

LUBELSKIE MATERIAŁY NEOFILOLOGICZNE—1975

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Question and answer programs

porary tendencies many teachers recommend eliminating them quite early in the process of teaching reading.

- 6) Rivers, Wilga, op.cit., p.235
- 7) Allen, Virginia French, Trends in the Teaching of Reading, ETF, vol.XI, No 3, pp.8-12
- 8) Norris, William E., op.cit., p.191
- 9) Ibid., p.191
- 10) Ibid., pp.194-200
- 11) Ibid., p.197
- 12) Ibid., p.198
- 13) Dobson, Julia, Making the Most of Reading, ETF, vol.XI, No 2, pp.7-9
- 14) Finocchiaro, Mary, English as a Second Language: From Theory to Practice, FWN, Warszawa 1967, p.71
- 15) Seliger, H. W., Improving Reading Speed and Comprehension in English as a Second Language, ETF, vol.VII, No 1, p.48; Jędrzejowski, Stanisław, Problem czytania głośnego w nauczaniu języka obcego, "Języki Obce w Szkole", Nr 4, 1975, pp.221-223
- 16) Dobson, Julia, op.cit., p.9
- 17) Morris, John, Creative Reading, ETF, vol.XXVI, No 3, pp.257-261

The question (Q) and answer (A) procedure which usually follows the reading of a typical "comprehension text" in an EFL class is assigned to test the students' comprehension of the text. It is, therefore, usually dominated by the teacher. He chooses the Qs he feels the students ought to be able to answer; he chooses the Qs he chooses the Qs, the students' comprehension will not be adequately tested (if the students choose their own Qs, they will, naturally, choose only the easy ones). The students are, consequently, expected to do little more than sit and wait for their turns to be examined.

I do not agree with this attitude. I do not think the students will necessarily choose the easy Qs if they are allowed to choose for themselves; but even if they do choose slightly easier Qs than the teacher would have chosen, I do not think this is such a bad thing. The problem in most EFL classes is not that the students' comprehension is inadequately tested, but that too much time is occupied by the teacher talking and too little by the students. I am not, of course, suggesting that comprehension tests be abandoned and conversation classes put in their place; but I am suggesting that comprehension tests, or classes, would benefit the students more if the testing (Q and A) procedure became more student-dominated and less teacher-dominated, more like a conversation about the text and less like an examination on the text.

This paper is an outline of one method of implementing this suggestion. It is obviously not the only method; but it is a method I have used successfully over the last two and a half years in Poland with adult students at the pre-intermediate and intermediate levels¹.

The basic idea is that the teacher, instead of being one of the participants (usually the questioner) in the Q and A procedure, should be the programmer. He should devise programs of Qs and As

for the students which simulate natural conversations about the text. The students should then be able, with the help of these programs, to conduct the Q and A procedure entirely by themselves.

The minimum requirement for a program is that it specify three things: the method of choosing the participants, the types of Qs to be asked, and the method of checking the answers. A program may provide more than three specifications, or may make one of these specifications more or less elaborate, but it may not provide less than three specifications.

The text I shall use for illustrative purposes is Passage 1² on page 37 of I. G. Alexander's "Practice and Progress", (Longmans) :-

The Greenwood Boys

The Greenwood Boys are a group of popular singers. At present they are visiting all parts of the country. They will be arriving here tomorrow. They will be coming by train and most of the young people in the town will be meeting them at the station. Tomorrow evening they will be singing at the Workers' Club. The Greenwood Boys will be staying for five days. During this time, they will give five performances. As usual, the police will have a difficult time. They will be trying to keep order. It is always the same on these occasions.

Program 1

- 1. t: Indication } choosing
 - a: Indication
 - 2. a: Yes-No Q
 - b: A
 - 3. a: Wh-Q
 - b: A
 - 4. a: Q } checking
 - a: A
- (t = teacher; a, b = students)

example

1. t: Mr Kowalski, please.
a: Miss Nowak, please.

2. a: Are the Greenwood Boys a group of folk-dancers?
b: No, they aren't.

- 3. a: What are they?
b: They are a group of popular singers.
- 4. b: Am I right?
a: Yes, you are.

In this program, the method of choosing is by indication only, that is, by pointing at the person (with four fingers!) and mentioning his or her name (or, if the name is not known, by saying "Plis/That gentleman/lady, please" or "You, please"). In other programs, as we shall see later, it may be by asking Qs.

Only the type of Qs (1st a Yes-No Q, 2nd a Wh-Q) is specified, not the content, of course. But it is important that the contents of both Qs exhibit some kind of thematic connection, such as that assumed by the use of the pronoun "they" in 3.a of the example above.

The method of checking in this program is simply by b asking a Q. The type of Q b asks could be specified exactly, but in this program this is considered unnecessary. Other possibilities are: Okay?; All right?; Satisfied?; Am I correct?; Is/Was my answer correct/right?; Are you satisfied?; (etc.).

Program 2

- 1. t: Indication } choosing
- a: Indication + Q
- b: A
- 2. a: Tag Q
- b: A
- 3. a: Wh-Q
- b: A
- 4. b: Q } checking
- a: A

example

1. t: You, please.
a: Piotr, may I ask you a question, please?
b: Yes, of course. Please do.

2. a: The Greenwood Boys are visiting all parts of the country at present, aren't they?
b: Yes, they are.

- 3. a: When will they be coming here?
- b: They'll be coming here tomorrow.
- 4. b: Okay?
- a: Yes. Fine!

Other possibilities in 1.a are Can/could I ask you a/two/some question/questions, please?; Would you like me to ask you a/two/some question/questions?; Would you mind if I asked you a/two/some question/questions?; Will/Can/ould you answer my/a/two/some Q/Qs, please; Would you mind answering this/my/a/two/some Q/Qs?. These can be specified quite easily in the program as q(can), or q(will), or q(mind-two), (etc.).

The A in 1.b will, of course, depend on the form of the Q, and the student will have to have been previously instructed in the correct grammatical replies, especially in the reply to q(mind).

Program 3

- 1. t: Indication
- a: Indication + q(could-answer-two)
- b: A
- 2. a: Yes-No Q
- b: A
- 3. a: Wh-Q(why)
- b: A
- 4. b: Q } checking
- a: A }

example

- 1. t: That lady over there, please.
- a: Dr Zieliński, could you answer two questions, please?
- b: With pleasure.
- 2. a: Will the police have a difficult time?
- b: Yes, they will.
- 3. a: Why will they?
- b: Because they will be trying to keep order.
- 4. b: Are you satisfied with my answer?
- a: Yes, perfectly satisfied. Thank you.

It is not only possible to elaborate the specifications of choosing and checking, but also of the types of Qs, of course. In

3.a the specification Wh-Q is elaborated into Wh-Q(why). Other possibilities are: Wh-Q(Where); Wh-Q(how); Wh-Q(why-not); Wh-Q(how many); (etc.). The Yes-No Qs can be elaborated in various ways too: Yes-No q(will); Yes-No Q(will be); Yes-No Q(fare); Yes-No Q(it's-not); (etc.).

Program 4

- 1. t: Indication
- a: Indication + q(ask-me)
- b: A
- 2. b: q(kind)
- a: A
- 3. b: Q
- a: A
- 4. a: Q } checking
- b: A }

example

- 1. t: Jan, please.
- a: Anna, would you like to ask me a question, please?
- b: Certainly.
- 2. b: What kind of question would you like?
- a: An Alternative question, please.
- 3. b: Okay. Will the Greenwood Boys be coming here by bus or by train?
- a: By train.
- 4. a: Am I correct?
- b: Yes.

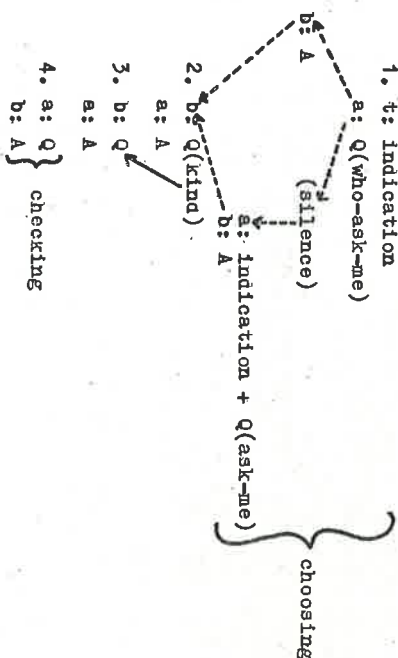
In this program, instead of a asking b if he can ask him (b) a Q, a asks b to ask him (a) a Q. In other words, the situation is reversed in stages 2. and 3. b asks the Qs instead of a. But 2.b is not a Q about the text; it is a question about the kind of question a would like. This kind of Q is then asked in 3.b.

Other possibilities in 1.a are: Will/can/would you ask me a/two/some Q/Qs, please?; Would you like to/would you ask me a/two/some Q/Qs, please?; Would you mind asking me a/two/some Q/Qs, please?; Would you mind asking me a/two/some Q/Qs, please?

Other possibilities in 2.b are: Would you like me to/shall I ask you a Yes-No Q/Wh-Q/Alternative Q?; Would you like me to/shall

I ask you a Yes-No Q/Wh-Q/Alt. Q or a Yes-No Q/Wh-Q/Alt. Q?; What kind of Q shall I/would you like me to ask you?; (etc.).

Program 5



- example
1. t: Mrs Kaminska, please.
a: Who wants to ask me a question?
b: I do.
a: Maria, would you ask me a question, please
b: Okay.
 2. b: Shall I ask you a Wh-Q?
a: Yes, please do.
 3. b: All right. How long will the Greenwood Boys be staying here for?
a: Five days.
 4. a: Is my answer okay?
b: Yes, it's perfect!

This final example of a program has two branches in stage 1. This is to account for the possibility that no one will take up a's invitation to ask her/him a Q. If no one does, and there is an embarrassing silence, a must indicate someone as in the previous programs. The students with whom I have used these programs and other similar programs which I have not exemplified in this paper have found branching programs like Program 5 particularly

amusing. They have enjoyed the opportunity of not responding and, by doing so, of not incurring the wrath of the teacher. They have also enjoyed the harmless and, in any case, only momentary embarrassment such a silence causes the questioner. On the other hand, they have equally enjoyed responding eagerly to the question and posing the questioner the (equally embarrassing?) problem of choosing from among so many willing answerers.

Variations of the Q in 1.a could be: Does anyone want to ask me a Q?; Would anyone like to ask me a Q?; Who would like to ask me a Q?; (etc.).

These five programs are a mere sample of the enormous number and variety of programs that a teacher can devise. I would not like to give the impression that I thought my treatment of them was exhaustive. I only intended, as I said at the beginning of this paper, to give an outline. I would, however, like to utter a word of caution to the teacher who might decide to take up my suggestion and use them as part of his comprehension class. -I have discovered that one program per lesson is quite enough, and that a good program lasts (in effectiveness) for considerably more than one lesson. So that, although the potential number of programs is vast, the teacher would be wiser to restrict himself to developing and perfecting very few.

Notes

1. I am referring to students at the Wrocław Technical University who attended the intensive summer-courses in English in 1973, 1974, and 1975, and to students who attended and still are attending the English course at the STROPEM Club in Pulawy.
2. I have chosen this text quite at random. I have actually used it in a class with an appropriate program, but so have I used other texts in this book and in other books with other programs. My purpose was merely to choose a text from a book which I knew was available in Poland.