Assessing the Suitability of Reading Materials for ESL Students

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The paper begins with an examination of the criteria by which first and second language reading texts have traditionally been graded, criteria which focus primarily on the linguistic characteristics of a text. It is proposed that if reading is viewed as interaction between a text and a reader, there are other variables to consider, those related to the *reader* side of the process: the readers' interests, background knowledge and purposes for reading. Within this interactive framework and after the reader variables have been considered, the subject matter, format, organization and discourse and linguistic variables of a text can be assessed. Implications of recent research in these areas are discussed. In conclusion, a set of guidelines is proposed for assessing the suitability of both graded and ungraded texts for ESL students.

In addition to all the other tasks confronting ESL classroom teachers is that of choosing suitable reading material for their students. In my own teaching, I have been frequently disappointed to find that published ESL graded reading materials were unsuitable for my ESL students. There is often a wide range of difficulty within a set of reading passages supposedly written at the same level; some are too easy, others appropriately challenging, while others prove frustratingly difficult. First language graded material sometimes provides a suitable alternative but often the same problems arise. I have had much greater success when I have adapted graded materials, adapted "authentic" texts or written my own. My dissatisfaction with much of the available material led me to explore more systematically the criteria I have used in determining the suitability of a text. In this paper I will look at the criteria that have been developed in the past for grading and sequencing reading material for both first and second language learners and will discuss their merits and weaknesses. I will then discuss a number of other factors which are not considered in these formulas but which I have found to be very important when assessing the suitability of reading materials.

READABILITY FORMULAS

In both first language (L1) and second language (L2) materials, formulas for determining text difficulty have been developed. Such formulas

have been extensively investigated and are widely used both for basal reading series and for the writing of textbooks in subjects other than language. Some publishers employ "readability experts" to ensure that materials are written at just the right level of difficulty for their intended readers. Most of the formulas developed and used for assessing L1 materials since 1939 are based on a combination of measures of vocabulary difficulty and sentence length (Klare 1974). Schemes developed for grading materials in second language publications have generally been based on vocabulary size and difficulty of grammatical structures. In some, sentence length and the number and type of complex sentences is also measured.

Such schemes and formulas are appealing because they seem easy to apply. However, their usefulness can only be judged by assessing the validity of their two components, (1) measures of vocabulary size or difficulty and (2) sentence complexity or sentence length.

Vocabulary Measures

Let us look first of all at the measures of word difficulty or vocabulary load. These are included in most L1 and L2 formulas and, from experience, most teachers and students would agree that vocabulary is a major, if not *the* major factor affecting difficulty. But how is word difficulty determined? In most L1 formulas, word frequency lists, such as the Dale and Chall (1948) or Thorndike Frequency Lists, (Thorndike & Lorge 1944) are used. Words not appearing on these lists are considered to be difficult because of their low frequency. In L2 texts, it is often the case that only words which have been introduced in a grammar lesson or which are glossed in the text are included. The words originally selected for the grammar lessons have often been chosen on the basis of similar frequency counts.

There are several problems with relying on frequency lists for vocabulary assessment. First of all, such lists are quickly out-dated. Second, although they may indicate the words readers will encounter most often in certain kinds of reading texts (those which were used in compiling the original lists), they cannot take into account either what readers bring with them to the reading task or what words in a text are essential for the learner's comprehension of the text for the performance of a particular task. Third, use of frequency lists makes no provision for the definition of a word in context, repetition of words or the importance of a word in the text. There are also no ways of assessing abstractness, multiple meanings, or idiomatic expressions. "There was a run on the bank" (Marshall 1979: 542) is computed as very easy, as is the expression "for the most part" (Square Dancing: 51—Note 1) because the individual words are among

the most frequent in the language. Fourth, for second language learners, there is no provision for cognates, borrowings, etc. Finally, some vocabulary measures take into account the number of syllables per word but this criterion fails to take account of the facilitating role of commonly used affixes and compound words.

Easy formulas for assessing vocabulary difficulty would seem then to offer little to the teacher who wants to make a "fit" between reading materials and ESL students, precisely because they fail to take the *student* into account. What then of the other criterion used in readability formulas—measures of sentence complexity?

Sentence Complexity

In most L1 formulas, sentence complexity is measured by sentence length. Measuring sentence length is quite easy and, according to Glazer (1974), is a fairly reliable measure of complexity. Using the Botel, Dawkins and Granowski Syntactic Complexity Formula (Botel, Dawkins, Granowski 1973) which assigns a weight to each syntactic element of the language, she found a high correlation between length and measures of syntactic complexity. Although sentences may be long either because of coordination of several simple kernel sentences or because of dependent clauses attached to a main clause, Glazer found that coordination accounted for the length in only a small number of sentences.

Using the "long sentence = complex sentence" hypothesis many writers and publishers have adapted difficult passages by shortening sentences. This improves the readability "score," pleases the readability expert and often helps to sell the book. The problem with this approach is that, although the sentences as separate units become "easier," much information is lost in the process. Pearson (1976) points out that it may be necessary to use a complex sentence to express a complex idea and gives the following example. When "Because the chain broke, the machine stopped" is rewritten as "The chain broke. The machine stopped," the causal link between the two events is lost and the reader is faced with the extra burden of inferring the relationship.

Shortening sentences in order to simplify them causes problems for both first and second language readers. Marshall (1979) gives the example of a high school text which was revised from a 12.4 readability level to an 8.5 level by shortening sentences and simplifying vocabulary. Students and teachers complained that the new edition was actually more difficult to read. After examining the texts, researchers concluded that the simplification process had resulted in a disjointed string of simple sentences which were no longer connected discourse. In a study with Puerto Rican ESL students, Blau (1982) found that comprehension scores were higher on a

text which used complex sentences with clues to underlying relationships left intact than on a version of the same text which used only short simple sentences. She concludes that readers benefit from the information regarding relationships that is revealed by complex sentences. Of course, just because sentence length is used as an easy measure of sentence complexity does not imply that writers and/or teachers will simplify texts by shortening sentences. But if this measure is used, it must be seen for what it is, a rough measure of complexity, not a formula for simplification.

Another method of controlling grammatical difficulty is that employed by many L2 materials writers who use only those structures with which the students are already familiar. For example, for each of the six levels of the Newbury House Readers Series, there is a list of the structures used. Books in the Collier Macmillan English Readers Series supposedly include only those structures which have been introduced in the *English 900* series. This approach to controlling grammatical difficulty would seem to have some validity, but there is a problem in how "structures" are defined. For example, the following sentence appears in a level one Collier-Macmillan English Reader: "The music came from a violin for the most part, but if there was no one to play an instrument, clapping was used to produce the rhythm by which to dance." (Note 2) Although this is presumably considered simple because the verb is in the past tense, other measures of grammatical difficulty such as the Botel, Dawkins and Granowski formula used by Glazer (1974) would place it at a much higher level of difficulty. The complexity level appears to be different depending upon which structures are considered. Unfortunately perhaps, grammar is far more complex than lists of verb tenses.

Other formulas work on the basis of assigning different weights to syntactic structures. Some revisers of the original readability formulas counted the number of prepositions or pronouns per one hundred words. The Botel, Dawkins and Granowski formula assigns weights to each syntactic element of the language based on findings of language performance tests, transformational grammar theory and the authors' intuitions concerning difficulty. Such features as dependent clauses, nominalized verbs, clauses used as subject, modifier load, pronoun substitution and modals are considered.

In a review of research on L1 reading, Nigalupta (1978) identified five syntactic features which contribute to difficulty: negatives, passive voice, embedding, deletion and nominalization. He then studied the reading comprehension of a group of Thai graduate students and found that these second language learners had difficulty with the same structures, although the results on nominalization were not clear. If we look at the sentence cited above in these terms, we find it contains four of these five features, qualifying it as a very difficult sentence.

However useful such complexity measures may be, they too have limitations and exceptions. For example, Nigalupta (1978) points out that relative clauses may facilitate rather than hinder comprehension when they are written as definitions or appositives. Stoodt (cited in Hittleman 1973) has found a significant correlation between reading comprehension and the comprehension of conjunctions, indicating more of a semantic than a syntactic problem. Both Blau (1982) and Blachowitz (1978) suggest that simplification through elimination of embedding may work against the natural comprehension process. The limitations of these measures must be recognized if they are to be useful to the L2 teacher/materials evaluator.

READING AS AN INTERACTIVE PROCESS

The foregoing indicates that readability formulas do not provide an adequate framework for the ESL teacher to use in assessing text difficulty. Certainly vocabulary, sentence length and syntactic complexity are factors which must be considered when evaluating materials, but they are only part of a much larger context. Readability formulas fail to take into account the fact that reading is an interactive process which involves texts *and* learners and that learners bring to the task, not only the vocabulary and structures they have learned in ESL class but their motivations, interests, background knowledge, outside experience, etc. Blachowitz (1979: 198) concludes her paper on comprehension with the following observation:

> The time for developing theories of comprehension and readability in isolation from the characteristics of the reader and the reading context is past.... Implicit [in new theories] is the belief that an adequate characterization of the process must take into account the changes within the mental schemata of the comprehender as well as the situational and contextual variables surrounding the comprehension act.

Hittleman (1973: 785), in somewhat less technical language, proposes that

> readability is a 'moment' at which time the reader's emotional, cognitive and linguistic backgrounds interact with each other, with the topic, and with the proposed purposes for doing the reading and with the author's choice of semantic and syntactic structures.

It is with these two quotes in mind that I propose guidelines by which L2 text difficulty can be assessed. But first, I would suggest that the term "readability" be replaced by "suitability." This term captures more clearly the idea of fitting or matching texts with readers. In keeping with

this perspective, the teacher must start first not by examining texts but by looking at the readers.

What the Reader Brings to the Task

The first thing that must be considered when looking at the reader side of the reading process is the interests of the students. Niles (1975) points out that many teachers feel that linguistic difficulty of material has *less* influence on comprehension than relevance. By relevant texts she means texts which are related to student interests, which deal with situations or ideas which students *perceive* as meaningful and important to them.

Interest is tied closely to the whole area of motivation and a purpose for reading. As Honeyfield (1977: 438) says

> Very often, conventional comprehension exercises trivialize the purposive aspect of reading by requiring students to seek, or recall numerous small items of information which merely represent narrow pedagogical preoccupations of a materials writer, e.g., to focus on "difficult points" or to exploit opportunities for vocabulary studies. Such exercises are not based on any purposes an intelligent reader might actually have in reading a passage outside the classroom.

Outside the classroom, students may read in their second language to practise their language skills or for pleasure, but more often their purpose is to acquire information. Meaningful exercises, therefore, should include the finding of specific facts about a subject (either discrete points like dates and names or elements which pertain to open-ended questions such as reasons, examples, etc.), getting the "gist" of a passage, determining the writer's point of view, comparing information from two sources, etc.

Once purpose has been selected, teachers can determine the skills that need to be practised and the type of texts which are suitable. For example, if students need to be able to make comparisons between sets of information, one necessary skill is scanning and the appropriate texts can be chosen on the basis of comparable content. If the purpose is gathering information on a question of particular personal interest to a student, the student's prior knowledge and interest in the subject can help compensate for the linguistic difficulty of the text. In both these cases the content of the passage may be more important than the linguistic structures.

Once interest areas and purposes have been considered, the teacher must try to assess the background knowledge which has been assumed by the author when writing the text. According to the psycholinguistic model of the reading process (Goodman 1967), in order to derive meaning from written language the reader must be able to provide semantic input from his previous experience. Schemata theory puts this even more strongly,

stating, according to Hudson (1982: 5), that the *principal* determinant of the knowledge one can acquire from reading is the knowledge one already possesses (one's schemata). Comprehension involves reconciliation of the internal schemata and the written message.

This background knowledge is first of all cultural, and many teachers have observed that students from non-Western cultures have more difficulty reading English than those with a Western background. In studies using folk stories and letters about traditional customs, Johnson (1981) and Steffensen, Joag-Dev and Anderson (1979) show clearly how such texts are interpreted differently depending on the reader's cultural background. But it is not only in such culture-specific texts as the ones used in these studies that cultural background affects comprehension. Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) cite passages from the text *Reader's Choice* (1977) which caused difficulty to students because the authors assumed a knowledge of urban mass transit and Western style management. Such knowledge is often taken for granted because it may be common to even quite young members of our Western urban culture. Teachers must learn to see texts through the eyes of students who bring to class assumptions about society which may be very different from their own.

Background knowledge involves one's cultural heritage, life experiences, interests, areas of previous study and personal relationships to name only a few factors. Of course, in order to really fit text to reader, taking into account all of such factors, materials would have to be almost completely individualized. For some purposes, such as reading for pleasure, and in some programs, this is possible and highly desirable. If students are given the opportunity to select their own materials, they can choose those which are of interest to them, and to which they bring sufficient background to ease them over linguistic difficulties. However, such self-selected reading is not appropriate or practical in many situations. It is more often the teacher's role to assure a fit between one text and several learners. In this situation, approaches vary depending on facilities available and the level of English which the students have mastered.

For adults just learning to read, many teachers and researchers (e.g. Carrell and Eisterhold 1983) advocate the use of "the language experience approach." In this approach, class begins with an oral discussion on a shared experience or topic of interest to the class. The students then volunteer remarks on the subject which are transcribed by the teacher. The resulting text is used to practise reading and writing skills. A principal advantage of this approach is that the teacher is sure that the content is firmly based in the students' experience because it has been written by them. With students who are at intermediate or advanced levels in their English, Johnson (1982) and Hudson (1982) suggest building background knowledge through cultural activities or pre-reading activities such as

brainstorming, predicting and discussion. Their research shows that such activities improve comprehension. At these levels Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) suggest that teachers consider working in thematic units so that background knowledge and vocabulary can be built up gradually and in context.

Content Variables

Interests, purpose and background knowledge are all factors which are part of the *reader* component of the reading process. When considering these factors, the teacher is trying to maximize student input. But once these reader variables have been considered, attention must be focussed on the text itself. Although readability formulas evaluate the text, they do so only at the sentence and word levels. Before moving to any such analysis, it is important to look at more global characteristics of the text: the content of the passage, the format and the availability of extra-textual support.

When considering the content of a text, there are two important matters to be addressed. The first is the concrete or abstract nature of the subject matter. Concrete subjects are those which deal with matters which are tangible, accessible through the senses or able to be visualized—facts and events. Abstract feelings like love and jealousy and concepts like violence or liberty are at the other end of the continuum. If a particular group of students is interested in sports, or have children who are eligible to participate in local community sports activities, a purpose for their reading could be to gather information about this subject. If the students are beginning readers, the teacher would keep the subject matter fairly concrete—schedules, locations, basic regulations, facilities available, etc. With more advanced readers, however, the same subject could be expanded into readings about violence in sport, the competitiveness fostered by many team sports, the benefits of learning to work as part of a team, etc.

The other important aspect in connection with the content is the *completeness* of the information in the text. Clarke and Silberstein (1977) refer to the importance of using semantically and conceptually complete reading passages.

In one sense, completeness can refer to the background knowledge which it is assumed the reader brings to the reading task, a problem discussed earlier. In another sense, completeness can mean that a text has a beginning, a middle and an end. Problems arise when excerpts from narratives or long articles are used as reading texts. For example, in several of the selections in *The Danger Light and Other Stories* (1978), the reader is plunged into the middle of a story, where he finds references to

events and persons introduced earlier in a part of the text not available to him. The problem here is not lack of background knowledge on the part of the reader. It is lack of information in the passage.

In a third sense, completeness can refer to the amount of inferencing required. This is at the root of the problem many students have when trying to understand a mystery story or a story with an unexpected ending. In such texts, suspense is created or curiosity aroused because not all the facts are available; then, at the end, there is a "twist" or an unexpected turn of events when a crucial, previously missing piece of information becomes available. These stories appeal to writers (and teachers) because the creation of suspense is a good technique for arousing interest and encouraging students to continue reading. Problems may be created, however, because the new information at the end means that the whole story must be reinterpreted in a new light. Although this reinterpretation is usually not made explicit, it can be done relatively easily by the accomplished reader who has appropriate background knowledge, experience in reading this type of story and good inferencing skills. For the less skilled reader the experience may be one of frustration and confusion. (Note 3)

Some stories compound the difficulty by being both abstract and incomplete. A good example is *The Danger Light* which is presented as a concrete story with easily visualized events and persons but which actually deals with some form of the supernatural or the imaginary. At the end, the reader is not sure if the narrator participated in some unexplainable event or whether it was all a figment of someone's imagination. Not only must he inference but, even if he succeeds in doing so, the subject is so abstract that he does not know if he has really "understood" the story. There is no "right" interpretation or understanding of the story. This is too confusing for many readers who need to build their confidence in their ability to comprehend, not to be left with an interesting question about the nature of reality.

Stories of a humorous nature pose similar problems. Although there is obviously a place for stories involving double meaning, humour, twists of plot and inferencing, they should be sparingly used with beginner and elementary level students.

A second important variable related to content is the format—print and spacing features and the availability of extra-textual support. Texts which use large print and ample spacing are easier to read than those that are densely packed onto a page. Texts which are accompanied by pictures, graphs, and/or diagrams or which have titles, sub-headings, outlines, etc. are easier than the same material which does not have such support. These non-linear aids act as a form of redundancy, and students should be

encouraged to use them. If adults can be convinced that looking at pictures and captions is not cheating but a valid part of the reading process, extra-textual support can provide an important aid to their reading.

Discourse and Rhetorical Features

Having considered content characteristics, one can turn to an evaluation of the rhetorical and discourse features of a text (i.e., text organization, and inter-paragraph and inter-sentence connections). Here, clarity is the key concept. At the level of overall text organization, clear, recognizable introductions and conclusions make a text easier to understand. Likewise, paragraphs with clearly stated topic sentences followed by relevant supporting details are easier. Between paragraphs and sentences and within sentences, markers of time, cause and effect, consequence, etc. (e.g. "however," "moreover," "thus") have the same effect.

In a study with L1 students, Rickards (1977) compared comprehension scores on texts which were identical except for their opening sentences. Scores were consistently higher when the introductory sentence expressed a superordinate concept (rather than a coordinate or unrelated statement). In other words, texts with topic sentences or introductions were easier to understand. Rickards concludes that such "advance organizers" help students chunk new information.

Another important concept to consider at both the text and paragraph level is redundancy, specifically redundancy of ideas. Although there are no easy measures of redundancy, two identifiable forms can be mentioned. One is the presence of non-linear, extra-textual support such as pictures, headings and graphs which were mentioned earlier. A second form, identified by Rosenshine (1969) in a study with L1 readers, is the frequent use of examples and of the rule-example-rule pattern. His findings reinforce the importance of both clear textual organization and redundancy.

Especially after students have passed the beginner stages, discourse and organizational features of texts must be considered. A passage should be checked to see that the relationships between sentences are clearly stated and that the reader is not expected to make a lot of inferences. The teacher should see if major points are clearly stated, if chapter titles and headings are meaningful, and if they clearly outline the major points. Particular attention should be paid to the author's use of examples, the rule-example-rule pattern and sequence signals or markers, all of which facilitate comprehension. In keeping with Rickards study, teachers could consider inserting some "advance organizers" into passages, to assist students in chunking information and separating main ideas from details.

Conversely, irrelevant information (found so frequently in newspaper articles) could be deleted although, as students gain proficiency, the teacher would want to have the students practise identifying such details themselves.

LINGUISTIC VARIABLES

Once the personal characteristics of the reader and the content and discourse variables have been considered, the teacher has narrowed down the vast array of printed material considerably. However, there are still choices to be made among texts. Even if the teacher decides that all the texts so selected will be used with a particular group, some thought must be given to the question of sequencing within a unit. It is at *this* point that the linguistic variables should be considered, *not* at the outset. These variables must be assessed *within* the framework already established by the personal and content characteristics.

Vocabulary

In assessing vocabulary load, the teacher must make certain assumptions. The first is that the students understand words and expressions which have been introduced in class. The second is that the students can comprehend many cognates, borrowings, derivatives and commonly accessible street and media language.

Next, the teacher will need to assess how important the unfamiliar words are to an understanding of the text. Even the most accomplished first language readers skip over unfamiliar words, either guessing approximate meaning from context or deciding that the word is not important enough to warrant consulting a dictionary. ESL students must be made aware that guessing meanings and "keeping going" are valid reading strategies which should be practised. Eliminating unknown vocabulary items reinforces the notion that all words are equally important and encourages reading at the word level. If students can learn to capitalize on the normal redundancy of a text, they can use reading to learn new vocabulary. The teacher will have to judge how much unfamiliar vocabulary any group of students can tolerate, but Johnson (1982) suggests that it may take a high percentage of difficult items to have a significant effect on comprehension. (This, of course, assumes that the students' task is realistic and does not rest on the recall of unnecessary unimportant details in a text.)

Two research studies have shed light on the question of vocabulary control and reinforce the position that less attention should be paid to

simplifying or explaining vocabulary and more to teaching strategies for coping with difficult words. Both Hudson (1982) and Johnson (1982) found that teaching of vocabulary words prior to and/or glossing of words during reading did not significantly improve comprehension scores. Both researchers suggest that the building of background knowledge allows the reader to construct meaning for unfamiliar words. This can be done through use of pre-activities and thematic units where vocabulary is introduced, recycled and practised in context.

Rosenshine (1969) suggests another vocabulary problem. He claims that comprehension is more difficult in texts where there is excessive use of vague and ambiguous terms like "rather," and "quite a lot" and of probability words such as "might" and "possibly." More concrete, precise terms clarify meaning.

Syntactic Complexity

In assessing syntactic complexity, as noted earlier, formulas seem to offer little assurance that the level of difficulty will be appropriate. Shortening sentences causes not only extra inferential burdens but also results in unnatural language. The approach which uses only structures that students have "learned" in grammar lessons has the same shortcomings as using only previously introduced vocabulary. Here too the student must become accustomed to meeting unfamiliar forms and to guessing at meaning from context.

Although *formulas* may not be useful, identifying structures which are difficult to process can offer some rough guidelines to the teacher (see Botel, Dawkins and Granowski 1973 and Nigalupta 1978). One very specific example is the passive voice which causes problems because it violates basic English word order. Looking again at the sentence "clapping was used to produce the rhythm by which to dance," one is struck by how much easier it would be for students to understand "people clapped their hands to produce a dance rhythm."

Further, the principle of clarity applied at more global levels also applies at the sentence level. Sentences are easier to understand if relationships between their parts are clear. This means, first, that referents for personal and relative pronouns should be unambiguous. Secondly, it means that deletions of relative pronouns or the subject or verb in subordinate clauses increase difficulty. For the learner, a sentence like "There was a news report about a man so injured in the crash he will never walk again" is made clearer if the deleted words are reinserted: "There was a news report about a man *who was* so injured in the crash *that* he will never walk again." Likewise, comprehension is easier in texts where linking words like "because," "in order to" and "if" are used to signal relation-

ships between ideas. Blau (1984: 528) considers "If you cook food for a long enough time, you will kill any disease germs that may be present" to be an easier sentence than "Cooking food for a long enough time will kill any disease germs possibly present." Although it is not desirable to avoid deletions and ambiguous referents altogether, the teacher can check to make sure that they are not used extensively.

If, after checking through a passage, the teacher concludes that the syntax is too complex but that s/he still wants to use the text, the solution may be simplification. In this regard, the best advice is given by Honeyfield (1977), who suggests that simplification should involve *retelling* or *recommunicating* the message rather than the present tendency towards writing "a linguistic translation," or following a formula for simplification. Such recommunication is probably best done by intuition but keeping in mind such rules of thumb as limiting embedding and deletions.

Acceptance of such guidelines about vocabulary and syntax control implies certain pedagogical considerations. If pronouns and subordinate and relative clauses are not going to be avoided, students must be given practice in identifying antecedents and the relationships between clauses. As with vocabulary, the emphasis shifts from reducing the load of unfamiliar items to teaching the student strategies for coping with the unfamiliar. This is of much greater service to the learner who wants to read independently of a teacher and selected graded texts.

CONCLUSION

The idea that the intrinsic difficulty or readability of a text can be measured by simple tests of vocabulary frequency or sentence length must be replaced by the notion of a text's *suitability* for a particular group of learners. Formulas which assess a text separately from its intended readers can give no more than a very rough estimate of its linguistic difficulty. They cannot evaluate what the *reader* brings to the reading task nor can they account for the high degree of individuality within the reading population.

I will conclude, therefore, with a set of questions which can serve as guidelines when assessing the suitability of reading materials for particular learners. Although it is not intended that they be followed in order, the "reader questions" are presented first as they establish the framework within which the text variables can be considered.

1. Will this text *interest* my students?
2. Is there a meaningful *purpose* for reading this text?
3. Do my students have or can I provide them with appropriate *background knowledge* for understanding the content?

4. Is the level of *abstractness* appropriate?
5. Is the passage *complete* in itself or has the author assumed a lot of other information and inferencing skills?
6. What kind of *extra-textual support* is available?
7. Is the text clearly *organized* with a beginning or introduction and clear sequence signals?
8. Is there sufficient *redundancy of ideas?*
9. Will the number of difficult vocabulary items interfere with the task which has been set?
10. Does the author use a lot of structures which are vague or which are difficult to process, given the students' experience with English?
11. Are syntactic relationships within sentences and between sentences *clear?*
12. Have I set an *appropriate task* for the type of text, the level of difficulty and the needs of my students, and have I taught them the necessary *skills* to cope with the task?

With such guidelines in mind, teachers can better assess ESL materials, and, more importantly, can choose and adapt authentic materials and write their own texts. And keeping in mind a shift of emphasis from simplification to teaching and learning strategies for coping with the unfamiliar, realistic purposes and tasks can be set up for reading.

NOTES

1. In *The Love Letter,* 1981. Collier Macmillan English Reader, Level 1. New York, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. 51-53.
2. *Ibid.,* p. 51.
3. An example of such a story is *The Empty Chair* in B. Hartley & P. Viney, (1981). *Streamline English: Connections.* London: Oxford University Press. Unit 42.

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