**Teaching English to refugees and migrants (summary of a training workshop to volunteers in Calais refugee camp, February 2016) by CELTA / DELTA trainers Ann Cowie and Linda Ruas**

**1/ Some general principles**

1. **Maximum student-talk** - it can be useful for learners to simply listen to the teacher explaining (this exposes them to language, can help them listen better, allow them an important ‘silent period’ to try to make sense of sounds and words etc.), but it’s probably more useful to get the learners talking as much as possible instead. Low level learners probably won’t understand verbal explanation anyway. Get them talking as soon as possible with simple pair or group tasks eg. one points at a picture, the other says the word; one asks for the thing in the picture, the other picks it up.
2. **Grade and cut teacher language** – for good, clear communication, it’s important to use simple language that learners will understand immediately. It’s good to cut out all complex sentence structures (eg. ‘I would have brought a picture if I hadn’t been kept awake all night’ – simplify to ‘Sorry, no picture’) and idiomatic language (eg. ‘Are you up for it?’ - simplify to ‘OK?’). A few simple clear words from the teacher with visuals and gestures to support the meaning are usually far better than a lot of language that the learners don’t understand (and may get confused by).
3. **Repetition –** to help with short-term memory, and for getting mouths around new sounds, it’s good to get learners to repeat all new words several times. They can listen to you (or another learner) saying the word first a few times, then all say the word together as a group. Then you can ask individuals to repeat it (and maybe spot and help with individual difficulties - eg. show how to say the ‘f’ sound in ‘fish’ with upper teeth over bottom lip if they say ‘pish’). Come back to words you’ve taught in random order. You could train the learners to always say the word when you point to the picture.
4. **Recycle and review** – learners also need help with long-term memory. Sometimes it’s easy to remember words/phrases for a few minutes, but you’ve forgotten it all 20 minutes later. You can help by recycling sets of words in different contexts eg. teach vocabulary of household items (hammer, bucket, screwdriver, tap, water bottle, scissors etc.) and practise using the words by ranking them in order of how useful they are. Then, an hour later, bring the same words back and practise asking for and giving the pictures in pairs. Then, the following day, bring out the words again and make lists of what we can do with all the items.
5. **Develop study skills** – how can learners carry on learning after the lesson? Will their notes (if they make them) make sense to them a few days later? Some learners have good study skills and know what they need to write down, some have low levels of literacy and hardly any schooling, so will need guidance. It might be good to copy the new words, make a simple drawing next to the word to remember what it is, and transcribe the sound (English spelling is often quite unpredictable!) in their language so they remember how to pronounce it and/or write the word in their own language. You can tell them to practise with friends later by covering the word and trying to remember it from the picture.
6. **Relevance** – what we teach should, if possible, be relevant to the learners. Most published ELT course books try to be relevant to many different contexts around the whole world but are often very euro-centric and support a celebrity-worshipping consumer society so might be totally irrelevant to many. We can start with what the learners want and need eg. necessary items and situations they might find themselves in, and build on that. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire started teaching literacy by sharing, discussing the whole political context of simple words (eg. ‘water’, ‘voting’) and getting people to share the words and meaning with others.
7. **Sensitivity –** we do, of course, need to be sensitive to the learners’ context (they may well not want to talk about family they’ve left behind), culture (it might be useful to practise asking if food is halal, where they can pray etc.) and possible suffering / trauma. Many of the learners we met wanted to talk about why they left their country and their journey, but many may not.
8. **Build on what they know** – we usually learn best by building on what we already know and making links to prior learning/knowledge. We can ‘hook’ new language onto what is already in our brain eg. it might be much more difficult to use ordinal numbers in dates (1st, 22nd, 30th etc.) before first learning and being confident with cardinal numbers (1, 22, 30 etc). Also, many words in English come from or are the same in other languages (eg. ‘pyjamas’ comes from Hindi), so it’s good to exploit the known/easy words first.

**2/ Some lesson sequences**

1. Food

i/ Get some pictures of various food items, on separate laminated sheets or all on one sheet.

ii/ Point and say the word for each in turn, randomly going back to previous words to recycle, getting learners to repeat each word several times (together as a group – ‘choral drilling’ – and separately ‘ individual drilling’).

iii/ Get learners, in pairs, to practise the words eg. they take it in turns to say a word and their partner points at it (demonstrate this first with a stronger learner so they know what to do).

iv/ Go through all the words again, pointing and getting learners to say them, then write each one. You can get learners to copy them, with a simple picture and transliteration, or give them a paper copy to take away.

v/ Set up some more practice eg. point, mime and show examples of food you like / don’t like : ‘Mmmm, I like milk’ … ‘Ughhh, I don’t like meat’. Repeat a few times, then get learners to say what they like/don’t like. They can practise in pairs. They could then decide as a group to rank the food items in order of how much they like them, or for cost, or for how healthy they are. You can also personalise the topic by discussing, in a simple way, how to make other food eg. flour + fat + milk + sugar = cake.

1. Necessary things >> illnesses >> doctor dialogue >> places in town >> giving directions (this could be over several days)

i/ Get several sets of flashcards: necessary items (blanket, tablets, bandage, toothbrush, comb, plaster etc.); illnesses & symptoms (cough, cold, backache, toothache, headache, pain, earache etc.); places in town (post office, mosque, cinema, park, hospital, dentist, bank, doctor etc.).

ii/ Teach the necessary items as above (show, drill/learners repeat, write, practise, review), then get learners to practise in sentences, saying ‘I need a …..’ and / or ‘Excuse me, have you got a …?’ – no need to break down the grammar of these phrases, learners can learn these simply as chunks of language.

iii/ Teach the words for illnesses/symptoms as above (show, drill, write, practise). Then link these to the necessary items in a practice task using longer strings of language eg. ‘I’ve got a headache – I need a tablet – Excuse me, have you got a tablet please?’. Learners can also do short doctor/patient role-plays to practise both sets of words.

iv/ Teach the ‘places in town’ words. Then draw (or get learners to draw) a simple town plan with several roads and the names for places they’ve learnt. Present and practise the phrases: ‘turn right’, ‘turn left’, ‘go straight on’, ‘cross the road’ etc. with repetition (and action?). Then, in pairs, learners can practise giving instructions: one has a bit of paper/ counter/ pen-top and they say ‘Where is the park, please?’. As their partner gives them directions, they move their counter around the ‘map’ to the other place.

v/ You can then recycle all these topics together by handing out flashcards to pairs to create a short dialogue.

**3/ Topics and materials**

Sets of flashcards:

* colours (and get learners to think of things that are that colour / make their country’s flag out of the colours etc.)
* means of transport (they could put these in order of cost, of speed, of comfort, how much they like them; they could talk about transport in their own country and Europe and their journey)
* clothes (you could invent various people they need to get clothes for – in hot weather and cold weather)
* time (you could work through times of a day to practise speaking about their daily routine in the camp, and maybe the daily routine of a farmer or shopkeeper in their country)
* days, months, dates (you could get them to ask for and give birthdates and practise saying the dates from dates in numerical form)
* verbs of senses (hear, see, touch, smell, taste – practise by saying what they can see and hear etc.)
* problems with living areas (leak, stolen lock, wet blankets, broken door, tarpaulin, gas bottle, stove, wood burner etc.) – learners can practise with a role-play explaining what is wrong
* emergency services – learners could practise telephoning and reporting an emergency
* legal or advice words/phrases – they could practise in a law/advice centre
* shop signs
* furniture
* sizes of clothes
* form-filling

**4/ Useful resources:**

Reflect ESOL tools: <http://www.reflect-action.org/reflectesol> - this explains the ‘participatory’, materials-light, learner-centred approach (often used with migrants and refugees in classes in the UK) and there is a link to the free pdf resource pack. Section 3 on ‘tools’ might be the most useful eg. showing how to use a simple body map, calendar, diagram of a river, a tree or a matrix or Venn (‘chapati’) diagram to guide learners to develop language. This can be used from very low levels.

The Handsup Project : <http://handsupproject.org/?s=stories-> + facebook: The Hands Up Project. Nick Bilsborough is teaching refugees in Gaza to children – mainly using stories - and writing about his experience on this blog. There are several short videos of how he is teaching on the blog.

TPR (Total Physical Response) : <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/total-physical-response-tpr> - get learners to learn by miming actions

Easier English wiki New Internationalist: <http://eewiki.newint.org/index.php/Main_Page> - a free, online resource of simplified (‘Easier English) articles from New Internationalist for learners (see instructions) about global justice around the world. Also, Ready Lessons for teachers to use on powerpoint or pdf – can be printed off as paper copies too.