

57 - Practising language in the real world

Aim: To provide guidance on how to extend and complement language support with additional practice in the real world outside the classroom.

In most situations where you are providing language support, refugees will hope and expect to use the language for genuine communicative purposes in the real world. This is particularly the case with refugees who have reached the country where they hope to be granted leave to remain. It follows that, if possible, you should try to find ways of helping them to bridge the gap between practising the language in classroom-like situations and using it in the world outside by offering opportunities to move from scenarios to real situations.

Deciding where to go with refugees

With the help of the refugees, make a list of potentially interesting places. Look at maps, local newspapers and websites etc. to identify possible places to go to. There are generally various options, such as:

- A shopping centre, a supermarket or a just a single shop.
- An information centre for visitors or tourists.
- A library, post office, bank etc. (see tool 48 *Finding your way in town: the local library*, and tool 52 *Using postal and banking services*).
- A train or bus station.
- A park or square where there are people with time to talk.
- A sports field or recreation ground.
- A café.
- A museum or gallery.
- Other facilities or places that refugees mention.

When deciding where to take refugees you will need to consider:

- How far away it is: will it be possible to walk there or will it involve using public transport?
- Can refugees afford to take public transport (or go to a café)?
- What language practice and language use opportunities will be available at the venue? For example, in supermarkets will there be opportunities to speak to someone?
- How relevant will the experience be to refugees' current or future lives?
- How interesting will it be for them? Remember, it may be that refugees have their own ideas about things they would like to do with your help outside the classroom.

Preparing for the outing

- Plan the trip together with your group. This is a good opportunity to use the target language for real communication.

- Look at a relevant map (printed or on the internet) together – see tool 42 *Using apps like Google Maps*. Estimate distances and walking times. If necessary, look up public transport links and timetables.
- Have some clear ideas about what language refugees will actually need to use at the venue you choose and on the way there. If the real-life experience can be related to previous practice in a scenario situation (see section ‘Scenarios’ for language support), this will be beneficial. The activities outside can then build on those done in the classroom-like environment.
- If the activities are likely to involve new language – new vocabulary and expressions – this will need to be practised first. For example, if you are planning to get refugees to ask questions, they will need to understand the possible answers. They will also need to be able to ask strangers in a polite way to speak more slowly or repeat what they have said (see examples below).
- Refugees may also need guidance about how to approach people, what body language to use, how to deal with people who decline to answer etc.
- They need to learn how to ask permission if they wish to take photos, record questions and answers, pick up leaflets etc. (‘May I...?’ type questions).
- Make sure refugees understand exactly where they are going by asking questions more than once about how to get there, and about the nature of the venue. For example, do refugees understand how a library works in their host country?

(See also Tool 56 *Planning language support activities in the community*.)

Useful resources: printed or hand-drawn maps, photos of the destination, mobile phones with cameras and a voice-recording function (make sure refugees understand that they need to ask permission before recording interactions in video or audio).

Precautions

- Make sure that refugees have permission to leave wherever they are staying and go to the venue in question; also, that they understand the purpose of the trip and the nature of the destination.
- Allow enough time to get to the venue, carry out the planned activities, and return.
- Make sure everyone understands and agrees on meeting points and times.
- Take precautions in case people get lost: e.g. exchange phone numbers, agree on a second meeting point in case someone is late, etc.
- It may be wise to inform people at the venue (e.g. a bank, a shop, the library) beforehand that you will be coming with a group of refugees.

After the trip

- Exchange pictures refugees have taken on the trip and other items they may have collected. Get them to ask one another questions about these.
- Identify new information refugees may have discovered about the customs and culture of the host country and the way people behave.
- Collect and review the language used or heard on the trip. If you or members of the group have made audio or video recordings, ask them to watch/listen to these and discuss them.
- If your group collected written information such as leaflets during the outing, some sections may be useful for reading.

- With the group, consider using some pictures and other items they collected to make a poster or scrap-book or create a posting on social media together. Help your group to decide on headings and brief descriptions in the target language.
- If you are able to organise such outings regularly, consider asking refugees to keep individual excursion diaries.

Outside the classroom – examples

Language café or language picnic

Aim: To give the refugees the opportunity to talk freely in the new language, or any language, and to get to know each other.

Note: It is not important for refugees only to use the language they are learning – they could communicate in a mixture of languages. The main thing is for them understand one another and to communicate.

Organisation: Run the language café in another space if possible, not in the room you usually use for language support. Weather permitting, you could have a picnic outside, e.g. in a park. It is good if everyone can bring something to eat or drink, but some participants may not be able to for financial reasons (or may not be able to eat or drink during Ramadan).

Beforehand: You could teach some simple language to help them get started, e.g.

- *“Would you like some water/some peanuts/a biscuit?” – “Oh, yes please/no thanks.”*
- *“Have you got a photo of your children (on your phone)?” – “Yes, this is my son.”*
- *“What’s your favourite (food, drink, colour, season etc.)?” “Who’s your favourite (singer, actor, writer etc.)?” – “My favourite drink is tea (because …)”*

During the language café: No specific procedure needs to be followed. The main thing is for refugees to talk to other people (not always the same person) and to have fun. You and they might learn something about other languages too.

Afterwards: The focus could be on what refugees learnt about each other:

- *“Where is Yamina from?” “What’s her favourite food?” etc.*

and learning to pronounce new vocabulary and expressions.

Getting there

Beforehand: Practise simple expressions for finding the way and travelling in a city (see also Tool 56 [Planning language support activities in the community](#)):

- *“Excuse me, where’s the station/bus stop?” – “Go straight on and turn left/right.”*
- *“How can I get to the market place?” – “Take a bus to the High Street.”*
- *“Hello, how far is the post office?” – “About 10 minutes on foot.”*
- *“Sorry, does this bus go to the station?”*
- *“Where can I get a bus ticket?” “How much is a return ticket?” etc.*

In the street: Get individual refugees to ask the way to the venue you have chosen. Choose those who are willing first, but suggest they go with another refugee (e.g. someone who has more difficulty with the

language). If necessary, take one or two refugees with you to ask the way. Check whether they understood the answer.

At the bus/tram stop: Ask one or two of them to find out where to get a ticket, how much it costs etc., and/or get them to ask which bus/tram goes to the destination, how long it takes to get to the destination etc.

At the destination: Get them to find the nearest pharmacy, bank, bookshop etc.

- “Excuse me, is there a pharmacy near here?” – “Yes, just round the corner”.
- “Hello. Where’s the nearest bank please?” – “Go up the street. It’s on the left next to the church”; etc.

Afterwards: Deal with questions about people’s answers which they did not understand (this is easier if someone recorded their interactions, with permission).

Buying things

Chose a place where they are likely to need language, such as a pharmacy, a bookshop or clothes shop.

Beforehand: Teach language relevant to the shop in question, e.g. for a pharmacy:

- “Hello. I’ve got a headache/stomach-ache/pain in my back” etc.
- “I’d like some painkillers/some medicine” etc.
- “How much is it/are they?”.
- “How many should I take? When should I take it/them?” etc.

Get refugees to do a role play in pairs (one is the customer, the other the shop assistant).

At the venue: Choose a time when shops are not busy. Go into shops in small groups (2 or 3). Also, be sure to ask shop assistants if they mind being recorded. Remind the refugees to ask assistants to speak more slowly or repeat their answer if necessary. Help them if they really don’t understand.

Afterwards: Get refugees to explain what they asked for and the answers they received. Practise relevant new language.