Answering questions in the target language

Rationale

A requirement of the MFL GCSE 2016 is for students to answer some questions in the target language[i]:

In listening (AO1) 20 - 30% of the marks must be awarded for responses to questions set in the assessed language.

In speaking (AO2) students will be required to express themselves solely in the assessed language.

In reading (AO3) 30 - 40% of the marks must be awarded for responses to questions set in the assessed language.

In writing (AO4) students will be required to express themselves solely in the assessed language.

Students will therefore need to be thoroughly familiar with question words in the target language, and how to recognise and respond to these.

Strategies

Classroom strategies

Strategies to support students in answering questions in the target language overlap with other key aspects of classroom practice, and can therefore be drip-fed throughout the course, building on KS3 (or where applicable, KS2) learning. They breakdown into the following areas: familiarity with question words; the ability to form and respond to TL questions; well-developed decoding skills. Here are a few, non-topic-specific classroom activities that address these three associated areas:

Question words
1 Matching jumbled questions and answers
2 Matching question halves
3 Generating short, even single word responses to the TL question prompts What? Where? When? Who? Why? in response to a picture stimulus
4 Scanning short texts to find information corresponding to the TL question prompts What? Where? When? Who? Why?

Question forming and response
1 Twenty questions (starting with one particular question word)
2 Turning one type of statement into the appropriate question
3 Generating possible questions for a set of statements / answers
4 Hotseating (using a written text as the stimulus for forming oral questions to ask another student in the class, who is in the 'hotseat')
5 Find someone who
6 Reading images (students respond to teacher TL questions, written or spoken, in response to a visual stimulus)
7 Reading texts with open TL questions (teacher-modelling, discussion, student practice)
8 Students create open TL questions for short reading texts

Decoding

1 Work as much as possible on synonyms, antonyms and equivalent expressions when doing reading and listening comprehensions. Many TL questions rely on students' recognition of words in the text that mean the same as or opposite to words in the task.

2 Students complete reading and listening tasks with multiple-choice, correct sentences and sentence completion formats. It is often helpful to do these tasks in whole-class interaction, then as peer and group tasks.

In addition, other general decoding strategies are:

3 Use a short English text with unknown target language words inserted. Students work out what they mean, and reflect on the strategies they used.

4 Students are given a particular pattern to look for. E.g. If 'ciudad' means 'city', find all the other words ending in –dad and translate them.

5 Students identify a specific number of unknown words for themselves and try to decode them, using the rest of the words in the sentence: E.g. *Ellos leen un libro* = They *?* a book.

6 Students are directed to specific unknown words in the text that are made up of familiar elements. E.g. *pobreza*. They are asked to identify familiar elements (i.e. p*obre*) and generate plausible English translations for those words.

Exam strategies

Reading formula for target language exam questions

Prediction	What can you tell about the text from the **title**, the **exam rubric**, any **visuals**, the **layout**, the **punctuation**?
Anticipation	Read the **TL questions / task / options** to add to your overall sense of what the text is about, and anticipate **possible answers** based on real world logic and probability. You may want to try to translate any that you can into English.
Skim reading	Read the **whole text** once through to add to your gist understanding. Don't stop when there are unfamiliar words.
Scanning	**Go back to the questions**, one by one. Decide what information you need. **Who? What? Where? When? Why?** If the task is multiple choice, correct statements or sentence completion **scan the text** for those specific words, or more likely, synonyms or equivalent TL expressions. Try to come up with possible TL synonyms to look for, too.
Evaluation	**Keep the overall text and context in mind.** Ensure that answers don't contradict each other (use in-text logic) and are not impossible or unlikely (use real world logic).
Deduction and inference	In more challenging TL questions, the **answers are not directly given** but are conveyed using synonyms, equivalent expressions or using an antonym in a negative construction. E.g The house is old = The house is not modern.
Drafting answers in the TL	In open-response TL questions, remember that you do not need to write full sentences (and you do not gain marks for doing so as it is not a test of your written ability!). When you have identified the answer, think about how to express it in the fewest possible words. You can often re-use language from the text but take care not to copy whole chunks of the original text that make your answer unclear.

In listening, many of the same Prediction and Anticipation strategies apply, particularly in TL questions, when you benefit from paying close attention to the TL question and multiple-choice options before you listen. Here are a few more listening-specific strategies:

Listening

1 What type of text is it: conversation, advert, news programme?
2 Try to get the gist /main message. What is the topic?
3 Predict – what is likely/unlikely given the topic?
4 Listen to the tone of the speakers' voices for clues as to opinions and moods
5 Pick out cognates – words that look like English words
6 Identify phrases which are unfamiliar
7 Hold the unfamiliar sounds in your head, repeat them over and over, without vocalising
8 Break down the stream of words into individual sounds, if possible
9 Try to write the sounds down and relate them to written words previously seen/learned or even to the multiple-choice options in the question
10 Listen out for the clues of tense/ word order

Practice

Please refer to the sample assessment materials, on the Edexcel website, for examples of target language questions.

With thanks to Rachel Hawkes

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[i] *Modern foreign languages GCSE subject content* (DfE, 2014)
www.gov.uk/government/publications
Reference: DFE-00348-2014