



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CLASS READER
EXERCISES: APPROACHES OF WRITERS**

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**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CLASS READER
EXERCISES: APPROACHES OF WRITERS**

By

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**Project Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the
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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CLASS
READER EXERCISES : APPROACHES OF WRITERS

By

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February 1998

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This study embarks on investigating the approaches of writers in the preparation of exercises in the Teaching files for the Class Readers. It analyses the types of exercises found in the teaching files by categorizing them into two broad categories. The findings indicate that the writers of the higher level (Form Five) teaching files prepared 'open-ended' exercises exclusively. The study also conducted a survey to find out the learners' attitude and preference towards these exercises.



Abstrak projek yang dikemukakan kepada Fakulti
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Ijazah Master Sains

ANALISIS PERBANDINGAN LATIHAN-LATIHAN
'CLASS READERS' : KAEDAH-KAEDAH PENULIS

Oleh

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Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk menyelidik kaedah-kaedah penulisan dalam penyediaan bahan latihan di dalam Fail Pengajaran bagi 'Class Readers'. Penyelidikan ini menganalisa jenis-jenis latihan yang terdapat dalam Fail Pengajaran dengan mengkategorikan latihan-latihan tersebut kepada dua bahagian yang besar. Dapatan menunjukkan penulis-penulis bagi tingkatan yang lebih tinggi (Tingkatan 5) mengutamakan penggunaan latihan-latihan jenis 'terbuka'.

Penyelidikan ini juga ada membuat tinjauan untuk mengambil tahu minat dan sikap pelajar terhadap latihan-latihan tersebut.



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, English occupies the position of a second language. The teaching of English aims to equip the learners with:

... skills and knowledge of English to communicate in certain everyday activities and certain job situations, and also to provide points to take of for various post-secondary school needs.

*(Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia,
1988 : 2)*

In order to achieve these aims, learners should be actively participating in the learning process in the language classrooms. Teachers need to use various instructional materials to motivate the learners, so that they become active participants in the learning process.

In the effort to revive literature as a component in the English Language syllabus at the secondary level in Malaysia, the Ministry of Education embarked on the Class Readers Programme. The programme was implemented at the Form One level in all secondary schools beginning 1990. It was fully operational at all levels (Forms 1-5) in all schools by 1995.



The aims of the Class Readers Programme as indicated in the teaching files are firstly; to expose students to material written in English, secondly; to motivate students to read, and to inculcate in them the reading habit, thirdly; to help students increase their language proficiency through teaching materials that can enrich and consolidate learning and finally; to generate interest in, and prepare students for, possible literature study.

The Class Readers Programme does allow for flexibility and choice in material selection for individual classroom use as some of the readers may not relate to the interest and the reading level of each set of students. In this respect, it should be realized that although prescribed class readers are being used in the CRP (Class Readers Programme), teachers should still be concerned with developing supplementary teaching materials for the classroom (Rosli, 1995).

The Schools Division of the Ministry of Education has prepared specific guidelines for the selection and grading of the class readers for secondary schools throughout Malaysia. These guidelines are intended to provide writers and publishers with an understanding of the requirements for content and format of the class

readers. Generally, the class readers must be suitable, captivating, and should cater for all levels of students in secondary schools. 'Suitability' of the readers is indicated as the 'readers' cater to individual classroom needs in relation to the interest and the reading level of each set of students. The teacher and the students decide the suitability of the class readers.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Writers need to identify learners level of entry to assist them to design tasks appropriate to the learners' capabilities. Some of the factors that should be considered are age, background knowledge and proficiency levels.

Educators have development classification schemes for defining the types of learning within cognitive affective psychomotor domains. These schemes, called taxonomies, are organized from the simplest to the most complex type of learning. This hierarchical organization means that the lower level skills must be learned before one can acquire the higher level skills.

Since the writers are focussing on tasks, both oral and written to exploit the class readers, it is appropriate to investigate if there is a gap between what writers know about hierarchies according to the levels of learning and the learners' actual learning outcome. This ensures a match between the learners level and the level of the tasks.

Although learners can participate in the activities designed, how true is it to state that such activities would motivate learners to read, inculcate the reading habit and also generate interest in, and prepare them for possible literature study.

Is there a definite variation in the writers' approaches in designing materials according to the different levels of learning?

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to:

1. Analyse the approaches by different writers and review these approaches in view of the objectives of the class Reader Programme.

2. Identify possible causes that could affect learners:
 - can they participate in the activities,
 - enjoy the class reader activities, and
 - motivate them to read further
3. Discuss solutions if problems are detected.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study analysed only twelve books (teaching files) used in Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan, Taman Ehsan, six out of which are from the Form One level and the other six from the Form Five level. This is to view the learning hierarchical organization, whereby the Form One learners are at the lowest level and the Fifth formers are at the highest level.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Behaviourist:

A theory of learning based on stimulus-response reinforcement, which became associated with audio-lingual methodology. Behaviourists see little difference between learning a language and learning anything else. According to them, there is no complex internal process going on, there is only what is objectively observable: a stimulus (for example, a

command for someone to do something); a response (the performance of the action); and reinforcements (a reward of some kind). The influence of behavioural psychology can be seen in the drills popular in audio-lingual approaches. (Prodromou. 1992)

There may still be a place for this approach to learning whenever the task is basically mechanical-for example, in learning the sounds of the language. It is not adequate, on the whole, as a response to the varied and unpredictable problems of the large mixed ability class.

Competence:

In the work of Chomsky, this is the speaker's total knowledge of a language system. This knowledge is, for most people, implicit; it is what makes "performance" possible, i.e. the actual occurrence of language in use. Thus, grammar is, in effect, a description of competence, while performance refers to the language produced by particular speakers. While competence is an idealised, perfect form of the language, performance may include errors, slips of the tongue and so on.

'Communicative competence' was coined in response to Chomsky's linguistic competence, and highlights the

social context of language use. If accuracy is a part of linguistic competence, appropriacy is an aspect of communicative competence, which is thus concerned with performance rather than an ideal knowledge of a language.

These terms should be compared with 'learning' and 'acquisition'. They should all help the teacher to decide on objectives, and to assess the relative roles of accurate grammatical knowledge and fluent communication within a clear framework.

Comprehensible input:

From Krashen's input hypothesis, referring to messages the students can understand. They need plenty of comprehensible input, presented in low-anxiety situations, in order to acquire a language naturally.

Dictation:

The conventional dictation procedure, going back to grammar/translation, involves reading texts three times at a slow pace, with pauses on the second reading to allow students to write the text down. Traditionally, the texts used are short narrative extracts.

Dictation began to regain some of the popularity it had lost in the seventies when research recently found it to be a more reliable testing device than, multiple choice. It is also gaining popularity as a teaching device, thanks largely to the publication of in Dictation by Davies and Rinvoluceri 1988. Dictation is, in fact, a flexible and highly expressive form of language use, and it requires little preparation.

Group and pair-work:

In traditional frontal or lock-step approaches, the teacher dominates the presentation-practice-production sequence of a typical lesson. Group and pair-work not only reduce teacher-talking time, converting the teacher's role into that of coordinator, facilitator and advisor, but also allow 'weaker' learners both to take a more active part in class and to work at their own pace. The shy student can also avoid the embarrassing glare of public performance. In short, group and pair-work is indispensable, just as talking at someone is very different from talking to them, and both are necessary.

Information transfer:

These techniques involve the learner in interpreting a written or spoken text and then

transforming the relevant parts of it into a non-verbal form: a table, chart, diagram, flow-chart, application form, etc. The use of such exercises marks a shift away from the exclusive use of comprehension questions of the yes/no or 'wh-' question variety, and thus reflects a greater interest in the learner's ability to focus on important information and ignore what is irrelevant. The learner also has the opportunity to practise a variety of sub-skills, such as listening for gist, note-taking, summarising, prediction, etc. It is assumed that the ability to state information in a non-linguistic form for example, by completing a diagram - reflects the learner's understanding of a text as effectively as answering conventional comprehension questions. In a mixed ability class, information transfer has several advantages.

Motivation:

This may be intrinsic or extrinsic. It is intrinsic when the learner finds the subject interesting in itself or useful in fulfilling personal aims. Motivation that is imposed from the outside in the form of tests, rewards or threats of punishment is extrinsic. Instrumental motivation refers to language learning that is done for a limited purpose as a means to an end, such as for a holiday abroad, or in order to pass an examination. Integrative motivation is in

operation when the language learner wishes to become a member of the community in which the language is spoken. This involves the learner's identification with native speakers of the language and their culture. The problems of the mixed ability class are often exacerbated by the students' lack of intrinsic motivation or by their resistance to the teacher's misguided attempts to 'sell' them the culture of the target language.

Reading:

An active, not a passive, process made up of a wide range of sub-skills, including prediction, guessing or inferring from context, reading for gist, skimming a text quickly, and scanning for specific information. The pendulum has swung both for and against reading in the history of ELT, from its predominance in the grammar/translation approach, to its relative neglect in audio-lingual approaches. In Communicative Methodology, it has received more attention as the emphasis on learner needs has led teachers to recognise that reading is an important skill for a large number of learners, who will need to read rather than speak the language. In the mixed ability class, reading has an important part to play in providing anxiety-free activity for shy and weak learners, as they are not required to produce language

in front of the rest of the class. It is also a skill that they can develop in their own time with the use of simplified readers.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

TEXT SELECTION

Accessibility

According to McRae (1991), accessibility depends more on how the reading text is presented than on any of the multiplicity of linguistic and cultural factors which may render it inaccessible. Students will often react negatively to a text because they have been understandably daunted by its register, its syntax, unknown vocabulary, the culture gap - any of a dozen stumbling blocks which make it infinitely easier for a learner to give up on text than to make it through to the end.

Accessibility, therefore, depends very much on making the student capable of getting through the text to the end. This is one of the main reasons why some writers strongly advocate the use of recordings of all kinds of representational texts. Listening while reading the text eliminates the feeling that reading literary texts is a variant on reading comprehension.



Reading representational materials is reading as a function of the imagination, so interpretation is to be encouraged rather than avoided. Discussion of how a recording presents an interpretation, acceptable or other, can become a regular part of the exercise.

Accessibility is increased by careful instruction as to what the student should do with the text. The student gains a great deal of confidence if he or she can get through the end of the text, then do the task, or answer the question, set on it. (MacRae 1991). So the reader must be clear of what he or she has to do with the text; find the names of the characters, decide where it is set, work out relationships and so on. Basic 'wh' questions give the simplest and the most basic of such stimuli as students answer these questions they become closer to the text and understand the text better. Clearly the context in which any text is presented will also have a lot to do with accessibility to students. A text must be seen as part of a course, or relevant to a subject under discussion, rather than just produced out of the blue without any clear point of reference (McRae, 1991).

Recent research in reading comprehension has clearly shown that what a reader understands from a text is not solely a function of the linguistic or even

hierarchical structure of the text. (Carrell, 1996). Reading comprehension is not solely an analysis problem, a bottom-up process of constructing meaning from the linguistic cues in the text. Reading comprehension is simultaneously both a top-down and a bottom-up process. It is bottom-up in the sense that readers must take in the linguistic cues of the text and integrate them into their ongoing hypothesis about the content and form of the text (Rumelhart, 1977).

According to Carrell (1996) a better understanding of what the mental representation of a text is and how it is formed in long term memory has implications for text production or composition, as well.

Difficulty

The question to be reflected upon at this juncture is- "What happens when students look at a new text?" If it is in the context of their learning situation, students will assume that the text is at least relevant to their language learning competence, and that they should normally be able to get something beneficial out of their reading. That 'something' beneficial has been established by the teacher or textbook writer who prepared the materials. If the text is designed as reading comprehension, it should be carefully attuned

to the level of the course the student has reached, probably stretching the learner a little in terms of vocabulary, but giving him or her the possibility of answering the questions which follow the passage. (Rosli, 1995; Mc Rae, 1991).

Story

The best texts contain some element of story. With the very shortest of texts, there is little scope for story-telling-although the building up, through students' suggestions, of a background, a situation or character involvement can make a story of even a one-liner.

Stories are a fundamental part of human experience. As George Steiner in Mc Rae (1991) puts it, 'no tribe on earth is so wretched that it does not express its dreams, its hopes, its ambitions, its fears in stories'. Stories can also be of any length. The following is an interesting one to examine.

Two Dogs who had been fighting for a bone, without advantage to either, referred their dispute to a Sheep. The Sheep patiently heard their dispute to a Sheep.

into a pond.

'Why did you do that?' said the Dogs
'Because,' replied the Sheep, 'I am a vegetarian'.

This story can be retold in many more accessible ways, eliminating the rather old-fashioned style. Many teachers would prefer to use the story in this form:

Two dogs were fighting over a bone. Neither beat the other. So they told a sheep their problem.
The sheep listened to them, then threw the bone into a pond.
'Why did you do that?' said the dogs.
'Because,' replied the sheep, 'I am a vegetarian.'

The differences between the two stories are minimal: sentence length, the removal of dependent clauses and clefting, fewer capital letters, easier verbs. But the second version is decidedly easier, or more accessible, to L2 readers. If the verbs were in the present tense, it would be even more accessible to more readers.

However, McRae, (1991) believes that once students have read whatever 'simplified' version the teacher decides to use, it is useful to have them compare it with the original. This is, of course, not possible with reduced versions of extended texts.

The Pleasure of the Text

Reading literature in a second language is not a simple exercise, nor is it immediately a pleasure. The pleasures of extended reading in L2 are an ideal, and objective that both students and teachers would doubtless like to reach, but that, realistically, requires a lot of effort. Reading for pleasure is a question of decisions and choices, the reader decides fairly quickly whether or not to continue reading a particular book or writer. In L2, the reader is more inhibited about admitting defeat.

There is the basic problem of intrinsic interest. There is probably no subject that will interest a sample of students from San Diego, Southampton, Aarhus, Ankara, Addis Ababa, Asuncion, Bradford and Burundi to an equal degree. Students learning the language are interested in what makes English language cultures work; the Coca-Colanisation of most of the world is a measure of how cultural features can be assimilated through marketing. In a sense, we are marketing imaginative exploration. But in no sense does this imply cultural imperialism. There can be many kinds of reason for studying English literature, but *studying* is a rather different aspect of the question. It indicates a specialisation in a rather different aspect