

## Didactic Scenarios 4 – January

Answer the following questions, being as specific and detailed as possible. Also exemplify wherever possible. You may want/need to refer back to the written topics.

1. We tell our students that the definite article is never used with proper nouns, but then they find instances such as: *the Mediterranean sea*. When can we use *the* with proper nouns?
2. Examples such as the following are somewhat problematic for our students: *this fact makes it clear that...*; *She considers it a waste of time to make her bed every day*; *I take it that you agree with me*. Explain the pronoun *it* in those sentences and expound on how it can be taught to our students.
3. How would you explain to your students the difference in pronunciation between the following sets of words: *hat/hate, tap/tape, mat/mate, sit/site, quit/quite, win/wine*?
4. At times, American and British English use the same word for different concepts (same word, different meanings). Include 10 examples and explain what they mean in each variety. **(this same exact question came up in the exam in 2018 - Andalucía)**
5. Our students often believe that learning a word is a question of learning what it means. Is that so? When faced with a new word, should students only learn its meaning or something else? Explain.
6. Students very often come for help as regards listening. What tips and resources would you give them to practice and improve their listening outside class? Use a maximum of **400** words.

## SUGGESTED ANSWERS

1. We tell our students that the definite article is never used with proper nouns, but then they find instances such as: *the Mediterranean sea*. When can we use *the* with proper nouns?

Topic 38

Proper nouns are generally used with zero article, but some of them are regularly preceded by the definite article. In the example of *the Mediterranean sea*, the article is used because it is a geographical name (a sea to be more exact, like *the North sea*). The article is regularly used with other geographical names such as rivers, canals, deserts, etc.: *the Panama Canal, the Atlantic, the Thames, the Missouri, the Sahara*, etc.

Other proper nouns that are regularly preceded by the definite article include the following:

- Plural geographical names:
  - Groups of islands: *the Bahamas, the Hebrides*.
  - Mountain ranges: *the Himalayas, the Pyrenees, the Alps*.
  - Some countries: *the Netherlands*.
- Some countries in singular: *the UK, the USA, the Dominican Republic*.
- Public institutions such as theatres, cinemas, hotels, galleries and centres: *the Odeon, the Empire (Hotel), the Apollo (theatre), The Library of Congress*.
- Many newspapers and some periodicals: *the New York Times, The Daily Telegraph*.

2. Examples such as the following are somewhat problematic for our students: *this find makes it clear that...*; *She considers it a waste of time to make her bed every day*; *I take it that you agree with me*. Explain the pronoun *it* in those sentences and expound on how it can be taught to our students.

These are instances of the so-called “anticipatory *it*”, which, as the name indicates, anticipates an element which comes later in the sentence, and which is always realised by a clause.

In all these examples, *it* anticipates the direct object that is expressed afterwards, although it could also be used to anticipate the subject in sentences like *it is believed that the economic situation will soon stabilise* (*it* would be the grammatical subject, whereas the *that*-clause would be the logical subject)<sup>1</sup>.

There are two reasons for the use of this “anticipatory *it*”:

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<sup>1</sup> This is an example of a complex passive sentence, which occurs when the direct object of the corresponding active sentence is realised by a clause. When this happens, English has two possibilities: to use an empty ‘it’ as the subject, as is the case here, or to use the subject of the nominal clause. The latter is preferred as, whenever possible, English prefers the use of a personal subject.

1. The end-weight principle, which states that long, heavy units should appear towards the end of the sentence. Therefore, the following sentence would not be grammatically accepted: *\*she considers to make her bed every day a waste of time*
2. When the subject or the direct object are realised by a clause (instead of a noun phrase), it is postponed, extraposed and replaced by the anticipatory *it*, which has cataphoric (backward) reference.

“Anticipatory *it*” tends to pose problems for Spanish speakers, since they tend to omit it: *I find (it) hard to believe that the summer is here already; I've always made (it) clear that my family has to take priority over my work.*

**3. How would you explain to your students the difference in pronunciation between the following sets of words: *hat/hate, tap/tape, mat/mate, sit/site, quit/quite, win/wine*?**

In all cases, the difference between the two words in each pair lies in the so-called “magic <e>”, traditionally called “silent <e>”. What this <e> does is change the short vowel sound into a long vowel sound, usually a diphthong. Teaching students this rule helps them to determine which sound the vowel will make.

The proper name for ‘magic e’ is ‘split digraph’, which means that a vowel sound has been split. A digraph is two letters (two vowels or two consonants or a vowel and a consonant) which together make one sound (as in the words *tail, boat, found* or *read*). When a digraph is split by a consonant it becomes a split digraph. For example:

- *wrote* – the ‘oe’ here make one sound. The ‘oe’ digraph is split by the ‘t’
- *lake* – the ‘ae’ here make one sound. The ‘ae’ digraph is split by the ‘k’.

When a ‘magic e’ end is added to certain words the <e> reaches backwards over the consonant to change the sound of the vowel before it. Read the following words and notice the difference in the vowel sound:

**Without 'magic e'      With 'magic e'**

grip	gripe
rag	rage
slop	slope
hug	huge
pet	Pete

4. At times, American and British English use the same word for different concepts (same word, different meanings). Include 10 examples and explain what they mean in each variety. (This same exact question came up in the exam in 2018)

	BrE	AmE
<i>Jumper</i>	A type of sweater, pullover	A kind of knitted dress
<i>Pants</i>	Underwear	Trousers
<i>Braces</i>	Braces hold up trousers	Devices placed on teeth to straighten them
<i>Trolley</i>	A shopping cart	A public transportation conveyance (most famous in San Francisco)
<i>Chips</i>	Thick-cut hot fried potato, as in "fish and chips" ("French fries in AmE)	Thin, crispy snacks eaten cold from a bag ("crisps" in BrE).
<i>Biscuit</i>	A cookie	A buttery bread roll
<i>Dummy</i>	A baby's pacifier	An idiot
<i>Pissed</i>	Drunk	Angry
<i>Bum</i>	Butt	A homeless person
<i>Chemist</i>	Someone who works at a chemistry/pharmacy	A scientist that has studied chemistry
<i>Pavement</i>	The side of the road where people walk ("sidewalk" in AmE)	The material a road is made of.
<i>Subway</i>	A pedestrian underpass	Underground railway
<i>Vest</i>	Underwear worn under your shirt ("undershirt" in AmE)	Part of a three-piece suit, worn under your jacket ("waistcoat" in BrE)
<i>Trainer</i>	A type of footwear to do sport.	A person that supervises your personal training
<i>Smart</i>	Intelligent	Elegant

5. What does it mean to learn a new word? Should students only learn its meaning or something else? Explain.

Knowing a word involves knowing:

- Meaning

- Spelling (+ any possible irregularities)
- Pronunciation
- Syntactic information (e.g. does it take singular or plural agreement? Is it countable or uncountable? What is the verb pattern: *to*-inf or *-ing*?, etc.)
- Register (e.g. is it a formal, neutral or colloquial word?)
- Use (e.g. in which contexts is this word used?)