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Classroom language management and linguistic variation

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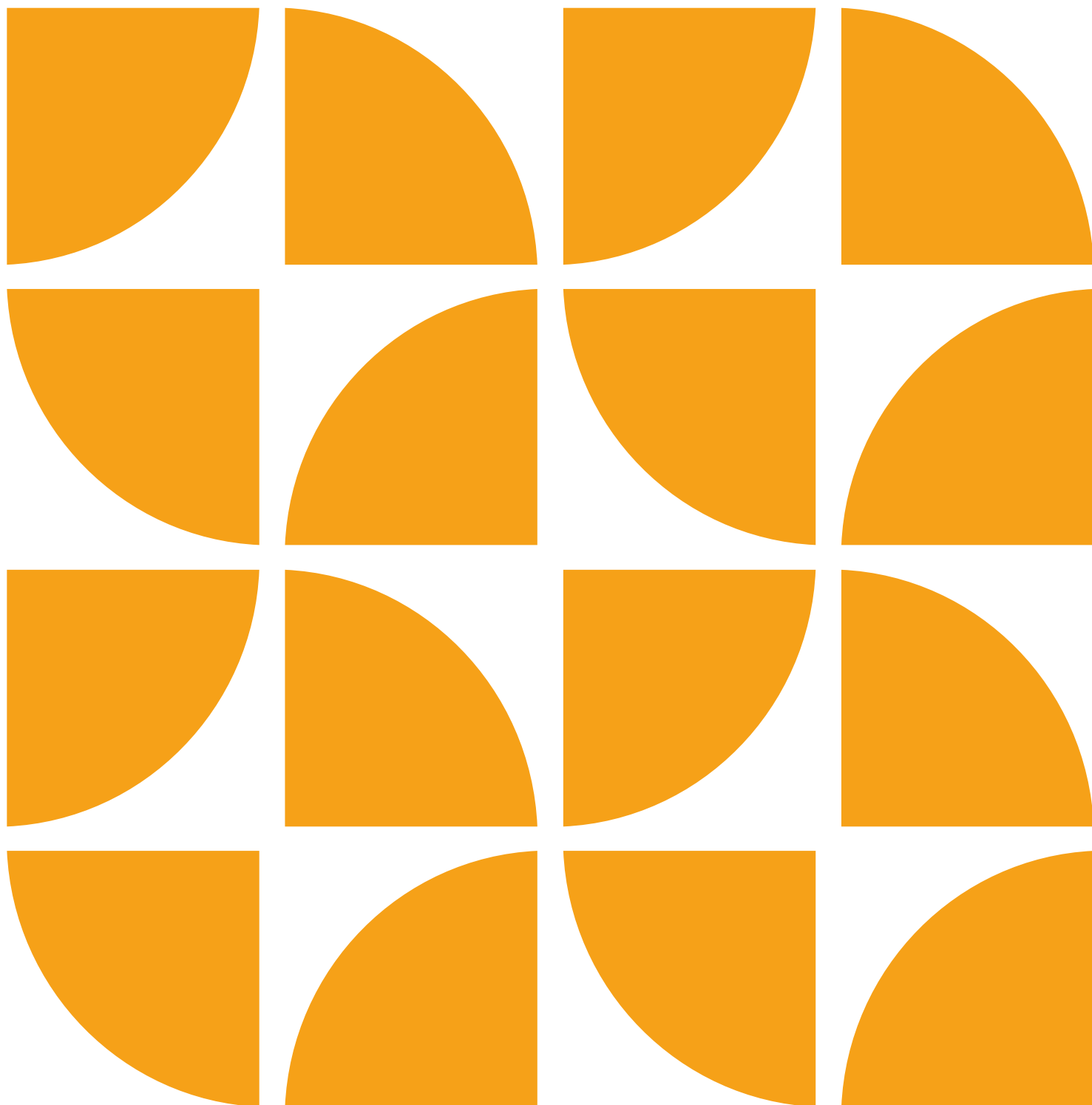
Outcomes

1. Knowing the properties and the characteristics of written and oral texts.

2. Identifying the mechanisms for the production of written and oral texts.

3. Developing the language of the classroom as a language model.

4. Understanding the importance of linguistic variation and registers.

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1. Introduction

This opening unit has been structured to put teaching tools and techniques into the wider context of the communicative competence. This is why topics such as oral and written registers, scaffolding, lexical resources and linguistic variation will be explained.

Learning a subject and a target language at the same time is both enriching and challenging. These opening pages intend to help educators navigate through this adventure and to provide them with a first kit of ideas and suggestions to create the right conditions to make their teaching more affective and more effective.

2. Classroom language

2.1 Content-obligatory language

Every subject has its own key vocabulary and key structures. It is up to CLIL teachers to decide and define the so-called content-obligatory language. Cloud, Genesee and Hamayan (2000) stated what it contains:

1. Technical vocabulary

2. Special expressions

3. Multiple meanings of words

4. Syntactical features

5. Relevant language functions (informing, analysing, classifying, predicting, inferring, explaining, justifying, etc.)

CLIL students need these five elements in order to acquire concepts, ask questions, explain understanding, demonstrate mastery and prepare for future learning in the subject.

2.2 The importance of scaffolding strategies

The aforementioned elements are necessary for students when dealing with the double challenge of language and content acquisition.

However, without the proper scaffolds, the language demands can obstruct English language learners' understanding of content. These language demands include understanding and making sense of investigation procedures, explaining processes, participating in discussions, acquiring specialised vocabulary, gathering information from books and writing observations and other expository texts.

As you will see in Unit 5, in order to overcome these difficulties, tools such as visual representations (e.g., concept maps and t-charts), inclusion of supplementary materials (books, maps, illustrations) and pre-teaching content vocabulary are necessary scaffolding strategies.

A proper scaffold combines immersion in an environment rich in vocabulary, elaborated interactions with important academic words, explicit instruction of a limited number of well-chosen words and instruction in strategies with which students can acquire words independently.

2.3 Essential elements in supporting language learning in class

In all this process, it is also important to bear in mind different tips in order to support language acquisition in a CLIL lesson (Ball, P. et al., 2015):

- **Create a psychologically safe environment**

Students must feel free to experiment with the language and not fear making mistakes. Students of all ages need to understand that they, too, must help create an environment where their classmates will feel comfortable.

This is done by having the class establish rules and through adherence to those classroom rules, by dealing with problems through discussion, by providing positive reinforcement for efforts to communicate constructively, and by encouraging students to analyse and improve their own commentary, i.e. verbal and non-verbal reactions and behaviours.

- **Consistently use one language**

Always strive to use the target language. Initially, when necessary, a student can summarise in the first language what was said in the CLIL language.

- **In the beginning, it is acceptable for students to use the first language**

Expect students at the primary level, who are at the start of a programme, to answer initially in their own language. They will often immediately verbalise structures taught to them in the target language. However, do not expect spontaneous self-expression in the target language from the very first moment.

- **Speak slowly and articulate clearly**

Speak very clearly when introducing new language and structures.

- **Use an appropriate level of language**

Avoid structures that are too complicated for your students, but speak in a grammatically correct manner. In order to keep challenging your students, use a level of language in class that is one step ahead of theirs - enough to make them work at it without making it too hard.

- **Use facial expressions, gestures and pictures to reinforce meaning**

Contrary to what is often common practice, have students listen carefully to the new words to try and discover the meaning in the target language before you show the visual aids.

- **Repetition is required**

Repetition will help students to grasp meaning and create a sense of security.

- **Make it meaningful**

The language, themes and content of classroom lessons must be relevant and of interest to the students. Initially, this means focusing on the students themselves, their family, their school and the community. Later on, this content can include music, local issues, school events, the environment, problems in the community, community workers, sports, fashion, healthy lifestyles, etc.

- **Provide a variety of language models**

Students need to listen to the CLIL language spoken by different people in different contexts.

- **Create a wealth of opportunities to use the language**

Proactive strategies such as group-work, pair-work and activity centres are more effective than having a class do primarily written exercises.

- **Communication is highly important**

It is more important for students to communicate than to worry about having perfect grammar. A student should receive positive reinforcement for speaking and for speaking correctly. The teacher can model the right word or phrase.

- **Create a wide variety of opportunities to develop all four language skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing**

Each language skill reinforces the other. Look for opportunities to combine all four skills.

- **Set high, but realistic expectations**

Do not underestimate what your students or you can do. Have high, but realistic expectations.

- **Find ways to recognise student effort and success**

Reward effort. Also, reward co-operation, peer teaching, self-reliance, analysis of the learning process, task completion and progress in meeting planned outcomes, as well as achievement in all subject areas.

3. Oral expression

3.1 Oral expression

As we have seen in previous headings, there are essential elements which support learning language in class. All of them promote oral interaction in classrooms in terms of affective and effective conditions that make learners feel comfortable.

This atmosphere should provide plenty of opportunities for oral interaction among students. We do not learn to speak a language simply by listening, reading or writing but by using it in a conversation. From a CLIL approach, speaking is enhanced by a perspective focused on students' interests, peer co-operative work and the fostering of critical thinking, among other methodological strategies.

3.2 Speaking activities

However, it is not enough to bear in mind all these principles and teachers should plan different types of speaking activities in order to promote interaction in class. There are many types of speaking activities (Ball, P. et al., 2015):

- **Individual talk and input** (digital slideshow presentations, show and tell, delivering a report, videos…).
- **Open and closed question-and-answer sessions** (from teacher to class and from student to student).
- **Speaking in pairs** (discussions, sharing information, interviewing each other…).
- **Speaking in small groups** (discussions, making group decisions, finding solutions to problems as a group…).
- **Role-playing of the subject** (dialogues on specific themes).
- **Speaking within a small group** and then sharing information with members of other groups (for example, 'jigsaw reading and speaking').
- **Speaking as a whole class** (plenary discussions, searching for information from class peers, surveying the class…).
- **Reading aloud** (information transfer or giving instructions). There are texts related to expressive reading, recitation, etc. We are talking about texts designed to include the characteristics of orality. As an example, within the wide range of options available, we can include: greetings, texts for poetic recitals, radio script, rhymes, chants, etc.

3.3 Oral presentation and final tasks

Table 1. Planning of oral expression
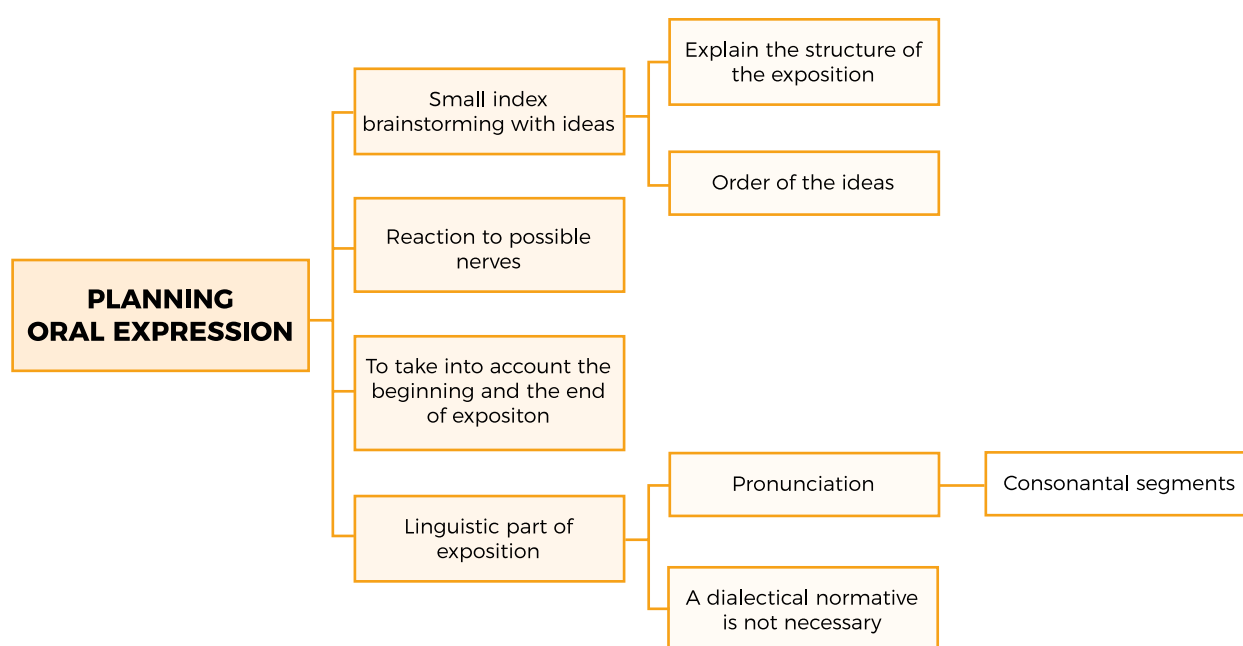
Source: CEFIRE Específic de Plurilingüisme (2018).

- **Oral presentation.**

It consists in developing a theme in front of an audience. In order to effectively communicate a clear and precise speech, we need to: look for and select the information, plan the oral presentation (with a previous script and speech structure), prepare support material and take into account both linguistic and non-verbal strategies.

- **Oral discussion**

It is an oral text with the aim of convincing someone or expressing our opinions in a logical way. In this oral text, it is necessary to use a deductive structure, which concludes with a clear idea at the end. In every oral discussion, we can appeal to feelings or persuade in order to convince.

For a good oral expression, it is recommended to draw our attention to:

- The control of gestures and body movements.
- Uncontrolled oral repetitions when thinking (eh, um, etc.). It is useful to use some expressions such as "In other words", "Let me think", etc.
- Intonation and tone.
- Different resources to keep the audience's attention (humour, ask the audience questions...).

Furthermore, it is worth considering the use of a brief script with ideas. The script should explain the structure of the presentation, the order of ideas and other support elements, such as the connectors with which the parts will be linked. It can be on paper or in a computer format (a slideshow programme).

3.4 Fluency or accuracy?

Language teachers might distinguish between 'accuracy' and 'fluency', since speaking activities tend to be orientated towards one or the other. Murphy (1991) offers a useful discussion of how accuracy and fluency speaking activities can be mapped onto each other but, in CLIL, a fluency activity will still need to be scaffolded and supported.

The key question for CLIL teachers is which language support is required for each activity. Therefore, in addition to talking about accuracy and fluency, we might talk about moving from activities which are 'more scaffolded' to 'less scaffolded' as learners develop more independence and become able to communicate more effectively and autonomously.

4. Written expression

Human language is a complex system which combines different units (phonetic or graphic, morphosyntactic, lexical, phraseological, etc.) which, at the same time, are organised in complex structures: texts. Texts can be considered linguistic units with a social basis, which create textual genres and typologies with clear characteristics (structure, modification, extension, register, etc.).

When teaching writing skills, we should build these elements taking into consideration two different levels:

- Specific contents of each language (spelling, morphosyntax, lexicon), referring to the linguistic norms and the various varieties of the language.

- Aspects related to the textuality, which are not specific of any language, and are easily coordinated between linguistic areas as well as other non-linguistic subjects.

It is obvious that these two levels require careful planning across the curriculum and all subjects should develop them by taking into account pragmatic adequacy, semantic coherence and syntactic cohesion, which are acquired through the production of written or oral language texts.

Table 2. Concept of language teaching
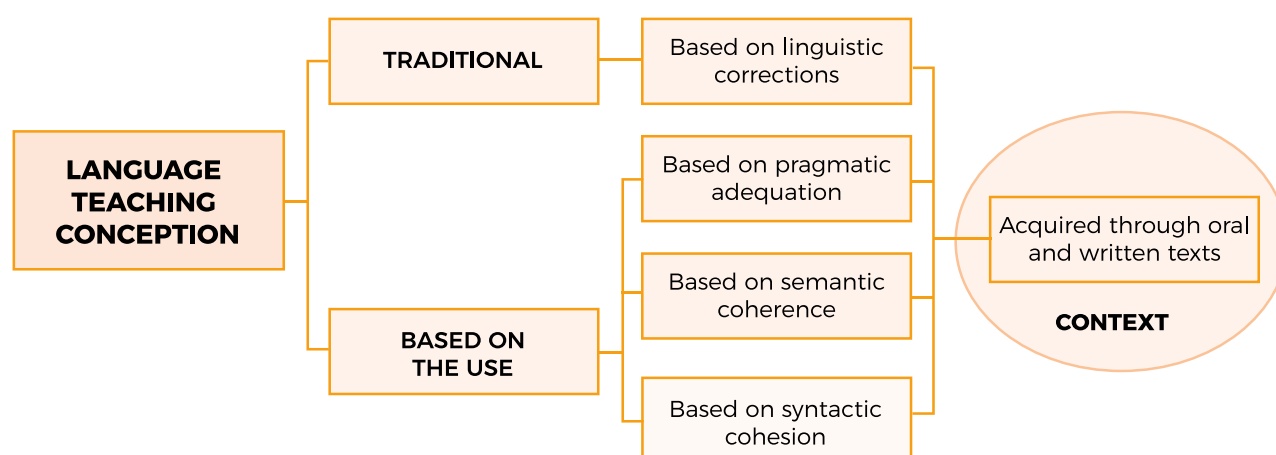
Source: CEFIRE Específic de Plurilingüisme (2018).

CLIL Teachers, like language teachers, must pay attention to all phases of production in a written text and not only to the final phase or task. This process can be easily guided by different steps or phases:

Table 3. Phases of production of written texts

PREWRITE	Think about the reader, the purpose, the situation of communication, the genre, the register, the extension, the degree of formality, etc.
	Use of information sources such as: encyclopedias, dictionaries, etc.
	Selection, grouping and ordering of ideas.
	Elaboration of schemes, conceptual maps, brainstorming, summaries, etc.
WRITE	Grouping the information in paragraphs.
	Punctuation marks.
	Connectors.
	Clear and precise style.

REVISE	Content review.
	Grammar revision.
	Review of conventions.
	Stylistic aspects: length of sentences, connectors, etc.
	Presentation.

Source: CEFIRE Específic de Plurilingüisme (2018).

4.1 Prewriting

In this phase, the main goal is to get information and ideas through: brainstorming, 6W (what, who, why, when, where, how) or from varied documentation (textbooks, encyclopaedias, etc.) which will provide us with a good base for the writing task. Then, contents from this previous information should be divided into logical criteria (analogy, contrast, chronology, situation, themes, objective facts, opinions, pros and cons, etc.) which will form the paragraphs.

These groups of related ideas will give us the basis for building the text. However, the key idea is to decide which information forms part of: the title of the text, the proper structures for the body or ideas for the closing paragraph (from general to more specific, in chronological order and from the most important to the least important).

4.2 Writing

Once the previous step has been completed, the text to write must be coherent, cohesive and stylistically correct.

Cohesion: it is achieved by using deixis resources, anaphoric elements, etc., and also with different elements such as:

- **Paragraphs:** they must be balanced in extension (too short, not too long) and they must have a content unit. One way to work them is to provide each paragraph with a title that gives you all the meaning.
- **Linking words:** they organise the most important ideas and explain the relationship amongst the meaning and the elements of the text (phrases, ideas, paragraphs, etc.). They must be adequate to the level of formality and varied in order to facilitate the reading and comprehension of the text.
- **Punctuation marks:** just like the connectors, they are essential in order to ensure a good understanding of the text.

4.3 The style

When a text is normative, it does not mean that it is stylistically correct. In fact, it is equally important to write with the proper register depending on the context (formal language, slang language, idioms, etc.).

As a general rule, a correct style facilitates reading. For example, it is better to use short sentences (usually not more than three lines) stylistically correct, properly linked, with punctuation marks and connectors, than to write long paragraphs without sense.

Other stylistic recommendations are:

- Do not repeat words in the same paragraph. Instead of this, use synonyms, definitions, etc.

- Use the logical structure of a sentence (subject, verb and complement).

- Present the text proper structure.

- Avoid high levels of abstraction.

- Do not write subsections which are too long.

4.4 The revision

When you revise the writing, you should pay attention to the content, the structure of the text, the objectives that you wanted to achieve and the elements explained in previous epigraphs. During this process, the student should use a dictionary, grammar and other language support resources.

Furthermore, other elements such as letter typography, line straightness or computer issues (paragraphs, margins, line spacing, font size, body, font, etc.) are also essential for an adequate presentation.

Table 4. Guide of questions to revise

Writing approach
- Is the text suitable for the situation?   - Does the text match my purpose? Is what I intend clear?   - Will the reader react as I expect when reading the text?   - Are the circumstances that motivate the writing clear enough?
Ideas and information
- Is there enough information? Not too much or too little?   - Do I understand everything that is written? Will the reader understand the text? Are the ideas clear enough?   - Is there a good balance between theory and practice, thesis and arguments, graphics and explanation, data and comments, information and opinion?
Structure
- Is it clear enough to help the reader understand the message? Does the structure reflect my point of view?   - Is the data well distributed in each section?   - Does the relevant information occupy important positions, at the beginning of the text, the epigraphs or paragraphs?
Paragraphs
- Does the paragraph deal with a different sub-theme or aspect?   - Do they have the right size? Are they too long?   - Are they visually marked on the page?

Sentences
- Are there many sentences which are negative, passive or too long? - Are they varied in extension, order, modality, style? - Do I have the relevant information at the beginning? - Did I detect repetitive words or structures? - Are there not many subscribers or long subordinates?

Words
- Are there frequent repetitions? - Are there many abstract or complex words? - Do I use the precise lexicon or terminology? - Do I use text markers appropriately? - Will the reader understand all the words that appear in the text?

Punctuation marks
- Have I reviewed all the punctuation marks? Are they correctly used? - Is the proportion of punctuation marks per phrase appropriate? - Are there many unnecessary parentheses?

Formality level
- Is the image that the text gives me appropriate? - Is the writing addressed to the reader correctly? - Is there an expression or a word which is too informal or vulgar? - Have I written any expressions or words which might be too complex or pretentious to understand? - Are there any sexist or disrespectful expressions?

Rhetorical resources
- Does the text attract the reader's interest? - Does the prose have a strong enough tone? - Is there an introduction, a summary or a recapitulation? Are they necessary? - Can I use a resource for comparisons, examples, rhetorical questions, idioms or games?

Presentation
- Is each page varied, different and attractive? - Are cursives, bold and capitals used rationally? - Are the schemes, graphics, columns and bands clear? - Are margins, titles and paragraphs well marked? - Does the text offer what the title promises?

Source: Daniel Cassany (1993). La cuina de l'escriptura (pàg. 190-191).

4.5 Structures and types of written texts

There are different types of written texts: narrative, descriptive, expository, argumentative, instructive, conversational or rhetorical.

The information of these texts is not always organised in the same structure and it is difficult to find the information written in a unique text typology. For instance, there are argumentative texts with expository sequences or narrative texts with conversational/descriptive sequences.

In the learning process, the majority of the texts are expository and argumentative because they are appropriate for a formal register. Furthermore, they are considered the basic text tipologies when completing different tasks of the syllabus.

The purpose of the expository text is to explain, describe or give information about a subject or a topic. Its text structure can be divided into three parts:

- **Introduction:** the subject is presented: its importance, the objectives, the documentary sources, etc. The introduction usually constitutes the first paragraph of the text.

- **Development:** the information on the subject is exposed in a clear and orderly manner. It is the central part of the text. The structure and the logical relations of the contents are relevant in these types of writings. We can find examples, comparisons, anecdotes, etc.

- **Conclusion:** summary of the main ideas that have been exposed or the personal opinion. There are typical closing formulas.

In spite of this general structure, the information in expository texts can be organised in different schemes:

- **Cause/consequence:** the information is organised in a way in which two or more important ideas are related. One of them is the cause of the other, which is the consequence.

- **Problem/solution:** in the information we can identify an exposition of the problem and possible solutions.

- **Comparison/contrast:** comparing and contrasting two facts, differences and coincidences.

- **Description of a process:** various elements of an object are specified. The contents are grouped around specific topics or features.

- **Temporary sequence:** the contents are ordered in a temporary sequence. A representative form is the description of processes.

Argumentative texts, instead, try to convince by exposing opinions and arguments. They start from shared premises and reach conclusions by using different ideas. In these texts, we can find: persuasion resources, irony, repetition, authority arguments, rhetorical resources, etc.

The structure of argumentative texts follows the following scheme:

- **Introduction or presentation:** presentation of the topic.

- **Development:** it is the presentation of the necessary ideas to defend the initial thesis.

- **Conclusion:** it is the synthesis or reaffirmation of the argued thesis. It has a recapitulative character with a summary. All the ideas are included and remembered.

5. Typology of dictionaries

If we follow the analysis carried out by Rafel, J. (2005: 35-58) dictionaries have traditionally been classified into the following types:

- Encyclopaedic dictionaries and dictionaries of language.
- General dictionaries and specialised dictionaries.
- Monolingual dictionaries and bilingual dictionaries.
- Descriptive dictionaries and prescriptive dictionaries.
- Synchronous dictionaries and diachronic dictionaries.

Another classification can be considered:

- **The dictionary of the language.** An alphabetical compilation of the words of a language, the terms of a science or an art, with its meaning. This dictionary can be monolingual or bilingual.
- **Encyclopaedic dictionary.** A dictionary that collects words with definitions that incorporate scientific, historical and geographical information.
- **Etymological dictionary.** This is the one which studies the origin of words.
- **Historical dictionary.** This one studies the lexicon of a language from its beginnings to the present. In addition, it indicates the evolution of the meaning and the use of words.
- **Ideological dictionary.** It presents the lexical units, alphabetically ordered in semantic fields.
- **Reverse dictionary.** In this type of dictionary, the words appear ordered alphabetically from right to left.
- **Terminology dictionary.** It defines the terms of a specific area of specialisation.
- **Visual dictionary.** It consists of thematically ordered illustrations in which the names of the objects they display are indicated.
- **Rhyming dictionary.** Words appear in reverse order. It is for word endings and is mainly used in versification.
- **Dictionary of idioms.** It collects idioms on diverse themes.
- **Dictionary of pronunciation.** It indicates the correct pronunciation of words with the help of a phonetic alphabet.

6. The linguistic variation and the English language

The goal of sociolinguistics is to study the variation of a language among social groups, situations or places and to find regular patterns in the variation of use. In all speech communities, these uses are determined by social conventions that vary as a result of the process they interpret, understand and perceive their lives. In fact, patterns in the variation of use are so specific that their analysis allows us to determine, for example, the origin of the speaker or his/her social and economic status.

From these ideas, we should also remark that language acquisition is a question of learning the code, but it is equally necessary to use it properly in several situations and uses.

6.1 Diachronic variation

The diachronic approach takes into account the study of variations in terms of linguistic changes through history.

6.1.1 Pronunciation change

It is obvious that pronunciation changes in all languages. However, modifications in pronunciation do not vary arbitrarily because sounds of related languages are similar in apparently systematic ways. This is what experts studying languages coined as "sound shift".

As a matter of fact, Rasmus Rask and Jacob Grimm, in the first quarter of the 19th century, demonstrated the relationship between Germanic (like Gothic or Old English) and the classical Indo-European languages (Greek and Latin).

Table 5. Relationship between Germanic and the classical Indo-European languages

GREEK	LATIN	GOTHIC	OLD ENGLISH	PRESENT-DAY ENGLISH
Patér	Pater	Fadar	Faeder	"Father"
Treis	Trēs	Þreis	Þri	"Three"

Source: Chacón, R. (2015).

6.1.2 Changes in syntax

Syntactic changes affect the patterning of sentences. Present day English and German changed from Proto-Indo-European in its underlying structure. For instance, there has been a gradual shift from OV to VO in the clause:

Table 6. Changes in syntax

English	That is the bookshop where I bought your book S V O
German	Das ist das Buchgeschäft, in dem ich dein Buch gekauft habe. S O V

Source: Chacón, R. (2015).

6.1.3 Semantic change

Semantic change is another important factor affecting meaning and uses. The wide range of meaning is caused by new demands of the lexical resources of a language. Actually, the change of meaning is closely related to social changes and they can be divided into various categories:

- Changes **in the range of meanings** of a word by means of generalisation, specification. New meanings can be added or lost.

- There are pairs of words with identical or similar referential meanings but with **different stylistic meaning.** The use depends on the communication situations:

  - To ask: to request (French: *requête*).

  - To answer: to reply (French: *répliquer*) - *respond* (Latin).

  - Belly: *abdomen* (Latin), stomach (French: *estomac*, Latin: *stomachus*).

- **The word stock.** Vocabulary can be borrowed from other languages, new words can be coined and new terms can be easily created by means of derivation and compounding of existing ones. With media, TV or the Internet, new words are quickly introduced from other languages (borrowings).

- Native words can be replaced by words from other languages or dialects.

6.2 Synchronic variation

It is the phenomenon observed in a language at a specific moment and time, without researching historical aspects. We can identify different types:

6.2.1 Diatopic variation

These variations are the small linguistic differences accumulated in distant parts of a region in which the speakers share the same language. In fact, the speech of each territory differs from the speech of their neighbours but without problems in mutual comprehension. All these little differences create dialects, a particular form of a language which is peculiar to a specific region or social group.

6.2.2 Diastratic variation

It takes into account linguistic uses of social classes which belong to the same speech community. These social dialects allow people to identify themselves with a social group. This variation is related to specialised languages (jobs, jargon, etc.) or slang language.

6.2.3 Diaphasic variation

It is the variation of a language in terms of register. We can easily identify two basic registers:

- Formal: an interview, work, etc.

- Informal: family, friends, etc.

6.3 Pidginisation and creolisation

We define pidginisation as the process that takes place when two languages come into contact. Consequently, there is a process of simplification or hybridisation. It occurs because there is a need to communicate between speakers of different languages with limited relations between them and the language is only used for a specific purpose in different fields (business, trade, etc.). In this process, some words from one language are acquired at the same time that people use syntactic structures of the other language.

The formation of pidgins was characteristic in the 16th and 17th centuries when European colonial powers reached other parts of the world with their language.

Finally, when pidgins are acquired as a mother tongue by children exposed to them, these variations become creoles. Some of them have become official languages in places such as Papua New Guinea and some others are quite widespread, such as English-based Hawaiian Creole and French-based Haitian Creole.

6.3.1 Some Instances of Pidgins

Most pidgins and creoles are based on European languages such as: English, French, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, Italian or German. English-based creoles are common in Africa, Asia and the Pacific Area. They tend to share some general characteristics:

- A lack of inflection in nouns, pronouns, verbs and adjectives.

- Nouns are unmarked for number or gender.

- Verbs lack tense markers.

- There is no distinction for case in personal pronouns, they/them.

- Syntactically, the absence of clausal structures.

6.3.2 Some Instances of Creoles

The 2 groups of English-based creoles can be divided into:

- The Atlantic group: spoken in West Africa and the Caribbean area, it counts with examples such as Jamaican Creole, the Lesser Antilles and Eastern Caribbean varieties.

- The Pacific group which includes Hawaiian Creole English and Tok Pisin.

Image 1. Creoles

HAWAII

JAMAICA

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

■ Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinea)
Example ⟶ Hap pas seven
"Half past seven"

■ Jamaica Patwa (Jamaica)
Example ⟶ Oder "Other"

■ Hawaiian Creole English (USA)
Example ⟶ Braddah
"Brother"

Source: CEFIRE Específic de Plurilingüisme (2018)

6.3.3 Decreolisation

This phenomenon takes place when creole speakers are in prolonged contact with the standard variety, on which they mirror their oral productions. As a consequence, a continuum emerges with the standard as a model at one end and the creole at the other. This process is clearly portrayed in places such as Barbados, Cameroon, India, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea. In those situations, creoles become socially stratified in different varieties:

- Educated society: acrolects.

- Social class: basilects.

- Identity among the speakers: mesolects.

7. Conclusion

The wide range of techniques, tips and tricks that has been presented in this unit intends to provide educators with plenty of ideas and resources to make communication with students more effective. Besides, oral and written registers have been analysed in order to raise consciousness on their peculiarities and on how to optimise the learning process, notably by creating positive environments and by scaffolding the delivery of new concepts.

In addition, as the English language is increasingly being used in subject-based teaching, all its richness, variety and world-wide polyphonic voices have also been highlighted. The ultimate aim of these opening pages has been, therefore, to set the right conditions for improving teachers' communicative competence and the quality of language-based lessons.

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