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# Intermediate TPR: What Do You Do After They Stand Up?

by Dale Griffee, Tokai University

Whoever follows the way of life feels alive,  
whoever uses it properly feels well used.

—Lao Tzu

Many teachers regard Total Physical Response (TPR) or learning through actions as a technique best suited for children or beginning language students. This is understandable because the type of language used in TPR is frequently the type used when talking to children. As Asher noted:

Utterances, usually commands from adults, are used to manipulate the orientation, relation, and locomotion of the child's entire body. This phenomenon can be observed in a massive number of commands as:

"Come here!"

"Stand still!"

"Don't make a fist when I'm trying to put on your coat!"

"Pick up the red truck and put it in the toy box in your room!" (1982:3).

This article will look at TPR from the point of view of a classroom teacher. It will consider both the strong and weak points of this technique and then consider a slightly different application suitable for high beginners or low intermediate students.

## Advantages of TPR

Perhaps the single most impressive feature of TPR is its simplicity. There are no charts to learn, no pedagogical training to master, no linguistic theory to comprehend. One person, usually the teacher, tells another

person or persons, usually students, to perform an action while at the same time performing that action himself. Later it becomes possible for the teacher to give commands without performing the action himself. With a little practice, students are able to understand and perform long and sometimes complicated sentence-commands. From the student's point of view, TPR can be summarized as you see, you hear and you act.

Another point to consider is communication. Since the 1970's we have been increasingly aware of the need to incorporate communication into our teaching. Indeed, it has come to the point that an instructional methodology that does not include communicative competence is not judged as adequate. At least three points can be made relative to TPR and communication.

1. TPR emphasizes communication in the natural spoken voice. In the sentence-command, "Go to the door" students listen for the *what* and the *where* of the sentence. It is not necessary to catch or to understand the preposition "to" or to engage in lengthy discussion on the difference between the use of "a door" and "the door".

2. Register and levels of politeness, considered important in a spoken language, can be introduced in the classroom because the command form can take several forms. Consider this one command:

Mary, go to the door.

Mary, could you go to the door.

Mary, can you go to the door, please.

Mary, if it's not too much trouble, could you go to the door.

3. It is possible to give the command in a natural spoken English which can include the natural contractions and reductions of spoken language. In other words, you-don't-have-to-speak-like-this.

A final comment on the merits of TPR should include its flexibility. Actions that may or may not include speaking can be used to begin a class or may be used as short transitions from one activity to another. These include actions while sitting, pointing to objects, actions while sitting in a crowded classroom, moving things on a desk and learning simple classroom procedures in the target language. For more details see my article in the special TPR issue of *The Language Teacher* (Griffiee 1985).

### Drawbacks of TPR

But all that glitters is not gold and TPR has its problems points too. From the point of view of a classroom teacher, here are three of them.

1. TPR is very demanding on the teacher. TPR is energy intensive and hard on the voice. One class using TPR might be OK, but a series of TPR class drain energy from the teacher to an unacceptable degree and most teachers teach many classes.

2. There is a tendency to run out of commands. There are few natural props in a traditional classroom and there are a limited number of commands that involve doors and windows. This is not to say that a clever teacher can not invent many, perhaps an almost infinite series of commands from a limited number of objects, but most of us are not that clever.

3. Another problem is that there is no real reason for any of the actions. In this

sense, TPR is somewhat like a drill. Although unlikely, this dialogue is possible:

Teacher: Go to the door.

Student: Why?

If the above dialogue were to take place, what could the teacher say?

### A "Mini-drama" Solution

These problems forced me to take another look at how I was using TPR in my classroom (Griffiee 1981) and the remainder of this article deals with my solution which I call mini-dramas.

Drama gives a reason for the TPR actions in that drama contains a story and stories have meaning. To see how this might work, let's examine the construct of a mini-drama and the commands which accompany it and then see how they might be applied in a classroom.

### An Example

Since many students in Asia are familiar with public means of transportation such as a bus, taking a bus to the post office can be the subject of a mini-drama.

1. Passenger, go to the bus stop. **Look at the schedule.** Look at your watch. Wait for the bus. Here comes a bus. **Wave at the bus driver.**
2. Driver, stop the bus and open the door.
3. Passenger, ask the driver, "Do you go by the post office?"
4. Driver, say, "Yes."
5. Passenger, get on the bus, **hold a strap, and look around for a seat.** Stand there for a minute. Find a seat. **Sit down.**

6. Driver, drive the bus. Now, say, "Next stop, post office."
7. Passenger, push the button.
8. Driver, stop the bus in front of the post office.
9. Passenger, stand up, walk to the front of the bus, and put some money in the box next to the driver. Now get off the bus. Walk to the post office. Try to open the door. You can't open the door. Look at the sign on the door. The sign says "Closed on Sundays and Holidays." Put your hand on your forehead and say, "Oh, no. Today is Sunday." (Griffiee 1982:12)

From this mini-drama, TPR commands can be derived as seen below.

Point to a watch.  
 Point to the door.  
 Point to your hand.  
 Point to your forehead.  
 Put your hand on your forehead.

Open your hand.  
 Close your hands.  
 Wave your hand.

Look around.  
 Look at the chair.  
 Go to the chair.  
 Sit down on the chair.

Point to the calendar.  
 Go to the calendar and point to "today".  
 Now point to Sunday.  
 Now point to a holiday.

Walk to the calendar.  
 Find a holiday and point to it.  
 Find a Sunday and point to it.

Find today and point to it.  
 Walk around the classroom.  
 Find an empty chair and sit down.

Here's a pencil.  
 Take a pencil.  
 Put the pencil in the box.

We have examined a mini-drama and some of the commands which might be derived from it. It is important to note that the mini-drama was written first. In other words, the mini-drama provides a context for the commands thus dealing with problem two of a tendency to not be clear why you are giving the commands and problem three of giving a reason for the commands. The effect of listening to the commands and acting is to prepare students for the drama. They are prepared for the language of the mini-drama by the active listening and they are prepared for the action of the mini-drama by the movement required by the commands. Students require a warm up the same as athletes do.

### Plan for Teaching

One possible teaching plan might be as follows:

1. The teacher reads the TPR commands being careful to demonstrate every action at least the first time a new action is introduced. Students have to see the action as well as hear the language to grasp the meaning.
2. The teacher and students read the mini-drama.
3. The teacher divides the class into groups of three. One student is assigned to be the passenger, another the driver and another the reader. Only the reader has a copy of the mini-drama. The purpose of the reader is to be the director and also a kind of mini-teacher. The students who are acting

perform all actions and say the lines assigned to their part. By reading the lines to the other two actors the assignment is made much easier as nothing has to be memorized.

4. Roles can be exchanged and the mini-drama performed again. The student who is the passenger becomes the reader, etc.

The role of the teacher at this stage is to move around the room, watch and encourage. The students, for their part, will be engrossed in the activity. Thus we have dealt with problem one, the exhausting energy drain, as well as provided the students with an opportunity for controlled group work.

### Summary

A mini-drama can be looked upon as an extension of TPR. It reduces the demand on the teacher by spreading it among the students, it provides a source of possible commands and gives a reason for the commands by providing a context of meaning. There is something about putting language learning in a context of physical action and meaning that creates life and enthusiasm. Or to paraphrase Lao Tzu, if you honor life, life will honor you.

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### About the Author

*Dale T. Griffiee teaches EFL at Tokai University in Tokyo, Japan. He is active in JALT and TESOL. He believes that the 20th century will be remembered primarily as a transition into a post-industrial, global civilization and that today it is the responsibility of every human being to train themselves to become a global citizen. His second textbook, HearSay: Survival Listening and Speaking (with David Hough) was recently published by Addison-Wesley.*

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# Focused Writing Exercises: Word Associations, Stream of Consciousness Writing, and Friday Specials

by Elaine K. Horwitz, The University of Texas at Austin

The current focus in second language education on the development of communicative competence calls for instructional activities stressing creative, spontaneous, and meaningful use of the target language. Unfortunately, students are often unprepared to participate in these types of linguistic experiences. Many teachers find that their beginning and intermediate students do well in structured oral activities (drill, fact-recall questions, etc.), but seem to have little to say during free conversations. Even advanced students may have had little experience with communicative language use. The following sets of exercises—word associations, stream of consciousness writing, and Friday Specials—have been designed to make students more flexible in both oral and written responses by giving them practice using language in inventive, unstructured, and practical ways; thus, these exercises help to bridge the gap between the limited patterned responses of beginning students and truly communicative language use.

## Word Associations

Word association exercises are based on the premise that language students need practice putting unusual combinations of words together before they can move from pat responses to creative ones.

1. Give students a word in English and ask them to write down the first English word which comes into their minds. Ask several students for the word they wrote down. Reinforce every response with phrases like: "That's good.", "How interesting!", "You had the same word as

\_\_\_\_\_.", "Anyone else have that one?" This exercise gives even the poorest student a chance to answer a question correctly. After all, every response is correct for the student who gave it.

2. Once again, give the students a word, but this time ask them to write down the first five words which come into their minds. Ask several students to report one of their answers, perhaps the one they like best or the one they feel is the most interesting. Sometimes it is fun to use a picture or even a nondescript blot on the wall as the word association stimulus. Since there are truly no "correct" words to be associated with a blot, this practice underlines the necessity of freely associating words rather than searching for a specific correct answer. Again, all answers should be reinforced by the teacher.

3. This time give students thirty seconds to write down as many associations to the stimulus as they can think of. Ask some students for their favorite word, ask others how many they were able to write. Take a show of hands to see who was able to list the most words.

The word association exercises should be done several times before moving to the next set of exercises. Students should be able to do the thirty-second association with ease before they move on to stream of consciousness writing.

## Stream of Consciousness Writing

Stream of consciousness writing helps students bypass their—perhaps natural—tendency to carefully consider and

meticulously construct an utterance before articulating it (thus creating a response which is more studied than fluent). Students should be given a set amount of time (starting out with one minute and working up to five minutes) to write in English. They should be given the following directions:

"Take out a pencil (or a pen) and a piece of paper. I'm going to give you \_\_\_ minutes and I want you to write in English the entire time. If you can't keep writing about one idea, change to something else. If you can't write sentences, write phrases; and if you can't write phrases, just list words. You must keep writing in English the entire time. I'm not going to collect this so don't be afraid to write something private."

As the students write, the teacher should circulate to keep them on task. It is important that this type of writing be done without reflection. If a student appears to falter, whisper quietly, "Keep writing, don't stop to think." Remind him/her that it is okay just to list words. When the time is up, ask students if they thought the task was hard, if they were able to write sentences the entire time, if they enjoyed the exercise, etc. *Do not* ask them to read what they wrote to the class or share it with others. The purpose of stream of consciousness writing is to avoid the monitoring process; thus, they may write thoughts—or linguistic forms—they would not want anyone else to see.

#### Extended Writing:

##### Friday Specials and Personal Journals.

1. Many teachers use short, journal-like writing assignments, but Leemann and Waverly (1977) were the first to use the term "Friday Special." Friday Specials are short, unstructured written assignments designed to focus students on the communication of meaning. The assignment is as follows: "Every Friday you are to turn in to me

approximately three, four, or five sentences in English." (Of course, the teacher should vary the timing of the assignment to meet his/her schedule. A Friday Special could become a Monday Special and/or be due every other week.) Friday Specials are appropriate for students at all levels, even beginners.

The important part of the Friday Special is the teacher's response. These assignments should never be graded; the student simply gets credit for doing them. (I have usually made them worth ten percent of the student's final grade. The student gets an "A" for that ten percent if s/he has turned in all Friday Specials with the grade prorated accordingly.) The teacher should read the Friday Special, correct obvious errors, and then write an appropriate response in English. The teacher's written comment should respond personally to what the student wrote. If the student says she saw a good movie, give your opinion of the same movie, or say that you have not seen it and ask if she thinks you would like it. At the beginning students may have difficulty thinking of something to say and may resort to handing in sentences copied from their textbook. The teacher should respond to these sentences as if they were meant to be communicative, "Oh, why did Robert put the red pen on the table and not the green one?" and then add that you hope that he writes something about himself in the next Friday Special. Besides being excellent language practice, Friday Specials open up a two-way channel of communication between teacher and student, give students individualized reading passages, and generally help teachers get to know their students. I have learned a great deal about student interests, experiences, and difficulties through their Friday Specials, and I feel that these writings make a large contribution toward establishing trust and rapport between teacher and student.

2. Journal writing is a natural extension of Friday Specials for more advanced



students. Students are asked to write at least one paragraph in a personal journal or diary on a regular basis. (To keep the writing from becoming burdensome, I have generally required students to write in the journal only five days a week rather than daily. In that way, they can feel that they occasionally have a night off.) Teachers should respond to journal writing in much the same way as they do to Friday Specials. The teacher can first point out important grammar errors, and then a personal reaction to the content should be written. It is not necessary to respond to every journal entry, just those which interest the teacher or specifically ask for a teacher response. Some general content reaction should also be included at the end of the journal, and sometimes, the teacher might want to add a grammatical explanation for a form the student consistently misused.

One drawback to journal assignments is the time it takes to read and react to them. For that reason, I limit my use of a journal assignment to one class at a time and collect the journals individually instead of the whole class at the same time. In that way, I feel less burdened by reading journals, and my comments are fresher and more spontaneous.

### Conclusion

The reader might be surprised that an article purporting to improve students' oral fluency concerns only written exercises. Certainly, the second language literature contains many excellent suggestions for oral activities stressing spontaneous and meaningful language use, and this article does not argue that these activities should be abandoned. Rather, the premise here is that writing provides an additional tool for developing oral skills, one perhaps ideally suited to students who feel self-conscious or uncomfortable expressing themselves in class. Although many of the suggested activities can also be done orally, writing provides a safe and familiar haven for students to experiment with new linguistic forms, important personal messages, or the

communication of complex ideas; students do not have to expose their abortive attempts to other class members or even to the teacher. Thus, written activities can seem less evaluative and threatening. Additionally, written activities can dramatically increase a student's communication opportunities during a single class session. During an oral activity, most students listen while a few students answer personal questions or act out a role-play situation. Even in small group activities, more student time is spent listening than speaking.

Focused writing exercises give students experience using language in novel and meaningful ways within a comfortable context. They can help students move from pattern manipulators to true communicators.

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### About the Author

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## A Special "Thank You"

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In producing the *TESL Reporter*, one of the most important behind-the-scenes jobs is the evaluation of manuscripts which have been submitted to the editor to be considered for publication. Manuscripts are evaluated not only by the *TESL Reporter's* editorial staff but also by other TESL professionals with expertise appropriate to the topic of the manuscript. In addition to evaluating submissions, these "referees" frequently offer useful suggestions on how manuscripts can be improved. For their service, these individuals receive no reward other than professional recognition and sincere thanks from the editor, the staff, and the readers of the *TESL Reporter*. Thus, we extend a special "thank you" to the following people who, in the past year, have evaluated manuscripts for the *TESL Reporter* :

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# The Use of Fictitious Occupations in the Classroom: An Adapted Technique

by Michael "Rube" Redfield, Nanzan Women's College

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The practice of assigning names from the language being studied to foreign-language students has been around for a long time. In my own 1960's high school German class, for example, I became Manfred. Today, certain textbook courses, such as the *Threshold* series, make it mandatory. Certain currently popular methods, like Suggestopedia and the Natural Method, take this identity-changing process even further. They assign prestigious, but fictitious, occupations to their students. Teachers using role-play and drama techniques in their classrooms report success as well. Perhaps this is because students act the parts of different people when carrying out their roles.

It has been hypothesized (Krashen, Burt, & Dulay, 1982) that assigning fictitious occupations and/or roles to students helps them lower their "affective filter," because it is the movie producer or successful business person who makes errors, not the beginning or intermediate student. And, following this theory, lowering the affective filter allows students to learn better.

Of course, you do not have to wholly accept the Monitor Model or follow the tenets of Suggestopedia in order to adapt interesting sounding techniques into your own teaching. This article describes one possible adaptation from the sources named above.

I personally do not like assigning students fictitious English names. Students have their own names, and should be proud of them. I have no such qualms, however, about having students adopt fictitious occupations. Only I do not assign them to

my students. I let the students pick their own, not from a list drawn up by the teacher, but out of their own heads. If a student wants to be a sumo wrestler or a fashion designer, I do not want to force him into being a foreign-service officer or airline pilot.

The practice of having students come up with fictitious occupations has proved very useful in teaching company classes, where everybody has similar occupations and works for the same company. It is also useful in school settings, for the same reason.

The technique of using fictitious occupations really comes in handy when you are using a standardized text. Most textbook series have sections or chapters dealing with occupations. In an effort to personalize instruction, teachers naturally ask the students about their own occupations, or better yet, have the students ask each other. When everybody is a mechanical engineer or college freshman, however, such efforts fall flat. But when you have a class made up of pro golfers, famous actors, baseball players, beer testers, and the Prime Minister, things go a lot more smoothly.

Another important consideration is the fact that students take to the idea very quickly. They are proud of their imagined occupation, perhaps because they thought it up themselves. And they readily remember those of their fellow students. They also exploit the material on their own (sometimes with a little prompting) by asking each other about their salaries, places of work, and past histories. I agree that students ought to be doing the same thing with their real identities, but delving into the

fictitious ones first sometimes helps pave the way into developing interest in each other's real lives and personalities. And it has the further benefit of providing shy students with a shield, and students who feel that their ordinary lives are dull and boring, with something interesting to talk about.

Language teaching is not only methods and theories, it is everyday classroom practice and performance. If techniques, taken from the former, can help us with the latter, our everyday classroom situation, we should by all means take advantage of them, adapting them to our own needs and situations.

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## About the Author

*Michael "Rube" Redfield (M.A. Stanford) is Assistant Professor of EFL and Spanish at Nanzan Women's College, Nagoya, Japan. He has taught and lectured in America, Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, and in Asia. He has presented at TESOL, RELC, JALT, and published in Forum, TESOL, Cross Currents, Hispania, etc.*

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## Conference Announcements

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TESL Canada's largest conference ever is being planned for March 12-14, 1987 in Vancouver, Canada. Co-sponsored by the Canadian national association and the Association of British Columbia TEAL (Teachers of English as an Additional Language), the conference salutes the Pacific Rim and will draw participants from around the Pacific, the United States, and across Canada. Contact: P. O. Box 82344, Burnaby, B.C., Canada V5C 5P8.

The Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics is planned for March 11-14, 1987 at Georgetown University. The theme is "Language Spread and Language Policy." Contact: Peter H. Lowenberg, Chair, GURT 1987, School of Languages and Linguistics, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057.

The University of Southern California will host the seventh Los Angeles Second Language Research Forum (SLRF) on February 20-22, 1987. Proposals are solicited dealing with data-based second language research in, but not restricted to, the following areas: classroom research and methodology, discourse analysis, interlanguage, bilingualism, psycholinguistics, language universals, transfer, sociolinguistics, and second language acquisition. Contact: Wes Friberg, Program Chair SLRF '87, American Language Institute, JEF-141, USC, Los Angeles, CA 90089-1294.

The fourteenth annual International Systemics Workshop will be held (following the AILA meetings) at the University of Sydney, August 24-28, 1987. For further information, contact: J. R. Martin, Linguistics Department, The University of Sydney, Sydney, N.S.W., 2006 Australia.

# Improving Language Skills Through Literature

## by Moira Chimombo, University of Malawi

"The study of literature is fundamentally a study of language in operation" (Moody 1971:22), and tasks set in the study of literature can lead to practice and improvement in all language skills. The purpose of this article is to show how language skills can be practiced in the literature class. I shall describe and give examples of work arising from the different kinds of tasks set for a class in which I teach a number of different texts, including plays, novels, and short stories.

All tasks demand at least some groupwork. They also depend on the students having *read* the text before coming to the first class session. Students who have not done this the first time very quickly rectify the omission by the second session because their ignorance is revealed in the group.

The students whom I have taught and from whom I have examples of work done are first-year students at Chancellor College, University of Malawi. These students have been selected on the basis of their results in the Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE), which is equivalent to the British "O" Level examination. However, I feel the tasks set are equally appropriate for senior secondary classes (grades 10-12). I have, in fact, advised student teachers to use such techniques in secondary school literature classes. (Literature is a compulsory component of the MSCE English examination, which all students must pass to obtain the MSCE Certificate.) These student teachers' reports and my own observations of them teaching literature classes in grade 11 confirm my feelings.

### Synopsis Writing

The first task I set the students is to write a synopsis of the text to be studied. After all, summary writing is a skill tested in many, if not all, language examinations, and synopsis is basically a summary of the plot. Furthermore, it is useful for the students to have a synopsis of any literature text they are studying, in the event that they have to sit for a literature examination, as they do in Malawi, so as to save time when revising.

The first time I introduce this task to the class, we examine together some notes on what a synopsis should contain and the synopses given in McCrimmon (1963:192-195). The students then have to write the synopsis of the text they are studying. They do not, however, practice the writing skill on their own, but in groups of six or seven. Each group is assigned to write a synopsis of one section, be it one short story in an anthology, one scene or act of a play, or a group of chapters in a novel.

When the different groups have finished their synopses of different sections of the text (within the same hour), these are typed up on stencil, uncorrected, in time for the next class session. Here is part of the synopsis of the first scene of *The Lion and the Jewel* by Wole Soyinka (1964), as produced by one of three groups in a class of 19 students:

#### Morning

Scene opens with Lakunle, a school master, teaching little children arithmetic in class. Sidi the most beautiful girl in

the village passes by. Lakunle stops teaching and goes after her. The two start talking and in the course of their conversation the following conflicts arise:

- (1) Why Sidi was carrying a pail on her head
- (2) She had dressed so shabbily
- (3) Lakunle is despised because he is a teacher
- (4) Lakunle is not accepted in the village because he is influenced by modern culture
- (5) Lakunle does not agree on bride price whereas Sidi insists that if Lakunle wants her as a wife, he should first pay the bride price . . .

After being told by her friends of the beautiful images from the book brought by the stranger and that the Bale was jealous of her, Sidi becomes more proud as she gains popularity. She regards everyone else in the village less important than herself. She gets very excited and organises a dance of the lost traveller. Lakunle is given the part of the drunkard stranger. Everything comes to a stop as Baroka appears and accuses Lakunle of trying to steal the village maidenhead - Sidi . . . . .

During this second session, the students read the synopses for the sections of the text they have not prepared, as well as the one they prepared themselves. So as to encourage *critical* reading, I tell the students to get into the same groups as the first class session, to discuss whether they have left anything important out from their own synopsis and to evaluate the completeness and usefulness of the other groups' synopses. They are told to make any changes they feel necessary on the duplicated sheets. This

reading and revision takes about 20 minutes for a play or a couple of short stories, but may take a full hour or more for a novel.

We then make time, as a class, to go through all groups' synopses and I point out any errors in grammar or choice of vocabulary, and any misunderstandings of the plot, either for the remaining 40 minutes of the class or in the next class session. For example, in the above extract, the students had problems of which tense to use, and also did not always choose their words carefully enough (for instance, *shabbily* when they meant *immodestly* ) They also suggested that Lakunle was accused of stealing Sidi, when what they meant was the stranger (acted by Lakunle). All such problems, whether of grammar, vocabulary, or literal or inferential comprehension of the text, can be sorted out quickly. The final step in the period is to discuss aspects of plot structure, including conflict, suspense, and denouement (Abrams 1981:137- 140, S. Chimombo 1982). This follow-up to the groupwork, which can be done as in a more traditional type of literature class, either by lecture or by questioning and class discussion, is essential to ensure accurate understanding of the text

### Character Study

The second task, which may also be done in groups, but may be done individually if the teacher wishes, is character study. As with the synopsis of the text, I have each group studying a different character, but this time answering preset questions such as these:

- (a) How are we introduced to this character? What is our first impression of this person? Illustrate with quotations, or examples, how this person behaves at the beginning of the play or novel (Sheal 1981:26-27)

The questions cover the aspects of character mentioned by Abrams (1981:20-22): development, traits, motivation, etc. Here is part of one group's character study of Sadiku (in *The Lion and the Jewel* ) in which are answered the above questions:

We are introduced to Sadiku as an old clever woman who is trying to win Sidi for Baroka. She is Baroka's head wife. Our first impression of this woman is that she is persuasive and very clever as she says, "Sidi have you considered ...life of bliss awaits you?"..."Your place will always be in the palace. (*sic* ) Other characters like Sidi see her as a cunning woman....

Again, each group's character study is typed up and duplicated for distribution to every member of the class, discussed in groups, and corrected for grammatical errors as well as misrepresentations by the class as a whole.

As a class, we also work on paragraphing, including topic sentences and the order of sentences within paragraphs. But my main concern in this task is with the form that quotations from a literature text (or any text, for that matter) must take, how to incorporate quotations into the text of an essay, and how to document properly when quoting from any text. For example, the students who produced the above character study did not pay attention to the syntax of the extracts they wished to cite in support of their observations, nor did they follow the conventions for citing an extract longer than three lines, nor did they indicate the page number from which the quote was taken.

Although it is not obvious from the above extract from the character study, the students also failed to give at the end of their paper the full reference to the text being studied. I have found that making them get into the habit of writing footnotes and bibliography entries for one-page papers in

literature, where more often than not at the first-year level they are only citing one text, helps them grasp the basics of footnote and bibliography writing before being confused by the great many variations of citation format both within one style, from journal article to short story within an anthology to a translation of a Greek play, and across different styles. Such details as citation and documentation formats need to be taught, not in an abstract way by examining how other people have done it, but by having students work on their own writing.

### Making Comparisons

The third task, which may also be done either individually or in groups, is that of making comparisons, a task which is frequently required not only in literature but in many other fields of study. For example, comparisons can be made of two characters within one text, such as Antigone and Ismene or Creon and Haemon in Sophocles' *Antigone* (1947), or theme and setting of two short stories may be contrasted, such as "Tekayo" by Grace Ogot (1981) and "Too Strange Not To Be True" by Cuthbert Khunga (1965). Sometimes the teacher may wish all individuals or groups to undertake the same comparison or contrast, but on other occasions he/she may prefer them to undertake different ones.

I find that giving groups the task of developing an outline for an essay demanding comparison and contrast helps them not only brainstorm for the ideas but also work on aspects such as the organization of the ideas, and strategies for writing an essay demanding comparison and contrast. Having worked together in groups to prepare the outline, the students then discuss the topic as a class. This class discussion is summarized on the chalkboard, dividing the board into two, one side for each of the two aspects to be compared. Thus,

for example, the comparison of setting in the above two short stories led to the following outline:

### "Tekayo"

#### Physical

Lakeshore village in Nyasaland (Malawi before independence)

#### Season

Dry season

### "Too Strange Not To Be True"

#### Physical

Village in semi-arid area, near jungle, in Sudan

#### Season

Beginning of short rains

The next step is for students to draft their essays individually. Lastly, prior to handing in their final copy, they have the opportunity to work on their introductions and conclusions and topic sentences of paragraphs, again in the same groups. Thus group work in literature forms the basis for some extensive work on developing writing skills.

A greater awareness of words and the power of language can be developed by close study of two short stories in which aspects of style and/or language are either strikingly similar or strikingly different, for example, "Too Strange Not To Be True" by Cuthbert Khunga (1965) and "Waiting for a Turn" by Ken Kipenga (1981). In other words, this is another exercise demanding comparison and contrast, but of a somewhat different kind. I find that students have great difficulty identifying stylistic aspects of a text, and being made to notice differences between two texts appears to help them later to see aspects of style in one text independent of another. Every group, pair, or individual studies the same two short stories for this task. They are required to identify in each text, for example, sentence patterns (under Style in Abrams 1981:190-192), figurative language (Abrams 1981:63-66), and point of

view (Abrams 1981:142-145), prior to looking for similarities and differences. A particularly effective way of heightening their awareness of aspects of an author's style is use of a modified cloze procedure in which key words are deleted from a significant passage in the work being studied (cf. Rye 1982:99-100). Here is an example of such a passage (I have indicated the exact omitted word for ease of reference):

#### Instructions

*Read the following extracts from Ken Lipenga's "Waiting for a Turn" carefully. Certain words have been omitted, one word from each space. Try to work out what word the author originally put in that space. In your groups, discuss the reasons you think the author may have had for choosing that particular word:*

All roads lead to Sapitwa. All (*traffic*) moves towards Sapitwa. Rivers (*criss-cross*) and point in different (*directions*). But all rivers flow (*into*) Sapitwa pool. Tears of (*laughter*) and tears of sorrow (*flow*) into Sapitwa pool. All (*enemies*) meet and shake hands at (*Sapitwa*)...

All roads lead to (*Sapitwa*). All traffic (*roars*) towards Sapitwa. Rivers criss-cross and (*point*) in different directions. But (*all*) rivers flow into Sapitwa (*pool*). Blood sweat and (*tears*) flow into Sapitwa pool. The (*wind*) blows all fires towards (*Sapitwa*). All (*roads*) lead to Sapitwa. Deadly (*enemies*) seal their (*mouths*) with the sap of the (*kachere*) tree and swear (*never*) to talk to each other. But (*all*) enemies meet and (*shake*) hands at Sapitwa....

Although they are not expected to write down their observations in essay form but simply to report back to the whole class from notes, their heightened awareness of language helps them in choice of vocabulary in particular and in essay writing in general,



as well as the immediate task of learning to appreciate an author's style.

### Debates

Finally, debates may be conducted on motions arising from themes in the literature texts studied. These debates are probably best prepared for in groups, so as to avoid weak arguments which are poorly supported by quotations from the text. For example, some groups may prepare arguments supporting the motion while others prepare arguments opposing it. Then those groups that have prepared the former arguments have to compare their notes and select the proposer and seconder, and likewise those opposed to the motion put together their arguments and select an opposer and seconder. Having prepared in this way, students are more likely to argue effectively.

In order to make sure that everybody is involved, even during the debate itself, the final assignment should be to write an essay, either supporting or opposing the motion, or if preferred, presenting both sides of the argument. One such debate I organized, as a final lesson on Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* (1968), was on the motion, "This house believes that Mugo deserved to die," but other motions similarly phrased are also possible, such as on Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Muthoni in Ngugi's *The River Between* (1965), or Antigone in Sophocles' *Antigone* (1947).

### Advantages

In all the above tasks, students are working on language skills while studying literature. In any task demanding group work, for instance, they are given vital practice in both speaking and listening in the process of arguing over what to include and what to exclude in their write-up of the assignment, be it a synopsis, a character study or any of the other tasks suggested, for a period of almost one hour. It also gives

them the opportunity to show their sense of responsibility to the rest of the class, not only to their own learning, because each group's work is generally essential for the other groups.

The third language skill they get extensive practice in is reading. Obviously, they have to have read the literature text which is being studied, as a preliminary to any of the other tasks. But they also have to read critically and evaluate their classmates' written work, such as synopses and character studies, because this work is also essential for them to have a complete picture of the text being studied and to be ready to be examined on that text. Their comprehension of the text is revealed in their ability both to notice omissions or misrepresentations in their classmates' work and to express themselves adequately and accurately, orally and in writing, in the course of all the tasks.

Lastly, they are also required to practice extensively the most difficult of language skills, writing. Sometimes the write-up is a communal effort, on other occasions it is the result of individual work, but the written work always gives the students the opportunity to see and discuss their errors, of grammar and structure, of content, and of organization. Detailed work is possible on outlining strategies, paragraph structure, including topic sentences, introductory and concluding paragraphs, overall essay presentation, and documentation skills.

Clearly, the literature class provides a great many opportunities for intensive practice in all four language skills, and as such the study of literature can justifiably be kept as a component of any language course. Furthermore, a greater understanding of the literature texts being studied may be achieved than by the lecture method, because the students are actively involved in their own interpretation of texts. They cannot be passive.

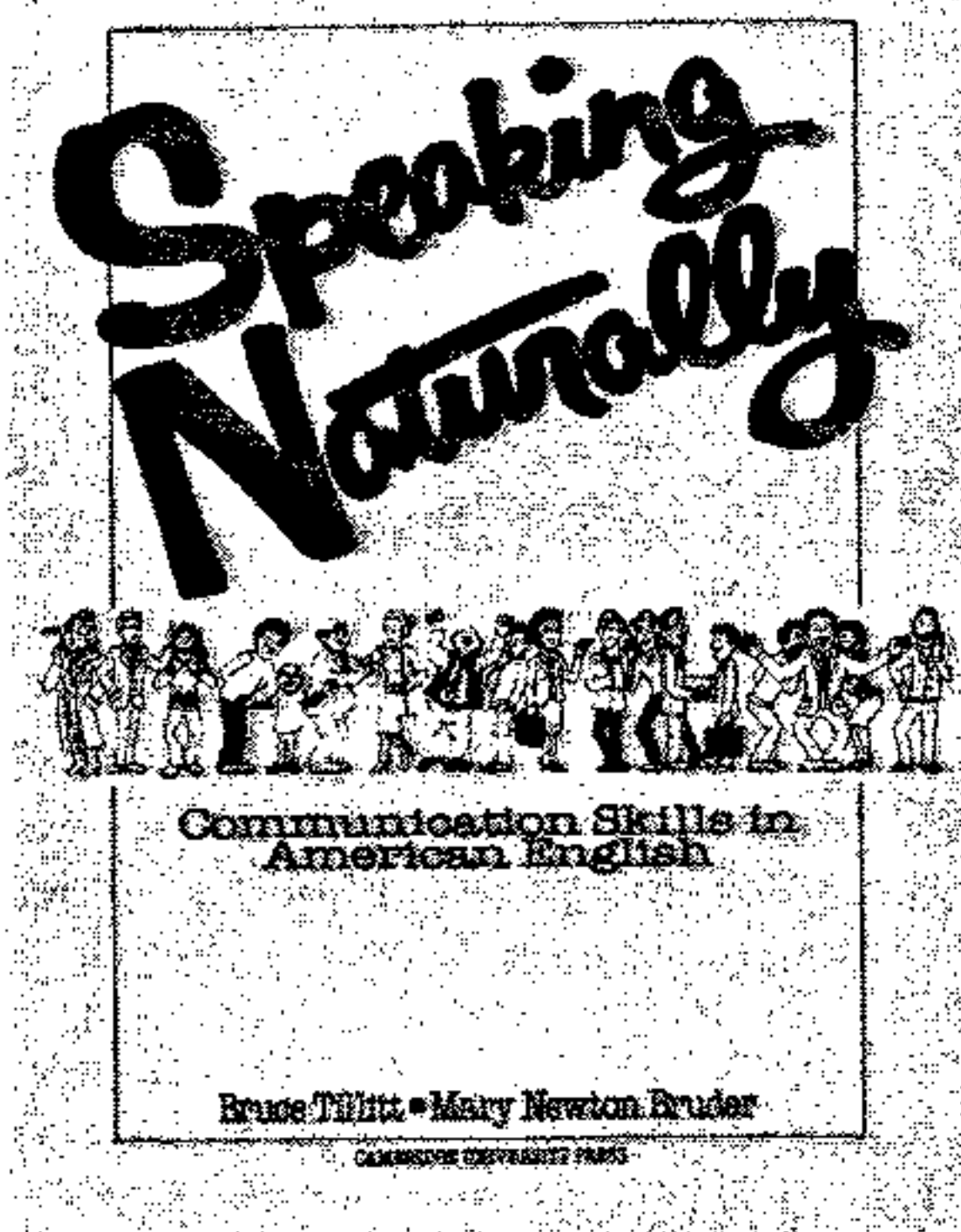
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