoken Production	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
Writing	Writing	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.

All pupils are settled in the Independent User Level (B1 and B2). It is important to highlight that in Spoken Interaction and Spoken Production descriptors most of them are levelled in B1 Level, because of their hesitation and the large amount of their passive vocabulary, that is to say, the words that people understand, yet may not be able to verbalize. Nevertheless, learners are not supposed to be passive recipients of the teaching process. They are expected to be more independent, to make choices and to initiate learning activities. Discourse elements and routines are important tools in helping autonomous learners to become successful. This script must allow the autonomous learner to make choices and consider alternatives.

As a first approach to the text analysis, we can perceive that conversations between those friends have their own formulae and conventions. They have different ways of opening and closing the encounter, different role relationships among them, different purposes and different settings. Discourse analysis is interested in all these different factors. Discourse functions, above all, are the raw material of language teaching, while the overall aim is to enable learners to use language functionally. When we are talking about functions we are concerned as much with what speakers are doing with language as with what they are saying. Discourse analysis is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between language and the contexts of its use.

The following are some of the specific theoretical perspectives and analytical approaches used in linguistic discourse analysis: Emergent grammar, Text grammar (or 'discourse grammar'), Cohesion and relevance theory, Functional grammar, Rhetoric, Stylistics (linguistics), Interactional sociolinguistics, Ethnography of communication, Pragmatics (particularly speech act theory), Conversation analysis, Variation analysis,

Applied linguistics, Cognitive psychology (often under the label discourse processing, studying the production and comprehension of discourse), Discursive psychology, Critical discourse analysis and Sublanguage analysis. Although these approaches emphasize different aspects of language use, they all view language as social interaction, and are concerned with the social contexts in which discourse is embedded (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discourse_analysis).

The first thing we notice is that, although this is clearly part of a larger discourse (a complete episode), it is completeness. There are some clues that suggest that we are in the middle of something, as the text written in parenthesis (*Ross comes back to the couch*) or what Ross tells to Monica (*Well, you were right. How can they do this to us, huh? It's Thanksgiving.*), if Ross says “*you were right*” is because they had been talking before about the subject. They are heard as Monica as the main speaker, because they are talking about Thanksgiving dinner and Monica is going to be the cook, pretending to cook the same as her mother. That’s why she is asking all her friends for their plans on Thanksgiving. That is not the only missing information; as a TV script, we can’t analyse gesture, spatial orientation, voice quality (volume, pitch, and timbre), accent or prosody (tempo, rhythm). Thus it is important for the pupils to watch the episode as a part of the analysis. Watching the complete episode in its original version (American English) could allow us to study and understand the accent and gestures. As it is impossible to cope with all the features, we should improvise some of them, knowing that these can bring changes over the original one.

After watching the complete episode, we can ask pupils to form groups and represent the script. In conversation, the interlocutors, in that case, pupils, not only have to read

the lines, but they have to monitor each other to control the turn-taking system. This is another feature of discourse in oral interaction, embedded in conversational analysis. The conversational turn-taking system of any language includes conventions governing matters such as: how conversation opens and closes, who speaks when and for how long, who can interrupt (and how this is done), how topics get changed, how much time can elapse between turns or between speakers, whether or not speakers can overlap, and whether or not speakers can complete or repair each other's utterances. To fulfil the activity, pupils should analyse the conventions exposed above. In order to look over conventions as changing topics or overlaps between speakers, some groups may prepare their representation changing some aspects from the original script. They should rehearse the script before representing it in front of the class. Before their rehearsal, not only is it important for pupils to watch the complete episode, but they should also know three interrelated claims involved in conversational analysis. Those statements are:

- In constructing their talk, participants normally address themselves to preceding talk and, most commonly, the immediately preceding talk. In this simple and direct sense, their talk is context-shaped.
- In doing some current action, participants normally project and require that some "next action" should be done by an upcoming participant. They thus create, or maintain, a context for the next person's talk.
- By producing their next actions, participants show an understanding of a prior action and do so at a multiplicity of levels. For example, by an "acceptance", someone can show an understanding that the prior turn was complete, that it was addressed to them, and so on. That is what happens in the selected piece of script when Monica asks Joey if he is going home for Thanksgiving. Through this

process they become perform and accept understandings created through a sequential framework of intersubjectivity.

Conversational analysis studies are thus simultaneously analyses of action, context management and intersubjectivity, because all three of these features are simultaneously, but not always consciously, the objects of the participants' actions.

In conversation, very little of what we say, the actions we perform or the order in which we do things is determined in advance. In this sense, conversations are unpredictable. In some forms of interaction the topics, contributions and order of speakership is organized from the outset in an explicit and predictable way. That is what happens if we ask pupils to represent the script after watching the episode. In order to look into some variety among conventions and conversational analysis, we have proposed to make some changes in the original script.

There are also often important cultural differences between speakers. A lack of understanding of these differences can cause problems in cross-cultural communication. There's a possible cultural problem posed on the script, exposed when Phoebe says that she is celebrating Thanksgiving in December with her grandmother and her boyfriend because she is lunar. The problem does not take place because her friends know her, but if the receiver/s of the information were unknown, it could have occurred a misunderstanding. Those misconceptions are very common among ESL learners, the younger and beginner in a language they are, the most common the confusion will be.

Speaking can be considered as one of the most difficult skills to acquire, because it requires the ability in both listening comprehension and speech production skills, such as vocabulary recovery, pronunciation, and so forth. On the other hand, speaking can be seen as one of the easiest skills as one can use body language, demonstration, repetition and other strategies to make one understood. An easy activity to practice the abilities of demonstration and body language, we can suggest to pupils an easy game. We need to form groups, so we can use the ones formed previously. Firstly, each group has to choose two words from the script. Let's suppose that the chosen ones had been: dinner, boyfriend, pilgrims, mashed potatoes, have, celebrate, cup and think. One of each group should go outside the classroom with the teacher, who will tell them to represent one of the selected words. Once they had represented it, the first group who guesses the word gets a point. It can seem a childish game, but it can be perfectly used as a warmer activity, making pupils lose their nervousness and embarrassment.

Producing spoken discourse, speakers use their grammatical competence to produce linguistically acceptable utterances in the target language. The ability to choose lexical items and use them in their proper form, the ability to present the lexical items using the proper word order, and the ability to pronounce the words in a comprehensible way all contribute to the linguistic realization of the utterance. This verbal product must relate with the context to be a meaningful piece of discourse. This is carried out through the use of cohesion and coherence. We will tackle those concepts in the Semantic report. Three important contextual factors are identified in speech production: demand, arousal and feedback. Demand refers to the amount of processing required by a task. Sometimes the demand is too high or too low, developing in miscommunications. This is a common issue in foreign or second language interaction. Arousal refers to the speaker's

emotional and cognitive response to a task and it's bounded to the importance the individual refers to the communicative interaction. The third factor is feedback, received by the speaker from the listener or by the environment affecting the discourse. All those factors could be analysed with the proposed activity. As English is a second language for pupils, and the English command pupils use to have in a second grade in High School is not very high, demand may be too high, producing miscommunication in some cases. Arousal will depend on the pupil's capacity to get into their character and feedback may be necessary, handed not only by all pupils involved in the representation, but by the teacher.

All the inferences made by the characters point out that all six speakers must be fairly close friends, not people meeting for the first time. The conversation shows different levels of familiarity among the six participants, so we can classify this conversation as a model for the analysis of spoken interaction in an informal and spontaneous context. There are four main types of linguistic patterns which represent and enact the social identities of participants in casual conversation. The patterns, which operate at different levels, are: grammatical, discourse, semantic and generic patterns. Discourse structure patterns operate across turns and are thus overtly interactional and sequential. They show us how participants choose to act on each other through their choice of speech functions, such as "demanding", "challenging", "contradicting" or "supporting", and how participants' choices function to sustain or terminate conversational exchanges. (Eggins, Slade 1997: 54).

How we interpret grammatical forms depends on a number of factors, some linguistic, some purely situational. One linguistic feature that may affect our interpretation is the intonation. Example:

Phoebe: Ooh, ooh! Why don't we invite her?

Phoebe begins her move with the exclamation “*ooh, ooh!*”, in reaction with Ross’ comment (*Well, I’m off to Carol’s*). She’s reacting to what it has been said, because she did not know it before, but she also is expressing joy, trying to content her friend Ross. Although the second clause has a different mood, expressing sarcasm, prosodically the two clauses are packaged as a single discourse unit. Sarcasm is a large component of social interaction and conversation. To demonstrate a sense of humour, people frequently use sarcasm as a means of being comedic with groups of friends. They say something contrary to what they feel and/or believe for the purpose of being funny. Sarcasm, in this instance, seems harmless and playful.

The reader also receives from the text information about Thanksgiving and pilgrims holidays. Therefore, we can introduce some pilgrim’s festivities and we can analyse this festival. Thanksgiving Day is a harvest festival. Traditionally, it is a time to give thanks for the harvest and express gratitude in general. It is a holiday celebrated primarily in Canada and the United States. While perhaps religious in origin, Thanksgiving is now primarily identified as a secular holiday. Today, Thanksgiving is celebrated on the second Monday of October in Canada and on the fourth Thursday of November in the United States. Thanksgiving dinner is held on this day, usually as a gathering of family members and friends. Festivities are only a small part of the social studies, but students of all ages are interested in the holiday and may be motivated by them. We can use

Thanksgiving to study American culture. Many world cultures have harvest festivals, special holidays set aside to give thanks for prosperity, or holidays that centre on a feast and family togetherness. But we can exploit as well this festivity to learn how to say thank you and to talk about the customs and manners surrounding thankfulness among American people.

SEMANTICS

“For me, semantics is by definition the study of meaning; and linguistic semantics is the study of meaning insofar as it is systematically encoded in the vocabulary and grammar of (so-called) natural languages.”

Lyons (Linguistic Semantics)

Semantics is defined as the study of meaning. But what is it meant by meaning in the context of the script? Most languages, spoken or written, depend on the context in which they are used for their interpretation. Included in the context are the beliefs of the participants, many of them culturally determined. Fine (1994) says that social reality is built up through language, and language is the means that enables social activity to take place. Cognitive and social factors act upon the way in which language is structured (cf. Alonso 2005: 88). As a result, foreign speakers could have problems to understand some conversations. Halliday said that a text or a conversation could not be understood by any foreigners or by people living outside that society even if translated into their own languages, because each message brings more meanings than those expressed through the words, meanings that could only be understood if accompanied by the

situation. In addition to that, Malinowski introduced the notion of “context of situation”, considering that the meaning of words was not enough to understand what people from other culture meant when they talked.

As many foreign language students tend to translate, we can work with the script trying to describe some fields of the text. That means that instead of translating, learners should try to understand why the characters act in that specific way and which of the given responses are lying over a cultural act. To achieve this goal, we should analyse the following contexts:

- **Significant Contexts:** the activities and goals around which the community is organized, the behavior of the community.
- **Context of Culture** is very important also because it is not the immediate sights that is important but also the whole cultural history behind the text and determining the significance for the culture. Knowing where and when the text is set will help to understand the text more.

There are three features of the context of situation:

- **The Field of Discourse:** Refers to what is happening, to the nature of the social action that is taking place.
- **The Tenor of Discourse:** Refers to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles.
- **The Mode of Discourse:** Refers to what part the language is playing, what is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation.

Thus, we can ask pupils to make a situational description according to the three features of the context of situation. The Field of Discourse is obvious, Monica is planning a Thanksgiving dinner. The analysis about the Tenor of Discourse may take them some time, though the fact that the episode belongs to a familiar TV series will help them to examine the statuses and roles of the participants. As a brief remark, we can summarize the later issue as follows:

- *Rachel Green* is a fashion enthusiast and Monica Geller's best friend since High School. Rachel is working as a waitress at the coffee shop Central Perk.
- *Monica Geller* is the "Mother Hen" of the group, known for her obsessive-compulsive and competitive nature. Monica works as a chef.
- *Phoebe Buffay* is an eccentric masseuse and musician. Phoebe is known for being street-smart and naïve.
- *Joey Tribbiani* is a struggling actor. Joey is known for having many girlfriends throughout the series. Born into an Italian family, Joey has a love for food.
- *Chandler Bing* is an executive. Chandler is known for his sarcastic sense of humour. In the piece of script it is said that he wants to boycott all pilgrim holidays. Thus it is not said in that script why that happens, pupils who are very familiar with that TV series should know that this "childish" behaviour started when Chandler's parents divorced when he was 9 years old, and they told him they were getting divorced over Thanksgiving dinner.
- *Ross Geller* is a palaeontologist working at a museum of Prehistoric History, and a professor of palaeontology at New York University. He is Monica's brother and he is in love with Rachel since High School.

To finish the situational description, pupils should analyse the Mode of Discourse, referring to what part language is playing. One of the proposed activities under the scope of Discourse Analysis was to represent the piece of script. As scrutinize the Mode of Discourse is not an easy task, we could try to tackle with this description after a few rehearsals of the play. Once learners are trying to act for their characters, it would be less demanding as they know what they are saying and how they are saying it, or at least that is what they should try to know.

Discourse function and grammatical form are somehow related. We need two ways of looking at dialogue: from the point of view of grammar (the constituent mood structures of conversational clauses) and from the point of view of discourse (the types of moves made in an interactive context). The first tells us primarily about the linguistic rights and privileges of social roles in the culture; the second tells us primarily how, while enacting those social roles, participants are constantly negotiating relationships of solidarity and intimacy. Although we will deal with grammar later, the two together contribute to our understanding of how participants enact their interpersonal differences in casual conversation (Eggins, Slade 1997: 179).

Halliday offers us a functional-semantic interpretation of interaction. In his approach, Halliday points out that when someone uses language to interact, there is a relationship established among the speaker and the hearer, who will probably become the next speaker. That is to say, dialogue is an exchange process that involves two aspects: a material to be exchanged (a message, goods or services) and the roles related with those exchanging relations (giving or demanding). The cross-classification of these aspects defines the four basic speech functions of English:

Speech Role	Commodity exchanged	
	Information	Goods and Services
Giving	Statement	Offer
Demanding	Question	Command

As Halliday said, “(...) if I am giving, you are called on to accept; if I am demanding, you are called on to give” (Halliday 1984: 12). Speaker and respondent roles position are changeable in the speech interaction. Explaining those speech English functions to the pupils may help them to analyse the Mode of Discourse, activity we have explained previously. It will also encourage them to carry out self-evaluation in order to further their learning and to develop metacognitive awareness in order to plan and regulate their language learning and language using skills. But these are not the only activities the representation of the script play can trigger. The giver and receiver of information have several responsibilities to ensure successful communication. As a result, we can give pupils some tips to help them to achieve that goal. When you are the giver, keep these things in mind: anticipate the needs of your audience, organize your thoughts in advance, use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation and allow the receiver a chance to understand your message and respond without interruption. When you are the receiver of information, you will enhance communication by reading or listening carefully and giving full attention to what is being given to you. Make sure you do not prejudge before getting the entire message. The giver and receiver share responsibilities to make communication effective. Consider the impact your words may have on the other person, and put yourself in the other person’s shoes. If misunderstandings or errors do arise, despite your best efforts to the contrary, clarify and correct as soon as

possible. Finally, since a large part of any interpersonal communication occurs non-verbally (through body language, eye contact, etc.), make sure your non-verbal messages are the same as what you are actually saying. If you are not communicating in person, on the other hand, be aware that the other person does not have the non-verbal cues as a guide, so make sure your message is clear and the tone is appropriate. (<http://www.nmcourt.fed.us/usbc/values-communication>).

“Communication is defined as a process by which we assign and convey meaning in an attempt to create shared understanding. This process requires a vast range of skills in intrapersonal and interpersonal processing, listening, observing, speaking, questioning, analyzing, and evaluating” (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). Within the frame of communication we can infer that messages are created through the interaction between semantics, contextual information and a cognitive factor. According to de Beaugrande and Dressler, any unit of communication must show seven constitutive principles:

- Cohesion (semantic/pragmatic/cognitive)
- Coherence (semantic/pragmatic/cognitive)
- Intentionality (cognitive/pragmatic)
- Acceptability (cognitive/pragmatic)
- Informativity (cognitive/semantic/pragmatic)
- Situationality (contextual, sociological/pragmatic)
- Intertextuality (contextual/sociological/pragmatic)

As we are dealing with Semantics, we will only focus on:

Cohesion

Concerns to the way words are connected in a text. The lack of cohesion of a text turns into a lack of understanding. Cohesion acts as a network of lexical, grammatical, and other relations. Those relations regulate the text. In order to achieve that regulation the reader or hearer should interpret the words and sentences and relate them with the other words and sentences from the text. Halliday and Hasan (1976) established five cohesion categories: co-reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunctions, and lexical cohesion.

We can work with the text from the script and those categories.

- Co-reference: It can be defined as a cohesive relation between the verbal text and another item, from which it obtains its meaning. At the beginning of the piece of script Monica tells Ross:

How about I cook dinner at my place? I'll make it just like Mom's.

The cohesive relation is achieved by the omission of some element in the second sentence that presupposes the first sentence.

- Substitution: It can be defined as the replacement of one item in the text by another. This category is shown in the script as follows:

***Monica:** And I assume, Chandler, you are still boycotting all the pilgrim holidays.*

***Chandler:** Yes, every single one of them.*

Substitution is established by the presence of the substitute “one” in the second sentence (Chandler’s answer), which is a counter of “pilgrims holidays” in the first sentence of the same example.

- Ellipsis: It is the replacement of one item of the text by nothing. Ellipsis may occur within the sentence or between sentences. The later one takes places in the following example:

Ross: (to Monica) Well, you were right. How can they do this to us, huh? It's Thanksgiving.

The sentence is incomplete; its meaning is not fully represented. The reader or hearer must recover the elliptical subject and verbal part of the predication. As we have said previously, this is a completeness script. The represented ellipsis would not take place if we had presented the complete script.

- Conjunctions: Cohesion can also be achieved by the use of connectives. There are several types of connectives. In the following example a Temporal Conjunctive Connective is shown:

Monica: Phoebe, you're gonna be with your grandma?

Phoebe: Yes, and her boyfriend. But we're celebrating Thanksgiving in December 'cause he is lunar.

Monica: So you're free Thursday, then.

- Lexical cohesion: Lexical cohesion is basically created by repetition (reiteration) of the same lexeme, general nouns, or other lexemes sharing the majority of semantic features. There are two basic types of lexical cohesion: reiteration and collocation.

a) Reiteration: It involves the repetition of a lexical item. In the example we are going to expose, “he” is a reiteration of “boyfriend” by a general word.

Phoebe: Yes, and her boyfriend. But we're celebrating Thanksgiving in December 'cause he is lunar.

b) Collocation: It happens when any pair of lexical items semantically close co-occur. There are many terms semantically related in the piece of script, as *Thanksgiving, dinner, lump* and *pilgrims holidays*. The coexistence of these words not only contributes to the coherence of the text, but it maintains a global discourse topic.

Coherence

Coherence is a network of relations that organise and create a text. Cohesion and coherence concern the mechanism language use to be connected. In the case of cohesion, some pieces of language are connected to others because of lexical and grammatical dependencies. In the case of coherence, they are connected by the way conceptual or meaning dependencies are perceived by language users.

Cohesion and coherence are the two resources language has to create texture in a text. Texture is the capacity a text has to work as a whole. “Cohesion works at surface level establishing meaning relations between elements of the context, and coherence arises from the meaning relations underlying a text. (...) The lexical and structural knowledge which the text activates combines with our knowledge of the world to produce coherence. Both cohesion and coherence are maintained by continual interaction of text-presented knowledge with situational knowledge and prior knowledge of the world.” (Alonso 2005: 88).

Informativity

A text has to contain some new information. A text is informative if it transfers new information, or information that was unknown before. Informativity should be seen as a sequenced procedure. The degree of informativity varies in every member of the communicative event. Aspects referred to situational factors also contribute to the informativity of a text.

In this section it is worth noting the term *dualism*, designation to meaning as part of the signified/signifier relation, encouraged by the term *meaning* itself and by the assertion that words and sentences have meaning. We all know what it is to have meaning for a word in practice. Knowing the significance of a word allows us to use it properly. If we extrapolate this statement to the class, it makes sense if we ask pupils “which words from the text have *meaning for you?*” or “what does *lump* mean?”. Semantics’ field is not to seek meaning. Semantics tries to understand how words and sentences can be meaningful. Some people assume that as Semantics is involved with words, it should

therefore be connected with dictionaries. But not every word has the same kind of meaning. We can differentiate between *full* words and *form* words. Some of the full words from the script we are dealing with are *dinner, pilgrim, cook, Thursday* and some of the form words are *it, and, about*. Those terms are meaningless without other words; they need to be in a sentence to be relevant. Moreover, some of the words that should be considered as *full* may not have a meaning for some pupils, that is the case of the terms *lump* or *mashed potatoes*. Both terms are common words for native speakers, but not for foreign speakers or young ESL learners. Something similar happens with idioms. It is important to note that phrasal verbs are considered a common type of idiom. Idioms are a sequence of words, but semantically idioms are single units. There are no idioms on the script, but pupils are familiar with many of them, as the commonly known “it is raining cats and dogs”. Obviously neither cats nor dogs are raining over no one. All those musings show us that a single word is not always enough; sometimes we need units larger than a word to come through meaning.

As a conclusion, we can offer the following activities to work with the meanings of words. It would be appropriate to suggest these activities before watching the episode. What do pupils know about Thanksgiving? Where is it celebrated? When it is celebrated? With this activity, we are working not only with words, but with cultural knowledge too. As a warmer exercise we can initiate a brainstorming about words related with Thanksgiving. Then, learners should match the words with its definitions:

A	B
1. turkey	a. a public holiday in the U.S. and in Canada when families have a large meal together to celebrate and be thankful for food, health, families, etc.

2. cider	b. to drink a glass of wine, etc., to thank someone, wish someone luck, or celebrate something.
3. cranberry	e. a religious person who travels a long way to a holy place.
4. pea	d. a bird that looks like a large chicken and is often eaten at Christmas and at Thanksgiving.
5. merriment	e. a small red sour fruit.
6. Thanksgiving	f. a round green seed that is cooked and eaten as a vegetable.
7. feast	g. to crush something, especially a food that has been cooked, until it is soft and smooth.
8. mash	h. a large meal where a lot of people celebrate a special occasion.
9. pilgrim	i. laughter, fun and enjoyment.
10. toast	j. an alcoholic drink made from apples.

Another activity could be to complete sentences using words from the exercise above:

1. The modern _____ dinner includes _____ and lamb.
2. Everyone wanted to drink _____.
3. My parents prepared a great _____.
4. The first European _____ arrived in America in 1620.

Another way to improve vocabulary is as simple as look for the meaning of the words in the dictionary. Do pupils know the meaning of those words?

pumpkin pie

sauce

juicy

tots

yam

crispy

oven

lumps

We can affirm that semantics is not a single discipline; it is related to other studies of the use of language, linguistic and non-linguistics context and discourse.

METHODOLOGICAL RESOURCES AND ITS APPLICATIONS

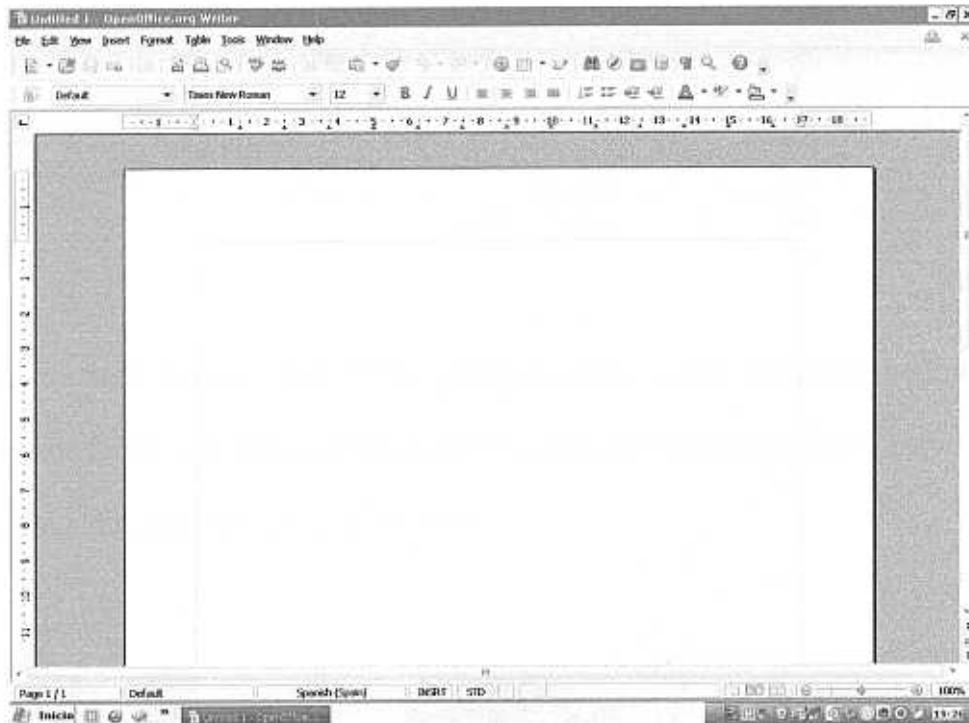
An alternative path to the teaching of Vocabulary and Grammar

Using computer-based technologies in ESL instruction makes sense practically and pedagogically. Providing language and literacy training for children learning ESL via computer is an appealing and intuitively way for students to learn. Computers are something ESL learners can work with when they cannot participate in class activities. Students can also review vocabulary through games or activities at home. Many instructional software packages include those kinds of activities and even many editorials have a website where children can work, play or read books. Introverted students may also benefit from multimedia language learning, not being susceptible to making mistakes in front of their mates. On the computer a child can think calmly without being judged. As well as empowering students, the on-line work can be a useful tool for teachers working with different levels, because it can allow them to pay attention to individual needs. Teachers should also provide context, an appropriate application of course material to fit the situation of the students, a forum for discussion, and live interaction that computers cannot provide. Teaching tools and computers cannot replace teachers, but they should all to work together.

New technologies are providing innovative and thrilling teaching tools. The interactive dimension of new multimedia technology can involve students into historical research and enrich moral understanding, thus providing strong pedagogical tools to teach tolerance and promote multicultural curricula. In addition, those technologies can help teachers to create the needed materials for the classroom. This is the case of Openoffice, a tool that enables teachers to create didactic materials for the classroom. Openoffice is

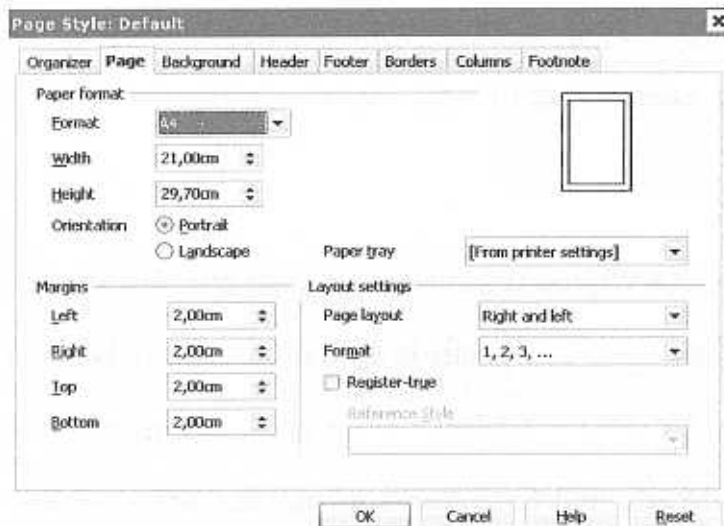
an open source with several independent applications such as a word processor (SWriter), a database and Impress (a program for designing presentations).

In opening the word-processor, the following screen appears:

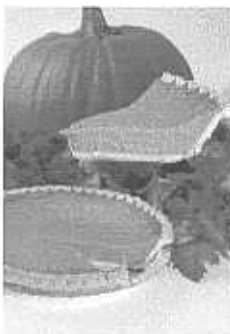
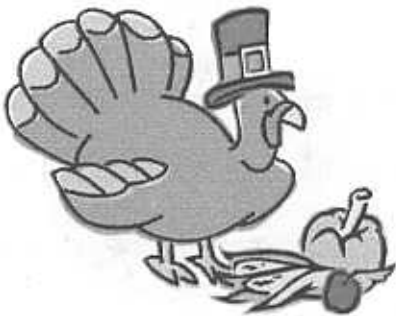


We can create flashcards with SWriter. A Flashcard is any of a set of cards bearing information, such as words or numbers, that is used in classroom drills to help with foreign language. Flashcards can bear vocabulary, historical dates, formulas or any subject matter that can be learned via a question and answer format. Flashcards are widely used as a learning drill to aid memorization by means of spaced repetition. They are broadly used in the English class because they are visually attractive and motivating for children, and they can be adapted to the needs and level of the class.

The first thing to do is to set the size of the element we want to create according to our preference. In the menu Format/Page, this screen will appear:



As we have been working with Thanksgiving vocabulary from the chosen text, we can create some flashcards to help students acquire the new vocabulary, for example turkey, cranberry, cider, pumpkin pie and pilgrims:



We can add text to the images or not. If we add text, it should be short, attractive and placed at the bottom of the page. This will make it easier for us to cover it in case we need to do so. To add text we should click on Tools/Fontwork to choose a font from the

gallery of samples. As it has been shown, we can create flashcards in a few steps.

Openoffice offers more tools to create different types of didactic resources such as slideshows and web pages.

There are other “easy to use” computer based tools that can prove to be very useful for practicing grammar and vocabulary through listening and visual input. Almost every computer with Windows operating system installed has a video editor called “Movie Maker”. This software is free and can be downloaded from the Microsoft webpage should we find it is not installed on our computer. Movie maker gives us the option to combine still and moving pictures. We can cut, paste, introduce transitions (between images), create titles, etc. Another option, once we have finished editing, is to introduce especial effects that can modify both, images and sounds. The possibilities are endless. Teaching grammar and/or vocabulary through custom made video activities can be very rewarding and fun for students.

If video editing can open up new spaces to teach a second language, we would expect no less from a sound editor. Audacity is also a freeware tool that enables us to edit sounds. We can record our own music, voice, or other audio files, edit it, mix it with other audio or musical parts, add effects like reverb, chorus, and echo, and burn it on a CD, post it on the World Wide Web or e-mail it. Again, the possibilities in front of us are vast. We can design different activities that may involve students recording themselves and/or others, so they can hear how their English sounds. We could also ask some students to record and distort their voices so others have to find out who is who, etc. The only limit is the teacher and students’ imagination.

Although, all these tools can be great to motivate students and teachers, they should be used with caution. By that we mean, that designing these types of activities can be too

time consuming. Many hours devoted to the designing of one activity, as good as it may be, could prove to be unpractical after all.

Some educators may argue that the learning curve for some of these tools is simply too complicated to really take advantage of them, but as we leave behind the 20th century, we have to redefine the concept of literacy as "a dynamic and ongoing process of perpetual transformation", whose evolution is influenced by a person's interests, cultures, and experiences. Succeeding in digital information-oriented society demands multiliteracies, that is, competence in a diverse set of functional, academic, critical, and electronic skills. To be considered multiliterate, students today must acquire a battery of skills that will enable them to take advantage of the diverse types of communication made possible by new technologies and to participate in a global learning community. Although becoming multiliterate is not an easy task for any student, it is especially difficult for ESL students operating in a second language. In their attempts to become multiliterate, ESL students must acquire linguistic competence in a new language and at the same time develop the cognitive and sociocultural skills necessary to gain access into the social, academic, and workforce environments of the 21st century. They must become functionally literate, be able to speak, understand, read, and write English, as well as use English to acquire, articulate and expand their knowledge. They must also become academically literate, be able to read and understand interdisciplinary texts, analyze and respond to those texts through various modes of written and oral discourse, and expand their knowledge through sustained and focused research. Furthermore, they must become critically literate, defined here as the ability to evaluate the validity and reliability of informational sources so that they may draw appropriate conclusions from their research efforts. Finally, in our digital age of information, students must become

electronically literate, be able "to *select* and *use* electronic tools for communication, construction, research, and autonomous learning".

(<http://llt.msu.edu/vol4num2/kasper/default.html>)

There is another computer based approach to the teaching of English that has been often used with success.

CORPUS LINGUISTICS

What is corpus linguistics?

Corpus Linguistics is the study of language through corpus-based research, differing from traditional linguistics in its insistence of the study of authentic examples of language in use.

What is a corpus?

A corpus is a collection of texts spoken and/or written that has been designed and compiled based on a set of clearly defined criteria

What is a specialized corpus?

A specialized corpus is a corpus which includes a particular type of texts. It may contain texts specialized in terms of a particular timeframe (text from 1920 to 1930) or a particular subject (art, science, politics, etc).

What is a general corpus?

This type of corpus may include various types of texts, either written or spoken on many different subjects. Sometimes it is called “reference corpus” because it serves as a reference material for language learning, translation etc. While specialized corpora tends to be reduced in number of words, general corpora is usually large.

These are some of the most important general corpora:

The Brown Corpus,

The LOB Corpus (1960s British English),

The British National Corpus, a 100 million word collection of a range of spoken and written texts, created in the 1990s,

The Frown Corpus (early 1990s American English),

The FLOB Corpus (1990s British English),

The International Corpus of English,

The 385+ million word Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) (1990-present),

Kolhapur (Indian English),

Wellington (New Zealand English), and

Australian Corpus of English (Australian English).

Now that we know what Corpus Linguistics is, we could create our own specialized corpus that could help us with ELS teaching. Using a specialized corpus in ESL (English Second Language) may provide a way of unifying theory and practice. On the one hand a corpus linguistic based approach is theoretically useful as it describes languages and opens new perspectives on the teaching of grammar and vocabulary. On

the other hand, corpus linguistics in ESL classrooms can be used to determine the content in our syllabus and how to work with it. In this section of the paper we will deal with questions concerning to corpus linguistics and ESL, which will be laid out as follows:

- Criteria for compilation.
- Corpus' compilation.
- Use of the corpus.
- Corpus Analysis.

CRITERIA FOR COMPILATION

Size

The corpus is composed of 86033 words, classified in 6781 word types.

Language

The English version of the scripts from the first season of the TV Series *Friends* has been used for the compilation of this corpus.

Texts

Friends is a comedy TV series.

Subject

A Comedy Series that chronicles the lives of six best friends as they navigated through the ups and downs of romance and of careers from the confines of their local coffee shop and some Manhattan apartments.

Authorship

Marta Kauffman started her acting career in Brandeis University with David Crane. They've been a team for over 20 years now. She began working in theatre in New York. She and David teamed up and worked with Michael Skloff (composer) and produced several musicals. One of the musicals was a stage version of the movie Arthur. She co-wrote the book and lyrics for the musical "Personals" with David. "Personals" received an Outer Critics Award and a Drama Desk nomination. They were co-executive producers on Dream On for many years, which received an Emmy nomination for best comedy series and a Cable Ace Award. They created the comedy "The Powers that Be" which starred John Forsythe, David Hyde Pierce and others. They also created and were executive producers on "Family Album", "Veronicas Closet" and were executive producers on "Jesse". They came up with the idea of "Friends" in 1994.

COMPUTER ASSISTED TOOLS

The use of corpus linguistics in the classroom can help the teacher meet his/her goals. If the teacher wants to extract information from the corpus, s/he needs to use a computer assisted tool. We have used Paul Nation's AntConc 3.2.1. software, which is a freeware concordance program for Windows, Macintosh OS X, and Linux. This free software can be used with "txt" format. The purpose of the program is to allow instructors to gather their own sets of texts and see which are the most frequent words, sentences, idioms..., in those texts. The program permits teachers to work with different texts of different sizes at the same time. After downloading the program, there are instructions that show

the teacher how to use the program. Teachers need to save the texts that they want to use as “.txt”; otherwise the program will not recognize them. If the texts are from internet sources, teachers have to copy and paste them into a Word Document and save them as “.txt”.

CORPUS ANALYSIS

The study of languages can be classified in two areas: the study of structure and the study of use. The focus of this paper is to emphasize language use. Instead of studying what is theoretically possible in a language, we study the language used in the contexts of *Friends*' scripts. From the several kinds of research questions that can be investigated, we are going to focus on the use of a linguistic feature, either a lexical item or a grammatical construction. Furthermore, those features can be investigated by considering associations with other features.

Computers can find all the instances of a word in a corpus and generate a complete list of them. As a result, if the teacher wants to know the most used words in the corpus, s/he only has to click on the “Frequency” file on the opening screen.

Rank	Freq	Word
1	3203	I
2	2207	you
3	1839	the
4	1835	s
5	1375	a
6	1353	to
7	1249	and
8	1136	it
9	857	that
10	855	Ross

“Frequency” results screen .

Once the counts are found, the teacher can decide to focus on the use of the verbs. Some examples of the most used verbs from the corpus are: *is, know, 're, was, be, and like.*

Rank	Freq	Word
12	838	is
15	723	know
32	460	re
35	414	was
40	397	be
43	380	like

Most frequent verbs.

However, rather than just telling the students how to use these words, we can make them understand how to use them in context. Some activities that describe how the teacher can make his/her students think about the context in which the verbs would be said and how the verbs found in the authentic texts could be used appropriately are:

Activity 1

Using the verbs found, make sentences using those verbs.

Activity 2

Write a composition using the verbs found.

One of the researches we can conduct with a corpus is to figure out the contexts in which a word can occur. As a result we can identify the different meanings of a word.

The program we are using displays the instances of the words with their contexts. Those displays are called concordance listings. If we choose the word “right” from our corpus, 300 concordance hits are found. Each concordance hit is presented in a line with the word in the middle. If we click on the word in each line, the program will display the word in its context, that is to say, a passage of the book where the word that is contended is shown. The displays are referred to as KWIC (Key Word in Context) displays. It is useful to see more than a single line of context.

Hit	KWIC
1	gotta be something wrong with him! Chandler: All right Joey, be nice. So does he have a hump? A hump an
2	.. there. Joey: Instead of...? Chandler: That's right. Joey: Never had that dream. Phoebe: No. Chand
27	from your hand. When you're holding it, you feel right. You feel complete. JOEY: Y'miss it? CHANDLER:
38	WISTER) ROSS: (DOING THE SPINNING) Okay, Monica: Right foot red. MONICA: Could've played Monopoly, but

KWIC entries with extended context.

The KWIC files can reveal the meanings of a word. In the figure exposed above, four different meanings for the word “right” are revealed. The first entry is in accordance with what is just, good, or proper (ex.: *right* conduct). The second refers to facts or truth: correct in your opinion or judgement (ex.: the *right* answer). The 27th entry conveys a sense of suitability, appropriateness. The 38th entry relates to the side of the body that is away from the side in which the heart is mostly located.

Another useful data that can help teachers prepare their lessons and the materials they need is the distribution of a word across registers. We can work with children with those entries instead of looking for those words in the dictionary. In addition, we can suggest to them the following activity:

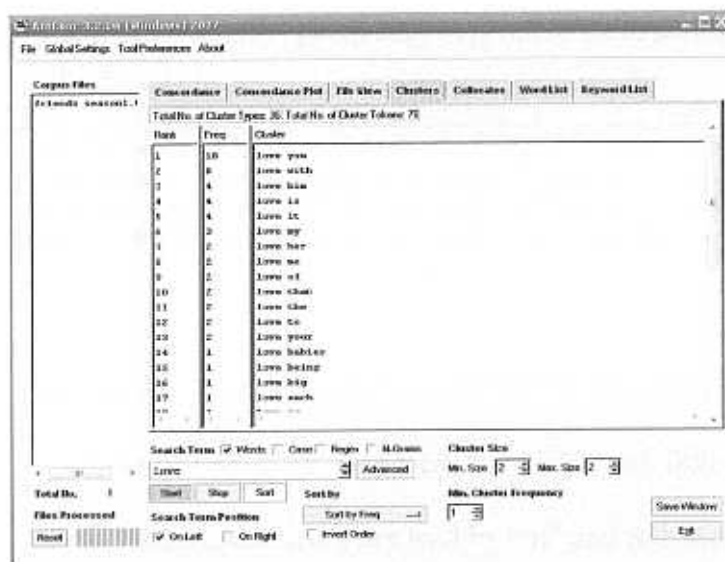
Exercise: Look at the concordance. Study the examples of the word “right” in use and answer the questions.

Hz	KWIC
1	wrong with him! Chandler: All right Joey, be nice. So does he
2	stead of...? Chandler: That's right. Joey: Never had that dre
3	. You're feeling a lot of pain right now. You're angry. You're l
4	y. umm-umm, I'll just--I'll be right back, I just gotta go ah, (
5	honeymoon, so nothing! Ross: Right, you're not even getting y
6	y brother's going through that right now, he's such a mess. How
7	clear of you. Monica: That's right. (Scene: Monica's Apartment
8	that I have any idea who we is right now, but you just have to (
9	is probably not what you need right now. Um... how long? Paul:
10	ammer, Andrea has cats. Joey: Right. Thanks. It's June. I'm
11	! (They do so.) Chandler: All right, kids, I gotta get to work.
12	Joey: Look, it was a job all right? Chandler: 'Look, Gippette
13	t to leave.) Chandler: You're right, I'm sorry. (Burst into so
14	problems can hear? Phoebe: All right, c'mere, gimme your feet.
15	or is 'anyway'... Monica: All right, you ready? Rachel: No. I
16	a any part of it. JOEY: Yeah, right!.....Y'serious? PHOEBE:
17	n last? PHOEBE: Boy! Probably right before she lost it! (CHAND
18	hours, you might be where I am right about now. (SHE COMES IN) (
19	...Well, this is still ruined, right? SCENE 2: MONICA AND RACH
20	She's a waitress. RACHEL: All right, you guys, I kinda gotta c
21	handler, you're an only child, right? You don't have any of this
22	ging. BARRY (TO INTERCOM): Be right there. (TO ROBBIE+RACHEL) I
23	ow. BARRY: You know, you were right? I mean, I thought we were

- How many meanings are there?
- Which meaning is the most frequent?

Since the corpus we are working with is not tagged, it would take us a long time to analyze the lemma of a word that can be a noun or a verb; for example: love.

To determine which occurrences of “love” are nouns or verbs, we must look at the forms in each context and count how many verbs and nouns there are. The results show that there are more occurrences of “love” as a verb than as a noun. To study the word “love” as a verb we have to search for the clusters, placing the term on the left. The following data is shown:



The more common pair shown is “love you” (frequency: 18), where force acts as a verb:

Hit	KWIC
1	py birthday, pal! JOEY: We love you, man. (KISSES HIM) ROSS: I
2	the second two- woooo! ...I love you guys. You guys are the gre
3	l. [Sits down beside her] I love you the most. Rachel: [Humour:
4	ng you love so much doesn't love you back. Rachel: ...I think t
5	: Alright, well, be good, I love you. [Kisses him and goes to le
6	Gotta go. I miss you too, I love you, but it's getting real late
7	e's somethin' right here. I love you. [They kiss.] CAROL: Oh,
8	[They kiss.] CAROL: Oh, I love you too. But-- ROSS: No but, r
9	und like a bug! Bzzzz.... I love you, Ross. ROSS: Her name is (
10	hat is so sweet. Oh gosh. I love you. Insurance? RACHEL: Oh, y
11	EL: Thank you. Thank you. I love you. MONICA: Hi. Ua, I'm gonn
12	hat is so sweet. Oh gosh. I love you. Insurance? RACHEL: Oh, y
13	EL: Thank you. Thank you. I love you. MONICA: Hi. Ua, I'm gonn
14	I did, I only did because I love you so much! RACHEL: Uh- whic
15	h with his hand] MONICA: --love you. [Ross, Rachel and Joey cr
16	ouple beers in me, but... I love you, man. [Joey gives Ross a h
17	pens door] CHAN: Rachel, I love you! Deal with me first! [she :
18	ROSS: Come on, they're gonna love you. [Scene: Close-up of Rache

The same thing happens with the following entry, “love with” (frequency: 8):

Hit	KWIC
1	other day about you making love with your socks on, but it isn't
2	ite men that women fall in love with. Believe me, I cannot sell
3	HOEBE: But he's falling in love with her. RACHEL: Please, they
4	indy. I think I'm still in love with you. Ross and Rachel: Oh!
5	ith her hand] ETHAN: --in love with you. MONICA: Really? ETHA
6	n college, when he fell in love with Carol and bought her that :
7	n that he's desperately in love with you, he probably wouldn't r
8	t us. Look, I-I've been in love with you since, like, the ninth

The next most common is “love him” (frequency: 4), where force acts as a verb too:

Hit	KWIC
1	im! I'm sorry. I just don't love him. Well, it matters to me!
2	I-I-I know, I know I didn't love him- PHOEBE: Oh, see, Jack die
3	him, the little guy? Oh, I love him! PHOEBE: Ooh, wait... wait.
4	party. MNCA: Oh my God! I love him! JOEY: [as Phoebe enters]

From the hits shown, almost all of them are preceded by “I” and followed by a pronoun (subject + love + pronoun), one is preceded by “making” and followed by “with + pronoun” (make + love + with), and seven are lead by “in” and followed by “with” (in + love + with + pronoun).

If we analyse those entries, we find that the most common sentence structure for the verb is: subject + verb (love) + pronoun. As a result, we can say that this is the most common form of the verb “love” that appears in the corpus. In order to make a real statement we should analyse all the entries. Doing it manually may be a tedious task, but since we did not have our corpus tagged, we can only offer a partial review. One of the reasons we did not have our corpus tagged is because of the complexity of tagging with freeware software solutions.

We can propose the following activities in order to make students analyze if the word love acts as a noun or as a verb:

Exercise 1: Look at this concordance for the word “love”. Notice the different functions and meanings it has:

Hit	KWIC
1	him! I'm sorry. I just don't love him. Well, it matters to me!
2	r change.] Phoebe: (singing) Love is sweet as summer showers, :
3	e is sweet as summer showers, love is a wondrous work of art, b
4	ondrous work of art, but your love oh your love, your love...is
5	of art, but your love oh your love, your love...is like a giant
6	your love oh your love, your love...is like a giant pigeon...c
7	he other day about you making love with your socks on, but it is
8	. You, however have had the love of a woman for four years.
9	world! It sucks. You're gonna love it! [Time Lapse, Rachel and
10	st gonna meet someone, fall in love- and that'd be it? (ROSS GAZI
11	hat are you talking about? We love Schhteve! Schhteve was schhe:
12	appy birthday, pal! JOEY: We love you, man. (KISSES HIM) ROSS:
13	, I-I-I know, I know I didn't love him- PHOEBE: Oh, see, Jack (
14	m- PHOEBE: Oh, see, Jack did love the cow. RACHEL: But see, it
15	h, him, the little guy? Oh, I love him! PHOEBE: Ooh, wait.. wa
16	t doesn't mean we still don't love each other. (TO THE R.R.) Y'
17	LER'S ROOM) CHANDLER: God, I love these fingers... AURORA: Ths
18	ust talk, and laugh, and make love, without feeling obligated to

Exercise 2: The concordance presented above shows examples of the word “love” in use. Which are nouns and which are verbs? Write the number of the line next to the correct word class:

- a) Noun
- b) Verb

There is a tendency to place a word with some associations to have a single sense or meaning. Identifying those associations leads to the analysis of the texts. If we had tagged the corpus, we could have done a multi-dimensional analysis. The multidimensional approach can be used to identify the variations among students and written registers.

- a) Initial *and* (i.e., occurrences of *and* used as clausal connector).
- b) Other initial words used as clausal connectors.
- c) Once-occurring words.

The first two items are additional measures of coordination and subordination; these features have been found in some studies to be important indicators of young writer's development. The third item, once-occurring words, gives an additional measure of lexical specificity (Biber D. 1998: 181).

ESL students' essays have a high number of initial *ands* and third-person pronouns. There are also many errors in the use of verb tense forms (young students make a great number of errors when using verbs, whether it is writing or speaking). One of the most common mistakes is the inappropriate use of the *-s* form when using verbs with the third-person pronouns in the Present Simple Tense. Corpus-based activities can help students to control those errors and to acquire some control over the linguistic demands of different writing tasks and purposes.

Many other corpus-based activities can be done with ESL students, for example: working with synonymous words, idioms, further grammar analyses (i.e., verb tense and voice studies) and grammatical associations. "The availability of large corpora and computer tools make it possible to study the patterned ways in which speakers use the grammatical resources of a language by investigating the frequency distribution of various constructions, the association patterns between grammatical structures and other linguistic and non-linguistic factors, and the factors that affect choices between structural variants" (Biber D. 1998: 56).

SYLLABUS DESIGN: A PRACTICAL VIEW

A syllabus is a statement of content used as the base for planning courses, in which the function of the syllabus designer is to select and grade this content. A syllabus can also be seen as a summary of the content to which learners will be exposed.

A syllabus is an agreement between the instructor and students, setting down the responsibilities and expectations on both sides. When designing a syllabus there are several components that are necessary:

Course Information:

- What do students need to learn?
- What pre-requisites are needed?

Instructor Information:

- What do I want students to know about my teaching philosophy?
- How can I communicate my enthusiasm for the course?

Course Description:

- What content will the course address?
- How is the course structured?
- How are the topics organized?

Course Objectives:

- What will the students know after having taken this course?

- What learning skills will the students develop in the course?

Instructional Approaches:

- What kinds of instructional interactions are needed?
- What kinds of instructional approaches are more helping to accomplish the learning objectives?

Course Requirements, Assignments:

- What will students be expected to do in the course?
- What kinds of assignments are needed for the course?
- Do assignments and tests obtain the kind of learning I want to foster?
Assignments (frequency, timing, sequence)? Tests? Quizzes? Exams? Papers?
Special projects? Journals? Oral presentations? Research on the web? Electronic databases?
- What kinds of skills do the students need to have in order to be successful in the course? Computer literacy? Research skills? Writing skills? Communication skills? Conflict resolution skills? Familiarity with software?

Course Policies:

- What is expected of the student? Attendance? Participation?

Grading, Evaluation:

- How will the students' work be graded and evaluated?
- How do students receive feedback on their performance?

Texts/Resources/Readings/Supplies:

- What kinds of materials will be used during the course?
- What kinds of instructional technologies will be used?

Course Calendar:

- What is the sequence of the content to be taught?

Learning Resources:

- What resources are available?

Student Feedback on Instruction:

- What kind of feedback are students going to receive?

There are several types of syllabuses. We can distinguish between product-oriented and process-oriented syllabuses. On one hand, product syllabuses are focused on the knowledge and skills learners should gain as a result of instruction. On the other hand, process syllabuses are focused on the learning experiences. We will shed some light on the last one.

Procedural or Task-based syllabuses

The content of the teaching is a series of determined tasks that the students want or need to perform with the language they are learning. Language learning is subordinate to task performance, and language teaching occurs only as the need arises during the performance of a given task.

Content syllabuses

The main purpose of content syllabuses is to teach some content using the language that the students are learning. In a content-based syllabus, the performance of the tasks is proceeding towards the developing of the second language. The subject matter is the most important thing, and language learning occurs as content learning is being acquired. Content-based language teaching is concerned with information, while task-based language teaching is concerned with communicative and cognitive processes.

The natural approach

Krashen and Terrell have identified the Natural Approach with the traditional approaches to language teaching. Traditional approaches are based on the use of language in communicative situations without the assistance of the native language. The Natural Approach adopts different techniques, using them to provide comprehensible input, such as:

- Comprehensible input presented in the target language through TPR activities, mime and gestures.
- Group techniques, alike to Communicative Language Teaching.
- Learners start to talk when they are ready.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

When designing a syllabus, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is an important aspect to bear in mind in language teaching. ICC requires that students acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and critical cultural awareness necessary to communicate interculturally. In the activities we are going to expose, the following elements will be shown:

- **Knowledge:** There are two types of knowledge required for ICC. The first is knowledge about social groups and cultures in one's own country and in the countries of one's interlocutors. In Spain, where English is the foreign language, students have to acknowledge many culture issues. The second type of knowledge is about the processes of interaction at societal and individual levels. If students speak grammatically correct English but have no knowledge of the processes of interaction, then communication will be a failure.
- **Attitudes:** Interest in discovering other perspectives or interpretations of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena, both in one's own and in other's culture.
- **Skills:** Ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own.
- **Critical cultural awareness:** Ability to identify significant references within and across cultures and elicit their significance and connotations (by establishing relationships of similarity and difference between them).

SYLLABUS ACTIVITIES: TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH THE FOUR BASIC SKILLS

“Expressing our wants, feelings, thoughts and opinions clearly and effectively is only half of the communication process needed for interpersonal effectiveness. The other half is listening and understanding what others communicate to us. When a person decides to communicate with another person, s/he does so to fulfil a need. The person wants something, feels discomfort, and/or has feelings or thoughts about something. In deciding to communicate, the person selects the method or code which s/he believes will effectively deliver the message to the other person. The code used to send the message can be either verbal or nonverbal. When the other person receives the coded message, they go through the process of decoding or interpreting it. Effective communication exists between two people when the receiver interprets and understands the sender’s message in the same way the sender intended it”.

(<http://www.drnadig.com/listening.htm>).

Keeping in mind what has been mentioned above; we would like to offer examples of activities that involve one or more of the four basic skills (i.e. reading, listening, speaking, and writing) and cope with real-life situations. These activities could be part of an English Syllabus.

We approach these activities as if they were training tasks, rather than tests. Our students need to know that they may not understand everything they hear or read.

Material used for the activities

Using videos or DVDs in the class is a motivating way to help students to understand language and to improve their listening skills, but we have to bear in mind some tips in order to make it work:

- Students cannot manage too much information. We should not go over five minutes, and that is why we have just worked with a part of the episode.
- Subtitles can help students receive a better understanding of what they are hearing and it is also a way to improve vocabulary, because they can write down the unfamiliar words and look for their meaning once the video or the DVD is over.

We have used scenes from *Friends*, one of the most famous American TV series of all times.

Guessing I

This activity is aimed to make our students practice predictive skills, because the effective listener can foresee what s/he is going to hear. In order to improve this skill we will write on the blackboard the following plot:

With their parents away, Monica and Ross decide to have Thanksgiving dinner together at Monica's. One by one their friends join in.

Once the students have read it, they should briefly discuss the topic and what they think is going to happen. Then, they will watch the episode and find out if they were wrong or right.

Guessing 2

This activity goes along the lines of the previous one. In this case, just before watching the scene for the first time, we will hand out a photocopy with some sentences. Students must write if they are true or false:

1. *Ross is happy about spending Thanksgiving at Monica's.*
2. *Chandler does not like Thanksgiving at all.*
3. *Rachel cannot go skiing.*
4. *Phoebe whips the potatoes.*
5. *Ross wants mashed potatoes with lumps.*
6. *Phoebe wants mashed potatoes with peas and onions.*
7. *Monica prepares four kinds of mashed potatoes.*
8. *Monica gets the keys.*
9. *The turkey is delicious.*
10. *They eat cheese sandwiches for dinner.*

With this activity, we will practice listening *for gist*, to get the general idea or meaning, ignoring the details and simply following the overall topic. We can watch the scene twice to give time to all students to complete the task. Then we will check it.

If there is enough time, we can hand out another photocopy with an extract from the script and some blanks. Students should fill the gaps while listening to the scene a third time:

Ross: (to Monica) Well, you were right. How can they do this to us, huh? It's Thanksgiving.

Monica: Ok, I'll tell you what. How about I cook dinner at my place? I'll make it just like Mom's.

Ross: Will you make the _____ with the _____?

Monica: You know, they're not actually supposed to have... (Ross looks at her sheepishly) I'll work on the lumps. Joey, you're going home, right?

Joey: Yeah.

Monica: And I assume, Chandler, you are still boycotting all the _____.

Chandler: Yes, every single one of them.

Monica: Phoebe, you're gonna be with your grandma?

Phoebe: Yes, and her boyfriend. But we're celebrating Thanksgiving in December 'cause he is lunar.

Monica: So you're free _____, then.

Phoebe: Yeah. Oh, can I come?

Monica: Yeah. Rach, are you thinking you're gonna make it to Vail?

Rachel: *Absolutely. Shoop, shoop, shoop. Only a hundred and two dollars to go.*

Chandler: *I thought it was \$98.50.*

Rachel: *Yeah, well it was. I, I broke a cup.*

Ross: *Well, I'm off to Carol's.*

Phoebe: *Ooh, ooh! Why don't we invite her?*

Ross: *(mimicking) Ooh, ooh. Because she's my ex-wife, and will probably want to bring her, ooh, ooh, lesbian life partner.*

With this activity we are practicing *listening for detail*, to get certain data, that is to say, extracting specific information.

Where are you from?

For this activity we have selected a *Friends* chapter that portrays cultural differences. After watching the chapter, we can discuss with our students the differences between some of the Spanish and the American festivities, illustrating aspects of intercultural communication and how things may go wrong in the absence of such communication.

Articles presentations

This activity focuses mainly on reading but there is some writing and listening involved as well.

Give the students a small range of articles related to the topic of the video they have previously watched and ask them to read as many of them as they can. Then, they should select one of the articles to present to the rest of the class. While a student is reading an article, the rest is listening and taking notes. At the end, there can be a Q&A session where classmates ask the student some questions to help them complete their notes. The teacher can also start a discussion about the article so the students can think and talk about the important points and apply the different reading skills such as: searching for main ideas, making inferences, etc. Being an oral activity, students will not see it as something tedious or intimidating.

We should not follow a fix type of standard approach whenever there is reading involved. However, there are some occasions when following a previously learned pattern can help. The following is an example of the steps we could follow when we want to work with a fixed pattern.

- Have students read through the text in silence.
- Ask the students to answer some questions that follow the reading after the initial silent reading (this way we encourage initial independent attempts at reading and comprehension).
- Have students compare their initial answers with other classmate.
- Go back to the start of the reading and have students reading sentences aloud in turns. During this reading, the teacher only helps with pronunciation.

- Following the reading aloud, the teacher models the right pronunciation of the words students had difficulties with while they were reading aloud and has students practice them chorally (this approach does not put individual students in front of the rest while reading aloud and makes pronunciation practice a group oriented rather than an individual activity).
- Start a general discussion about the reading with main ideas and important details and then go on into any comprehension or skill-based questions.
- Finish paying some attention to any highlighted vocabulary.

Role play

Using plays or drama can be a rewarding experience for both teacher and students. We will give some suggestions on how to get the best from our students when doing role-playing. When we use plays, our students can:

- Improve their reading and speaking skills
- Encourage creativity.
- Help them experiment with language, tone of voice, body language etc.
- Boost their confidence.
- Involve the whole class (nonspeaking parts can be given to learners who do not wish to speak or are less confident).

- Create additional roles or tasks such as: Sound effects, scenery, lights, props, etc.

Using the *Friends* TV show for role playing is a great idea but we should take into consideration the following aspects:

- Short narratives based on very brief scenes of 10-15 line maximum.
- Scenes with plenty of humour and action.
- Scenes that contain some songs.
- Scenes that involve both genders.
- Very popular scenes that everybody knows about or has seen before.
- Scenes that avoid sensible material or topics not suitable for the students age.

Learning idioms

Students always complain that no matter how much time they devote to learning, their English never sounds native-like. They usually prefer to learn the “stuff” they hear in movies or TV series such as *Friends*. Idioms, slang, expressions, etc are no doubt what they most hear in an English every-day environment.

We have mentioned before that real material about real language in use should be used in the ESL classroom, therefore we see no reason why we should not include this non-formal everyday way of talking. It goes without saying that we need to carefully select the content we want them to learn. Non-academic language can become sometimes ungrammatical or not appropriate.

We have selected some idioms or expressions from the *Friends* TV show that can be useful or fun for our students. We have also created a list with those idioms in use and what they mean.

Our team is strong, but it won't be a piece of cake to make it to the finals.

“A piece of cake”: **very easy.**

When the teacher found out, all hell broke loose.

“All hell broke loose”: **people did crazy things, everybody was fighting.**

The morning after the fire, it was business as usual at the bank.

“Business as usual”: **everything is normal, nothing has changed.**

The meeting seemed to drag on all morning.

“Drag on”: **used when speaking about something or someone that is boring.**

The soil is too hard for farming. I think we should call it quits.

“Call it quits”: **stop doing something, quit what you are doing.**

Joe may be the best player, but the coach calls the shots.

“Call the shots”: **make the decisions, decide what happens.**

This hospital is at the cutting edge of medical technology.

“Cutting edge”: **the latest technology, state of the art.**

Pat dodged a bullet. He passed the final exam.

“Dodged a bullet”: **avoid a failure, loss or injury.**

The cream of the crop will be invited to the party.

“Cream of the crop”: **best of a group, the chosen ones.**

Peter was dressed to kill for the job interview.

“Dressed to kill”: **dressed well and looking very sharp.**

I was trying to keep the surprise a secret, but Jim went and let the cat out of the bag.

“Let the cat out of the bag”: **let information out prematurely.**

Lighten up, Rose. Try to see the good in life.

“Lighten up”: **relax, do not be so serious.**

Please, cut to the chase. We're tired of this tale already.

“Cut to the chase”: **get to the point.**

So they're opening a new park? That's music to my ears.

“Music to my ears”: **good news, a message that makes me happy.**

I'm sure Julie will be here soon; please don't make a fuss.

“Make a fuss”: **cry or complain.**

*I'm really tired. I think I'll go **hit the sack**.*

“Hit the sack”: **go to bed.**

*Mr. Smith can do plumbing, carpentry, or a bit of cooking - he's a **jack of all trades**.*

“Jack of all trades”: **a person who has many skills.**

Once the lists have been carefully revised, we can go ahead and try to identify them with our students whenever they show up in *Friends*. This is an on-going process. If the teacher or one of the students detect a new expression in *Friends* or learn it elsewhere, it will be added to the list. At the end, students will have their own small idioms dictionary.

Speaking situations

This activity is similar to the role play one that we presented before, but this time students do not have to learn a script from *Friends*. Instead, we will present them with speaking situations that they have to solve in groups improvising with the knowledge they already have. Although, they do not use a *Friends* script they still have to choose one the characters from the series and act accordingly with their personality. Before each situation, students will be given a number of restrictions about things they should avoid. If one group fails to follow any of the restrictions, it would be eliminated.

Introducing others

Restrictions: Do NOT ask:

A person's age

Birth date
Salary
Weight
Marital status

Example,

A: Have you two met each other?

B: No, we haven't.

A: Ross, this is Rachel. Rachel this is Ross.

(B and C smile and shake hands).

B: Nice to meet you Ross.

C: Nice to meet you toooooo Rachelllll. (Ross acting is likely to be odd the first time he meets Rachel).

Introducing yourself

Restrictions: Do not use titles with first names, and do not use last names alone without titles.

Example,

Hello, Mr. Chandler (Wrong!).

Hi, Chandler (Okay).

Good morning, Tribiany (Wrong!).

Good morning, Mr. Tribiany (Correct).

Example,

I'm Mr. Joey Tribiany. (Title is not necessary here).

I'm Robert Smith. (Better)

I'm Dr. Sampson. (Okay, if you want to keep the relationship formal)

(After an introduction)

Nice to meet you, Mr. Tribiany.

Oh, please call me "Joey."

Conversation Starters

There are no restrictions for this situation.

Example,

General greetings and inquires

- How's it going Joey? (This means "How are you?" not "Where are you going?").

How's everything Ross?

How's life Raquel?

Asking about present activities

What's up? (What are you doing now?).

What's happening?

Asking and telling about recent events

What's new? (What interesting has happened since I last saw you?).

Guess what? (I want to tell you something. Ask me about it.).

(The appropriate response to this is "What?").

A: Guess what?

A: I just got a new job.

B: What?

B: Congratulations!

Bringing up a serious topic

Can I talk to you for a minute?

Do you have a minute?

Got a minute?

Requesting

Restrictions: Do NOT ever omit:

Can you

Could you

Will you

Would you

Would you mind V+ing

Example,

Lend me your umbrella!, Phoebe (sounds rude).

Excuse me Phoebe, could you lend me your umbrella? (more polite).

Help me fix my car Joey. (sounds too demanding).

Sorry to bother you Joey. I'm having trouble with my car.

Would you mind helping me for a minute Joey? (better).

Many other real-life situations could be practiced following this pattern. The fact that students take somebody else's personality and have to improvise makes this activity really fun for everyone.

CONCLUSION

Designing our own program on what to teach and how to do it might be really time consuming and difficult, but in the long run it might be rewarding when knowing that we are giving the students what they need and not just what somebody else has decided.

After this section of the paper we hope that the distinction between curriculum and syllabus is clear. Curriculum includes the philosophy, purposes, design and implementation of a whole course whereas syllabus is the specification and ordering of the content of a course made by the teacher.

It is important to keep in mind that most of the time commercial books that we regularly use in the class have not been specifically designed for the different contexts we may find.

The factors to consider when defining the context such as: people, physical setting, teaching resources, and time are of the outmost importance if we want to create our own program instead of just following a book.

Although, there is probably no one way of organizing a course, the factors mentioned can help us choose how to do it.

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