**Activating previous knowledge in EFL classes**

While unfolding, a lesson displays a number of stages not only helpful, but basically compulsory and unavoidable in a coherent linguistic and/or competence-based teaching process. One of these stages is ELICITATION, generally placed before the new knowledge introduction stage.

When teaching a foreign language, there is a significant number of types of eliciting information from the learners. Among them, vocabulary and grammar ELICITING are the most commonly used in assessing and gathering data about what the learners do or don’t know, in a particular linguistic area. It is, therefore, a diagnostic tool designed to allow the teachers to determine what their pupils/students need to know, without wasting time rehearsing previously introduced content.

Then, eliciting creates a learner-centered environment, as it gets learners to think about the new topic in a broader sense, allowing them to peer-learn and share information on a specific topic; what is more, eliciting is a tool which can be used for gathering not only language knowledge, as mentioned above, but also background or general knowledge, opinions, feelings, associations, answers, ideas, questions and the list goes on.

Studies have shown that students become more involved in the learning process through eliciting, because they find it easier to participate in the lesson, producing speech and offering information, this approach shifting from passively listening to actively participating in the teaching-learning process. This, in its turn, leads to a better retention of the new content, as it makes the content more relevant to the students.

In terms of eliciting techniques, there is a large variety which can suit the requirements of any type of lesson; all the teacher has to do is to select the right technique(s) for the objectives he/she designed for the lesson. There is, though, a challenge in eliciting info in a foreign language lesson: a small number of pupils might not have the courage to participate in such a dynamic activity due to several causes, such as slow linguistic code switch, poor linguistic knowledge, nervousness and so on. It is, therefore, the teacher who can promote a cooperative learning environment and can persevere in maintaining it at all times. The way to avoid a standstill is nominating students to answer particular questions, involving everyone, regardless the relevance of the mistakes the learners might make. This method helps reinforce participation, builds confidence and communicative skills, and corrects potential wrong language use.

Types of elicitation:

1 ELICITING VOCABULARY

Teachers can use elicitation when they intend to revise vocabulary previously taught. One common technique is to have students match words to their definitions. A great aid would be for the learners to have a dictionary at hand.

Another technique is to use synonyms or antonyms to elicit target words. Students can be asked to paraphrase a sentence/statement by using synonyms or, for contrasting contexts, to paraphrase the sentence/statement using antonyms.

For the young learners, flashcards and pictures are the most effective ways to elicit topic-related vocabulary, simply by presenting the image and asking questions about it. Another technique is to use flashcards having relatively similar images and get the students spot the differences. Most often than ever, students associate visuals with fun, therefore, they get more easily engaged in classroom interaction and the entire activity becomes more dynamic and impactful.

For older, upper-level learners, a better alternative to writing down words in a list is to use mind maps or word clusters. Mind maps or conceptual maps develop not only lexis, but they also stimulate creativity, as visuals help promote ideas and develop critical thinking through comparing and contrasting two or more images.

Another technique for upper-level learners is to have students map a topic-word, written in the middle of the board/worksheet, adding subclasses of words, concepts, ideas to it. This is a great way to encourage students to see the links and connections between different concepts and words.

These activities can build up by helping students come up with new vocabulary, given their need to express the ideas they have once the eliciting process starts. Equally, it would be a better idea to get them bring a dictionary so that they can design the entire mind map they have pictured in their mind. Again, this is an efficient way to take in new lexis. In order, though, that the newly-introduced/ revised vocabulary may become functional and easily usable, such activities need to be revisited when new topics and time permit. As follow-up activities, students can sort the vocabulary they have learned in logical categories/classes or sub-classes. For instance, when revising ANIMALS, according to their linguistic level, students can associate pictures with words or they can sort the animals into various categories - e.g. species, habitat etc.

To sum up, there is a large variety in designing vocabulary eliciting activities, many of which include a lot of fun with positive impact on learning and class dynamics.