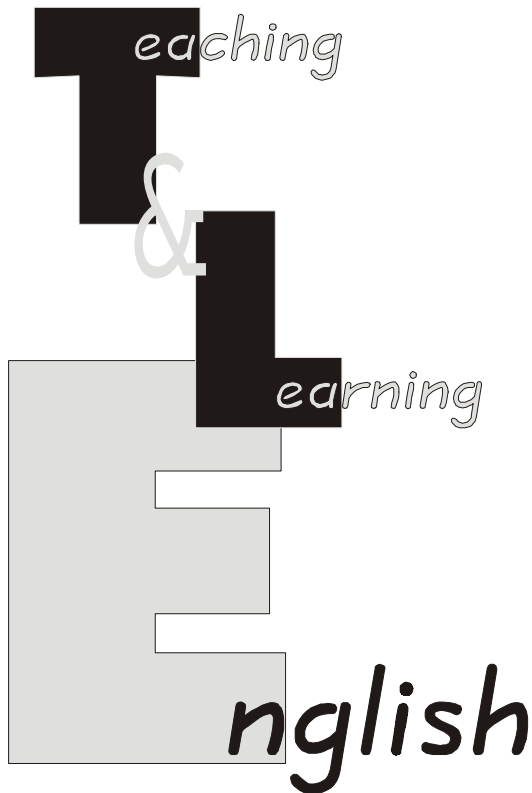


Alba Loyo - Mabel Rivero - Romina Picchio
(compiladoras)

2003



In the 21st Century



**ASOCIACIÓN RIOCUARTENSE
DE PROFESORES DE INGLÉS**

Teaching and Learning English in the 21th Century 2003
Mabel Rivero - Alba Loyo - Romina Picchio (comp.)

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María Cristina «Chichi» Moral

ARPI's First President



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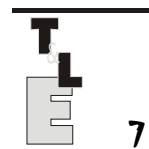
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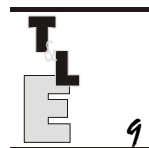
Introduction

It is a genuine pleasure and a great responsibility for the Asociación Riocuartense de Profesores de Inglés (ARPI) to present this first issue of Teaching and Learning English in the 21st Century 2003.

The main aim of this issue is to provide ideas and resources for teachers who work in different educational levels and have to deal with the changing context of language teaching. It also intends to start a series of publications to offer the opportunity of sharing knowledge and contributing to professional updating and consequent empowerment.

Teaching and Learning English in the 21st Century 2003 is a selection of papers on topics related to the teaching of English as a Foreign Language. It contains contributions reflecting the authors' insights and classroom experiences. Thus, this publication includes seventeen articles about foreign language teaching and learning, such as methodology, phonetics and phonology, literature, neuro-linguistics and the application of technology. Some of these articles provide suggestions connected to multimodal reading, grammar at secondary school, English for Specific Purposes, pronunciation and intonation. Others focus on learning styles, electronic portfolios, interactive learning, hypertext reading, computer conferencing, and reading comprehension. Articles about writing transactional letters, using literature in the language classroom, and applying concordances and corpus linguistics are also included in this volume. Many of the papers have several authors; usually, each author brings a slightly different experience and point of view to the common effort, so that the final product is much better than would have been if written by a single person.

ARPI wishes to acknowledge the members of the Academic Committee for the detailed



proofreading of the papers included in this volume. Their advice and suggestions have enriched the quality of the contributions. On the other hand, the views expressed in each article are those of the authors.

It is hoped that teachers find in Teaching and Learning English in the 21st Century innovative ideas and activities to be put to use!

*Alba Loyo - Mabel Rivero -
Romina Picchio*

ARPI

HISTORY OF ARPI

ARPI (Asociación Riocuartense de Profesores de Inglés), founded in 1971, has grown to be an important contributor to culture in Rio Cuarto. However, there is not any record describing its foundation and further development, and this makes a written account of its origin and growth necessary. To carry out this project the present Committee has asked Miss Margarita Ryan one of its members, to coordinate a research project that will carry out the task of collecting all the information available to write the history of the Association. The main aim of this research work will be to search for information on the foundation of the Association and its activities throughout all these years. A further objective of this project is to keep alive the ideals of its founders and members. This qualitative study will make use of techniques used by the social sciences such as searching for documents and interviewing. This is an open invitation to any member of ARPI who may be interested in joining a team to write the history of the Association.



Teaching FCE Transactional Letters: A Genre-Based Approach

María Elena Alonso - Carolina Panza- Luciana Remondino

Instituto KE 'S

Writing in a second language is a difficult task that not only requires grammatical competence in the target language but also skill in using this knowledge appropriately in different kinds of contexts. It has been argued that while students have an extensive unconscious knowledge of different text types and of their characteristics, which enables them to distinguish, for example, between a recipe and a description or an argumentation, they are not always skillful enough to produce these same texts acceptably. English language course books encourage learners to write appropriate texts, for a certain audience and with a particular purpose. Yet, what constitutes an appropriate form is often defined in general or vague terms. The purpose of this study is to complement the writing pedagogical proposal of First Certificate English (FCE) course books with what appears to be missing in them: genre awareness activities.

In recent years, some work done on the analysis of written genres, or text types, has developed into a greater understanding of how texts are structured. Insights from the analysis of written texts have an essential role in the writing class as they can help students build an understanding of how texts can be effectively organized and constructed both at macro (schematic structure /rhetorical patterns) and micro (lexico-grammar choices) levels. Swales (1990) defines 'genres' as "a class of communicative events which share some sets of communicative purposes". Martin (1985) states that genres are staged, purposeful



communicative events.”In both definitions genre is considered in relation to **communicative purpose**, since it not only shapes the schematic structure (rhetorical pattern) of a piece of discourse but also constrains the choice of content and language.

Genre theorists also state that the communicative purpose of a given genre is accomplished gradually and in stages, though a series of **rhetorical moves**, which give the genre its typical structure. Each move serves to fulfil a communicative intention (function), which contributes to the overall communicative purpose of the genre. In order to realize a particular ‘move’ (communicative intention/function) an individual writer may use different **rhetorical strategies or ‘steps’** which, though non discriminative, are characterized by ‘typical’ choices at the level of grammar, discourse or lexis. These choices are writers’ ‘allowable contributions’. Moves/steps patterns have proved to be relatively stable and predictable in certain genres. Building students’ awareness on the existence and stability of such patterns can be a very useful teaching device.

The approach to generic analysis adopted in this study is the one proposed by the Australian School of Systemic Functional Linguistics. We consider **stages or rhetorical moves** those turns or group of turns that fulfil a function relative to the whole. We therefore call something a stage/move if we can assign it a functional label. Traditional functional labels such as ‘beginning, middle and end’ are empty since they are not genre-specific -they do not distinguish between, for example, the beginning of a narrative and that of an argumentation-, and they do not tell students how to organize their meanings so as to accomplish their purpose effectively and appropriately.

Moving to the micro level (lexico-grammatical features), we adhere to the idea that although writers have a lot of freedom to use linguistic resource/s in any way, they must conform to certain standard practices –this is why we can distinguish which genre a given piece of writing belongs to. Mismatches between linguistic resources and purpose are likely to result in an odd text. Even if it is not

always possible or easy to find an exact correlation between the forms of language (lexico-grammar and/or discourse) and the functional values (rhetorical functions) they assume in a text, one is more likely to find a much closer relationship between them within a genre.

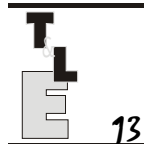
Move-Step Analysis of the FCE Transactional Letter

In the context of the exam, FCE transactional letters are written to get something done: to complain, to ask for and give information, invite and give advice/ suggest plans. They always “respond to writing input (advertisements, other letters, notes, invitations, etc) and/or visual prompts (maps, drawings, etc)” (Evans, 1998:57) and are usually addressed to a stranger.

Tips and explanations provided in most course books deal with transactional letters in general and do not distinguish between the different rhetorical patterns each of these letters display as a result of the different purposes they have. Little reference is made to the moves/steps, in which a certain purpose is achieved. Students are instructed to “organize the information clearly into paragraphs”, to refer to the advert that prompts their letter and to say why they are writing in the first paragraph, and to state what they expect from the reader in the last sentence (Prodromou 1998:22). As far as the linguistic features of transactional letters, course books provide some ‘useful phrases and expressions to request information and to make a complaint.’ They are also asked to write in ‘appropriate’ style.

Though helpful, explanations offered by course books are not always clear enough to students. Thus a more conscious and exhaustive analysis of the characteristics of the text they are expected to write could render into a better performance. As an example of how this could be achieved, we include a genre-based analysis of the transactional letter asking for information and a series of genre awareness activities.

An analysis of model FCE transactional letters requesting information reveals that their purpose is achieved in three



moves, each of them realized in different steps through the following typical linguistic features:

Stages/Moves	Steps	Typical linguistic features
1) Stating Purpose	1.a. Making reference to prompt 1.b. Introducing general request	Formal opening and sign off expressions
2) Requesting information (This cycle of move/steps is generally repeated at least three times)	2.a. Requesting specific information 2.b. Informing of personal needs/ wishes in relation to a request.	Present tenses Direct /Indirect questions Sequential linkers
3) Closing	3.a. Stating specific expectation 3.b. Thanking 3.c. Signing off	First and Second person constructions

On the basis of the above analysis, we propose a sequence of activities¹ which aim at developing students' conscious knowledge of the rhetorical organization and typical linguistic features of a letter asking for information. They have been designed on Schmidt's (1993) postulate of 'noticing' which proposes that attention seems to be required for all learning and thus, in order to acquire genre knowledge, students must attend to 'genre specific features'.

As a first step towards developing genre awareness, we propose asking students to identify and match moves and steps on a model text and fill in the frame included below: A- *Informing about personal needs/ wishes in relation to a request*; B- *Thanking*, C- *Requesting specific information*; D- *Referring to written/ visual prompt*; E- *Stating expectation*; F- *Stating general request for information*; G- *Signing off*.

Stages/Moves	Steps
1) Stating Purpose	1.a. 1.b.
2) Requesting information (This cycle of move/steps is generally repeated at least three times)	2.a. 2.b.
3) Closing	3.a. 3.b. 3.c.

A further step would require an analysis of non-typical letters where some moves and steps are absent or incomplete, or which contain non-typical stages. In this case students are asked to judge the rhetorical organization of non-typical letters and delete or complete moves-steps as suitable according to the pattern a typical letter should display.

To develop awareness of the linguistic features typical of a letter asking for information, we propose analyzing the lexico-grammatical elements used to realize each move-step on model texts as well as encouraging students to contribute with alternative choices.

1) Stating Purpose
2) Requesting information
3) Closing

As a final genre awareness activity before production, we propose asking students to develop missing moves-steps in an incomplete letter in response to an advert as requested in the exam.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to ask for some information about the Ocean Safari holidays

First of all, I would like to know if the water sports offered are charged extra or if they are included in the price

..... I am planning to travel alone so it would be very important to know in advance if I have to pay extra or If I will have to share my cabin with someone else.

Furthermore, I would be very interested in stopping at one of the many islands the cruiser goes through

Another important thing I would like to know is how many crew members travel onboard

Finally, since no reference to price is included in the advertisement and I need to know it in advance

.....

Yours faithfully, Maria Chandler

A genre-based approach to teaching writing like the one adopted here is not only more likely to result in students' better performance, but it may also provide teachers with useful insight when assessing students' productions since it better equips them to judge what is an appropriate, acceptable text. ✕

Notes

¹ Space constraints prevent a full development of the activities, so only a description of them is included here

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The Picture Story Book in the Second Language Classroom: Multimodal Reading

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1. Introduction

Unsworth (2001) observes that the textual environment which affects us and which we affect, has experienced remarkable changes in the twentieth century and will continue to do so in the twenty-first century, as the young learners we teach grow to adulthood. Naturally, these changes have affected children's literacy practices which are no longer *only* restricted to the conventional text formats; now, young children also engage with electronic format texts often, outside their classroom experiences. However, Goodwyn (1998) points out that the traditional text formats, rather than being displaced by computer text, will maintain a complementary role and continue to be both *co-opted* and *adapted* in the evolution of our textual habitat. An outstanding feature of an electronic text is its multimodality, which is facilitated by computer technology and achieved by typographic variation, the use of *dynamic text* and images. Contemporary written texts, from newspapers to school textbooks, are increasingly becoming multimodal due to the incorporation of images with written language. According to Kress (1997) the contemporary integrative use of the visual and the verbal has produced a new code of writing *and* image in which information is carried differentially

by the two modes. This is the case of the picture-story books, which need to be read multimodally. The aim of this paper is to illustrate practically how relations between verbal and visual



modalities may be uncovered through an approach which begins with considering the different layers of meaning conveyed by the language before moving to an analysis of the meanings conveyed by images (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1990). *Tortoise Shell* (1993) has been chosen for this purpose for the following reasons. First of all, its interest-value for young second language learners can be found in the matching relations that are foregrounded, and secondly, in the images that reinforce the meaning of these relations. The learning value in terms of language-pay off, which should be the concern of second language teachers, can be found in the presence of the matching relations that provide repeated exposure to the same language patterns. This feature may be conducive to the acquisition of the syntactic and lexical elements of such patterns with the advantage that children may apprehend their meanings in the context of the story.

2. Analysis

2.1. Schematic Structure

Tortoise Shell begins with an *orientation* (Rothery and Stenglin, 1997) that presents the only character, Tortoise, with his physical characteristics and introduces the problem through his words: he wishes to have a different shell as he thinks he looks boring in his ordinary one (Fig. 1). The story may be divided into five clearly differentiated event sequences that have the same schematic structure: a **solution** (to the problem presented in the orientation) that comes from an idea that occurs to Tortoise who decides to make a new shell in order to look different; a **complicating action** when tortoise gets into trouble because his new shell proves to be inadequate. Because of all these problems, Tortoise evaluates “negatively” every new shell he makes; it is this *evaluation* that leads to a new event sequence when tortoise will go through the *same stages* as before. The story closes with Tortoise’s thoughts: 1) My metal shell rusted, 2) My paper shell blew away, 3) My wooden shell burnt, 4) My woollen shell unravelled, 5) My paper shell bounced.



Once there was a tortoise. He was a very ordinary tortoise, just like every other tortoise. You know, a head, four legs, a tail and a hard shell.

"I'm boring," thought tortoise. "I wish I had an armour-plated shell like an armadillo, or beautiful colourful wings like a butterfly, or fine strong antlers like a stag."

Some days, tortoise wished he wasn't a tortoise at all.



Figure 1

The clauses have been numbered to illustrate that through them Tortoise –this time in the role of narrator– provides the synthesis of each of the five episodes. Each mini-narrative is followed by his final evaluation: "Maybe my shell is the best shell after all... Maybe I don't need anything else." However, as Tortoise



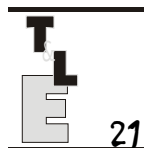
sees some paint he is likely to try again and persevere in his attempts to have a more attractive shell.

2.2. Matching Relations in Text and Image

Hoey (1987) observes that although work on narrative has tended to concentrate on sequence relations, matching relations which also serve to organize a text can be shown to be central to our sense of what makes a narrative acceptable. Winter (1994) uses the term matching relations to refer to a larger semantic field characterized by *a high degree of systematic repetition* between its clauses and by the *semantics of compatibility and incompatibility*. In other words, we have matching relations when segments of a text are compared or contrasted by means of repetition structures. Winter notes that the primary function of repetition is to focus on the replacement or change within the repetition structure; the element that is replaced is identified as “variable” and the element that is repeated in the matched clauses is identified as “constant”.

Hasan (1989) points out that a) repetition is complete identity of lexis and grammar whereas, parallel structures may be parallel “up to a certain point” because some structures can be more parallel than others; b) the degree of parallelism is determined by lexical selection: the perception of parallelism being greater with greater lexical congruity; and c) that parallel structure should be considered as a *textual pattern* that defines and characterizes a given text. According to Cook (1989) parallelism suggests a connection of meaning through “an echo of form” which at the same time can have a *powerful emotional effect* and be a *useful aid to memory*.

In *Tortoise Shell*, except for the clauses “*Then he had an idea*” and “*So he set to work*” which can be considered as repetition structures because they exhibit complete identity of lexis and grammar, all the other matching relations have some internal lexical variation as can be seen in the following examples:



Maybe I could have an armour-plated shell like an armadillo.
Maybe I could have a strong wooden shell and some fine antlers
like a stag.
Maybe I could have a smart warm coat like a sheep.

Constant what he wanted to have

Variable the type of shell he wanted to have

Soon he had a bright new shiny metal shell.
Soon he had a beautiful new colourful paper shell.
Soon he had a strong new wooden shell.

Constant he had a new shell

Variable the type of shell he had

Tortoise walked along the road in his shiny metal shell.
Tortoise walked along the road in his colourful paper shell.
Tortoise walked along the road in his strong wooden shell.

Constant what he did after he had a new shell

Variable the type of shell he had

My metal shell rusted.
My paper shell blew away.
My wooden shell burnt.

Constant something happened to the shell

Variable what actually happened to the shell

The function of these matching relations is to hold all the episodes together because they represent the *same attempts* and *the same failures* as regards Tortoise's efforts to look different. At the end of this cluster of matched events, Tortoise is shown looking speculatively at a paint tin. On the basis of this visual image –with which the story ends– the reader may anticipate a



potentially *successful* episode in which Tortoise does not replace his shell; he *only* decorates it.

The visual images that go with every event sequence can be said to contribute to the matching relations. This can be clearly seen in every picture that shows Tortoise, in the role of *human actor* (Toolan, 1992) working on a new shell (Figs. 2, 3, 4 and 5).



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

Although Kress and van Leeuwen's main purpose is to contribute towards the development of a grammar of images, they insist on the need to relate images to language and to talk about images and about language at the same time. It is believed that these requirements are essential when the intended reader of a picture book is a second language learner. Therefore, pictures must be assessed not only in terms of how they contribute to the content of the written story but also in terms of how they can enhance the process of second language learning (Astorga, 1999).

3. Conclusion

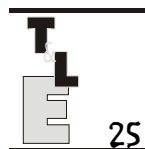
The L2 teacher, in order to explore new pedagogic practices to ensure that picture-story books can be sources of children's enjoyment not only because of their "what" (their characters, plots, etc.) but also because of their "how" (the linguistic and visual forms) needs to develop a critical understanding of how the resources of language and image *separately* and *interactively* construct the different dimensions of meanings in the stories learners read. ✕

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Science-fiction and Library Research: Educational Aids for the Teaching of English for Specific Purposes¹

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I. Situation Overview

Any reading comprehension course dealing with scientific texts has a short-term objective that points at the acquisition of reading strategies together with a long-term objective that consists in turning students into independent readers with the capacity to read any type of texts. The scientific discourse is mainly referential and –as the word indicates–, it makes reference to a concrete reality leaving almost no place for inferences or the discovery of implicit information.

After many years devoted to the teaching of ESP, we have noticed that students, especially those attending the first years of their studies, tend to make use of photocopies and manuals or guides provided by the teachers. As a consequence, they do not feel the need to search for additional information, usually provided by original sources, to carry out a more independent learning. Besides, most students are not familiar with the updated material available at the University Central Library essential to keep up with the latest findings published on different topics. Furthermore, the problem of students at all educational levels (primary and secondary)

who do not have a reading habit is also evident at the university level where students and even teachers only read hyperspecialized texts.



ESP teaching at the University also faces the problem of a constant increase in the number of students attending the course without a proportional growth in the teaching staff, thus turning the individual follow-up of students an unfeasible task. Moreover, as the course is not one of the core subjects in their studies, it occupies a minor position in the students' rank of priorities. As a consequence, even though the reading passages in the manuals used in class are constantly updated and new and varied activities are employed to exploit them, students do not respond in the way we would expect them to do.

II. What is new in our proposal?

The project consists of adding two different though complementary activities to the conventional course, aimed at encouraging reading by making the students aware of the multiplicity of research sources they have at their disposal in the library and by improving their reading competence of texts other than scientific ones.

- a) The use of a science fiction text: *The Lost World* by Michael Crichton in its abridged form, was considered a suitable text for several reasons: 1) the plot is familiar to the students; 2) it deals with a contemporary issue, that of genetic engineering and its consequences; 3) actual scientific data are used to support the fictional events; and 4) it features the degree of action and suspense needed to keep young readers' attention. This abridged version was further modified by shortening and/or simplifying long passages and dialogues and by adding vocabulary and specific information from the fields of Biology, Microbiology and Geology which results in more confidence on the part of the students as they have the background knowledge to facilitate comprehension. The story was divided into different sections accompanied by activities intended to be as varied as possible so as to focus on aspects related to the structure and form of the story by introducing notions like plot, characters,

setting, etc., that make the students feel that they are reading “just for the sake of reading” instead of being assessed.

- b)** Guided assignments in the University Central Library: During the second term, the students visit the library in small groups accompanied by a teacher or an assistant. This activity consists of several steps: firstly, students are shown the arrangement and location of books in English according to the different fields of specialization. Secondly, they are invited to select books that may interest them; thirdly, they are prompted to explore the layout of books (content, references, visual aids, index, etc.). Then, they are asked to complete a card with all the elements relevant to bibliography entries. Finally, students work with specific information by taking notes and making a summary of a chapter of their choice applying different reading strategies learned during the course. Students are also encouraged to relate their search to topics that are currently dealt with in other subjects.

III. Discussion

- a) Imaginative literature allows the reader’s critical involvement with the text by compelling him or her to go beyond a literal comprehension of what is explicitly said. This is a fundamental practice since we are surrounded in our daily lives by messages that are not overtly manifested. The process of reading is seen by Rosenblatt (1996:67) from the perspective of the relation between reader and text, as “transactional” in the sense that it emphasizes a fluid dynamic circuit, a reciprocal process in time, the fusion of reader and text in a synthesis that becomes “meaning”. The reader brings to the text an accumulation or memory of past internal encounters with both language and the world. When reading, the words in the text interact with those elements stored in the reader’s mind that trigger internal states related to words – states not only linked



to references of verbal symbols, but also to personal, sensitive, imaginative and associative aspects.

Therefore, we consider that the creative aspect in the education of future professionals is essential in regard to problem solving not necessarily related to artistic aspects. No less important is the pleasure associated to the reading process as distinguished from the generally sustained view of instruction as compulsory. Through the narrative text, students go beyond the “mere acquisition of knowledge” and develop habits of reflection.

A positive attitude towards reading will not only contribute to the students’ general learning process but also to the development of a critical way of thinking, crucial for their professional future. Through the reading process our worldview expands or changes preparing us to face reality with an open mind. As we combine conscious and unconscious links between linguistic relations, events and background knowledge (intertexts) we develop complex strategies such as association.

Incorporating fiction to an ESP course, may thus contribute to turning reading into a fruitful habit which will result not only in a more effective learning of the second language but also in an improvement of students’ competences in the native one.

- b) As for the tasks to be carried out in the Library, we intend to develop a growing self-confidence in autonomous study, to promote a better use of the available reading material in English and to encourage research in the original sources of information. The library is the place where a direct contact between reader and book is established and this contact contributes to enhance the desire to read. Since the idea is to have an open library where readers have the possibility of an active participation, work in the library is considered a fundamental step in the promotion of reading and the encouragement of a cultural habit. As

Sassaroli and Argüello state, “the contact between reader and text should be a permanent concern for building free reading, reflection, knowledge and imagination into a teaching-learning process of self-development and democratic participation” (1993:24).

IV. Results

Narrative text

The first reaction to the science fiction story was surprise and perplexity. Most students could not see the relationship between this kind of literature and ESP. At the end of the year, however, they felt that reading a story helped them to access texts other than those specific to their careers, and manifested their interest in trying to read other stories in English. They also acknowledged that the text was a pleasant way to review grammar structures and to expand their vocabulary.

Additionally, as the course developed, students could overcome certain difficulties in organizing their thoughts in words, backing Van Peer’s statement that by stimulating the imagination, the narrative text fosters the development of the more complex cognitive abilities –inference, integration, and conjecture (Van Peer 1989: 277, 281).

It was also an enriching experience from the sociological and affective point of view, since reading in a more relaxed environment favoured the relationship between teachers and learners, and furthered cooperation among students through teamwork and the exchange of ideas, predictions, interpretations and discussions.

Library tasks

The result of the Library activity far exceeded our expectations, since students were enthusiastic at the possibility of freely exploring new, updated, and very attractive material from the visual point of view (color pictures, diagrams, maps). By the end of the year they not only fulfilled the requirements of the course but also developed



the habit of borrowing books in English to extract information for other subjects.

At the end of the year students were asked to evaluate the project by means of a survey whose results were 87% positive. ✕

Notes

¹ This paper is a synthesis of an experience put into practice during the year 2002 and currently carried out in an ESP course for Science students. It has been submitted to Secretaría Académica for its evaluation as an innovative project.

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Teaching English in High School: Catering for Different Learning Styles

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“A sign of a good teacher is the ability to flex one’s teaching style to better fit the needs of those being taught” (Lawrence, 1996; in Cooper, 2001:331)

Recent studies in the area of second language acquisition are drawing special attention to learner differences (Cohen, 2000; Kinsella, 1995; Oxford and Green, 1996; Reid, 1996). Teachers who advocate a learning-centered approach may be familiar with this view of learning -considering the learning process envisaged for the learners as the principal consideration in decision making- but yet fail to address learner preferences in a systematic way. In our secondary school classrooms, due to the complex nature of our language classes, learner preferences are rarely addressed, probably because teachers may consider planning a lesson on the basis of individual differences an extra burden to their already loaded schedule. Quite on the contrary, getting familiar with a methodology that addresses learner differences does not involve an extra effort and may greatly benefit both teacher and students.

The purpose of this paper is to present the theoretical background which supports learning-style pedagogy and to suggest classroom implications.

Theoretical background

Learning styles have been defined as “an individual’s natural, habitual, and preferred ways of absorbing, processing,



and retaining new information and skills which persists regardless of teaching method or content area” (Kinsella, 1995:171).

Several surveys have been designed to indicate style preferences, for example, the *Learning Channel Preference Checklist* by Lynn O’Brien (1990), the *Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire* by Joy Reid (1984), the *Style Analysis Survey* by Rebecca Oxford (1993), among others. These instruments use different labels to classify students’ learning style information. These instruments should not be considered an exact measure to predict behavior, but as a clear indication of students’ overall style preferences. Reid (1995) warns us that, in general learning styles terminology and categories tend to overlap, which has caused learning styles research to become inaccessible for classroom use. The most common categories used in different surveys are: visual, auditory, hands-on, tactile and kinesthetic, some other surveys, like Oxford’s (1993), also include categories such as extroverted versus introverted, intuitive versus concrete-sequential, closure-oriented versus open-oriented and global versus analytic.

The most widely used labels to identify different sensory channels are: *visual*, *auditory* and *hands on*. *Visual* learners like to read a lot, they need visual stimulation and thus must have written directions if they are to function well in the classroom (Oxford, 1993). According to Oxford (2000) there are two types of visual learners: *visual verbal*, who prefer the written word, and *visual non-verbal*, who rely on charts, graphs and drawings to grasp the information in a better way. The visual sense is the most popular sense in many cultures. *Auditory* learners prefer listening and speaking activities like debates and role-plays. *Hands-on* students enjoy doing projects, games, conducting experiments, etc. These learners are also called *tactile* or *kinesthetic* (Kinsella, 1995), i.e. those who prefer language activities which involve some kind of movement.

In relation to the way learners deal with other people, Oxford (1993) uses the label *extroverted* to refer to those learners who prefer a wide-range of social conversations and

discussions and *introverted* for those students who enjoy reading by themselves and working with the computer. The former seem to need contact with other learners to generate the energy needed to work properly, whereas the latter, aware of possessing strong inner energy, do not need the group to operate successfully (Oxford, 2000).

As far as how learners handle possibilities, if they are *intuitive*, they will prefer to set goals and to use abstract thinking; while if they have a *concrete-sequential* approach, they will work in a very organized way and will follow procedures step by step (Oxford, 1993).

Regarding how learners approach tasks, they can be classified as *closure oriented* if they like to meet dead-lines and plan ahead, or as *open* if they prefer discovery learning and enjoy learning without rules or deadlines.

In relation to the way learners deal with ideas, if the learners' preference is *global*, they will get main ideas first and communicate even if they do not know all the words. If they are *analytic*, they will focus on details, analysis and contrasts.

It needs to be pointed out that many of the multiple elements that comprise an individual learning style are bipolar, representing a continuum from one extreme to another. However, no value judgment should be made about where in the continuum a learner falls, since no learning style is inherently good or bad (Kinsella, 1995). Learners tend to exhibit a comfort zone (Oxford, 1993) where they feel at ease working within the limits of their own learning styles

Pedagogical implications

Given the nature of ESL classes, we believe that they provide an appropriate environment for students to become more comfortable with learning approaches that they have not previously experienced. In fact, in the

English class students are presented with a wide variety of contexts that deal with an array of topics, such as personal experiences, current issues, culture, science, etc. that encourage the activation of different learning styles. Moreover,

the ESL teacher is in an optimal position to encourage transference to other situations, not just in the English classroom, but also across the curriculum and to other non-academic situations.

When we analyze the textbooks in use in our secondary schools, we usually find that many of the activities proposed fail to address a variety of styles, limiting the activities mainly to visual analytic modes of processing, as if students possessed only one hemisphere, the left one. According to Kinsella (1995), teachers “unintentionally select methods that reflect their own preferred ways of approaching academic tasks” (1995:170). We believe that with some training and little extra effort, teachers can broaden their own approach to teaching and eventually encourage their students to stretch their own learning styles. Teachers should design different tasks to help learners stretch beyond their ordinary “comfort zone”, to expand their learning and working potential.

The teacher’s first job should be to observe (Reid, 1996). This could be done by performing a critical evaluation of the activities presented in the course-book in use, placing special attention to the types of learning styles favored. In case the material proposes limited options, the teacher should compensate for those weaknesses by making some significant changes to the activities given, in order to make them suitable for different learning styles.

The following are some suggestions to take into account if we are to cater for different learning styles: make students aware of their own learning preferences, plan activities that encourage learning by doing and interacting with others, encourage participation in role plays and simulations, include team work, talk openly about your own learning style and what activities worked best for you as a language learner, devise tasks that will need learners work.

If ESL teachers help students analyze why they are having trouble with an assignment, or why they can succeed in some cases and not in others, they will be leading students to become more aware of their individual learning strengths and weaknesses, and in turn, autonomous and independent language learners. ✕

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Neuro-Linguistic Programming: the importance of perception channels in learning

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The name I have chosen for this paper is Neuro-Linguistic Programming: the importance of *perception channels in learning*¹ since it is only when we acknowledge the predominant perception channels (visual, auditory or kinesthetic) our students have that we are able to establish an optimal communication with them. Said perception channels -also called representational systems- represent the particular ways in which all of us take in, store and code information in our minds.

Communication starts with our thoughts. In order to express our thoughts we use words, tonality and body language. What are thoughts then? In the book *Introducing Neuro-Linguistic Programming* Joseph O'Connor and John Seymour (1990) express that "one useful way of thinking about thinking is that we are using our senses internally." When we think about what we see, hear and feel, we recreate these sights, sounds and feelings internally. In other words, we re-experience information in the sensory system form in which we first perceived it. In NLP the different ways in which we do this in our minds (seeing, hearing, feeling, taste and smell) are known as perception channels or representational systems. These systems are classified into three systems: visual, auditory and kinesthetic.

Visual System (V')	Auditory System (A')	Kinesthetic System (K')
We use it externally when we are looking at the outside world.	We use it when we hear external sounds.	Include the tactile sensations like touch temperature and moisture.
We use it internally when we are mentally visualizing.	We use it when we hear internal sounds.	Include remembered sensations, emotions, and the inner feeling of balance and bodily awareness.

We all use the three primary systems all the time although we are not equally aware of them. Furthermore, we have a tendency not only to develop but also to value one sense over the others. The particular perception experience each student has leads to his or her way of thinking which is manifested in the way he or she processes information internally, his or her preferences and verbal expressions, and his or her behavior. To acknowledge the predominant perception channel all our students have and to communicate with them taking into account these data represent a valuable resource for teachers since students feel accepted in their unique way to connect with their perception experience and learn the language effectively.

In the book *Dynamic Learning*, Robert Dilts and Tedd Epstein (1995) state that when people think or learn they sometimes adopt corporal postures that are systematic and habitual. These postures give us clues that lead us to the representational system that has been activated in the student. In the following chart you will find additional information regarding general characteristics, body postures, access clues, gestures and some typical words or phrases for each representational system.

VISUAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General characteristics: observation, order, and neatness. • Body posture: leans back, head and shoulders lifted or lowered, superficial breathing, quick eye movement, memorization through images • Access clues: fast and superficial breathing, furtive look, quick movements and loud voice. • Gestures: touch or point to the eyes, gestures at eye level. • Some words and phrases to describe the subjective experience: look, illustrate, clarify, clear, common place, at first sight, evidently, visibly, clear, light, picturesque, gloomy, lucid, objective, perspective, clairvoyant, illusion, etc. • Ways of learning: by means of pictures, drawings. Takes in information globally. He/she remembers what he/she sees. Prefers to read.
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AUDITORY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Body posture: body leaning forward, head leaned to one side, relaxed shoulders leaning backwards. • Access cues: diaphragmatic breathing, fluctuating movements and voice. Speaks rhythmically making pauses. • Gestures: points to or gesticulates near the ears, touches the mouth and the chin • Some words to describe the subjective experience: echo, listen, tell, say, sound, speak, ring, discuss, harmony, orchestra, music to my ears, on the same wavelength, did I hear well?, etc. • Ways of learning: listening to himself/herself and others. He/she gets distracted easily. Repeats what he/she listens. Prefers to listen.
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KINESTHETIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General characteristics: express what they feel using their bodies. They move a lot. They respond to physical stimuli. Memorizes through walking. He touches himself/others. • Body posture: drooping head and shoulders. Deep breathing. • Access cues: abdominal breathing, slow movements and deep voice. • Gestures: touches the chest and stomach areas, gestures produced below the neck. • Some words to describe the subjective experience: feel, understand, hold, hit, push, crash, common sense, hot, warm, cold, contact, heavy, light, rough, tough, smell, experiment, get in touch with you, a nice person, etc. • Ways of learning: by experimenting, touching, and manipulating. He/she remembers what he/she feels or experiment. Prefers to write, act or dramatize.
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Thinking in terms of classroom applications I would like to start this second part by using a common classroom situation. Before assigning a composition task, the teacher asks her three students –Victor, Alice and Karen– to imagine

they are at a birthday party. In order to guide their students, she asks them questions like where is the party held? How is the place decorated? What other things can you see there? As soon as the teacher finishes Victor (visual) puts up his hand and produces his answers quickly. Alice listens to Victor's account carefully but when it comes her turn to answer she finds it hard to describe what she sees. Karen takes a deep breath and looks down as she taps her fingers on the desk. What seems to be the problem here? The point is that teacher's guided questions only included those questions that catered for Victor's predominant representational system: visual. In order to remedy the situation she adds some questions like: What about music? What other sounds can you hear? Is food tasty? How do people feel? What are they doing? Consequently, Alice puts up her hand and gives an account full of details. Karen smiles and says things like People are happy! They are dancing and jumping because they are very good friends and the food is delicious. Whenever you are in front of a group of students even though you disregard they predominant perception channel, it is better to use a mix of predicates so as to let the visualizers see what you are saying. Let the auditory thinkers hear you loud and clear and put yourself over so that the kinesthetic thinkers can grasp your meaning. Otherwise you risk two thirds of the audience not following your explanations if you explain it in one representational system.

Taking into account oral production, take a dialogue situation from a textbook or create one of your own such as striking up a conversation with someone at the airport. Before students start doing the activity, ask students to think about where they are, what they can see or hear there, how it feels to be there and so on and so forth. Once they have the elements to produce the dialogue give all the necessary instructions related to the communicational items or grammar or vocabulary you expect them to use.

Listening seems to be hardest part of learning for students. Auditory thinkers may find it easier since following what is said is something they feel comfortable about. But, what about the visual thinkers well as the kinesthetic thinkers?



Read the extract of whichever listening activity you are working with and before you give the task guide your students so that they can optimize their ability to derive as much information as they can from the extract. For example, let's suppose that the listening is about someone who is telling about one day at the amusement park. Focus on questions related to the visual and auditory aspects provided by the extract. Likewise draw students to detect feelings and sensations. Ask questions such as: how does the speaker feel? How do you give account for that?

In relation to reading proceed accordingly. Read the text carefully to know what it is about. Most of the article headings are suggestive thus serving the purpose of attracting students' interest so use them to kick off. Prior to the reading task, ask students to imagine situation of things related to the content of the reading. If the paragraph is about a student from Hong Kong who is telling about his school life, lead your students attention towards things they hear (people greeting each other, the bell ringing, students chatting, etc.), see (teacher, students, classroom objects, etc.) and what their preferences are (subjects, extra curricular activities, etc.).

All in all, NLP resources used in teaching a foreign language constitute a powerful tool in the hands of the teacher. By getting to know our students' predominant perception channels, we have the chance to access the particular way to understand the world that surrounds them. Although there are three main representational systems, they are not to be taken as stereotypes to classify our students since they just represent their particular ways to connect to their own experiences. If we let students do this they feel motivated and respected. ✕

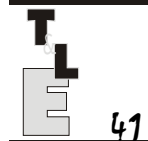
Notes

¹ A longer version of this paper was published in the FAAPI Conference Proceedings 2002.

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Tools to Solve Language Problems in the Language Classroom

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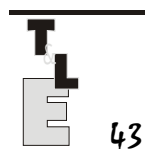
Consider the following examples:

- Se arrojó en la universidad una campaña solidaria.
- La Secretaría Académica de la UNRC informó que se estira el plazo de inscripción para el curso.
- La inflación de abril superó el 6 por ciento, al tiempo que el cesto familiar de emergencia fue calculado en \$824.
- El seminario está conducido a investigadores y profesionales interesados en temas territoriales.

The above examples could have been produced by a non-native speaker of Spanish. We have included them here to illustrate the type of problems that we, teachers and students, have as non-native speakers. These problems cannot be explained by traditional theories of grammar, as they involve a grammar of lexis, rather than a grammar of categories. They are problems of idiomaticity that make evident the fact that lexical items have syntagmatic relations, that is, occur in the company of certain words. Idiomaticity is addressed by a theory of language based on huge quantities of authentic data known as corpus linguistics, whose most important representative is Sinclair (1991) from the University of Birmingham.

In this presentation we will:

- Introduce the theory that addresses idiomaticity, **corpus linguistics**.



- Present a technological tool to solve language problems based on the theory, **a concordancer and a corpus.**
- Introduce the pedagogy associated to corpus linguistics, **Data Driven Learning.**
- Show some **practical applications**

Corpus linguistics has been defined as the study of language in real use. It involves the analysis of data collected as a corpus. Stubbs (1996) has synthesized the theory in seven principles:

PRINCIPLE 1. Linguistics is essentially a social and applied science. Among its principal applications are teaching English as a foreign language or mother tongue, teacher training and dictionary making.

PRINCIPLE 2. Language should be studied in actual, attested, authentic instances of use, not as intuitive, invented, isolated sentences. The theory considers that real examples represent the language better than invented examples and that intuitive judgments cannot be trusted in terms of frequency and distribution of forms and meanings.

PRINCIPLE 3. The unit of study must be whole texts, as few linguistic features of a text are distributed evenly throughout.

PRINCIPLE 4. Texts and text types (genres) must be studied comparatively across text corpora. This is due to the fact that language varies systematically across text types, and it is through comparison of texts that we can interpret systematic selections.

PRINCIPLE 5. Linguistics is concerned with the study of meaning: form and meaning are inseparable. Meaning affects structure, a phenomenon known as colligation, and meaning determines syntagmatic relations between words, a phenomenon known as collocation. Thus, a divorce is amicable, not friendly, and a PC program is friendly, not amicable.

PRINCIPLE 6. There is no boundary between lexis and grammar: lexis and grammar are interdependent.

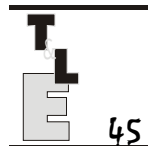
PRINCIPLE 7. Much language use is routine (as opposed to creative)



The tools to carry out corpus-based studies are a **corpus** of natural language and a **concordancer**. A **language corpus** is a collection of texts –spoken or written– which contains information in relation to grammar, lexis and collocations that may not be found in dictionaries or grammar books. A corpus may be small, 1,000,000 words, or large, millions of words. The analysis of these large bodies of texts is done with computers in texts that have been turned into computer readable material –digitalized– for ease of access and processing.

The creation of a corpus, according to Sinclair (1991), is a simple matter involving making decisions on for the design on the basis of a series of guiding general principles briefly described below in the form of questions.

1. Will the corpus be used for manual or computerized analysis? For computerized analysis we need digitalized texts.
2. Is the corpus representative of the whole of a language (general) or is it representative of a particular domain of that language (specific)? For example, we as teachers can create specific corpora of texts taken from the students' coursebook, of business texts for an ESP course, or of letters of complaint.
3. Is the corpus representative of the written or spoken word? This will determine the method of data collection, sources, and data processing.
4. Will data be typed, scanned or downloaded from the Internet?
5. Is the time period a characteristic feature of the corpus? The collection may be representative of Old English.
6. Is the corpus meant to show regularities at the level of whole texts and its constituent parts? The corpus can comprise whole texts and/or it can be divided into sections.
7. Is the corpus meant to be a large or a small one?
8. What is a corpus useful for? It answers different kinds of questions depending on how it has been designed. For example, if we are teaching letters of complaint



one of the problems that may arise is the type of adjectives used. We may know that “faulty”, “defective” and “flawed” exist but we may want to know their frequency and semantic value in the genre.

There are different corpora available that can be consulted or ordered from the Internet (the British National Corpus, the Collins Wordbanks Online, and the Reuters Corpus).

- The **British National Corpus** is a 100 million-word corpus of modern written and spoken English. (Regional and national newspapers, specialist periodicals and journals, academic books and popular fiction, and unscripted informal conversation) The following is the web page where a query on the **BNC Online** can be made: <http://sara.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/lookup.html>
- The **Collins Wordbanks Online** is composed of 56 million words of contemporary written and spoken text. The following is the web page where a query on the Bank of English corpus can be made <http://titania.cobuild.collins.co.uk/form.html>
- The **Reuters corpus** is a collection of news articles stored in two CDROMs. The following is the web page where the corpus can be ordered free of charge:
http://about.reuters.com/researchandstandards/corpus/how_to_apply.asp

A concordancer is a computer program especially designed to analyze language data electronically stored. It is able to retrieve language samples from a corpus. The concordance output obtained is “a list of unconnected lines of text. At the center of each line is the item being studied (keyword). The rest of the line contains the immediate co-text. Such a list enables the analyst to look for eventual patterns in the surrounding co-text” (Partington, 1998:3). The query results provide information about how language is used, but of a different nature than more traditional ways of getting language information (e.g., grammar book, dictionary), which present data already analyzed and

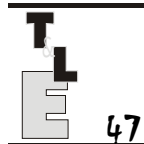


interpreted. The concordancer only provides data. It is up to the reader to discover patterns or confirm or contrast hypotheses (Gavioli, 1997). Currently, there are several such concordancers available, for example MicroConcord (Scott and Johns, 1993) and WordSmith Tools (Scott and OUP, 1998). MicroConcord can be freely downloaded from the Internet at <http://www.lexically.net/software/index.htm>

With the impetus gained by corpus linguistics and the rapid advancement in technology, it is now a common understanding among TEFL practitioners that concordancing can play an important role in language learning (Johns, 1991; Leech, 1997; Gavioli, 1997). Concordancing, or, in John's terms, **data-driven learning (DDL)** is an approach to foreign language learning which uses a corpus of natural language and a concordance software to help learners discover language patterns of use on their own. The corpus acts as a language informant, which enables the learner to explore, analyze and come to conclusions about how language is used by native speakers. The concordancer serves as a problem-solving electronic resource, which they can consult to solve problems of collocation or colligation. In an approach like this, the role of the language teacher is to act as a facilitator or a guide whose task is to help the learner develop strategies for interrogating corpora and interpreting the data (Gavioli, 1997).

The concordancer, then, helps learners see language patterns in context through induction. However, for this to take place, the samples presented to the students should be carefully selected by the instructor at the beginning. The teacher should act as a facilitator, guiding the learners from a very controlled environment to a more independent one in which the learners assume control over their learning process.

With a data-driven learning approach, using a concordancer and a corpus of natural language, "learners can short-cut the process of acquiring competence in the target language, because the computer is able to help them organize huge amounts of language data so that patterns are more easily discerned"



(Stevens, 1995:8). A pedagogy like this can also help learners become “more intelligent in posing questions and interpreting responses” (Gavioli, 1997:83).

The interaction with a corpus through a computer program may be an enriching experience for non-native language users. The corpus can act as a *native speaker* in answering questions about grammar, lexis and collocations with instances of natural occurring language wherefrom the user can work out a particular pattern and use. This promotes learners’ autonomy by stimulating them to speculate, discover idiomatic patterns and come up with generalizations. ✕

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Teaching Grammar at Secondary School through a Grammar-awareness Approach

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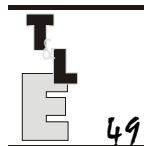
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Introduction

Most EFL language teachers would probably agree that teaching English in an EFL setting is a great challenge. It is often the case that students do not have much exposure to the English language outside the English classroom, and therefore, teachers have to deal with the many complex aspects of the teaching situation all at once in the very limited schedule they have available. Too much is generally demanded from teachers, and students' final level of achievement and degree of motivation are not always the desirable ones.

Over the last years, a major source of concern for teachers of English in Argentina has been to find alternative ways to provide grammatical instruction at the high school level. With the advent of the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, most of the time, grammatical instruction was given a more secondary role, when not left aside completely. The dilemma has been, then, what role grammatical competence should play in formal instruction in a General English course, and what methodology would be more suitable to be applied.

It was with this situation in mind that we decided to investigate on the topic of learners' internalization of grammatical rules at the high school level. We found Grammar



Consciousness-Raising theory (GCR) quite appropriate for our teaching reality, and in consequence, we decided to conduct a research study to find out about the role played by grammatical consciousness-raising on the teaching of the English grammar. Special interest was placed in this study since almost no bibliography exists about empirical and systematic studies in this field, and, as acknowledged by some, the “effects of this cognitive approach have remained relatively untested” (Ellis, 1994:257).

What is GCR?

GCR is a cognitive approach to grammatical instruction developed by Sharwood Smith and Rutherford (1985) that focuses on strategies and mechanisms that promote form-meaning connections during comprehension without necessarily using explicit rules or specialized jargon. Its ultimate goal is to help learners discover patterns and rules by themselves by focusing on aspects of the target language.

The notions of grammar consciousness-raising have given grammar teaching a new role in the curriculum, as regards the type of input provided, and the roles played by both teachers and students in this process of grammar acquisition.

This approach known as “*Grammatical consciousness-raising*” (GCR) considers this process of grammar consciousness raising “as a *means* to attain grammatical competence in another language, as opposed to more traditional approaches to ‘grammar teaching’ which attempt to instill that competence directly” (Rutherford, 1987:24). Its aim is to “direct learners’ attention to relevant features of grammar in the input, and to encourage correct form-meaning mappings that result in better intake”. This type of input is *structured* because it is not “free-flowing and spontaneous like the input one might receive in a communicative interaction. It is purposefully prepared and manipulated to highlight some particular grammatical features” (1995:72). And the word *input* is used to make reference to the fact that learners are not



engaged in producing the language, but are, instead actively engaged in processing the input received.

VanPatten and Sanz (1995:173) summarize the main rules to follow in order to attain *processing input*: a) *Teach only one thing at a time*, b) *Keep meaning in focus*, c) *Learners must “do something” with the input*, d) *Use both oral and written input*, e) *Move from sentences to connected discourse*, and f) *Keep the psycholinguistic processing mechanisms in mind*.

Material development

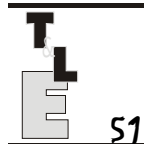
In our first attempt to find an alternative way to deal with grammar instruction in the classroom trying to apply the theory behind G C R, we devised our first classroom guide, which aimed at fostering learners' acquisition of “regular verbs in the simple past tense” –grammar item developed in the course book a group of students in 9th grade EGB was using. Students worked through the guide easily, felt confident when solving practice activities and asked about the possibility of having this kind of instruction for the rest of the grammar contents to be covered throughout the school year. The idea was taken. This group of students became the control group for our study, and we started working on more grammar-awareness guides in an attempt to introduce every grammar item proposed in the students' curriculum.

Material Description

The guides were later on compiled into two handbooks called “*Understanding Grammar: Grammar awareness Guides*”. Each level contains grammar items that coincide with the syllabus of the textbook “*Open Doors*” –currently used in many schools in Río Cuarto.

How are instructions provided?

Instructions in each guide are provided in Spanish in the belief that the learning process should involve relating what students are learning to what they already know. In this way,



students' L1 is the point of reference when learning the foreign language and, by resorting to their L1, students are more likely to feel on safe grounds, minimizing chances of misunderstanding and failure. Another advantage of this approach is that it is believed to foster autonomous learning. Given the task and the time allotted for completion, students can work at their own pace and on those aspects students consider more relevant.

We hold the view that the use of students' mother tongue in instruction should not be neglected when used as a tool for learning the new language, provided that students are clearly warned about the disadvantages of overusing L1 at other stages of the lesson.

How is each guide structured?

Each guide has the following pattern: a) A brief situation intended as "structured input", b) grammar item identification by the process of "noticing", c) hypothesis forming and rule formulation and, d) grammar-item awareness.

How are these guides used?

- Students are handed in a guide, or else, students are asked to look for a specific guide in their Handbook;
- The teacher sets the situation and explains the procedure;
- Students work on the guides individually;
- They are given enough time to work on the guide. Individual differences and learning styles are respected;
- Students are encouraged to share answers with their classmates **after** they have finished working on that guide;
- When all students in the class have finished, the teacher goes through the guide with the whole group, trying to solve doubts, checking answers and making students "notice" some specific aspects;
- Then the teacher asks students to identify the grammar aspect already introduced in the GCR guide in their regular textbook;



- Finally, the teacher provides activities to practise the topics worked on in each of the GCR guides.

In sum, during class time, learners focus on their processes for arriving at the rules and comprehension. The teacher is an instructor that provides grammatical explanations when they are needed, monitors the students' behaviour, and provides feedback about the students' performance.

Students' Perceptions

Students at large felt comfortable and motivated when working with the GCR guides. In order to have their perceptions on the approach, they were asked to complete a three-point-Likert feedback appreciation survey in which they had to comment on: a) the usefulness of working with this methodology and its value as a study instrument; b) the degree of difficulty for following the guides' logical development; c) the appropriateness of the instructions given in Spanish, and d) the likelihood of using this methodology as a presentation device for subsequent grammar points.

Students' responses were more satisfactory and encouraging than what we had anticipated.

- a) 92 % of the students considered that working with this methodology was useful.

78% of the students rated the guides valuable as a study instrument.

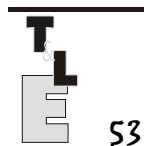
- b) 76% found it easy to follow the logical development of the guides.

- c) 78% of the students considered the instructions given in Spanish as a facilitating means to solve the tasks and reach the stage of rule-formulation.

- d) 76% of the students showed preference for using this methodology as a presentation device for subsequent grammar points.

Final considerations

All in all, we have found GCR methodology highly advantageous for our target population, from a two-fold



perspective. From the students' perspective, they reported having profited and enjoyed from working with this methodology, not only because they could work on their own and at their own pace but also because they felt involved and active in their learning process. The instruction and acquisition process could be speeded, and students felt they had more control on the grammatical structure being introduced.

On the other hand, from the teacher's perspective, we believe, GCR provides educators with a powerful tool to make the most of their personal meeting with the students, and thus allowing for more free time to be devoted to interactive and communicative aspects of the teaching process. ✕

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Sensitisation to pronunciation work

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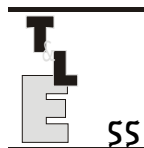
Introduction

As teachers of phonetic courses for Spanish students we face the fact that learners many a time lack the effective strategies that they can apply to improve their oral performance. Although some students may put into use certain learning strategies, they are seldom aware of their potential. We have also noticed that students tend to believe that improving pronunciation has to be done with disregard of content and context through mechanical and meaningless tasks. We believe that learning is more effective when teachers act as facilitators, shift the focus to the learners (thus favouring a learner-centred approach), and encourage them to become involved and participate actively in the learning process.

This is why, in our perspective, the teacher plays an important role in helping learners develop and use strategies in more productive ways and in raising awareness of the workings of pronunciation and intonation in particular contexts of situation.

The idea of this paper stems from a proposal we have been implementing with our Phonetics students at the teacher- training college for the last five years.

The National University of Rio Cuarto offers a four-year course in English in order to become a teacher of English, qualifying teachers for teaching English at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Among the core subjects, students are required to take four courses in the area of Phonetics.



Our students are young adults, mostly women, aged between 18 and 23. In the last five years, due to a change in the syllabus, we have been giving a massive enrolment of approximately 100 students. Every year, we split the class into two or three groups in order to assist them better and provide personalized feedback. Introduction to Phonetics is the first of the phonetic courses. We approach the subject in a practical way, with no theory introduced later on in Phonetics I, when learners have a fairly acceptable linguistic competence.

Our students are all Spanish speakers with an average of three years of formal study of EFL and with few opportunities to be exposed to the target language, since ours is not an English speaking community. The students are not required to sit for an entrance examination, though a certain proficiency in the target language is expected. However, the majority of students show little or practically no awareness of the phonology of L2, a point of vital importance since they are going to be "models" in their future as teachers. With this idea in mind we have designed a set of activities, which will help learners discover sounds and intonation patterns through direct experience, and at the same time, encourage strategies application in the development of oral skills.

We adhere to Underhill (1994) when he claims that working with sounds does not necessarily imply the aural sense alone; appealing to the different senses, i.e. visual, tactile, and kinetic is important in helping learners with different learning styles get engaged actively in pronunciation work. And though it, they can easily integrate these activities with almost any other type of activities.

Suggested activities to raise students' awareness of pronunciation and intonation

1. *Relaxing*

Aim: Creating the right atmosphere

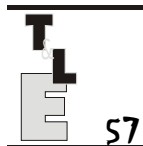
Situation: whole class (any number of students), soft music needed

Time allotted: 15 minutes

Being relaxed is very important for the correct pronunciation of sounds and the fluent production of speech. A number of factors may stress students and impair in different ways the successful achievement of any pronunciation task. As teachers, it is our job to help them get the best out of themselves and of the situation.

To begin with, it is necessary to help the students relax. Being in a class with their peers and having to perform in front of them and their teacher is a stressing situation for most of them. They are afraid of making mistakes, which, for most of them will mean embarrassment and discomfort. Here is a suggested activity adapted from Atkins (1994) to help our students feel at ease.

First of all, it is important that the teacher create the appropriate classroom atmosphere by explaining the aim of the intended activity. Next, students are asked to leave their books on their seats, walk to the nearest wall and lean their back against it. They should not exert pressure on it only use it as support. Immediately after, they are asked to close their eyes, breathe deeply and listen to the music. This unexpected situation may give rise to giggling and laughing on the part of the students. This is the right time for the teacher to comfort them by saying: "It's all right", "Go on. Let yourself go" and so on. It is important for the learners to realize that they felt something and were able to express it. Students begin to relax. The teacher tells them to concentrate on their breathing, repeating instructions such as "breathe in deeply through your nose" and "let it out through your mouth". In general, breathing in this way leads to the relaxation of the whole body and the vocal organs as well.



Once the appropriate atmosphere has been settled, students are prompted to say their names using “I am (name), I’m (name) or “My name is (name)”. Thus, this warm up activity may also serve as language activator. We must remember that actions can make language more meaningful and consequently more memorable, and at the same time, some spontaneous production of the oral language is likely to take place.

Finally, students are asked to open their eyes and to return to their places. In general, one feels that something has changed due, probably, to the fact that they have shared a sort of experience that has made them feel a sense of togetherness. At this point, it is important that the teacher ask them as a group how they feel. Answers will probably come not from their words (which they may lack), but from the expression on their faces.

Again, these relaxation exercises help students become less tense, they can free their body and mind, relax their whole body as well as the speech organs: the mouth, the pharynx, the larynx- and most important- the vocal folds, which play a decisive role in the production of speech. Pronunciation is thus seen as the physical side of language, involving the body, breath and muscles.

2. Reading with different moods

Aims: to encourage learners to participate spontaneously and creatively.
to show feelings
to associate moods to body language, voice quality and intonation.

Time allotted: approx. 10-20 minutes

The teacher selects a dialogue suitable to be read with different moods to show surprise, irritation, anger, impatience, etc. If necessary, some alterations can be made to include words with the sounds the teacher wants students to practice.

Learners form pairs and read the dialogue silently first, and then in a loud voice showing different feelings and emotions.



This activity is suitable to any level, depending on the complexity of the dialogue chosen. Students can also participate in building up their own dialogues as the course progresses and different intonation patterns are presented.

The use of drama activities allows weaker members of the class to compensate for their lack of language through paralinguistic features such as gesture, mime and body language.

The idea is not to “put students on the spot” or embarrass them; rather, to encourage them to participate actively and spontaneously by showing a positive attitude. Thus, language is given more substance by the accompanying action.

Sample dialogue (Adapted from Cieri, Barbeito and Cardinali 2003):

A. What are you doing here/ in the dark/ in the cold...

B. Waiting for somebody/my boss/ a friend...

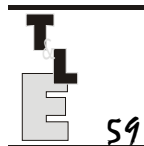
A. Have you been waiting long?

B. Half an hour/ two hours/the whole afternoon...

3. Sounds in isolation

Aim: to develop a deep awareness through direct experience of what happens in the vocal tract and how this relates to what is perceived through the ears.

By appealing to the senses: tactile, visual and auditory, students are encouraged to focus on the internal physical movements of the tongue and muscles involved. They can feel how and where sounds are produced by sliding the tongue up and down, backwards and forwards, by focusing on lip shape and movement: rounded, spread, neutral. Students may also become aware of and “discover” the neighbouring sounds, produce them (in their minds, whispering, and/or speaking aloud) and compare them to the taped sounds. To this aim, articulatory gymnastics proves useful.



Students should become aware of how they produce the sounds by manipulating their vocal musculature, and of how the internal sensation of using the muscles relates to sounds, as they are perceived.

4. Sounds in connected speech (Idea adapted from Underhill, 1994)

Aim: to raise students' awareness of speech simplifications and practise them.

Students are exposed to naturally occurring simplification in the speech flow and are encouraged to contrast dictionary pronunciation of isolated words and connected speech pronunciation of words, to focus on assimilation, elision, gradation, linking features and to reflect upon their effect on English rhythm, fluency and understanding.

Sample activity

- A short taped exchange in slow colloquial style is played.
- Learners transcribe it in phonetic script (they may refer to the dictionary to check).
- Students read their version and compare it to the taped version. Their production may sound rather stilted, unsimplified.

Example:

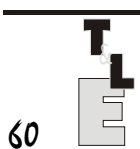
- Then, they listen to the same exchange (on tape), which has been recorded in rapid colloquial style.

A: Did you eat? - δ δ φ | ιτ?

B: Yes, thanks. - φσ, θ — | κσ

- Students transcribe it, making the necessary changes: more assimilations, pauses, weak forms, vowel reductions.

- They read their product and compare it to the previous version.



- Students and teacher discuss differences, make observations and draw conclusions from experience.

A: - δ | ιτ?

B: - φ̄.; θ—|κσ

This approach is holistic in that it allows learners to work from their individual strengths. As shown in this proposal, articulatory gymnastics, awareness questions, miming, are placed in a meaningful context in which learners are prompted to develop trust in their own capabilities to learn. Thus, English pronunciation and intonation can be approached in a non-threatening way. ✕

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Intonation: An Aid to Listening Comprehension

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Any time learners of a second language are faced with oral discourse, they have to make do with whatever resources are at hand to be able to make sense of it. Besides having to overcome –among other linguistic and non linguistic obstacles– unknown lexis and syntactic forms, lack of knowledge of the sound system, interference from features originated in their first language which may distort the way they perceive the target language (Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 1996), non-native speakers are confronted with difficulties to recognize and interpret intonation features. Consequently, it is the instructors' job to expose learners to the way native speakers express themselves in natural speech so that they can comprehend spoken English –and later produce it– in all its dimensions.

First-year students at the English Training College (Universidad Nacional de Río Cuarto) make up a really heterogeneous group as regards previous knowledge of the target language, and for most of them the proficiency level required at this level is quite high: upper intermediate. It goes without saying that for these in-coming students, the area of phonetics and phonology is the one most of them have been least exposed to, if at all. The main textbook they use for English Language I provides them with authentic listening passages that they are expected to understand because this is one of the skills they have to develop as part of their curricula. Clearly, this contact with natural rapid speech offers opportunities for comprehension work and subsequent oral discussion.



What I intend to discuss in this paper is the role played by intonation as a facilitator for listening comprehension through a listening passage –an extract from a radio programme called “*Hidden Talents*”, which integrates one of the units of the textbook these learners have to use–*Landmark Upper Intermediate* (Haines & Stewart, 2000) (See Appendix)

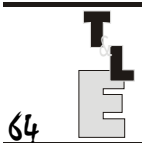
From the linguistic point of view, this text poses many lexical and syntactic difficulties to those learners who are not still proficient enough to handle this level of English. However, it is my opinion –in view of my classroom experience in dealing with this text in particular for about three years–, that the rhythm, stress and intonation present in this listening passage contribute greatly to the students’ identification of information focus and attitudinal tone of the speaker. Richards (Nunnan, 1989) states that “listening involves the ability to recognize the function of stress and intonation *to signal the information structure of the utterance*”. It is, in this sense, that listening becomes important for the process of acquiring language as learners gain self-confidence when they feel they are applying effective listening strategies, and not simply focus on understanding every word.

As can be seen in the tapescript, a lady is describing what she considers her own “hidden talent”, which is nothing less than a personal failure: forgetting where she leaves things in her house. The rhythm, stress and intonation she applies to her description undoubtedly help to highlight the underlying meaning: pure absent-mindedness. There are terms and expressions in this listening text which are semantically very strong, and as such, they are uttered with the necessary variation of pitch so as to transmit the speaker’s *attitude*: she sounds light-hearted, not serious, unconcerned and unaware of her carelessness. Instances of such tonic words are: “*disappeared / quite / re-appearance / invisible/ there / exactly / obvious / remarkable / discovered / potatoes / always / neatly / unpredictable / all/ slightest/ burglar / every / unusual / finding / losing / happiness / every / minute* “, among others. The tone of her talk is an aid and a cue to meaning for the listeners

in the sense that it guides them to interpret –*to listen between the lines*– and to grasp what the speaker is really saying. It is Gilian Brown’s view (1990) that paralinguistic features contribute to the expression of attitude and meaning above and over the verbal elements of the message, as well as to the reinforcement of the content of what is being uttered. Also, O’Malley and Chamot (1990) think that language comprehension consists of active and complex processes in which individuals *construct meaning* from both *aural* and written contextual information.

The classroom experience I have had with these learners and this listening text comes to support Roach’s point of view (2000) that intonation makes it easier for a listener to understand what a speaker is trying to convey, and this happens because of the relationship between linguistic elements and the context in which they occur. This is the point where intonation and discourse intersect to focus the listener’s attention on aspects of the message that are most important. If learners of a foreign language are made aware of the fact that tonic stress will tend to be placed on words with high information content (Roach, 2000), the question of comprehending a rather linguistically complex listening text will be facilitated, and they will approach oral discourse in the foreign language much more confidently.

Why is it that, in general, learners of a foreign language do not seem to pay due attention to intonation as they are dealing with listening comprehension? It is Clennell’s opinion (1997) that due to “their inherent opaqueness in the discourse”, these pragmatic functions are not really appreciated even by native speakers. Inappropriate prosodic perception, in Clennell’s view, may bring about misunderstanding. However, my students have been able to decode the speaker’s intended meaning in the text under focus, in my consideration, thanks to the ‘tonic prominence’ placed on the meaningfully salient words.



It is extremely advantageous for learners to become familiar with a range of implied speaker intentions. For this purpose, and at this level of language proficiency, relevant

classroom tasks such as getting students to mark perceptually significant prosodic features (Clennell, 1997) would help them develop awareness of these skills before production. Other non-productive activities aiming to sensitise students to features of natural speech may be to ask them to listen to and repeat expressions recorded by native speakers which focus on attitude, or getting them to discriminate language functions through intonation, such as persuading / advising / complaining, among many others.

When learners do not attend to, or are unaware of intonationally different utterances in a foreign language, communication can break down. For them to develop efficient communicative competence in the target language, frequent listening to texts of the type analysed in this paper is essential. It is my conviction that the perception of critical prosodic differences can constitute a powerful aid to listening comprehension. ✕

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Appendix

Tapescript

I have a secret power. I can make objects vanish into thin air. I can put keys, pens, or glasses on to surfaces or into drawers, and a few seconds later they have disappeared. Unfortunately, I don't have quite so much control over the re-appearance of these objects. Sometimes my secret power makes an object invisible, so that it only looks as if it's disappeared –after a few days, weeks, or months, it becomes visible again, and there it is, exactly where I first put it. Once I spent a whole day looking for an important document that I knew I'd left in an obvious place on the table. Although I couldn't see the document, it was there. Medical experts might say this was a case of temporary blindness, but, erm, I'm not so sure.

More often, objects disappear to special parts of the house. They particularly like hiding in my daughter's bedroom. She can never understand how my hairbrush or T-shirt materializes in her room. Another favourite hiding place is my car. Objects I'm certain I left on top of the fridge turn up under the driver's seat.

My most remarkable experience was when the last remaining key to the kitchen door disappeared and we had to leave the door unlocked and banging in the week for several weeks. One day, as I was unpacking the food I had just bought at the local supermarket, I discovered the missing key under a bag of potatoes. I have to say I was puzzled by this, but grateful, of course, to be able to lock the door again.

When I first became aware of my talent, I was not altogether happy about it. I began to envy people whose keys always hung on special hooks and whose papers were always neatly put away in cupboards and drawers. Then I realized that the tidiness of these people's houses reminded me of old-fashioned museums with their carefully labelled exhibits.

In my opinion, a good house is an unpredictable house, with objects in all kinds of unexpected places. It's nice to be able to open a kitchen cupboard without having the slightest idea of what's inside.

Another advantage is that unpredictable houses don't appeal to burglars. In the last few months every house in my street has been burgled except mine. Admittedly, I don't have a video or a hi-fi system but I feel the unusual combinations of objects in my house might have made the burglar think that my house had already been broken into.

It is true that the pleasure of finding things is far greater than the inconvenience of losing them. The things I find are hardly ever the things I'm looking for. While I was looking for a screwdriver recently, I found my daughter's birth certificate, which I'd been searching for months. On another occasion, while I was looking for my glasses, I came across a sandwich, which I'd lost the previous weekend.

The happiness you feel when you find a missing object is worth every minute of the time you've spent searching for it. Of course, even as you smile to yourself, you know that the object will not be staying for long.



(Source: Haines, S. & B. Stewart (2000) *Landmark* (Upper Intermediate) Student's Book. Oxford University Press)

Literature in the Language Classroom

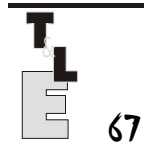
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As Collie and Slater have put it in *Literature in the Language Classroom*, “literature offers a bountiful and extremely varied body of written material which is important in the sense that it says something about fundamental human issues, and which is enduring rather than ephemeral” (1988:3). At the same time literature is a source of authentic material, that is, language that is genuine and undistorted for it is intended for the native speaker. Therefore, as a student, being exposed to this sort of material increases receptive vocabulary and facilitates transfer to a more active form of knowledge.

These issues have been at the centre of discussion over the last two decades and have meant the inclusion of literature in the foreign language classroom. Practices that include the literary text in the language classroom should replace the old traditional text-centred approaches favouring a student-centred approach within the framework of reader-response theory. As Wolfgang Iser (1980:51) has put it “a literary text must therefore be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader’s imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative”.

Literature is beneficial for the language learning process. Students do not learn a foreign language simply by being told how its grammar and syntax work. They do learn it when they are exposed to language in use and interact with it. As literature



provides a rich context in which individual lexical or syntactical items are made more memorable, it broadens and enriches the learners' own reading, writing, listening and speaking skills, as well as the ability to make inferences and deduce meaning from context. Thus, literature leads to a complete language learning experience.

Why?

Reasons for using literature in the language classroom

One of the reasons to include literary texts in the language classroom is that it provides motivating material. Engaging imaginatively with literature enables learners to shift the focus of their attention beyond the more mechanical aspects of the foreign language system and it gives learners a sense of satisfaction when they are able to take possession of a previously unknown territory: "Literature exposes students to complex themes, and fresh, unexpected uses of language ... this involvement may be more engaging for students than the pseudo narratives frequently found in course books" (Lazar, 1993:15). If material is carefully chosen students will feel that what they do in the classroom is meaningful and relevant to their own lives.

It also provides access to cultural background. For learners of a second language, literature is an important complement to deepen their insight into the cultural values. Learning about the culture gives impetus to language acquisition.

Literature encourages language acquisition and communication. Literature provides meaningful contexts for processing and interpreting new language. Students acquire a great deal of new language while reading with enjoyment. The use of literary texts is a successful way of promoting activities where students need to share views and opinions thus practising the language and accelerating acquisition. At the same time, it helps develop their interpretative abilities. Interpreting a literary text requires the use of logical thinking, that is, proceeding from carefully observing to discovering relationships and drawing conclusions.



Finally, literary works, as they appeal to our imagination, can enlarge our world, for we may re-evaluate notions we thought to be definite or absolute and modify or alter our perceptions of the world. Gaining an ability to consider other views and values leads to understanding and tolerance; and thus it involves personal growth.

What?

Selecting material

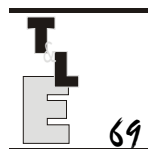
A syllabus is concerned with the selection and grading of the material to be used. To get the best out of a literary text in the language classroom, the criteria of suitability should consider age and conceptual level of learners, their needs and interests, their linguistic competence and their background, motivation and time available (for class and home reading). That is to say, linguistic, psychological and cultural considerations are important.¹ If the aim when using a literary text in the language classroom is to stimulate personal involvement, when selecting material, texts that arouse interest and provoke reactions should be preferred.

How?

Designing an approach

As Stanley Fish has noted three important aspects form the basis of the relationship between reader and text: “the process of anticipation and retrospection, the consequent unfolding of the text as a living event, and the resultant impression of lifelikeness” (Fish, 1980:64). As the reader-response approach to the text is suitable for its exploitation, students’ personal response to literature should be encouraged. The exploration of a text should help them develop confidence to express and value their own response and that of others.

It should be noted that when literary texts are used in the language classroom, the aim is to help students develop their communicative competence. Rather than imparting



information as to the author, the movement, techniques, etc, the literary texts should be used as stimulus for students' responses, followed by reflection on the use of language. Students should be encouraged to share their views with each other using the target language, making the text their own, or in Stanley Fish's words, thinking of "language as an experience rather than as a repository of extractable meaning" (Fish, 1980:99).

Using poetry in the Language Classroom - Activities proposed

When designing activities, variety should be considered to maintain interest and involvement. These student-centred activities should involve as many of the students' abilities as possible. The experience of sharing with a group should be maximised, for the discussion among peers is helpful to bring about confidence and overcome difficulties.

The following set of activities is meant to accompany the poem "*He Treats Them to Ice-Cream*", which has been selected for a beginner group of teenagers and/or adults. Time allotted for this lesson is 40 minutes approximately.

The activities to work with the poem have been organised into three sections: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. Pre-reading activities help introduce the poem to the students before they read it. They generate excitement, which will result in a closer or more careful reading of the work. While-reading and post-reading activities help students focus their attention on key sections, modify or corroborate their anticipations, share their interpretation with the group through active interaction.

He Treats Them to Ice Cream

Pre-reading activities

- 1) You are going to read a poem called "He Treats Them to Ice-cream" by Anna Swirszczynskia (in Rumens (ed) 1985, Making for the Open, Chatto and Windus, p. 51).

Work with a partner. What does the verb "treat" mean here?



Write down what you think the poem is about. Share your ideas with the class.

While reading activities

- 2) Now, read the first verse of the poem. After you have read it write down what you think happens next. Read this aloud to your class.

Every Sunday they went for a walk together.

He, she

And the three children.

- 3) Now read the next verse of the poem:

One night, when she tried to stop him going

To his other woman,

He pulled out a flick-knife

From under the mattress.

Were you right about what happened next in the poem? With your partner, write a last verse for the poem.

- 4) Here is the last verse of the poem

They still go for a walk

Every Sunday,

He, she and the three children.

He treats them to ice-cream and they all laugh.

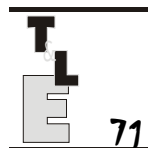
She too.

Does it have the kind of ending you expected?

What do you think of the ending. Share your ideas with the rest of the class.

After-reading activities

- 5) Look at the title of the poem again. Then look at these definitions for the verb treat



Treat: [T] 1- to act or behave towards someone in a particular way: She treats us like children. 2- to handle something in a particular way: this glass must be treated with care. 3-to try to cure an illness by medical means: a new drug to treat this disease. 4- to buy or give someone something special: I'm going to treat myself to a holiday in Spain. 5- to put a special substance on something to protect it or give it a special quality: the wood has been treated to make it waterproof.

Which of these meanings is connected to the poem? Explain your choice. ✕

Notes

¹ See chart on p 12-13 in Ellis and Brewster.

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Enjoying literature in the EFL classroom: the process of book selection

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New English Institute

Everyone seems to be aware of the importance of reading literature in the field of second language acquisition as a way to foster creativity, improve language performance and tackle themes which are not generally dealt with in ESL classes. However, this concern is not always approached in a suitable way in practice because teachers of English are faced with the challenge of finding good materials, generally expensive and difficult to obtain. This scenario is worsened by students' reluctance to read since, in general, they reject the mere idea of reading claiming that it is a boring and difficult task with the inclusion of books which do not fulfill their expectations.

We feel that a sound theoretical background is crucial to develop an approach that could be appealing to students and teachers alike. In order to originate a change in the way teachers view literature and to provide them with the rationale needed to take that leap, we designed an institutional project at New English Institute which started with an in-service literary workshop where, among other activities, the theoretical guidelines were presented and the books students would read were chosen. We began working with the students a few months ago and so far the results have been very positive. In this paper we will present the theoretical guidelines on which we based the selection of literary books illustrating with examples of the materials chosen.

We strongly believe that the implementation of this approach will eventually lead to the reinforcement of reading habits in the students' mother tongue. "Literature, as opposed to materials written especially for ESL/EFL, can motivate students to want to read and help them develop the habit of reading both in and out of class" (Celce-Murcia, 1991:328). As language teachers, we are responding to the concerns expressed by many other teachers all over the country in relation to the reading problems faced by our young readers in the Argentine educational system.

Background

There is a new perspective on the notion of literature and the methodology to approach literary discourse. The current conception of literature has been broadened to include not only the classics but much more. "Unconventional genres" such as comic strips, uncannozed works coming from the margins, nursery rhymes, and graffiti, among others, have gained a new status in the literary world. As a result, the conception of the teaching of literature has undergone critical changes with the development of different approaches to cope with the heterogeneity that characterizes the literary texts. One of such approaches is the "reader-response theory" which departs from the "conviction that a text's meaning and significance is intimately bound up with the activity of the reader" (Selden, 1989:121).

From this point of view, the teaching of literature becomes student-centered and the role of the language teacher is that of a guide or facilitator who helps learners interact with the text. This being the case, it is essential that language teachers encourage learners to value literature in its own right. The means to do this is giving literary discourse an integral role in the language curriculum and not the role of something "extra" and subsidiary, or as a good excuse to teach or reinforce grammatical items only.

There is much more to this issue than meets the eye if the aim is that students learn a language and enjoy literature as well. There is the issue of focusing not only on the literary

content but also on students' expectations and reactions which will contribute to get them to read. Thus, the act of reading will be regarded as a pleasurable activity where the reader interacts and unfolds the world the writer has created in the text.

Criteria for book evaluation

One of the difficulties that a teacher faces when intending to include literature in her classes is that of the nature of the literary texts included in EFL course books which are in general demotivating. What is more, the great quantity of books offered by ESL/EFL editorials (usually presented in their simplified form) does not necessarily imply a good quality.

A way to solve this situation is to resort to literature by trying to find books varied in content and form that will in turn invite readers to find pleasure and enjoyment in reading. This leads to the question of defining what quality books are. The process of qualifying books for children or teenagers becomes a crucial issue in this new perspective, and teachers need to be equipped with parameters on which to base their book selection. Being critical of the books available at the institution where you work or of those to be bought is essential at this point. In our situation, making the right decisions is imperative, selection is synonym of richness, it allows us to make variety stand out from an undistinguishable, uniform bulk of books (Patte, 1995).

But, what do we exactly mean by good quality? In general, a book, belonging to any genre, conventional or unconventional, is considered to have literary value when it follows certain standards both in its form and content that make it worth reading: an appealing layout, quality of illustrations, a meaningful design that invites to different interpretations, an original narration, and a distinctive use of vocabulary that goes beyond the text. To these parameters, we could add the ones stated in *Piedra Libre* magazine (1993), which are "The originality of texts, structure, language, characters and conflict resolution as well as innovative forms of dealing with different topics. The

aesthetic level and the possible relations between the fictional world and the reader's universe. The ideological content and the underlying scale of values..." (1993, menú especial).

Results of book assessment

The main aim of New English literary project is to help foreign language learners of English get involved in reading different kinds of literary texts for we believe that reading not only is essential to language learning but also to the development of learners' critical thinking and creativity. This way of approaching reading may eventually lead to the development of independent readers.

One of the first steps in this project was to set the parameters on which the selection of books was made, which was worked out by the teachers participating in the in-service workshop. Based on the general premises mentioned before, we chose books:

- a- whose richness of expression allows the readers to go beyond words
- b- whose illustrations have meaning in themselves.
- c- which belong to "sub genres" like comics, graffiti, ads, sayings, proverbs, etc.
- d- which have a rich content that promotes the discussion of themes related to different human issues that aim at providing a new vision of the world.
- e- which are self-reflective about the place given to the act of reading as well as the place given to literature in our lives.
- f- which consider literature not as something "serious", with a difficult terminology and exclusively directed to a specialist audience.
- g- which consider that literature as an art should be connected to other artistic fields.
- h- which involve the senses (emotion, pleasure, joy, surprise, etc.) that make them more memorable.
- i- which push literary studies towards uncannozed literary productions.



The following books are examples of the parameters at work:

The napping house, by A. Wood, is a book for children that was chosen because the superb quality of its illustrations, which, together with the musicality contained in its embedded rhyme make the reader eager to explore the story. A story characterized by events which can only be true in an imaginary world which children allow themselves to enter.

Some of the stories compiled in *Garfield* were chosen to be read by teenagers on the basis of the idea that comics could form part of the texts that are not traditionally “literary” but that could be treated as such. *Garfield* has the potential to discuss what is regarded as funny and amusing and the way humor responds to cultural differences, plays on words and background knowledge.

Matilda, by R. Dahl, contains beautiful passages for the students to become conscious of the importance of reading literature and the possibility that readers have to discover a fictional world through the printed word. *Matilda* is transported to a world of imagination by the stories she reads.

According to my Mood, by Zephaniah, is a clear example of the poem that is not directed to a specialized audience written with difficult expressions. In addition to this, it represents the voice of a group living in a multicultural society like Great Britain.

About Children’s Rights, by S. Silverstein, is a poem that calls our attention because of its meaningful drawings. Its richness also lies on the possibilities it offers for the discussion of topics such as human rights and the need to participate in order to complain about the injustices in our society.

At New English Institute we believe that as language teachers we have an important role in the promotion of good

reading habits and the taste for reading. By learning how to select good quality books we feel we are taking a step towards a fresher perspective in the teaching of literature. ✕

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Interactive Project-based Learning¹

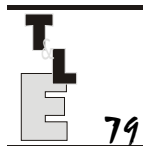
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This proposal presents an interactive project-based learning experience carried out with university students of English as a foreign language. However, it lends itself for all levels of instruction from low intermediate secondary school students to advance trainees.

Project-based learning is a comprehensive method by means of which students are involved in interdisciplinary project planning. Besides, it is in agreement with humanistic approaches, communicative language learning (Omaggio-Hadley, 2001) and constructivist principles (Thanasoulas, 2002). The design of interactive projects emphasizes the participation of learners and their involvement in problem solving activities. The learner and the development of his learning process as well as his capacity to learn how to learn is at the heart of this approach. That is, students apply their background knowledge to real-life situations by exploring authentic reading materials (Brandl, 2001). This process gives learners the possibility to decide what and how they learn, and teachers the opportunity to act as guides, facilitators or explorers, helping students to build up motivation and achieve their own projects.

These interactive projects can be carried out searching for information from different sources including the Internet, where students can explore meaningful authentic materials from multiple perspectives and make their own choices. These explorations on the Web have additional advantages for the enhancement of students' reading skills. As hypermedia has a nonlinear structure, reading hypertexts



requires the use of different skills or strategies. According to the “cognitive flexibility theory” readers can access the required information from different perspectives, that is, they may return to the same topic and even to the same place repeatedly and from different directions. According to Jonassen (1991, in Doolittle, 2001) to “stress conceptual interrelatedness, providing multiple representations or perspectives of content” is among constructivist design principles. Moreover, this process favors incidental language learning and helps to deepen knowledge acquisition. Besides, the information the students find on the Internet, presents graphics, animations and other images, which they can attach to the texts (Brandl, 2001). It is well known that visual aids are effective not only in activating background knowledge but also in their facilitating effect on comprehension. In developing their projects students can use different technological devices such as computers with modem and printer, Internet access, computer application programs, scanners and digital cameras.

The experience

The experience consisted in the development of interactive technology projects in which students were expected to work collaboratively towards the achievement of an end product. Pair and group work as well as interaction with teachers and experts proved to be effective ways for promoting communicative language learning and for developing the students’ social experience, (Vygotsky, 1978, in Doolittle, 2001). Different types of communication technologies were used in the development of these interactive projects but they can be carried out with any other available resources.

First Stage

The first stage of this practical experience was the selection of topics and group organization. An interesting array of topics and subtopics such as human rights, poverty,



corruption and hazardous situations, determined the language items to be learnt during the academic year and involved the students in context-related language-learning activities. Then, the students organized themselves in groups of three to four and chose the subtopic to be researched on. In these activities they were expected to search for information, read it carefully, make their own interpretation, express their opinions and negotiate meanings. The focus was on meaningful learning and on the content they had to work with rather than on the correctness of form and fluency.

Second Stage

Each group searched in newspapers, magazines, and journals or on the Internet for information about the subtopic previously chosen. Afterwards, the members of the group examined the material and selected the most relevant issues for their purpose. Then, the groups themselves set their own objectives that were presented to the class before starting the project. The students carried out various activities such as,

- selecting material from the different sources,
- analyzing the relevance of the information they found,
- comparing similar views on the same topic,
- contrasting the different ways in which the issues could be solved in other parts of the world,
- synthesizing the information,
- organizing the material to be presented to the whole class, and finally,
- evaluating the results.

It should be emphasized that these activities involved the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies and the development of higher order learning skills. Besides, during all this process the students were engaged in activities, which involved the development of language learning skills such as reading from different sources, writing summaries of the information they found, reporting on their experience to the class, listening to the reports presented by their classmates.

Third stage

The third stage of these projects was to organize an effective presentation of the end product. For this purpose students made use of new communication technologies and other forms of reproduction of information according to the resources available and their comfort level with computers.

Finally, project-based learning did change not only teaching and learning methods but also assessing performance. In fact, in this instance, the assessment process was summative and formative. From many specialists' point of view, this type of assessment may be subjective and time consuming, that was why rubrics and checklists to evaluate the students' end product were used.

An example of an interactive learning project is presented below:

Sample Project

Topic: Hazardous situations (earthquakes, floods, storms, hurricanes, tornados)

Content: Floods: multiple perspectives on this hazardous situation.

Audience: classmates, teachers and students from other courses.

Technology: journals, magazines, newspapers, the World Wide Web, interactive encyclopedias, dictionaries, and grammars.

Teamwork: Groups of 3 to 4 students.

1) Activities: Fill in the following cards:

Project Title	Floods
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ To search for information on the different possibilities of solving this problem.➤ To design a public presentation
Name of students in the group

2) Write the sources of information accurately

Sources of information	
Hazardous situation:	Floods
Place:	Río Cuarto
Date of occurrence:	December 2009
People's life before the hazardous situation	Describe daily routines
People's life after the hazardous situation	Describe how people managed to overcome the situation
How this problem is solved in Argentina	Provide examples
How this problem is solved in other parts of the World	Find examples

3) Final Product resources

Written documents	
Overhead Transparencies	
Photographs, slides, pictures, posters	
Recorded Cassettes	
Power Point presentation	
Other	

PROJECT ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

Group members	
Project Title:	Floods

RATING	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	COMMENTS
Content				
Organization				
Resources				
Relevance				
Creativity				
Grammar and spelling				
Written documents				
Design				

Concluding Remarks

Project-based learning “leads to the authentic integration of skills”, “culminates in an end product” and is “potentially motivating, stimulating, empowering and challenging” (Brandl, 2001:106). Besides, it is student-centered, it focuses on content learning and it lends itself for cooperative learning. The experience with interactive projects described above helped to build up confidence and self-esteem to those students who had never been exposed to make a public presentation before. In the post project-work interviews, the students reported their satisfaction on having worked autonomously while improving their own reading skills. Others commented that interactive projects had been a unique opportunity to develop both electronic literacy and a critical attitude towards information. Finally, it should be said that interactive projects allowed students to apply their knowledge to real-life situations, which was significant for their professional development. The whole experience was so challenging and rewarding that it surpassed students’ and teachers’ expectations. ✕

Notes

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Technology in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom: Maximizing Hypertext Reading¹ Skills

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Hypertext: definition and characteristics

In recent years, communication has been influenced by the use of sophisticated technology-assisted media. These new systems allow for the rapid and massive delivery of information and for the presentation of that information in various different ways. Educational materials and methods have also been modified by the use of technology. In the case of EFL instruction, technology-assisted teaching is being implemented more often each day, influencing the process of understanding, presenting and producing language.

One of the most important changes is observed in the area of reading comprehension. It is generally accepted by teachers that students are being increasingly exposed to the hypertextual environment as they read from interactive software programs or from the Internet. Hypertext can be defined as “a new way to read on-line text. . . ; [in hypertext] information is represented in a semantic network in which multiple and related sections of the text are connected to each other” (Foltz, 1996: 109). The presence of links (nodes) that readers can select (by clicking on them) permits immediate access to new information.

According to Rouet and Levonen, hypertexts enable the reader “to build his or her own paths, to select and organize



the information relevant to his or her own needs or objectives” (1996:9). These authors expand the definition of hypertext as “a *space* in which the readers *navigate* according to their objectives” (italics added). The inclusion of such concepts highlights the active role of the reader in the process of making decisions and reconstructing ideas in order to get meanings out of the text.

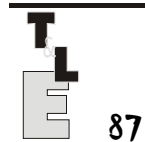
Reading Comprehension Strategies

When dealing with reading one may wonder about the scope of this concept, or just simply ask oneself what it does mean. In the reading process Goodman (1988) sees a crucial interaction between language and thought. He defines it as a “psycholinguistic process in that it starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning which the reader constructs” (1988: 12).

The goals of reading instruction may be several. Among its basic ones, Tierney, Readence and Dishner mention “to develop strategies by which children can become independent comprehenders” (1995:251). But the development of strategies is not something that only children should aim at; any learner, no matter the age, should achieve so. Oxford claims that strategies are “important for language learning, because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence” (1990:1).

The strategies applied to reading comprehension are defined by Carrell as “actions that readers actively select and control to achieve desired goals and objectives” (1998:2). Anderson (1991) suggests a list of twenty four strategies classified into three groups: cognitive reading strategies (thinking), metacognitive reading strategies (thinking about your thinking/planning), and compensating reading strategies.

In order to become a successful reader, McGrath suggests a cycle in which strategies or tactics should be applied before, during and after reading. According to her,



reading involves much more than saying words. It is the “active thinking process of understanding an author’s ideas; connecting those ideas to what you already know, and organizing all the ideas so you can remember and use them” (2001:1).

To cope with the absence of reading theory to guide hypertext processing, it is often suggested that reading strategies used for printed material could be considered as basic and then expanded taking into account the mechanisms available in each hypertext as well as the specific goals of the readers (Foltz, 1996). The navigational flexibility provided by hypertexts might require the flexible use of a wide repertoire of strategies, especially to support activities such as searching for information and maintaining coherence during reading. In the case of EFL hypertext reading, the use of strategies has a crucial relevance, as they help readers to compensate for possible linguistic deficiencies and, at the same time, support information-searching and problem-solving activities.

Strategy Development and Hypertext Processing

Reading hypertexts demands, as said before, a series of abilities that should be developed so as to achieve proper comprehension. It is generally pointed out that teachers should help students maximize the use of reading strategies. To achieve this aim, it is suggested that a great deal of importance should be given to the use of metacognitive strategies (Hammond, 1993). Hammond assumes that the effective application of this type of strategies will get readers monitor their comprehension and evaluate whether to access certain links, therefore contributing to avoid disorientation. In addition, he proposes that instructors should provide learners with motivating and clearly focused learning assignments. According to this author, having a clear purpose to read enhances the use of available information, prevents passive browsing and increases the possibility of making well-motivated choices when searching for information. Also, Foltz (1996) suggests getting students to



consider the macrostructure of the hypertext as a guide for the reading task. In his opinion, activities such as analysing titles, identifying nodes, and guessing whether following a link will lead to relevant information help to determine coherent transitions and maximize comprehension.

Apart from considering strategy selection when using the Internet as a reading source, another group of specialists have highlighted the role of critical reading skills. For example, Fellog (2000) suggests evaluating web sites. This idea is shared by Kirk (1996) Brandl (1996) and Dalton and Grisham (2001) who make the point that information on the web is not filtered, and therefore there is little control over the quality and accuracy of the content of texts. Fellog and Kirk agree on the criteria applied for web-site evaluation, and propose that students should be encouraged to consider aspects such as:

- Authorship: Who is the author of the web page? Is she /he a specialist on the subject?
- Publishing body: Is the site owned by a commercial business or an educational institution?
- Point of view or bias: How accurate is the information? Does the information reveal the ideology / point of view of a particular group? Do they have a reason to present an opinion or bias? Do they present only one side of the issue?
- Referral to other sources: Does the author allude to other authors' ideas to support his thesis?
- Currency: How old is the information? Does it include a publication date or information on the regularity of updates?

Concluding Remarks

Different specialists in the area of hypertext reading have proposed that a series of abilities are involved in accurate and fluent electronic text processing. Certain cognitive and metacognitive abilities, as said before, may support reading

in a hypertextual environment, by regulating readers' movement and therefore avoiding disorientation. In addition, critical thinking skills could also be important to evaluate the reliability of information found on-line. However, further research is needed in this field to agree on a set of strategies that should be applied to hypertext reading. For this reason, teachers could adapt existing suggestions, expanding and / or adapting them to each educational situation. X

Notes

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Web Technologies in ESP teaching: A web-based course using computer conference¹

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Integration of Internet technologies and the World Wide Web into new technology-based educational environments is likely to enhance delivery of instruction. In the latest years, the use of computer conference systems for self-directed learning has facilitated English teaching and contributed to motivating students. Studies on Web-based courses have shown improvements in the learning process, and may provide a solution to our students' lack of autonomy while working, lack of motivation in reading and inappropriate self-directed learning environments. This paper² presents the design and teaching experience of a Web-based course for ESP training students, using the computer conference system. The present course design responds to the principles of self-directed learning, since students worked with their learning material at their own pace, without direct teacher or peer supervision (Keirns, 1999).

The computer conference system used in this course consisted of a combination of face-to-face and web communication among content, students and instructors, in which students interacted with a variety of communication technologies. The basic principle was asynchronous communication by website interaction and e-mail. This type of distance learning approach is particularly appropriate to foreign language teaching

since it is accepted by students who prefer a reflexive learning style and are used to interacting and participating in class. (Moore & Kearsley, 1996)



In order for the self-directed learning to take place, this should occur in environments that are likely to provide interactive capacities, freedom of action, as well as possibilities for sharing information among participants and content. Such characteristics may be available in an online context that allows for delivery of information and interaction with the target information. In the context of a computer conference Web-based course, students may develop learning skills by participating in either individual or group work; where they may, not only share peer responses in a discussion board, but also build their own answers based on the group contributions. Furthermore, continuous feedback is provided to students' content responses and personal opinions, which include guidelines or comments from the instructor.

Some of the authors who have carried out studies on the design and application of computer conference systems, such as Easley (1992), Harasim (1990, 1994), Hiltz and Turoff (1993), consider that computer conference systems require a good level of organization and planning to facilitate individual, team, as well as project work. Furthermore, the computer conference system allows participants not only to communicate by e-mail, but also to share discussion forums, to save and download documents, and to interact in synchronous communication chat areas. (Berge & Collins, 1993) In these interactive environments students may take advantage of the combination of such technologies depending on the specific Web course planning and design.

One of the strengths of this type of computer conference system lies on the nature and format of the messages that are used as communication instruments. Moore and Kearsley (1996) propose a series of guidelines to which both teachers and students should conform to regarding message composition. The authors suggest that each message should be short and should concentrate on a single idea or subject, thus facilitating reading and comprehension in the computer screen. Besides, questions or assignments should be carefully

selected; they should focus on the topic by providing headings in the subject message, so that participants can anticipate content and topic ideas.

Other considerations, such as asking for weekly summaries of the responses and giving personal feedback by the instructor are essential for the dynamics of the conference. In addition, the role of instructors is not only limited to the delivery of instruction and content; instructors should, as well, keep track of students' contributions to the discussion board and contact those who may be reluctant or shy to participate. It is necessary for instructors to be proficient in dealing with the technological features in order to keep continuous communication, and be able to encourage students to participate and interact in a friendly atmosphere.

The experience consisted of the application of a course design that included a combination of Web-based and face-to-face communication among students, instructors and content. Students carried out a series of scheduled activities using computers with Internet connection from different locations, both on and off campus.

The course format was designed as an interactive online environment where both students and instructors were encouraged to take active participation in discussions about content items. Students were expected to carry out readings of the required bibliography, active Internet search, as well as e-mail and file exchange. Students' tasks consisted of responses to questions posted to the discussion board and of commentaries to peer responses in the website. These responses, which made up weekly discussions, were posted to the discussion board, in threaded format according to date of arrival, so that all hyperlinked posts could be read by the participants. Students were encouraged to read all their peers' responses and to write both, formal and informal comments to one another.

In addition, student teams were assigned the roles of assistant 'moderators' in the weekly discussions. The role of assistant discussion moderators was to summarize the most relevant responses of a discussion topic and to report them



to the board at the end of the week. While discussions were in progress, instructors took active participation by providing feedback to individual and group participants; the colloquial and informal tone of instructor presence on the board helped activate discussions and motivate shy participants.

Another course requirement included face-to-face meetings among students and instructors, which took place at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the course. In the early classes, content items, as well as technology guidelines, were introduced and explained. Later, mid-course face-to-face meetings served as a reflection forum where the methodology and course progress, both their strengths and weaknesses, were discussed. At the end of the course, students shared final projects with their peers and instructors through electronic presentations, which were built, either on the basis of the topics discussed, or on other related subjects. These electronic presentations were designed and developed with a presentation graphics program (PowerPoint), and shown to the audience by means of a multimedia projector. The students designed their presentations mainly on a text-based format, though some of them were able to enhance their works by including some multimedia elements, such as graphics or sound.

Research protocols were analyzed following the online monitoring technique, which consisted of saving the students' exact responses while interacting through a computer. This technique, put forward by researchers at Penn State University, aims at studying possible learning improvement as well as to understanding distance teaching methods (Moore and Kearsley, 1996).

From the analysis of the main research variables: autonomous work, technology use and student participation, it is concluded that some advantages may be drawn from the application of online course experience. Some results show student motivation in reading, and handling of online material. Learning efficiency of content based reading material was considered satisfactory based on the quality of the responses, both in individual and group work. Students'

presence in the course was determined by their contributions in the discussions, therefore, a significant degree of student participation was revealed by the access statistics and timely submitted assignments.

As regards the use of the technology, it was observed that participants soon became familiar with the conference system, and were able to carry out a fluid handling of message readings and postings. However, some of the students had to overcome minor difficulties, mainly due to delays in Internet navigation speed or, in some cases, to Internet cost; depending on the kind of Internet providers they had access to.

Although these results are not concluding, they may throw light on further reflection about the advantages of integrating new technologies into foreign, or second language teaching, on the basis of a theoretically based course planning and design. One final consideration suggests that the development of content-based distance education in online learning, may help teachers “model knowledge building strategies for students, by integrating the use of new technologies into learning, and by providing well designed online learning experiences” (McIsaac, 1999:4). ✕

Notes

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² A longer version of this paper was published in the FAAPI Conference Proceedings 2002.

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MicroConcord and its Applications to Language Teaching and Learning

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MicroConcord as a Tool for Implementing the DDL Approach

The purpose of this presentation is to describe an application of computers to language learning known as “classroom concordancing” or “data-driven learning (DDL)”. Johns and King (1991) define data-driven learning as “the use in the classroom of computer-generated concordances to get students to explore the regularities of patterning in the target language, and the development of activities and exercises based on concordance output.” In this approach to language learning both the learner and the teacher have a specific role: the learner’s task, according to Johns (1991), is to “discover the foreign language”, and the teacher’s task is “to provide a context in which the learner can develop strategies for discovery - strategies through which he/she can “learn how to learn.”

Following the same author, “the most important computing tool for the data-driven approach is the concordancer, which is able to recover from text all the contexts for a particular item”. One such concordancer is **MicroConcord**, a computer program that allows users to search large amounts of computer-readable texts providing evidence of how language is actually used in real contexts. Here we will present some examples based on Scott and Johns (1993) of how MicroConcord can be used in language teaching and learning.



Examples of MicroConcord Use

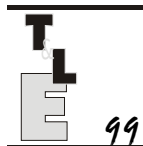
Collocation

One important aspect of using concordances in the learning of languages is the study of collocation. Sinclair (1991) defines collocation as “the occurrence of two or more words within a short space of each other in a text” and determines the usual measure of proximity as a maximum of four words to the left and right of the word studied. By allowing the user to sort alphabetically the words occurring to the right and left of the search word, MicroConcord facilitates the discovery of collocational patterning and draws attention in a very visual way to co-occurrences in texts. Teachers and students can therefore corroborate the words with which a given word collocates in the concordance lines generated by the program. The user can, for instance, check whether *understood* collocates with *poorly*, with *hardly* or with *little*, whether *temperature* collocates with *high*, *hot* or *tall*, or whether *acid* collocates with *immensely* or with *extremely*.

In an attempt to find out whether the intensifiers *immensely* and *extremely* can be used interchangeably, we looked for examples in MicroConcord. Of the 163 lines, 146 were *extremely* and only 17 were *immensely*. Out of a study of the adjectives with which the two intensifiers collocated, it was clear that *immensely* tended to collocate with adjectives with positive connotations – *enjoyable*, *great*, *happy*, *important*, *powerful*, *successful*, whereas *extremely* did not seem marked as to positive or negative connotations. Finally, the concordance also drew attention to the fact that *immensely* can be used adverbially in such expressions as *to enjoy oneself immensely*, whereas *extremely* cannot.

Colligation

As Sinclair (1991) says, collocation in its purest sense recognises only the lexical co-occurrence of words. However, co-occurrence of words also occurs at the grammatical level. “Items that tend to be selected together in grammatical combinations are



said to be *colligable* and the result is called a *colligation*.” (Beaugrande, 2001). “The two terms *collocation* and *colligation* help to determine whether a discourse sounds more or less fluent, natural or idiomatic.” (Sinclair, 1984, in Beaugrande, 2001).

As non-native teachers or students we sometimes face problems regarding language use. Although grammar books as well as dictionaries can help us solve many of these problems, there are certain occasions on which we need to consult a native speaker. MicroConcord can act as a native speaker by providing a number of examples of the problem case obtained from authentic texts.

An activity to be carried out in the presentation illustrates how colligation can be exploited in the classroom using a concordancer. The noun “decision” will be observed in relation to its colligational context to see what verbs can be used before it to say “tomar una decisión acerca de” and to find out what prepositions follow this noun in the same case. There are 538 occurrences of the word “decision” in MicroConcord. The students will receive a handout showing 29 examples already selected by the instructor. The concordances will show that the word *decision* can be preceded by the verb *make* as well as *take* which probably non-natives would not have predicted. It will also show that *on* and *about* can be placed after the word analysed but the percentage of cases in which *on* is used is much higher showing that *on* is the alternative preferred by natives. The students will be encouraged to make a generalization based on the data provided by the corpus.

Pragmatics

An important aspect of language is that studied by pragmatics, namely the meanings and effects that come from the use of language in particular situations. Words do not only have meanings. We use words to do many things: to make an invitation, to emphasise what we are saying, or to express our thoughts, hopes and feelings; and in so doing, we convey our attitude towards our discourse.



The pragmatic use of a word is often unusual in relation to its characteristic meanings. That is, apart from the semantic meaning, the word has added or additional meanings in particular situations of use. Given sufficient context we should be able to work this out for ourselves. MicroConcord enables users to discover such different uses of a word in real contexts that are sometimes difficult to find in any other source.

One word that apart from having a semantic meaning can carry pragmatic value is *little*. To show its pragmatic behaviour we made a concordance of the words *little* and *small* and selected examples illustrating both words in real contexts of use. The analysis of the concordance output shows a marked contrast on how these two terms are used. In the concordance of the word *small*, on the one hand, the examples show that this lexical item is used to specify that something is not large in size. We can talk, then, of a small house, a small place, a small room or small villages. The concordance lines of the word *little*, on the other hand, reveal that in these particular examples *little* takes on a pragmatic value: they indicate that someone or something is small, but in a pleasant and attractive way. Therefore, *a little man, a little house or a little place* add positive emotional value to discourse, and this is evident in the collocation of *little* with positive words such as *charming*, or *cool* (lines 10, 12).

Conclusion

“The use of [a] concordancer [...] can have a considerable influence on the process of language learning, stimulating inquiry and speculation on the part of the learner, and helping the learner to develop the ability to see patterning in the target language and to form generalizations to account for that patterning” (Johns, 1991). Techniques and strategies for using concordances are still being worked out and it may take some years before the full potential of this new resource is realised. ✕

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Assessing Students through the Use of Electronic Portfolios¹

Laura Severini - Silvia Depetris - Gabriela Sergi - Mariana Pascual

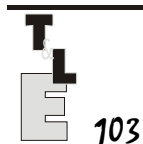
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Introduction

Since the 1990's reading and writing research and theory have favoured the term *process* over *skills*. Literature on this field suggests that both processes are purposeful, intentional actions rather than passive behaviours which take part in the negotiation and building of meaning. Reading and writing interrelate to generate a conceptual flow that leads to the active participation of the reader/writer in the construction of a textual world, promoting in turn, collaborative learning. (Tierney and Leys, 1986).

Reading and writing are interactive processes which can be enhanced through the use of modern technology. Research has shown that the *new technologies* have positive effects on instruction, contributing to the development of lower and higher level skills. Furthermore, these technologies represent one of the most authentic teaching resources since they build real contexts for learning, make use of a wide range of sources, highlight the author's voice, and foster independent learning.

Another advantage is that the interactive use of multimedia technology increases the students' motivation and autonomy for they are required to demonstrate -among other things- their problem-solving skills as well as their ability to analyse and synthesise information which they will then use as a source for their own writing. Besides, current technology allows for the capture and storage of information



in the form of text, graphics, and sound; thus, enabling students to save their writing samples in a coherent document.

As an alternative assessment tool, the *electronic portfolio*, is considered a good source of motivation that hones students' reading and writing skills, offers students an authentic demonstration of accomplishments, and also allows them to take responsibility for the work they have done. *Portfolio assessment* is an ongoing process involving the student and teacher in selecting samples of student work for inclusion in a collection, the main purpose of which is to show the student's progress. E-portfolio offers many advantages for both teachers and students as an assessment tool, and hopefully, through its use, it is expected to become more popular in this information age.

In this proposal we intend to show how electronic portfolios can be used to innovate assessment procedures in the language classroom.

Objectives

The following are the *general* objectives behind the use of electronic portfolios in the language class:

a) To promote:

- students' responsibility and involvement in the learning process
- students' ability to think critically
- students' interest in the use of technology
- self-assessment among students

b) To develop:

- team work
- a continuous, cumulative record of language development
- students' motivation and self-esteem because achievement is recognised
- students' autonomy when working

c) To assess:

- students' progress in reading/writing using non-conventional strategies
- students' competence in making peer and self-assessment

Project objectives

In relation to the more *specific* objectives of this project, it is expected –after instruction and practice– that students are able to:

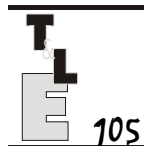
- organise and develop a discursive text presenting viewpoints and reasons
- support and explain their own opinions, ideas, arguments, etc.
- learn how to deal with technology
- perform the different assignments (at the practice stage)
- look for information, process it to produce their own pieces of writing, and store it.

Proposal

This project was designed to use electronic portfolios to assess students' performance in the learning process. The collection of students' work throughout a semester will tell the story of their effort, progress and achievement. Special attention will be put on the development of students' reading and writing skills.

This proposal aims at developing students' abilities to analyse and synthesise information, which will be used as a source for their own writings. One of the main objectives is to train learners in the use of specific reading strategies like recognition of different levels of information, facts and opinions, discourse markers, among others. Then, through different activities students will be gradually led to written production.

In this project students will be trained in the development of certain reading strategies and, through different activities they will be made aware of the different types of *genres* for



writing purposes. In one of the units to be developed in the electronic portfolios, students will have access to a model text –an opinion essay– and they will be guided to recognise specific elements of good writing and features of this text type. In this awareness-raising stage students will perform different activities that will lead them to:

- identify type of text from given patterns in its organisation.
- recognise the formal structure of an opinion essay.
- identify useful linking words and phrases and establish their function in the context they appear.
- learn more and discuss about issues related to the topic they are dealing with.
- identify and analyse the writer’s viewpoint on a given topic.

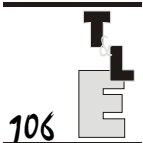
Following this stage, students will be asked to resort to different sources, such as the Internet, CD ROMs, on-line data bases, discussion groups and printed material among others, to look for extra information related to the topic selected for discussion. This information will be analysed and synthesised, constituting the conceptual base which students will use when experimenting in the writing stage.

On the basis of the analysis of the students’ needs and interests different thematic units will be selected taking into account the specific objectives set up for the development of the portfolios. All the documentation gathered from the students will be used for both students’ self reflections and teachers’ evaluation.

Assessment

If assessment is understood as “those sets of processes through which we make judgements about a learner’s level of skills and knowledge” (Nunan, 1990), then in order for those judgements to be successful, teachers have to make sure that the following critical elements be present during assessment.

It should:



- be authentic and valid
- continuous over time
- involve repeated observations of different patterns of behaviour
- provide means for systematic feedback

In relation to portfolio assessment, the elements mentioned above will have to be present because one of the main objectives of this type of evaluation is precisely to show students' progress and achievement over time. An important issue to be considered is to assure that systematic feedback is provided to facilitate the instruction process and students' successful performance.

During the instruction and practice stages, students will work on their own, becoming responsible for their own learning and self-assessment. Through a series of activities to be performed in the PowerPoint programme, students will be provided with opportunities to assess their own performance through the immediate feedback they receive after completing each activity. After these stages, students will produce their own texts using a word processor and will send them to the instructor and their peers via e-mail. Students will not be awarded grades but they will receive some feedback from the instructor and reactions from their peers on their written products after each stage, with extensive comments about their written pieces. This is done electronically –via e-mail– or through the use of *cards* with teachers' commentaries on what they need to improve or on what they are doing well.

Conclusion

The electronic medium provides an endless list of pedagogical possibilities to both language students and teachers. Besides, research has widely shown that the whole range of computer technologies available for EFL teaching and learning, offers an excellent context for practising reading and writing skills interactively and with a real purpose.

In this technology age, EFL teachers have gradually understood that computers have become part of our every day practice and started to experiment with new ways of teaching and assessing the learners' language skills. In this new EFL classroom, it is important that we as educators include a variety of teaching and evaluation procedures so as to enhance students' motivation and ongoing learning process. ✕

Notes

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Technological Support in the EFL Classroom: Reading Comprehension in Web-based Environments¹

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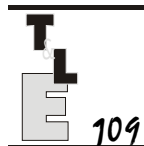
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Introduction

During the last decades, reading comprehension in a foreign language has been aided by the use of different media. The computer, educational multimedia and the Internet have proved very useful in providing pedagogic support and, therefore, in facilitating the learner's progress towards a more efficient and independent learning process. Reading texts from the computer screen allows the reader to use certain technological facilities that are not available on the printed material. During the last years, students attending the English Teacher Training Program at Universidad Nacional de Río Cuarto have shown difficulties in reading comprehension, as well as in listening skills. The objective of this paper² is to study the effect produced by the frequent and systematic exposure of EFL students to written texts available on the Internet.

Background information

The repertoire of materials and methodologies in the field of Foreign Language Teaching has been expanded as a result of the development of new technologies, such as the computer, the multimedia, and the Internet, which can be exploited as useful educational tools. Concerning the various educational media and technologies,



many research studies have been carried out. Chun and Plass (1997), Kozma (1991), Moham (1992), and Williams (1996) are some of the authors that have conducted research on the use of the new technologies for language teaching.

The advantage of the Internet and multimedia lies in their potential for fostering an interactive environment that facilitates the student's active involvement when exposed to texts written in English. Different from reading the printed version of a text, the interactive elements available on-line allow the student to participate actively by interacting with the technology in Web environments (Hazari & Schno, 1999). The information displayed on the Web is presented as hypertext documents that are structured through HTML (Hypertext Markup Language). HTML allows for the integration of multimedia elements such as graphics, sound, animation and hyperlinks (Shuman, 1998). Thus, exposing students to Web texts has important implications in the reading process since a creative interaction process is developed among the reader, the text, the writer and the technology. Interactivity is enriched by the diverse modes of content delivery through multimedia, which brings about multisensory impressions on the reader (Smith, 1997).

Interactivity is a two-way process between the user and the program and may be defined as the way in which users behave during their experience with multimedia (Shuman, 1998). Readers build their own reading route and determine the goal of their reading process through the selection of the links provided by the Web site (Sandbothe, 1996). In this process, the student becomes an active reader that participates, makes decisions and is exposed to choices, thus discovering the information through the active exploration of the content, which facilitates comprehension and retention (Thibodeau, 1997).

A key element in interactive Web environments is feedback, which users need to receive so as to know whether the program has acted as a result of their actions. According to Shuman (op. cit), feedback is the process through which the user obtains some information indicating that a specific action has been



recognised by the computer. In the Web, feedback is delivered not only through verbal messages but also through varied electronic demonstrations like sound, animation, graphic manipulation, and hyperlinks.

The Study

This research study consisted of a case study in which qualitative and quantitative analyses were used. The research was carried out in two moments, the first focused on reading texts from the computer screen while simultaneously listening to their oral version; the second focused on reading Web texts and exposing students to different elements of interactivity in the Web with the purpose of studying the effectiveness of other interactive Web components than audio.

First moment

The criterion for subject selection in the first moment was based on the subject's reading comprehension level. It was considered that the subject should have intermediate reading comprehension competence, so as to be able to understand the texts available on the Internet, which are mostly informative and addressed to a general public. The materials used for the treatment consisted of authentic texts published in the World Wide Web and objective comprehension tests. The oral versions of the texts were available on the Website.

The data yielded by the objective tests were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The results of the treatment as regards pre and post tests, as well as reading comprehension tests were analyzed in quantitative terms. In addition, the answers provided by the tests were studied considering the subject's responses.

As regards the discussion of these responses, it was observed that a number of activities were carried out:

- First, she went through the activities presented in the written tests; sometimes asking about the meaning of certain multiple-choice options.

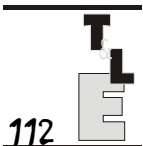
- She skimmed the text without interruptions. She showed self-confidence when using the mouse to navigate through the text.
- She read and listened to the text several times. Often, she read and listened to the text simultaneously three times and, finally, she read the text once more, without the audio support.
- The subject re-read the text by using the mouse in order to select and focus on specific parts. Before writing down the general idea of the text, she read the text again.

Second moment

For the second moment of the research another subject was selected taking into consideration the same criterion for subject selection as the one used in the first moment, that is, reading comprehension level.

The materials used for the treatment consisted of authentic interactive texts published in six different Web sites, and objective comprehension tests. During a period of two weeks, the subject was exposed to eight Web texts in four one-hour sessions. The texts selected for the second moment showed a variety of interactive components other than audio, thus providing for the new interactivity elements, to be dealt with at this stage of the study. The results to be obtained from the objective tests will be analysed during the discussion phase.

Although the second moment of this study has not been concluded, the researcher's observations reveal that no difficulties were perceived in the subject's handling of the computer and in the navigation actions through the Web page. The subject seemed self-confident when manipulating the different elements of interactivity provided by the Web sites selected for the second moment of this study.



Conclusions

From the analysis of the results of the first moment of this study, it is possible to conclude that there was a favorable

effect on the subject's reading comprehension after the application of the treatment, which involved the simultaneous reading of texts from a Webpage and the listening of the oral versions of the same texts. The favorable effect of the treatment on the subject's comprehension is revealed in her reading progress. Likewise, it can be observed that reading comprehension was improved by using audio as an element of interactivity in this type of reading approach. It is finally considered that these findings may not be concluding and that the analysis of the data obtained in the second moment of this study might throw light on the use of interactive elements in the reading of Web texts in foreign language learning. ✕

Notes

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- ² A longer version of this paper was published in the FAAPI Conference Proceedings 2002.

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