TESL REPORTER

Vol. 42(1) April 2009

TESL Reporter

A Forum for and by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

Video as a Resource for Teaching American Culture

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"English teachers all over the world cry out for materials which can make English come alive for their students. TV, video, and the newer video-related technologies provide just such a resource . . ." (Susan Stempleski, 1995a, p. 48).

The advantages of using video in the EFL classroom are many and obvious. Authors point out high motivation, and an "enjoyable learning environment" (Stempleski, 1995a p. 48). Videos increase oral comprehension, "stimulate student interaction and communication with other classmates," "promote cross-cultural awareness," and "are adaptable for use with students at any English-language proficiency level" (Rice, 1993, p. vii). Tomalin (1992) assumes that "Video communicates meaning better than any other media" (p. 49). The usefulness of this technology is almost universally recognized. Many proponents of using video for EFL teaching maintain that it can be successfully used for teaching culture and agree that videos stimulate students to acquire the target culture, as well as language (e.g., Henly, 1993; Ladau-Harjulin, 1992; Stempleski, 1992; Tomalin, 1992).

The concept of culture has given rise to a lot of debate in the literature. Out of many definitions—symbolic, cognitive, behaviorist, functionalist, psychological, sociological, anthropological—the two latter ones are of paramount importance to an EFL teacher (See discussion in Omaggio-Hadley, 1993, p. 362ff.; Robinson, 1985, pp. 7–12). Many authors distinguish between "little-c" and "big-C" cultures. Thus, Brooks (1976) distinguishes between "culture as *everything* in human life" ("little-c"), and "Culture as the *best* of everything in human life" (p. 20). The connotations of "little-c" culture are so subtle and intangible that it is difficult to study, identify, observe, and teach them. In this article, culture is understood as "everything in human life." Videos are a perfect resource for teaching culture, but the question arises as to how to maximize the benefits of videos for teaching culture. The difficulty lies in designing the accompanying tasks. I would like to underscore that teaching culture requires different methods and techniques. It requires a special set of tasks and a special taxonomy of exercises.

An Example

For teaching American culture (dating patterns, superstitions, holidays—Halloween—and traditional American marriage and child rearing), I use *Popeye, the*

Sailor animated cartoons series, namely, *Parlez Vous Woo?*; *I Don't Scare; Fright to the Finish; Bride and Gloom.* Most scholars advocate the use of short segments, "bite-sized" chunks (Stempleski, 1995b, p. 49), based on the assumption that "5–10 minutes of video can easily provide enough work for an hour-long period" (Arcario, 1992, p. 119). I believe that cartoons meet this goal.

The structure of each unit falls into the three parts recognized in modern methodology: previewing, viewing and postviewing. I offer the taxonomy of Topic Focus (TF), Language Focus (LF), and Culture Focus (CF) exercises. Since the goal of TF exercises is to raise the student's interest in the topic, they are in the previewing section. They mostly consist of general and personalized questions.

Because a film "may go beyond the learner's linguistic and conceptual competence" (Massi & Meriño, 1996, p. 21) I include LF exercises to eliminate language difficulties, to raise language competence and to enlarge the student's vocabulary. LF exercises are in all three parts of a unit. These exercises (both in-class and take-home) may include assignments to work on the vocabulary, identify words or phrases and insert them into gaps (fill-in-the-gap exercises), and find context sentences for active vocabulary. The goal of many LF exercises is to help students generate their own speech using the new words they have acquired watching a film or video segment. These exercises consist of reading and translating sentences (intended for developing translation skills), finding definitions in a dictionary (fosters synonym and collocation acquisition), commenting on the active words, giving sentences of their own, playing guessing and matching games based on definitions, doing cross-word puzzles, acrostics, and other word games based on authentic sentences used as clues. My own view is that if such LF exercises keep the general tone of the video cartoons, they are great fun even for adult learners.

Moreover, all the LF exercises are saturated with cultural information. I use this technique to make exercises all-embracing: e.g., students learn about "blind" dating or group dating patterns in the U.S. indirectly, from working on LF exercises (*Parlez Vous Woo?*). In short, the purpose of LF exercises is two-fold: to eliminate possible language difficulties and indirectly widen the knowledge of American culture.

The main goal of CF exercises is to attract students' attention to those cultural issue they may leave unnoticed and to highlight cross-cultural issues. Covering all three sections of a unit, CF exercises include the following:

- observation of a culture pattern (the first acquaintance with American culture);

- identification of a "culture-loaded" phenomenon (e.g., While watching the cartoon *I Don't Scare,* the teacher might make a list of "good luck" and "bad luck" superstitions.);

- identification and comparison of cross-cultural issues (e.g., One might compare American and Russian superstitions);

- commentary on the customs, traditions, behavior in a postviewing section (e.g., "Why was Olive so scared on seeing Popeye opening an umbrella in the house?");

- mastering communication and developing cultural competence through role plays, simulations, and discussions. Going from the assumption that videos can be used as springboards for other activities (Stoller, 1992; Tomalin, 1992), I integrate the related material and the video into one whole so that the message of a cartoon is disclosed directly by CF exercises and indirectly by LF exercises.

The above-described methods and techniques can be beneficial for teaching specific cultural phenomena, with one unit (cartoon) covering one or two major themes.

The question then arises, is it possible to show a continuum of American culture? I present a general overview of American culture in a course "Introduction to American Culture" where I widely integrate video to demonstrate culture patterns. At the final stage of the course, I ask students to analyze the film *Mrs. Doubtfire*. The reasons for choosing the film are based on the following criteria:

- it ranks 14th on All-Time *Top 50 American Movies*, 1994 list indicating that this film is very well known to Americans;

- the film is indicative of American culture: it covers a fairly large range of culture issues and could be regarded as a dissection of present-day American culture;

- my students (of the American Studies Department) are highly motivated to know more about American culture, and are psychologically mature enough to understand the underlying messages.

The film is presented two times (with optional third time). Before the first presentation the students are asked to divide a sheet of paper into two parts, heading the left-hand column "Scene Sequence," and the right-hand column "Cultural Interpretation." The students are asked to watch the film and take notes of scenes and events.

During the second presentation the students are told to focus on cultural interpretation. The following tentative list of cultural categories is offered to students for the cultural analyses (See Appendix for typical student responses):

- Ethos (national identity, national diversity)

- National character

- Values

- Family

- Homes and Houses

- Lifestyle

- Economic-Occupational characteristics

- Family problems

- Judicial institutions

- Entertainment

- Nonverbal behavior (paralanguage, facial expression, kinesics, oculesics, haptics, proxemics, chronemics, artifacts).

My goal is to teach students to observe, identify, and comment on cultural phenomena. I realize that these topics by far do not exhaust the inventory of American culture, but I do believe that the integration of videos into the curriculum enlarges students' awareness and understanding of American culture.

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of English in Russia, the Far Eastern Association of Teachers of English, and the American Studies Association and others.

Appendix

Excerpts from several students' cultural analyses:
(I give students' interpretation of some of the categories as an example of the way they perceived American culture in the film).

National Character:

Self-reliance. "Daniel Hillard is self-reliant. Having lost his job and home he does not accept his brother's offer to stay at his place. He does not want, on the one hand, to violate his brother's privacy and, on the other hand, to lose his independence and freedom. The relations between the brothers and their mother are also indicative of the American character. Children get independent and self-reliant early. Miranda is self-reliant too. Stuart is a macho. Miranda Hillard receives an urgent phone call from her neighbor who tells her that something is wrong in her house. From this fact we can conclude that there is a strong sense of community and neighborliness: they know each other's telephone numbers and keep an eye on the houses."

Friendliness. "In the movie we see casual friendliness everywhere in public places, in the streets, at the office. A good illustration of casual friendliness is the episode when Mrs. Doubtfire first sees Stuart from the window. Their eyes meet, she waves her hand, smiles, says "Hello," but this is not what she thinks or feels about him. When Stuart does not see her, she gives him the finger, a vulgar gesture which shows a real attitude toward Stuart. At least in two episodes we can see that Americans would rather be polite and friendly than hurt other people's feelings. While talking on the phone with his mother, Daniel's brother, instead of insulting his mother with his brother's "no" to her offer to stay at her place after the divorce answers, "He says he'll think of it." It is normal within the limits of casual friendliness for Americans to say "Hi," "How are you" or things like these to a stranger. In the movie when Mrs. Doubtfire gets on the bus, the driver greets her though they obviously do not know each other. This is typical of American culture.'

Work Ethic. "Having lost his permanent job, Daniel is ready to take up any job no matter how hard it is. Miranda is on a fast track too."

Practicality, materialism. "Daniel is considered to be a loser by others because he is an exception; he is not practical, or materialistic as others are (Stuart for example)."

Competitiveness. "Miranda and Stuart are highly competitive."

Love of newness and innovation. "Daniel loves everything new; he loves innovation, that is why he devised a new program, a new way of speaking to children."

Nonverbal behavior:

Facial expression. "Most of the persons are very emotional; their faces express their emotions, feelings (joy, happiness disappointment, etc). The most expressive is their youngest daughter: all the emotions are "written" on her face. Americans generally permit more emotions to show on their faces."

Kinesics. "We could watch an "American walk": the walker moves at a rapid pace, holds the chest forward, and swings the arms vigorously. All the characters feel free to be sloppy, slouch down. Moderate gesturing is appropriate, as it is considered by the rules of etiquette. The parents use gestures in the scene of their quarrel which demonstrates their strong emotions. By the way, people who keep their hands and arms very close to their bodies are to be regarded as "too stiff; too formal, up-tight; as inspector lady from the social department. Many gestures are informal and friendly, there is one vulgar gesture: when Mrs. Doubtfire (Mr. Hillard) saw his ex-wife's companion, he was mad and made this gesture from the window. The father and the son devised some very special gesture. The children and the father put their hands over each other's hands to express agreement, or clap their hands. Daniel and his son rub their noses, Daniel waves his hand to greet someone, raises his thumb up (OK-sign). Miranda cuts her throat ("it's awful"-sign; or "I've had enough"-sign). Daniel and his younger daughter cover their mouths with their index finger to show they will keep it a secret. The bus driver ribbed Mrs. Doubtfire (kidding, playing, trying to attract attention). There are parental gestures (hugs, petting)."

Oculesics. "Eye contact can be seen in all the scenes, e.g. when the children were introduced to a baby-sitter. We know that eye contact is very important for Americans. If a person does not look straight into his eyes, Americans may decide that this person doesn't tell the truth."

Haptics: "We saw shaking hands during introduction with the children, (Mr. Hillard and the producer). Stuart embraces Miranda. On coming home, Miranda kisses each of her children. Daniel hugs his brother and children. The children hug their parents very often. Adults hug at some distance, put their hands on the shoulder."

Proxemics. The distance between unknown people is more than between the people who know each other or are relatives. During the first meeting the distance between Mrs. Doubtfire and the children is about one meter, the average distance is about 0.5 meters—much more than in Russian culture. There is an example in the movie when

proxemics plays an important role. During the episode when Miranda takes the children home from Daniel's place, Daniel opens the door for them to leave and when Miranda is coming out they both make an awkward movement to enlarge the space between them. They do this because they are divorced. This space shows that their status has changed."

Chronemics. "The tempo of speech is very high. When one person is speaking the other shows his attention by saying words (interjections) like "really," and "wow.""

Artifacts. "In the film there were not many artifacts. Miranda wears earrings, a chain, or beads. Everyday clothes are very sloppy and comfortable, but when they go to the restaurant they wear beautiful clothes or formal suits, the children are well-dressed too. Miranda always wears business formal clothes, she looks very elegant."
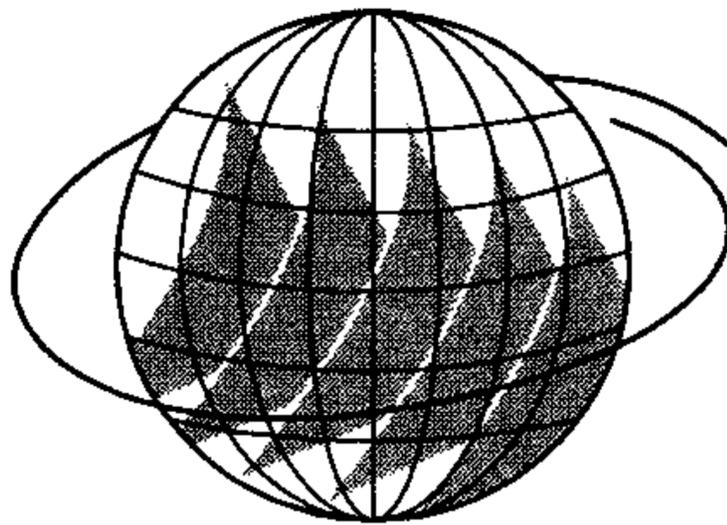
TESOL 2000
NAVIGATING THE NEW MILLENNIUM
March 14–18, 2000
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Reading-Based Integrated-Skills Instruction: A Bridge to Success When Teaching ESP in Limited Class-Time Conditions

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English is a compulsory educational subject for the majority of students in tertiary schools of the former Soviet Union. It is taught for at least two academic years (first and second years of study), and teaching is professionally-oriented, (e.g., teaching English for Science and Technology, English for Medical Students, or Business English), as opposed to the classic dichotomy of General English or EAP. But during these two years of compulsory classes in English, the number of such classes per week is almost always very small. For instance, in Ukraine, it usually varies from one to two classes per week, with 90 minutes for each class. Taking into account the fact that the outcomes of teaching and learning English in secondary schools of the former USSR countries are seldom high, it is hardly surprising that college-level EFL teachers do not often achieve very tangible results in developing the communicative competence of their students. They simply have too little time for it (for more detailed analysis of the EFL teaching situation in Ukraine, see Tarnopolsky, 1996). Therefore, it may be said that in the Ukraine and in many other former USSR countries, tertiary school ESP teachers have to work in limited class-time conditions which creates one of the major obstacles to success in their efforts.

The solution to the problem (due to small chances of increasing allocated class-time for teaching/learning English) was ordinarily sought in limiting teaching/learning objectives in ESP—usually reading professional literature in English, since reading skills were considered to be the most important ones for professional advancement in professional activities outside an English-speaking country. Besides, reading seems to be the skill easiest taught in limited class-time conditions as a lot of work can be done by students themselves in the absence of their teacher (home assignments). In this way, teaching oral communication was limited to the simplest discussions (question-answer work) of assigned texts, and communicative exchanges having no relation to ESP (introducing oneself and making acquaintances, speaking out about towns and countries where people live, universities where they study, etc.). So, if teaching in English was

really content-based (in the sense content-based instruction is understood by Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989), focusing on authentic professional texts, listening and speaking were left in the domain of General English, despite explicitly stated course objectives. Likewise, writing was almost totally excluded from the curricula.

Leaving aside the question whether this scheme, principally designed for developing reading skills, worked well in the past (far from always so, first of all because of the numerous vestiges of the grammar-translation method in teaching reading), it is clearly inadequate at present when the fall of the iron curtain has made possible, highly desirable, and quite frequent, direct contacts between Ukrainian, Russian, Byelorussian and other former USSR specialists in science, technology, economics, etc., and their Western colleagues. The situation requires not only reading, but speaking, listening, and writing as well. These last three skills must be developed in a process that is content-based (ESP) in just the same way as reading skills are developed—otherwise, professionals cannot meet their special needs.

Certainly, reading still remains the focal point as the skill that can most often be used in day-to-day professional activities outside an English-speaking country and as the most probable one in which students can attain reasonably high proficiency in limited class-time conditions (that have not changed). But focusing on reading must be combined with teaching procedures that effectively develop speaking, listening, and writing. If reading is to remain a focal skill and a focal point in teaching, speaking, listening, and writing skills may be and should be developed on the basis of and in inextricable connection with it, i.e., in the process of reading-based integrated-skills instruction. In the context of limited instructional time, it is hardly possible to count on students' attaining as high a level of speaking, listening, and writing proficiency as is possible for reading. But, at least minimum proficiency for professional communication in oral or written form needs to be achieved. It requires a specific teaching program and what follows is the description of an attempt to develop such a program for one of the leading Ukrainian technical universities—Dniepropetrovsk State Technical University of Railway Transport.

Reading-based Integrated-skills Instruction

A program of reading-based integrated-skills instruction in ESP was developed for second-year students of the above-mentioned University majoring in Transport Economy and Management. In view of these particular students' future professional activities, the specific kind of ESP for them is Business English. But the syllabus specifies that business texts themselves (such as texts of business contracts and agreements, corporate annual reports etc.,) are to be read beginning only from the second

year of study while reading in the first year is concentrated around the general issues of economy, basic notions of management etc. The reasons for this division are as follows: (1) It is only from their second year of study that students fully start their major program, while in the first year they study economy and management in general and (2) developing skills of reading authentic business texts (not texts on general issues of economy and management) is the most important task and, therefore, should be done in the most favorable conditions—in particular, allowing for contribution of L1 reading ability to L2 reading performance. According to the threshold hypothesis (Carrell, 1988; Clarke, 1980; Cummins, 1979), supported in an EFL context by the experimental results of Lee and Schallert's (1997) research, students need to reach some minimum level of proficiency in L2 before their L1 reading ability can help them in improving their skills in L2 reading. The first year of English at Dniepropetrovsk Technical University is designed to attain that level.

Therefore, the genuine course of ESP begins in the second-year, and it was for this year that we developed a specific ESP reading-based integrated-skills instruction program. Though this program like most, was concentrated on reading as the focal point, reading did not take the greatest part of class time (reading occupied only about one fifth or less of it). In fact, speaking, listening, and writing were given the greatest amount of time (especially the first two) with topics, content of communication, and language material coming from assigned reading. In the program, all the classes in a semester were divided into units (three 90-minute classes in one unit), each unit having a unifying theme (e.g. business contracts and agreements, standard structure and hierarchy of a firm or company, etc.). Classes in a unit were divided into the pre-reading stage, reading stage, and post-reading stage with specific learning activities for each.

The Pre-Reading Stage

This stage (the first 90-minutes in a unit) includes:

1. Introducing learners to the topic (theme) of one or several texts to be read, i.e., introducing them to the subject-matter to make it easier for comprehension, as recommended in a sheltered English approach (Freeman & Freeman, 1991). Such a preview is done in an oral presentation by the teacher, followed by students listening either to a tape-recorded business lecture or conversation dealing with the same content or, more often, their watching a short video on the same topic (recordings and videos used are taken from US or British Business English teaching materials). Videos are preferred to tape-recordings and are used whenever possible since they give a unique opportunity of demonstrating complete communicative situations and visualizing them,

as well as the objects of discourse. Thus, this phase of the pre-reading stage is totally devoted to listening (and viewing—with videos).

2. Discussing what was heard and sharing views. At first the discussion is teacher-fronted and is used as a comprehension check and as a means of clarifying to some of the students what they have failed to understand when listening (key words and structures from the teacher's oral presentation and the other listening materials are also discussed in this phase). The ordinary continuation is further discussion of the information obtained while listening, in small groups of 3–4 students. Participants are asked to exchange opinions on what they have just heard and share their own background information and knowledge of the subject matter. As a final stage, short presentations are made by representatives of every small group for all the students to hear. Such presentations sum up the results of small group discussions and serve as a basis for a new teacher-fronted discussion. In this way, the second phase of the pre-reading stage is focused on speaking English (and listening too—to what other students have to say). This stage, as a whole, makes it possible for students not only to guess fairly accurately the content of the texts to be read in the next stage and articulate their background knowledge as to this content, but also to make future reading a reasoning task (Swaffar, Arens, & Byrnes, 1991).

The Reading Stage

The reading stage occupies the second class in a unit and consists of:

1. Reading by all the students following the SQ3R (survey, question, read, recite, review) procedure. This is done in the classroom during the first 3 or 4 units so the students fully master the SQ3R procedure. (Afterwards, it is transferred to home assignments given at the end of the first class in a unit). Reading is followed by a discussion that is either teacher-fronted or conducted in small groups. The purpose of the discussion is not only to clarify some points in the text, but to also allow the teacher to check comprehension), and elicit students' personal opinions about what was read. The discussion also serves as a means of comparing what was listened to and said on the same subject matter during the preceding stage (class) with what was read in the text. Special attention is given to information that does not coincide or is in conflict with students' opinions and pre-reading guesses, or their background knowledge. Thus, this phase is designed to promote oral communication on the basis of what is read (and heard from other students).

2. In-class reading of different texts by different students, i.e., texts different in content but dealing with the same topic (theme) as the first text. It should be noted that

both the individual texts and the preceding text (same for all) are authentic ones taken from original US or British sources (e.g., *The Wall Street Journal*). Reading of individual texts is always timed and done in different regimes but with the emphasis on skimming and scanning, since the principle task is to teach reading of extended pieces of texts for general information—using appropriate skills and strategies (Grabe, 1986).

3. Exchanging information obtained from individual texts just read. The work is done in small groups of 3–4 students. Every student in such a small group tells his/her partners about the content of his/her text(s), answers their questions about this content, and then information from different individual texts is compared and discussed, taking into account all the preceding information obtained while reading, listening, and speaking. In this way, speaking English and listening to what other people say are the essence of the students' activities in the third phase of the second class in a unit.

Post-Reading Stage Structure

The final class in a unit includes:

1. Simulation(s) organized and carried out on the basis of information obtained from the preceding reading, listening, and discussing. For instance, if in the preceding two classes everything read, listened to, or discussed concentrated on financial issues, the executive board meeting of an imaginary firm or company may be simulated—this meeting devoted to the firm's financial situation, budget, profit and losses etc. Different simulations usually take up to one half (45 minutes) of the third class in a unit, and are organized in accordance with recommendations and suggestions made by Jones (1982). So, this is the phase of creative imaginary situation-stimulated speaking and listening to other students.

2. Writing an essay of about 100–150 words on the topic of what was read, listened to, and discussed heretofore. For instance, if the subject matter was finances, the topic of an essay may be different ways of maintaining financial stability in a firm or company. The writing itself is done as a home assignment from the second to the third class in a unit. In class, students exchange their essay, and write a short commentary. Then (in the same class) the peer-commented essays are given back to their authors who, after reading the commentary, either correct, or modify their drafts, and rewrite them, or, in the case of disagreement with the peer-commentator, write a short response to her/his comments. The peer-commented essays, after having passed again through the hands of their authors (for correcting or leaving unchanged the first draft), are handed over to the teacher for her/his commentaries. The teacher discusses the results with her/his students at the very beginning of the first class in the following unit, and after this discussion, some or all of

the essays may be rewritten and again teacher-commented. This approach approximates process-oriented writing (Zamel, 1982) and is linked to not only the preceding reading (Zamel, 1992), but with listening and speaking as well, and serves as a kind of summing up end-piece to all the activities in the unit.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the above description of the reading-based integrated-skills instruction program, in every unit students proceed, following the path of listening → speaking (with listening) → reading (with speaking and listening) → reading → speaking (with listening) → speaking (with listening) → writing. In this way, reading naturally occupies the central position in the sequence, influencing and even determining both the preceding and the following activities, while allowing for the simultaneous and balanced development of listening, speaking and writing.

It should be noted that as to class-time spent, reading itself takes probably the shortest part of it while the greatest part is allocated to speaking and listening. This does not weaken or slow down the development of reading skills (the focal ones) since a lot can be read in a short time if effective reading strategies are used and reading is done not only in class but also at home. In addition, it should not be forgotten that in integrated-skills instruction every skill being developed contributes to development of other skills as listening leads to reading and discussion and so forth (McDonough & Shaw, 1993).

Therefore, the suggested approach seems not only reasonable but probably one of the best for attaining desired results in teaching ESP where class-time is limited and where the goal is both to develop students' skills for reading professional literature and to develop the skills of listening, speaking, and writing in professional situations. This approach has really proven its efficiency in our practical experience of using it at Dniepropetrovsk State Technical University of Railway Transport—especially when compared to more traditional approaches for tertiary institutions of the former USSR countries.

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The Role of Discourse Elements in Determining the Readability of Texts

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Introduction

In the realm of ELT/FLT, the concepts of grading and sequencing reading passages are of high importance, since for most second/foreign language learners, reading is the only means of contact with (and sometimes the sole purpose for learning) another language.

Subjective measures of reading difficulty have almost always proved inadequate and imprecise, leading the researchers to look for new ways of calculating readability. Different models and concepts of readability have been proposed, such as the Flesch Formula, the Dale/Chall Formula, and the Fair-Jenkins-Paterson Formula, to name a few. Almost all the available formulas and models rely on the syntactic or morphological characteristics of the text elements (words, phrases, sentences), while the semantic or "functional" aspects of the texts are ignored. This paper tries to look at the concept of readability from a discourse perspective and attempts to investigate the relationship between the formal measures of reading difficulty and their discourse counterparts.

Review of Literature

Readability Formulas

No matter what the motive of the readers, the text they are to read in their L2 must be of appropriate difficulty for them. Neglect of this principle will lead to boredom or frustration on the part of the reader.

To match a text's difficulty level with the reader's perceived level of competence, a number of researchers have developed what are termed as "readability formulas." Readability formulas can be defined as mathematical equations used for the determination or the prediction of the level of reading competence necessary for the comprehension of a particular piece of writing.

A readability formula, according to Klare (1963), uses counts of language variables in a piece of writing in order to provide an index of probable difficulty for the reader. It is a predictive device in the sense that no actual participation by the reader is needed.

Most of the readability formulas rely on linguistic criteria for the prediction of text difficulty. Semantic difficulty and syntactic complexity are two such measures. Semantic difficulty refers to the ease of recognition and comprehension of individual words within a reading passage. Semantic difficulty is measured either by the length of words (i.e., the number of syllables or letters in a word) or by the absence of a word on a word list (based on frequency counts).

Syntactic complexity, on the other hand, refers to the difficulty of the structure of language, and is usually analyzed on the sentence level. Most research studies have related syntactic complexity to sentence length. Thus, the mean number of words per sentence has been the most common measure of syntactic complexity.

Many readability formulas have been developed over the years. Out of these numerous formulas, some have grown in popularity and are more frequently used than the others. This popularity is partly due to the ease of application of these formulas, and partly due to their relative precision.

One of the earliest developed readability formulas is that of Flesch (Klare, 1984). The formula, which was designed for general (adult) reading materials, uses average sentence length in words, the number of personal references, and the number of affixes, as predictors of reading difficulty of a text. In subsequent formula, Flesch added "the number of syllables per 100 words" as another predictor of readability.

Dale and Chall are two other researchers who developed a practical readability formula. (Klare, 1984; Mirzaee, 1991). Their readability measure uses average sentence length and the relative number of words out of Dale's list of 3,000 words, as estimates of a text's difficulty level.

The Fox Index is a widely used readability formula (Klare, 1988). Average sentence length and the percentage of words of three or more syllables are the two elements on which the readability formula relies.

Another popular readability formula is that of Fry (1968). In this user-friendly formula, Fry makes use of the number of syllables per 100 words and the number of words per sentence as measures of readability. The user simply enters the count of these variables in a graph and reads the readability grade score directly from it.

Each of these has been used with some success, particularly with native speakers, but they also have been criticized to some extent for their narrowness in determining readability.

Discourse Elements

The concepts of "theme" and "rheme" have received relatively wide attention in the literature related to "Functional" or systemic grammar. The development of Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics has also added to the importance of these two concepts (see, for example: Brown & Yule, 1983; Cook, 1989, 1994; Eggins, 1994; Ghadessy, 1995; Halliday & Hasan, 1990; McCarthy, 1991).

However, the most extensive treatment of the concepts of theme and rheme is that of Halliday (1985). Halliday defines theme as "the element which serves as the point of departure of the message: it is that with which the clause is concerned" (p. 38). Whatever is not the theme is the rheme of the message. It becomes clear from these definitions that a message consists of two major elements: theme + rheme.

In English, theme is identified through word order; it is usually the element that comes first in the clause. In declarative sentences, if the theme and the grammatical subject of the clause coincide, then we label the theme as unmarked. Lack of conflation of these two elements will lead to a marked theme in a declarative sentence. Sentence 1 is an example of an unmarked theme; sentence 2 is an instance of marked theme.

> 1. I caught the first ball.
> Theme

> 2. Today, I learned that Mary had a little lamb.
> Theme

Themes can also be multiple or simple. Simple themes are made up of one element or "two or more elements forming a single complete element" (Halliday, 1991, p. 41). Sentence 3 is an example of a simple theme:

> 3. The Walrus and the Carpenter were both walking.
> Theme

A multiple theme, on the other hand, appears when the first element in the clause does not function as subject or complement. As a result, the subject, complement, or adjunct next following would be regarded as a part of the theme. In other words, in a multiple-theme "part of the clause functioning as theme has a further internal structure of its own." (Halliday, 1985, p. 53).

The internal structure of a multiple-theme is the result of the interaction of three semantic processes or meta-functions: Ideational, Interpersonal, and Textual.

Ideational meaning of the clause deals with its representational aspects. Here we treat the clause as the representation of experience. Interpersonal meaning is meaning as a form of action, and textual meaning looks at the relevance of a clause to its context.

A theme must always have an ideational element. However, the presence of interpersonal and textual meaning is not obligatory. Nevertheless, if a theme contains all three types of meaning at the same time, their order will be Textual + Interpersonal + Ideational. The ideational component in the theme is an entity that acts as subject, adjunct or complement, which is sometimes referred to as "topical theme".

Thematic structure is not just limited to clause elements; it can also be detected at clause and text levels. An example of theme at clause level is "predicated theme" or what is termed in traditional grammar as "cleft-sentence". The function of such themes is the "explicit formulation of contrast" (p. 60), as it is indicated in the following sentence:

> It was Mary Magdalene, not Mary the Mother of Jesus, who had been
> the real, if secret object of Mariolatry cults through the ages.

The choice of theme in clauses of a text is not haphazard; it is in fact one of the organizing principles of any type of discourse, what Halliday (1985) refers to as the method of development of a text.

Core vs. Non-Core Words

Vocabulary has been a relatively neglected variable in foreign language instruction (Celce-Murcia and Rosenweig, 1979; Seal, 1991). The demise of Audiolingualism and the rejection of its linguistic foundations did not result in the long-expected revival of lexical studies. It does not mean that no attention has been paid to the role of vocabulary in L2 instruction; there have been a number of valuable studies dealing with the role of L2 lexical items in foreign language instruction (for a review, see Carter & McCarthy, 1988; and Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997). However, the lion's share of research has gone to studying the L2 syntax.

Early L2 lexical studies were mainly in the form of word lists and frequency counts (Thorndike & Lorge, 1944; West, 1959). Few serious attempts have been made to classify word categories in L2 through semantic or functional criteria. A relevant study, however, is a paper by Carter (1988). Carter classifies vocabulary items into two general groups: Core and non-core. "The term core vocabulary is used to describe those elements in the lexical network of a language which are unmarked. That is, they usually constitute the most normal basis of simple words available to the language user" (p. 9). According to Carter, core words have clear synonyms, high collocation frequency, are

used for defining words, lack connotations, do not belong to a specific domain, and ar
usually superordinate terms. Words that do not possess these qualities are non-core.

The Study

Aims

The study reported here aimed to find out the extent to which discourse elements ca
determine readability of texts. So many readability formulas have been developed t
determine the appropriacy of passages for an intended population. Attempts were mad
in this study to see if the discourse elements could be taken as reliable criteria for rankin
the texts according to their levels of difficulty. Significant correlations between th
rankings gained by the existing readability formulas, the reliability and validity of whic
have already been established, and the rankings gained by the use of the criteria base
on discourse elements may show that the new profile is also dependable.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. Will there be a significant relationship between the different rankings of the tex
   based on the Flesch formula and the discourse elements?

2. Will the rankings of the texts based on the Flesch formula highly correlate wi
   the ranking of the same texts based on advanced students' performance.

3. Will the ranking of texts based on the Flesch formula correlate highly with t
   ranking of the same texts based on intermediate subjects' performance?

4. Do the ranking of the texts based on the discourse elements significan
   correlate with the advanced students' performance, resulting in the conclusi
   that the ranking of the texts based on discourse elements are at least as relial
   (for advanced students) as readability formulas?

5. Do the ranking of the texts based on the discourse elements significan
   correlate with the intermediate students' performance, resulting in the conclusi
   that the ranking of the texts based on discourse elements are as reliable (
   intermediate students) as readability formulas?

Subjects

A total of 208 subjects participated in this study. All the subjects were English ma
students studying at an Iranian state university. One group of 136 subjects took a reti
TOEFL and 72 others took another retired TOEFL, the listening parts of which had b

omitted. For the purposes of this study, the subjects' performance on the Reading Comprehension texts were taken for data analysis. Of course, the classification of subjects into advanced, and intermediate groupings were based on their performance on the whole tests. The advanced subjects were those whose score was one standard deviation above the mean and the intermediate ones were those who score was between .5 standard deviation above the mean or 0.5 standard deviation below the mean. From among the subjects selected in this way, only those who had answered all the comprehension questions of the texts of each TOEFL were chosen. Altogether, the data related to 65 subjects entered the process of data analysis: 26 from the advanced level and 39 from the intermediate level. The lowest proficiency group, whose scores were less than 0.5 standard deviation below the mean, were excluded from the study because they failed to answer all the comprehension questions.

Procedures

Data collection: The ten texts, five from TOEFL 1, and five from TOEFL 2, were analyzed from different viewpoints.

First, the Flesch grade level of difficulty of each text was determined.

Second, each text was analyzed for the number of core and non-core words it contained. The framework used for this purpose was that suggested by Carter (1988).

Third, each text was analyzed for the thematic structure it contained; the number of simple themes, multiple themes, ellipted themes, clauses as theme, and the independent clauses was counted.

Fourth, the number of marked and unmarked topical themes were counted for each text.

Fifth, the number of the correct answers given by subjects for each text was counted once for the advanced subjects and once for intermediate ones.

Data Processing

First, for the simple themes, multiple themes, ellipted themes, unmarked and marked topical themes, the proportion of their frequency over the total number of independent clauses was calculated.

Second, all the data gathered through the first stage were used to rank the texts. Each text was given a rank based on several criteria including: The Flesch grade level; the number of simple themes; the number of clauses as themes; the number of unmarked themes; the number of marked themes; the number of core words; the number of non-core words; the number of correct responses given by advanced students; the number of correct responses given by intermediate students; and the number of independent clauses.

Table 1 shows the ranking given for each text based on the results of all these analyses:

Table 1

The Ranking of Texts According to all Criteria

Texts	simple theme	multiple theme	ellipted theme	clause as theme	unmarked theme	marked theme	core words	non-core words	Flesch Grade level	Advanced students	e students
1	9	5	2	7	5.5	6	7	10	7	7	10
2	1	8	8	9	2	9	4	5	8	10	9
3	6	7	9	2	3	7	6	2	5	1	5
4	2	9	10	3	8	4	5	7	2	5	7
5	4.5	3.5	6	4	7	5	2	1	3	3	1
6	10	1	5	6	5.5	3	10	9	10	9	8
7	7	2	4	10	1	8	3	3	6	8	6
8	3	10	7	1	10	1	9	6	1	6	4
9	8	6	2	5	9	2	1	4	4	4	3
10	4.5	3.5	2	8	4	10	8	8	9	2	2

Results and Discussion

Addressing the first question, the rank order correlations between the Flesch grade level and the discourse elements were calculated. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

The Rank Order Correlation Between Flesch and Discourse Elements

	Simple theme	Multiple theme	Ellipted theme	Clause as theme	Unmarked theme	Marked theme	Core words	Non-core words
Flesch	.407	.638	.423	.721	.644	.566	.33	.442

To test these correlations for significance, the obtained values were transformed into *t*-values and a null hypothesis was formulated (Table 3).

Table 3

The *t*-values for the Correlations Between Flesch and Discourse Elements

	Simple theme	Multiple theme	Ellipted theme	Clause as theme	Unmarked theme	Marked theme	Core words	Non-core words
Flesch	1.26	2.312*	1.32	2.944*	2.383*	1.929*	.988	1.395

As can be seen, there is a significant correlation (t_{crit} =1.86, p=.05, df=8) between the ranking of texts based on the Flesch formula and that based on some of the discourse elements including multiple theme, clause as theme, unmarked theme, and marked theme. In other words, the rankings produced by the use of multiple theme, clause as theme, unmarked theme, and marked theme are as reliable as those produced by the use of Flesch.

Research question 2 addresses the reliability of the Flesch formula itself: First, the texts were ranked according to the subjects' performance. The attempt was made to find out the extent to which this ranking correlates with the ranking produced by the Flesch formula. The performance of the advanced and intermediate subjects were dealt with separately.

Tables 4 and 5 show the rank order correlation and *t*-values between Flesch and the performance of the subjects for the two levels of proficiency.

Table 4

The Rank Order Correlation Between Flesch and the
Performance of Advanced and Intermediate Subjects

	Advanced	Intermediate
Flesch	.345	.381

Table 5

The t-values for the Correlations Between Flesch and the
Performance of Advanced and Intermediate Subjects

	Advanced	Intermediate
Flesch	1.413	1.168

Since the necessary value of t for significance at the .05 level with 8 degrees of freedom is 1.86, we cannot reject our null hypothesis. In other words, that which Flesch predicts to be difficult is not so for advanced students, neither is it difficult for the intermediate ones; though, of course, there is a trend in the expected direction.

To answer questions 4 & 5, the rank order correlations between the rankings of texts based on the performance of the advanced students and the rankings based on discourse elements were calculated. The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

The Rank Order Correlations Between the Advanced
Students' Performance and the Discourse Elements

	Simple	Multiple	Ellipted	Clause	Unmarked	Marked	Core	Non-core
Advanced Students	.06	.109	.006	.667	.133	.054	.475	.503

As can be seen from Table 7, a good determinant of the level of difficulty of texts for advanced students is clause as theme; core words and non-core words also show a trend in this direction.

Table 7

The *t*-values for the Correlations Between the
Advanced Students' Performance and the Discourse Elements

	Simple	Multiple	Ellipted	Clause	Unmarked	Marked	Core	Non-core
Advanced Students	.172	.311	.017	2.691*	.378	.154	1.53	1.646

As far as the intermediate subjects are concerned, the rank order correlations between the rankings of the texts based on their performance and the discourse elements are calculated and later adapted to *t*-values. Tables 8 and 9 show the results.

Table 8

The Rank Order Correlations Between the Intermediate Students'
Performance and the Discourse Elements

	Simple theme	Multiple theme	Ellipted theme	Clause as theme	Unmarked theme	Marked theme	Core words	Non-core words
Intermediate	.145	.072	.3	.303	.322	.127	.503	.539

Table 9

The *t*-values for the Correlations Between the Intermediate
Subjects' Performance and the Discourse Elements

	Simple theme	Multiple theme	Ellipted theme	Clause as theme	Unmarked theme	Marked theme	Core words	Non-core words
Intermediate	.417	.206	.891	.857	.962	.363	1.646	1.818

The results show that the best determinant (though not statistically significant) for the readability of texts for intermediate students is the non-core words.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that certain discourse elements can be reliable indicators of the readability of texts. If texts are ranked based on the number of multiple themes, clauses as themes, unmarked and marked structures they contain, the results will

highly correlate with the ranks given to texts based on the Flesch Formula. However, the Flesch Formula ranking of texts is different from that obtained by the performance of the advanced or intermediate students. But the rankings based on the clauses used as themes significantly correlate with rankings based on the advanced subjects' performance. And for the intermediate subjects, the ranking based on non-core words are better determinants of text difficulty.

In summary, readability is the product of many text and learner-related variables. The more variables are taken into consideration in determining readability, the more likely such a measure will possess predictive validity. The measure of discourse-level elements described in this study seem equally as predictive of student performance as traditional syntactic/morphological ones, and deserve inclusion in further studies on the determination of what is more or less difficult; what is readable, and what is not.

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Tips for Teachers

Ambiguous Phenomena May Be Used Positively In ESL Classes

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Ambiguity in language refers to a word, a structure, or pronunciation of words in a sentence that can be understood in more than one way. Each language has its own specific ambiguous phenomena. Such phenomena may be obstacles for learners of English as a second language, but if we use them positively, they can be extremely helpful to the learners. It sometimes happens that what seems most difficult in an endeavor turns out to be a window of opportunity for solving a problem. So, when students are confused by ambiguous phenomena in the English language, knowledge of how to deal with them will not only make the learning of the language less painful, it may also offer positive advantages. For this reason, the teacher should not be afraid to focus attention on ambiguous phenomena from time to time.

Helping students to grasp various meanings of a word, phrase, or sentence in different contexts is an example of this. One might focus on the word "bill" which has many different meanings as a noun. The following sentence with "bill" can be explained in four ways.

"The bill is large."

> The jaw of the bird is large.
>
> The paper shows a large amount of money must be paid.
>
> The paper money is of high value.
>
> The printed notice is large in size.

We can see that this one word may be difficult because it has any of a variety of meanings, with its correct meaning arising from the context in which it is being used.

The ambiguity can be explained, then, by teaching the students to look always for the context. In learning new words they should form the habit of learning them as they are used in sentences, or sentences that reflect the various possible uses of the word. This is, in fact, the way in which any good foreign language dictionary presents foreign language words in their various meanings.

Linguists have classified different types of ambiguity with a number of labels including: Lexical, Semantic, Non-lexical, Grammatical, Structural/Constructional, Syntactic, Derivational, Ambiguous in Scope, or Ambiguous in Speech. But it is usually treated in three broad categories: Lexical, structural and oral.

Lexical ambiguity is exemplified above by the various noun meanings of the word "bill." Structural ambiguity may be demonstrated by the meaning of the same words arranged in different sentence structures.

For example: "The dog looked longer than the cat." Either the dog appeared longer in its bodily length than the cat did, or, the dog looked (at whatever) for a longer length of time than the cat did.

Ambiguity in speech arises from peculiarities of pronunciation as in the case of homophones and homonyms. For example, the homophones "bear" and "bare" both pronounced /b r/ or the homophones "write," "rite," "right" and "wright" all pronounced /rayt/. The homonyms "fair" (having a good clear clean appearance or quality) and "fair" (a market) are the same both in spelling and pronunciation, or "bark" (to make the sound that dogs make) and "bark" (the strong outer covering of a tree), or "minute" (one of the 60 parts into which an hour is divided) and "minute" (very small, in size or degree); or the sentence: /ð s nz reyz miyt/ can be understood as follows:

The sun's rays meet.

The sons raise meat.

My students benefit in three ways from their careful study of ambiguity. First, they more easily overcome difficulties in comprehension. Secondly, they acquire more extensive vocabularies. Third, they maintain a higher level of enthusiasm for their language study. The last of these may be most critical.

In class, the students are presented with ambiguous sentences. First, they try to infer the meanings of such a sentence. They are encouraged to tell as many of the alternative meanings as they can. Students see this as a challenge, and compete in supplying meanings. As they provide various meanings, I write them on the chalkboard, adding any that they are unable to recognize.

Some further examples:

Hugo is drawing a picture of a cart.

> Hugo is drawing a picture of a cart.
>
> Hugo is pulling a cart.

She couldn't bear children.

> She couldn't give birth to children.
>
> She couldn't put up with children.

She took in the stranger.

> She brought the stranger inside.
>
> She deceived the stranger.
>
> She received the stranger and provided the stranger with lodgings.

The boy looked better than his companion.

> The boy appeared handsome or healthier than his companion.
>
> The boy had better eyesight than his companion.
>
> The boy performed better than his companion.

He looked over the old fence.

> He inspected the old fence.
>
> He looked at something on the other side of the fence.

Susan has more expensive clothes than I have.

> Susan has a greater quantity of expensive clothes than I have.
>
> Susan's clothes are more expensive than mine.

Smith and Lucy are married.

> Smith and Lucy are married to each other.
>
> Smith and Lucy are married, but not to each other.

They weren't at home for the whole day.

> For the whole day, they weren't at home.
>
> It's not true that they were at home the *whole* day.
>
> (contrary meanings!)

In each class, when we touch on ambiguous words or structures, I treat them, not as "another difficulty of the English language," but as a fascinating, even amusing, peculiarity for which there is an easy method to gain clear comprehension: consider the whole, consider the context. We say "where there is a will there is a way." Equally true, "where there is a way, there is a will."

Acknowledgement

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Class Parties: Making them Part of the Curriculum
J. Perry Christensen, Brigham Young University—Hawaii

Due to the intimate atmosphere developed in many ESL classroom settings, it is felt appropriate or even desirable to have a closing class party or celebration. Oftentimes the party is hurriedly planned with the teacher or class leader making last minute food and other assignments. Sometimes a short discussion may pursue on what video to watch or what activities to do. On the day of the party, the class sits around, eats, watches a video, or does some other meaningless activity that adds little to the advancement of the student's English skills.

Over the years I have experienced many of these meaningless parties. I have wrestled with ideas of how to have a successful party where the students enjoy themselves, yet English is still the focus. I believe I have finally found one answer. It lies in the preparation for the party. In this teaching tip, I shall describe how to plan and hold a fun successful party by having the students make a party booklet.

A party booklet is a task that combines several language skills. It is assigned about three weeks before the scheduled party date, giving the class plenty of time to brainstorm, plan, write, and revise. Below is an outline of things that could be included in a party booklet.

Booklet	Definition
Cover	The cover adds professionalism to the booklet. Students good in art or graphic design could apply their talents here. It also helps the students to choose an appropriate title.

Title Page	The title page restates the title, lists the authors, and recognizes for which class or institution the booklet is being made.
Table of Contents	This lists the order and page number of the items included in the booklet. It builds global organizational skills.
Introduction	The introduction summarizes what is in the booklet and states the purpose for having the party.
Agenda	This is a chronological list depicting the time and venue for starting the party, each activity to be completed, and a time for the party to end. It helps to keep the party moving.
Map	The map is used in giving directions to the party (such as the teacher's house or restaurant). If the party is a field trip, the map would also mark the sights and places to be visited.
Menu	The menu involves planning and discussion. It may generate ideas for possible cooking demonstrations and explanations. Recipes for traditional food from each of the students' respective countries could certainly be added.
Assignments	The assignment page is a written document outlining what each person in the class contributed to the planning and preparation of the party. It involves planning, group work, and delegating.
Demonstrations	This is one of the activities to be done at the party. The steps for each demonstration should be written in the party booklet. The steps could be in outline or paragraph form. This builds the students' ability to plan or write a process paragraph It also helps each student identify vocabulary words that will be needed as the student gives the oral presentation portion at the party.
Activities	These should be described in the party booklet with accompanying directions and a list of items needed to complete each activity. Possible suggestions include playing traditional games, teaching a new dance step, offering toasts, and/or presenting awards. The list of possibilities is endless once a class puts its mind to planning a party.
Autograph Page	The final page may contain a class picture or wallet sized pictures with a short biography of each student. This page is a natural place for students to collect autographs from each other.

*Many of the ideas listed could be changed or adapted, and others added, for use in a myriad of class activity situations.

A Personal Experience

While teaching in Samoa, I taught a group of college age students who were learning English as preparation for entrance into an American university. It became a tradition to have an end-of-semester beach barbecue. The plans were often hurried and the party mostly consisted of eating. When the food was gone, the party dragged or ended. Furthermore, the students often reverted back to their native language of Samoan and only used English when addressing me. I felt a bit guilty using precious class time for these parties. Finally, I was determined to turn the party into a neatly disguised learning project.

About three weeks before the end of the semester, I asked the class if they would like to have a party. Of course, they eagerly agreed. I then told them they would have to earn the party. As part of earning the party the class would have to work together to compile a small 10–12 page booklet that would require research, planning, and organization. We would use this booklet as the guide for our party. I took the rest of the class period explaining what this booklet would entail and laying down some ground rules.

Enthusiasm suddenly vanished. It seemed that the amount of work would be greater than the pleasure gained. But, with some prodding I was able to get them to choose a class leader and get started.

As the students began brainstorming about the location and the activities we would engage in, the enthusiasm started to grow again. I would even say some got rather excited. After the plans had been solidified and the booklet was being prepared, one of the students was so excited about the party that he kept asking me, "Are we really going to do it? Are we really going to have our party?" I was happy to see the anticipation and excitement building within each of my students. It appeared to me that the plans the students were making were far better than what I could have come up with on my own. They also encouraged each other to complete the various parts of the party booklet. In the end, the students planned and compiled a wonderful booklet for a beach barbecue.

On the day of the party, we followed the agenda written in the booklet. We borrowed a school van and drove to the far end of our island. There we parked the van and took a short boat ride to a small secluded island where we had our barbecue and beach activities. While the food was cooking, various students did demonstrations. Each of these demonstrations had the major steps outlined in our party booklet. One student demonstrated how to climb a coconut tree. Another showed how to husk a coconut. A third showed how to open the coconut for drinking and explained how to scrape the meat out. Others demonstrated how to weave palm fronds, peel and cook

green bananas, do traditional dance moves, and wear traditional clothing. They were all excited as they shared their culture with each other and me.

In summary, the whole point of having a party is to have fun. By getting the students involved in the planning process, anticipation builds, interest is generated, and success is insured. Furthermore, a party booklet helps the students to act and interact in English, thereby turning the traditional class party into a wonderful educational experience while providing a tangible record of names and memories.

$$\text{♦ ♦}$$

Authentic Foreign Language Materials in the EFL Classroom

Daniel Linder, Cursos Internacionales de la Universidad de Salamanca,Spain

In most European countries, English is learned as a foreign language, not as a second language. The implication for the use of authentic materials written in English in such classrooms is much greater than might be thought. In the ESL classroom, authentic materials such as transportation schedules, radio programs, and television broadcasts may be obtained locally and will have an immediacy which these learners will sense and be able to put into practice instantly. However, for the EFL classroom, authentic materials must be gathered in the U.S. or other English-speaking countries and may call for a certain amount of imagination on the part of these learners to apply. Other issues such as student age and mixed ability to deal with materials which have not been adapted will also distance some of these materials from the EFL learner. In my personal experience, most of my maps, timetables, song introduction segments on cassette, and television advertisements on video are completely lost on young adult learners unless there is a strong attitudinal link to the material, and lost also on mature adult learners unless the materials deal directly with aspects they can apply at work. The following activities are a selection of the many that I use in my lessons which make use of locally available materials written in the students' L1 and which do have an immediate usefulness for them.

I would like to make a small aside before introducing them, however. None of the activities is designed to be a translation activity. Each one of these activities is designed to give input, whether for information-gap type activities, project work, or other activities which require an input of facts and information. The language learners are expected to only use English in the output stage.

1. Gossip Columns/Articles:

Almost every film/music, fashion, or teenage fan magazine has a one-page section featuring short articles that showcase the rich and famous, and almost everybody likes to keep up to date on their eventful lives. Photocopy several different pages from these sections and hand one out to each student. Have them read about the people who they are interested in and give the class a summary in their own words. This activity has worked very well with a young adult class which had previously been very reluctant to open up. This activity may also be done with audio or audiovisual pieces rather than magazine texts.

2. Proper Names for Pronunciation:

Locally produced pronunciations of people and place names can range from the literal syllable-by-syllable pronunciations to those far off the mark. Photocopy small articles from newspapers which give a range of people and place names and have the students read them out in the L1, but concentrate on pronouncing the names properly. This exercise can be very revealing for those who mispronounce Arkansas, Tom Cruise, and so on. It may also be a chance to practice some words that are a part of the place names, but are often translated into the students' L1, such as New York, South Dakota or the Rocky Mountains.

3. Interviews with Questions:

Interviews of people in the news often appear in "question and answer" form in newspapers and magazines. Photocopy a one-page interview of this type from a suitable source newspaper or magazine and have the students read through it. Then do an exercise similar to #1 above by asking your students questions in the third person or using indirect speech and having them give you the interviewee's answer in their own words. Once they have been exposed to the English question either in the third person or using indirect speech, ask them the question in the second person or using direct speech and have them answer in the first.

4. Film Titles:

Commercial film titles vary from the non-translation to the complete adaptation. You can have students work with film titles in a three step process. First, they may be exposed to the idea of how widely titles may vary by doing a matching exercise to raise their awareness. Second, select a number of film titles as they were commercialized in the L1 and have them try to render them into English. Give them the original titles of their own knowledge and amusement. Third, have them take well-known films in their own language and try to render them for an English-speaking audience. Examine

together with them why some will work and others will not, whether the reasons be linguistic or pragmatic. The film titles to be used can be selected on the basis of linguistic components to be practiced.

5. A Critical Look at Dubbed Material:

Often dubbed material sounds strange and foreign to the L1 ear, but this is not entirely the fault of those responsible for the dub-readers' script. Oftentimes, mouth movement determines a linguistic choice, however inaccurate it may sound to the L1 native speaker. Have students keep notes on expressions of this type while watching T.V. at home or films in the cinema, and discuss them in class. Try to stimulate your students to produce the English of the original. Be flexible in accepting the "original" sentences they offer up.

In summary, I encourage teachers to think creatively about the term "authentic" materials and not be afraid of the wider use of local sources that can offer fertile points of departure.

Conference Announcements

Peru TESOL (Peru-TESOL). July 31–August 2, 1999. 8th annual conference, Lima, Peru. Proposal deadline, June 7, 1999. Contact Liliana Nunez, Pasaje Schell 121, Suite 300, Miraflores, Lima 18 Peru. Tel/Fax 511-444-2329 or Tel. 511-991-1830. E-mail: tesoler1@amauta.rcp.net.pe.

12th World Congress of Applied Linguistics (AILA '99) and the **Japan Association of College English Teachers** (JACET), Tokyo. August 2-6, 1999. Information: Secretariat for AILA '99 Tokyo, Simul International, Kowa Bldg. No 9, 1-8-10 Akasaka, Minato-ku, Tokyo 107, Japan. Tel. 81-3-3586-8691. Http://langue.hyper.chubu.ac.jp/jacet/AILA99/

Paraguay TESOL (ParaTESOL). August 21–22, 1999. Conference, Asuncion, Paraguay. Contact Mrs. Stael Rufinelli de Ortiz, Gral. Santos 606, Asunción, Paraguay. Tel/Fax 59521-202-630. E-mail: staelins@mmail.com.

Association of Teachers of English of the Czech Republic (ATECR). September 16–18, 1999. LSP Forum, Prague, Czech Republic. Contact Marta Chroma, Dept. of Foreign Languages, Law Faculty of Charles University, Nám. Curiovych 7, 116 40 Prah 1. Tel. 420-2-21005387. Fax 420-2-24810472. E-mail: chroma@ius.prf.cuni.cz.

Accent Lab and *American Speechsounds*

Review by Brent Green
Church College of Western Samoa

ACCENT LAB. Accent Technologies, 12240 Venice Blvd., Suite 22, Los Angeles, CA: 1996. $39.95

AMERICAN SPEECHSOUNDS. Speech Communication, Inc. Newport Beach, CA: 1997. Personal version $69.95 with academic discount; Professional version $199 with academic discount.

The recent resurgence of interest in pronunciation teaching has spawned the development of numerous ESL/EFL computer-based pronunciation hardware and software. *American Speechsounds* and *Accent Lab* are two recent software programs that have hit the market.

Both programs are designed to run on any multimedia PC. *Accent Lab* comes packaged on three floppy disks and runs in a Microsoft Windows 3.1 or Windows 95 environment. *American Speechsounds* requires a CD-Rom drive and runs in Windows 95. *American Speechsounds* comes with a separate hard copy users' guide which includes detailed information about vowel and consonant articulations and supplemental word lists. *Accent Lab's* on-line users' guide helps answer technical questions about running the software. The articulation hints are found within the program lessons. *American Speechsounds'* professional version and *Accent Lab* are equipped with authoring capabilities so teachers can add their own lesson materials if desired.

Both *American Speechsounds* and *Accent Lab* primarily teach the pronunciation of North American English segmentals through digitized listening and speaking activities. The instructional activities of *American Speechsounds* are divided into four units. Three units provide both listening and speaking practice at the sound, word, and sentence level, while the fourth quizzes students' ability to perceive minimal pair differences at the sound and word levels. Since there is no time limit on any of the activities, students can listen, record, and play back as many times as they would like.

In addition to providing native models, recording, and playback features, *Accent Lab* offers a detailed analysis and visual comparison of student and native speaker utterances through pitch diagrams, spectrograms and vowel and consonant charts. The basic *Accent Lab* lesson involves listening to a sentence taken from Rebecca Dauers'

Accurate English: A Complete Course in Pronunciation (1993), recording it, and then proceeding through a three-step visual analysis.

While both have pleasing visual appeal and sound qualities, there is very little instructional variety and the behavioristic-based practice (listen, record, play back) of *American Speechsounds* isn't a very appealing approach to pronunciation teaching. The underlying pedagogical foundation for *American Speechsounds,* and to some extent, *Accent Lab,* is the belief that if students listen to a native speaker model enough times the will be able to produce the correct form. While this may be an effective approach for some learners, others may not have the ability to hear the differences. *Accent Lab's* visual comparisons add an extra instructional dimension, but students may be confused by the spectrograms. Also, after several attempts, even native speakers have a hard time appropriating the native models on the pitch diagrams and vowel and consonant charts.

Perhaps the most noticeable shortcoming of both programs is the lack of suprasegmental practice activities and instruction guides. *American Speechsounds* ignores these aspects and *Accent Lab* only offers very basic intonation practice. Another weakness of *American Speechsounds* is the lack of on-line articulation guides. The learner must refer back to the hard copy users' guide to get help with consonant and vowel pronunciations.

While there may be some value in using *American Speechsounds* and *Accent Lab* as support tools for classroom pronunciation instruction, the sound, word, and sentence-level instruction that is provided still offers very little help in meeting discourse-level pronunciation demands. Therefore, I would not recommend the use of either program as the one and only approach to pronunciation teaching.

References

Dauer, R. M. (1993). *Accurate English: A Complete Course in Pronunciation.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Regents.

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About the Reviewer

Brent A. Green directs the Samoa English as an International Language Program at the Church College of Western Samoa, Pesega, Western Samoa. He has taught ESL/EFL in the Marshall Islands, Taiwan, Tonga, Hawaii and Utah.

English and the Discourses of Colonialism

Review by Daniel Linder
Cursos Internacionales de la Universidad de Salamanca, Spain

ENGLISH AND THE DISCOURSES OF COLONIALISM. Allistair Pennycock. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.

The cultural debate on the lingering discourses of colonialism/imperialism has touched the English language teaching (ELT) profession on two different occasions. In 1992, Robert Philipson published *Linguistic Imperialism*, and now, in 1998, Allistair Pennycock has published *English and the Discourses of Colonialism*, an analysis of how the discourses of colonialism "adhere" to the English language itself—a topic of potential interest to all of those in the ELT profession.

Pennycock combines his personal insights gained while teaching English in Hong Kong with solid academic research conducted before the territory was handed over to mainland China. He also makes reference to other East Asian former British colonies, including Australia, where he lives and works. He has concluded that within the spaces where colonialist discourse has taken place, both in the colonies and within Britain itself, certain representations of the colonizer (the Self) and the colonized (the Other) have a way of "adhering" to the English language itself, while producing and reproducing (what Pennycock refers to as "(re)producing") each other reciprocally. This is how these colonialist discourses have remained even though the physical colonial presence has departed. These discourses of the Self and the Other become available to the speakers of English, whether native or non-native, while resistance discourses are made unavailable to those who most need them. These concepts of adherence and availability of discourses are newly introduced by Pennycock here.

TESL Reporter readers will enjoy chapters 5 and 6 the most. In chapter 6, Pennycock locates the source of adherent notions concerning the English language itself (the TE in TESOL), such as English as a dynamic language with a greater vocabulary and simpler grammar than others, outside the discourses of education and applied linguistics. In chapter 7, the author discusses how notions about our students (the SOL) emanate from similar sources, become fixed as a stereotype, and continue to be (re)produced through popular discourse, ELT materials, and textbooks.

Allistair Pennycock's book only marginally mentions the U.S. as a space of

even though Britain's physical colonies have been handed back, colonialist discourse continues. However, he leaves a gap by not studying the discourses of U.S. cultural and social colonialism. Such an analysis will be needed to fill this gap left by Pennycock.

About the Reviewer

Daniel Linder has taught English as a foreign language at Cursos Internacionales, Universidad de Salamanca (Spain) for the last ten years. His professional interests also include translation, a field with which he is involved as translator and member of the Institute of Linguists (London). He welcomes comments at <dlinder@gugu.usal.es> or <amateos@gugu.usal.es>.

Conference Announcements

Panama TESOL. September 17–19, 1999. Conference, "Advancing to the Millennium," Panama City, Republic of Panama. Contact Marcela Peart Dickens, PO Box 246 9A, Panama 9A, Republic of Panama. Tel. 507-221-9952. Fax 507-224-4113.

SLRF 99, September 23–26, 1999. University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Theme: The Interaction of social and cognitive factors in SLA. Proposal deadline 1/1/99; send to slrf@tc.umn.edu and include "paper submission" or "poster submission" in the subject heading. Http://languagecenter.cla.umn.edu/es1/slrf99

Korea TESOL (KOTESOL). October 1–3, 1999. Conference, "Teaching English: Asian Contexts and Culture," Seoul, South Korea. Contact Jane Hoelker, OAC2 Public Relations Chair, Pusan National University, San 30 Jangjeon-don, Pusan 609-735 South Korea. Fax 8251-583-3869. E-mail: hoelker@hyon.cc.pusan.ac.kr orhoelkerj@hotmail.com. Http://www2.gol.com/users/pnd1/PAC/PACmain/pacintro.html.

JALT 99. October 8–11, 1999. Maebashi Green Dome, Maebashi-shi, Gunma-ken Japan. "Teacher action, teacher belief: Connecting research and the classroom." See call for papers and online submission forms at www.seafolk.ne.jp/kqjalt/submissions/html

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). November 19–21, 1999, Dallas. Information: ACTFL, 6 Executive Plaza, Yonkers, NY 10701. Tel. 914-963-8830. Fax 914-963-1275.

TESOL. March 21–25, 2000, Vancouver. Contact TESOL Conventions Dept., 1600 Cameron Street Suite 300, Alexandria VA 22314. Tel. 703-836-0774. Fax 703-836-7864. E-mail: conv@tesol.edu. Http://www.tesol.edu

Notes to Contributors

The *TESL Reporter* is a semiannual publication of the Language, Literature, and Communications Division of Brigham Young University–Hawaii, and is dedicated to the dissemination of ideas and issues of interest to teachers of English to speakers of other languages worldwide.

Manuscripts relevant to teaching English as a second/foreign language, bilingual education, intercultural education and communication, and teacher preparation in these areas are welcomed and should be submitted (in duplicate) to the editor. Manuscripts dealing with classroom implications of the above are especially encouraged.

Manuscripts should be typed and double spaced throughout, generally not exceeding fifteen pages. Each manuscript should be accompanied by a cover sheet with the title; author's name, position, and address; and a short (less than 50 words) biodata statement. Identifying information should not appear elsewhere in the manuscript in order to insure an impartial review. Authors are encouraged to follow APA style and review past issues of the *TESL Reporter* for matters of style. Any tables, graphs, or illustrations should be sent in camera-ready form whenever possible.

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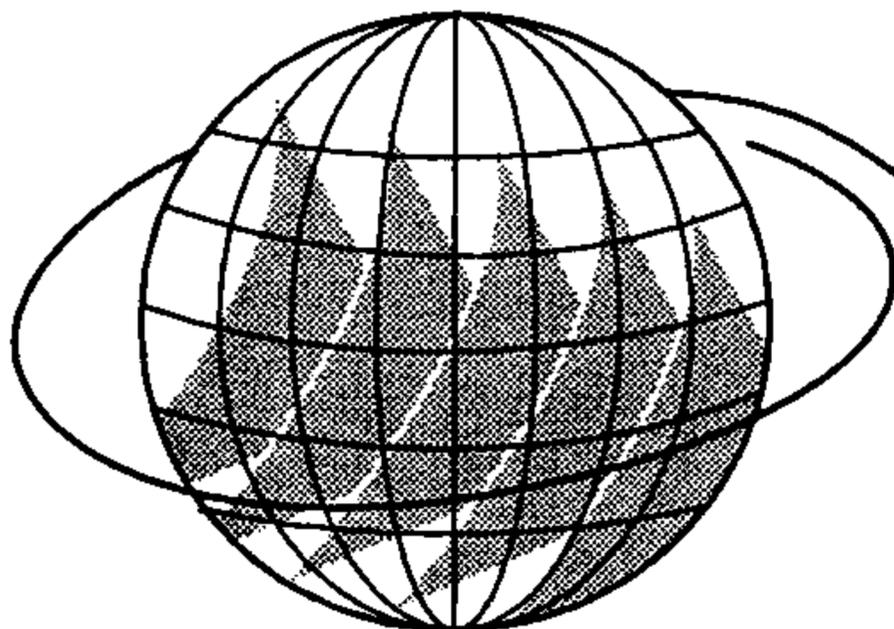
Reviews of recent textbooks, resource materials, tests, and non-print materials (films, tapes, or computer software) are also invited. Potential reviewers who indicate a particular area of interest to the review editor will be contacted concerning recent titles in that area. Requests for review guidelines should be addressed to the review editor. Authors of published reviews will receive two complimentary copies of the issue in which the review is published.

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