A few weeks ago, I suggested ways of getting started with advanced students. This time, we’ll look at grammar. However, I don’t like focusing only on structures at high levels, but rather function, and how students can use language to express themselves.

What my students find interesting is seeing language in a new light. So this might mean comparing structures, and how using one over another helps self-expression (e.g. using a second instead of first conditional to express distance/politeness), or changing the focus of information with passives, to emphasize activity, or talk about rules, e.g. *Skateboarding is not allowed on the platform*.

Another approach can focus on the range of uses of a word, e.g. *will*, or even *would*, e.g: *My sister will keep on singing that awful song* (expresses insistence), and *The government won’t back down on the new education bill* (refusal). Compare these to assumptions such as, *I’m sure you’ll agree this is a good idea* (present), or *Hurry up because Tom will have been waiting ages by now* (past). *Will* can be used to express the future, but has a much wider range of uses; advanced level students can begin to appreciate these.

Other language areas worth investigating, with rewarding results, are auxiliaries for emphasis or substitution (e.g. *do/did*, and *so* as in *So do I; I did enjoy the evening; Yes, I have*), quantifiers (*all-whole, some-any-none, each-every*), and modal verbs and phrases with associated meanings (*bound to, doubtful that* etc.).

I also like to hand over responsibility to learners, for example by making them ‘experts’ on a specific grammar point: use language examples which you know your students need work on (e.g. relative clauses, articles, etc.), allocate a structure to pairs of students, and make ‘rules’ accessible to them. Give each pair time to read and study these, and perhaps write a few sentences to demonstrate the rules. You can then give the class exercises based on these structures, with each pair being the source of knowledge for helping the others. (You’ll still need to be on hand to answer queries!) Students find this motivating and empowering. Useful sources include *Oxford Practice Grammar* or *Oxford Grammar Course*.

And finally, meaning changes significantly in different contexts, so looking at authentic colloquial spoken English opens up interesting discussions. In Mike Leigh’s 2008 film *Happy Go Lucky*, Poppy (Sally Hawkins) has her first driving lesson, and uses phrases which could be misinterpreted: what does she actually mean by these phrases?

[When they meet, Scott, the driving instructor (Eddie Marsan) refuses to shakes hands with Poppy.]  
*P:* They’re not infected! *What are you like?*  
* [...]  
*S:* And they told you the price - £22.50 an hour? [...] *We may be cheap but we’re better.*  
*P:* Are you?  
*S:* You go with the big companies, they use inexperienced instructors.  
*P:* They don’t?  
* [...]  
*S:* So, do you want the same time every week?  
*P:* Go on, then.  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-J_m8fe0qq
With easier access to film scripts (http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/h/happy-go-lucky-script-transcript.html), you can ask the following: Why did s/he say this? What else could s/he have said? What’s the relationship between them? What’s the situation?

Approaching language from other angles can inject new life into structures which may have otherwise become tedious. After all, most high-level students have some awareness of most grammar ‘rules’, even if used inaccurately, so a fresh approach will help motivate and inspire them!

Let me know if you have any tips and strategies YOU use with your advanced students – I’d love to hear about them!