

# The languaging curriculum

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Most English language teaching (ELT) aims to get students to match the standard norms of the language with mismatches, or errors, being judged as wrong and penalized. The limited impact of this traditional approach is apparent in countries like Thailand where the majority of students, despite having studied English for at least 12 years, can understand very little, communicate even less and have such little confidence in their English ability that they actively avoid the language.

It's time to shift perspectives and try something different, and two recent movements suggest a possible direction. First, the English as a lingua franca movement argues that, in many real-world contexts, the ability to convey your meaning is far more important than being accurate, implying that the focus of teaching should be strategies for using the language, such as how to pre-empt communication breakdowns, rather than the traditional goal of producing appropriate language forms. Second, within linguistic philosophy, the idea of languaging emphasizes doing things with language and so views English as a process, not a product to be copied.

From these roots, we propose the languaging curriculum which involves learning to strategically make use of available tools and resources to successfully do things with English for real-world purposes. Such an approach challenges many of the accepted practices in ELT. For example, there are no standard norms so teachers need to be completely non-judgmental about any language the students produce; and there is an ever-increasing number of resources that can help students to do things with English, such as Google Translate, that should be exploited, rather than banned.

To design a languaging curriculum, we started with several principles:

- The focus is on doing things with English, rather than the English language itself.
- The focus is on successful communication, not accuracy.
- The focus is on language use strategies, not language forms.
- The focus is on real-world language use, not classroom practice.
- No judgments are made about how students use language.
- The curriculum should help students see the importance of English for doing things.
- The curriculum should motivate students to want to do things in English.
- The curriculum should help students realize the potential of their existing resources for doing things in English.
- The curriculum should provide support so that students can have more success in doing things in English.

These principles were put into practice in an English course at a Thai university where the students were highly mixed-ability. To provide motivation, the course was organized around learning a hobby and comprised three main stages over 15 weeks:

Stage 1: Students learn about their hobby from reading and watching videos

Stage 2: Students interact about their hobby on Reddit

Stage 3: Students create a video about their hobby which they upload to YouTube

Throughout the course, every student was exposed to and used different language because each was working on their own hobby, but they all received the same guidance

and support for doing things with English. For example, guidance with judicious use of Google Translate to help with reading about the hobby was given; and students were supported in analyzing existing Reddit posts such as identifying the features of successful posts and concordancing useful words for their own posts. Details of the course including lesson plans and materials can be found at <https://solatlc.wixsite.com/languaging/hobby-course>.

During the course, students wrote reflections, and a few quotations from these illustrate the impacts of the course.

"This course is different from other subjects which are the practice of using English language openly without fearing that you will use the wrong language. Which at first, I don't like English at all but after studying in this subject, it made me like English more."

"The difference between this class and other classes is I can choose how learn English by what I'm interested. Learning must start from passion or curiosity."

"The grammar scared is one of the biggest problem that made Thai people scared to communicate in English it might affect from their classroom because teacher always says that 'if wrong grammar will affect to your score...' This class can removed this thing out from the students mind."

It's also worth noting that six months after the course, most of the students were still using their Reddit hobby community.

The languaging curriculum as manifested in the hobby course provides a new paradigm in ELT - in the words of one student, the course is "a good beginning to change the education model in Thailand" – and may address the lack of progress apparent on traditional ELT – again, in the words of a student, "this course is really helpful for people who are trying desperately to learn English but never find the right way to get the noticeable result".

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