

2 ELICITING GRAMMAR/STRUCTURE

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In retrospect, eliciting is a technique which can be used in EFL classes in a number of ways and for a number of purposes, all converging to communicative skills reinforcement.

Equally, eliciting is based on some universally valid assumptions:

- more often than not, teaching a foreign language is based on previous knowledge;
- collectively, students form a corpus of various amounts of knowledge, both of their mother tongue or of the language they are studying and, equally, of the real world which they can put to use for everyone's benefit;
- although not a completely Socratic technique, EFL leading-in through questioning is a tool for self-discovery which makes the new linguistic input more memorable through transferring into the pupils' personal lives.

Apart from vocabulary eliciting, there is also another linguistic segment that can successfully employ this technique, generating extensive linguistic acquisition through the shift from the teacher-centred learning process to the learner-centred approach. The segment refers to the grammatical part of the language, specifically the structure/form and the function.

a) eliciting structure/form is a process that can lead the student from a particular example, to the rule that applies to a certain category. It usually resorts to previous knowledge either from the native language or from the target language or both, as a scaffolding to the newly-introduced structure.

e.g. At 5pm yesterday, I was reading the newspaper.

In order to introduce the structure – Past Progressive/Continuous, T can ask questions such as:

1 “What action do we have here?”

Some students may answer “reading”, others, the more intuitive ones, may come up with a full form of the tense: “was reading”.

2 “Who does this action?” ~ “I”

3 “Is the action placed in the past, in the present or in the future?” ~ “In the past”

4 “How many verbs can you see here?” ~ “Two.”

5 “What form is the first verb?” ~ “Past Simple form of ‘to be’.” etc.

b) eliciting function is a more sophisticated process as it involves more abstract thinking. It is, therefore, more appropriate to higher levels of language knowledge – B1, B2 and upper, establishing the ground for arranging and tackling previous knowledge from a different or more comprehensive perspective. For instance, reviewing the modals maps the semantics/function and the morphology of each familiar modal, as well as setting the ground for the introduction of new meanings.

Every eliciting step involves a certain amount of teacher support, in various forms – pictures, photos, examples written on the board, on handouts etc.
Take MUST, for instance, in B1 learners of English:

1 “I **must go** now.”

2 “You **must drive** on the left side of the road in England.”

3 “You **must not smoke** in here!”

T asks: “When you read or hear such statements, what comes to your mind? Can you feel any kind of pressure from someone else or from an exterior entity?” ~ “Yes, 1 is a necessity, a polite formula, 2 is an obligation based on customs and law and 3 is a prohibition” etc.

The teacher can add a new statement, for a new function which can be introduced on the elicited map described above:

“They must be tired after such a hectic programme.”

The teacher asks: “Do we still have a prohibition, an interdiction or a necessity here?” ~ “None. It is a logical assumption based on some facts – people get tired after great workload.” etc.

A subsequent eliciting step is to have students build their own statement using every function of the old or new structure, i.e. build sentences about their personal environment, using various functions of MUST, as in the scenario described above.

Every step of the eliciting way, the teacher has to provide bits of input to the students, in other words, the teacher facilitates the process by offering visual or linguistic support in order to get students to think, compare, contrast, decode, encode and conceptualize a linguistic chunk.

To sum up, eliciting grammar can help both the teacher and the student in the process of teaching-learning English, as it helps students picture the structure and transform the learning process in a more personal experience, once the language becomes a tool for expressing personal thoughts, idea, feelings.