COURSE DESCRIPTION

GNS 101: USE OF ENGLISH

LANGUAGE LEARNING IS MOST EFFECTIVE WHEN IT TAKES PLACE THROUGH MEANINGFUL, INTERACTIVE TASKS. Language learners will thus learn most when they are engaged in meaningful, purposeful activities of social and cognitive nature in the context of the classroom (content-based instruction) and outside it (social settings).

Following this curriculum, students will learn content-related information while acquiring English language skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The emphasis on teaching English for academic purposes entails the development of thinking skills.
LANGUAGE SKILLS ARE INTERDEPENDENT. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills are not thought of by language users as independent skills; they are rather perceived as interdependent where one skill often activates the other skills as well as the paralinguistic skills for the achievement of effective communication.

Apart from the above, this course helps students improve their ability to read and understand scientific articles, to think about them critically, and to communicate about them in English. Students also learn to use language related to their scientific and technical fields in speaking, giving presentations, and writing. As a result, students gain confidence in reading scientific journals and articles and using English for their major subjects (Agricultural Science, Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Sciences, Physics, Computer Science, among others).

At the end of the course, students should be able to communicate effectively in different situations and settings with L1, ESL and EFL speakers alike using authentic, appropriate, and correct linguistic forms; communicate effectively in subject matter areas in general, thus equipping them with the requisite linguistic skills for pursuing university education in their fields of specialization.

Course Content:

1. **AWARENESS RAISING**

For many people, mastering writing is the most difficult aspect of learning a foreign language. Here, we shall look at the different kinds of difficulties students have and some of the mistakes they make when writing in English - mistakes which have to do with spelling, punctuation, grammatical use and organisation. Differences in formal and informal use of English shall also be examined. Written English is the same way as spoken English, be it *formal* or *informal*. The differences between written and spoken English shall be illustrated from a number of examples. In general, informal spoken English contains a number of colloquialisms i.e. conversational expressions that are inappropriate for formal written English. It is, however important not to mix styles. Since the course is task-based and student-oriented, students shall be given some tasks to perform in and outside the class.

2. **LISTENING SKILL**

Listening is the ability to hear and pay attention so that the end product would be the understanding and evaluation of what the listener hears (Dale *et. al.*, 1988).

It thus involves the ability to distinguish between the sound systems of English or any other target language that serves as the learner's second language – to differentiate the unfamiliar sounds in the given language.

Basically, listening is one of the most important and frequent behaviour in which we engage. It is one of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). It can be described as an important everyday skill commonly used in all academic disciplines. It is therefore important for everyone, especially students, to improve one's listening skills and be the best listener one can be. In order to listen and comprehend in both social and academic contexts, the following are the enabling listening skills (requirements):

- functioning ear
- concentration
- ability to think along with the speaker
- ability to anticipate what the speaker is about to say based on what he has said
- ability to take note of the main points of the speaker (Olaofe, 1991).

Comprehension, a major ingredient of listening activities, can be improved by:

- listening attentively
- following the speaker's speech
- possessing a wide range of vocabulary related to the subject matter
- identifying and recognizing major speech patterns (introduction, change of ideas, shift of emphasis, sentence patterns/sequence)
- showing interest in what the speaker is saying; among others.

In most academic endeavours, students listen to acquire information which may come in various ways as:

- instructions
- facts
- data, figures and formulae
- dates
- illustrations
- questions and answers
- theories

These sources of information may take place in the lecture hall, laboratory, and within the campus.

At the end of this lecture, students should be able to:

- Develop basic factual comprehension of what is heard.
- Comprehend and interpret what is heard.
- Appreciate and enjoy certain aspects of spoken discourse.
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- Comprehend and interpret what is heard.
- Appreciate and enjoy certain aspects of spoken discourse.
- Paraphrase events in a story.

- State similarities and differences among characters, feelings, and actions in a story.
- Answer basic information questions about what is heard.
- Comprehend explicit information in spoken discourse (actions, ideas, reactions,etc.)
- Comprehend, interpret, appreciate and enjoy spoken discourse
- Take note of specific information based on what is heard.
- Identify mood, setting, character, and purpose based on what is heard.
  Classify vocabulary into semantic and/or grammatical categories.

3. SPEAKING SKILL

This aspect is primarily to assist students with difficulty in their English language speaking skill. It relates the sounds of the English Language to international phonetic and orthographic symbols. Apart from the treatment of the phonemes, it also includes a simplified form of the stress and intonation system to provide a simple guide in these two grammatically important aspects of spoken English.

In all languages we speak with air from the lungs. Air leaves the lungs through the vocal cords to the mouth, the vocal tract then modifies the air to provide sound. Sound is therefore the modification of air by the vocal tract. Getting the air into and outside the lungs involves a process whereby some organs are involved. The organs involved in the process of speech making are called the speech organs. They include:

1) The vocal cords   2) The palate
3) The teeth   4) The tongue

5) The lips   6) The lungs

7) The nasal cavity.

There are forty four sounds in the English Language. These are divided into two groups, vowels and consonants. Generally, the difference is that a vowel sound comes out with a free flow of air from the vocal tract while a consonant sound is obstructed by some parts of the vocal tract. In English, as in Nigerian Languages, each sound is represented by a letter or a group of letters.

However, there is a problem with English when it comes to relating sounds to letters, or vice versa. First, in English, one sound may be represented by different letters, e.g. the sound made by *e* in *fed* is the same as that of *ea* in *lead*. It is also the same as that of *ie* in *friend*. Secondly, several different sounds may be represented by the same letter or group of letters, e.g. the letter *o* has one type of sound in *some*, a different type in *hot* and a different one in *form*. And thirdly, one sound may be represented by a group of two letters, each of which by itself may represent the same sound, or a different sound. For example, the sound made by *e* in *fed* is also made by the *ea* of *lead*.

This makes the spelling of English words confusing and difficult for students. It also contributes to the difficulty of pronouncing English words correctly. In English, the spelling of a word cannot be completely and reliably used as a guide to its pronunciation. The situation is however, different with Nigerian languages in which the way a word is spelled is exactly how it is pronounced.

Here also, we shall examine other aspects of speech works such as stress and **Intonation.** Stress is the energy (Prominence or force) exerted on a particular part of speech. There are three main degrees /levels of stress.

- Main or primary stress is indicated with a stroke placed before and above the relevant syllable in a word e.g. ˈconflict, ˈboy, ˈlady
- Minor or secondary stress is usually indicated with a stroke placed before and below the relevant syllable e.g. ˌacademic, ˌexpectation, ˌradiation
- Unstressed word or unmarked syllables have no mark at all e.g. raid, pep, lunch.

There are three types of stress.

1. word
2. sentence
3. emphatic

Word stress is the force or energy exerted on a syllable in a word. e.g ˈexport (n), exˈport (v)

Both words are spelt the same way but the stress mark shows the difference between the two. The first example is a noun, with the stress mark/stroke placed on the initial syllable while the second example is a verb where the stress is on the second syllable.

Sentence stress is the pressure exerted on a particular part of a sentence. Content words such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs are stressed while grammatical words like articles, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions and auxiliary verbs are not stressed except for emphasis. e.g.

The ˈbeautiful ˈlady ˈinvited ˈme to the ˈparty

The marked words in the above sentence are adjective, noun, verb, pronoun respectively while the unmarked words **to** and **the** are unstressed. *Emphatic stress* is an extra force used when pronouncing a particular word in order to distinguish it from other words in a sentence. Such words could be content or grammatical. e.g.

 My sister has a new box.

An emphatic stress could be given to *my* in the above sentence. It implies that it is *my sister* and not *yours*, *his* or *hers*. Secondly, special prominence could be given to *SISTER* (not brother, mother, aunt etc). Thirdly, *has* could be stressed.

Intonation is the variation that occurs in the pattern of pitch in a sentence, that is, the rise and fall in the pitch of the voice in a sentence. The part of a sentence over which a particular pattern extends is called a tone group. A tone group usually coincides with major grammatical units, such as the sentence, clause, phrase or word. For example, the sentence, **Water is ˌliquid**

constitutes one tone group. Within the tone group, the syllable that carries the major pitch change is called the tonic syllable.

4. GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES

This unit introduces students to the commonest English Language grammatical structures. These are Nouns, Pronouns, Verbs, Adjectives, Adverbs, Prepositions, Conjunctions and Interjections. Determiners are words used at the beginning of noun groups. They are generally used to refer to people or thing without saying exactly who or what they are. Nouns are basically names given to things. They may be names of human beings like Kola, Garba or Chinyere. Names given to days of the weeks and months in the year are also nouns such as Sunday, Friday, Saturday, August, March, etc. Names of animals, concepts, abstract ideas, etc, are also nouns. Some *common nouns are *count (countable) nouns e.g. girl, books, etc, while others are *non-count (uncountable) because they are *mass nouns e.g. rice, sand, importance, etc. Count nouns must have *determiners (a, one, my, this) in the singular, though this is not necessary in the plural. *Non-count nouns are usually concepts and *abstract ideas like: love, blood, excitement, philosophy, physics, etc.
The pronoun is related to nouns. It is traditionally defined as a word used instead of a noun. Examples are: *He/She/It/I/You/We/Him/Us/Them*.

In the English language, a pronoun must agree with its antecedent (word to which it refers) in number, that is, singular or plural, and in gender, that is female, male or neuter. Examples are:

- The *girl* came, *she* saw and *she* conquered
- The *boy* came, *he* saw and *he* conquered
- The *men* came, *they* saw and *they* conquered.

English pronouns can be of different types: personal, reflexive, possessive, demonstrative, relative, interrogative and indefinite. The first three types are referred to as Central Pronouns.

Personal Pronouns refer to the first person (i.e. the speaker(s) – I, we; the second person i.e. the person being spoken to 'You' (both singular and plural) and the third person i.e. the entity being spoken about – ('He' for singular male, 'She' for singular female, 'It' for non-human things, 'They' for plural). **Reflexive Pronouns** are used when a verb has identical subject and direct object; **Possessive Pronouns**, as the name suggest are used to indicate that something belongs to a person or thing; while **Demonstrative Pronouns** serve to point out a particular place, person or thing. These are *this, those, that, those*. **Relative Pronouns** are used to introduce adjectival clauses which are words which give additional information about the noun or noun phrase. **Interrogative Pronouns** are used in asking questions: *Where* do you think you are going?

Verbs are words used to indicate *action*. They are sometimes referred to as *doing* words or words to express *being* or *existing*. When verbs occur in sentences to express action, they give meaning and completeness to the sentences. Verbs could be transitive or intransitive.

A transitive verb is one that needs a direct object to complete its meaning; while **an Intransitive Verb** is one that does not need a direct object to complete its meaning.

Verbs are also categorised as regular and irregular according to their behaviour in tenses. Regular verbs have their past tense and past participle both ending in ___ed e.g. I looked into the well before sitting on it. Irregular verbs change forms in their past and past participle tenses

Tense is the form of the verb used to indicate: the *time* of the action, the *continuance* of the action, or the *completeness* of the action.

Concord or agreement refers to the form in which the different parts of a sentence relate to one another. It is expected that certain grammatical items must agree with each other in number and person. Such harmonious relationship is expressed in rules known as rules of concord or agreement. These insist that a condition that obtains in one part of a sentence correlated in another part of the same structure. To establish concord therefore, we must establish a harmony of conditions in the various parts of a sentence. Where such a correspondence fails to holds, the principle or rule of concord is breached. In this section, we are concerned with the following types of concord: subject-verb concord; subject-complement- concord; subject-object concord and pronoun-antecedent concord.

5. PUNTUATION MARKS

Punctuation is a complicated subject; hence, only the main principles shall be treated. The purpose of punctuation is to mark out strings of words into manageable groups and help clarify their meaning (or in some cases, to prevent a wrong meaning being deduced). The marks most commonly used to divide a piece of prose or other writing are the full stop, the semi-colon and the comma, with the strength of dividing or separating role diminishing from the full stop to the comma. The full stop therefore, marks the main division into sentences; the semi-colon joins sentences; and the comma (which is the most flexible in use and causes most problems) seperates smaller elements with the least loss of continuity. Brackets and dashes also serve as separators – often more strikingly than commas. In a nutshell, in this unit, we shall examine the capital letter, full stop, semi-colon, comma, question mark, exclamation mark, apostrophe, quotation marks bracket, dash and hyphen.

6. COMMON ERRORS

Errors are human. However, they can be reduced or avoided altogether through careful and conscious effort. It is imperative, especially in writing, for a student/writer to create time in every situation – during examinations, in or out-of-class assignments, essay writing, among others, to read over and correct all errors. In this section, some of the possible causes of errors outlined are various execises illustrating many frequently committed errors are provided. The student will benefit much from practising these exercises with the intention of identifying and crrecting the errors.

(1) Literal translation or transfer of language p[atterns and ideas from one's first language (L1) to the target language (Engliosh). For example: They are calling you (when the subject is an elderly person). This is a direct translation of the honorific pronoun (usually uses to refer to elders as a sign of respect in most Nigerian languages) from the user's L1 into English. The correct pronoun form for the third person singular is **he/she/it** no matter the age.

(2) The use of long, complex sentences. These tend to cause mistakes that could have been avoided if shorter or simpler sentences were used.

(3) Writing as one speaks; this may lead to a wrong or poor style as written work is usually formal while speech is informal.

(4) Wrong use of a word for another e.g. **avoid** for **afford**.

Other types of errors include concord, malapropism, homophones and near homophones, word classes, synonyms, tautologies, misspellings, addition of (a) wrong letter(s) to a word, wrong placement of (a) word(s), punctuation, among others.

7.   READING SKILL

Reading is the process of extracting meaning from written or printed language. It is one of the four language skills (others are listening, speaking and writing) and one of the two major aspects of literacy. There are basically two kinds of activities involved in reading: reading aloud (oral reading) and silent reading. The latter is a task undertaken in private reading where a reader thinks through the meaning of what is read. Silent reading, therefore, is central to high academic achievement. Here, we shall examine:

(1) Purpose for reading

- Find the main ideas or main thought expressed

- Select important information or details

- Answer specific questions, identify certain information or make a general survey

- Derive pleasure or enhance relaxation and creativity

- Evaluate the writer's ideas and facts

(2) Reading rates

- Skimming rate (extremely fast)

- Rapid reading (medium fast)

- Normal rate medium (slow/average)

- Careful rate (very slow and thoughtful)

(3) Reading exercises

At the end of this lecture, students are expected to:
- Comprehend, interpret, appreciate and enjoy written discourse.
- Expand linguistic analysis skills to get meaning.
- Comprehend varied printed materials (prose and non-prose)
- Sequence events in a logical order.
- Distinguish between different characters, motives, literary genres, plots, etc.
- Provide synonyms, antonyms, and simple definitions of underlined words in a text.
- Answer basic information questions about the contents of the text.
- Explain characters' feelings and motives.

- Underline common homophones, homographs, compound words, etc.
- Complete close exercises based on what is read.
- Differentiate between cause and effect, fiction and non-fiction, fact and opinion etc.
- Identify and explain the functions of organizational elements of text (key terms, transitional, semantic bridges, etc.).
- Recognize and suggest synonyms, antonyms, homonyms etc.
- Generate and discuss various types of literal questions
- Relate information to personal experience and other content areas.
- Determine the mood, setting, characters, plot, etc. of a story.
- Use context clues to get meaning

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