

WARMING UP IN EBE CLASSES

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Abstract

This article highlights the importance of using warm up activities in English classes and especially when teaching English for Business and Economics (EBE). It mentions principles of preparing a good warmer and the reasons for making this teaching technique essential in planning a lesson. As there is a scarcity of sources on warmers for ESP classes, this paper offers some practical suggestions of warm-up activities in EBE classes that can be used by the teachers in order to have more interesting and meaningful lessons with the maximum implication of the students.

Keywords: warming up, English for Business and Economics, students' attention, games, minute mysteries, categories.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, due to the importance of English for successful communication and exchange of information in the business world, English for Business and Economics (EBE) is in high demand and most teachers will be asked to teach an EBE class at some point. Besides, taking into account that the number of people choosing different universities of economics as their target for future career has been substantially increasing, EBE has become one of the most desired courses that meets the need for Business English talent. (Calina, 2012: 84)

As the beneficiaries of the EBE course are primarily the first-year students, they do not realize yet the importance and necessity of some topics for their future career and rate them as very boring (e.g. business correspondence, financial management, inflation, etc.). Unfortunately the ESP classes do precede some of the topics in the special subjects, which leads to the lack of motivation of the students. Usually they are more confident and motivated to discuss in English the topics they are aware of in their native language. So, the EBE teachers' main objective is to get the students' attention at the beginning of the class by means of enjoyable short-term activities and to motivate them to be involved into the further stages of the lesson. This kind of activities is called warmers or warm up activities or warm ups, and the general process is called warming up. It is also possible to hyphenate these words, when they serve as nouns, adjectives or gerund (e.g. warm-up, warming-up) and it is never hyphenated when it is a verb (e.g. to warm up).

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2 The role of Warming-up

The importance of warm up activities should not be underestimated, especially in EBE classes. Warmers should be planned quite carefully in order to arouse the students' interest in the topic of the lesson. As we deal with students who live in a non-English environment, we should understand that it is difficult for them to switch from their native language to English, that is why warming-up is an effective way to help the students begin to think in English and to review previously introduced material.

Warmers are usually games and they are presented in abundance on the Internet. But if we speak about EBE classes, it is an entirely different issue. The EBE course includes serious topics with complicated vocabulary intended for adult learners. The EBE teacher needs to be ingenious and creative in order to make warmers match the topic of the lesson that can be sometimes rather dry and dull. Warmers are designed to make the students guess the topic of the lesson or the issues that are going to be dealt with, they are meant to attract students' attention, to make them get rid of distracting thoughts and focus on the activities that follow. How well students have done in class mostly depends on how well they were warmed up. That is why the EBE teachers should take into account the following principles when preparing warm-up activities. A warmer should:

- “go at the beginning of the class;
- last 5-10 minutes;
- be related to the topic;
- help students begin to work;
- prepare students for a period of concentration;
- be an interesting and enjoyable activity;
- be useful to continue the class” (Velandia, 2008: 13).

Some EBE teachers and even some students consider that using warmers is a waste of precious time and the lesson should begin with checking homework and proceeding to the topic of the lesson. But it is a big mistake.

Starting with a warmer is important for a number of reasons. The students need a chance to settle down into the class and get their minds focused on the lesson ahead. Delving straight into difficult subject matter is not going to help them in the least bit. Undoubtedly, a warm up lesson will set the tone for what is to take place during the class. Students will have some idea of what to expect, and the topic can easily be introduced to them. Warm ups and ice breakers are essential for those classes where everybody is new, including the teacher. They will allow everyone to relax and get to know each other. This way, the students will become less inhibited and more likely to chat with their peers and with the teacher. (Zakhareuski)

Up to ten minutes of the lesson can be spent for a warmer but not more in order not to transform it into an activity that will substitute the tasks of the lesson.

Warming up is an essential teaching technique that “breaks the monotony of learning, makes the teacher’s tasks more interesting and increases the involvement of the students” (Velandia, 2008: 12). Unfortunately, there are no sources about the origin of this teaching technique. Warming up is a preparatory activity and usually singers and actors warm up before starting to perform. As the job of a teacher refers in a way to the same artistic category, the teachers of English have started to use the same method.

3. Suggestions of Warm up Activities in EBE Classes

The following material can be used as warmers in EBE classes or the teachers can create their own warm up activities based on the proposed ones depending on the topic of the lesson. I have classified them according to the EBE course syllabus at the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova.

Warmer 1: For example to teach the topic “*Money*” the teacher can use a riddle as a warmer. The tasks of this activity are: to involve the students into active thinking, to develop their creative thinking and to develop the skill of working in a team. So, the students are divided into groups of 6 people. And the teacher begins reading the riddle line by line:

*“I’m usually made of paper,
but in Australia I’m plastic.
I come in lots of colours.
I have pictures and numbers on me.
You use me to buy things”* (Kalganova).

After each line read the students try to solve the riddle. The team who provides the correct answer after the first line read gets 6 points, after the second line – 5 points and so on. The riddle is about a *banknote*, of course.

Warmer 2: When dealing with the topic “*Management*” the teacher “can dictate a statement by giving each word of this statement through definitions. After the students have put it down, they should comment on it.

*We use it in order to form the negative imperative – **Don’t**
The synonym for the verb “to allow” after which the bare infinitive is used – **let**
Possessive pronoun in the second person – **your**
The person who is in charge of an organization – **manager**
The synonym for “to be aware of” – **know**
The antonym for “this” – **that**
Second person personal pronoun – **you***

Present Simple of the verb used by Hamlet – are
Comparative degree of the antonym for “bad” - better
Finish the statement.

So, the students say whether they agree or disagree with the statement: “*Don’t let your manager know that you are better than him*” (Calina, 2012:86). This warmer makes the students revise grammar and vocabulary items and develop their communication skills by putting forth their arguments, sharing opinions and debating.

It is more interesting to give a statement through definitions rather than to write it immediately on the blackboard for discussion, but everything depends on the teacher’s ability to provide interesting definitions of the words in a statement, which is not very easy, I should admit.

Warmer 3: When teaching the topic “*Employment file. Job Interview*” the teacher can ask the students to put down their first names and to provide adjectives that describe their positive qualities. Each adjective should start with each letter of their names. For example, my name is Olga, so I am **o**ptimistic, **l**oyal, **g**enerous and **a**rticulate. Of course, the students should comment on the adjectives chosen by providing examples of their behavior in some real life situations.

Moreover, the teacher can ask the students to put on the desk 3 objects they have with. These objects should represent them, for example it can be sunglasses, gloves, a pencil, an agenda, a lipstick, a watch, etc. The students should substantiate their choices of objects. This type of warmer helps the students to characterize themselves and to enrich their vocabulary with positive qualities they will need to mention in their letters of application or job interviews.

Warmer 4: The teacher can start any topic by asking the students some questions that test their general knowledge. For instance:

- What country produces the make of the car “Volvo”? (Sweden);
- Which countries out of those that were the members of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia joined the European Union? (Slovenia and Croatia);
- Where is situated the deepest oil well? (the USA)
- What country being not the member of the European Union has Euro as their official currency? (Montenegro). And so on.

The teacher can make up many interesting questions. Usually a warmer may include 5-6 questions. This type of task promotes interdisciplinary learning in the classroom. It makes the students who do not know the answers read more and perform better next time.

Another warmer can be that the teacher can ask the students about the latest news they have read or watched on economic issues in their country and abroad and to comment on the importance of this news to the country's population. During this warmer the students use actively the economic terminology in English. Mentioning some news they may unintentionally introduce the fellow students to the topic of the lesson. Thus, the teacher should use this warmer when he/she knows that one of the recent news is related to the topic they are going to teach.

Warmer 5: When teaching the topic “*Currency*” the teacher can use “Minute Mysteries or Lateral Thinking Puzzles” (Kalganova). These are little mind-bending games which are good for expanding the students' powers of deduction. The teacher provides the students with a scenario and they have to deduce what has happened. The students should ask questions in order to find out more about the situation, and eventually to solve the mystery. They can only ask questions that can be answered with “yes”, “no”, “maybe”, or “doesn't matter”. There is no limit to the number of questions, and it can be helpful to have multiple people working on the case.

“Mystery: “*A woman goes into a convenience store to buy a can of Coke. She pays for it with a \$20 bill and receives \$20.05 in change. No mistake was made*”.

Mystery solved: *It is in Canada: she pays in American money and receives change in Canadian money*” (Minute Mysteries: Mystery 60).

This type of warmer makes the students revise the grammar aspect on formulating questions, develops their imagination and creative thinking. The students can unravel the mystery working alone, in pairs or in groups.

Warmer 6: To practice the vocabulary studied the teacher can start his/her lesson with an English shiritori. “The students are divided into several groups. Their task is to create a chain of words. Each new word should start with the last letter of the previous word. The words should be connected with the topics studied, e.g. “*Forms of Business Ownership*”. The group that manages within a limited time to have the chain with the largest number of words wins.

e.g. *Business*>>*shareholder*>>*revenue*>>*employer*>>*remuneration*>>... and so on.

In order to make this task more challenging the teacher may ask the students to create a word chain in which the last two letters of a word are the first two letters of the next one.

e.g. *Enterprise* >> *service*>>*certificate*>>*tenancy*>>*cycle*>>*lender*>>... and so on.

Word chains help students with their spelling because they encourage them to recognize possible letter combinations” (Calina, 2012: 86) and to revise the vocabulary items.

Warmer 7: Some teachers prefer to use as warmers simple questions based on the topic of the lesson in order to make their students become good conversationalists. These questions are usually answered in 3-5 minutes and then the teacher does a round-up in order to proceed to the topic. For example, when teaching the topic “*Enterprise*” the teacher can ask the following questions:

- 1) Would you like to be a manager of an enterprise?
- 2) Is it better to manage a large-scale or a small enterprise?
- 3) How would privatization affect the activity of public enterprises in your country?
- 4) Have you ever heard anything about corporate raid? And so on.

This type of warmer is preferred by the teachers as it does not take much time to make up questions based on the topic to be studied. Besides many books have Lead-in at the beginning of each unit.

Warmer 8: When teaching the topic “*Advertising*” the warm-up activity called “Categories” can be used. “The teacher chooses a category that is relevant to what the class is studying. For example, the teacher might choose the category “*Company slogans*.” Students go around in a circle and have to name something in that category. If a student can’t think of any slogan in five seconds, he/she is out of the game. The game continues until only one person remains” (TEFL Warm Ups and Activities for Adults).

If the teacher deals with a group of students whose level of English is pre-intermediate and they cannot name slogans in English, then the following task can be given to them, which they also find interesting and enjoyable.

Match the advertising slogans with the category of the advertised goods:

Advertising slogan	Category of goods
1. Makes water more interesting	a) jeans
2. Use it to start something	b) wine
3. There is a bit of the West in all of us	c) car
4. Good things take time	d) coffee
5. We bet you’ll love it	e) shoes
6. The best a man can get	f) juice
7. See the whiteness. Feel the shine	g) tequila
8. Wake up. It’s 8 o’clock	h) razor
9. Give value to your feet	i) restaurant
10. Come hungry. Leave happy	j) lighter
11. The most reliable member of your family	k) toothpaste
12. Life is harsh. Get lost. Find yourself	l) casino

This type of warmer leads to a mini-debate as the students might have different variants of responses.

Warmer 9: When teaching “*Business correspondence*” the teacher may use “Error Correction Races” as a warmer. This task makes students pay attention to different types of mistakes: spelling, grammar, lexical, stylistic, etc. that should be avoided when writing a business letter. “The teacher puts students in two teams and gives each team samples of business e-mails containing mistakes. Students race to see which team can identify and correct the mistakes in the e-mails first”. (TEFL Warm Ups and Activities for Adults)

“Correct the mistakes in the following e-mail excerpt:

“I would like to remember everyone that Mr. Lewis, a prospective client, will visit the office next Tuesday. He’ll be in the office since 9 a.m. until about noon. I will appreciate it if everyone could dress in business professional attire during his visit. We want to make sure everyone make a good impression”.

Answer:

“I would like to ~~remember~~ remind everyone that Mr. Lewis, a prospective client, will be visiting the office next Tuesday. He’ll be in the office ~~since~~ from 9 a.m. until about noon. I ~~will~~-would (I’d) appreciate it if everyone could dress in business professional attire during his visit. We want to make sure everyone makes a good impression”. (TEFL Warm Ups and Activities for Adults)

Warmer 10: When the teacher has the first lesson with the group where he/she have to introduce themselves and to get acquainted with the students, the warmer “Here’s the Answer, what’s the Question?” can be successfully used.

“The teacher writes the answers to a few questions about his/her life on the board. Students have to guess what the corresponding questions are”. (TEFL Warm Ups and Activities for Adults)

Example:

1. 2
2. sushi
3. St. Petersburg

For number one, guesses might include “How many siblings do you have?”, “How many foreign languages do you speak?” “How many years have you been working as a teacher?” etc.

For number two, the students might ask the following questions: “What have you never eaten?”, “What do you like to eat most of all?”, etc.

For number three – “What city did you visit in the summer?”, “What city do you find the most beautiful in the world?”, etc.

This is a great warm up activity for getting students to practice asking questions using correct tenses and for creating a friendly atmosphere where the students can find some information about their new teacher and feel free to introduce themselves.

4. Conclusions

The above mentioned suggestions of warm up activities are made for EBE teachers in order to have more interesting and meaningful lessons with the maximum implication of the students. Unfortunately, the warming up in EBE classes is not very well studied and there are few sources on these activities offered to EBE teachers. The lack of sources may be accounted for by the fact that usual warmers are mostly represented through funny games but the EBE course includes serious topics with complicated vocabulary designed for adult learners where there is no room for games.

I should admit that it is very difficult to have an enjoyable and topic-related warmer at every EBE lesson, taking into account that there is not so much time offered for direct contact with the students and there are so many topics to cover. The EBE learners, especially the first-year students, will not be able to master EBE without the teacher's help. The course contains special terminology and only the teacher can improve the students' ability to process and generate economic and business information in English. Still, when planning a lesson a warmer should be an integral part of it, a good English conversation starter and motivator that will help to successfully deliver the lesson to the beneficiaries that nowadays like to be entertained. So, speaking about warmers in EBE classes, it means teaching formal topics in an informal atmosphere. Preparing a good warm up activity for an EBE class requires from the teacher creativity, good knowledge of the topic, sense of humour, ingeniousness and patience. Usually, this short-term activity takes the most time to be created. But it is worth spending time on it if you want to achieve all the learning objectives set. As British people say: "A good beginning makes a good ending".

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