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Studying language

Language study refers to any stage in a lesson where students and teachers focus in on (the construction of) a specific feature of the language in order to understand it better. The immediate goal of language study is to increase knowledge of the language system so that the longer-term aim of improving productive and receptive skills can be achieved. As we shall see in Chapter 12, students should not only study language in the classroom under the direction of a teacher, but should also research language on their own. We need to have as one of our goals the training of autonomous learners (see Chapter 24A). However, the activities in this chapter are designed for the vast majority of students who benefit from a teacher-led focus on specific language forms.

A Studying structure and use

The language study described in this chapter focuses on the structure and use of language forms, particularly in the following areas:

- the morphology of forms (e.g. the fact that *is* and *am* are forms of *be*, but **amn't* is not)
- the syntax of phrases, clauses, and sentences (e.g. the rules of question formation or the construction of *if*-sentences)
- vocabulary, including the meanings of words, their lexical grammar (e.g. the fact that *enjoy* can be followed by an *-ing* form but not by an infinitive), and collocation rules (e.g. we say *even-handed* and not **even-footed*)
- the meanings and functions that phrases and sentences can convey
- pronunciation
- spelling

There are of course other ways in which students can study language, such as genre analysis and the study of written and spoken text construction (see Chapters 15 and 16). In both these cases, however, students are asked to notice a number of different aspects of the texts in front of them rather than focusing on a specific language item or items as they will be asked to do in the examples below. Pronunciation is part of this, but it will also be dealt with separately in Chapter 13.

A1 Language study techniques

There are a number of study techniques which we can use to ensure that students not only understand the meaning of a language form and how it is used in exchanges or texts, but are also clear about its construction:

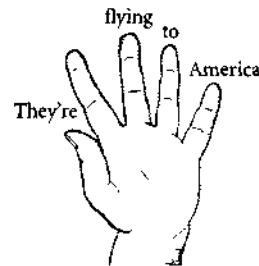
- **Demonstration:** we can demonstrate the language forms which we want students to study by offering them a situation which shows the language in action and then modelling the language ourselves (see Chapter 4, D2). The language can be used in a text which clearly shows what it means; we can also use pictures or various items of realia to demonstrate meaning (as described in Chapter 10).

Demonstration on its own may not be enough; some students will need a mixture of demonstration and explanation, and the other techniques described below to be sure of understanding the new form(s) correctly.

- **Explanation:** we can explain the construction of language in diagrams using the board or overhead projector. We can make use of equipment such as Cuisenaire rods to show syntactic relationships or stress patterns (see Chapter 10D). We can use finger-pointing to show how contractions are made, e.g:



Uncontracted form



Contracted form

At higher levels we can offer grammatical explanations by saying things such as *We don't use words or phrases which refer to a specific time in the past (like 'yesterday' or 'last week') with the present perfect or The choice of which verb we use to talk about the future depends on our precise intention – how definite we wish to be about future plans and arrangements.* We can explain rules in the students' own language, but this can detract from the English atmosphere of the class.

In the traditional PPP model, explanation is frequently given by isolating and distorting bits of the language which the teacher is modelling (see Chapter 6, A2).

The way we offer explanation to our students will depend upon the language form we are focusing on and the age, level, and preferences of the class.

- **Discovery:** students can be encouraged to understand new language forms either by discovering them for themselves in a text, or by looking at grammatical evidence in order to work out a grammar rule.

In order for us to have confidence that discovery leads to real understanding, we need to be available for students to check with us whether they have worked things out correctly. In the words of one Swedish student 'You can't be 100 per cent sure that you've found the rule. You must have the possibility to get the right rule from the teacher' (Fortune 1992: 168).

- **Accurate reproduction:** one of the ways students learn new language forms best is through an accurate reproduction stage. Here we ask students to repeat new words, phrases, or sentences in a controlled way, correcting them when

they get things wrong and showing approval when they use the form correctly. Not only does this allow them to try out the new language, but the teacher's feedback also serves as further demonstration and explanation of the new forms.

Accurate reproduction – or controlled practice – is the 'practice' stage of the PPP model (see Chapter 6, A2). However, where students show an immediate grasp of the language forms such controlled repetition may not be necessary. This is especially the case at higher levels.

- **Immediate creativity:** where students show an understanding of the meaning, use, and construction of the language form we are focusing on, we can ask them to create their own sentences using the language form. Such early language production will give a good indication, to both students and the teacher, of how well the language form has been understood.

Immediate creativity is the 'production' phase of the traditional PPP model. As an early activation of language it is not strictly a study activity, though most study sequences will allow for it at some stage. It can also be used after any explanation, or after a discovery activity.

- **Check questions:** we can use check questions to see if students have understood meaning and use. If students are learning to use past continuous sentences such as *At eight o'clock she was watching television* we can measure their comprehension by asking *Did she start watching television at exactly eight o'clock or before?* If they are working with *as ... as* comparisons in sentences such as *Denise isn't as tall as Chris*, we can ask *Who's taller?* to check their understanding of the language.

A2 Language study in lesson sequences

The status of language study depends on why and when it occurs. It may form the main focus of a lesson: we might say, for example, that a chief part of today's lesson will be the teaching of relative clauses (or the future continuous, or ways of suggesting) and design the lesson around this central purpose.

Many study activities (especially in coursebooks) have tended to follow the PPP model. Yet, this may be entirely inappropriate for certain types of students and with certain areas of language (see Chapter 6, A3). We may also wish to preface a study exercise with activities which show us how much of the language in question is already known, or we may interleave the study with other elements. Rather than always following 'straight arrow' sequences, in other words, we will often find that 'boomerang' or 'patchwork' lessons are more suitable (see page 84).

Language study may not be the main focus of a lesson sequence, however, but may be only one element in a grander design, in which case a decision will have to be taken about where the study activity should be placed in a sequence. Should the focus on any necessary language forms take place before, during, or after the performance of a communicative task or a receptive skills activity?

One approach (often taken by materials writers) is for students to study language in a variety of ways, then explore a topic, and then use what they have learnt to

perform a task (see, for example, Cunningham and Moor 1998). Alternatively, the study of language forms may happen during a task-based sequence. We might focus on one or two past tense forms in the middle of an extended narrative-writing task; we might have our students study vocabulary to describe the weather in the middle of a sequence on holiday planning. Students can also research language as part of a task (see Chapter 12).

Sometimes we study forms after the students have performed the task. This usually happens as a form of language repair when the task has shown up language problems – or when students might have found the task easier if they had been able to produce certain language forms which they did not use at all. Studying language after the task has been completed is a feature of the Task-based model followed by Jane Willis (1996).

However, even where we have not planned to include language study in a particular lesson sequence we sometimes find opportunities presenting themselves which we find impossible to ignore, and, as a result, we get students to focus on language items which we had not anticipated including. Such ‘opportunistic’ study may happen because a student wants to know how or why some language is constructed; it might take place because completely unforeseen problems present themselves; we might suddenly become aware of the chance to offer students some language which they cannot use but which – if they are now exposed to it – will significantly raise the level at which they are performing the task.

Opportunistic teaching – studying language which suddenly ‘comes up’ – exposes the tension between planning lessons in advance but yet responding to what actually happens in class (see Chapter 22, c1). When used appropriately, the relevance and immediacy of opportunistic language study may make it the most memorable and effective kind of language study there is.

Known or unknown language?

Apart from real beginners each individual student has some degree of linguistic knowledge and ability in English. In addition to this, individual students learn at different speeds and in different ways. These two facts taken together explain why so many classes can rightly be described as ‘mixed ability’ – though this is more extreme in some cases than in others.

The fact of mixed ability throws up a problem for the study of language forms since it will frequently be impossible to know whether such forms really are new or not for the individual students in a class. And even if most of our students have experienced the language before, it is not necessarily the case that they can all use it.

If – for the reasons stated above – we cannot be sure whether or not our students know the language we are about to ask them to study, we will need to find this information out. If we do not, we risk teaching them things they already know, or assuming knowledge they do not have.

One way of avoiding teaching already known language is to have students perform tasks and see how well they use the language forms in question before deciding whether we need to introduce those forms as if they were new. A less

elaborate technique is to attempt to elicit the new language forms we wish them to study. If we find that students can produce them satisfactorily we will not want to demonstrate or explain them all over again, and accurate reproduction will be a waste of time. If elicitation is unsuccessful, however, we have good grounds for treating the language forms as new and proceeding accordingly.

A4 Choosing study activities

We will frequently decide how and when to have students study language form and use on the basis of the syllabus and/or the coursebook since it may offer an explanation and an exercise that we are happy to use almost unchanged. However, many of these sequences may not suit the particular styles and progress of our learners, and may thus need adjusting or replacing in some way (see Chapter 21, c2). We may want to try out new activities, or be concerned not to go on using the same kind of activity day after day. How then do we make such decisions?

- **Following planning principles:** when deciding how to have students study language form we need to bear general planning principles in mind (see Chapter 22A). This means that we have to think about activities which the students do before and after this study session so that we do not simply repeat the same kind of activity again and again. We need to offer a varied diet of exercises when studying language forms both because all our students have different learning styles (see Chapter 3, B3 and B5) and also to help sustain student motivation.
- **Assessing a language study activity for use in class:** when assessing an activity designed for the study of language form we need to decide how effective it will be when we take it into class. It should justify the time we will need to spend on it both before and during the lesson. We need to believe that the activity demonstrates meaning and use clearly and that it allows opportunities for a focus on (and practice of) the construction of the language form. We have to think that it will engage our learners successfully.

Scott Thornbury, in his book on grammar teaching, suggests measuring activities according to 'efficiency' and 'appropriacy' factors. In the first category he wants us to work out the economy, ease, and efficacy of the activity (Is it do-able economically? How easy is it for the teacher? Does it work?). In terms of appropriacy we need to judge whether the activity is suitable for our particular group of students at their level, for that time of day, for those classroom conditions, and so on (Thornbury 1999a: 25–27).

We often take activities and exercises into class that we have used before with other groups. We will have, therefore, a good idea of how effective they will be. Nevertheless we need to remember that groups are different, and that what was appropriate for one class may not work as well with other students.

- **Evaluating a study activity after use in class:** we need to evaluate the success of an activity which focuses on language form, whether we do this formally or informally. That is one reason why we should keep records of our

classes (see Chapter 22, c2) and why we should conduct our own action research (see Chapter 24, B1).

Evaluation of an activity answers questions such as whether or not the exercise helped students to learn the new language, whether it was clear, whether it took more or less time than anticipated, whether students were engaged by it, and whether or not we want to use it again. Part of this evaluation involves us in thinking about how we might modify the activity the next time we use it.

B Examples of language study activities

The activities in this section demonstrate both the teacher-led introduction of new language, and material designed to enable students to work things out for themselves with the teacher's help.

B1 Introducing new language

The following example shows how a situation can be used to provide the context for the introduction of new language (though elicitation will show if the language really is new).

Example 1: Light in space

Language: *should/shouldn't have done*
 Age: any
 Level: intermediate/upper
 intermediate

The sequence starts when the students are asked if they ever read science fiction, making sure that they understand what genre of fiction we are talking about. This might develop into a quick discussion of what they read and why. The point is to get them engaged and interested in what is coming. Students can be prompted to say what they would expect to find in a science-fiction text.

We now ask the students to read the following text. While they do this they must find out information such as how many people are in the space station at the beginning and end of the text, whether they are men or women, and how long they have been there.

They had been up here for five years. Five years for five people, cut off from earth since World War IV. True the Moonshuttle came every six months with a supply of food, but it was pilotless. They had not been able to make contact with Moonbase for two years. Cathy said it was weird.

'You say that three times a day,' Rosie answered.

'Well it's true. It's weird and I don't think I can stand it much longer.'

'Oh for Jupiter's sake shut up! Go and play eight-dimensional death-chess and leave me alone. You drive me crazy!'

'Thanks!' Cathy said quietly, 'I can see I'm not wanted.' She left the cabin.

The door hissed behind her.

When she got to the exit chamber she didn't look at the record book where Mitch had written '9 – motor malfunction. Do not use'. She got into suit number nine and pressed the exit key. The outside door hissed open and she sailed out into space. She hadn't told the others where she was going (space station rule 345/2/z3). It gave her a good sense of freedom.

Back in the station Rosie saw the red warning light above the exit control but she ignored it. They'd had trouble with the lights recently. Nothing serious. Captain Clarke saw it, though. She got on her personal people communicator and called Tim Hotzenfop the station engineer.

'I think we've got a problem. You'd better come up quick.' But Tim was deep in conversation with Leila so he said 'Sure. I'll be up,' and then switched off the radio. Leila was nicer to listen to than old Clarke.

Mitch was in the repair shop next to the exit chamber when the audio-alarm went off. But he was wearing his spacewalk-man. He didn't hear a thing.

200 metres away from the station Cathy suddenly realised that she had forgotten to close the station exit door. She must go back. She pressed the motor control on the front of her suit. There was no response. She pressed it again. Nothing. At that moment, looking back, she saw the space station she had just left roll over and she thought she heard a scream echoing out into the darkness. Her eyes widened in horror. And then she saw the light.

When the students have read the text and shown that they have understood it by answering comprehension questions we can then ask them to say what they think happens next: 'What is the light? What has happened to the space station and why?' The object is to get them to be creative with language and with their response to the text.

We now ask the students to list things that people did that were 'bad' or 'not sensible' and write them on the board, for example:

- a Rosie was rude to Cathy.
- b Cathy didn't look at the record book.
- c Cathy didn't tell the others where she was going.
- d Rosie ignored the red warning light.
- e Tim switched off his radio.
- f Tim didn't do anything about the captain's call.
- g Mitch was wearing his spacewalk-man.
- h Cathy didn't close the station exit door.

We then ask the students if they can make a sentence about event (a) using *should not* to elicit the sentence *Rosie shouldn't have been rude to Cathy*. We may write *should (not) have DONE* on the board. We then encourage students to make

sentences about the other 'silly' actions using the same construction. We may get students to come up to the board and write the sentences so that the board ends up looking like this:

- a Rosie was rude to Cathy.
She shouldn't have been rude to Cathy.
- b Cathy didn't look at the record book.
She should have looked at the record book.
- c Cathy didn't tell the others where she was going.
She should have told the others where she was going.
- d Rosie ignored the red warning light.
She shouldn't have ignored the warning light.
- e Tim switched off his radio.
He shouldn't have switched off his radio.
- f Tim didn't do anything about it.
He should have done something about it.
- g Mitch was wearing his spacewalk-man.
He shouldn't have been wearing his spacewalk-man.
- h Cathy didn't close the station exit door.
She should have closed the station exit door.

If students are having trouble pronouncing any of the parts of the sentences we may model those parts and possibly have students repeat either chorally or individually. For example, we may focus on /'ʃədəv/ and /'ʃədntəv/, showing how the phrases are stressed and contracted.

Students are now in a position to tell stories of things in the past which they should/shouldn't have done (*I should have done my homework on time/I shouldn't have left the car unlocked*) after the teacher has told stories, perhaps, about himself to demonstrate what is expected.

Other situation-based contexts for introducing new language might include (for vocabulary) asking students to label items in a house with 'new' words we give them or (for a functional lesson) getting them to try and match problems and suggestions as a lead-in to the introduction of suggestion language.

2 Discovery activities

In the following examples, students are encouraged to work out for themselves how language forms are constructed and used.

Example 2: Comparative adjectives	Language: word formation - comparative adjectives
	Age: any
	Level: elementary/pre-intermediate

In this example students have listened to a dialogue in which people have been comparing things. Before moving on to make their own sentences, the teacher wants to draw their attention to the way that we make adjectives comparative. She could have done this by giving rules, or perhaps just by ignoring such technical information and

hoping that students will 'notice' the various possibilities for themselves. Instead she chooses to put them in pairs and give them the following exercise:

Look at this!

old → older
 new → newer
 light → lighter
 big → bigger
 thin → thinner
 noisy → noisier
 silly → sillier
 expensive → more expensive
 beautiful → more beautiful

Now work these out!

a How do we make one-syllable adjectives into comparative adjectives?
 b Why are 'big' and 'thin' different?
 c What has to change when we make words like 'noisy' and 'silly' into comparative adjectives?
 d What is different about 'expensive' and 'beautiful'? Why?

When the pairs have finished she checks through the answers making sure they understand that one-syllable words which end with a vowel and a consonant double the last letter, that *-y* becomes *-i*, and that longer words are preceded by *more* but otherwise stay the same. She now moves on to a practice exercise.

There are two potential problems with this approach. First, it is not always easy to give a complete grammatical picture. This exercise does not give all the necessary information about comparatives. There are no irregular ones here (like *good-better*), nor are there examples of words that are made comparative by either taking *-er* or being preceded by *more* (e.g. *clever* in many spoken varieties of the language). Second, it is not necessarily the case that all students enjoy this kind of detective work. But as a way of encouraging them to think about how language works such exercises are extremely useful, especially when, as here, the language rules they are investigating are fairly easy to discern.

Example 3: Rules and freedom

Language: functions - expressing obligation (*can't/have to/must/allowed to*)

Age: adult

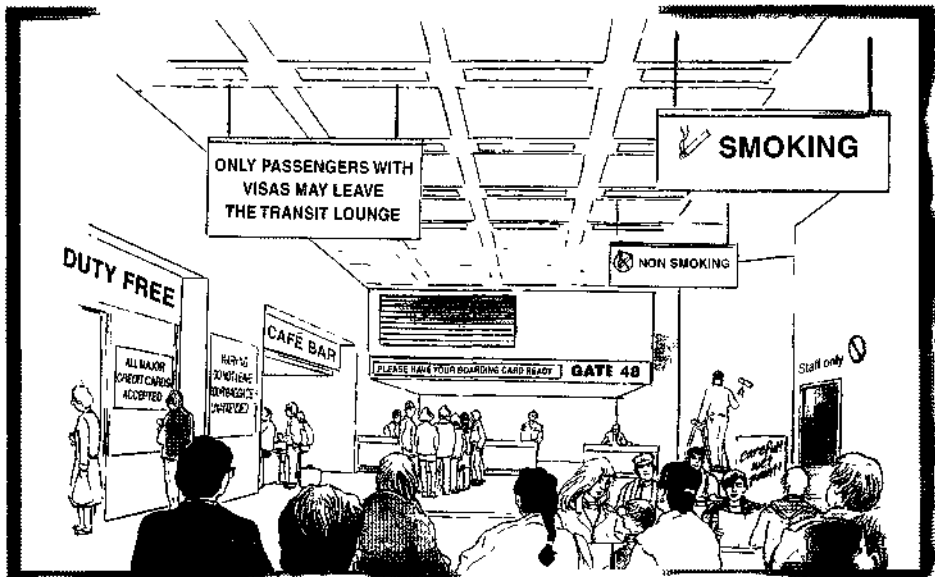
Level: intermediate

In this example from an intermediate coursebook, the students are going to look at obligation language, some of which they may have already come across separately.

The teaching sequence starts when students discuss how many rules and regulations they can think of for either the school they are studying in, or related to

different ages (e.g. before people are eighteen), or for when there is a political election, or for when you travel to a foreign country. The object of this discussion is to interest the students in the topic and to elicit some of the language which will be the focus of study.

The teacher now gets students to look at the following illustration. They are asked how many signs they can see and what they mean:



From *Cutting Edge Intermediate*, by S Cunningham and P Moor (Pearson Education Ltd)

At this stage the teacher will be happy to accept sentences like *Don't smoke* or *Smoking is okay*. The main thing is that students should understand the meaning of the signs.

Students are now asked to put a tick next to the following sentences if they mean the same as the signs in the picture and a cross if they do not:

- | | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| a | You <u>can</u> use a credit card in the duty-free shop. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| | You <u>have to</u> use a credit card in the duty-free shop. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| b | You <u>have to</u> have a visa to leave the transit lounge. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | You've <u>got to</u> have a visa to leave the transit lounge. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c | You <u>can't</u> smoke in the area at the back. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | You're <u>allowed to</u> smoke in the area at the back. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d | The public <u>mustn't</u> go through the door that says 'staff only'. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | The public <u>aren't allowed to</u> go through the door that says 'staff only'. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e | You <u>mustn't</u> smoke in the area at the front. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | You <u>don't have to</u> smoke in the area at the front. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

This is an ideal opportunity for the students to do an exercise in pairs or groups. By discussing each sentence and sharing their knowledge they help each other understand things they did not previously know.

The teacher checks through the answers with the whole class and then asks them to go through the following 'Analysis' box where they have to work out the grammar and meaning of the underlined verbs:

- 1 Look at the underlined verbs in the sentences above. Complete the following lists showing how the verbs are used.

a <u>it is necessary</u> <i>have to</i>	b <u>it is okay / permitted</u> <i>can</i>	c <u>it is a good idea / the correct thing</u>
d <u>it is not necessary</u>	e <u>it is not okay / it is prohibited</u>	f <u>it is not a good idea / not the correct thing</u>

- 2 What is the difference (if any) in the use of *must* and *have to* in the following pairs of sentences?

- a • *You must finish all the medicine – it's really important.*
• *The doctor says I have to finish all the medicine – it's really important.*
- b • *You mustn't walk home alone in the dark – it's dangerous.*
• *You don't have to walk home – we'll give you a lift.*

Now read Language summary A on page 150.

Once the teacher has checked that the students have been able to complete the analysis chart, she can get them to do a fill-in exercise where they have to discriminate between *have to*, *don't have to*, *should*, *shouldn't*, and *are/aren't allowed*. They then make their own sentences about what the rules are in places which they know and visit, or they can give rules and the other students have to guess what place is being talked about (e.g. *You have to be quiet. You can't take books unless you sign them out at the desk. You can't take food into this place.* etc).

We can also have students discover grammar with any reading text (where we might ask them to find *if*-sentences, for example, and work out the different constructions they find), or get them to study the transcript of a conversation to see how people agree and disagree.

B3 Remembering

At various stages of learning teachers will want students to revisit language forms which they have been exposed to previously. This may be part of an overt correction stage, part of a sequence which the teacher has slotted in because students have had trouble with that language in a task, or part of a straightforward revision process where language forms are recycled from time to time to help students remember them better.

Remembering activities usually fall towards the middle of the 'communication continuum' (see page 85); they encourage students to bridge the gap between language study and language activation (see Chapter 6, A3). In more communicative activities we hope that students will activate previously learnt language forms subconsciously, but in remembering exercises students will be aware of an overt focus on particular forms, which they will then be expected to use.

The following examples of remembering activities all presuppose that the students have already worked on the language areas which they will be using.

Example 4: Perfect one-liners

Language: structure – past perfect continuous

Age: any

Level: intermediate/advanced

In this activity students practise the past perfect continuous tense based on prompts from the teacher. They are required to use their imagination and/or sense of humour and the exercise is given added enjoyment by being designed as a team game.

The teacher divides the class into small teams of two to four people. She tells them that she will be reading sentences for which they have to find appropriate responses, using the past perfect continuous. She starts by giving them a sentence such as *When I got home last night my flatmate was asleep in the car.* She asks the class, in general, what kind of reason they can think of, and hopes to elicit sentences like *Well, she had been listening to a programme on the radio and fallen asleep,* or *Yes, well that's because she had been talking to a hypnotist on her mobile phone,* etc.

Now that the students understand the idea of the exercise she reads out the following sentences:

- a When I came to see you yesterday your cat was in the fridge.
- b Can you explain why you bit my dog?
- c That was my new Rolls Royce your son pushed over the cliff.
- d You had blood all over your wedding clothes after the ceremony.
- e You were the only one in the room before the theft.
- f You had different coloured socks on the other day.
- g Why did Henry VIII have his wife Anne Boleyn beheaded?

From *The Anti-Grammar Grammar Book* by N Hall and J Shephard (Pearson Education Ltd)

For each sentence the teams are given a short time to come up with good sentences. If they are correct and/or appropriate the teacher awards a point, but no team can offer a sentence that has been used previously.

This game-like practice does nothing more or less than force students to make sentences using a particular verb tense. Yet by adding the element of surreal humour it can cause great enjoyment. Of course students may find it difficult, and teachers may want to use different sentence prompts from those given here for any number of reasons. But the idea of a teacher giving prompts in this way has considerable

attraction since it requires no material or technology and can be slotted into a lesson at various stages.

Example 5: In the queue

Language: vocabulary – physical description
Age: adult
Level: beginners

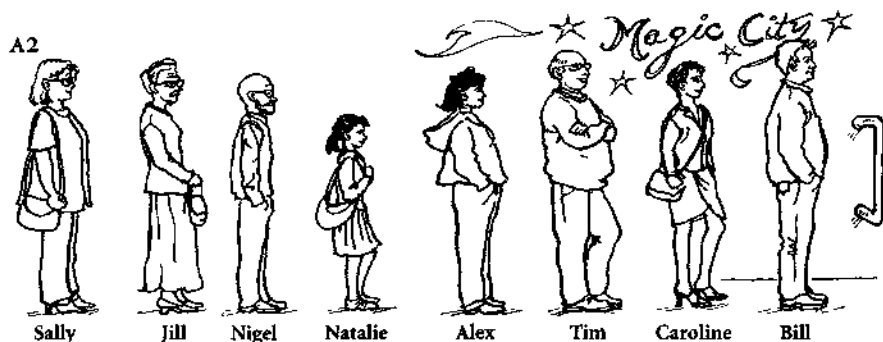
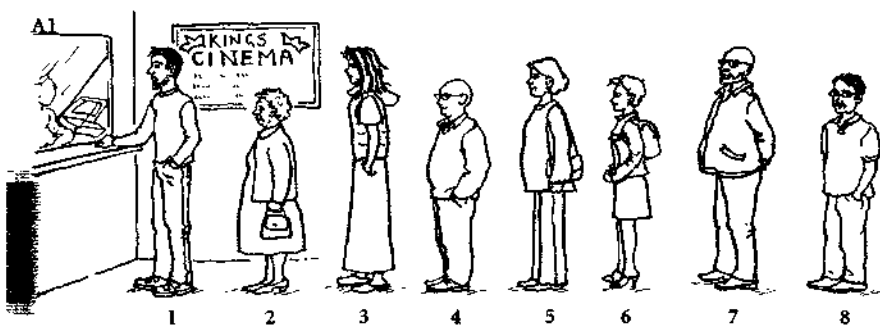
In this practice activity designed to get students using the language of description (e.g. *He's quite tall. She has blond hair. He has a beard*), an artificial 'information gap' is created by getting the students to look at different pictures.

The teacher starts by putting a picture of people in a queue on the board and giving the students a list of names. They can then ask him, e.g. *What's John like?* to which the teacher replies *He's quite tall with glasses. He has a beard*. A student then comes up and points to the correct person in the picture.

The teacher now puts students in pairs. In each pair one student is A and the other is B. Each A student looks at the following two pictures – which are in colour in the original – and is told (a) to find out which of the following names apply to which of the people in the cinema queue (picture A1):

Cathy Jim Karly Kit Mick Monica Philip Susan

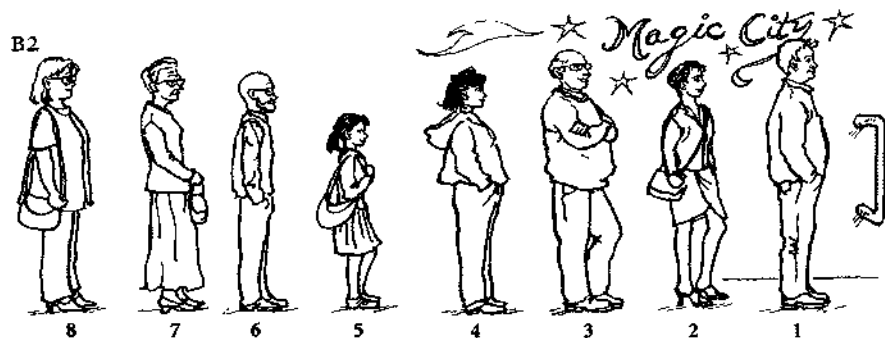
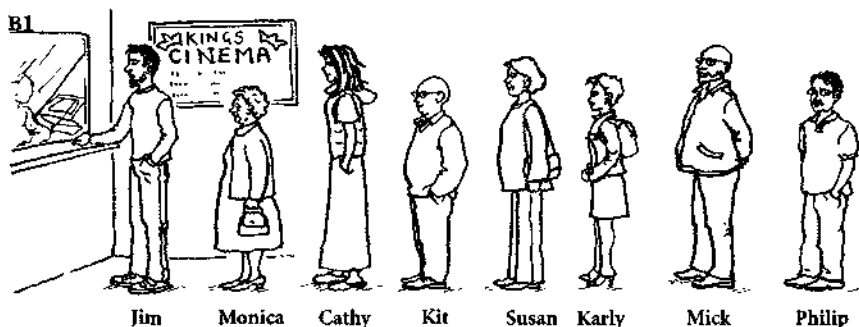
and (b) to answer B's questions about the people in picture A2. Thus, for picture A1, A will ask *What's Cathy like?* and B will reply *She's quite young. She's tall and thin and her hair is quite long*.



Each student B, on the other hand, looks at the following two pictures and is told (a) to find out which of the following names apply to which of the people in the queue to 'Magic City' (picture B2):

Alex Bill Caroline Jill Natalie Nigel Sally Tim

and (b) to answer A's questions about the people in picture B1. Thus, for picture B2, B will ask *What's Alex like?* and A will reply *She's medium height and quite well-built. She has dark hair.*



When the activity is over the teacher has different students describe the various characters (Alex, Cathy, Susan, etc.) to check that they are happy using the description language.

Chapter notes and further reading

• Situations for introducing new language

In his ground-breaking book *English in Situations* Robert O'Neill was one of the first to create situations which provoked a number of examples of the target language (O'Neill 1972).

• Mixed-ability classes

On mixed-ability classes, see L Prodromou (1992), B Bowler and S Parminter (1997 and 2000) and J Rose (1997).

12

Researching language

Students frequently need to research language on their own, whether this is because they are studying autonomously (see Chapter 24A), because they are correcting a piece of homework (see Chapter 24, A1), because they are finding out about language as part of a project or task (see Chapters 6, A5 and 17–19), or because they are searching for the meanings of words in reading and listening texts (see Chapters 14–16).

A What dictionaries are for

One of the mainstays of any language ‘researcher’ is the dictionary. Many students understand this and, as a result, buy themselves bilingual dictionaries or electronic translators because they fervently hope that they will find an instantly usable translation of a word they know in their language. There is every good reason for them to want this since, at least in earlier stages, people tend to translate in their heads when they are learning in a foreign language, and the idea of a one-to-one correspondence between words in two languages is immensely attractive.

There is nothing wrong with bilingual dictionaries (or electronic translators) of course. When they work well they provide just what the students are looking for. But all too often they fail to show students how words are used in the foreign language, providing simple answers for what is, in effect, considerably more complex. Sometimes, for example, a word in the L1 may have six or seven equivalencies in the L2; if these equivalencies are just offered as a list of words they provide the student with no information about which one to choose – and when. Sometimes there are restrictions on the use of a word in L1 which do not apply in the L2. Unless these are given, the information is not complete. Many bilingual dictionaries also fail to give sufficient information about grammatical context, appropriacy, and connotation.

This does not mean that all bilingual dictionaries are bad or that students should never use them. There are some excellent examples available now and whether we like it or not, students will always use them, especially at lower levels. What we can do is show them something different which is just as good – and in many ways better: the monolingual dictionary (MLD).

MLDs, whether in book form, on CDs or available on the Internet, are those written in only one language (in this case English). Although most ‘general’ dictionaries are, of course, monolingual in this sense, the acronym tends to be used to describe dictionaries written especially for language learners, and that is the sense

in which we use it here. Current examples include the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, and the *COBUILD Dictionary*. In them users will find information such as the different meanings that words have, how they are pronounced, what other words they collocate with, and when they can be used. They also give examples of the words in phrases and sentences so that students get a very good idea of how they themselves can use this word. One of the more important features of many of the current generation of MLDs is that their definitions are written in a language which is itself simplified, thus avoiding the possibility that the definition is more difficult to understand than the word itself: it makes a lot more sense to say that a *dog is a very common animal that people keep as a pet or to guard a building (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English)* than that it is a *canine quadruped!*

Students at beginner level will usually find MLDs too difficult to use because the language in the definitions will be way above their heads however careful the lexicographers have been. Such people may well rely on their bilingual dictionaries. But from somewhere around the intermediate level, students will find the information that MLDs contain invaluable, as we shall see in the following examples in this section.

A1 Reference and production dictionaries

Reference dictionaries – the kind that we most frequently use – need to be distinguished from production dictionaries, a type of dictionary which has emerged comparatively recently.

A reference dictionary is one where a student looks up a word to see what meanings it has, how it is used, and the way it is spelt and pronounced, e.g:

re.search¹/rɪ'sɜːtʃ/, rɪːsɜːtʃ|l-ɜːr-/n[U] also **researches** [plural] **1** serious study of a subject, that is intended to discover new facts or test new ideas: [+into/on] *research into the causes of cancer* | **research project** / **student** / **grant** etc *Alison is a research student in our lab.* **2** the activity of finding information about something that you are interested in or need to know about: **do research** *I'm doing some research for an article about student life.* | *I've done some research – it looks as if the train will be fastest.* – see also MARKET RESEARCH, R AND D

re.search²/rɪ'sɜːtʃ|l-ɜːr-/v[T] **1** to study a subject in detail, especially in order to discover new facts or test new ideas: *He's researching the effects of aerosols on the environment.* **2** to supply all the necessary facts and information for something: *This book has been very well researched.* – **researcher** n [C]

Entries for *research* in the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (Pearson Education Ltd)

Depending on the particular word being defined (and exemplified) some or all of the following information may also be given:

- differences between British and American usage, for example *Monday to Friday inclusive* (British), and *Monday through Friday* (American)
- similar words, for example the difference between *gaze*, *stare*, and *gape*
- frequency in different media, for example the fact that *certainly* is more common in speech than in writing

- levels of formality, for example the fact that *indolent* is a formal word
- connotation, for example the fact that *vagabond* is 'especially literary' and that certain words are 'taboo'

Dictionaries are generally used when students have already come across a word and then look it up to check that they know how to use it. Sometimes they will find a word in their bilingual dictionaries and then check with the MLD to see if they have understood correctly.

Production dictionaries, on the other hand, are designed for students to use the other way round, starting with a meaning they wish to express and in order to look for the word that expresses it. Suppose, for example, that they wish to express the idea of someone secretly listening to someone else while standing near him, perhaps on the other side of a door. A native speaker would immediately choose the word *eavesdrop* to describe the situation. The foreign student might find this in a bilingual dictionary, but would have more trouble with a reference MLD since, not knowing the word in the first place, he or she would not, of course, be able to look it up.

In a production dictionary students look for a general word that they already know, and which is a bit like the concept they wish to be able to express in English. In the case of *eavesdrop*, for example, that word might be *listen*. Opening the production dictionary (in this case the *Longman Essential Activator*) the student finds the following:

LISTEN

see also HEAR

⚠ Don't confuse listen and hear. If you listen to something, you pay attention so that you can hear it well.

Listen /'lɪsən/ [v I] to pay attention to what someone is saying or to a sound that you hear: *I didn't hear the answer because I wasn't listening when she read it out.*
+ to *Gordon was lying on his bed, listening to his music.*

listen carefully *They all listened carefully while she was telling them the story.*

Listen! SPOKEN (say this when you want to get someone's attention) *Listen! I've just had a brilliant idea.*

⚠ Don't say 'I listen music'. Say **I listen to music.**

pay attention /peɪ ə'tenʃən/ to listen carefully to what someone is saying: *I have some important information about travel arrangements, so please pay attention.*

+ to *She went on talking, but I wasn't really paying attention to what she was saying.*

eavesdrop /'i:vzdrɒp||-dra:p/ [v I] to secretly listen to someone else's conversation by standing near them, hiding behind a door etc: *"How does Jake know that?" "He must have been eavesdropping."*

+ on *We talked very quietly so that no-one could eavesdrop on us.*

listen in /lɪsən 'ɪn/ [*phrasal verb* 1] to listen to someone else's telephone conversation when they do not know you are listening.

+ on *The police were listening in on their conversation.*

From the *Longman Essential Activator* (Pearson Education Ltd)

Going down the column they come across a word which, through its definition and the examples given, is exactly what they are looking for. They can now use it with confidence.

Reference MLDs are packed full of information which is invaluable to students checking word use. Production dictionaries, in contrast, allow students to find new words.

A2 Training students to use dictionaries

If we want students to use dictionaries it will probably not be sufficient just to recommend a dictionary and tell them how useful it is. Even though huge improvements have been made in dictionary design over the last few years – and even though there are now a number of Internet, CD-ROM, and DVD-based dictionaries – still the wealth of information can be extremely daunting to some users. Indeed the frequently dense design of some dictionaries may be enough to put them off altogether.

In order to avoid this problem many teachers and materials designers put dictionary training into lesson sequences, so that students will see how to use them and what the benefits of such use are. Thus we can make sure, for example, that students recognise the metaphorical meanings that are given, and that they identify typical lexical phrases which the word they are looking for occurs in – and which good dictionaries list clearly.

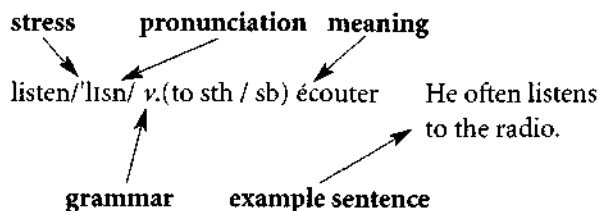
The following two examples show dictionary training in action:

Example 1: The bilingual dictionary Level: pre-intermediate

The following example from a textbook for elementary/pre-intermediate learners is based on the assumption that students will be using a bilingual dictionary and therefore points out to them some of the things they can find out from it:

□ How can a good dictionary help me?

A good bilingual dictionary is very important for efficient language learning. A dictionary doesn't only tell you the meaning of a word. It also tells you the grammar, pronunciation, and stress. It sometimes gives you an example sentence too.



1 Dictionary abbreviations What do they mean?

1	sth	<i>something</i>	
2	sb	_____	
3	n.	_____	(e.g. house)
4	adj.	_____	(e.g. fat)
5	v.	_____	(e.g. go)
6	prep.	_____	(e.g. in)
7	adv.	_____	(e.g. slowly)
8	pron.	_____	(e.g. we / us)

From *English File Student's Book 2* by C Oxenden et al. (Oxford University Press)

At the very least such a good piece of advice shows students that dictionaries are a 'good thing' and that they contain a variety of useful information. The next example goes further, however, taking entries from MLDs and asking students some exacting questions which they answer as they learn how to use the MLD.

Example 2: Dictionary codes

Level: intermediate

One thing that students need to discover is what the various abbreviations and definitions in a dictionary mean, and how meanings are given and explained. The following exercise is designed for this purpose:

Look at the following dictionary entries and answer the questions:

swol-len¹ /'swɒlən/ 'swou-/the past participle of SWELL
swollen² *adj* 1 a part of your body that is swollen is bigger than usual because of illness or injury: *He bandaged his swollen ankle.* 2 a river that is swollen has more water in it than usual 3 **have a swollen head/ be swollen-headed** *BrE* to be too proud so that you think you are very clever or important

- What parts of speech can *swollen* be? How do you know?
- How is *swollen* pronounced? How do you know?
- How many meanings of *swollen* are given? How do you know?
- What examples of *swollen* are given? How do you know?

e Are any of the uses of swollen particular to any special national or regional language variety? How do you know?

Such questions point the students towards the grammar labels (for example, adj), towards the phonetic transcriptions that are given, towards the way the dictionary lists different meanings, to the fact that examples are usually in italics, and to labels like *BrE* to denote special usage in one particular language variety.

B What grammar books are for

Grammar books come in many shapes and sizes. The most popular ones tend to offer quick digestible explanations of grammar points and provide opportunities for practice of these specific points, for example:

UNIT
67

a car / some money (countable/uncountable 2)

A a/an and some

a/an + *singular countable noun* (car/apple/shoe etc.):

- I need a new **car**.
- Would you like an **apple**?



an apple

some + *plural countable nouns* (cars/apples/shoes etc.):

- I need **some** new shoes.
- Would you like **some** apples?



some apples

some + *uncountable nouns* (water/money/music etc.):

- I need **some** money.
- Would you like **some** cheese?
- (or Would you like a **piece** of cheese?)



some cheese or
a piece of cheese

Compare a and some:

- Linda bought a **hat**, **some** shoes and **some** perfume.
- I read a **newspaper**, wrote **some** letters and listened to **some** music.

B Many nouns are *sometimes* countable and *sometimes* uncountable. For example:

 a cake	 some cakes	 some cake or a piece of cake
 a chicken	 some chickens	 some chicken or a piece of chicken

Compare a **paper** (= a newspaper) and **some** **paper**:

- I want something to read. I'm going to buy a **paper**.
- but* • I want to make a list. I need **some** **paper** / a **piece** of **paper**. (*not* 'a paper')

From *Essential Grammar in Use* by R Murphy (Cambridge University Press)

At intermediate and higher levels, however, it is possible to give more complex explanations, as in the following example:

2.14 How to identify countable and uncountable nouns

All common nouns fall into one of two sub-classes: they may be either **countable nouns** (sometimes known as **unit** or **count** nouns) or **uncountable nouns** (sometimes known as **mass** or **non-count** nouns). The distinction between countable and uncountable nouns is fundamental in English, for only by distinguishing between the two can we understand when to use singular or plural forms and when to use indefinite, definite and zero articles: *a/an, the* and \emptyset [> 3.2–3], or the appropriate quantifier: *a few, much, many, etc.* [>3.1, 5.1].

Unfortunately, we cannot always rely on common sense (using the idea of counting as a guide) to tell us when a noun is countable or uncountable. For example, the noun *information* is uncountable in English, but its equivalent in another language may refer to an item or items of information and will therefore be countable [> 2.17].

Experience is uncountable, but we can refer to *an experience* to mean an event which contributes to *experience*:

*They want someone with **experience** for this job.*

*I had **a strange experience** the other day.*

Many nouns which are normally uncountable can be used as countables in certain contexts [>2.16.3]. This suggests that strict classifications of nouns as countable or uncountable are in many cases unreliable. It would be better to think in terms of countable and uncountable *uses* of nouns. For detailed information about individual nouns, consult a good dictionary.

2.14.1 Countable nouns

If a noun is countable:

- we can use *a/an* in front of it: *a book, an envelope*.
- it has a plural and can be used in the question *How many?*:
How many stamps/envelopes? – *Four stamps/envelopes*.
- we can use numbers: *one stamp, two stamps*.

2.14.2 Uncountable nouns

If a noun is uncountable:

- we do not normally use *a/an* in front of it: *Sugar is expensive*.
- it does not normally have a plural and it can be used in the question *How much?*: *How much meat/oil?* – *A lot of meat/A little oil*.
- we cannot normally use a number (*one, two*) in front of it.

From *Longman English Grammar* by L G Alexander (Pearson Education Ltd)

Both students and teachers may consult grammar books for a number of reasons. For example, students may be drafting or redrafting a piece of written work and may want to check that they are using some grammar correctly. Alternatively, a teacher, having noticed that a student is making a lot of mistakes in one particular area,

might tell that student to look up the language in a grammar book in order to understand it better. Perhaps a student gets back a piece of written homework which has correction marks on it highlighting grammatical problems; when the student is rewriting the homework he or she can consult a reference grammar (such as the *Longman English Grammar* above). But students can also work through the explanations and exercises in self-study grammars such as *Essential Grammar in Use* either on their own or because a teacher sets exercises for homework (see Chapter 24, A1) or classwork. Finally, teachers often use grammar books (e.g. Alexander (1988), Swan (1995), Parrott (2000)) to check grammar concepts, especially where students ask difficult questions which we cannot answer on the spot, or where an area is complex so that we need to revisit it from time to time to remind ourselves of the full picture. Grammar books are also vital for the preparation of materials.

C What language corpora are for

With a very few notable exceptions (see, for example, Tribble and Jones 1997), it has always been assumed that language corpora (huge collections of language from sources such as books, magazines, newspapers, and speech, stored on computers) are only useful for language researchers. The complexity of the software needed to use them and the unfriendly look of the evidence which they produce has deterred many teachers and students from going anywhere near them. Another problem has been the source of the texts that have gone into the corpora. How can students be expected to understand language evidence that, perhaps, comes from scientific journals or from highly idiosyncratic language varieties which they are not used to?

Things are changing, however, and the development of new programs and more user-friendly interfaces has started to bring corpora into more common use. Materials writers are also thinking of compiling the kind of language corpora which students might find usable – removing texts which they would conceivably have significant problems with.

At their simplest, software programs used with language corpora show how particular words are used. These 'key words in context' (KWICs) appear on the screen embedded in the sentences or phrases where they occur. Each line of the concordance is taken from the different texts stored on the corpus (though you may, of course, have different examples from the same text too).

People who use concordancing software packages often ask their computer to give them a 'sample' of the word. This is because on a large corpus of 200 million words or more, asking the computer to give every example of a high frequency word (such as *crime*) would produce screen after screen of lines. Instead we can get a representative sample of the word, so that if we asked for a 25-line sample of a word like *handsome* we might get the following:

is back	The third cell (82d) contains a	handsome	young man clad in (very dated) Estalian clothing
and wait	His patient was on for fifty, a	handsome,	tall woman, very well-dressed Her
do look a trifle	stale You make a	handsome	couple" Thank you, Herr Direktor
message and show the rest of the readership what a		handsome	chap you are May I also pass on my thanks to
week of digging up roads, try presenting them with a		handsome	bound volume of Gaelic poetry Please
Guppy was his best man Smooth, dark and		handsome	in morning dress and blue cravat, he took his
could see now that he was a big fellow, sleek and		handsome	His fur shone and his claws and teeth
Actually Hamilton himself so smart and		handsome	when he travels, soon looked as grimy and
Carly still looked on with awe Brian had been		handsome	before alcohol thickened his face, and she
lifted her face – the features somewhat masculine but		handsome	– to the constable's The sleep was
sheet and tucked it around him Looking at his		handsome	face, she felt a pang for what might have been
the light craft through the water effortlessly, his		handsome	mouth formed into a smile, his back held straight
Drew, and Randy Sherwood, who was laughing his		handsome	head off, had jumped into the pool and were trying
The frown gave a ruthless edge to his		handsome	face, as though the leashed danger in him had
impossibly blue eyes, the golden hair, the laughing		handsome	face, and the awful thing was that, if he came
in the sunlight, and silver dishes were laid out on		handsome	chests and cabinets In the great hall
raucously at each other, but they really are quite		handsome	birds Everywhere there was luxurious
The Dean gazed affectionately at her a tall,		handsome	woman whose company he'd enjoyed immensely
emerged behind the bodyguard He was a tall,		handsome	man who had an air of confidence about him
did extremely well to beat Redbridge and Ilford by the		handsome	score of 4 – 1 in the semi final, but the rugged
economy aligned him with the new Liberals hence the		handsome	tribute he paid to J A Hobson, spite of the
was very proud of Nutmeg thought himself very		handsome	He lived in a big house which had a
My husband was an accountant He was very		handsome	and he was very good to me But one
after my grandfather He was wonderfully		handsome,	incredibly dashing, astoundingly brave and
Oh, but he was so handsome! Yet,		handsome?	No, no Not to be trusted

handsome sampled from the *British National Corpus* (BNC)

Although this may look confusing to the unaccustomed eye, people (such as researchers, teachers, and more advanced students) who are used to reading concordances will quickly spot examples not only of *very handsome*, but also of *quite handsome*, and even *wonderfully handsome*.

Because, too, we have asked the computer program to 'left-sort' the word immediately before the KWIC (in alphabetical order), we can quickly see three examples of the pattern *[adjective] and handsome* before a noun (*dark and handsome*, *sleek and handsome*, *smart and handsome*), and even an example of *[adjective] but handsome* (*masculine but handsome*). It is also clear that a common pattern is indefinite article + *handsome* + noun. We will also notice that the word is used to describe both men and women. It is interesting, too, to see that *handsome* (when used to describe people) often has the concept of 'tall' included with it. The concordance – even sampled down to only 25 KWIC sentences – has already yielded a wealth of information.

If we 'right-sorted' the concordance (in alphabetical order of the words immediately following the KWIC) it would instantly become clear that we can talk about *handsome men* and *women*, but also about *handsome birds/chests/couples/faces* (three times)/*heads/mouths/scores/tributes*. Because *face* occurs three times in such a small number of examples it is reasonable to suppose that this is a common

collocation. Notice too that both occurrences of the word with *woman* use the word *tall*, suggesting that we would be unlikely to use the word for a short woman.

Left- and right-sorting give us convincing evidence that would take longer to find if we did not use these tools. We can also refine our search by asking the software to sort the lines by two or three words to the left or right, or in various other ways. Each time different facts about words and how they are used emerge from the mass of data in front of us.

Apart from left- and right-sorting we can also get examples of a word from only the spoken corpus or from the written corpus – so that we can see if a word is used differently in speech and writing. We can ask it to give us only KWIC sentences from fiction or from newspapers to learn more about language use in certain genres (see Chapter 2, c4). We can ask the software to give us examples of the word only when used as a noun. We can also find out how common a word is, too, and may be able to do a number of more complex tasks as well.

C1 Typical or divergent?

Students who consult a language corpus get the thrill of being their own language researchers and of seeing evidence that is immediately persuasive. This is language ‘in the raw’, and its authenticity makes it instantly attractive. Although much of this information is available in dictionaries, it is predigested there, and even in the most user-friendly examples, surrounded by signs and symbols which some students find off-putting – and which they need to be trained to use. Here, on the contrary, students are looking at compelling language evidence which they can evaluate themselves.

However, language corpora can be problematic too, both because of the texts that are put into them, and because of the KWIC sentences they produce.

- **What goes in:** a language corpus depends upon the texts that have gone into it. If every text in a corpus came from Shakespeare then we would get a strange idea of what modern English was like; if every text came from contemporary teenage magazines we would only have information about teenage magazine language, whereas if we fill our computer corpus with *The Times* newspaper we will get only a partial view of language use. We need, therefore, to know how a corpus was assembled, so that we can be sure it is appropriate for us and for our students.
- **What comes out:** if students accept all uses of a word in a concordance as equally valid they may have problems since at least some uses which the program throws up will be idiosyncratic or, in some cases, just plain wrong. We need to train students, therefore, to recognise when certain uses are divergent. A simple rule is that the more often a pattern occurs, the more confident the student can be that this is a common usage. Where it only occurs once they might want to check with a dictionary or a teacher.

D Examples of language research

In the following examples students become language researchers: by finding out information for themselves, they increasingly become more independent and self-reliant, and develop as autonomous learners (see Chapter 24A).

Example 3: Body movements

Language: body movement collocations

Age: any

Level: intermediate

In this example the teacher wants the students to discuss different body movements and what they mean/are used for. In a multicultural class this can cause great amusement as people discover that the same gesture can mean different things in different cultures. Where teachers are working with monolingual groups, however, the same effect can be created by discussing what gestures English people use and how this compares with other people – or by discussing how different people use gesture to give clear messages.

The teaching sequence starts when the teacher gets students to discuss how they should behave if they meet the president, the king/queen, the prime minister, a religious leader, a film star or a national beauty queen (in other words bowing, if this is appropriate, or shaking hands perhaps). After this activity, which is intended to introduce the topic of physical gesture and engage the students' interest, they are given the following exercise to perform individually or in pairs:

Which of the following parts of the body can go with these verbs?
 arm(s) ears eyebrow(s) fist finger hand(s) head hips leg(s) shoulders teeth

wave		hunch	
fold		shrug	
clench		nod	
point		raise	
wiggle		cross	
wag		shake	

What special meaning (if any) does each gesture or action have?

What actions or gestures do you use to do the following?

Meaning	Gesture
say hello	
say goodbye	
express anger	
express surprise	
express indifference	
express agreement	
express disagreement	

In order to complete the task students work with each other and, crucially, they consult their dictionaries and/or the computer corpus when they are not sure which words collocate. If they look up *clench*, for example, they will find:

clench /klent]/v [T] **clench your fists/teeth/jaw etc** to hold your hands, teeth etc together tightly, usually because you feel angry or determined: *She muttered "Go away" through clenched teeth.*

From the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (Pearson Education Ltd)

It is immediately clear that the main words which collocate with *clench* are *fists*, *teeth*, and *jaw*. The students can now use these collocations with confidence.

If students have access to a language corpus and they ask for a concordance of *shrug*, they might find:

nightmare or perk of budding stardom? His	shrug	seems to say, "Hell, why not?"
those circumstances potential customers will simply	shrug	their shoulders, walk away and do without
shared experience, giving her the confidence to	shrug	her shoulders when she feels like it.
if somebody's got to benefit from inequality, her	shrug	suggests, it might as well be her.
the garage just pursed his lips and said with a	shrug,	"Madame, there are no parts.
a furious damp face on Rossendale who could only	shrug	mute agreement. Lord John though
He stared, then, with an enormous	shrug	of reluctance, he walked to the door,
"Use your own," replied the Mason with a	shrug.	"Isn't that the way of it?
he mean by that? Then she gave a tiny	shrug.	The man was more than just a mystery
people like them?" She felt Fitzalan	shrug.	"Sometimes there's trouble."
killed him." Our eyes meet. I	shrug	and look away, as if it doesn't matter.
if they throw me out ..." he trailed off with a	shrug.	"Those are my terms, Sabrina.
She lifted her shoulders in a dismissive	shrug,	wishing heartily that someone else would
to the ether from where he'd been summoned; to	shrug	off the body which Sartori had congealed
stopped by a blizzard? The she gave a tiny	shrug.	She couldn't back out now - Kelly
shamefaced grin but probably looks like a careless	shrug.	"You're right," I tell him.
It's ingrained. We can't	shrug	it off." "I'm not worried about
Jezrael raised her eyebrows in a facial	shrug,	gave a faint nod: I think I might live.
McKimm has fought a losing battle to	shrug	off injury and is replaced by another
Newcastle line-up, but Paul Bracewell is likely to	shrug	off a toe injury. Keegan
flights are always crowded," he told her with a	shrug.	"But I'm hoping to catch the
point of view. "Anyway," she added with a	shrug,	"the jacket might not be there now.
hat?" The stiff shoulders moved in a	shrug	that almost failed to happen. What
"And had there been?" Again a	shrug,	this time dismissive. "No, not to
got to move fast, though." He tried to	shrug	her off, but Cally held on to him.

shrug sampled from the *British National Corpus* (BNC)

From this concordance it is immediately apparent that *shrug* can be a verb, a noun, or a part of the phrasal verb *shrug off*. Where *shrug* collocates with a part of the body, that is always *shoulder* and, once again, the student can now use this collocation with confidence.

Researching words in this way allows students to complete the task; they can then go on to use some or all of the collocations they have found in scenarios where people show how they are feeling and what they mean with the body movements they use.

Example 4: Films

Language: film vocabulary

Age: teenage and above

Level: elementary

If students are doing a project on films and film-going, they need to find appropriate words and phrases for the topic. They could rely on the teacher or the textbook, of course; both or either of these could give them everything they needed. But they might be working on their own, in which case they need to consult some other source of information.

Students who consult a production dictionary will be able to research words they have perhaps never heard or seen before. Thus, within the topic of films/movies they might search for words for films and going to see them (e.g. *film*, *movie*, *cinema*, *go to the cinema*, etc.), types of film (*horror*, *comedy*, *war film*, *road movie*, etc.), people in films (*actor*, *actress*, *star*), people who make films (*director*, *producer*, *film crew*, etc.) – and various other categories, including what happens in a film.

Z what happens in a film

plot/story /plot, 'stɔ:ri|plɔ:t-/ [n C] the things that happen in a film: *Tom Hanks was great, but I thought the plot was really boring.* | *It's basically a love story.*

scene /si:n/ [n C] one part of a film: *The first scene takes place on a beach.* | *a love scene* | *I love the scene where the alien comes out through John Hurt's chest.*

special effect /,speʃəl 'ɪfekt/ [n C] an unusual image or sound that is produced artificially, in order to make something that is impossible look as if it is really happening: *The special effects were amazing – the dinosaurs looked as if they were alive.*

ending /'endɪŋ/ [n C] the way that the story in a film ends: *I like movies with a happy ending best.*

twist /twɪst/ [n C] something surprising that happens in a film, which you did not expect: *The film has a twist at the end, when we discover that the detective is the murderer.*

From the *Longman Essential Activator* (Pearson Education Ltd)

Provided that the dictionary designers have managed to predict the words which the students are likely to need, such production material is an ideal tool for language research. The students can now use the words for the project or task they are involved in.

Example 5: Say and tellLanguage: verb complementation (*say*
and *tell*)

Age: any

Level: intermediate and above

A student has got a corrected piece of homework back from the teacher. The teacher has underlined the sentence *He was tired of people saying him what to do*. In the margin he has written *There is a problem here with the verb 'say'. Look at Practical English Usage, page 489, and rewrite the sentence before the next class.*

When the student looks at the correct page she reads that both verbs can be used with direct and indirect speech and that *say* refers to any kind of speech whereas *tell* is only used to mean *instruct* or *inform*. She then goes on to read the following:

2 objects

After *tell*, we usually say who is told.

She told me that she would be late. (NOT *She told that ...*)

Say is most often used without a personal object.

She said that she would be late. (NOT *She said me ...*)

If we want to put a personal object after *say*, we use *to*.

And I say to all the people of this great country ...

Tell is not used before objects like *a word, a name, a sentence, a phrase*.

Alice said a naughty word this morning. (NOT *Alice told ...*)

We do not usually use it after *tell* to refer to a fact.

'What time's the meeting?' 'I'll tell you tomorrow.'

(NOT *'I'll tell you it tomorrow.'*)

3 Infinitives

Tell can be used before **object + infinitive**, in the sense of 'order' or 'instruct'.

Say cannot be used like this.

I told the children to go away. (NOT *I said the children go away.*)

4 tell without a personal object

Tell is used without a personal object in a few expressions. Common examples *tell the truth, tell a lie, tell a story/joke*.

I don't think she's telling the truth. (NOT ... *saying the truth.*)

Note also the use of *tell* to mean 'distinguish', 'understand', as in *tell the difference, tell the time*.

5 Indirect questions

Neither *tell* nor *say* can introduce indirect questions.

Bill asked whether I wanted to see a film.

(NOT *Bill said whether I wanted to see a film.*)

(NOT *Bill told me whether ...*)

But *say* and *tell* can introduce the answers to questions.

Has she said who's coming?

He only told one person where the money was.

From *Practical English Usage* by Michael Swan (Oxford University Press)

"... she can rewrite the homework sentence as *He was tired of people telling him what to do* and know that she has got it right. Research has offered a powerful alternative to teacher explanation.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Bilingual dictionaries**

Kernerman Publishing in Israel, for example, produces a 'semi-bilingual' dictionary (*Oxford Student's Dictionary for Hebrew Speakers*) which mixes the benefits of a monolingual dictionary with Hebrew translations.

Cambridge University Press publishes a series of bilingual books called *Word Routes* and *Word Selector* for five languages (Catalan, French, Greek, Italian, Spanish). Because they are organised by topic and concept, they have strong production potential.

- **MLDs**

For an excellently clear history of MLD dictionary development, see M Rundell (1998).

Many dictionaries are available on CD-ROM and some are also available on the Internet (see references on pages 152–153).

- **Concordancing**

Concordancing packages are gradually becoming available (and usable) for teachers and students. See especially the *WordSmith Tools* software designed by Mike Scott and published by Oxford University Press and the sampler CD from the *British National Corpus* distributed by the Humanities Computing Unit of Oxford University on behalf of the BNC consortium. More information about the BNC, including details of its free online browse facility, is available at <http://info.ox.ac.uk/bnc>. See also the corpus references on pages 35–36.

- **Typical or divergent**

C Owen (1996) has doubts about how useful language concordancing may be for resolving issues of correctness. He is also interesting about the limitation of computer concordances in dictionary design (Owen 1993) – though these doubts were answered by G Francis and J Sinclair (1994).

13

Teaching pronunciation

A Pronunciation issues

Almost all English language teachers get students to study grammar and vocabulary, practise functional dialogues, take part in productive skill activities, and become competent in listening and reading. Yet some of these same teachers make little attempt to teach pronunciation in any overt way and only give attention to it in passing. It is possible that they are nervous of dealing with sounds and intonation; perhaps they feel they have too much to do already and pronunciation teaching will only make things worse. They may claim that even without a formal pronunciation syllabus, and without specific pronunciation teaching, many students seem to acquire serviceable pronunciation in the course of their studies.

However, the fact that some students are able to acquire reasonable pronunciation without overt pronunciation teaching should not blind us to the benefits of a focus on pronunciation in our lessons. Pronunciation teaching not only makes students aware of different sounds and sound features (and what these mean), but can also improve their speaking immeasurably. Concentrating on sounds, showing where they are made in the mouth, making students aware of where words should be stressed – all these things give them extra information about spoken English and help them achieve the goal of improved comprehension and intelligibility.

In some particular cases pronunciation help allows students to get over serious intelligibility problems. Joan Kerr, a speech pathologist, described (in a paper at the 1998 ELICOS conference in Melbourne, Australia) how she was able to help a Cantonese speaker of English achieve considerably greater intelligibility by working on his point of articulation – changing his focus of resonance. Whereas many Cantonese vowels happen towards the back of the mouth, English ones are frequently articulated nearer the front or in the centre of the mouth. The moment you can get Cantonese speakers, she suggested, to bring their vowels further forward, increased intelligibility occurs. With other language groups it may be a problem of nasality (e.g. Vietnamese) or the degree to which speakers do or do not open their mouths. Other language groups may have trouble with intonation or stress patterns in phrases and sentences (see Chapter 2, D2 and D5), and there are many individual sounds which cause difficulty for different first language speakers.

For all these people, being made aware of pronunciation issues will be of immense benefit not only to their own production, but also to their own understanding of spoken English.

A1 Perfection versus intelligibility

A question we need to answer is how good our students' pronunciation ought to be. Should they sound like native speakers, so perfect that just by listening to them we would assume that they were British or American or Australian? Or is this asking too much? Perhaps we should be happy if they can at least make themselves understood.

The degree to which students acquire 'perfect' pronunciation seems to depend very much on their attitude to how they speak and how well they hear. In the case of attitude there are a number of psychological issues which may well affect how 'foreign' a person sounds when they speak. For example, many students do not especially want to sound like native speakers; frequently they wish to be speakers of English as an international language and this does not necessarily imply trying to sound exactly like someone from Britain or Canada, for example. Frequently foreign language speakers want to retain their own accent when they speak the foreign language because that is part of their identity. Thus speaking English with, say, a Mexican accent is fine for the speaker who wishes to retain his or her 'Mexican-ness' in the foreign language.

Under the pressure of such cultural considerations it has become customary for language teachers to consider intelligibility as the prime goal of pronunciation teaching. This implies that the students should be able to use pronunciation which is good enough for them to be always understood. If their pronunciation is not up to this standard, it is thought, then there is a serious danger that they will fail to communicate effectively.

If intelligibility is the goal then it suggests that some pronunciation features are more important than others. Some sounds, for example, have to be right if the speaker is to get their message across (for example /n/ as in /sɪnɪŋ/ versus /ŋ/ as in /sɪnɪŋ/) though others (for example /ð/ and /θ/) may not cause a lack of intelligibility if they are confused. Stressing words and phrases correctly is vital if emphasis is to be given to the important parts of messages and if words are to be understood correctly. Intonation – the ability to vary the pitch and tune of speech – is an important meaning carrier too.

The fact that we may want our students to work towards an intelligible pronunciation rather than achieve a native-speaker quality may not appeal to all, however. Despite what we have said about identity, some may wish to sound exactly like a native speaker. In such circumstances it would be churlish to deny them such an objective.

A2 Problems

Two particular problems occur in much pronunciation teaching and learning:

- **What students can hear:** some students have great difficulty hearing pronunciation features which we want them to reproduce. Frequently speakers of different first languages have problems with different sounds, especially where, as with /b/ and /v/ for Spanish speakers, there are not the same two sounds in their language. If they cannot distinguish between them,

they will find it almost impossible to produce the two different English phonemes.

There are two ways of dealing with this: in the first place we can show students how sounds are made through demonstration, diagrams, and explanation. But we can also draw the sounds to their attention every time they appear on a tape or in our own conversation. In this way we gradually train the students' ears. When they can hear correctly they are on the way to being able to speak correctly.

- **The intonation problem:** for many teachers the most problematic area of pronunciation is intonation. Some of us (and many of our students) find it extremely difficult to hear 'tunes' or to identify the different patterns of rising and falling tones. In such situations it would be foolish to try and teach them.

However, the fact that we may have difficulty recognising specific intonation tunes does not mean that we should abandon intonation teaching altogether. Most of us can hear when someone is being enthusiastic or bored, when they are surprised, or when they are really asking a question rather than just confirming something they already know. One of our tasks, then, is to give students opportunities to recognise such moods and intentions either on tape, or through the way we ourselves model them (see Chapter 4, D2). We can then get students to imitate the way these moods are articulated, even though we may not (be able to) discuss the technicalities of the different intonation patterns themselves.

The key to successful pronunciation teaching, however, is not so much getting students to produce correct sounds or intonation tunes, but rather to have them listen and notice how English is spoken – either on audio or videotape or from the teachers themselves. The more aware they are the greater the chance that their own intelligibility levels will rise.

A3 The phonemic alphabet: to use or not to use?

It is perfectly possible to work on the sounds of English without ever using any phonemic symbols. We can get students to hear the difference, say, between *sheep* and *cheap* or between *ship* and *sheep* just by saying the words enough times. There is no reason why this should not be effective. We can also describe how the sounds are made (by demonstrating, drawing pictures of the mouth and lips, or explaining where the sounds are made).

However, since English is bedevilled, for many students (and even first language speakers), by problems of sound and spelling correspondence, it may make sense for them to be aware of the different phonemes, and the clearest way of promoting this awareness is to introduce the various symbols.

There are other reasons for using phonemic symbols too. Dictionaries usually give the pronunciation of their words in phonemic symbols. If students can read these symbols they can know how the word is said even without having to hear it. When both teacher and students know the symbols it is easier to explain what mistake has

occurred and why it has happened; we can also use the symbols for pronunciation tasks and games.

Some teachers complain that learning the symbols places an unnecessary burden on students. For certain groups this may be true, and the level of strain is greatly increased if they are asked to write in phonemic script (Newton 1999). But if they are only asked to recognise rather than produce the different symbols, then the strain is not so great, especially if they are introduced to the various symbols gradually rather than all at once.

In this chapter we assume that the knowledge of phonemic script is of benefit to students.

A4 When to teach pronunciation

Just as with any aspect of language – grammar, vocabulary, etc. – teachers have to decide when to include pronunciation teaching into lesson sequences. There are a number of alternatives to choose from:

- **Whole lessons:** some teachers devote whole lesson sequences to pronunciation, and some schools timetable pronunciation lessons at various stages during the week.

Though it would be difficult to spend a whole class period working on one or two sounds, it can make sense to work on connected speech concentrating on stress and intonation over some forty-five minutes, provided that we follow normal planning principles (see Chapter 22A). Thus we could have students do recognition work on intonation patterns, work on the stress in certain key phrases, and then move on to the rehearsing and performing of a short play extract which exemplified some of the issues we worked on.

Making pronunciation the main focus of a lesson does not mean that every minute of that lesson has to be spent on pronunciation work. Sometimes students may also listen to a longer tape, working on listening skills before moving to the pronunciation part of the sequence. Sometimes students may work on aspects of vocabulary before going on to work on word stress, sounds, and spelling.

- **Discrete slots:** some teachers insert short, separate bits of pronunciation work into lesson sequences. Over a period of weeks they work on all the individual phonemes either separately or in contrasting pairs. At other times they spend a few minutes on a particular aspect of intonation, say, or on the contrast between two or more sounds.

Such separate pronunciation slots can be extremely useful, and provide a welcome change of pace and activity during a lesson. Many students enjoy them, and they succeed precisely because we do not spend too long on any one issue. However, pronunciation is not a separate skill; it is part of the way we speak. Even if we want to keep our separate pronunciation phases for the reasons we have suggested, we will also need times when we integrate pronunciation work into longer lesson sequences.

- **Integrated phases:** many teachers get students to focus on pronunciation issues as an integral part of a lesson. When students listen to a tape, for example, one of the things which we can do is draw their attention to pronunciation features on the tape, if necessary having students work on sounds that are especially prominent, or getting them to imitate intonation patterns for questions, for example.
Pronunciation teaching forms a part of many sequences where students study language form (see Chapter 11). When we model words and phrases we draw our students' attention to the way they are said; one of the things we want to concentrate on during an accurate reproduction stage (see Chapter 11, A1) is the students' correct pronunciation.
- **Opportunistic teaching:** just as teachers may stray from their original plan when lesson realities make this inevitable, and teach vocabulary or grammar opportunistically because it has 'come up' (see Chapter 11, A2), so there are good reasons why we may want to stop what we are doing and spend a minute or two on some pronunciation issue that has arisen in the course of an activity. A lot will depend on what kind of activity the students are involved in since we will be reluctant to interrupt fluency work inappropriately (see Chapter 7, C3), but tackling a problem at the moment when it occurs can be a successful way of dealing with pronunciation.

Although whole pronunciation lessons may be an unaffordable luxury for classes under syllabus and timetable pressure, many teachers tackle pronunciation in a mixture of the ways suggested above.

Examples of pronunciation teaching

The areas of pronunciation which we need to draw our students' attention to include individual sounds they are having difficulty with, word and phrase/sentence stress, and intonation. But students will also need help with connected speech for fluency and the correspondence between sounds and spelling. All of these areas are touched on in the examples below.

Working with sounds

We often ask students to focus on one particular sound. This allows us to demonstrate how it is made and show how it can be spelt – a major concern with English since there is far less one-to-one correspondence between sound and spelling than there is in some other languages – especially Romance languages.

We could follow the approach taken in the *Lifelines Intermediate* books and have students identify which words in a list (including *bird, word, worm, worth, curl, heard, first, lurch*, etc.) have the sound /ɜ:/ (Hutchinson 1998: 45). They are then asked to identify the one consonant (r) which is always present in the spelling of words with this sound. We could also show or demonstrate the position of the lips when this sound is made and get students to make the sound and say words which include it.

Two more examples show specific approaches to the teaching and practising of sounds:

Example 1: *Ship and chip*

Sounds: /ʃ/ and /tʃ/

Level: intermediate

Contrasting two sounds which are very similar and often confused is a popular way of getting students to concentrate on specific aspects of pronunciation.

The sequence starts with students listening to pairs of words and practising the difference between /ʃ/ and /tʃ/, for example:

ship	chip	washing	watching
sherry	cherry	cash	catch
shoes	choose	mash	match
sheep	cheap	wish	which, witch

From *Sounds English* by J O'Connor and C Fletcher (Pearson Education Ltd).

The teaching sequence described here comes directly from this book.

If they have no problem with these sounds the teacher may well move on to other sounds and/or merely do a short practice exercise as a reminder of the difference between them. But if the students have difficulty discriminating between /ʃ/ and /tʃ/ the teacher asks them to listen to a tape and, in a series of exercises, they have to work out which word they hear, for example:

- 1 Small shops/chops are often expensive.
- 2 The dishes/ditches need cleaning.
- 3 I couldn't mash/match these things up.
- 4 She enjoys washing/watching the children.

They now move on to exercises which practise each sound separately, for example:

It's very cheap.
 a grey chair
 a cheese sandwich
 You cheat!
 no chance
 a pretty child

before doing a communication task which has words with the target sounds built into it, for example:

How much do you enjoy the things in the chart below?

1 very much 2 not much 3 not at all

Fill in the chart for yourself, and then ask three other people.

	You		
playing chess			
watching TV			
washing up			
going to a football match			
cooking chips			
eating chips			
lying in the sunshine			
shopping			

If, during this teaching sequence, students seem to be having trouble with either of the sounds, the teacher may well refer to a diagram of the mouth to help students see where the sounds are made, for example:



/tʃ/



/ʃ/

Contrasting sounds in this way has a lot to recommend it. It helps students concentrate on detail, especially when they are listening to hear the small difference between the sounds. It identifies sounds that are frequently confused by various nationalities. It is manageable for the teacher (rather than taking on a whole range of sounds at the same time), and it can be good fun for the students.

This kind of exercise can be done whether or not the teacher and students work with phonemic symbols.

Example 2: The phonemic chart

Sounds: all

Level: any

The writer Adrian Underhill is unambiguous about the use of phonemic symbols (see A3 above) and has produced a 'phonemic chart', which he recommends integrating into English lessons at various points.

The phonemic chart is laid out in relation to where in the mouth the forty-four sounds of southern British English are produced. In its top right-hand corner little boxes are used to describe stress patterns, and arrows are used to describe the five basic intonation patterns (i.e. fall, rise, fall-rise, rise-fall, and level):

i:	I	U	u:	Iə	eI	!	X
e	ə	ɜ:	ɔ:	ʊə	ɔI	əʊ	
æ	ʌ	ɑ:	ɒ	eə	aI	aʊ	
P	b	t	d	tʃ	dʒ	k	g
f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ
m	n	ŋ	h	l	r	w	j

The phonemic chart from *Sound Foundations* by A Underhill (Macmillan Heinemann)

What makes this chart special are the ways in which Adrian Underhill suggests that it should be used. Because each sound has a separate square, either the teacher or the students can point to that square to ask students to produce that sound or to show they recognise which sound is being produced. For example, the teacher might point to three sounds one after the other (/f/, /a/, and /p/) to get the students to say *shop*. Among other possibilities, the teacher can say a sound or a word and the student has to point to the sound(s) on the chart. When learners say something and produce an incorrect sound, the teacher can point to the sound they should have made. When the teacher first models a sound he can point to it on the chart to identify it for the students (Underhill 1994: 101).

The phonemic chart can be carried around by the teacher or left on the classroom wall. If it is permanently there and easily accessible, the teacher can use it at any stage when it becomes appropriate. Such a usable resource is a wonderful teaching aid as a visit to many classrooms where the chart is in evidence will demonstrate.

There are many other techniques and activities for teaching sounds apart from the ones we have shown here. Some teachers play sound bingo where the squares on the bingo card have sounds, or phonemically 'spelt' words instead of ordinary orthographic words. When the teacher says the sound or the word the student can cross off that square of their board. When all their squares are covered they shout 'bingo'. Noughts and crosses can be played in the same way, where each square has a sound and the students have to say a word with that sound in it to get that square, for example:

/æ/	/dʒ/	/t/
/i:/	/ə/	/d/
/ə/	/ɔ:/	/z/

Teachers can get students to say 'tongue-twisters' sometimes too (e.g. *She sells sea shells by the sea shore*) or to find rhymes for poetry/limerick lines. When students are familiar with the phonemic alphabet they can play 'odd man out' (five vocabulary items where one does not fit in with the others), but the words are written in phonemic script rather than ordinary orthography.

B2 Working with stress

Stress is important in individual words, in phrases, and in sentences. By shifting it around in a phrase or a sentence we can change emphasis or meaning.

As we saw in Figure 16 in Chapter 10c, it is assumed that when students meet new words in class (and if the new words end up on the board) the teacher will mark the stress of those words (using a consistent system of stress marking). Another common way of drawing our students' attention to stress issues is to show where the weak vowel sounds occur in words (rather than focusing on the stressed syllables themselves). We can draw attention to the *schwa* /ə/ in words like /fət'ɒgrəfə/ (*photographer*), or /ɒpə'tju:nɪtɪ/ (*opportunity*).

However, we can also focus on stress issues in longer phrases and in sentences, as the following two examples demonstrate.

Example 3: Fishing

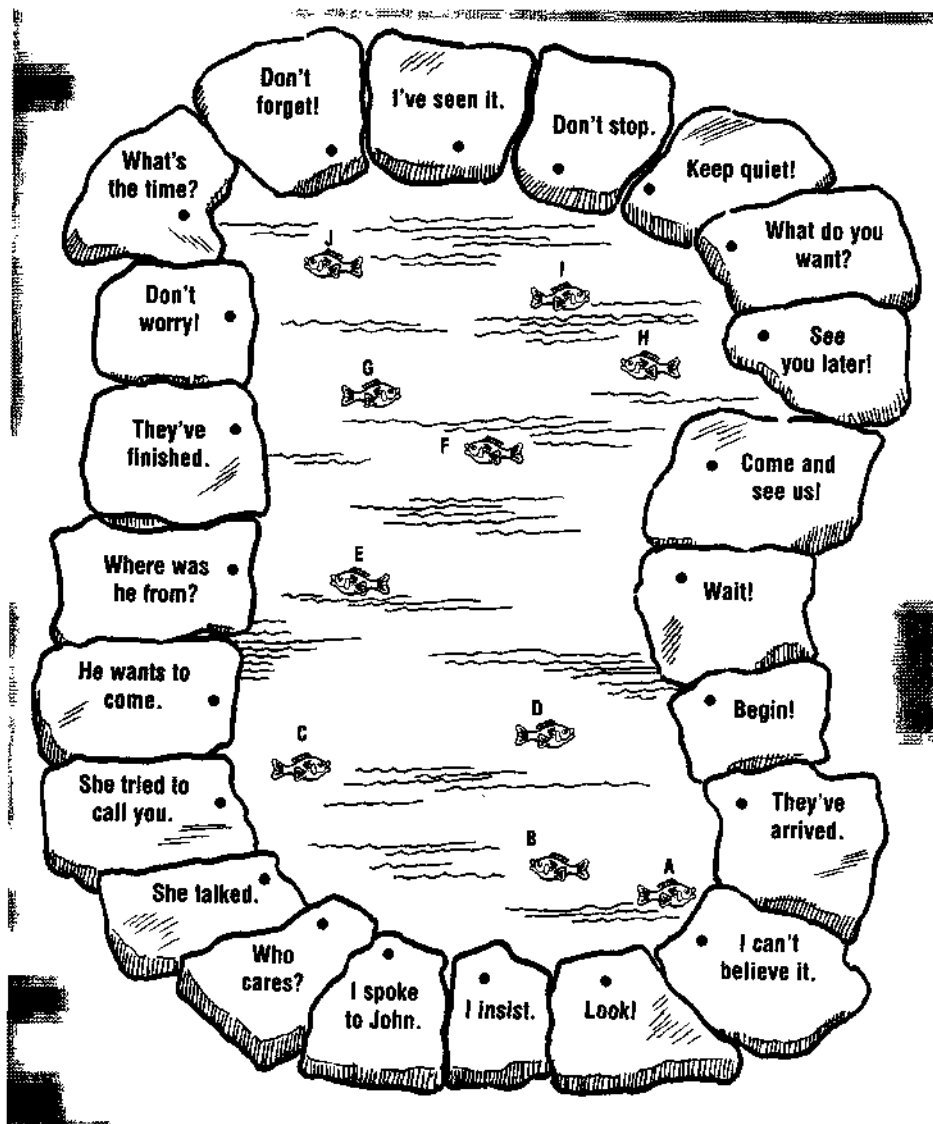
Sounds: phrase stress patterns

Level: pre-intermediate upwards

The following activity (in which students are asked to recognise stress patterns in phrases) comes from a book of pronunciation games which are designed to '... engage learners in a challenge and, at the same time, highlight an aspect of pronunciation' (Hancock 1995: 1).

The sequence starts when the teacher chooses some short phrases which the students are familiar with and writes them on the board. She then reads the phrases aloud and, as she does so, draws a large circle under each stressed syllable (which will be in the content words like *bel'ieve* and *'later*, as opposed to grammatical words like *to*, *of*, and *by*) and small circles under the unstressed syllables.

Now that students are clued in to the big and small circles the teacher gives them a copy of the following game board:



From *Pronunciation Games* by M Hancock (Cambridge University Press)

Using the 'circles' stress patterns they have to join pairs of phrases with the same stress patterns, e.g. *Look – wait!*, *Begin! – she talked*, *Who cares? – Don't stop!* The object of the game is to discover which fish is caught (a fish is caught when it is completely surrounded by lines). If students get the exercise right they will have encircled fish B.

Students can now say the phrases and teachers can ask them to come up with their own phrases to follow the various stress patterns – or teachers can make their own game along similar lines.

Example 4: Special stress

Sounds: variable stress

Level elementary

The stress in phrases changes depending upon what we want to say. The following exercise draws students' attention to this fact and gets them to ask why it happens.

Students listen to the following conversations:

3 Special stress

- 1 **T.9.3.A.** Walter is a waiter in a busy snack bar.
Listen to some of his conversations with the customers.



- a W So that's two coffees, a beef sandwich, and a tomato soup ...
C *No, a chicken sandwich.*
W Sorry, sir ...
- b W Yes, sir?
C A small mushroom pizza, please.
W Okay ...
C *No, make that a large mushroom pizza.*
W Certainly, sir ...
- c W Okay, so you want one coffee, six colas, four strawberry ice-creams, two chocolate ice-creams and a piece of apple pie ...
C *No, four chocolate ice-creams and two strawberry ...*
W Anything else?

From *Headway Elementary Pronunciation* by S Cunningham and P Moor (Oxford University Press)

They are now asked to listen again and look at the lines in italics. They should underline the words that are specially stressed and then say why they think this happens in this particular conversation (because the customer is correcting a mistake). Students can then practise saying the dialogues.

We might also give students a straightforward sentence like *I lent my sister ten pounds for a train ticket last week* and ask them what it would mean if different words took the main stress, e.g. *I LENT my sister ten pounds ...* (= I didn't give it to her), or *I lent my sister ten pounds for a train ticket last WEEK* (= Can you believe it? She still hasn't paid me back!).

There are many other ways of teaching and demonstrating stress. Some teachers like to choose appropriate texts and have students read them aloud after they have

done some work on which bits of phrases and sentences take the main stress. Some teachers like to train students in the performance of dialogues, much as a theatre director might do with actors. This will involve identifying the main stress in phrases and seeing this in relation to the intonation patterns (see B3 below).

Cuisenaire rods (see Chapter 10D) are also useful in that they can provide graphic illustrations of how words and phrases are stressed. These rods of different lengths and colours can be set up to demonstrate the stress patterns of phrases and sentences as in the following example *I'll ring you next WEEK*:



Whereas if we want to say *I'll RING you next week* (= I won't come and see you), we can organise the rods like this:



For stress in words, we can ask students to put words in correct columns depending upon their stress patterns, for example:

■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■
information	discovery
consultation	recovery
aggravation	acknowledgement
insulation	catastrophe
agoraphobic	photographer

B3 Working with intonation

We need to draw our students' attention to the way we use changes in pitch to convey meaning, to reflect the thematic structure of what we are saying, and to convey mood.

One simple way of doing this is to show how many different meanings can be squeezed out of just one word such as *yes*. To do this we can get students to ask us any 'yes/no' question (e.g. *Are you happy?*) and answer *Yes* to it in a neutral way. Now we get them to ask the question again. This time, through changing our intonation, we use *Yes* to mean something different, e.g. *I'm not sure* or *How wonderful of you to ask that question* or *How dare you ask that question*. Students can be asked to identify

what we mean each time by using words for emotions or matching our intonation to pictures of faces with different expressions. We can now get them to ask each other similar 'yes/no' questions and, when they answer, use intonation to convey particular meanings which their classmates have to identify.

The point of exercises like this is not so much to identify specific intonation patterns, but rather to raise the students' awareness of the power of intonation and to encourage them to vary their own speech. It also trains them to listen more carefully to understand what messages are being given to them.

Example 5: Falling and rising tones Sounds: falling and rising tones
Level: pre-intermediate

In the following exercise students listen to identify nuclear stress (that is the main stress where there is a change of pitch) in phrases and to hear falling and rising intonation:

1 Listen to these examples. Prominent words are in capital letters. Notice how the voice FALLS at the end.

It's ~~MINE~~. She's from ~~ROME~~. Is it ~~YOURS~~?
I ~~MET~~ him at a ~~DISCO~~.

Now listen to these examples. Notice how the voice RISES at the end.

I ~~THINK~~ so. ~~PROBABLY~~. Are they ~~HERE~~ yet?
Is ~~THIS~~ the ~~PARIS~~ train?

From *Pronunciation Tasks* by M Hewings (Cambridge University Press)

When they have done this the teacher may ask them to repeat the phrases with the right intonation before moving on to Exercise 2 where they have to listen to a tape and identify whether the voice falls or rises:

2 Listen to these sentence halves. Write (↘) in the space if the voice falls at the end and write (↗) if it goes up. Two are done for you.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 a) I went to London ... (↘) | b) ... on Saturday. (↗) |
| 2 a) David ... () | b) ... works in a bookshop. () |
| 3 a) There's some cake ... () | b) ... in the kitchen. () |
| 4 a) In Hong Kong ... () | b) ... last year. () |
| 5 a) I'm fairly sure ... () | b) ... it's upstairs. () |
| 6 a) Yes, ... () | b) ... of course. () |
| 7 a) Turn left here ... | b) ... then go straight on. () |
| 8 a) Oh dear, ... () | b) ... I am sorry. () |
| 9 a) I like it ... () | b) ... very much. () |
| 10 a) I don't smoke ... () | b) ... thank you. () |

They then join the sentence halves together before working in pairs to answer questions with their new complete sentences, e.g. *What does your son do now? David works in a bookshop, etc.* Later they make their own conversations after noticing how a character uses a rising tone for a subject which is already being talked about and a falling tone to give new information.

This exercise not only gets students to listen carefully to intonation patterns, but by dividing sentences in two before joining them up again it allows them to identify

basic fall–rise patterns. We can also get students to listen to the way speakers react to see whether words like *okay* or *really* indicate enthusiasm, boredom, or indifference.

There are other ways to teach intonation too: some teachers like to get their students to make dialogues without words – humming the ‘tune’ of what they want to say in such a way that other students can understand them. Many teachers also use a variety of devices such as arrows on the board and arm movements which ‘draw’ patterns in the air to demonstrate intonation. Some teachers exaggerate (and get their students to exaggerate) intonation patterns which can be extremely amusing and which also makes patterns very clear.

B4 Sounds and spelling

Although there are many regularities in English spelling (such as word roots and grammatical endings) the fact that there is no complete one-to-one correspondence between letters and phonemes causes many problems for learners. The following two exercises are designed to teach sound–spelling correspondence for particular spellings.

Example 6: Sounds of *ou*

Level: elementary

Students are asked to listen to a tape and see how many different pronunciations they can find for the *ou* spelling in words like the following:

could	rough	country
sound	foul	thought
ground	though	house
through	out	unconscious
round	young	

They can record the different sounds in their vocabulary books (see Chapter 24, A1).

Teachers can also help students by giving them typical spellings for sounds every time they work on them. In a class on /ʃ/ and /tʃ/, for example, they can be given the following information:

S P E L L I N G		
/ʃ/ Shop		/tʃ/ chin
<i>Common:</i>	<i>Less common:</i>	MOST ch chin,
ALL sh shop,	ch in words of	rich
wish,	<i>French origin:</i>	ALL tch match,
bishop	machine,	butcher,
	champagne	kitchen
<i>Endings with</i>	s insurance	ALL t + ure
ti + vowel or		future,
ci + vowel		nature,
education,		picture
initial,		
musician,		
delicious		

From *Sounds English* by J O'Connor and C Fletcher (Pearson Education Ltd)

Example 7: Looking for rules

Level: intermediate and above

In this exercise students are asked to read the following two lists of words aloud. When they have agreed that the letter *c* can be pronounced in two ways, we can ask them if they can see what the rule is which decides which pronunciation will be used. We might have to prompt them by suggesting that they look at the letter which follows the *c*.

These are the lists they see:

A		B	
cell	certain	cat	catch
place	dance	cup	coffee
city	cycle	cry	coin
policy	cent	call	cake
decide	cinema	came	cost
		custom	could

From *Teaching English Pronunciation* by J Kenworthy (Pearson Education Ltd)

This kind of discovery approach (see Chapter 11, B2) to sound and spelling rules allows students to become aware that English spelling is not quite so random as they might think.

5 Connected speech and fluency

Good pronunciation does not just mean saying individual words or even individual sounds correctly. The sounds of words change when they come into contact with each other. This is something we need to draw students' attention to in our pronunciation teaching.

We can adopt a three-stage procedure for teaching students about features such as elision and assimilation (see Chapter 2, D4):

- **Stage 1/comparing:** we can start by showing students sentences and phrases and having them pronounce the words correctly in isolation, e.g. *I am going to see him tomorrow* /aɪ/ /æm/ /gəʊɪŋ/ /tu:/ /sɪ:/ /hɪm/ /təməʊrəʊ/. We then play them a tape of someone saying the sentences in normal connected speech (or we say them ourselves), e.g. /aɪmɡəʊnəsi:jɪmtəməʊrəʊ/. We ask students what differences they can hear.
- **Stage 2/identifying:** we have students listen to recordings of connected speech (or we say the phrases ourselves), and the students have to write out a full grammatical equivalent of what they heard. Thus we could say /dʒəwəʊnəkəfɪ/ and expect the students to write *Do you want a coffee?*, or we could play them a tape with someone saying /aɪdəvʌmbɪfə:/ and expect them to write *I would have come before*.

- **Stage 3/production:** in our modelling and teaching of phrases and sentences we will give students the connected version, including contractions where necessary, and get them to say the phrases and sentences in this way.

Fluency is also helped by having students say phrases and sentences (such as the ones used in stages 1–3 above) as quickly as possible, starting slowly and then speeding up. Getting students to perform dialogues and play extracts – if we spend some time coaching them – will also make them aware of speaking customs and help them to improve their overall fluency.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Meaning and perfection**

For a discussion about what pronunciation norms and models we should get our students to aim for, see J Jenkins (1998). See also C Dalton and B Seidlhofer (1995: Chapter 1).

- **Different languages**

For the pronunciation difficulties experienced by different first language speakers, see J Kenworthy (1987: Part 2). G Kelly (2000: Appendix B) lists English sounds that cause problems for different speakers.

- **Phonemic chart**

G Kelly (2000: Appendix A) has created a different pronunciation chart for students which categorises sounds in terms of their place of articulation, and whether they are voiced or voiceless – in the case of consonants.

- **Sounds and spelling**

See J Kenworthy (1987: Chapter 5) and G Kelly (2000: Appendix C).

14

Teaching receptive skills

Receptive skills are the ways in which people extract meaning from the discourse they see or hear. There are generalities about this kind of processing which apply to both reading and listening – and which will be addressed in this chapter – but there are also significant differences between reading (Chapter 15) and listening (Chapter 16) processes too, and in the ways we can teach these skills in the classroom.

A How we read and listen

When we read a story or a newspaper, listen to the news, or take part in conversation we employ our previous knowledge as we approach the process of comprehension, and we deploy a range of receptive skills; which ones we use will be determined by our reading or listening purpose.

1 What we bring to the task

If a British reader walks past a newspaper stand and sees the headline ‘England in six-wicket collapse’ he or she will almost certainly guess that the England cricket team has been beaten in an international match. This guess will be based on the reader’s pre-existing knowledge of newspapers, their experience of how headlines are constructed, their understanding that *wicket* is a cricketing term, and their knowledge that England has not been doing too well in the sport lately. If the reader then goes on to buy the newspaper he or she will use all this pre-existing knowledge to predict the relevant article’s contents both before and during the reading of it. However, a reader who did not have such pre-existing knowledge (because he or she did not know anything about cricket, for example), would find the reading task more difficult.

What the above example suggests is that understanding a piece of discourse involves much more than just knowing the language. In order to make sense of any text we need to have ‘pre-existent knowledge of the world’ (Cook 1989: 69). Such knowledge is often referred to as **schema** (plural **schemata**). Each of us carries in our heads mental representations of typical situations that we come across. When we are stimulated by particular words, discourse patterns, or contexts, such schematic knowledge is activated and we are able to recognise what we see or hear because it fits into patterns that we already know. As Chris Tribble points out, we recognise a letter of rejection or a letter offering a job within the first couple of lines (Tribble 1997: 35).

When we see a written text our schematic knowledge may first tell us what kind of text **genre** we are dealing with (see Chapter 2, c4). Thus if we recognise an extract as coming from a novel we will have expectations about the kind of text we are going to read. These will be different from the expectations aroused if we recognise a piece of text as coming from an instruction manual. Knowing what kind of a text we are dealing with allows us to predict the form it may take at the text, paragraph, and sentence level. Key words and phrases alert us to the subject of a text, and this again allows us, as we read, to predict what is coming next.

In conversation a knowledge of typical interactions helps participants to communicate efficiently. As the conversation continues, the speakers and listeners draw upon various schemata – including genre, topic, discourse patterning, and the use of specific language features – to help them make sense of what they are hearing. As with readers, such schemata arouse expectations which allow listeners to predict what will happen in the conversation. Such predictions give the interaction a far greater chance of success than if the participants did not have such pre-existing knowledge to draw upon.

Shared schemata make spoken and written communication efficient. Without the right kind of pre-existing knowledge, comprehension becomes much more difficult. And that is the problem for some foreign language learners who, because they have a different shared knowledge of cultural reference and discourse patterning in their own language and culture from that in the English variety they are dealing with, have to work doubly hard to understand what they see or hear.

A2 Reasons for reading and listening

When we read a sign on the motorway our motives are different from when we read a detective novel; when we take an audiotape guide round a museum we have a different purpose in mind from when we listen to a stranger giving us directions on a street corner. We can divide reasons for reading and listening into two broad categories:

- **Instrumental:** a large amount of reading and listening takes place because it will help us to achieve some clear aim. Thus, for example, we read a road sign so that we know where to go. We read the instructions on a ticket machine because we need to know how to operate it. When we ring up a technical support company because we cannot make our computer or washing machine work, we listen to a customer advisor because we are desperate to know what to do next.

One type of reading or listening, in other words, takes place because we have some kind of utilitarian or instrumental purpose in mind.

- **Pleasurable:** another kind of reading and listening takes place largely for pleasure. Thus people read magazines or spend hours buried in the Sunday paper. Others go to poetry readings or listen to Talk Radio. Some people read illustrated cartoon or photo-stories while others listen to comedy tapes or programmes.

Instrumental reading and listening can be pleasurable too; reading history textbooks or going to history lectures (or any other subject we are studying or which interests

us) may be done for fun as well as for some utilitarian purpose. There is a great deal of 'crossover' between the two categories. But a consideration of the two types does at least allow us to consider different receptive skill styles, and helps us to ensure that we do not ignore genres which students need to be able to handle.

A3 Top-down and bottom-up

A frequent distinction is made – especially in the analysis of reading – between top-down and bottom-up processing. In metaphorical terms this can be likened to the difference between looking down on something from above – getting an overview – and, on the contrary, being in the middle of something and understanding where we are by concentrating on all the individual features. It is the difference between looking at a forest, or studying the individual trees within it.

It has been said that in top-down processing the reader or listener gets a general view of the reading or listening passage by, in some way, absorbing the overall picture. This is greatly helped if the reader or listener's schemata allow them to have appropriate expectations of what they are going to come across. In bottom-up processing, on the other hand, the reader or listener focuses on individual words and phrases, and achieves understanding by stringing these detailed elements together to build up a whole.

It is probably most useful to see acts of reading and listening as interactions between top-down and bottom-up processing. Sometimes it is the individual details that help us understand the whole; sometimes it is our overview that allows us to process the details. Without a good understanding of a reasonable proportion of the details gained through some bottom-up processing we will be unable to get any clear general picture of what the text is about. A non-scientist attempting to read a specialist science journal finds this to be the case almost immediately. A person listening to a conversation in a foreign language with many words he or she does not know finds bottom-up and top-down processing almost impossible.

→ Different skills

The processes we go through when reading a novel or listening to a poem are likely to be different from those we use when we are looking for someone's number in a telephone directory, or when we are listening to a spoken 'alert' message on a computer. Our use of these different skills will frequently depend on what we are reading or listening for.

- **Identifying the topic:** good readers and listeners are able to pick up the topic of a written or spoken text very quickly. With the help of their own schemata they quickly get an idea of what is being talked about. This ability allows them to process the text more effectively as it progresses.
- **Predicting and guessing:** both readers and listeners sometimes guess in order to try and understand what is being written or talked about, especially if they have first identified the topic. Sometimes they look forward, trying to predict what is coming; sometimes they make assumptions or guess the content from

their initial glance or half-hearing – as they try and apply their schemata to what is in front of them. Their subsequent reading and listening helps them to confirm their expectations of what they have predicted or to readjust what they thought was going to happen in the light of experience.

- **Reading and listening for general understanding:** good readers and listeners are able to take in a stream of discourse and understand the **gist** of it without worrying too much about the details. Reading and listening for such ‘general’ comprehension means not stopping for every word, not analysing everything that the writer or speaker includes in the text.

A term commonly used in discussions about reading is **skimming** (which means running your eyes over a text to get a quick idea of the gist of a text). By encouraging students to have a quick look at the text before plunging into it for detail, we help them to get a general understanding of what it is all about. This will help them when and if they read for more specific information.

Gist reading and listening are not ‘lazy’ options. The reader or listener has made a choice not to attend to every detail, but to use their processing powers to get more of a top-down view of what is going on.

- **Reading and listening for specific information:** in contrast to reading and listening for gist, we frequently go to written and spoken text because we want specific details. We may listen to the news, only concentrating when the particular item that interests us comes up. We may quickly look through a film review to find the name of the director or the star. In both cases we almost ignore all the other information until we come to the specific item we are looking for. In discussions about reading this skill is frequently referred to as **scanning**.
- **Reading and listening for detailed information:** sometimes we read and listen in order to understand everything we are reading in detail. This is usually the case with written instructions or directions, or with the description of scientific procedures; it happens when someone gives us their address and telephone number and we write down all the details. If we are in an airport and an announcement starts with *Here is an announcement for passengers on flight AA671 to Lima* (and if that is where we are going), we listen in a concentrated way to everything that is said.
- **Interpreting text:** readers and listeners are able to see beyond the literal meaning of words in a passage, using a variety of clues to understand what the writer or speaker is implying or suggesting. Successful interpretation of this kind depends to a large extent on shared schemata as in the example of the lecturer who, by saying to a student *You’re in a non-smoking zone* was understood to be asking the student to put her cigarette out (see page 23).

We get a lot more from a reading or listening text than the words alone suggest because, as active participants, we use our schemata together with our knowledge of the world to expand the pictures we have been given, and to fill in the gaps which the writer or speaker seems to have left.

B Problems and solutions

The teaching and learning of receptive skills presents a number of particular problems which will need to be addressed. These are to do with language, topic, the tasks students are asked to perform, and the expectations they have of reading and listening, as we shall discuss below.

B1 Language

What is it that makes a text difficult? In the case of written text some researchers look at word and sentence-length (Wallace 1992: 77), on the premise that texts with longer sentences and longer words will be more difficult to understand than those with shorter ones. Others, however, claim that the critical issue is quite simply the number of unfamiliar words which the text contains. If readers and listeners do not know half the words in a text, they will have great difficulty in understanding the text as a whole. To be successful they have to recognise a high proportion of the vocabulary without consciously thinking about it (Paran 1996). It is clear that both sentence length and the percentage of unknown words both play their part in a text's comprehensibility.

When students who are engaged in listening encounter unknown lexis it can be 'like a dropped barrier causing them to stop and think about the meaning of a word and thus making them miss the next part of the speech' (Underwood 1989: 17). Unlike reading, there may be no opportunity to go back and listen to the lexis again. Comprehension is gradually degraded, therefore, and unless the listener is able to latch on to a new element to help them back into the flow of what is being said the danger is that they will lose heart and gradually disengage from the receptive task since it is just too difficult.

If, as Stephen Krashen suggests, comprehensible input aids language acquisition (see Chapter 5B), then it follows that 'incomprehensible' input will not. We can try and get students to read or listen to such texts, but the only effect this will probably have is to de-motivate them.

Apart from the obvious point that the more language we expose students to the more they will learn, there are specific ways of addressing the problem of language difficulty: pre-teaching vocabulary, using extensive reading/listening, and considering alternatives to authentic language.

- **Pre-teaching vocabulary:** one way of helping students is to pre-teach vocabulary that is in the reading or listening text. This removes at least some of the barriers to understanding which they are likely to encounter.

However, if we want to give students practice in what it is like to tackle authentic reading and listening texts for general understanding then getting past words they do not understand is one of the skills they need to develop. By giving them some or all of those words we deny them that chance.

We need a common-sense solution to this dilemma: where students are likely to be held back unnecessarily because of three or four words, it makes

sense to teach them first. Where they should be able to comprehend the text despite some unknown words, we can leave vocabulary work till later (see Chapter 15, A3).

An appropriate compromise is to use some (possibly unknown) words from a reading or listening text as part of our procedure to create interest and activate the students' schemata, since the words may suggest topic, genre, or construction – or all three. The students can first research the meanings of words and phrases (see Chapter 12) and then predict what a text with such words is likely to be about (see Example 1 in Chapter 15, B1).

- **Extensive reading and listening:** most researchers like to make a difference between 'extensive' and 'intensive' reading and listening. Whereas the former suggests reading or listening at length, often for pleasure and in a leisurely way, intensive reading or listening tends to be more concentrated, less relaxed, and often dedicated not so much to pleasure as to the achievement of a study goal.

Extensive reading and listening frequently take place when students are on their own, whereas intensive reading or listening is often done with the help and/or intervention of the teacher.

Extensive reading – especially where students are reading material written specially at their level – has a number of benefits for the development of a student's language (see Chapter 15, A1). Colin Davis suggests that any classroom will be the poorer for the lack of an extensive reading programme, and will be 'unable to promote its pupils' language development in all aspects as effectively as if such a programme were present' (1995: 335). He also claims that such a programme will make students more positive about reading, improve their overall comprehension skills, and give them a wider passive and active vocabulary. Richard Day and Julian Bamford agree, citing as two of the many goals for extensive reading, enabling students to read without constantly stopping and providing an increased word recognition (Day and Bamford 1998).

What these commentators and others are claiming is that extensive reading is the best possible way for students to develop automaticity – that is the automatic recognition of words when they see them. It is by far the best way to improve their English reading (and writing) overall.

The benefits of extensive reading are echoed by the benefits for extensive listening: the more students listen, the more language they acquire, and the better they get at listening activities in general. Whether they choose passages from textbooks, recordings of simplified readers, listening material designed for their level, or recordings of radio programmes which they are capable of following, the effect will be the same. Provided the input is comprehensible they will gradually acquire more words and greater schematic knowledge which will, in turn, resolve many of the language difficulties they started out with.

- **Authenticity:** because it is vital for students to get practice in dealing with written text and speech where they miss quite a few words but are still able to extract the general meaning, an argument can be made for using mainly

authentic reading and listening texts in class. After all, it is when students come into contact with 'real' language that they have to work hardest to understand.

Authentic material is language where no concessions are made to foreign speakers. It is normal, natural language used by native – or competent – speakers of a language. This is what our students encounter (or will encounter) in real life if they come into contact with target-language speakers, and, precisely because it is authentic, it is unlikely to be simplified, spoken slowly, or to be full of simplistic content (as some textbook language has a tendency to be).

Authentic material which has been carelessly chosen can be extremely de-motivating for students (see Chapter 3, c2) since they will not understand it. Instead of encouraging such failure, therefore, we should let students read and listen to things they can understand. For beginners this may mean roughly-tuned language from the teacher and specially designed reading and listening texts from materials writers. However, it is essential that such listening texts approximate to authentic language use. The language may be simplified, but it must not be unnatural. As Ronald Carter and his colleagues suggest, 'concocted, made-up language can be perfectly viable but it should be modelled on naturalistic samples' (Carter et al. 1998: 86).

Authentic material can be used by students at fairly low levels, however, if the tasks that go with it are well designed and help students understand it better, rather than showing them how little they know. A gently paced sequence of activities with small tasks leading to bigger ones, for example, can enable students to watch television soap operas in English and end up understanding far more than they might have thought possible (Farrell 1998).

It is worth pointing out that deciding what is or is not authentic is not easy. A stage play, written for native speakers, is a playwright's representation of spontaneous speech rather than the real thing, so it is, in a sense, both authentic and inauthentic. A father talking to his baby daughter may be employing 'baby talk' – rough-tuning the language so that it can be comprehensible – but there is nothing inauthentic about it. The language which students are exposed to has just as strong claims to authenticity as the play or the parent, provided that it is not altered in such a way as to make it unrecognisable in style and construction from the language which native speakers encounter in many walks of life.

Topic and genre

Many receptive skill activities prove less successful than anticipated because the topic is not appropriate or because students are not familiar with the genre they are dealing with. If students are not interested in a topic, or if they are unfamiliar with the text genre we are asking them to work on, they may be reluctant to engage fully with the activity. Their lack of engagement or schematic knowledge may be a major hindrance to successful reading or listening.

To resolve such problems we need to think about how we choose and use topics, and how we approach different reading and speaking genres:

- **Choose the right topics:** we should try and choose topics which our students will be interested in. We can find this out by questionnaires, interviews, or by the reactions of students in both current and previous classes to various activities and topics we have used (see Chapter 24, B1). However, individual students have individual interests, so that it is unlikely that all members of a class will be interested in the same things (see Chapter 3, B5). For this reason we need to include a variety of topics across a series of lessons so that all our students' interests will be catered for in the end.
- **Create interest:** if we can get the students engaged in the task (see Chapter 6, A3) there is a much better chance that they will read or listen with commitment and concentration, whether or not they were interested in the topic to start with.

We can get students engaged by talking about the topic, by showing a picture for prediction, by asking them to guess what they are going to see or hear on the basis of a few words or phrases from the text, or by having them look at headlines or captions before they read the whole thing. Perhaps we will show them a picture of someone famous and get them to say if they know anything about that person before they read a text about them or hear them talking. Perhaps students can be asked to say which sport they might find most frightening (as a lead-in to a listening about ski-jumping or mountaineering).

- **Activate schemata:** in the same way we create interest by giving students predictive tasks and interesting activities, we want to activate their knowledge before they read or listen so that they bring their schemata to the text. If they are going to read 'lonely hearts' advertisements (see Chapter 2, C4) we can discuss how they expect them to be constructed as a way of directing their reading. We can ask them what they know about the way speeches are structured if they are going to listen to someone proposing the health of a couple at a wedding, or talk about the kinds of questions an interviewer might use with a celebrity if they were going to listen to an interview with a sports star.
- **Vary topics and genres:** a way of countering student unfamiliarity with certain written and spoken genres is to make sure we expose them to a variety of different text types, from written instructions and taped announcements to stories in books and live, spontaneous conversation, from Internet pages to business letters, from pre-recorded messages on phone lines to radio dramas.

In good general English coursebooks a number of different genres are represented in both reading and listening activities. If the teacher is not following a coursebook, however, then it is a good idea to make a list of text genres which are relevant to the students' needs and interests in order to be sure that they will experience an appropriate range of texts. Ensuring students' confidence with more than one genre becomes vitally important, too, in the teaching of productive skills (see Chapter 17, A3).

B3 Comprehension tasks

A key feature in the successful teaching of receptive skills concerns the choice of comprehension tasks. Sometimes such tasks appear to be testing the students rather than helping them to understand. Although reading and listening are perfectly proper mediums for language and skill testing (see Chapter 23, B3), nevertheless, if we are trying to encourage students to improve their receptive skills, testing them will not be an appropriate way of accomplishing this. Sometimes texts and/or the tasks which accompany them are far too easy or far too difficult.

In order to resolve these problems we need to use comprehension tasks which promote understanding and we need to match text and task appropriately.

- **Testing and teaching:** the best kinds of tasks are those which raise students' expectations, help them tease out meanings, and provoke an examination of the reading or listening passage. Unlike reading and listening tests, these tasks bring them to a greater understanding of language and text construction. By having students perform activities such as looking up information on the Internet, filling in forms on the basis of a listening tape, or solving reading puzzles, we are helping them become better readers and listeners.

Some tasks seem to fall half way between testing and teaching, however, since by appearing to demand a right answer (for example, by asking if certain statements about the text are true or false, or by asking questions about the text with *what*, *when*, *how many*, and *how often*) they could, in theory, be used to assess student performance. Indeed when they are done under test conditions, their purpose is obviously to explore student strengths and weaknesses. Yet such comprehension items can also be an indispensable part of a teacher's receptive skills armoury too. By the simple expedient of having students work in pairs to agree on whether a statement about part of a text is true or false – or as a result of a discussion between the teacher and the class – the comprehension items help each individual (through conversation and comparison) to understand something, rather than challenging them to give right answers under test-like conditions. If students predict the answers to such questions before they read or listen, expectations are created in their minds to help them focus their reading or listening. In both cases we have turned a potential test task into a creative tool for receptive skill training.

Whatever the reading task, in other words, a lot will depend on the conditions in which students are asked to perform that task. Even the most formal test-like items can be used to help students rather than frighten them!

- **Appropriate challenge:** when asking students to read and listen we want to avoid texts and tasks that are either far too easy or far too difficult. As with many other language tasks we want to get the level of challenge right, to make the tasks 'difficult but achievable' (Scrivener 1994b: 149).

Getting the level right depends on the right match between text and task. Thus, where a text is difficult, we may still be able to use it, but only if the task is

appropriate. We could theoretically, for example, have beginners listen to the famous soliloquy from Shakespeare's Hamlet (*To be or not to be?/That is the question./Whether 'tis nobler ...*, etc.) and ask them how many people are speaking. We could ask students to read *Ulysses* by James Joyce and ask them how many full stops they can find. Despite the difficulty of the texts, both of these tasks are achievable. Yet we might feel that neither is appropriate or useful. On the other hand, having students listen to a news broadcast where the language level is very challenging, may be entirely appropriate if the task only asks them – at first – to try and identify the five main topics in the broadcast.

B4 Negative expectations

Students sometimes have low expectations of reading and listening. They can feel that they are not going to understand the passage in the book or on tape because it is bound to be too difficult, and they predict that the whole experience will be frustrating and de-motivating.

Such attitudes, where they exist, are often due to previous unhappy or unsuccessful experiences. If, in the past, students have been given reading and listening texts which are too difficult for them, that will colour their view of the process. If they have been given reading or listening passages in which they have no interest (and where teachers failed to excite their interest) then they are likely to expect future procedures to be boring – so they probably will be.

Where students have low expectations of reading and listening (and of course not all students do) it will be our job to persuade them, through our actions, to change these negative expectations into realistic optimism.

- **Manufacturing success:** by getting the level of challenge right (in terms of language, text, and tasks) we can ensure that students are successful. By giving students a clear and achievable purpose, we can help them to achieve that purpose. Each time we offer them a challenging text which we help them to read or listen to successfully, we dilute the negative effect of past experiences, and create ideal conditions for future engagement.
- **Agreeing on a purpose:** it is important for teacher and students to agree on both general and specific purposes for their reading or listening. Are the students trying to discover detailed information or just get a general understanding of what something is about? Perhaps they are listening to find out the time of the next train; maybe they are reading in order to discern only whether a writer approves of the person they are describing.

If students know why they are reading or listening they can choose how to approach the text. If they understand the purpose they will have a better chance of knowing how well they have achieved it.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Schema**

For more (and slightly differing) accounts of schema theory see G Cook (1989: 68–74), C Wallace (1992: 33–38), and C Tribble (1997: 33–35).

- **Pre-teaching vocabulary**

J Field (1998b) thinks that pre-teaching vocabulary for listening may be unhelpful in the development of listening skills.

A Extensive and intensive reading

To get maximum benefit from their reading, students need to be involved in both extensive and intensive reading. Whereas with the former a teacher encourages students to choose for themselves what they read and to do so for pleasure and general language improvement, the latter is often (but not exclusively) teacher chosen and directed, and is designed to enable students to develop specific receptive skills (see Chapter 14, A4).

A1 Extensive reading

We have discussed the importance of extensive reading for the development of our students' word recognition – and for their improvement as readers overall (see Chapter 14, B1). But it is not enough to tell students to 'read a lot'; we need to offer them a programme which includes appropriate materials, guidance, tasks, and facilities such as permanent or portable libraries of books.

- **Extensive reading materials:** one of the fundamental conditions of a successful extensive reading programme is that students should be reading material which they can understand. If they are struggling to understand every word, they can hardly be reading for pleasure – the main goal of this activity. This means that we need to provide books which either by chance, or because they have been specially written, are readily accessible to our students.

Specially written materials for extensive reading – what Richard Day and Julian Bamford call 'language learner literature' (1998: 61) – are often referred to as 'readers' or 'simplified readers'. They can take the form of original fiction and non-fiction books as well as simplifications of established works of literature. Such books succeed because the writers or adaptors work within specific lists of allowed words and grammar. This means that students at the appropriate level can read them with ease and confidence. At their best such books, despite the limitations on language, can speak to the reader through the creation of atmosphere and/or compelling plot lines. Consider, for example, the following short extract from the second chapter of a level 1 (elementary) murder mystery for adults. In the first chapter a man in a hospital bed appears to be suffering from amnesia. In the second chapter that same man speaks to us directly:

There is a man near my bed. His clothes are white. No. Some of his clothes are white. He has a white coat, but his trousers are brown. He also has brown hair. The man in the white coat says he's a doctor. He says his name is Doctor Cox. He tells me to call him Philip. He says he is going to help me.

But he's not going to help me. They think I don't remember. They think I don't know anything. They know nothing, the doctors. Or the police. Nobody knows who I am. I sit in the bed and answer questions. They ask lots of questions.

'Do you know what amnesia is, John?' Doctor Cox asks me.

Doctor Cox. Doctor Philip Cox. He thinks he's somebody. He's nobody. I know what amnesia is.

From *John Doe* by A Moses (Cambridge University Press)

The language is simple and controlled, but the atmosphere – in true murder-mystery style – is satisfyingly creepy. A student who likes this kind of story and whose level of English is fairly low should enjoy it enormously.

- **Setting up a library:** in order to set up an extensive reading programme, we need to build up a library of suitable books. Although this may appear costly, it will be money well spent. If necessary, we should persuade our schools and institutions to provide such funds, or raise money through other sources.

If possible, we should organise static libraries in the classroom or in some other part of a school. If this is not possible we need to work out some way of carrying the books around with us – in boxes or on trolleys.

Once books have been purchased, we should code them for level and genre so that students can easily identify what kind of books they are. We should make the students aware of what the library contains and explain our classification system to them.

We need to devise some way of keeping track of the books in the library. A simple signing-out system should ensure that our collection does not disappear over time.

All of these setting-up procedures take time. But we can use students to help us administer the scheme. We can, if we are lucky, persuade the school administration to help us.

If our students take part in extensive reading programmes, all the time we have spent on setting up a library will not have been wasted.

- **The role of the teacher in extensive reading programmes:** most students will not do a lot of extensive reading by themselves unless they are encouraged to do so by their teachers. Clearly, then, our role is crucial. We need to promote reading and by our own espousal of reading as a valid occupation, persuade students of its benefits. Perhaps, for example, we can occasionally read aloud from books we like and show, by our manner of reading, how exciting books can be.

Having persuaded our students about the benefits of extensive reading, we can organise reading programmes where we indicate to students how many books we expect them to read over a given period. We can explain how they can make their choice of what to read, making it clear that the choice is theirs, but that they can consult other students' reviews and comments to help them make that choice. We can suggest that they look for books in a genre (be it crime fiction, romantic novels, science fiction, etc.) that they enjoy, and that they make appropriate level choices. We will act throughout as part organiser, part tutor (see Chapter 4B).

- **Extensive reading tasks:** because students should be allowed to choose their own reading texts, following their own likes and interests, they will not all be reading the same texts at once. For this reason – and because we want to prompt students to keep reading – we should encourage them to report back on their reading in a number of ways.

One approach is to set aside a time at various points in a course – say every two weeks – at which students can ask questions and/or tell their classmates about books they have found particularly enjoyable, or noticeably awful. However, if this is inappropriate because not all students read at the same speed – or because they often do not have much to say about the book in front of their colleagues – we can ask them each to keep a weekly reading diary either on its own, or as part of any learning journal they may be writing (see Chapter 24, A1). Students can also write short book reviews for the class noticeboard. At the end of a month, a semester, or a year, they can vote on the most popular book in the library.

We can also put comment sheets into the books for students to write in, as the following example for a book called *The Earthquake* shows:

Rating	Your comment and Your Name
5	I'm afraid earthquake happens to us. Shoko
5	Great! Gabriel is nice. He is cool. TOMOKO
4	"Who is really taking care of me," I think after reading this book. YOKO
4	I had a chance to think what's the most important thing by reading this book. Hisako

From *Extensive Reading in the Second Language Classroom* by R Day and J Bamford
(Cambridge University Press)

It does not really matter which of these tasks students are asked to perform provided that what they are asked to do helps to keep them reading as much and as often as possible.

A2 Intensive reading: the roles of the teacher

In order to get students to read enthusiastically in class, we need to work to create interest in the topic and tasks (see Chapter 14, B2). However, there are further roles we need to adopt when asking students to read intensively:

- **Organiser:** we need to tell students exactly what their reading purpose is (see Chapter 14, B4), and give them clear instructions about how to achieve it, and how long they have to do this. Once we have said 'You have four minutes for this' we should not change that time unless observation (see below) suggests that it is necessary.

- **Observer:** when we ask students to read on their own we need to give them space to do so. This means restraining ourselves from interrupting that reading, even though the temptation may be to add more information or instructions.

While students are reading we can observe their progress since this will give us valuable information about how well they are doing individually and collectively, and will tell us whether to give them some extra time or, instead, move to organising feedback more quickly than we had anticipated.

- **Feedback organiser:** when our students have completed the task, we can lead a feedback session to check that they have completed the task successfully. We may start by having them compare their answers in pairs and then ask for answers from the class in general or from pairs in particular. Students often appreciate giving paired answers like this since, by sharing their knowledge, they are also sharing their responsibility for the answers.

When we ask students to give answers we should always ask them to say where in the text they found the information for their answers. This provokes a detailed study of the text which will help them the next time they come to a similar reading passage. It also tells us exactly what comprehension problems they have if and when they get answers wrong.

It is important to be supportive when organising feedback after reading if we are to counter any negative feelings students might have about the process (see Chapter 14, B4), and if we wish to sustain their motivation (see Chapter 3, C3).

- **Prompter:** when students have read a text we can prompt them to notice language features in that text (see Chapter 5C). We may also, as controllers, direct them to certain features of text construction, clarifying ambiguities, and making them aware of issues of text structure which they had not come across previously.

Intensive reading: the vocabulary question

A common paradox in reading lessons is that while teachers are encouraging students to read for general understanding, without worrying about the meaning of

every single word, the students, on the other hand, are desperate to know what each individual word means. Given half a chance, many of them would rather tackle a reading passage with a dictionary (electronic or otherwise) in one hand and a pen in the other to write translations all over the page!

It is easy to be dismissive of such student preferences, yet as Carol Walker points out, 'It seems contradictory to insist that students "read for meaning" while simultaneously discouraging them from trying to understand the text at a deeper level than merely gist' (1998: 172). Clearly we need to find some accommodation between our desire to have students develop particular reading skills (such as the ability to understand the general message without understanding every detail) and their natural urge to understand the meaning of every single word.

One way of reaching a compromise is to strike some kind of a bargain with a class (see Chapter 6, B1) whereby they will do more or less what we ask of them provided that we do more or less what they ask of us. Thus we may encourage students to read for general understanding without understanding every word on a first or second read-through. But then, depending on what else is going to be done, we can give them a chance to ask questions about individual words and/or give them a chance to look them up. That way both parties in the teaching-learning transaction have their needs met.

A word of caution needs to be added here. If students ask for the meaning of all the words they do **not** know – and given some of the problems inherent in the explaining of different word meanings – the majority of a lesson may be taken up in this way. We need, therefore, to limit the amount of time spent on vocabulary checking in the following ways:

- **Time limit:** we can give a time limit of, say, five minutes for vocabulary enquiry, whether this involves dictionary use, language corpus searches, or questions to the teacher.
- **Word/phrase limit:** we can say that we will only answer questions about five or eight words or phrases.
- **Meaning consensus:** we can get students to work together to search for and find word meanings. To start the procedure individual students write down three to five words from the text they most want to know the meaning of. When they have each done this, they share their list with another student and come up with a new joint list of only five words. This means they will probably have to discuss which words to leave out. Two pairs join to make new groups of four and once again they have to pool their lists and end up with only five words. Finally (perhaps after new groups of eight have been formed – it depends on the atmosphere in the class) students can look for meanings of their words in dictionaries and/or we can answer questions about the words which the groups have decided on.

This process works for two reasons. In the first place students may well be able to tell each other about some of the words which individual students did

not know. More importantly, perhaps, is the fact that by the time we are asked for meanings, the students really do want to know them because the intervening process has encouraged them to invest some time in the meaning search. 'Understanding every word' has been changed into a cooperative learning task in its own right.

In responding to a natural hunger for vocabulary meaning both teachers and students will have to compromise. It is unrealistic to expect only one-sided change, but there are ways of dealing with the problem which make a virtue out of what seems – to many teachers – a frustrating necessity.

B Reading lesson sequences

We use intensive reading sequences in class for a number of reasons. We may want to have students practise specific skills such as reading to extract specific information, or reading for general understanding (gist) (see Chapter 14, A4).

We may, on the other hand, get students to read texts for communicative purposes, as part of other activities, as sources of information, or in order to identify specific uses of language. Reading is often a prelude to a speaking or writing activity (see Chapter 17, B1).

Most reading sequences involve more than one reading skill. We may start by having students read for gist and then get them to read the text again for detailed comprehension. They may start by identifying the topic of a text before scanning it quickly to recover specific information; they may read for specific information before going back to the text to identify features of text construction.

Examples of reading sequences

In the following examples the reading activity is specified. The skills which are involved are detailed, and the way that the text can be used within a lesson is explained.

Example 1: AKA Diaz

Activity:	reading to confirm expectations
Skills:	predicting, reading for gist, reading for detailed comprehension
Age:	adult
Level:	upper intermediate

In this example students predict the content of a text not from a picture, but from a few tantalising clues they are given (in the form of phrases from the passage they will read).

The teacher gives each student in the class a letter from A to E. She then tells all the students to close their eyes. She then asks all the students with the letter A to open their eyes and shows them the word: *lion*, written large so that they can see it. Then she makes them close their eyes again and this time shows the B students the phrase *racial groups*. She shows the C students the phrase *paper aeroplanes*, the D students the word *tattoos*, and the E students the word *guard*.

She now puts the students in five-person groups composed of students A–E. By discussing their words and phrases, each group has to try and predict what the text is all about. The teacher can go round the groups encouraging them and, perhaps, feeding them with new words like *cage*, *the tensest man*, or *moral authority*, etc.

Finally, when the groups have made some predictions, the teacher asks them whether they would like to hear the text that all the words came from before reading the following text aloud, investing it with humour and making the reading dramatic and enjoyable.

‘This is it,’ Rick said, in a cheerful voice. Through the windows of the classroom I could see the men. They were not in their seats; instead they were circling the room restlessly, like lions in a cage.

‘Is there going to be a guard in the room while I teach?’ I asked. I realized that this was something that should have been straightened out earlier.

Rick looked at me with deep concern. ‘I’ll come by a bit later, see that you’re OK,’ he said.

I walked through the door into the classroom. My students barely looked human. The desks were arranged in no special order, except that some of the men had got into racial groups. Many of them were smoking, and under the glare of the lights I could see their tattoos. One man with a pointed beard and a long mane of black hair circled behind me and around the other side of the desk. He was easily the tensest man I had ever seen. I thought of telling him to sit down but wondered what I would do if he refused so I kept the suggestion to myself. I placed my leather bag on the desk and faced the class. Nobody paid any attention to me. The conversation grew louder. I wanted to cut out and run. I had volunteered for this.

Every teacher has these moments of panic. We worry about rebellion: our moral authority lost, the students taking over. I had a teacher in high school, a Miss Hutchinson, who after taking roll would turn towards the board and be followed by an avalanche of paper aeroplanes and spitballs, sometimes even the bodies of students flying forward, an impromptu riot.

I unpacked my bag and began the roll. A few names down, I called out ‘Diaz.’ No answer. ‘Djaz,’ I said again.

‘Ain’t my name,’ a man in the front row volunteered.

‘Why did you answer?’ I asked.

‘I’m here under another name,’ he said. ‘An alias. I could tell you my real name, but then I’d have to kill you.’

‘We’ll count that as “present”,’ I said. Several members of the class laughed: at least that slowed down the conversation. I finished the roll and handed out the syllabus for the class. I read it aloud and when I got to the end I looked up. ‘So any questions?’ I asked. The paper trembled in my hand.

‘Yeah, I got a question.’ AKA Diaz raised his hand. ‘I want to know what the *&!* it means.’

From *Maximum Security* by R O’Connor in the literary magazine *Granta* (no. 54, 1996)

The students now read the text for themselves to answer the following detailed comprehension questions:

1 True, false, or probably (not)?

- a The class is in a prison.
- b There's a guard in the classroom.
- c Robert O'Connor had offered to teach the class.
- d There are white, black, Hispanic and Asian students in the class.
- e The class has both sexes.
- f Robert O'Connor was frightened.
- g The men threw paper aeroplanes at the teacher.
- h The men wanted to take the class.
- i Diaz is the man's real name.
- j AKA means 'also known as'.
- k The class was going to be a great success.

Before moving on to work with the content of the text the teacher may well take advantage of the language in it to study some aspects that are of interest. For example, how is the meaning of *would* different in the sentences *I wondered what I would do if he refused* and *a teacher ... who ... would turn towards the board ...*? Can students make sentences using the same construction as *He was easily the tensest man I had ever seen* (e.g. *He/she was easily the* (superlative adjective + noun) *I had ever* (past participle)) or *I could tell you my real name, but then I'd have to kill you* (e.g. *I could ... but then I'd have to ...*)?

The discussion possibilities for this text are endless. How many differences are there between Robert O'Connor's class and the students' own class? How many similarities are there? How would they (the students) handle working in a prison? Should prisoners be given classes anyway, and if so, of what kind? What would the students themselves do if they were giving their first English class in a prison or in a more ordinary school environment?

Part of this sequence has involved the teacher reading aloud. This can be very powerful if it is not overdone (see Chapter 4, D2). By mixing the skills of speaking, listening, and reading the students have had a rich language experience, and because they have had a chance to predict content, listen, read and then discuss the text, they are likely to be very involved with the procedure.

Example 2: Going home

Activity: general reading

Skills: reading for gist, reading for detailed comprehension

Age: any

Level: upper intermediate

Many years ago Michael Scott and his colleagues working at university level with ESP students in Brazil designed a 'standard exercise' which could be used by their students with any reading text (Scott et al. 1984). In their version the questions were detailed and were in Portuguese. The usefulness of the questions was assured

because any students, even if they were having trouble with their spoken English, could read a text with the help of this broad-based reading 'kit'.

For general English we can use the same principle, and design questions which can be given to students in English or in their own language, and which can be used for any reading text they meet. Consider the following general questions:

- 1 What is the text about?
- 2 Who was it written by?
- 3 Who was it written for?
- 4 What is the writer's intention?
- 5 Do you like the text?

These can be used with any text such as the one opposite (page 219), where, when students have discussed their answers to the reading kit questions, they can then go back to the text to answer more detailed questions (e.g. *Who went for a picnic? Who has to pay rupees?*). The teacher may then want to draw their attention to certain items of vocabulary in the text with a task such as:

Match the words from the text with their definitions.

- | | | |
|-------------|-----|---|
| a gesturing | i | move eyes in order to see something |
| b glance | ii | give a short quick look |
| c grins | iii | looking at something for a period of time, often when it is moving/doing something |
| d look | iv | look for a long time with eyes wide open because of interest, surprise, etc. Can be rude. |
| e smile | v | moving hands, arms, head, etc. to express an idea or feeling |
| f stare | vi | smile widely |
| g watching | vii | use the position of the mouth to show pleasure |

The students can now make sentences with these words using the pronouns *I* or *we*, e.g. *I like it when people smile at me*. They could discuss why Penny has written her story in the present tense, and they could then go on to talk about journeys they have made, or discuss how they feel if they spend a long time away from home.

Or perhaps they could work on an exercise like the following:

You are going home after six months in the jungle or on a desert island. Copy and complete the chart with things you are looking forward to most when you get home.

food	
drink	
object(s)	
activity	

In whatever ways the text is exploited, the use of the general questions ensures that students will approach it – for the first read anyway – in a general way.

19-year-old Penny Elvey and her project partner Anna are going home after six months as volunteers in a school in Nepal. But then the rain starts, and the roads are flooded. This is part of their story.

At the village of Meestal there is a huge river blocking our path. We came here a few weeks ago with some students for a picnic but the innocent little stream that we sat by had now become a raging torrent.

Across the water we can see a truck. On our side a man approaches us.

'That is my friend,' he says gesturing to a man standing by the vehicle. 'You go with truck.'

Anna and I smile enthusiastically. But our guide steps forward.

'It is too dangerous. We must wait. The river will become smaller.'

Anna and I glance at each other. It is a curious philosophy since the rain is still falling steadily.

The truck driver's friend grins at me.

'We help. You give me 600 rupees.'

600 rupees is far too much but we are desperate. He knows. He knows I know he knows. Our eyes lock.

People are watching us curiously to see how we are going to react. I fold my arms and force a laugh.

'Then we will stay the night here.'

For a terrible moment I think he is going to walk away, but then he smiles nervously.

'I mean 300 for you; 300 for your friend.'

He calls two of his friends and they hold our luggage above their heads as they step into the water. Slowly and steadily they cross the river and reach the other side safely.

Suddenly a man taps my shoulder.

'For you too dangerous. You must stay here.'

My rucksack and walking boots are now sitting on a rock across the water. In the pocket of my rucksack are all my papers and money. Where my passport goes I follow. Maybe the current is not that strong.

'You can swim?'

A small crowd of people gathers on the other side. Anna goes first. Four men take hold of her and lead her safely across. Now it is my turn. I step forward gingerly but catch my ankle on a rock. The water pulls my legs away from under me. But the men drag me to the safety of the far side.

Anna and I pick up our things and climb into the old truck. The people there stare at us in amusement. We are wet through, covered in mud, our clothes in tatters. But as the truck shudders to life, we look at each other and smile. We are going to make it to Kathmandu in time for breakfast!

Adapted from *Network*, the GAP Activity Projects annual newsletter

Of course many texts can be used in this way, whether for beginners or advanced students.

Example 3: Village of snakes

Activity: modified cloze text

Skills: reading for gist, reading for detailed comprehension

Age: teenage

Level: elementary

A popular test of comprehension is the 'modified' cloze procedure (see Chapter 23, B2) where every n th word is replaced by a blank. Although there may be some doubts about this as a testing technique, when used with students for fun it can be a good way to help them arrive at a general understanding of a piece of text and a detailed understanding of the sentences in it. It may be necessary, however, for the teacher to choose some of the words that will be replaced by blanks – because some of them which happen, say, every seventh word, may cause too much trouble and should therefore be avoided.

In this example, teenage students are going to read about snakes and snake charmers in an Indian village. The teacher starts by asking students if they know any words about snakes and the people who play music to snakes. Words like *poison*, *poisonous*, and *snake charmer* will then be elicited.

Students are now given the following text and asked to work with a colleague to see if they can fill in the blanks as they read:

VILLAGE OF SNAKES

by Sohan Devu

Saperagaon isn't an ordinary Indian village – (1) _____ a village of snake charmers. In (2) _____ house in the village there are (3) _____ lot of poisonous snakes: vipers, kraits (4) _____ cobras. Each one of these snakes (5) _____ poisonous enough to kill you, but (6) _____ children love playing with them.

It (7) _____ the beginning of a new day (8) _____ Saperagaon. The sun is coming up. Twelve-(9) _____ -old Ravi is happy because it (10) _____ warm enough to wake the cobras. (11) _____ opens the basket and a king cobra (12) _____ its head. It hisses and then (13) _____ to bite. 'It doesn't like waking (14) _____!' says Ravi, laughing.

The villagers use (15) _____ snakes to earn money for food. '(16) _____ day we walk 15 or 20 (17) _____ to the nearest town,' says Ravi. '(18) _____ play music on the pipes and (19) _____ snakes dance. People enjoy the show, (20) _____ they don't like paying. Each day (21) _____ earn only 25 or 30 rupees.' '(22) _____ not enough for an ice cream (23) _____ the UK).

'There aren't many snake charmers (24) _____ India now,' says Sanjay Nath, (25) _____ father.

'Do many snake charmers die (26) _____ snake bites?' I ask.

'No, not (27) _____,' says Sanjay, 'but that isn't the (28) _____. We haven't got much money or (29) _____. It's too difficult to earn money. (30) _____ is not a good enough life (31) _____ children. They go to school now. (32) _____ learning a different way to live.'

The text is taken from *Go Students Book 2* by S Elsworth and J Rose (Pearson Education Ltd)

When the teacher and students have checked the answers to the blanks, they can read the complete text again for answers to more detailed questions such as *How many types of poisonous snakes are there?*, *Why does Ravi like the sun?* Students can then be directed to look at the text again for any language points which are interesting and/or to make sure they have understood the text as fully as is necessary. They may then say if they would like to be a snake charmer, or talk about animals they like/dislike. They might listen to an interview with Ravi about his daily life and then talk about their own.

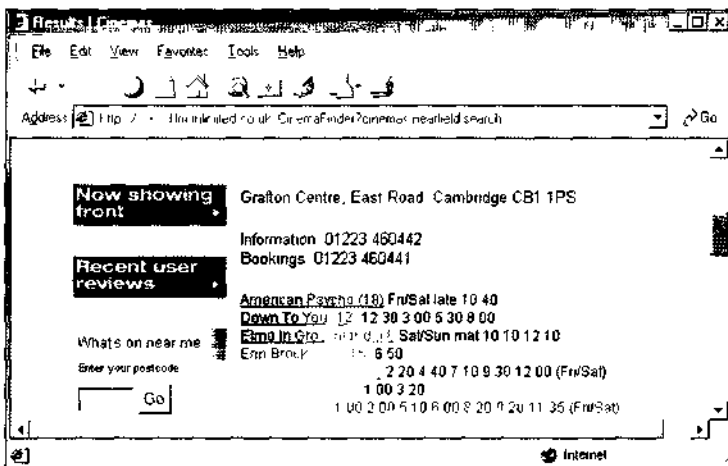
Example 4: The right film

Activity: researching a topic
 Skills: scanning, reading for gist
 Age: any
 Level: elementary plus

The following example (especially appropriate for students in the UK) shows how computers and the Internet can be used in class (or in a self-access or computer centre) to get students searching for information in an entirely realistic and enjoyable way.

Students are told that they are going to the cinema in Cambridge, England. They have to find a film that is suitable for themselves and a fourteen-year-old, and which is on in the evening. They will have to check reviews to make sure the film is a good one. Before they do this they have the British rating system explained to them (U = anyone can go, PG = parental guidance (children can go with their parents or alone if their parents say they can), 12 = suitable for twelve-year-olds upwards, 15 = suitable for fifteen-year-olds upwards, and 18 = anyone eighteen or older).

Students are directed to *Guardian Unlimited*, the web site for one of Britain's most widely-read quality newspapers – <http://www.guardian.co.uk/> – and then to the 'Films' pages within the web site. The teacher tells them to enter a Cambridge postcode in the space provided. When they hit the 'Go' button, they will find something like the following on the screen:



They now have to click on the U, PG, and 12 films to read summaries and short film reviews (which are also available at this site). If they choose *Down To You* they find the following:

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a movie page for "Down To You". The page includes a "Now showing" banner with a photo of the main characters, a "User rating" of 4.8 (5 votes) with a "Vote" button, and a "User reviews" section with a link to "Sandie's review". A "Summary" section describes the plot: "Three years after the love of his life left him, Al Connelly (Freddie Prinze Jr) feels he has to revisit the past before he can move on with the future." The "With:" section lists the cast: Ashton Kutcher, Freddie Prinze Jr, Julia Stiles, Selma Blair, Shawn Hatosy, and Zak Orth. The "Directed by:" section lists Kris Isaacson. On the right side, there is a "Down To You" header, the year "2000", country "USA", genre "Romance", and rating "Cert 12, 92 mins". Below this is a quote from "The Guardian" by Ian Brooks, describing the film as a cinematic equivalent of a teen magazine photo story. A "Ratings" section shows scores from various sources: Anthony Quinn (Independent) with 4 stars, Guest critic (Telegraph) with 4 stars, Guest critic (Guardian) with 4 stars, and Guest critic (Times) with 3 stars.

When they have done this for all the films which suit their target audience, they have to make a choice based on the summaries and the review information. But they have to do this as quickly as possible.

When choices have been made the students have to explain which film they are going to see and why. They can also tell their classmates which films they would have preferred to go and see – if they did not have to worry about the fourteen-year-old and/or they could go at different times of the day.

The Internet (see Chapter 10F) is the ideal resource tool for this kind of reading. Provided that the teacher has researched the topic (and the appropriate web sites) beforehand, the reading for specific detail will be purposeful and enjoyable whether students are looking at films, weather patterns, or holiday destinations, for example. However, it is important for the teacher to have done some of the work in locating sites so that a lot of time is not spent searching uselessly.

Example 5: The neighbours' cat	Activity: ordering paragraphs
	Skills: reading for gist, reading for detailed information
	Age: any
	Level: intermediate plus

In this example students first have to do a reading puzzle, before going on to use the reading for a discussion and/or a role-playing task.

The students are told they are going to read a story called 'The neighbours' cat' and they are asked to predict what it is going to be about. They are then given the following jumbled paragraphs where, apart from the first two, they are in the wrong order for the story. In pairs they are told to number the paragraphs to show how they can be reconstructed to make a coherent narrative.

- [1] The Moriarty family moved into a house two doors down the road one sunny Wednesday in July. They seemed like nice people. We invited them for a drink for the following Friday.
- [2] Our next-door neighbour (Jane) loves animals. She has a pet rat and two budgerigars. She knocked on our door on Thursday morning. 'Is this your cat?' she asked. She was holding an old, thin ginger cat with a little green collar. 'No,' we replied. 'We've never seen it before. Why?'
- [3] 'How are you getting on in your new home?' one of us asked.
- [4] 'I don't think it's very well,' Jane said. 'I'm going to take it to the vet.' We agreed with her idea. She cares about animals a lot. But when we saw her again that evening she was looking sad.
- [5] 'Oh fine,' said Mrs Moriarty looking happily at her husband and her two young children. 'But there's just one problem. Our cat's gone missing.'
- [6] 'You know that cat?' she said, 'the ginger one with the green collar? Well the vet said it was very old and very sick. So he gave it an injection. Put it to sleep. It's in cat heaven now. Well, what else could he do? We didn't know whose cat it was.'
- [7] On Friday evening the Moriartys came for a drink. So did Jane and two other friends from across the street.

When they have done this the teacher checks to see that their orders are correct (e.g. 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 3 and 5).

The class now decide exactly who is at the small neighbours' party, and in groups they decide how the story continues. Does the next-door neighbour explain what has happened? Do they brush the conversation aside and tell the Moriartys quietly the next day? How will Mr Moriarty react? What will the children feel?

The point here is that one reading puzzle leads into an imaginative task. The students have to take the text further, extending the original story and meaning. It should be enjoyable, and it gives the reading a real purpose.

Example 6: The other Bruce

Activity: picturing from a text

Skills: reading for gist, interpreting text

Age: adult

Level: upper intermediate

In this example students read a text and use the information in it to build up a picture of one of the characters, even though there is not a lot of physical description on the page.

Students are asked to read the following text. All they have to do is find out how many people there are in it and what their names are (if this information is given).

Back at the motel, I was half asleep when there was a knock on my door.
'Bru?'

'Yes.'

'It's Bru.'

'I know.'

'Oh!'

This other Bru had sat next to me on the bus from Katherine. He was travelling down Darwin, where he had just broken up with his wife. He had a big pot belly and was not very bright.

At Tenant Creek he had said, 'You and me could be mates, Bru. I could teach you to drive a "dozer"?' Another time, with greater warmth, he said, 'You're not a whingeing Pom, Bru.' Now long after midnight, he was outside my door calling.

'Bru?'

'What is it?'

'Want to come and get pissed?'

'No.'

'Oh!'

'We could find some sheilas,' he said.

'That a fact?' I said. 'This time of night?'

'You're right, Bru.'

'Go to bed,' I said.

'Well, goo' night, Bru.'

'Good night!'

'Bru?'

'What do you want now?'

'Nothing,' he said and shuffled off, dragging his rubber thongs *shlip ... shlip* along the corridor.

From *The Songlines* by Bruce Chatwin (Jonathan Cape)

Students and the teacher agree that there are two main characters in the text (the narrator 'Bru' and the other 'Bru'), and that the other Bru's unnamed wife is also briefly mentioned. The teacher then asks them to agree – first in pairs, and then in groups – on five words or phrases that they want to know the meaning of, and then allows them to find these words in a dictionary or discuss them with classmates (see A3 above).

The students are then asked to say whether there is any physical description in the text. When they have identified and understood *pot belly* and *rubber thongs*, they are then asked to build up a complete physical picture of 'this other Bru.' What is he wearing? What colour is his hair? What are his eyes like? His arms? It is interesting to see how clearly a physical picture has formed in their minds as a result of reading only this short text.

Now that the students have their physical picture they can discuss the question of what they think the narrator's attitude is to the man who is knocking on the door. Why is he telling this story? Does he admire the other Bru or pity him? Does he find him repulsive or amusing? What can they find out by 'reading between the lines'?

As a follow-up students can be asked to write the conversation the two Brus had on the bus from Katherine, or they can write conversations where people they only vaguely know suddenly turn up on their doorstep.

The point of this kind of activity is that when we ask students to make these kinds of imaginative leaps (picturing a character in a text, or trying to think their way into a character's head) we are asking them to relate to a reading passage in a completely different, personal way, allowing the words to create pictures for them. Such reading is a powerful alternative to some of the more utilitarian tasks we have described so far in this chapter.

Example 7: Fire hero

Activity: identifying text construction

Skills: identifying topic, prediction, reading for gist, reading for detailed comprehension

Age: young adult and above

Level: intermediate plus

In the following example, students will study a reading text to identify facets of its construction which make it typical of the genre it is written in. The text has potential for student motivation since it is entirely authentic (see Chapter 14, B1).

The class starts with the teacher asking the students to look at the text – that is glance at the pictures, and scan the text without properly reading it – and say where they think it comes from. When they have agreed that it comes from a newspaper, they are asked whether they think it is local or national.

HERO PULLS NEIGHBOUR FROM BLAZE

By **DAN GRIMMER**

A COURAGEOUS villager battled through a burning bungalow to carry his neighbour to safety.

Hero Laurence Broderick rescued Jean Butler after a fire tore through her home in High Street Waresley, destroying much of the roof.

Around 30 firefighters tackled the blaze, which broke out at about 10am on Saturday.

While crews using breathing equipment were fighting the flames, the roof caved in and one firefighter needed hospital treatment after being injured.

Mr Broderick of Vicarage Road, said he realised something was amiss in the normally quiet village when he heard a car beeping its horn.

The driver was his son Graham, who had spotted smoke billowing from the bungalow on his way to visit his father.

Mr Broderick, a sculptor, rushed to the



bungalow because he knew Ms Butler, who is in her 50s, had been ill.

He said: 'The whole place was smoking. At first I ran around like a headless chicken. But once I had calmed down I rushed in and there she was in her nightdress with no shoes.'

'My first reaction was to get her out. I got her out of the door and it was a gravel drive so I picked her up and carried her clear of the house. I felt remarkably in control.'

A passing motorist took care of Ms Butler while Mr Broderick returned to the house in case anyone else was there. He found the smoke so dense he could not get in.

After the dramatic rescue, fire crews from St Neots, Gamlingay and Potton, along with the command vehicle from Huntingdon, spent an

hour bringing the fire under control and then making the building safe.

Station officer Mike Church said: 'The flames were through the roof. It was a very serious house fire. The middle section of the roof is gone so we have had to make it stable.'

John Archer, of Manor Close, a cousin of Mrs Butler, said she had moved into the house just before Christmas.

He said: 'We got a call saying the house was on fire and came down here. The house is in a terrible state but at least she is all right.'

Ms Butler is being kept in Hinchinbrook hospital for observation after treatment for smoke inhalation.

The injured fire fighter received stitches after cutting his hand



Hero Laurence Broderick, who carried Jean Butler to safety and above left, Araman at the scene. Pictures: Matthew Potts 1721/88

Thousands gather for Duxford Air Show – Page 5

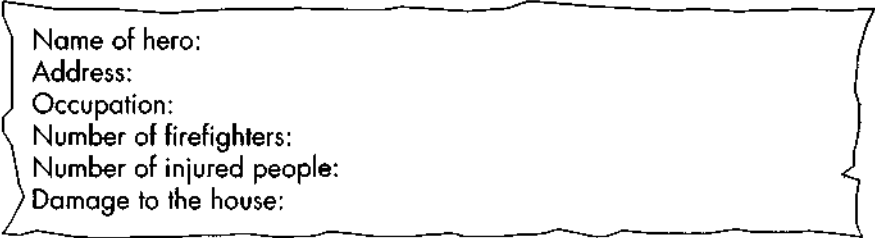
INSIDE: TV 2 18 & 19, WEATHER 2, LETTERS, WHAT'S ON, STARS 22, CLASSIFIEDS 23, CROSSWORD 35

From *The Cambridge Evening News*, Monday 3rd May 1999

The class then discusses what the headline is designed for (impact, topic identification) and what is special about its construction (it is written in the present simple for dramatic effect, and misses out linguistic items such as possessive pronouns and articles). They are then asked to predict the content of the text before reading it in full.

Students can now answer general questions about the text: *Who rescued whom? Where was the fire? Who controlled the fire? Where is the rescued person now?*

When they have all agreed on the answers, the teacher can ask them for more detailed information, for example:



Name of hero:
Address:
Occupation:
Number of firefighters:
Number of injured people:
Damage to the house:

Students will now want to study the text to assess certain features of its construction. In the first place the text is a collection of short sentences and paragraphs. It does not use many of the linking devices nor the paragraph construction that we might expect from more literary writing, or from more carefully constructed reports. As with many newspaper articles the whole story is told in the first sentence/paragraph, which acts as a summary.

In this newspaper article both reported and direct speech are used, the latter being more immediate (and easier to write) than the former. The article concludes with a statement of where the main protagonists are now.

The teacher can use the text for any number of other activities such as role-playing interviews with the various people concerned, writing the information in a short radio news broadcast, using the information as the basis for a discussion about how heroic people are, and what students would be prepared to risk their lives for. The text can also be used as a model for writing despite its 'journalistic' construction.

Chapter notes and further reading

• Reading

On reading in general, see C Nuttall (1996), C Wallace (1992), and F Grellet (1981).

On encouraging students to analyse the language of texts in detail, see R Gower (1999). As a learner he found 'explication de texte' (e.g. describing features of a text in detail after reading/listening to it) extremely useful, however 'old-fashioned' it was (see also C Walker (1998: 172)).

On reading for reaction to content, see A Kennedy (2000).

- **Testing reading**

On the testing of reading, see J C Alderson in Nuttall (1996).

- **Extensive reading**

The Edinburgh Project on extensive reading (EPER) run by David Hill maintains a complete bibliography of all readers currently in print. Many publishers (Pearson Education, Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, and Macmillan Heinemann) publish a variety of simplified readers.

C Nuttall (1996: 127) talks about 'vicious' and 'virtuous' reading circles. The former occur when weak readers read less and less and so read slower and less effectively, whereas a virtuous circle occurs when students read faster and therefore more effectively. Day and Bamford use the term 'book strapping' to describe how the effects of an action (extensive reading) are fed back into the process to achieve greater results with less effort (1998: 30).