

MÁSTER EN EDUCACIÓN SECUNDARIA OBLIGATORIA Y BACHILLERATO,  
FORMACIÓN PROFESIONAL Y ENSEÑANZA DE IDIOMAS

# Designing Teaching Materials for the Development of Conversation

The use of films in online environments

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

English is, no doubt, the lingua franca in today's world. Apart from the fact that it is very rewarding to learn a second language, the reason above may be enough to give such importance to English in Spanish schools. In most of them, children start learning English at the age of three being this subject compulsory until they are eighteen (provided that they do not quit their studies before).

One of the main problems arises, however, when talking about oral skills since most students do not get a good command of them. Among many other reasons, it could be because we do not teach enough conversational skills or maybe because of a lack of proper input. According to Hyong-Ju (2003), "when it comes to language input, both teachers and students in a non-English-speaking environment have no opportunity of being exposed to real language in natural settings. This lack of exposure to authentic language results in, first of all, difficulties in getting authentic materials". Therefore, for most students the classroom becomes the only place where they really have the opportunity to listen and speak English.

It is essential to be aware of the fact that authentic language as input is needed in order to achieve the wished competence. Unfortunately, in most textbooks such authentic or natural language is not present (see section 3.2.). We still expect students to reproduce the "right grammatical utterance" following a determined grammatical rule. That may be the reason why the language we find in there is quite "superficial" and this is something we cannot consider to be people's day-to-day language.

Teaching oral skills in a foreign language is a broad issue, and there are many aspects to deal with in order to acquire a good conversational proficiency. In this respect, I am going to support the idea of using film dialogues as a more natural model of conversation than textbook dialogues. I will use the theories of spoken discourse analysis, focusing on speech acts as essential factors needed to be communicatively appropriate. In order to fulfil this purpose, teachers are essential since they have to be updated with discourse theories and have a good command of them. This way, we can give students the opportunity to get more in touch with natural conversation independently of their social or economic status. As in face-to-face communication,

they will also notice the importance of seeing the physical reactions and facial expressions of the participants in order to express themselves and understand others while the conversation takes place.

Though there are several works about the use of films in the classroom (Baddock, 1996; Tschirner, 2001; King, 2002; Moreno Jaén and Pérez Basanta, 2009; Rodríguez Martín, 2010), this study will focus on a more interactive way to develop students' oral skills using speech acts as a starting and essential point. But apart from speech acts, I will also apply other aspects of conversational exchanges such as their structure, strategies and non-verbal features in the resulting activities. Hence, the ultimate goal of this work is presenting a sound and well informed set of teaching materials aimed at improving students' conversational competence, making the most of the advantages that new technologies offer for foreign language teaching at the moment (in particular in relation to DVD films and online learning).

To this end, this work sets as follows: in section 2, I will focus on the nature of the conversational competence, with a special emphasis on speech acts and all the devices needed to achieve conversational skills successfully. In section 3, I will review the different approaches to teaching speaking to offer an analysis of two textbooks. After that, I will concentrate on the use of films in the classroom and its major characteristics. In section 4, I will take into consideration the context in which I will work and the methodology, criteria and procedures followed in order to design, later on, the digital materials I propose in this study. In section 4.1. I will describe the legal framework, the school, and the students I am aiming to. Sections 4.2. and 4.3. will cover the objectives and contents of the B2 language level. From section 4.4. to section 4.5.4. I will explain the process and the criteria used in order to select the two films suggested: *Juno* (2007) and *Death at a funeral* (2007), and the two software programmes used to design some of the activities. Finally, our teaching proposal (i.e. the digital materials designed) is provided in the CD-Rom accompanying this work.

## 2. CONVERSATIONAL COMPETENCE. ITS NATURE

First of all, I have to explain what conversation is. Despite being something not very easy to explain in a few lines, I will try to give an insight of what conversation is in this context. The Oxford English Dictionary defines conversation as the “manner of conducting oneself in the world or in society; behaviour, mode or course of life” or the “interchange of thoughts and words; familiar discourse or talk”. I have chosen these definitions because they both show the importance of the relation among individuals in order to make conversation possible.

As Hughes (1996: 6) claims, “writing shares many characteristics with a mountain: permanent, clearly delineated and readily available for inspection”. For speech, “rather than a physically unchanging mountain, the more appropriate metaphor is that of the ocean: mutable, shifting and difficult to capture and define”. We cannot teach our students a foreign language as a compulsory activity they can only learn through books, but as a reality they have to search (and they can find) somewhere else. Textbooks mostly show language (even oral discourse) as something written and static, following a unique set of rules and patterns. The view shown in textbooks seems to be quite wrong in the sense that speech is a constantly changing act, highly determined by phonetic and sociocultural factors, whose great variety of accents, dialects, and its different degrees of formality, for example, cannot be taught unless it is offered in the right context and through the right medium (which in any case will have to be oral). Otherwise, we are depriving our students of the opportunity of developing the foreign language as they do with their mother tongue. As Bruner (1978) said referring to our first language, when acquiring a second one we must learn “how to make our intentions known to others, how to communicate what we have in our consciousness, what we want done on our behalf, how we wish to relate to others, and what in these or other words is possible”.

When talking about language learning, Carter and McCarthy (1995:141) support the idea that the teaching of speaking skills “should be based upon the grammar of spoken language, and not on grammars which mainly reflect written norms”.

Although, as Rühlemann (2006: 385) argues, conversation is “the major situationally defined variety of the spoken language”, we have to make a difference between both concepts. The fact that a person speaks English very well does not mean that they converse equally well. Hyong-Ju (2003) noted in his study that second language learners of English who are equipped with a good knowledge of syntax, phonology and a large vocabulary often fail as “conversationalists” though they “speak” reasonably correct and even fluent English.

Conversation is a basic human need which must be developed in a social context. If there is no social factor in it, conversation does not make sense. The main reason for this is that society marks the type of context or situation in which conversation happens and has to adapt to.

In order to analyze the different factors that occur in conversation, such as who the speakers are or when and where they are holding their conversation, we also have to take into account those factors which are external to the conversation itself. Biber et al. (1999: 1041-1051) listed the main external factors of conversation:

- conversation takes place in the spoken medium;
- it takes place in shared context;
- it avoids elaboration or specification of meaning;
- it is interactive;
- it is expressive of politeness, emotion, and attitude;
- it takes place in real time;
- it has a restricted and repetitive repertoire;
- it employs a vernacular range of expression;
- it lacks functional explanation.

Rühlemann (2007: 35) also analyzes five factors which are typical in conversational exchanges:

- *Shared context*: “the setting in which conversation typically takes place is characterized by a wealth of context that is shared between the participants” (person, place and time deixis).
- *Co-construction*: focus on informal conversation, which is mainly related to question tags, backchannels and co-constructed utterances, and turn-taking and adjacency.
- *Real-time processing*: is the factor that determines the conversational situation, the “pressures of planning and processing in the real time”.
- *Discourse management phenomena*: discourse markers to indicate the intention that the conversation is having. It helps to manage conversation since it is spontaneous.
- *Relation management phenomena*: it makes reference to the relation among the participants (participant-relation) and “how to relate to what they are saying (proposition-relation)”. He refers to the use of first-names, endearments and familiarizers, and the use of introductory *this* and historic present as a means of involving audiences in conversational narratives (2007: 181 – 189).

Next, I will explain the components of conversation: speech acts, structure, and strategies.

## 2.1. SPEECH ACTS

Speech acts have to do with the functions and uses of languages: all the acts we perform through speaking, all the things we do when we speak and all the social intentions for which we use language. The approach of Speech Act theory deals with the analysis of language functions and it is based on the work of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). Their main focus is to show how language serves communicative acts between the speaker and the listener. This theory states that speech acts can be locutionary (just the speech act), illocutionary (the performance of saying something) and perlocutionary (the effect that the speech causes), and direct (the act itself: “close the window”) or indirect (by performing another speech act: “it’s cold” meaning “close the window”).



When we talk about speech acts we have to distinguish between the linguistic formula and the social relationship (Schmidt and Richards, 1980). In other words, a verb is not the same as a speech act since the last one depends on the context or negotiation of meaning. In order to know if the negotiation (or renegotiation) of meaning is successful, speakers need to know that their message has been received and understood by the listener. Also, hearers need to demonstrate that they have received and understood the message. To understand a verb does not mean that the listener understands the speech act since it is subject to different conditions (e.g. sincerity). For instance, the utterance “I’m thirsty” can be interpreted as an act to inform (“I want you to know that I’m thirsty”) or as an act to request (“Bring me a drink”). This is not as simple for our students as we may think because just one form may perform many different acts.

According to Searle (1976), speech acts can be classified as follows:

- *Representatives*: tell people how things are (claim, say, report, assert...).
- *Directives*: when the speaker wants the hearer to do something (requests, commands, and directives).
- *Commissives*: to commit the speaker to do something (promises and threats).
- *Expressives*: to express feelings and attitudes about states of affairs (apologise, thank, welcome, regret, deplore...).
- *Declarations*: an act of doing something rather than an act of saying (“You are out” says the referee to the football player).

We must not forget that gestures can function as speech acts as well, when offering or asking, for instance. This normally happens in order to simplify matters (Gullberg, 2006):

[ ]? – Yes please.

In the example above, the brackets represent raising the hand holding an imaginary cup to the mouth and raising eyebrows. That is: “*Would you like a coffee/tea?*” This is just

one example of the multiple gestures that we make everyday conscious or unconsciously and have the same effect on the hearer.

As Schmidt and Richards (1980) state, speech acts are different cross culturally in their distribution, function and frequency of occurrence, as well as the use and meaning of gestures. That is why learners need to acquire an understanding of the rules and conditions which govern the performance of the speech acts in the two languages concerned, in addition to the surface features of language such as syntax, phonology and vocabulary (White, 1993: 201). They also need to focus mainly on differences between both languages. We must take into account that, in order to understand a linguistic form, we need to relate it to the participants, roles and settings that take part in the act (McCarthy, 1991: 18).

But when applying this theory to the analyses of conversation, a number of problems may arise: “[speech acts] are usually defined in terms of speaker intentions and beliefs, whereas the nature of conversations depends crucially on interaction between speaker and hearer” (Richards and Schmidt, 1983: 126). Given the complexity of conversation, thus, we need to provide students with all resources possible for them to observe and understand how speech acts function in natural exchanges. And this is our main aim.

## 2.2. STRUCTURE AND STRATEGIES

Focusing on conversation itself, there exist many features and strategies which characterise all exchanges and must be taken into account when teaching conversation in the L2 classroom. Providing students with these strategies will contribute to their conversation to be successful.

In terms of structure, an exchange consists of different kinds of moves (also called turns) and each move has a function. In its most basic forms, we can distinguish:

- *Initiating/opening move* (the first speaker).
- *Responding move* (the person responding with words or actions).
- *Feedback/follow up move* (in many cases though not always).

Therefore, in the following list adapted from *A framework of features and strategies of conversation* (Pérez Basanta and Rodríguez Martín, 2007) we can find what is interesting in terms of conversational structure:

- 1) *Openings*: they usually start with greeting adjacency pairs. It can also be a question, an offer, a request...
- 2) *Closings*: Normally introduced by leave-taking adjacency pairs.
- 3) *Turn-taking devices*:

- a) *Taking the turn*:

- Starting up: a hesitant start using filled pauses (*um*), verbal fillers (*well, I mean, you know*), and/or items such as *obviously, actually*, a clean start using introductory devices (such as *well*).
- Taking over: subsequent turns may be connected by an ‘uptake’ (*yeah, oh, well, yes, no*) or a link (*and, but, cos, so*) which is often triggered off by an ‘appealer’ in the previous speaker’s turn (*you know*).
- Interrupting: ‘alerts’ (*hey, listen*) and ‘metacomments’ (*Can I say something about this?, Could I stop you there?, let me just...*) can serve as interruptors.

- b) *Holding the turn*: filled pauses and/or verbal fillers, strategically placed silent pauses, repetition and/or new starts help the speaker to play for time.

- c) *Yielding the turn*:

- Prompting: some discourse acts prompt the other party to respond, acting as turn-yielders, e.g. apology, greeting, offer, question, request.
- Appealing: turn-final ‘appealers’ serve as an explicit signal to the listener that some kind of feedback would be appropriate. They occur in separate tone units with a rising tone, e.g. question tags, *all right, OK, you know, you see*.

- Giving up: the speaker realises that s/he has no more to say or that s/he thinks it is time the listener said something.

4) Adjacency pairs: Among others, we can find:

- Greeting – greeting: e.g. *Hello – Hello*
- Congratulation – thanks: e.g. *Congratulations on the baby – Thank you very much.*
- Apology – acceptance: e.g. *I'm sorry – It's okay.*
- Inform – acknowledge: e.g. *My name is Peter – Okay.*
- Leave-taking – leave-taking: e.g. *Bye – Bye.*
- Question – answer: e.g. *You alright? - Yes, I'm fine.*

As for strategies, we must pay attention to the following ones:

- 1) Hedges: e.g. *sort of, kind of.*
- 2) Discourse markers: e.g. *ok, now, so, well, actually, in fact, of course, anyway.*
- 3) Downtoners: e.g. *just, please.*
- 4) Fillers or thinking devices: e.g. *you know, you see.*
- 5) Pauses:

- Filled pauses: e.g. *er, erm, um.*

- Silent pauses.

6) Disfluencies:

• *Speaker edited:*

- Hesitations (comprising repetition of segments, syllables, single and multiple words): e.g. *Uh sh ... shall I go ..., I think we must we must try and ...*

- Self-corrections: e.g. *Yeah I definily definitely can.*
- Further-detailing, specifications: e.g. *She was thinking Lizzie was thinking of coming but ....*
- Change of plan: e.g. *No but actually you weren't supposed to you were advised not to drink ...*

• *Non-speaker edited:*

- Incomplete items: e.g. *That is hilar hilarious.*
- Errors: e.g. *I didn't see too many evidence.*

7) Topic-shifts: Usually marked by discourse markers (e.g. *anyway*): e.g. *Thank you very much for coming. Anyway, would you like a coffee before the meeting?*

Following Pérez Basanta and Rodríguez Martín (2007), the knowledge of turn-taking rules and strategies will facilitate students' attempts to converse in English, so that their fluency and native like competence improve. In conversation it is essential for L2 students to be aware of these rules because, as Nolasco and Arthur (1987: 9-10) state, they are not “automatically transferred to a foreign language”. Together with adjacency pairs, it is important to look at discourse markers in spoken language because they mark the rhythm of the conversation, and hesitations or pauses occurring while conversing. They are essential to know when, how and for how long we have to talk. As these authors claim (1987: 51), “students need to be aware of what native speakers do in conversation if they are themselves to achieve conversational competence in the target language”.

Once I have explained all these features, I am going to focus on the importance of teaching conversation and what we have to take into account in order to do it properly.

### 3. TEACHING L2 CONVERSATION

Without reciprocity there is no conversation. Therefore, it is useless to present our students with language just from the side of the teacher. Even if the teacher has a great command of the second language or even if this language is his/her native one, it is essential to find the way of creating environments in which conversation (and therefore interaction) is possible. Neither it is good to let students speak in pairs if they are not aware of the techniques or tools they need to use in order to thank, express regret, order, etc. When this happens in the classroom, students usually “translate” from their mother tongue not taking into consideration the way in which what they are saying is conveyed in the target language or up to what degree they can do that. We must let them see that conversation is essential for efficient communication and that in the end this is the main purpose of every language (either a mother tongue or a second language, and regardless of whether we use it for pleasure, for business, for academic purposes...).

“Conversation is not just saying something grammatically correct, it is a social activity and has a multitude of internal and social rules” (Roger, 2008: 9). Generally speaking, students are good conversationalists in their mother tongue, so if we want them to create and reproduce a good output in the second language, first, they need to be exposed to a kind of input which is both authentic and motivating. The input must be authentic so that the output can be as authentic as possible too. At the same time, if it is motivating, it will be easier for teachers to keep students’ attention and interest above all.

People constantly find themselves in situations in which they need to use speech acts (such as asking for information or apologizing). In the classroom, we have to present the most common speech acts to students so that they can understand better the pragmatic aspects of language. This way, they can get familiar with them and they become able, in a short period of time, to analyze the speech acts they feel most useful. Also, using speech acts as basic elements to teach conversation, we can carefully select materials and, therefore, organize the contents of each session and every activity. Later on, I will suggest films as an appropriate choice for teaching speech acts and conversation.

### 3.1. APPROACHES TO TEACHING SPEAKING

At the moment, there are not any approaches to teaching conversation that I am aware of. For that reason, I am going to focus on the three different approaches to teaching speaking, being these ones the closest to conversation: *Indirect Approach*, *Direct Approach* and *Awareness Raising Approach*.

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#### 3.1.1. INDIRECT APPROACH

This *inductive* approach supports the idea that languages can be acquired unconsciously just by exposing students to comprehensible input and giving them as many opportunities as possible to practise their oral skills. In the Indirect Approach, learners practise the elements of speaking through their participation in different communicative activities. It states that explicit focus on form is not important since children learning their first language do not receive this explicit instruction, and they become competent conversationalists all the same.

In the classroom, the Indirect Approach tends to give students many opportunities for face-to-face interaction among them, using language as a means to an end. That is, attention is paid to comprehensible input and opportunities to interact rather than to focus on explicit rules and strategies of the oral component. Some of the methodologies that have evolved from this approach are Communicative Language Teaching and Task-based Language Teaching.

Richards (1994) criticised this approach because it fails when referring to other areas such as accuracy or sociolinguistic appropriacy in order to be competent when speaking. Speakers can produce utterances quickly but they are not appropriate or accurate, and these last two things are essential for being successful when communicating. Also, it has been criticised because the L2 learning process is not the same as the L1 process, and thus learners of foreign languages do need some explicit teaching.

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### 3.1.2. DIRECT APPROACH

The Direct Approach states that speaking should be taught explicitly. Teachers should make learners aware of the nature, systems and patterns of language through very specific input. This way, students know how to use the more abundant set of expressions in spoken discourse. It tries to immerse learners in the language in the same way as when they learnt their first one, but teaching speaking skills explicitly based on the assumption that learners need to be aware of the elements of speaking in order to control, in a conscious way, their use of language.

Focusing on conversation, students would be expected to participate in speaking activities trying to reproduce all the aspects of their daily life in sets as similar as possible to real contexts. Here, attention is paid on students to use better learning strategies.

But this *deductive* approach also fails (Richards, 1994) since the human mental processing capacity has limitations in environments where stress arises, for example. Hence, speaking errors are more frequent and speaking competence decreases as learners tend to become too self-conscious when interacting in spoken environments.

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### 3.1.3. AWARENESS RAISING APPROACH

Nolasco and Arthur (1987) say that the most important thing in order to develop conversation is that students need to be conscious of how native speakers achieve conversational competence in the target language. This is the reason why it is essential to provide students with direct instructions for the better observation of the different aspects of language.

Eslami-Rasekh (2005: 200) states that “through awareness-raising activities, students acquire information about pragmatic aspects of language”. That is, working with speech acts, we can make them see what they can transfer from their first language to their second language, which strategies are used for a specific purpose in each language, what is considered an offence (and its degree) according to the situation in different languages, and how the participants relate in each act. Exposing students to this aspect



of language, we are providing them with the analytical tools they need in order to develop their autonomous observation, their ability to establish and test out hypotheses in relation to the way language works and their critical thinking, making them aware of the language they have to use (and how they have to use it) in different contexts.

Kasper (1997, quoted in Eslami-Rasek, 2005:201) suggests two kinds of activities: activities aimed at raising students' pragmatic awareness, and activities offering opportunities for communicative practice. Hughes (2002, quoted in Rodríguez Martín 2010: 250) insists on how we have to make students aware of the main features of spoken language with activities based on the rules of face-to-face interactions. For this reason, the activities that this work will offer will take this fact into account so that we can build up a closer and more conscious relation between the learner and its target language. This way, as students' level of awareness increases, they will be given little by little fewer hints being their language, as a result, more spontaneous.

### 3.2. STATE OF THE ART IN TEXTBOOKS

In this section, we are going to discuss whether present-day textbooks are good models for teaching conversation. Authors such as McCarthy and O'Keeffe (2004) insist that dialogues for classroom use are not appropriate since most of them are scripted and they are normally based on two-part question-answer sequences. They continue saying that classroom dialogues fail to give an approximate approach of everyday language. Furthermore, students have a passive role. This way, these dialogues do not prepare students for future interactions, and it is here where teachers should help students more since they have few opportunities to participate.

I have chosen two textbooks to exemplify McCarthy and O'Keeffe's opinion, focusing on how natural or authentic dialogues are. If we want materials to be useful, they need to be true and show what informal natural conversation is like, giving examples of the different dimensions in which we converse in our daily life. If we include authentic dialogues as a usual material in the classroom, it will be easier for both students and teachers to work together analysing all the factors to take into account when having a

conversation. This is our premise and what we would expect to find in good classroom materials.

The two textbooks chosen belong to the second year of post-compulsory secondary education, where students have English as a second language as a compulsory subject: *Steps to Success* (Wetz, 2005) and *Take Note* (Hastings, 2005). The first one will be referred from now on as A, and the second one as B. The section to analyse in A and B is called “Listening and Speaking”.

The principal sub-sections (types of activities) in which the main section “Listening and Speaking” is divided are the following ones:

- 1) Complete the dialogue with the correct forms of the verbs/expressions. Then listen and check your answers. Practise the dialogue.
- 2) Invent a new dialogue and practise your new dialogue.
- 3) Listen to the dialogue and answer the questions.
- 4) Pairwork/ Groupwork. Choose a situation: interview/ discussion.

Example:

Unit 6. LIFESTYLES. *Steps to Success* (Wetz, 2005: 63)

**Speaking**

**Discussing a problem**

1  Complete the dialogue with the correct forms of the verbs. Then listen and check your answers.



A Angie, listen. I just don't know what (1) ..... (**do**) about these exams.

B I know, they're a real pain, but you've got to stop (2) ..... (**worry**), Lee. Just relax!

A I can't. I'm fed up with them now. I'm so tired of (3) ..... (**study**). I can't even sleep properly.

B Have you thought of (4) ..... (**do**) yoga?


A Yoga? You're joking, aren't you?

B No, I'm not. I know it's hard (5) ..... (**relax**), but I want you (6) ..... (**promise**) that you'll try.

A OK. I'm lucky really that I've got such good friends.

B It's OK. That's what friends are for.

In activities like the previous one, students are not asked to pay attention to the whole speech but to the missing words. In A, these are given and they just have to write the right form. So, we can say that, in order to fill in this exercise, it is not necessary to listen to the tape since students can use their knowledge about grammar to make a guess of what the right tense may be. Therefore, it makes no sense to include this activity in the speaking section.



Useful language. Complete the expressions below. Listen again to check.

1. a) ... is Toni. Is Lisa...?  
b) She's not ... right now.  
c) I'll call back ... . Do you know ... she'll be ...?  
d) No, sorry, I've ... ..  
e) OK, thanks ... .  
f) You're ... .

Here, this exercise could be very good to teach the structure of a telephone conversation, but the gaps that students have to fill in are not made to work the structure of the conversation but rather vocabulary and/or grammar. It is also interesting to mention that the structure of this kind of conversation is not explained in any of the previous sections.

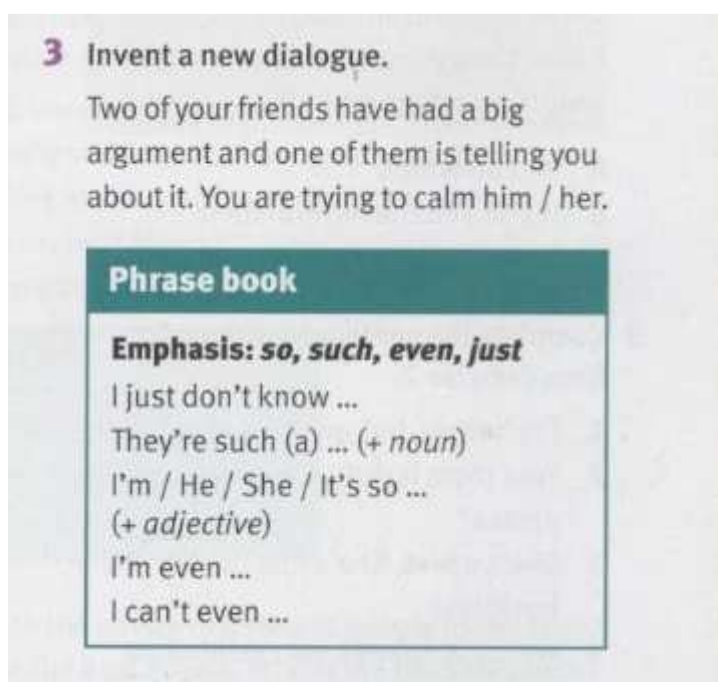
Later, in this section, it says: *Practise the dialogue*. If we intend students to practise a real dialogue, here we can see how this is not possible since the presented dialogue has already been listened to several times and it gives students no opportunity to be spontaneous. In fact, we could not even consider them as actors who perform their script. They are allowed to read a text but in no way they are likely to interact or behave as if they were communicating in their mother tongue. There are no facial expressions, no gestures, no authenticity in their words. Here speaking is more exploited for listening comprehension rather than for producing output and, furthermore, there is no information gap or any real purpose for communication.

Activities in sub-section 2 (*Invent a new dialogue and Practise your new dialogue*) are focused on the creation of a dialogue. Again, though we are asking students to create a dialogue, this is not authentic because they are going to pay more attention to the form than to the interaction itself. Also, though we are in the listening and speaking section, we are asking students to work with the written language and not with the spoken one.

And this last thing seems to be quite contradictory since students are being trained to write when/while they listen, when in conversation we reply speaking and not reading what we have written.

Example:

**Unit 6. LIFESTYLES. *Steps to Success* (Wetz, 2005: 63)**



**3** Invent a new dialogue.

Two of your friends have had a big argument and one of them is telling you about it. You are trying to calm him / her.

**Phrase book**

**Emphasis: so, such, even, just**

- I just don't know ...
- They're such (a) ... (+ *noun*)
- I'm / He / She / It's so ... (+ *adjective*)
- I'm even ...
- I can't even ...

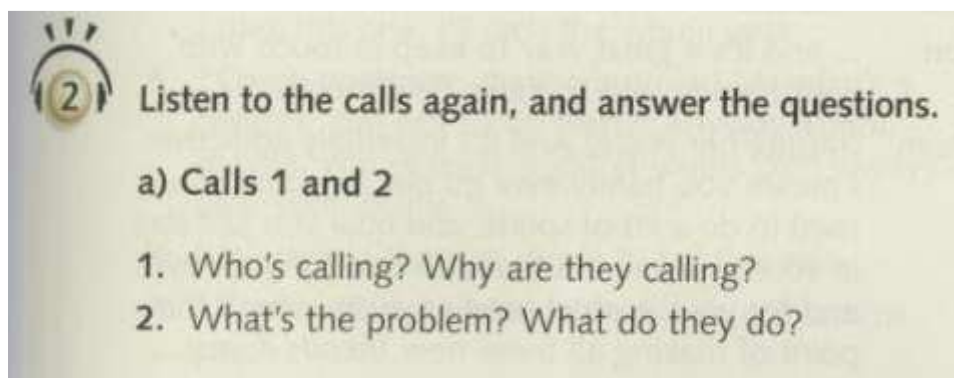
As reference to discuss a problem, they have a conversation between two people in which speaker 2 suggests speaker 1 to practise some yoga in order to relax in the exam period, but they might not focus explicitly on the speech act itself since they may tend to reproduce the same structure as before by simply adding new words. The activity does not finish here. Just below the statement, there is a box called “*Phrase book*” in which students are given some fixed structures to use in their dialogue:

Again, there is no room for spontaneity here since they are expected to attach these expressions to their speech and they are not specific for the speech act they are working. Apart from that, we can see how obviously attention is focused on grammar and form instead of meaning.

In sub-section 3, in B we can find activities that ask for very general information. This way, we are encouraging students to ignore many aspects of conversation and try to get only what they are asked.

Example:

**Unit 7. COMMUNICATION. *Take Note* (Hastings, 2005: 73)**



Considering the kind of activity students are required to do, this kind of recorded CDs seem to be created to improve general listening comprehension and pronunciation, not to develop students' awareness of patterns and features of specific communicative events or discourse types (in this case, conversation). If we limit our students to get this minimum of information, they are not likely to make an effort to get involved in the conversation. We, as teachers, should promote the immersion of students, together with us, in the conversation and make them see it as a whole and be aware of the speech act in particular, rather than an asking-answering activity, especially when the questions of the statement can be applied to any kind of conversation, discourse, etc.

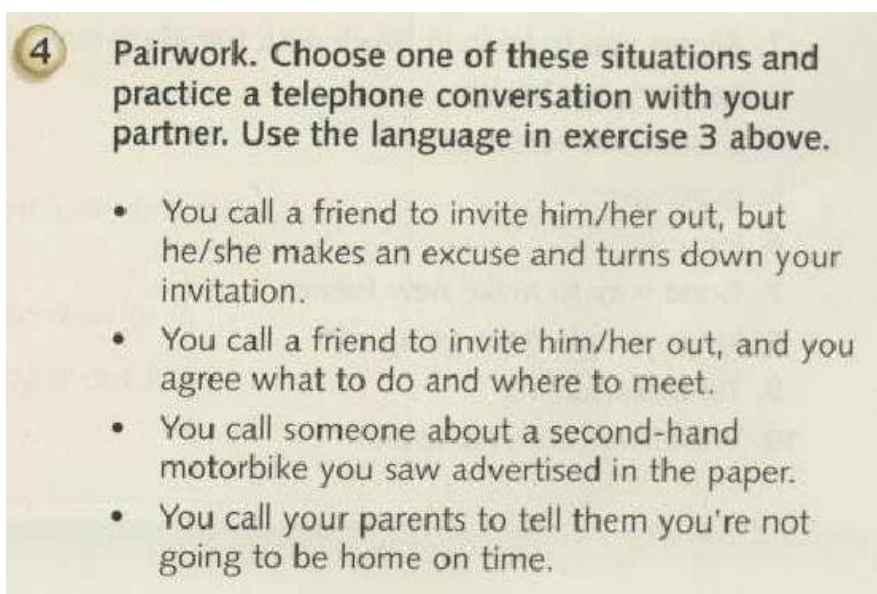
Another problem with this type of listening activities may be that they are not attractive at all for students. They might see them as a compulsory task from which they have to get something very specific and that, sometimes, is difficult for them since they may not be able to pick any clues which help them to get the expected information. If they do not get what they are asked for, they might feel they have failed, but the truth is that they are not given any opportunities to ask again about something they have not understood, to make a gesture so that the speaker can see their message has not reached the hearer properly, etc. Repetition is important when there is a need to clarify something, but here it seems to work as a strategy to show the use of the phrase

depending on the rule(s) that the unit deals with. As mentioned before, being in the appropriate context can help students to see gestures or to hear noises that would facilitate their task and would make it more interesting for them. Also, they feel more successful for having the chance of communicating in a more natural way, where they can get the information being helped by their own body language. But students cannot get access to all this information with audio because they do not watch. Anyway, the activity is not focused to make students aware of features of conversation but simply for listening comprehension. Apart from that, listening is not presented here as a basis for a future output but just as a comprehension activity.

Finally, the last sub-section, devoted to pairwork or groupwork, has many limitations for students too.

Example:

**Unit 7. COMMUNICATION. *Take Note* (Hastings, 2005: 73)**



**4** **Pairwork. Choose one of these situations and practice a telephone conversation with your partner. Use the language in exercise 3 above.**

- You call a friend to invite him/her out, but he/she makes an excuse and turns down your invitation.
- You call a friend to invite him/her out, and you agree what to do and where to meet.
- You call someone about a second-hand motorbike you saw advertised in the paper.
- You call your parents to tell them you're not going to be home on time.

Students can choose among four different situations and they are given a context and a purpose to speak, but they are asked again to use the language they have seen in the exercise above, starting, in this way, their dialogue with these restrictions. Anyway, the main problem here seems to be that they have not received any previous instruction on the structure of telephone conversations and they have not had enough activities to pay

attention to this aspect in order to produce a more spontaneous conversation by themselves.

All this leads us to the conclusion that, although we are aware that we need authentic input, the reality we still have in the classroom does not meet this need. Nowadays, there is still a lack of rich input, which is surprising given the vast amount of materials and resources that today's teachers have at their disposal. Both books analysed here focus on talk from a more transactional point of view, though it is true that dialogues make an attempt to approach genuine talk. Exchanges are quite short and their structure is quite simple and predictable. This means that these examples are still far from the interactional talk that textbooks should encourage.

### 3.3. USING FILMS IN THE L2 CLASSROOM

A study by Moreno Jaén and Pérez Basanta (2009) reveals how films use a wide range of strategies and devices that serve as a good input for students in order to teach conversation in the L2 classroom. The benefits of DVDs they consider in their study are:

- a) *Controllable by the learner* (and for the learner): Learners can select features of a particular film, “read” communicative situations and reflect on relevant features. It is possible to compare different scenes, moving back and forward as many times as they need as if it was a written text. Also, it allows us to create many different activities that can be focused on the features we are more interested.
- b) *Authenticity*: Films can be replicas of real-life people and real-life situations, and utilize real-life language. Students receive input from many different speakers of the language they are to learn.
- c) *Films provide semiotic modalities* (gestures, facial expressions...) making students aware of the way language interacts with other sign systems.
- d) *Sociolinguistic and pragmatic level of language*: they show sociocultural elements of language and the subtleties of register.



e) *Promoting real vocabulary acquisition*: showing and learning words in context is a vital factor for learnability. They can also notice aspects of pronunciation, grammar, phraseology or different levels of meaning. This kind of interaction avoids fossilization.

f) *Motivation, interest and confidence*: DVDs are an attractive tool that has a great potential for motivating students, avoiding or reducing in this way anxiety since we can create a more relaxed and interesting atmosphere.

After explaining all these benefits, we are going to focus on the nature of film language and context and culture as basic remarkable aspects of films.

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### 3.3.1. THE NATURE OF FILM LANGUAGE

If we pay attention to textbooks, the spoken language they use is based on rules of written language, often forgetting that spoken language has its own features (e.g. spontaneity). As Moreno Jaén and Pérez Basanta (2009: 287) state, textbooks present “artificial scripted dialogues based on someone’s intuitions about what people are likely to say or in most cases drawn from written language”. Listening activities offered in these books are premeditated too and furthermore, they usually lack all those external factors that make conversation natural (i.e. noise). “Students need to learn language as it is used by native speakers for real purposes, rather than language ‘invented’ by linguists and textbook writers’ (Baddock, 1996: 20).

A plausible alternative is using films in the classroom. Many people have criticised the use of films as a way to teach a language due to its lack of authenticity. One of the criteria they use to support this idea is the fact that film language is not as spontaneous as natural language can be. Scripts are written to be spoken, so it is a premeditated activity: scriptwriters plan every word, every gesture, every movement, every set, etc. Apart from that, we can also add that actors simulate their interactions, relations, and events. So, as Taylor argues (2006: 1), we could talk about a specific kind of language which differs from authentic conversation: *filmese* (film language). He also states that in the case of film drama conversations, we are dealing with a deliberately non-spontaneous and non-authentic form of spoken discourse, and its lack of genuineness is

immediately observable except when in the hands of consummate professionals. It is not the same a professional film that a school play or some ads in the TV played out by footballers, models, etc. (2004: 77).

However, there is a relation between film language and real conversation which leads us to support the use of film language as authentic for teaching conversation. In this vein, as well as authors against the use of films in the classroom as a method for teaching conversation, there are many others who support their authenticity. King (2002: 510), for instance, claims that films show “colloquial English in real life contexts rather than artificial situations and they expose students to a wide range of native speakers, each with their own slang, reduced speech, stress, accents, and dialects”. We can say that, despite its limitation, it is true that film language is closer to natural conversation than the dialogues we find in textbooks. Gregory and Carroll (1978) say about film language that it is “written to be spoken as if not written”. Actors behave as if they were part of that “reality”, as if they were in the shown context. They also bring their own tricks modifying the original scene or adding something to it so that the scene looks more real.

Anyhow, we must not confuse the concepts “natural” and “authentic”. Here, we are supporting the use of films as authentic materials to approach natural conversation, acknowledging the differences with spontaneous “authentic” conversation, but still extremely useful to bring a “slice of real life” to the classroom (Lonergan, 1984, quoted in Moreno Jaén and Pérez Basanta, 2009: 290).

Film language is very varied and, in general, richer than authentic conversation. Therefore, there exist some differences between these two languages. According to Rodríguez Martín (2010), who conducted a study comparing the language in a corpus of movies with that used in the conversation section of the British National Corpus, some of the main differences are:

- Speech acts or functions of language seem to be more significant in movies with a high frequency of the word *please*.
- Phonological reduction (the use of contractions). The frequency of negative and verb contractions (*isn't*, *haven't*) and “conversational contractions” (*gonna*, *gotta*) is higher in face-to-face conversations.

- Grammatical reduction (*ain't*) is more used in face-to-face conversation than in movies.
- Deixis. The word *here* is more used in films while the word *there* has a higher frequency in face-to-face conversations.
- Discourse management. Discourse markers such as *anyway*, *then*, *well* present a higher frequency in the face-to-face conversations corpus, while the discourse marker *okay* is overused in movies.
- The use of interjections (*ah*, *oh*) seems to be more significant in the face-to-face conversations corpus.
- The items *yes*, *yeah* and *mm*, are more frequent in face-to-face conversations. They can be included in backchannelling as manifestations of the co-constructive nature of conversation.

However, in spite of these differences, and perhaps thanks to them, the appropriate use of films in the classroom may be very advantageous since they give students a wide exposition to language, and we can both promote the conversational skills of our students and make them aware of the cultural background of language and communication. Furthermore, we can show students that:

- Standard English is not the only variety, but that there are several ones.
- As Rühlemann says, this way we can shift “the emphasis in EFL from a monolithic view of language to a register-sensitive view which acknowledges the fundamental functional diversity of language use” (2008: 672).
- The grammatical rules that Standard English follows are quite different from those of conversational grammar.

DVDs also may help students “to gain broad access to oral communication both visually and auditory” (Tschirner, 2001: 305). With the incorporation of DVDs we are not using monomodal materials anymore. As Moreno Jaén and Pérez Basanta state (2009: 288),

conversation is multimodal and therefore it cannot be taught with monomodal materials. This is the aspect we now turn our attention to.

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### 3.3.2. CONTEXT AND CULTURE

“Spoken discourse is context dependent, unplanned, transient, oral/aural and dynamic as well as a locus of change, interpersonal, informal, rhetorical and primary” (Hughes, 2002, quoted in Rodríguez Martín, 2010: 245-246). Thanks to it, speakers are going to share a lot of information which is not always explicit and therefore, makes conversation more difficult to understand. Because of it, interlocutors take for granted many aspects, especially cultural ones, which do not need to be explained every time they have a conversation. As Goodwin and Duranti (1992, quoted in McConachy, 2009: 116) support, “no linguistic utterance can be definitely understood without referring to the social and communicative context in which it was uttered”.

In order to analyse a context, we have to pay attention to the following variables:

- *Field*: subject matter, purpose, topic of conversation.
- *Tenor*: relationship between the participants (relative status, power, distance...). A woman can be both a dentist to her patient and a mother to her child.
- *Mode*: the medium through which communication is achieved. It could be *auditory* (discourses, music, noise...) or *visual*, that is, involving paralinguistics or colours, pictures, etc.

Focusing on the foreign language classroom, we entirely agree with López Sako (2010: 268) when he states that “the aim would be to bring the students’ attention to the importance of the contextualization cues that are salient for the correct use and interpretation of the whole interaction and of individual turns of talk that shape the ongoing event”. We share this author’s opinion in that DVD film clips are “a useful instrument to raise EFL learners’ awareness of the contextual features” (López Sako, 2010: 270). Teachers used to think (and many of them still do) that just concentrating

on output and fluency, conversational competence could be achieved. Lately, we have seen some studies which show that authentic input is needed as a basic factor for conversational competence, but we do not find enough exposure of students to authentic materials or contexts. Films, if well manipulated, offer us contextualised learning since they are multimodal materials that “expose learners to *authentic learning environments* so that they can interpret the pragmatic and semiotic variables of the social context” (Moreno Jaén and Pérez Basanta, 2009: 284). The more we expose students to a context or cultural set, the better they will understand it and, in consequence, they will develop a better comprehension every time they face a conversation, reducing as well the risk of transferring their native rules to their second language in an inappropriate way.

Taking all this into account, we can check how meaning is created as a whole unit (Taylor, 2004: 72). Multimodality also “allows us to see how the verbal element is integrated with the other semiotic resources and thus how those other resources can at times compensate for the verbal” (Taylor: Ibid). That is, we must also stress non-verbal factors when learning a language. Unconsciously, students will look for visual clues when watching a movie that can help them to understand better what is going on. Something as simple as the location of the participants or the way they move will make them more involved in the situation. Also, the way in which characters dress may give students a clue of the characters’ social class, education, background, taste, lifestyle, etc., affecting the way they speak and the kind of conversation they have. Therefore, a multimodal approach can help students to be aware of how important contextual factors are to create meaning and to understand different events. The following chart shows some of the patterns that paralinguistics and non-verbal language offer in order to build up meaning:

VISUAL MODE ELEMENTS	PATTERNS
<b>Paralinguistics</b>	<b>Gestures, postures, facial expressions, eye-contact, gaze, proxemics, etc.</b>
<b>Non-verbal information</b>	<b>Colour, background/foreground, images, layout and spacing.</b>

Figure 1 Elements of the visual mode in conversation (Calvo Maturana, C., *et al*: 2010).

If we focus on gestures, for example, learners' gestural repertoire is part of their communicative competence and essential for its development. Gestures are a rich input in order to make us comprehend and communicate better. They help to "expand our understanding of L2 acquisition, both as a product and as a process" (Gullberg, 2006: 104). This is another reason why films are excellent materials, because they include gestures to the speech and it is easier for students to visualize and memorize them (Gullberg, *Ibid*).

Another advantage that films bring into the classroom is cultural knowledge. This last aspect is not less important since socio-cultural aspects of language are essential, and without the social factor, conversation would not be possible. Furthermore, students need to feel they are part of the world of native speakers and feel, at the same time, they connect properly in this world or at least that they understand it. In opposition to the way in which textbooks offer culture to students, films integrate it within conversation, becoming an essential aspect for the better understanding of communication. *Cultural background* "enables us to perform important skills like recognizing situations around us and responding to them appropriately" (Baddock, 1996: 10). Using films, we can fill the empty gap that language students have concerning the way in which people live and behave in the foreign language. They can notice the similarities and differences that the target language has in comparison to their native one. Together with language, they will use this cultural knowledge, their communicative skills, their familiarity with films and other techniques to understand a conversation. We are all influenced by the atmosphere

in many different ways, so films are a window to go beyond school, home, class, country, and our own language.

As Baddock (1996) says, *film's realism* is one the strongest attractions to students. For him, this is the best way to show language in real-life situations (people, the way they live, the things they do and say...). We must be critical when watching a film and get the most of it.

Also, we can apply a moral aspect to teaching culture through films. The acceptance of diversity is a keystone when learning any language. No one really understands a language until their mind is open to the culture and the people of the new language. Tolerance, thus, must be considered as important as any other linguistic, phonetic, or grammatical aspect of language, especially when the main purpose of communication is the exchange of thoughts in society.

## 4. MATERIAL DESIGN

Next, I am going to explain the different aspects I have taken into account in order to design the activities I will suggest later on in this work for the Official School of Languages: *teaching context, objectives, contents, methodology, and procedure.*

### 4.1. TEACHING CONTEXT

#### 4.1.1. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The main contents and objectives the activities of this work cover are based on the following decrees:

- The basic competences and objectives students have to reach in the Royal Decree 1629/2006, December 29, based on the Organic Law of Education (LOE) 2/2006, May 3.
- The Decree 239/2007, September 4, and the guidelines in the Order October 18, 2007 approved by the Regional Government of Andalusia.

#### 4.1.2. SCHOOL

The Official Schools of Languages are funded institutions under the direction of the *Consejería de Educación de la Junta de Andalucía* and they belong to the system of non-obligatory language education. Here, in Granada, this School shares the building with the Secondary Education School *Francisco Ayala*, located in a central area of the northern part of the city. At the moment, the Official School of Languages in Granada offers courses in Arabic, English, French, German and Spanish for foreigners. Thanks to the Plurilingualism Promotion Plan, the Official Schools of Languages have become key language training centres, offering contact lessons, semi-contact lessons and online courses. The course levels offered in this School are designed according to the Common



European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and therefore they are structured into three different levels:

- *Basic Level* (divided into two courses): Basic 1 and Basic 2, which correspond with CEFR Level A2;
- *Intermediate Level* corresponding to CEFR Level B1.
- *Advanced Level* (divided into two courses): Advanced 1 and Advanced 2, corresponding to CEFR Level B2.

Furthermore, apart from regular courses, the School also offers courses called CAL for teachers involved in the Bilingual Schools Project through the Plurilinguism Promotion Plan. The School has also been a very active participant in the following projects:

- The Virtual Library.
- Experimental PEL (European Language Portfolio).
- Organization of the course “Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language”.
- Programme outline of the curriculum of the Official Schools of Languages in Andalusia.
- Programme outline of the Arabic curriculum in Secondary Education.
- Welcoming Erasmus students.

The Official School of Languages in Granada has five different departments in order to provide a quality and comprehensive education to its students:

- Complementary and Extracurricular Activities Department.
- Equality and Coeducation Department.
- Training, Evaluation and Innovation Department.
- Quality Control Department.
- Resource Department.

As for the main aspects which influence the Official Schools of Languages, they are summarised as follows:

Students usually expect to receive practical training in order to develop their communicative competence.

The Official Schools of Languages aim at teaching languages to students not included in the obligatory education system. This means that they are framed in the field of continuing education where aspects such as strategies and self-learning (*autonomy*) are crucial.

The School motivates students and offers Official Certifications in concert with the Council of Europe and, consequently, they must combine practical use, precision, and reputation.

- The Official Schools of Languages are framed in the Plurilingualism Promotion Plan of Andalusia and, therefore, the schools must provide students with plurilingual and pluricultural skills and practices. The schools must give students the urge to use English in order to communicate in a context as realistic as possible. This has to be done in a way so that it encourages the students to become conscious that English language is a true and powerful instrument which can help them to discover and make their own vision of the world.

As for material resources, we have to emphasize that the establishment is an ICT Centre, so teachers can use laptops, smart boards and projectors in classroom for pedagogic purposes. The classrooms are arranged with double desks in order to foster team work. Any resources or materials the students may need (CDs, books, computers, Internet, etc.) are available both in the library and the classroom.

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#### 4.1.3. STUDENTS

The main characteristic of the students of the Official School of Languages in Granada is that they belong to different age groups. In the same classroom, we can easily find

students from sixteen years old to students in their forties and fifties. However, the average age we will find in the CAL courses is completely different to the rest of groups and levels. In men, the average is around 50 years old onwards and they have a university degree, whereas the average in women enrolled in this course is between 25 and 45 years old and they also have a university degree. The main reason why they decide to enrol in this Official School of Languages is the establishment of the Plurilingualism Promotion Plan in the centres where they teach. Also, some of them emphasize that it helps their intellectual enrichment. They are all ICTs users and they can spend some time of language study outside the classroom. Though they have other obligations, ICTs are the best way to combine them with their study time.

Since this Official School of Languages belongs to the system of non-obligatory language education, students who apply to this school are generally motivated on their own. So, their behaviour in class is generally positive and there is an active and good participation in class. The exception we can find here is, again, in students in CAL courses since they are required by their schools to obtain the B1 level. Furthermore, due to the fact that this school is a funded institution of the *Consejería de Educación de la Junta de Andalucía*, fees are very low. Normally, any person willing to study in this centre should have some economic obstacles. However, most students have a middle or upper socioeconomic status and so it is their cultural level. The main reason of this may be that people with a low socioeconomic and cultural status are not encouraged by their social environment to study foreign languages.

## 4.2. OBJECTIVES

First of all, in order to set the objectives we want to achieve, we have to establish the level we are dealing with. The proposed level for these activities would be the Advanced one that corresponds to the level B2. As the Royal Decree 1629/2006 states, people with this level will have to:

Use language with some confidence and flexibility in different situations, both standard and specific, so that they can understand and produce oral and written texts which are linguistically complex, with a wide lexical repertoire, and about general, current or specialised issues.

Since my proposal is uniquely focused on oral skills, I will describe now the general capacities and abilities established in the Royal Decree 1629/2006 that students must achieve regarding these skills:

- *Listening comprehension*: to understand texts which are well organised and linguistically complex about abstract and specific issues, in standard language and at a normal rate even though the acoustic context is not the most appropriate.
- *Spoken expression and interaction*: to produce texts which are clear, well organised and understandable by the hearer, dealing with several issues, and giving pros and cons. Speakers must be able to participate in long conversations in noisy contexts, being fluent and natural when speaking even though they make occasional mistakes.

I have also taken into account those objectives of the English Department in the Official School of Languages of Granada, related to oral skills. They are detailed below:

- To improve students' oral skills by encouraging participation in class and the elaboration of glossaries divided into different semantic fields and by designing new and motivating oral activities in cooperation with the language assistants of the school.
- To promote students' participation in extracurricular activities.
- To encourage the use of ICTs, e.g. power point presentations, teachers' blogs and wikis.
- To increase material in the virtual library available for downloading.

#### 4.3. CONTENTS

Together with the objectives, both the Royal Decree 1629/2006 (BOE) and the Decree 239/2007 (BOJA) explain the general basic contents needed to reach the advanced level. All these contents must be integrated because in real situations they will be activated simultaneously. The main ones are:

- *Notional contents*: entities, properties (quantity, quality, etc.), relations (time, place, etc.).
- *Sociocultural contents*: daily life (festivities, timetables, etc.), living conditions (housing, work, etc.), personal relationships (social structure and the relationships of its members), values, beliefs, and attitudes (institutions, art, sense of humour, etc.), body language (gestures, visual contact, etc.), social conventions (conventions and taboos related to behaviour), ritual behaviour (celebrations, traditions, etc.).
- *Communicative competence*: linguistic competences (vocabulary, grammar, phonetics), sociolinguistic competence (stereotypes, register, politeness, dialects, accents), pragmatic competence (speech acts/functions: representatives, directives, commissives, expressive, declarations), discursive contents (textual coherence and cohesion).

In the proposed activities, we will deal mainly with:

- *Communicative competence*: pragmatic competence (expressive speech acts) and sociolinguistic competence (register and accents);
- *Sociocultural contents*: body language, ritual behaviour (funerals), daily life, and personal relationships (family and relationships).

As we said at the beginning of this section, all these contents and competences must be integrated and, as we will see later on, the clips I have selected are very good examples of this because they show possible real situations in which all the factors are activated at the same time.

#### 4.4. METHODOLOGY

Since the activities of this work are designed for students to work with their computers and our activities will be available in an online platform, I am going to focus on virtual environments in order to explain the pedagogical model on which we can base this kind of learning. According to Picardo (2003), e-learning enriches the learning experience,

since it is dialogic, constructive and it exploits environments. Apart from acquiring logical learning, students can get social and affective learning. As I have mentioned before, learning a second language is a social activity since people need to express themselves and being understood at the same time. The capability that technologies offer in order to guide learners' attention to vast amounts of information make students reflect and forces them to understand messages in order to fulfil tasks successfully. Also, they bring them metacognitive resources so that students can control their own learning and evaluate their own results. In other words, the main goal of this process is to get meaningful learning (Pérez Basanta, 2006).

Therefore, we can say that the model that e-learning follows is Constructivism, in which successful learning is based on the students' effort in order to "construct" and organize their knowledge. As Candy (1991) states, "one of the central tenets of constructivism is that individuals try to give meaning to, or construe, the perplexing maelstrom of events and ideas in which they find themselves caught up". Here, knowledge cannot be separated from context since it is based on it. Therefore, students learn in the context in which they are going to put into practice what they have learnt.

Next, I will list some general principles of Constructivism (Zahorik, 1995) which are shared with e-learning (Pérez Basanta, 2006):

- Knowledge structured in nets and without being prioritised linearly (links and hypertext).
- Knowledge as a social construction, promoting peer work (cooperation).
- Contextualised learning: students develop their knowledge according to their natural environment (authentic materials).
- Gradual transfer of learning responsibility: the role of the teacher disappears little by little (leaning autonomy).

We can also add some advantages to these previous characteristics if we take into account that they can access to the Internet:

- Availability of updated and unlimited information and resources (Mak, 1996).

- Opportunities for interacting and integrating in an intercultural and global context (Thorne and Thorne, 2000 quoted in Pérez Basanta, 2006: 25).
- Opportunities for cooperation in intercultural projects (Pérez Basanta, 2006).

Here, it is important as well to focus on learning autonomy. Lately, there are more and more authors who talk about the importance of promoting learning autonomy (Benson and Voller, 1997; Lee, 1998; Coterall, 2000; etc.). According to Holec (1981: 3 quoted in Benson and Voller, 1997: 1) autonomy is “the ability to take charge of one’s learning”. That is the reason why virtual learning fits perfectly well with autonomy (Brett, 2000). It adapts easily to the different kinds of learning at different paces, and it helps to solve problems individually. Apart from that, it promotes reflective and critical thinking.

Finally, we could say that e-learning is a different kind of learning since materials are specifically designed by teachers taking into account the number of hours that students need to devote and the results they need to achieve. Some of the conclusions and recommendations we can get from this learning (listed by Pérez Basanta, 2006) are:

- Students are dealing with material whose linguistic difficulty is not beyond their capabilities. This way, it is easier to maintain their motivation.
- Online activities must be workable and the results must be palpable. For this reason, instructions must be clear and precise.
- Activities must be designed in a way in which students can move easily from one page to another using the links they are provided with. This is how we can prevent them from wasting their time.
- Specific contents must take into account scientific and pedagogic bases.
- The proposed activities or tasks must require a cognitive effort from the student.
- The contents must be selected according to students’ needs, interests, expectations, age, and level.

- And what is most important, students must know at all times what their goal is, and be aware at the same time of their progress while learning.

In our online platform, the activities available will only be intended to improve and develop students' oral skills. We will have a premium on *input/awareness* online activities so that students can practise as much as they need to. Later on, they would be prompted to produce a better output through a series of activities in the classroom together with their peers and their teacher.

#### 4.5. PROCEDURE

One of the main general problems we find when teaching English as a second language is that “the teaching of conversational competence has mainly concentrated on output processing” (Moreno Jaén and Pérez Basanta, 2009: 283). However, we must be aware that, first of all, we need a proper input in order to be successful when outputting, and that is the main concern of this work.

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##### 4.5.1. USING FILMS FOR MATERIAL DESIGN

It is important to take into account that films are not helpful on their own in the classroom. Teachers must select extracts that can lead to the subsequent design of activities. That is, each extract must be shown with the intention of teaching viewers one or more specific aspects of language and culture. If students are not guided or we give them the whole film, they would not be able to focus on the several clues that films can offer about the language they are learning. They must be aware during the whole extract of how native speakers behave, talk, interact, etc. That is the reason why it is easier to maintain their attention with small extracts rather than with the entire film.

If we present good materials accompanied with curricular and methodological innovation they are likely to work. Especially, if we consider that films are at the same time an oral and a visual input, students have a broader access to oral communication.



As Tschirner (2001: 306) states, “rich and varied authentic oral input is an essential and fundamental prerequisite for achieving oral competence”.

The same way we want authentic material as input for our students, tasks must be authentic too. The ideal thing would be to ask students for something that has to do with real life or something they are likely to need in their real life. This will mark the attitude of our students towards the task, making possible that they can even enjoy the tasks too.

Here, I am going to work with two films. The first one is *Juno* (2007). The reason why I have chosen this film is because it reflects very well, and at different levels, the relationships among the characters. We can see a conversation between two very best friends from school, a daughter with her parents, a teenager with unknown people, etc. Also, we can frame these conversations in very different contexts: at home, at school, signing a contract with a lawyer, at the doctor’s... With this film it is easy to see as well two social statuses showing this way how families with different economic incomes and cultural backgrounds live in the United States. There are also plenty of scenes we can work with in order to deal with functions, gestures, structures and strategies that will help students to improve their conversational skills. Another important fact to take into account is that it is a film apt to ages from 15 onwards. It deals with important and current issues that are interesting for all ages and therefore, they are very good to discuss later on in the classroom. As for output activities, this is essential since we can have a wide range of exercises which, later on, can be perfectly applied to other kinds of issues.

The second film is *Death at a Funeral* (2007). Now we change the setting from the United States to the United Kingdom (in London, exactly). We locate ourselves in a funeral in a posh cottage where not only death is involved but drugs, and family and relationships too. The accent of the characters changes a lot from the previous film, and also the accent among the characters in the present one. This way, we can show students the wide variety of accents English language has and, at the same time, we can deal with different registers since not all the characters have the same job or age, for example, and thus, do not talk and address people in the same way. Though they are all dressed for a funeral, we can guess also because of their clothes their different statuses. They will appreciate as well the role each member of the family has depending on their age, the

main differences between our culture and their culture, etc. As for functions, this film is very interesting since, for instance, with just one word (*sorry*), we can aim for different purposes that students will have to identify.

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#### 4.5.2. CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION OF CLIPS

Selecting clips is not an easy task if we want to offer students the right materials. In order to choose the right clips, I have used a systematic framework for the analysis of multimodal materials (Moreno Jaén and Pérez Basanta, 2009: 290). Following the framework that the authors offer, teachers can create activities helping students to discover the multimodal layers of meaning and interpretation in oral interactions.

The framework allows us to analyse the three main parameters needed to describe context in film clips: context of situation, context of culture, and register. We have applied this framework for the analysis and selection of the clips to be exploited in our work, as well as for the design of teaching materials. An illustration of one of such detailed analyses is provided in the Appendix, with an extract taken from *Death at a Funeral* (2007). There, we can see the aspects we have taken into account in order to, later on, build up the activities for that clip (though, of course, not all features are equally interesting for our purposes and only the ones considered most relevant were addressed in the teaching materials).

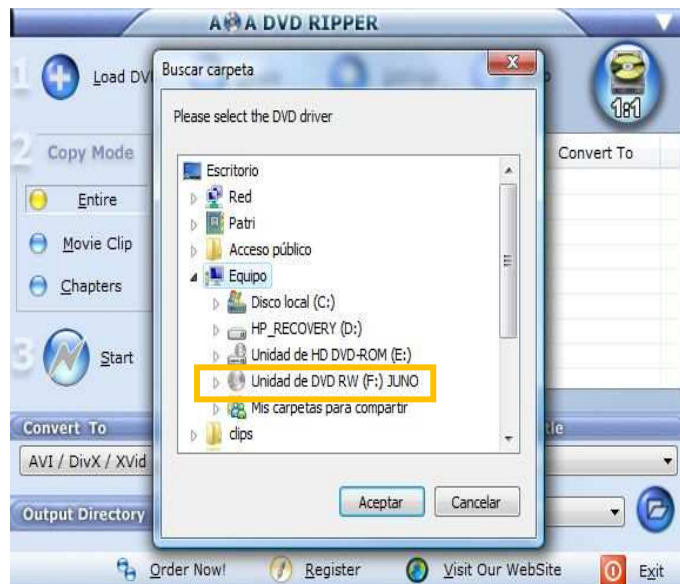
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#### 4.5.3. TECHNICALITIES

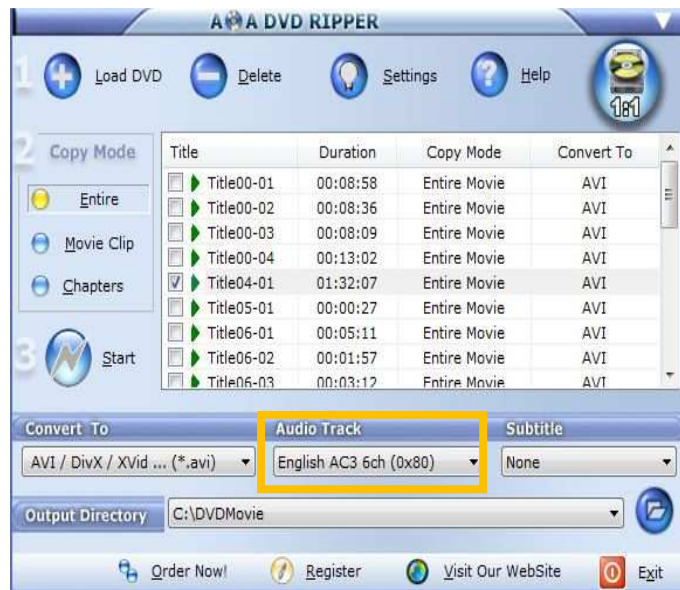
In order to design the activities it has been essential the use of two software programmes.

First of all, I have used *AoA DVD Ripper*. It provides a fast and easy way to slash any parts of a DVD and convert it to play on the web or any other device. It also extracts audio tracks from all kinds of DVD and saves them as WAV. For our activities, I have followed these steps in order to rip the clips:

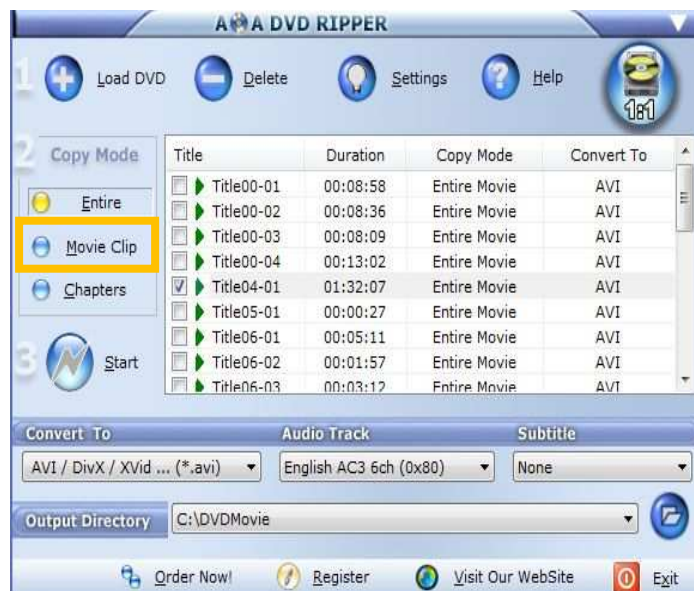
- 1) **Loading the DVD.** Since we have worked with original DVDs, we will choose the option **Import From DVD Disk:**



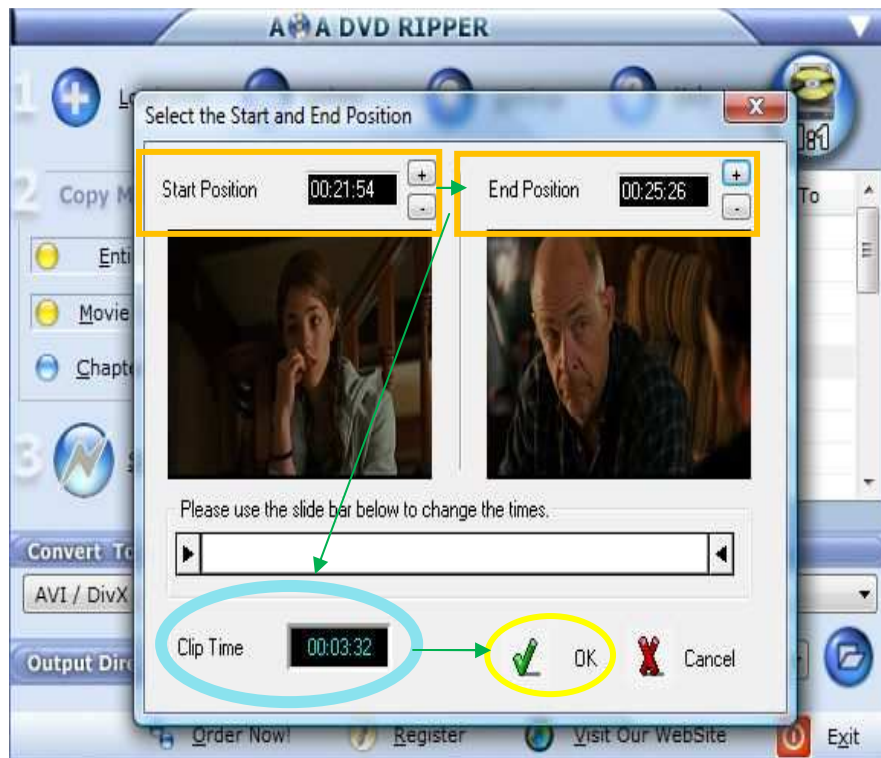
- 2) Once we have loaded the film, we have to make sure that we select the right **Audio Track** language:



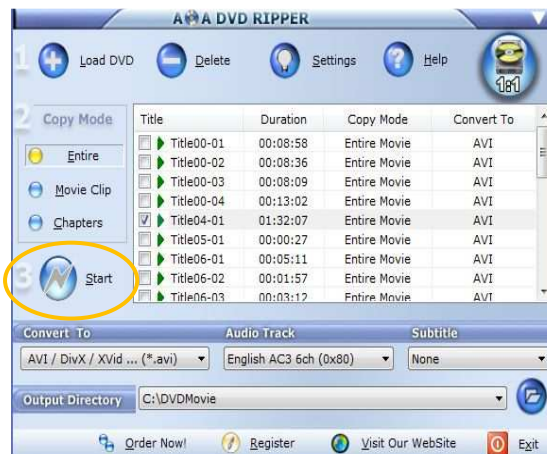
3) Then, we select **Movie Clip** so that we can choose the extract we want to rip:

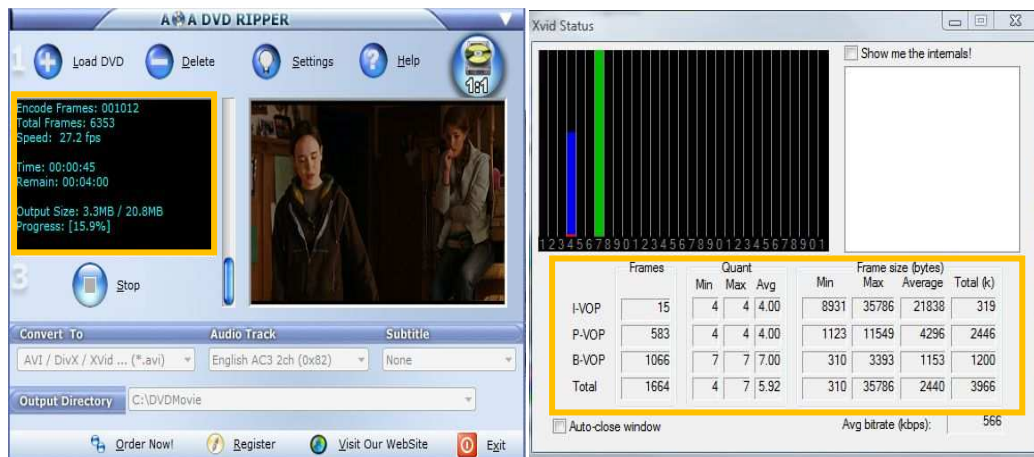


4) Here, we have to enter the minutes of the **Start Position** and the **End Position** of our clip. In order to make it easier, each position will show its scene and below, we will find the total **Clip Time**. When finished, we press **OK**.

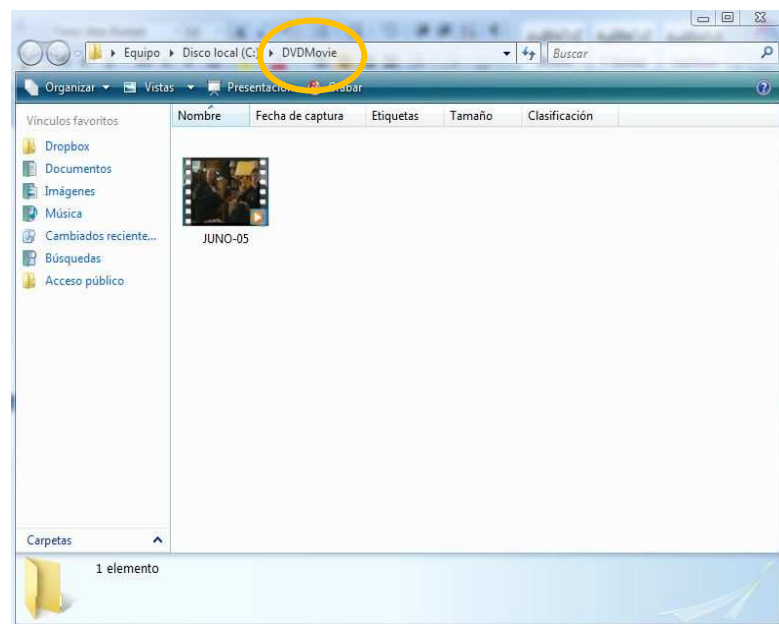


- 5) Again, in the main menu, we have to press **Start** and we will have two windows which show us the process and the internal characteristics of the clip:

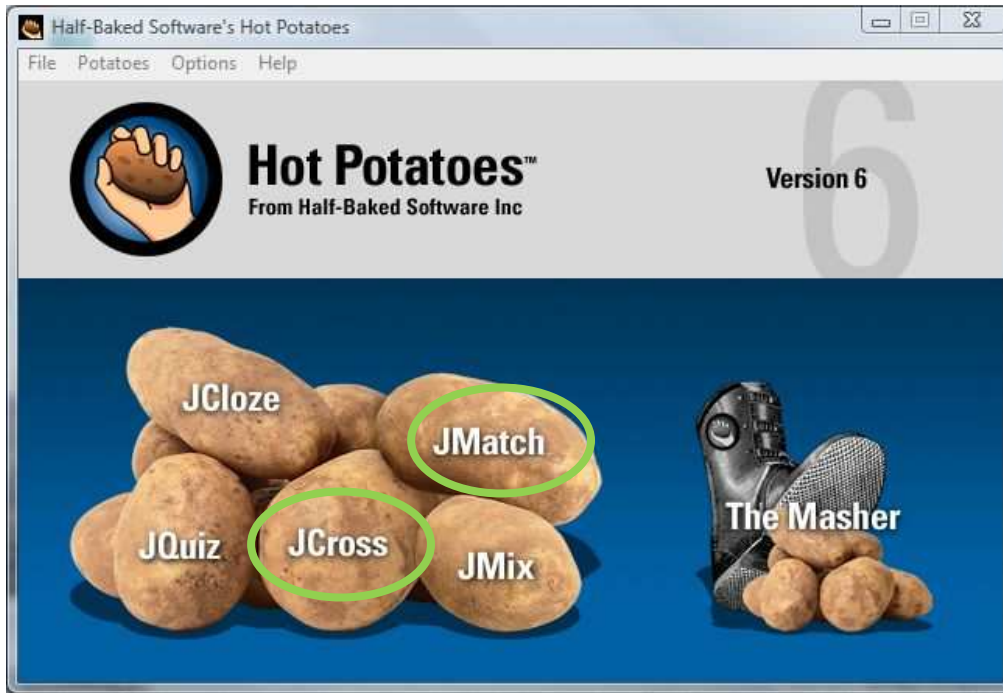




6) Finally, in one of the windows we will get the message **frames Done!** and the **total encoding time**. After that, we have to exit the programme. Automatically, the folder **DVDMovie** will open with the clip ready.

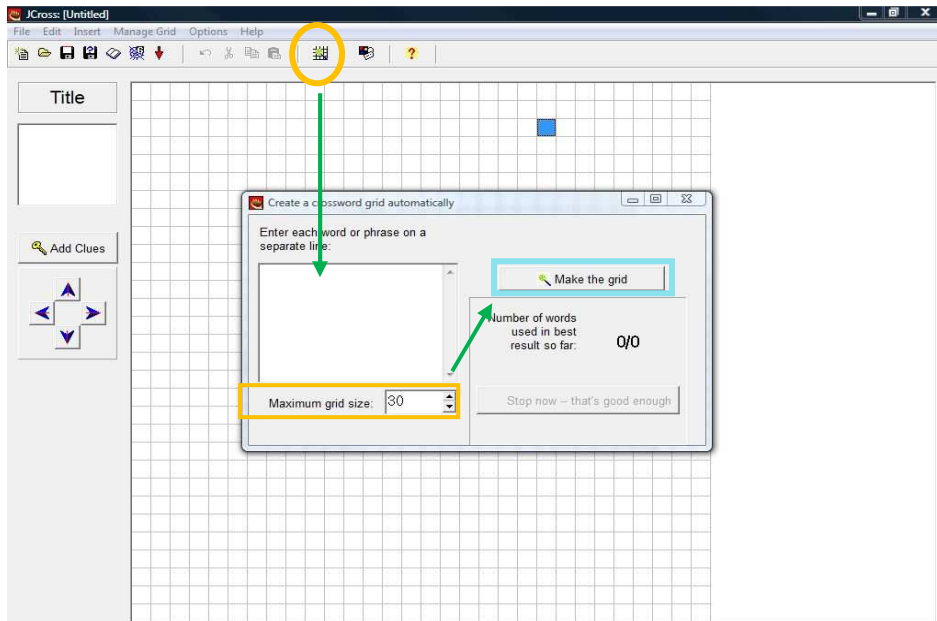


The second and last programme I have used is *Hot Potatoes*. It is a set of six applications that allows you to create interactive multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword, matching/ordering and gap-fill exercises for the Web. From this program, I will explain only the two applications I have used: *JCross* (for crossword) and *JMatch* (for multiple-choice exercises).

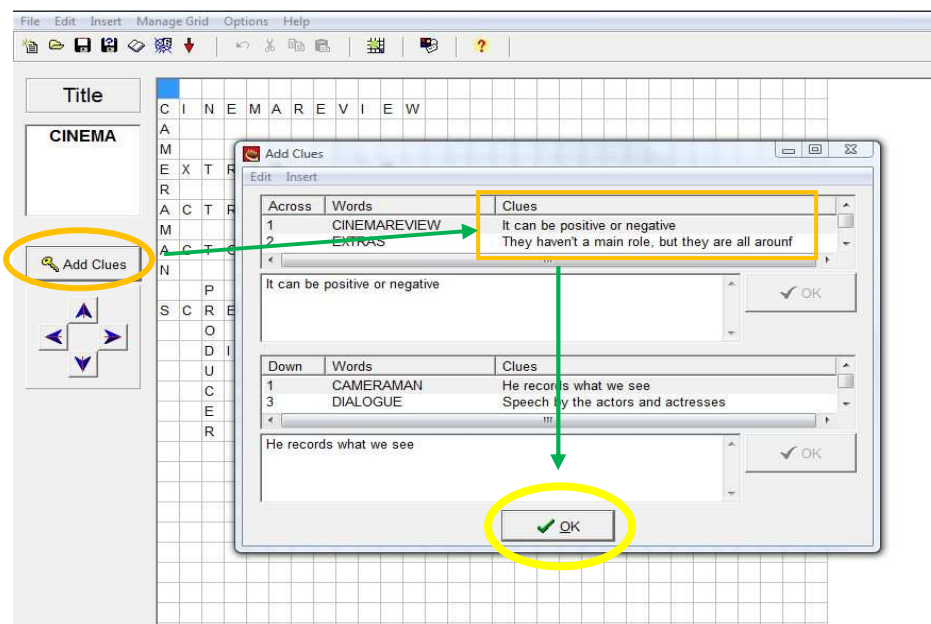


- *JCross*:

- 1) Though you can distribute the words in the way you want, I have done it automatically. For that, we just have to press **Create a crossword grid automatically**. This way, we just have to add the list of words we want and indicate the **maximum grid size**. After doing this, we press **make the grid**.

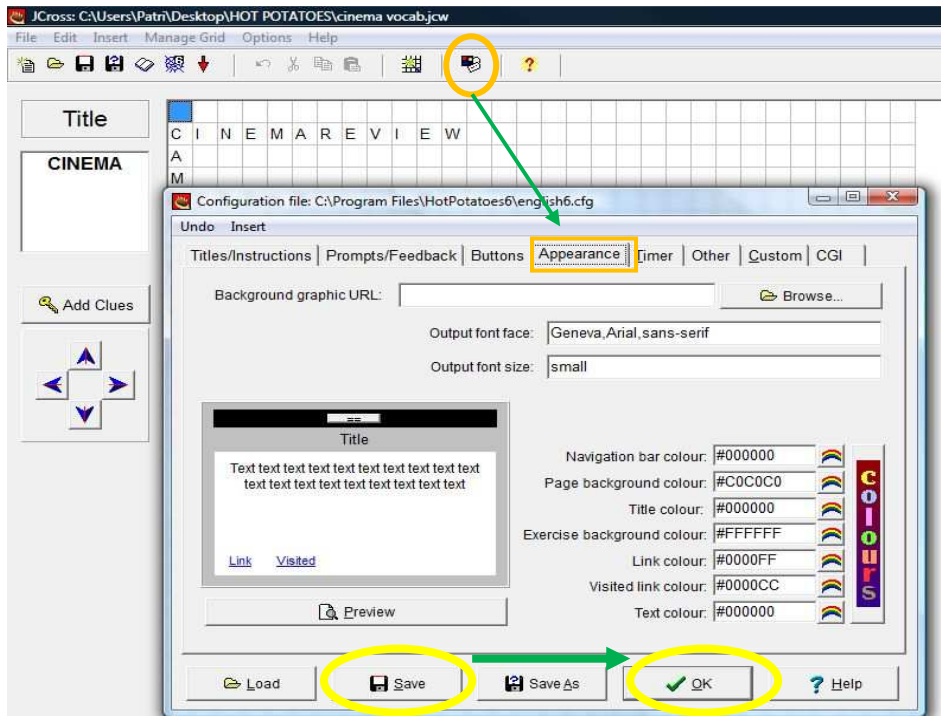


2) I have also used the section **Add Clues** to help students with the words:

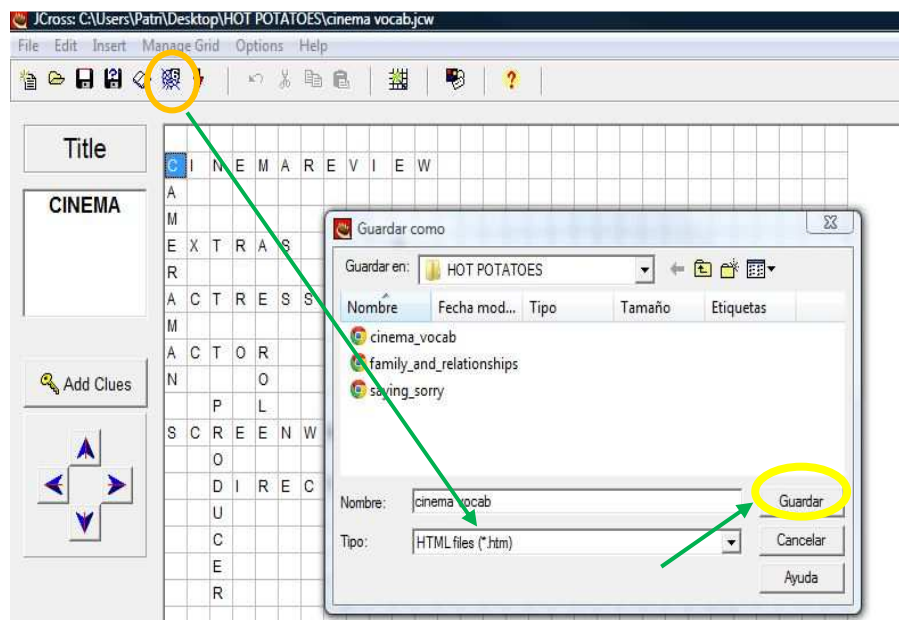


3) After introducing the list of words, I have clicked on the **configuration screen** to set the preferences. In this case, I just changed the **appearance**:



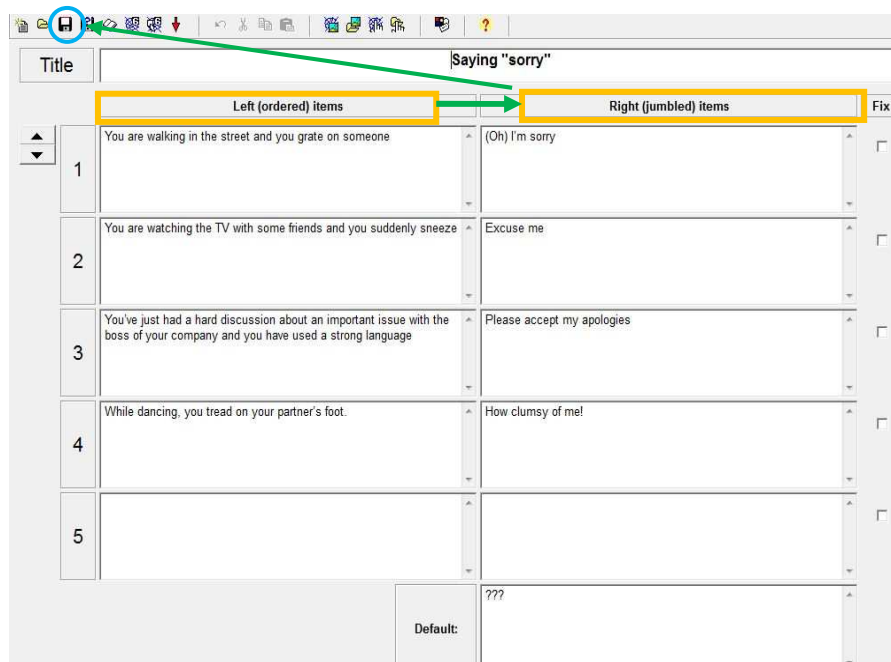


- 4) When saved and accepted the changes, we can export it in .htm using **Export to create Hot Potatoes Web Page.**



- JMatch:

- 1) In this section, we have two columns: **Left** and **Right**. In the left one, we have to put the items that are going to appear ordered. In the right one, the items will appear jumbled.



- 2) The procedure to change the settings of the exercise and to save it as .htm is the same for all the applications, which makes it easier to use.

#### 4.5.4. DESIGN OF ACTIVITIES

The procedure to follow when creating activities consists of two different steps:

- *Input and Observation/awareness activities:* After explaining in the classroom the function/functions we have to work with, we must ask students to do communicative activities with exchange of new information. These activities would mean the “first” exposition of students to “authentic” language, so we will ask them to pay attention to communicative skills rather than grammatical or lexical aspects and get everything they can from the clip. In order to let them know how to do it, first, we will see together in class one clip and we will analyse all the features we need to consider. The following step would consist of

pinpointing all the different aspects we want students to pay attention to in order to fulfil an action. That is: the speech act itself and its purpose, the use of conversational strategies and structures (turn-takings, adjacency pairs, repetitions, paraphrasing...), the main information about the participants influencing the act (age, social status...), the context (time, place, noise...), the gestural repertoire, etc. Later, at home, they will have access to the different activities we have uploaded in the online platform. There, they will find a wide range of activities so that they can do as many as they need, and they can reproduce the clip as many times as they need. We must also try to give students different clips so that they can compare different situations.

- *Output activities*: Finally, we have to focus these activities on the production of a fluent and accurate output, exchanging unknown information for them and prompting some negotiation of meaning. Depending on the context they are given to work with, they must produce their dialogue taking into account not only those aspects they have paid attention to in the previous section, but also the norms of appropriateness. Their production will be tested in the classroom by teachers. After working during some days on input and observation activities, the teacher will check the development of students as they work on the different features already seen in the classroom.

Following these detailed procedure, therefore, I have selected four clips from the film *Juno* and nine clips from *Death at a Funeral*. Then, a set of online activities have been designed to be exploited in a classroom of Advanced level of English at the Official School of Languages of Granada (although, of course, this material may be equally exploitable in other teaching contexts which share similar objectives and characteristics). A copy of the film clips and the digital material designed can be found in the CD-Rom accompanying this work.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This work discusses the current role of conversation in the English classroom, in an attempt to improve students' oral skills (especially in focusing on conversational competence) exposing them to authentic input. For this, I have studied the nature of conversation and the theories of discourse analysis to extract those strategies and structures that make conversation more real and successful. With a review of the different approaches to speaking, I have checked the advantages and limitations they present when used in the classroom. I have also analysed two textbooks, an analysis that comes to confirm that better approaches and resources to teach conversation are urgently needed. Then, I have focused on the study of film language as a new source to approach natural conversation. Finally, I have analysed the teaching context for which I have suggested and designed a series of activities.

After doing this, I have concluded the following:

- It is essential for teachers to know different theories of discourse analysis so that they can teach conversation using these theories as a basis for their work.
- Using speech acts in the classroom seems to be a good formula to teach students how to perform the functions they need to master. At the same time, they will understand that the right use of a linguistic structure does not mean that they are understood, since meaning depends on its negotiation and/or context.
- Conversation goes beyond oral language. Body language is very important to help the hearer to understand and the speaker to be understood.
- Though there are three different theories to teach speaking (*Indirect approach*, *Direct approach*, and *Awareness raising approach*), it is possible to get a closer approach to conversation selecting different aspects of each one.

- Textbooks lack authenticity and spontaneity. In most cases, conversation activities present restrictions, and students are expected to make use of fixed structures presented along the unit.
- The use of films as input has many benefits for students (rich input, authenticity, motivation, interest...). Furthermore, they can make a use of them that suits their needs.
- Film language is varied and approaches students to natural conversation.
- Context and culture are essential factors to help students to connect with the target community and understand it.

Nevertheless, this work has some limitations that must be taken into account when considering the conclusions drawn and when applying the proposal made in this study. Firstly, it is not easy to make sure that all the teachers can be familiar with the theories of discourse analysis and, therefore, that they can master the strategies and structures needed to teach conversation successfully. For this, it would be interesting to do further research on teachers' training and monitoring focused on conversational skills. Secondly, in order to show the lack of authentic material in textbooks, I have only analysed two. Analyses on other textbooks should be done taking into account all the language skills in order to develop and improve them. Finally, the activities suggested in this work are focused on the use of a few speech acts in different but specific situations. Since not all the films are appropriate to promote conversation, and those which are may not show at the same time all the functions we want to deal with, it would be interesting to work on the creation of a data base with films for this purpose. This way, when selecting the skills and/or the speech act we want to work with, we could access a list of selected scenes from different films where these aspects are treated.

The use of speech acts together with films to promote oral skills can be the result of a wide range of very different materials and further research. But we must always take into account that the best material we can ever find is our own, since no one knows better than the teacher the needs that his/her students may have.

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## LEGISLATION

Decreto 239/2007, de 4 de septiembre, por el que se establece la ordenación y currículo de las enseñanzas de idiomas de régimen especial en Andalucía.

Escuela Oficial de Idiomas de Granada, <<http://www.eoidegranada.org/jla/>> [last visit 26/08/2011].

Orden de 18 de octubre de 2007, por la que se desarrolla el currículo correspondiente a las enseñanzas de idiomas de régimen especial en Andalucía.

Real Decreto 1629/2006, de 29 de diciembre, por el que se fijan los aspectos básicos del currículo de las enseñanzas de idiomas de régimen especial reguladas por la Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación.

**VIDEO CLIP: ANALYSIS OF *DEATH AT A FUNERAL* (2007)**

<b>DIALOGUE</b>		<p>H: There's just nowhere to park! This is ridiculous.          J: How about over there?          H: Uh?          J: The guy is coming out of there.          H: Alright.          J: Take it! Take it! Take it!          H: Alright! What are you doing? Are you mental?          Sorry. Excuse me. Hi, sorry... Oh, hi Martha. I was just about to park there, actually.          M: Yeah, well. Are you relative, Howard?          H: No, I'm not. But...          J: Hey Martha.          T: Who's that?          U.A: What's happening?          J: Did you see that? She barely even looked at me.          U.A: I said what's happening? Are we there?          H: Oh, my God. We got Uncle Alfie in the car!              I cannot believe I forgot to say we've got Uncle Alfie in the car.              Alright, keep your hair on!          U.A: What the hell is going on?          H: Ouh!          J: She barely even looked.</p>
<b>CONTEXT OF SITUATION</b>	<b>Tenor</b>	<p><b>THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Status:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Middle age hypochondriac man (Howard) who is in charge of taking Uncle Alfie to the funeral vs. Middle age gothic man (Justin) who goes to the funeral just to see Martha.</li> <li>- Howard vs. Van driver</li> <li>- Howard vs. Young upper class woman (Martha) who is introducing her fiancée in the funeral.</li> <li>- Young irresponsible pharmacy student (Troy) from an upper class family vs. Martha, her sister.</li> <li>- Justin vs. Martha.</li> <li>- Uncle Alfie vs. Howard.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <b>Mood:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Howard: nervous, spontaneous and very hypochondriac. Justin: informal and insouciant. Martha: Self-assured, assertive and straightforward. Troy: irresponsible party animal. Uncle Alfie: grumpy old man.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<b>Field</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Subject matter:</b> Howard is trying to find a place to park close to the house since he's taking Uncle Alfie (who uses a wheelchair) with him. When he is about to park, Martha takes his place.</li> <li>▪ <b>Purpose:</b> Howard complains about the situation while Justin tries to catch Martha's attention.</li> </ul>
	<b>Mode</b>	<p><b>LINGUISTIC MODALITY:</b> Dialogue, oral language.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Prosodic features:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Stress/emphasis: H: <i>WHAT</i> are you <i>DOING</i>? Are you <i>MENTAL</i>?</li> <li>○ Pauses: Between turns.</li> <li>○ Tone: Howard: Rising tones (complaining attitude):  <i>There's just nowhere to park!</i>                      Justin: Level tone (expressing reservation and astonishment): <i>She barely even looked.</i>                      Uncle Alfie: Rising tones (anger and complaining attitude): <i>I said what's happening? Are we there?</i></li> <li>○ Loudness/clarity: Martha: Clear voice: <i>Are you relative, Howard?</i>                      Howard: Loud intensity (almost shouting): <i>Alright! Keep your hair on!</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Conversational rules and structure:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Openings: <i>H: Hi, Martha</i></li> <li>○ Adjacency pairs: <i>M: Are you a relative, Howard? / H: No, I'm not.</i></li> <li>○ Interrupting: <i>H: No, I'm not. But... J: Hey, Martha.</i></li> <li>○ Turn-taking: <i>H: Sorry. Excuse me. / H: Alright!</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <b>Conversational strategies:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Hedges: <i>H: I was about to park there.</i></li> <li>○ Fillers: <i>UA: What the hell is going on?</i></li> <li>○ Repetitions: <i>UA: What's happening? / I said what's happening? / What the hell is going on?</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ <b>Functions and speech acts:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Asking for information: <i>T: Who's that?</i></li> <li>○ Suggestions: <i>J: How about over there?</i></li> <li>○ Commands: <i>J: Take it!</i></li> <li>○ Agreeing: <i>H: Alright!</i></li> <li>○ Claiming: <i>H: I was about to park there actually.</i></li> <li>○ Denials: <i>H: No, I'm not.</i></li> <li>○ Expressing disbelief: <i>H: I cannot believe I forgot to say we've got Uncle Alfie in the car.</i></li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>J: Did you see that? She barely even looked at me.</i></p> </li> </ul> <p><b>VISUAL MODALITY:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Paralinguistics:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Body expression: Howard is uneasy trying to find a parking lot. Justin seems to be relaxed at the beginning but later on he seems shocked. Uncle Alfie is sleepy, which shows he is quite old. Martha is tense about the situation and what is going to happen later on.</li> <li>○ Gestures: There are gestures expressing astonishment, anger, restlessness, etc. Raising hands meaning disbelief. Hand in the pocket for insouciance. Touching forehead repeatedly as sign of being nervous. Closing the car door hardly to show anger. Raising eyebrows as a sign of astonishment and disbelief. Striking with a cane to catch someone's attention.</li> <li>○ Position: Sitting in the car but standing during the argument, keeping the distance.</li> <li>○ Eye-contact: Little and spontaneous eye-contact.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Others:</b> differences in the type of cars and clothes of the characters.</p> <p><b>AUDIO MODALITY:</b> Noise coming from the cars (wheels, engine and horns) and birds, mainly.</p>
<b>CONTEXT OF CULTURE</b>	<b>Background information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Content:</b> A family attempts to resolve a number of problems while attending the funeral of the patriarch.</li> <li>▪ <b>Place:</b> Big and beautiful cottage in the outskirts of London.</li> <li>▪ <b>Time:</b> Current time.</li> </ul>
	<b>Socio-cultural features</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Differences between social classes.</li> </ul>
<b>REGISTER</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ At the beginning, informal. When complaining about the parking lot, the conversation turns into more formal but dropping hints.</li> </ul>