Pedagogical Proposal to Develop Pragmatic Competence Through the Application of some Learning Guides Using Esa Elements

Propuesta Pedagógica para desarrollar la Competencia Pragmática por medio de la aplicación de guías de Aprendizaje usando los elementos Esa

Proposition Pédagogique Pour Développer la Compétence Pragmatique à Travers L'application de Certains Guides D'apprentissage Utilisant des Éléments Esa.

Proposta Pedagógica para Desenvolver Competência Pragmática Através da Aplicação de alguns Guias de Aprendizagem Utilizando Elementos Esa

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Resumen

Este artículo analiza los resultados de una investigación a pequeña escala enfocada en el desarrollo de una competencia que generalmente se descuida en el aula. El propósito era trabajar mediante la aplicación de una propuesta pedagógica que promueva un buen entorno que involucre oportunidades de lenguaje comunicativo. El proyecto se aplicó a estudiantes de séptimo grado de una institución privada que no estaban acostumbrados a realizar actos de habla como actividades de clase. Diálogos se llevaron a cabo por los estudiantes para que los demás estudiantes se sintieran seguros, para que mantuvieran conversaciones básicas. Los hallazgos revelan que, si los estudiantes se capacitan para desarrollar actividades comunicativas orales utilizando el idioma extranjero, mejoran la capacidad pragmática progresivamente.

Palabras Clave:
Competencia Pragmática, Entrada, Comunicación.

Abstract

This article analyzes the results of a small scale research focused on developing a competence which is generally neglected in the classroom. The purpose was to work by means of the application of a pedagogical proposal which promotes a good environment that engages communicative language opportunities. The project was applied to students of seventh grade of a private

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institution who were not used to perform speech acts as class activities. Dialogues were performed by students in order for students to feel confident, to maintain basic conversations. Findings reveal that if students are trained to develop oral communicative activities by using the foreign language, they improve pragmatic ability progressively.

Key words:
Pragmatic competence, input, communication.

Résumé

Cet article analyse les résultats d'une recherche à petite échelle axée sur le développement d'une compétence généralement négligée en classe. L'objectif était de travailler à travers l'application d'une proposition pédagogique qui favorise un environnement propice aux échanges linguistiques. Le projet a été appliqué à des élèves de septième année d'un établissement privé qui n'étaient pas habitués à effectuer des actes de langage comme activités de classe. Les dialogues ont été réalisés par les étudiants afin que ceux-ci se sentent en confiance et puissent maintenir des conversations élémentaires. Les résultats révèlent que si les étudiants sont formés pour développer des activités de communication orale en utilisant une langue étrangère, ils améliorent progressivement la capacité pragmatique.

Mots clés:
Compétence pragmatique, apport, communication.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa os resultados de uma pesquisa em pequena escala focada no desenvolvimento de uma competência geralmente negligenciada em sala de aula. O objetivo foi trabalhar por meio da aplicação de uma proposta pedagógica que promova um bom ambiente que envolva oportunidades de linguagem comunicativa. O projeto foi aplicado a alunos do sétimo ano de uma instituição privada que não estavam acostumados a realizar atos de fala como atividades de classe. Diálogos foram realizados pelos alunos para que os alunos se sentissem confiantes, para manter conversas básicas. Os resultados revelam que, se os alunos são treinados para desenvolver atividades comunicativas orais usando a língua estrangeira, eles melhoram a capacidade pragmática progressivamente.

Palavras-chave:
Competência pragmática, entrada, comunicação.

Introduction

During the two years that I worked as an English teacher in Ciudad del Sol School in Sogamoso, I was always concerned to help students to improve weaknesses they had on the development of pragmatic competence, they always showed apathy and fear to use the language in speech acts, students were not able to perform language functions appropriately to create spoken discourse. Once the students had interiorized some of the vocabulary and grammatical rules, they were not able to communicate among them by using the foreign language; the input environment was poor to engage pragmatic ability.

They were focused a lot of time to develop grammatical exercises and they did not know how to communicate their feelings and thoughts effectively; for them, it was only to translate literally from Spanish to English, they were not aware of the great importance of knowing about the influence that context and culture have when communicating, they were not able to find the correct word they had to use depending of what they wanted to express, consequently, there were misunderstandings and it was impossible to maintain a good communication and to interpret messages, they had not developed pragmatic competence to social interaction because of the lack of training to carry out speech acts.

Taking into account the previous need, this project intend to be a pedagogical intervention to develop pragmatic competence by using the methodology established by Jeremy Harmer (2007) Engage Study and Activate (ESA elements) so that students use the language to communicate, express feelings and interact. At the same time it is relevant to work a little about grammar because some of them do not use the grammatical rules effectively.

Statement of the Problem

Foreign language learners of seventh grade of Ciudad del Sol School, did not know how to approach to communicative speech acts effectively, they did not know how to use knowledge they had in a given language situation to perform linguistic actions. They were carrying out their learning process in an environment where the pragmatic competence was generally neglected in the classroom. As the students expressed, they were used to develop grammatical exercises

or memorize vocabulary but they did not produce language in communicative speech situations in which they had the opportunity to use English to express themselves by taking into account the context and culture which play an important role in an effective speech act.

In order to tackle this problem, three workshops were designed to help students to develop the pragmatic competence. The research question that guided this project was: How to help students to develop pragmatic competence through the ESA elements?

Research Setting and Participants

The context
This research was carried out in Ciudad del Sol School in Sogamoso, it is a private institution which offers primary and high school; primary, in the afternoon and high school in the morning. Students were supposed to take three sessions of English classes of 60 minutes per week, classes used to be focused on translations word by word or answering grammatical exercises to get an understanding of a specific topic. They were not trained to maintain at least basic conversations; however, society demands students have some specific speaking abilities if students want to continue with university studies.

The Students
Group of 33 foreign language learners of seventh grade of Ciudad del Sol school in Sogamoso, they ranged in age from eleven to thirteen years old, they are 31 people in the course, 18 men and 13 women. English classes were held on Tuesday at 10:45, on Wednesday at 7:15 and finally on Thursday at 11:45 which was the last academic hour. The majority of students were of medium

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economic level, some of them attended to school in the morning and worked in the afternoon, in many cases students were children of divorced parents, therefore, their school performance was affected and in general students had a low English level.

The Teacher (s)

During the development of this investigation, there was a research teacher who designed and developed the pedagogical proposal for being applied with the purpose of reaching the objective. There was also, a school teacher who let the application of this research and furthermore gave students grades for the participation in the activities.

Theoretical Framework

In favor of reaching the goal of this research, which is to develop pragmatic competence, specifically speaking skill on foreign language learners of seventh grade of Ciudad del Sol School in Sogamoso, the following concepts were considered as very important: communicative competence, pragmatic competence and ESA elements methodology.

Communicative Competence

Nowadays, there is a debate about the best focus that a teacher can give to a language class; sometimes, the focus is on grammatical explanations and some others, it is on the development of the communicative competence, in this case students performed dialogues; however, it was necessary a little bit of grammatical explanation, taking into account that students' age and level are the most important things when making the decision of teaching grammar.

Communicative competence is that aspect that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meaning with others by using the language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals. Hymes (1967) did a distinction between linguistic, as knowledge about language forms; and communicative competence, as knowledge that enables a person to communicate functionally and interactively. However, other researcher as Bachman (1990: 87) established some other subcategories.

Figure 1. Components of communicative competence
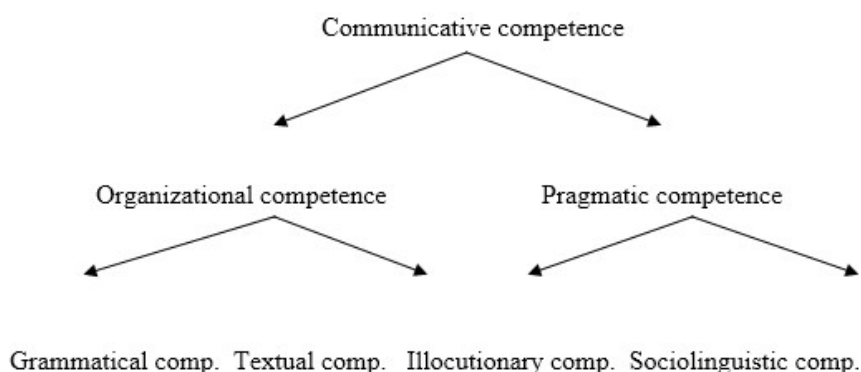
Components of communicative competence (Bachman 1990:87)

Source: Bachman 1990:87

This research sought for the development of the communicative competence, the idea was that students were able to maintain basic conversations in the classroom, but the specific competence that was developed was the pragmatic competence addressed to sociolinguistic because it refers to knowing how to use and respond to language appropriately, given the setting, the topic, and the relationships among the people communicating, how students expressed a specific attitude like courtesy, authority, friendliness, request and warning.

Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatics refers to language production, interpretation of communicative acts according to sociocultural features to avoid misunderstandings while communicating, but sometimes the main obstacle to students exploit pragmatic competence is the restricted foreign language in accessing it smoothly. Just as Tello Rueda (2006) advocated that ¨pragmatics seek to furnish students with linguistic tools that allow them to comprehend linguistic action in a contextually appropriate way ¨ (p. 171).

Pragmatics analyzes the language in terms of the use, not only to build sentences grammatically correct, pragmatics deals with how social context affects communication.

> Crystal (1997) defined pragmatic as the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choice they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on the participants in the act of communication. (p. 301)

In other words, pragmatic competence is one important component of the communicative competence, but also as Bachman (1990: 87) cited before and Canale (1988), mentioned there are also two subcategories from the pragmatic competence which are illocutionary competence, or the knowledge for performing language functions; and sociolinguistic competence, or the ways in which context contributes to meaning. In this case, the proposal was addressed to the development of both; the sociolinguistic competence, because speech communities perform differently in a particular communicative act; but also, the illocutionary competence, because participants have to develop language functions by using their background to sending and receiving meaning, in this case students developed personal interactional functions.

ESA Elements

This methodology established by Jeremy Harmer (2007, p:51) describes the exercises and activities which are designed to get students to use the language communicatively, it is very important that students have exposure, motivation and opportunities for language use. This methodology has certain characteristics or elements, the elements are Engage, Study and Activate (ESA).

Engage Element (E): Sometimes in the development of a class students are attentive on what the teacher is explaining, but it is very different to be really passionate or involved on the lesson. This element of the methodology consists of getting students learn much better; the idea is maintaining students really engaged emotionally and mentally with the learning process, minds and hearts must be brought into service to get the maximum benefit from the learning experience. The engagement is a vital part for a successful use of language.

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Study Element (S): In this part students do all intellectual work rather than leaving it to the teacher, they are asked to focus on the construction of something. It is important that the teacher show learners examples of language and ask them to produce language following teacher´s guidance as a kind of discovery activities.

Activate Element (A): This element focuses on giving students opportunities to use the language as freely and communicatively as they can, in this way students will not be focused on the use on particular structure they will be asked to use the language with little or no restriction getting a chance to use real language.

ESA Lesson Sequence

Harmer (2007, p. 54) established that the elements of this methodology need to be presented in a lesson, but it is not necessary that the elements appear always in the same order.

The order depends on what we want to achieve. ¨If we are running a task-based lesson, the study event may well come after activation. On the other hand, if we are introducing a piece of grammar, we may study the language first before the students are asked to try to use it¨. In this research, it was necessary a little bit of grammar explanation, before the students' language production, furthermore, it is the vital importance to maintain students' attention, and if ESA lesson sequence is always presented in the same order learners could be boring.

Research Methodology

The kind of investigation is action research, because it is based on the three main characteristics of this kind of methodology, ac-

cording to Cohen & Manion (1994, p. 186): a diagnosis of a problem, the implementation of a proposal and the evaluation of the proposal. In this case, I perceived a problem when I was working in Ciudad del Sol School that was the reason to begin this research, with the purpose of looking for a solution by means of the implementation of a proposal and then, the evaluation of the results.

Data Collection Procedures

The instruments that were used in order to gather information were a questionnaire, a journal, video recordings and a semistructured interview. A questionnaire at the beginning as a diagnosis of the problem. The two learning guides, to prepare students to produce language. The journal was kept during the time the data was collected, the teacher took notes related to what was happening in the classroom while the development of the two workshops. The video recordings were done during the performance of dialogues by using vocabulary studied in the workshops. Finally, the interview was held at the end of the process, to know if students had achieved the goal being able to use pragmatic competence to maintain a conversation the type of interview was semistructured because students had to do appreciations and comments. (It is presented in the appendix 1).

The Pedagogical Proposal

The pedagogical proposal that was implemented was the application of two learning guides by using the methodology established by Jeremy Harmer which is divided in three stages: Engage, Study and Activate.

First, in the Engage stage, students were encouraged to perform spoken dialogues by means of the modeling of two English teachers, they performed spoken dialogues and

the students were listening, the dialogue contended basic and daily used vocabulary (we can see an example in appendix 1).

Second, in the Study stage, two workshops were developed. Some vocabulary and examples of dialogues were given to students, so that they had material to create their own, to perform in groups of two or three people in a class activity; also, listening activities were carried out in every single workshop. Finally Activate, in this stage, students carried out a short dialogue invented by their own, in which they used the vocabulary presented in the workshops; they were trained on the pronunciation and dialogue construction before the performance of the activity.

Engage Stage: In this part, students observed a spoken dialogue that the two teachers were performing at the beginning of the class, before the implementation of the workshops. Taking into account the students' reaction, we could note that the activity calls the students' interest; they felt motivated because they were exposed to English language, they were emotionally engaged.

Study Stage: In this second part of ESA methodology, foreign language learners had to develop the two workshops (presented in the appendix 2), in which the main focus was the construction of the language to students use in speech context. Some vocabulary, verbs, time expressions and grammar exercises were given to students, and also a dialogue with the native pronunciation, they had to listen to the audio in order to guide students to produce their own dialogue in the next stage.

Activate Stage: In this last part, students used the language freely and communica-

tively by designing a dialogue in which they used the given vocabulary in the workshops, a video recording of the students' performance was carried out.

Methodology

The methodology of data analysis was action research because of its emphasis of problem solving, its flexibility and adaptability which let the pedagogical proposal to answer the question that guided this research relying on observation and behavioral data during a specific period of time when information was collected by means of different instruments. I consider in this case action research is the method that best fit to analyze gathered information because it was possible to monitor behavior, performance of students to identify a problem to look for the improvements of the teaching practice that in this case looked to improve pragmatic competence.

Findings

After implementing and collecting data throughout this research study, I could find the following results from the different instruments used. About the questionnaire, two main categories were found after the application of the questionnaire, these two categories are vocabulary and grammar. The results reveal that 60% of students had problems of vocabulary; they could not understand the meaning of the question because they did not know the vocabulary and answered something without sense. 30% of students had grammatical weaknesses; they were confused about auxiliary verbs and third persons. Finally, 10% of students had weaknesses related to both vocabulary and grammar. We can see more clearly in the graphic.
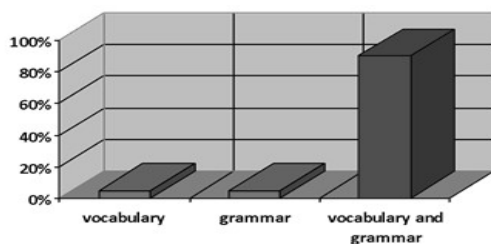
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Figure 2. Chart 1
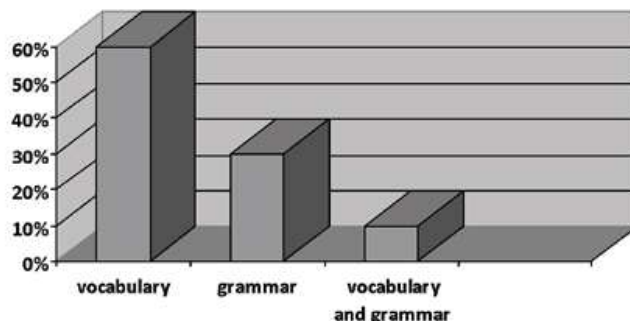
Source: Autoría propia

After analyzing the results of the implementation of the learning guides some categories emerged, those categories were nominated as language forms; it refers to the results about how much the students improve vocabulary and grammatical problems. The other one is about risky and unrisky students; it refers to students who were able to maintain basic conversations and who were not, maybe because they did not feel confident or did not want.

The results about language forms show that the majority of students solve the problems about grammar and vocabulary, except some others who definitely were not interested in improving weaknesses. The learning guides contained also some short grammar exercise that let the students check understanding of the grammatical rules; however, the focus of the learning guides was not grammatical explanation, it was communication but grammar was necessary in this case. The graphic outlines the following results, 5% of students did not improve problems of vocabulary, other 5% of students did not improve problems of grammar, but 90% improve vocabulary and grammatical weaknesses.

Figure 2. Chart 2

Students who did not improve vocabulary and grammar weaknesses.

Students who improve vocabulary and grammar weaknesses.

Source: Autoría propia

About risky and unrisky students, the results were positive because 80% of students were able to maintain short conversations, maybe they did not perform the dialogues perfectly but they tried, and on the contrary 20% did not perform the dialogues, they were restless, it was evident that they did not like this kind of activities. Furthermore, they were not used to develop this kind of activities. The following chart shows us the contrast between the students who were risky to perform dialogues and the others who did not do.

Figure 2. Chart 3
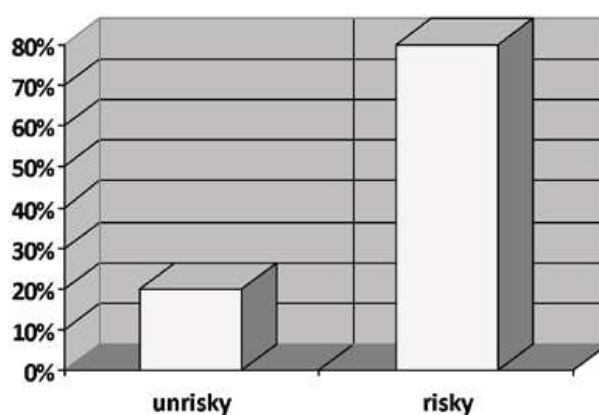
Source: Autoría propia

About the interview, five students were selected at random. I asked some questions in English, but students asked me that before tell about the translation, I help them with the translation; however, at the moment of the interview I asked in Spanish and in English, then we began with the interviews. Students answered the question in a very short way. When I asked about the class activities, the students all agreed that class activities were pertinent. Here there is the transcription of the first question and the students' answers:

Teacher: what do you think about the activities developed in class?

A: mmm...it help to English.

S: good learning and ..... feel happy.

K: good way to learn.

I: good because ..... speak in English

E: ...... it that different.

This shows that students enjoyed the activities although they did not speak perfectly in English, they were motivated to speak and feel confident.

Now about the second question do you think that being exposed to English language is a way to motivate you to perform dialogues? these were the answers

A: I want to continue.

I: ………….. I feel nervous

K: yes because…….. is different activity.

S: yes, yes… because we improve the pronunciation.

E: yes I like.

The students liked this kind of activities and they tried to do their best, there was a good environment which promoted the development of the pragmatic ability.

Conclusions

It is clear that if students are not trained to develop pragmatic activities they are not able to perform oral activities by using the foreign language, if pragmatic competence is neglected in the classroom, it is obvious that the students' abilities have weaknesses. It is not enough to teach grammatical rules or only work on developing communicative competence, maybe, a student can be strong at communicating, but doing mistakes like giving a wrong message, for example, if pragmatic competence fail, someone could not know which question is not appropriate to ask to a guest, or how to interpret and use an utterance.

To develop this kind of ability it is important that teacher maintains an appropriate environment to students receive an excellent input that encourage them to be risky to take the charge on their own learning and feel confident to speak in English, to maintain conversations by means of a frequent training and being successful communicating in the target language, considering context and situation as something which influence the language.

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Appendix 1: Instruments

UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA Y TECNOLÓGICA DE COLOMBIA

QUESTIONAIRE

Name: _____

Answer the following questions.

1.   What do you do?

_____

2.   Where do you live?

_____

3.   What time do you get up?

_____

4.   Do you practice any sport? If yes, what sport do you practice?

_____

5.   What kind of fast food do you like?

_____

6.   Does your mother work?

_____

7.   What does she do?

_____

8.   What does she do in her free time?

9.   Do you have brothers and sisters?

_____

10.   What does your father do?

_____

UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA Y TECNOLÓGICA DE COLOMBIA

INTERVIEW

1. What do you think about the activities developed in class?

2. Do you think that being exposed to english language is a way to motivate you to perform dialogues?

3. How do you feel when you listen someone speaking in english?

4. How do you feel when you speak in english?

5. Do you want to continue working by using spoken activities?

Appendix 2: Learning Guides

UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA Y TECNOLÓGICA DE COLOMBIA

LEARNING GUIDE

Objective: To develop basic conversations in foreign language learners.

Name: _____

1. Complete the conversations, you can use the words in the word bank.

• A: What _____ you _____?

B: I´m a student. I study business

WORD BANK

I – you   he - she

work, take study, teach, do, go, have   works, takes, studies, teaches, does, goes, has

A: And _____ do you _____ to school?

B: I _____ to Jefferson College.

A: _____ do you like your classes?

B: I _____ them a lot.

• A: What _____ Kanya do?

B: She´s a teacher. She _____ mathematics at a school in

Bangkok.

A: And what about Somsak? Where _____ he work?

B: He _____ for an electronics company.

A: _____does he do, exactly?

B: He´s a salesman. He _____ computer equipment

2. What do you know about these jobs? Write sentences describing each job, using he or she, then share with a partner.

A DOCTOR A SECRETARY A TEACHER

He works in a hospital

He has an office

He works long hours

He cares for patients

A TAXI DRIVER   A SINGER   A WAITER

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3. Here there are other professions, match the information in columns A, B and

 C, then share with a partner.

A	B	C
A salesperson	for an airline	builds houses
A chef	in a restaurant	cares for patients
A flight attendant	for a construction company	answers the phone
A carpenter	in a hospital	cooks food
A receptionist	in a department store	serves passengers
A nurse	in an office	sells clothes

Example: A salesperson works in a department store, he sells clothes.

4. There is a dialogue where people are using vocabulary about professions. Listen to the tape recording and take it into account and prepare a similar dialogue to perform in class, you can use the information used in the last exercises.

DESCRIBING WORK

Jason: Where do you work, Andrea?
Andrea: I work for Thomas Cook Travel.

Jason: Oh, really? What do you do there?

Andrea: I´m a guide. I take people on tours to countries in South America, like Peru.

Jason: That sounds interesting.

Andrea: Yes, it´s a great job. I love it. And what do you do?

Jason: I´m a student and I have a part-time job, too.

Andrea: Oh? Where do you work?

Jason: In a fast food restaurant.

Andrea: Which restaurant?

Jason: Hamburger Heaven

UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA Y TECNOLÓGICA DE COLOMBIA
LEARNING GUIDE

Objective: To develop basic conversations in foreign language learners.

Name: _____

1. Complete the chart with words from the list and number the items in each list from 1(you like more) to 7 (you like in the least).

Classical   Jazz   Salsa   Talk show

Game shows   News   Science fiction   Thrillers
Horror films   Pop   Soap opera   Westerns

Movies   Music

_____

_____   _____

_____   _____

 Entertainment TV programs   _____

_____   _____

_____

_____

2. Write five questions about likes and dislikes, then ask and answer your questions in groups.

• Do you like ..... ?

 (pop music, TV, movies, plays)

• What kinds of .... Do you like?

(music, movies, TV programs)

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- What do you think of...?

(horror films, gospel music)

3. Complete this information about your group.

OUR LIKES AND DISLIKES GROUP

WHAT´S YOUR FAVORITE KIND OF....? WHO´S YOUR FAVORITE...?

Music: Singer:
Movie   Actor:

TV program   Actress:

4. There is a dialogue where people are using vocabulary about likes and dislikes. Listen the pronunciation and taking into account it, prepare a similar dialogue to perform in class, you can use the information worked in the last exercises.

LIKES AND DISLIKES
Liz: Do you like jazz, Tom?
Tom: No, I don´t like it very much. Do you?

Liz: Well, yes, I do. I´m a real fan of Wynton Marsalis.

Tom: Oh, does he play the piano?

Liz: No, he doesn´t. He plays the trumpet.

So, what kind of music do you like?

Tom: I like rock a lot.

Liz: Who´s your favorite group?

Tom: The Cramberries. I love their music.

 How about you? Do you like them?

Liz: No, I don´t. I can´t stand them.