Language for employability

Dr Philida Schellekens

Going Global 2010

Background to this talk

- Fieldwork in construction, engineering, hospital management, transport, airline catering and tourism
- UK, Vietnam and the Middle East
- Inspector in education, vocational training and work-based learning
- Occupational standards writer for CILT
- *Language in Construction* (2004) CITB
- *The Oxford ESOL Handbook* (2007) OUP

Session aim

- Review the delivery of language training in the context of vocational training and employment
- Identify key areas for development
- Consider how to promote effective delivery
  - practical ways of bringing language teaching and the workplace together
  - Institutional and governmental infra-structure

We teach our students
English and work skills

Our employees can’t speak English.
They can’t communicate in the workplace

Language skills 1

- Understanding spoken English, identifying words in a stream of sound
- To <u>some</u> extent vocabulary and jargon and idioms, e.g. *drywalling, keyhole saw, cradle*
- Frequently used language in the workplace, e.g. phrasal verbs like *set* and *set out*; *go off*, *run* and *run out of; pop in, pop this on*

Language skills 2

- Description of process and instruction: *The engine should be turned clock-wise before inserting it*

- Understanding instructions and explanations: *Before you do X, you do Y*

- Language for social interaction
  Second language speakers are often seen as aloof and even arrogant

Language syllabus

- Question to be asked:

  Do the priorities for work-related language learning differ significantly from the typical ELT syllabus?

2 Written and spoken language

- Employers and employees tell us:
  'Oral language skills are the most important in the workplace'
- Research on spoken language
  - Significant differences spoken ⇔ written English
- Language teaching traditionally focused on the rules of the written language
- Work-based materials are often produced in written form

It's a tough world out there: actual language used on site

Regulations require that we separate pedestrians from vehicles

Everybody should have been familiarised who is using the cradles

This upper ground floor is very congested and we are reallocating it to be used

Language in Construction CITB 2004

3 Language and vocational requirements

- Work functions are often simple, routine and easy to master

- Language and communicative requirements are potentially much more complex and variable

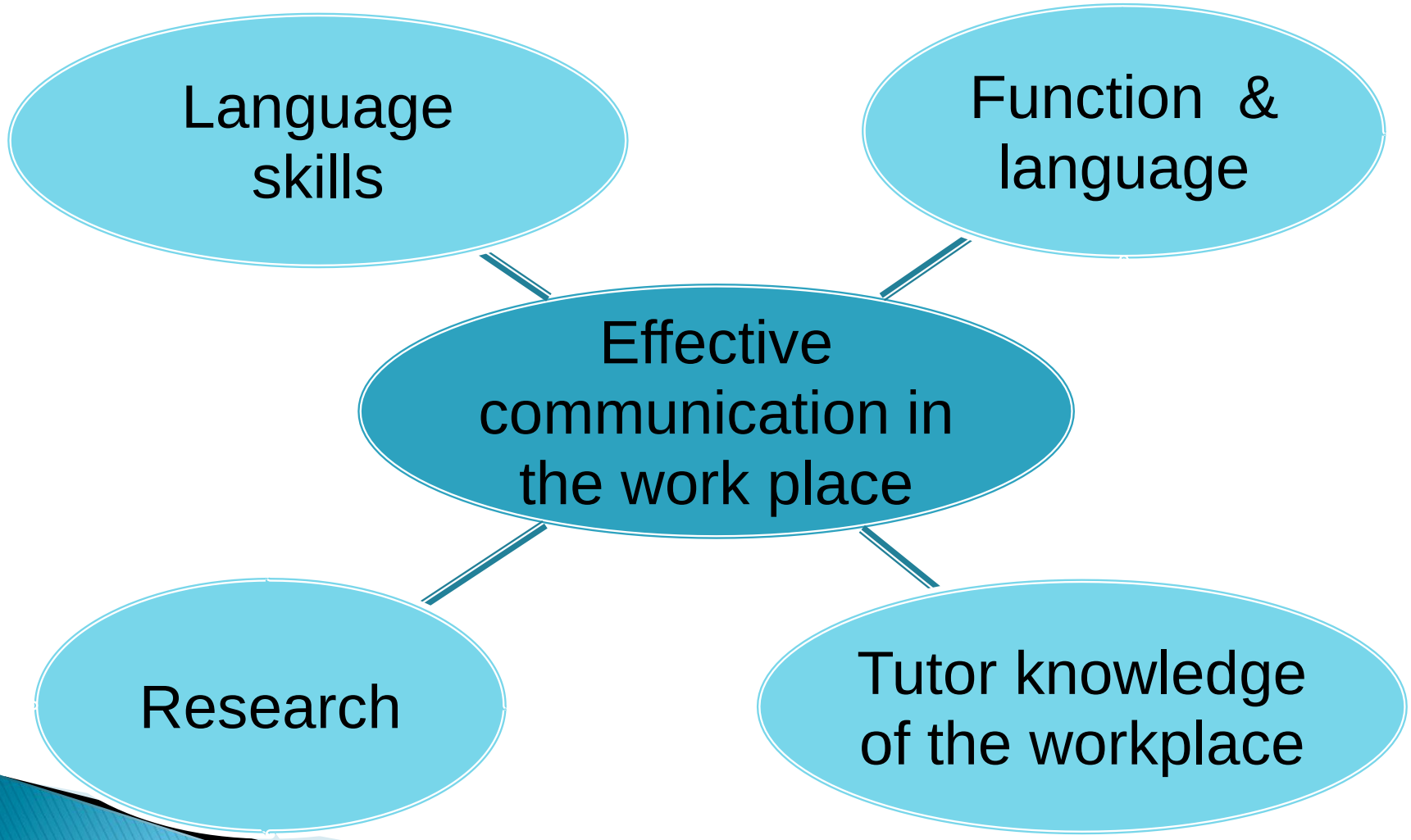
...especially when things go wrong

4 Tutor understanding

5 New research on second language acquisition

- Formulaic language e.g. Wray
- Lexical segmentation Field
- Subskills approach to teach reading e.g. Grabe, Weir and Khalifa

Areas for development



Practical steps

- High level of tutor experience and training
  - Good understanding of how language works
  - Training in work, language and communication skills analysis

- Tutor time on the work floor
  - Yes, familiarise with documentation
  - Yes, meet the manager/Human Resources
  - But, also spend time on the work floor
  - Most successful: shadow employees/trainees

A valuable tool

- Record interaction on the shop floor
- Analyse and transcribe
- Use for planning of learning
- Use as input in learning sessions
  - spoken language
  - transcripts

Planning for learning

- Work backwards!
  - from the language the employees will need at work
  - from the language the trainees will need to complete their qualification
- Take into account the length of the course and resources available
- Work out how much language challenge the average learner can cope with
- Set minimum standards for entry to the course

Institutional and national infra-structure

- Invest in teaching staff
- Engage employers and providers
- Build in time to develop courses and resources
- Monitor and evaluate
  - e.g. programme and student tracking
- Disseminate good practice

Evidence of effectiveness

- Better planning for learning by tutors
- Relevant and effective language learning for workers
- Improved motivation among learners
- Happy employers