Learning a Language

A Speaking Class

By Lindsay Clandfield

Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Aim: A questionnaire and interview activity. Students interview each other and discuss languages. They then self-assess what they can do orally in English.

Materials: Make one copy of the worksheet for every pair of students.

NOTE: The following class is ideal for one of the first classes in a course. It can be done with monolingual and multilingual groups.

Procedure:

Warm Up

Play the Clap Game. Have all the students sitting or standing in a circle. Start a four-beat rhythm by clapping. Clap your hands on your thighs the first three times and then clap your hands together the fourth time. Students take turns, going clockwise, to call out a language on every fourth clap. If a student repeats a word, says the wrong word or doesn't know a word they are OUT. Make sure everybody is clapping, and then begin yourself by shouting out the first word "English!".

Stage One

When students have finished the warm up, tell them to sit down with a partner. Distribute the worksheets and tell students to complete the first section for themselves. They must do this alone and silently. When they are finished, they should ask the questions to their partner and answer their partner's questions. Feedback on this as a whole class at the end.

Stage Two

Instruct students to swap partners for stage two. Each student should be sitting with a new partner. They should read the sentences out and discuss whether they think they are true or false. Encourage the students to discuss these points, but tell them that if they are not sure, they can put not sure in the box. When this stage is finished, you could do some whole class feedback on the subject "How can you really learn a language?"

Stage Three:

With the same partner, instruct the students to ask and answer the questions about what they can do in English. You can point out that these questions are adapted from the Association of Language Testers of Europe, or ALTE (www.alte.org/can_do/index.cfm). ALTE describes each level of language learning with a series of *Can-do* statements, which "*define levels of ability in terms of what language users can typically do at each level*".

Optional: Once students have finished stage three, you could use what came up in that section to plan some future lessons.

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NAME: _____

PART ONE: LANGUAGES

Answer these questions and then compare answers with a partner.

How many languages do you speak?   _____

Have you studied other languages? Which ones? _____

Do you like learning other languages? _____

Do you want to study another language apart from English? _____

Have you visited an English speaking country? _____

Have you lived in an English speaking country? _____

Do many people around the world speak your language? _____

Do you think your language is in danger from other languages? _____

PART TWO: LEARNING A LANGUAGE
Interview a partner. Does your partner think these sentences are T, F or NS (not sure)? Why?

What do you think?	T	F	NS
English is very difficult to learn.			
Your language is very difficult to learn. More difficult than English?			
You can only really learn a language if you live in the country where it is spoken.			
You can learn a language by yourself with a book and some tapes.			
You need to have a teacher to learn a language.			

PART THREE: WHAT CAN YOU DO IN ENGLISH?
Work with a partner. What can you do in English? Can you do these things when you speak? Put a Y for Yes and an N for No. Compare your answers with a partner.

- Can you spell your name aloud and give your telephone number?
- Can you ask simple questions to get information from another person?
- Can you talk about what you like and don't like?
- Can you express your opinions comfortably?
- Can you talk about the news?
- Can you talk about your life and your work?
- Can you talk about changes in your life from the past to the present?
- Can you make plans with somebody to meet them in the future?
- Can you have a long conversation with another person or group of people?
- Can you talk about complicated or sensitive issues?