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Five Design Principles for Language Learning Materials Development

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Abstract

Creating teacher-authored materials can be a challenging task for a variety of reasons. While relying on coursebooks to provide a ready-made structure to our classes, we often design our own materials to meet some of the specific needs and interests of our learners. Teachers usually approach the task of materials development through intuition and trial and error without a clear understanding of the principles of design that might help us in the creation of successful materials. This article outlines five research-based design principles that form the foundation of materials development and gives practical suggestions for how to put these into practice to produce materials that are aesthetically appealing, well scaffolded, authentic, affectively and cognitively engaging, and consistently revised and updated.

Key Words *materials design principles, aesthetics, scaffolding, authenticity, affective and cognitive engagement, revising*

Introduction

As language teachers, we often find ourselves having to create our own materials since commercially available coursebooks often do not match our particular learning context or meet our learners' varied levels, needs, and cultural and educational backgrounds. Even with the most successful textbook, we sometimes design our own materials just to provide a needed change of focus in the classroom and further personalize and localize the input. With many now having moved to online learning, designing materials suitable for online platforms adds an extra layer of complexity since it can be difficult to find ones that fit our students' needs. However, because of a lack of training or experience, we commonly approach the task of materials development through intuition and trial and error, and may not recognize the shortcomings of our own materials (Howard and Major, 2004). Poorly designed materials can do more harm than good: "We can promote learning by changing the instructional materials presented to students and managing intrinsic and extraneous cognitive load. Conversely, we can have a negative effect on

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learning by increasing extraneous cognitive load" (Feinberg and Murphy, 2000, p. 354). Beginning with a deep understanding of the process of second language acquisition gained through research, some vital principles of materials design for language teachers can be extrapolated. This paper will outline key principles that should inform materials design as well as practical guidelines to follow when creating our own materials, whether paper-based or digital, including a focus on aesthetics, scaffolding, authenticity, affective and cognitive engagement, and revision. Although originally directed at new teachers, experienced teachers may also benefit from being reminded of these principles as they continue to create and update materials.

Theory into Practice: Where do we start?

It is important to start with the research that underpins our current understanding of how second languages are learned. Briefly stated: *comprehensible input + output + affective and cognitive engagement + time* leads to *meaningful and purposeful interaction* which leads to *language acquisition* (adapted from Mishan, 2015, p. 25). That is, exposure to meaningful language input (which is rich, comprehensible, relevant, and varied) combined with purposeful output and negotiated interactions (which flow from real-world texts and tasks and result in noticing and intake) will motivate, challenge, and stimulate learners in a welcoming and respectful environment (which fosters risk tolerance and creativity). Learners who are allowed sufficient time and repeated exposures to increasingly complex and recycled language input will acquire language that is more fully automatized and encoded in long-term memory. Although not strictly necessary for language acquisition, formal instruction and corrective feedback are helpful elements that can systematically provide opportunities to experience language-rich input as well as structured opportunities for focused attention on form, leading to more fluency, accuracy, and complexity in language output (Green, 2020). I find it useful to keep a visual summary of these essential elements of second language acquisition in view (see Figure 1) while designing materials as a reminder of the goal.

Keeping in mind our current understanding of how languages are acquired, the following five design principles should be applied to teaching materials so that the theories of language acquisition can be put into practice
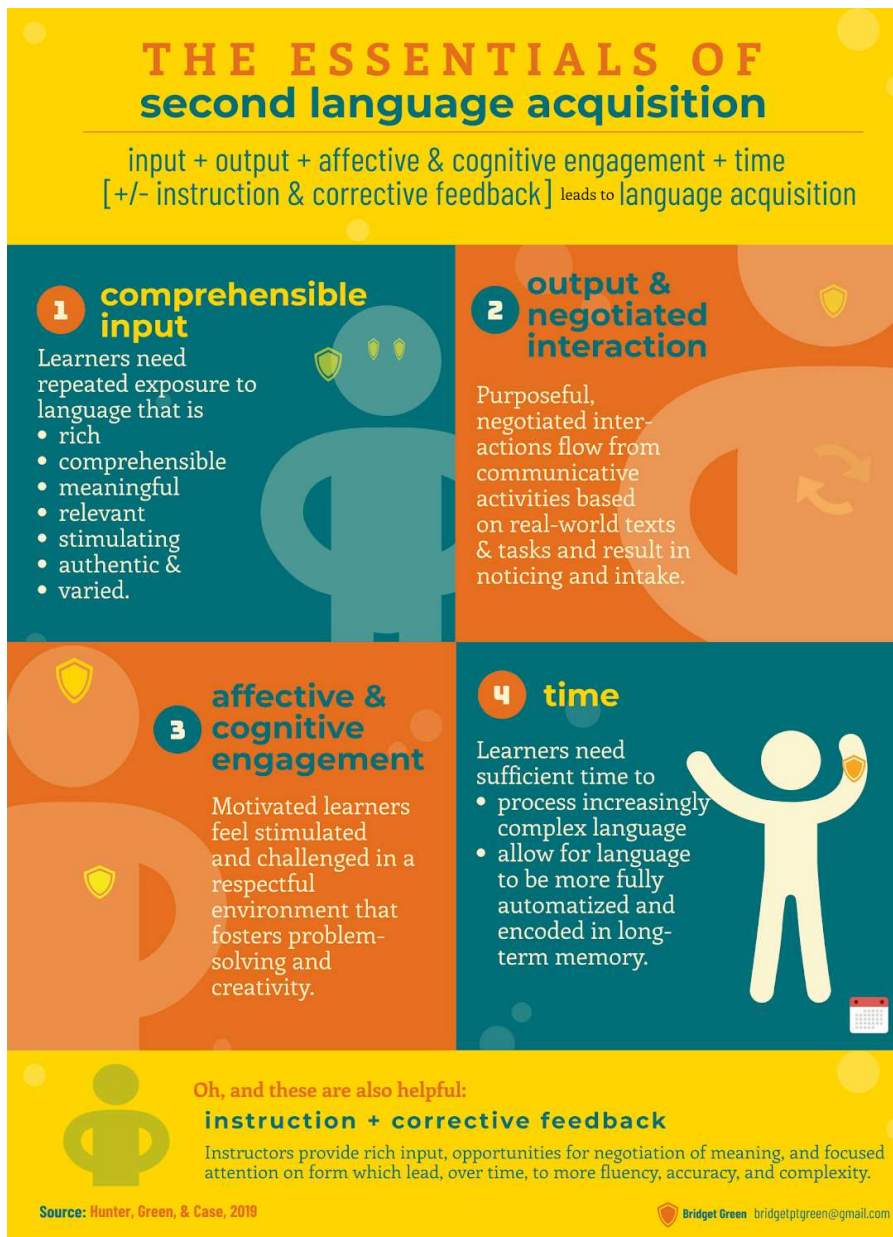
Figure 1: SLA essentials infographic

1 Aesthetics: Make it appealing

First impressions matter. When encountering visual materials for the first time, learners form an immediate first impression of its appeal based on how cluttered the page is (Tuch, Presslaber, Stöcklin, Opwis, and Bargas-Avila, 2012). The most common error in materials development by novice designers is a cluttered page with text that is laid out with no thought to the cognitive load imposed by such visual complexity. So use the space well. Spread out. Think of the page(s) as a blank canvas. Just as painters do not

generally leave a large blank space at the bottom of a canvas, materials writers should avoid a blank space at the bottom of the page. Sufficient white space, which allows the learners' eyes to rest, is key to an uncluttered look. Also, if you expect learners to use the space to fill in responses and work with peers, be sure to allow enough room for them to write. Double space any text that has blanks to fill; extend the blanks to a uniform length of 15 underlined spaces for a single word, longer for a phrase. If the space is at the end of a line, use the tab marker to extend the underlined blank to the end. Low visual complexity—spreading out content, leaving sufficient white space, and leaving room for students to write their answers—makes content much more engaging to learners (Tuch et al., 2012).

Visual clutter is sometimes exacerbated by formatting choices. Try to avoid adding boxes around titles, headings, vocabulary lists, or basically anything that is within the main body of the work as this creates visual noise that increases the cognitive load. Use hanging indents for all numbered content. Choose only one formatting intensifier (use bold *or* italics *or* underline) rather than piling them on. Make titles slightly larger than headings, which should be slightly larger than the 10- or 12-point body text. Traditionally, titles and headings should be in a sans serif font (without the spiky bits on the ends of the typeface) and text in a serif font (with the spiky bits on the end), but more important is choosing a font that is easy to read and not distracting.

Text-heavy handouts sprinkled with outdated clip art are all too common in some teacher-authored materials. Using colorful, evocative images may improve not only motivation, but learning as well—the picture-superiority effect is a well-researched phenomenon in which images are recalled far better than labels on memory tests (Whitehouse, 2006); images make materials more aesthetically appealing to learners and attract more readers than content without images (Ma, 2016). However, cognitive load and retrieval demands can reverse the picture-superiority effect (Carpenter and Olson, 2012). If the content is challenging, it is not enough merely to decorate our pages with colorful images; we must include retrieval activities that encourage learners to more elaboratively process the images so that the connection between language and concept is better encoded. (See Figure 2 for an example of a crowded landscape with unconnected images, unhelpful bullets, inconsistent headings and underlines, a lack of contextualization and personalization, unused space, etc.)

Should've Said No

By Taylor Swift

♦ <u>should have</u> = should've
   "should have" is contracted form of "should've."
   Native English speakers say "should've" unless they are in formal situation.
✓ Same for: <u>would have</u> = would've
           <u>Could have</u> = could've
♦ Listen to the music, and fill in the blanks

It's strange to think the songs we used to sing
The smiles, the flowers, everything is gone
Yesterday I found out about you
Even now just looking at you feels wrong
You say that you'd take it all back, given one chance
It was a moment of weakness and you said yes
You _____ no, you _____ home
You _____ twice 'fore you let it all go
You _____ that word
But what you did with her get back to me
And _____ there in the back of your mind
I shouldn't be asking myself why
You shouldn't be begging for forgiveness at my feet
You _____ no, baby and you might still have me

♦ Draw <u>lines</u> to connect phrasal verbs and verbs
   Phrasal Verbs   **Verbs**
   Find out ○   ○   discover
   take back ○   ○   return
   get back ○   ○   return an item

♦ Write a story about the singer. Why does she feel this way? What happened?   "...should have...."
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

Figure 2: Materials with a heavy cognitive load

Thus, materials developers should insert clear, colorful images that aid learners' comprehension near the content that we hope to highlight and should build in activities that ensure students connect the content and the image(s) in a constructive way. For example, after a vocabulary activity, ask the students to connect the images to one or more of the words or phrases that are being practiced; later, ask students if they can recall, or better, reproduce any of the images and the words they illustrate. Using a variety of evocative images will help learners better understand and remember the content if the images are used as a tool for learning and not just ornamentation. As long as you are only using your materials for teaching, you should be able to use Google image search for teaching, research, and study. (Read the [Statement on the Fair Use of Images for Teaching, Research, and Study](#) for more information.)

2 Scaffolding: Break it down

Design principles for language learning materials must acknowledge the central role that scaffolding plays in making language input accessible by breaking learning into manageable chunks, progressing from simpler to more complex tasks, and providing language support along the way since "if too much cognitive load is created through poor instructional design, or dealing with complex materials, then learning is compromised because insufficient working memory resources are available to be devoted to the processes required to learn" (Ayres and Paas, 2012, p. 827). Although teachers naturally provide that support in their classroom while teaching, these vital steps may be omitted in materials we develop. When teaching online, whether synchronously or asynchronously, it is even more important to scaffold carefully since peer and teacher support are much harder to access. If we design materials with clearer, more explicit instructions and examples, keeping students' independent work uppermost in mind, we may resist the urge to hurry through the very steps that assure that learners know what to do. Including careful scaffolding also gives teachers another opportunity to talk less and for groups of students to interact more as they work together to negotiate meaning, which contributes to better language acquisition by encoding learning in long-term memory.

Begin by making instructions simple, clear, concise, and direct. Think carefully about the steps that need to be laid out before and after exposure to the central input. Notice, for example, the instructions in Figure 3 which begin with "Put the words in the correct blanks below." This sudden leap into the center of the action passes over essential scaffolding steps that invite the learner to care about the topic being discussed by previewing the title and activating learners' background knowledge and attitudes about the topic being discussed by previewing the title and activating learners' background knowledge and attitudes about the topic itself.

Practice Vocabulary Exercises
Put the words in the correct blanks below. You may have to change the verb form. A word can be used more than once.

embrace advocate artificial estimate hilarious advocate exception ups and downs participant

Coming to Study in the US

As an international student, I have to _____ the challenges of living in the United States. Otherwise, I may not enjoy my time here. Learning English and a new culture has its _____. Some days I am so excited to learn new things, and I want to try to express myself in a new language. Other days, I want to cry and go back to my home country because I don't have to struggle to be understood there. In my own country, everything is natural for me.

Sometimes in American culture, people say "Hi" to me and try to talk to me suddenly. I know it's part of American culture to be friendly, and saying "Hi" to strangers is natural for them. Yet, my first thought is that their "Hi" may be _____. I don't know why I react this way, but it just feels fake. In my country people are less demonstrative with their friendliness. They often talk to people they know. It's harder to talk to strangers.

I came to study in the United States because my mother is an English teacher. Her and her colleagues strongly _____ that it was necessary for me to know English. They said it was for my benefit. It seems like most of my mom's friends agreed with her opinion that English is vital to my success in life. However, my father said I didn't need to learn English, and that I should follow my own desires. He was an _____ to the other people my mom talked to. So, she sent me here. I don't mind though, I enjoy the opportunity. I _____ I will finish studying English in four or five years. I hope so anyways!

Ups and Downs

Figure 3: Unscaffolded materials

Students may or may not know the vocabulary being used, so taking the time to read the vocabulary list and mark the words they know allows them to fully engage with the work to come (see Figure 4). Building in thinking time as well as time for peer teaching is also a way to reduce teacher talking time, leading to a more effective learning environment. Well-scaffolded material should include examples, explicit opportunities for peer interaction, a (re)focus on the image, and crucially, the learners' responses to the content of the text. In Figure 4, notice the 3 invitations to interact with peers (*Talk to your classmates about the topic. Check with a partner. When you're finished, check with a partner.*), discuss the image (*What vocabulary word does the image show?*), and respond personally to the content of the article (*What do you know about this topic? Did the article surprise you?*)

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Coming to Study in the US
Building your vocabulary

What do you think? You are going to read an article about an international student who goes to another country to study. What do you know about this topic? Before you read the article, talk to your classmates about the topic.

Read the words below. Do you remember the meanings of the words? Put a checkmark (✔) next to the words you know.

- ❑ art<u>ifi</u>cial
- ❑ ad<u>vo</u>cate
- ❑ <u>e</u>stimate

- ❑ ex<u>cep</u>tion
- ❑ ups and <u>downs</u>
- ❑ em<u>brace</u>

- ❑ par<u>ti</u>cipant
- ❑ hil<u>ar</u>ious

Check with a partner. Help each other understand.

Read the text below. Use the words above to fill in the blanks with the missing words. You can use a word more than once. You may need to change the word form. (If there are any you don't know, skip them and come back later.)

Coming to Study in the US

As an international student, I have to _embrace_ the challenges of living in the United States. Otherwise, I may not enjoy my time here. Learning English and a new culture has its _____. Some days I am so excited to learn new things, and I want to try to express myself in a new language. Other days, I want to cry and go back to my home country because I don't have to struggle to be understood there. In my own country, everything comes naturally to me.

Sometimes in American culture, people say "Hi" to me and try to talk to me suddenly. I know it's part of American culture to be friendly, and saying "Hi" to strangers is natural for them. Yet, my first thought is that their "Hi" may be _____. I don't know why I react this way, but it just feels fake. In my country people are less demonstrative with their friendliness. They often talk to people they know. It's harder to talk to strangers.

I came to study in the United States because my mother is an English teacher. Her and her colleagues strongly _____ that I go abroad in order to learn English. They said it was for my benefit. It seems like most of my mom's friends agreed with her opinion that English is vital to my success in life. However, my father said I didn't need to learn English, and that I should follow my own desires. He was an _____ to the other people my mom and I talked to. In the end, though, I decided to come. I'm not sure, but I _____ that I will finish studying English in four or five years. I hope so anyway!
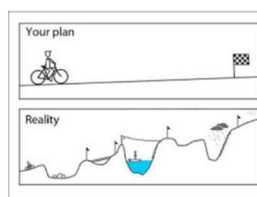
When you're finished, check with a partner. Do you have the same answers?

What vocabulary word does the image show? Explain it.

What do you think now? Did the article surprise you? Discuss it.

Figure 4: Scaffolded materials

Note, too, that the image of going up and down stairs in Figure 3 does not illustrate the idiomatic meaning of 'ups and downs' in this context ('the mixture of good and bad experiences that happen in any situation or relationship'), while the one in Figure 4 does. It is important to choose images that clearly illustrate the words or concepts you hope the students will retain.

Cognitive load theory is about more than just the complexity of the text that is presented to students: "the manner in which information is presented to learners and the learning activities required of learners can also impose a cognitive load" (Paas, Renkl, and Sweller, 2003, p. 2). The lack of confidence one feels when struggling to learn another

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language can be mitigated by well-designed materials that are clear and easy to navigate. Materials that are carefully scaffolded like those in Figure 4 can increase retention and help learners feel more engaged, supported, and successful because with the reduction in the cognitive load, students feel confident that they know what to do and can focus on the input being presented.

3 Authenticity: Don't reinvent the wheel

It is widely accepted that exposure to authentic input is more beneficial for language learners than are simplified, contrived texts (Mishan, 2005; Tomlinson, 2013). If possible, we should choose varied authentic content that match the learners' needs and interests, and develop affectively- and cognitively-engaging scaffolding around it. Choosing authentic, real-world, culture-rich examples of language in use–songs, commercials, advertisements, podcasts, artwork, movie trailers, official forms, tiktok videos, and on and on–are especially motivating to learners and it is scaffolding that makes them accessible. Creating materials that support learners, focus their attention on select aspects of language, and guide them towards noticing, understanding, and using language is the only way to make authentic content accessible.

However, teachers are often required to use textbooks which may or may not incorporate authentic language; for the purposes of this discussion, therefore, we will focus on developing the texts already on offer in an authentic way as well as supplemental texts that we develop to support learning objectives. When scaffolding input, we sometimes fail to use authentic learner resources and instead rely on our own knowledge, however faulty. Take for example a teacher-authored handout for the song *Ironic* by Alanis Morissette developed for an intermediate-EFL class (see Figure 5), which presents 26 vocabulary words with their definitions in a matching activity. [Insert Figure 5 here.]

```
1. VOCABULARY MATCH
   In pairs or groups, find the vocabulary word on the left in the song. Then find the definition in the list on the right.
   Write the vocabulary word in front of the definition. No numbers - this is not math class!

   Vocabulary Words                    Definitions or explanations
   1.  turned                          a.  curse word, expressing anger or condemnation
   2.  the lottery                     b.  a notice in a public place to give information or
   3.  a fly (n.)                          directions
   4.  to fly (vb.)                     c.  airplane trip
   5.  Chardonnay                       d.  black flying insect (dirty)
   6.  death row                        e.  many cars in the streets
   7.  pardon                           f.  slang for children
   8.  ironic                           g.  direction, helpful information, guidance
   9.  wedding                          h.  forgiveness, removal of punishment
   10. free                            i.  game where one wins money or a prize after a
   11. advice                              drawing
   12. afraid                          j.  had an accident
   13. packed                          k.  having a meaning or result of the opposite of what
   14. suitcase                            you would expect
   15. kids                            l.  having fear
   16. whole                           m.  hopes or images / pictures you have when asleep
   17. damn                            n.  kitchen utensil for cutting
   18. flight                          o.  kitchen utensils for soup
   19. crashed                         p.  line of prison cells where the criminals who are
   20. sneaking                            condemned to die stay
   21. traffic                         q.  luggage, bag to carry clothes in when traveling
   22. sign                            r.  marriage ceremony
   23. spoons                          s.  no cost, gratis
   24. knife                           t.  put clothes and possessions in a suitcase
   25. dreams                          u.  to travel in an airplane
   26. wife                            v.  to walk or come up quietly
                                       w.  total, complete, entire
                                       x.  verb meaning to change your age by one more year
                                       y.  white wine - originally from France, popular in CA
                                       z.  women married to man
```

Figure 5: Teacher-authored vocabulary matching exercise

Leaving aside the excess of items presented and the lack of a designated space to write answers, or an example to lead the way and alleviate some of the visual overload, the definitions themselves are problematic–*spoons* is defined as 'kitchen utensils for soup'; *turned* as 'verb meaning to change your age by one more year' and *crashed* as 'had an accident.' It seems clear that these definitions were invented on the fly without much thought to the difficulty of the defining language (since *utensils* is far less common than *spoons*) or the nuances of the word (since *crash* means to have an accident specifically 'in a car, plane, etc. by violently hitting something else'. When making our own materials, it is very important to use those authentic learner tools/teacher resources that are readily available, such as learner dictionaries like the Oxford Learner's Dictionary and, for lower level students, the Longman's Dictionary of Contemporary English, in order to make the input more accessible. (Note that in both of these learner's dictionaries, *spoon* is illustrated with an image—by far the simplest method of conveying the meaning of the term.)

The New General Service List of core high-frequency vocabulary words is another corpus-based resource that allows teachers to move beyond their intuition when choosing which vocabulary words to gloss by listing words in order of frequency beginning with

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K1 (the 1,000 most common words) and moving on to K34. *Spoon,* for example, is in the K5 category (5,415) whereas *utensil* is K11 (11,826). Another useful tool is a vocabulary profiler such as LexTutor, which reveals that over half (fifteen items) of the words glossed (*afraid*, *case, death, dreams, fly, free, kids, pack, pardon, sign, suit, turn, wedding, whole,* and *wife*) in Figure 4 are K1 and therefore may not need to be glossed at all, but may be recalled. In contrast, six of the words (*row, advice, flight, crash, traffic,* and *knife*) are K2, two are K3 (*ironic, damned*). Knowing, rather than intuiting, the frequency and therefore usefulness of the vocabulary is vital. When addressing the needs of high-intermediate and advanced students of English, materials developers should also access the New Academic Word List which expands on Coxhead's (2000) version.

Another teacher resource that should be on every ESL/EFL materials developer's menu bar is the Corpus of Contemporary American English. COCA allows teachers to test their intuition about frequency and collocations. (From COCA, we learn, for example, that *spoon* occurs in the corpus 8,281 times, while *utensil* occurs only 188 times.) Further, when developing activities such as gap fills to practice vocabulary in use, COCA is useful for supplying authentic sample sentences that, when clicked on, provide more contextualization from which to draw, thus again avoiding reinventing the wheel. For those who lack the time to invest in learning how to use COCA, Google Ngram Viewer is a corpus made up of the scanned books available in Google Books and is a quick, visual way to check for frequency of written words.

The focus on authenticity should extend to the language used to describe learning activities as well; when developing materials, avoid teacher-centric language such as "Vocabulary Practice", "Pre-Listening Task", "Reading Comprehension", as well as the use of Roman numerals, in favor of the more authentic and learner-centered "Building your vocabulary", "Before you listen", "Did you understand?" and Arabic numbers.

Finally, and perhaps most important, the language you choose to use should move beyond the usual native-speaker-centric, formal language that is prevalent in many coursebooks to better mirror the English that is used globally and that learners will most likely encounter (Kiczkowiak, 2020). Find examples of the authentic speech of successful English speakers from the culture(s) of your students; remind them that as speakers of global English, they will most likely be communicating with others using English as a lingua franca.

4 Affective and Cognitive Engagement through personalization and higher-order thinking

Cognitive engagement comes as a result of materials that are intellectually stimulating and meaningful. Choosing topics that challenge learners and that they care about, or come to care about, leads to more productive language exposure (Mishan, 2015), but how

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do we do that? Use frequent needs assessments to help you focus on what is relevant to the learners, what motivates, interests, and intrigues them, but also on what surprises, amazes, and challenges them, and present those topics in a variety of ways that meet different learning styles. Ask them how they learn best and try to present materials that clearly respond to that information. Materials that are explicitly designed to engage learners cognitively and affectively can lead to intrinsic motivation in those who seem checked out during class.

Show your students the levels of learning in Bloom's taxonomy and the need to do more than just memorize lexical items. To retain language, we need to analyze, evaluate, and create; we need to use language as a tool to communicate our whole selves. Develop materials that reflect this. Begin by contextualizing the input and allowing learners to share their own knowledge and experience. Personalize materials. Instead of the usual inner-circle, native-speaker personas, substitute your and your current students' names and interests when appropriate. Thus, *Tom and Sue _____ (watch) a movie yesterday* becomes, for example, *Abdullah and Kenji _____ (watch) the FIFA World Cup final match yesterday.* For vocabulary practice, including of academic words like *obtain* and *impact*, rather than a word bank followed by a teacher-authored gap-fill, ask leading questions such as *What has been difficult for you to* obtain *in this country? Which person has had the greatest* impact *on you?* By responding to these questions (in full and complete answers that include reasons and details), learners demonstrate their understanding of the target vocabulary in a way that is both creative and personal, and which builds community as we come to know each other better.

When in doubt, ask, don't tell. Give choices. Choice is essential for stimulating cognitive and affective engagement (Mishan, 2015), and texts, tasks, and activities should incorporate as many opportunities for learner choice as possible including the choice of topics, presentation formats, and assessment approaches. Try to allow for choices at the individual, pair, group, and full class. Making a choice in conjunction with others allows for negotiation, compromise, and group cohesion.

Include explicit instructions that give students permission to take the time they need to learn. After instructions on how to, for example, do an activity, you can add, *If there are any you don't know, skip them, and come back later.* This allows students to de-stress and do their best without the expectation that they need to get it all correct on the first attempt.

Include frequent checks of their affective and cognitive responses to the text, and their rating of its level of difficulty and interest. To increase motivation, provide explicit information about the relevance of what they are learning by including corpus data about the usefulness of the language being presented when possible. For example, when

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presenting affixes, include information such as "*The 15 prefixes listed here represent 79% of the most common prefixes used in American high school textbooks!*" Ask them to supply their own response to the relevance by asking often how they feel about what they are learning and whether it is useful to them. For example, follow up activities with a Likert scale asking *How difficult was this? How useful was this?* or *What did you learn? Ask Why are we learning this? What is the best way to remember it?* Move beyond micro-comprehension of details to global meaning, personal connection, and local context. Ask, for example, *What do you think? Is this true for you? What happens in your country? In what way does this challenge your beliefs about this topic?* These questions allow learners to respond critically to the core message of the content, to analyze its personal and cultural meaningfulness, and to create a culturally appropriate response. Even a rejection of the content is an engaging and creative response if it's accompanied by reasoned explanations. These metacognitive practices, or thinking about thinking, can lead students towards the habit of higher-order responses to what they learn.

5 Revision: Keep making it better

Perhaps the most important principle that leads to the production of good materials is revision. Tomlinson (2013) reminds us that "Good materials developers are thinking developers who have confidence in their ability and in their materials but who are prepared to rethink and revise their principles and beliefs in response to further stimulus and information" (p. 493). Good developers take immense professional pride in excellence but recognize that materials development is a long-term process. Think of each use of your materials, therefore, as a 'pilot', or initial test, which you are assessing for consistency and clarity. After the first use, clear up any confusion. If you do not have time to revise immediately, add a quick note in red at the top of the page to remind you of changes to make later. Every time you return to re-use material, update it to reflect your growing knowledge of the latest research, what works with your current group of students, and what does not. Encourage the sharing of materials among your colleagues so that each subsequent use can lead to better materials development. (Always add your name to the footer in 6-point type to document your own progress as well as to limit plagiarism and the use of materials outside of the group or level of learners for which they were intended.) This recursive process of development, adaptation, and re-use is never completely finished as each iteration of our materials invites further improvements.

Conclusion

Materials developers should have a deep and growing understanding of the essential elements of language acquisition in mind as they apply the following five design principles (see Figure 6) to their in-class and online materials development:

- **Aesthetics**: present visually appealing content while using the space well and incorporating evocative, relevant images that aid comprehension;
- **Scaffolding**: progress from simpler to more complex tasks, elicit background knowledge of language and culture, build in thinking time, interaction, and noticing while encouraging learners to respond to global meaning;
- **Authenticity**: include stimulating, current content and focus on meaning while scaffolding real-world tasks with learner-centered language using authentic language and helpful teacher resources;
- **Affective and cognitive engagement**: encourage learner responses to language and culture through a variety of relevant (personal, local, contextualized) input that matches your students' needs and interests, and incorporates Bloom's depth of learning; and
- **Revision**: systematically edit, update, rethink, and revise materials for consistency and clarity.

Figure 5: Principles of material design infographic

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Feature Article

English Language Features Challenging for Nepali English Learners

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Abstract

This paper explored and analyzed features of English pronunciation that could cause intelligibility problems for Nepali English learners (ELs), who use English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL). We examined the Nepali ELs' pronunciation issues by juxtaposing them with comparable segmental and suprasegmental features of the Nepali language. We found that Nepali has far less sound inventory and voiceless consonants than English, yet it has a lot of contrastive consonants. Similarly, the Nepali language has fewer vowels, minimal diphthongs, and no triphthongs. While both English and Nepali share limited suprasegmental characteristics, they do not complement each other. Given the distinctiveness in pronunciation of the two languages, Nepali ELs are likely to face several intelligibility challenges as they encounter other non-Nepali English users. Thus, they need knowledge and appropriate training to enhance intelligibility for effective communication in workplaces and academic spaces that promote English.

Key Words *Nepali English learners; English pronunciation; intelligibility; teaching*

Introduction

This paper explores and descriptively analyses the features of English pronunciation that could cause intelligibility problems for Nepali ELs (also emergent bilinguals or multilinguals). The analyses of Nepali ELs' pronunciation problems are done by contrasting them with similar pronunciation features in Nepali. The main purpose of the current analyses is to help facilitate classroom instruction for Nepali ELs by providing teachers with insights into Nepali ELs' oral communication barriers.

Throughout this paper, *Nepali* refers to the Nepali language or people, whereas *Nepalis* refers to Nepali people or English users whose first language (L1 or home language or mother tongue) or second language (L2 or additional language) is Nepali. Finally, *English* refers to the English language spoken by native speakers of English.

Several reasons warrant this study. First, there has been a significant influx of Nepalis into English-speaking countries and educational contexts where English has been

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preferred as a medium of instruction as (im)migrants and students until recently (see Mishra, 2011; Regmi, 2020), hinting that effective oral English is essential for Nepalis to survive and succeed in the new world. Thus, English medium instruction in Nepal and Nepali (im)migrant-receiving and student-welcoming countries must orient Nepali ELs toward their pronunciation issues and help them enhance intelligibility in oral English. Second, since English is a stress-timed language (Kenworthy, 1987; Roach, 2009), in contrast to the syllable-timed local languages in Nepal, Nepali ELs find English pronunciation hard to follow even if they may be aware of such differences. Finally, as English and Nepali come from different language families—English emerged from Anglo-Saxon and Nepali descended from Sanskrit—their sound systems are unique. When languages have different origins, they are likely to have distinct sound inventories. Accordingly, Nepali ELs need literacy in various English pronunciation aspects and receive appropriate training and strategies for successful communication. As the lack of extended sound inventory in L1 leads to pronunciation problems in L2 (Brekelmans, 2017), Nepali ELs must be prepared to deal with English's extended sound inventory. With all these reasons, teachers need to comprehend the phonologies of L1 and the target language to envision learners' pronunciation issues (see Burgess & Spencer, 2000) for effective classroom instruction.

Methods

This paper descriptively analyses the features of English pronunciation that are challenging for Nepali ELs by contrasting them with the features of Nepali pronunciation. The analyses are based on published literature, including the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

Analyses of Contrastive Pronunciation Features of English and Nepali

Consonants

Consonants are produced in different manners and places of articulation (see Table 1). Jones (1998) describes the manner vocal cords function in producing consonant sounds as, "they may be held wide apart, they may be closed completely, or they may be held loosely together so that they vibrate when air passes between them" (p. 168). As vocal cords are held apart, the air passes between them, and voiceless sounds like [k] and [s] are heard; when we draw the vocal cords together, the air is forced to pass between them by vibrating cords that help us hear sounds like [d] and [g] (Khatiwada, 2009; Roach, 2009). Also, the vocal cords do not vibrate while making voiceless sounds, implying that vibration produces voicing.

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Table 1

Nepali and English Consonants

Manner of Articulation	Bilabial Voiceless	Bilabial Voiced	Labiodental Voiceless	Labiodental Voiced	Dental Voiceless	Dental Voiced	Alveolar Voiceless	Alveolar Voiced	Postalveolar Voiceless	Postalveolar Voiced	Retroflex Voiceless	Retroflex Voiced	Palatal Voiceless	Palatal Voiced	Velar Voiceless	Velar Voiced	Glottal Voiceless	Glottal Voiced
Plosive	p	b					t	d			ʈ	ɖ			k	g		
	p^h	$b^ɦ$			t^h	$d^ɦ$					$ʈ^h$	$ɖ^ɦ$			k^h	$g^ɦ$		
Affricate									tʃ	dʒ								
									ts	dz								
									ts^h	$dz^ɦ$								
Nasal	m	m					n	n							ŋ	ŋ		
Tap or flap								r										
Fricative			f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ							h	ɦ
	f^h	$v^ɦ$																
Latteral							l	l										
Approximant	w	w								r			j	j				

Adapted from Khatiwada (2009) & Roach (2009).

Notes on the table:
- English consonant sounds are printed normal.
- Nepali consonant sounds are shown in boldface.
- English consonants close to Nepali consonants are underlined.
- The consonants with superscripts represent contrastive sounds in Nepali.

Plosives

Plosives are consonant sounds that are produced by holding the air coming through the vocal cords in the mouth, compressing the air, and releasing it in the final stage. To

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produce English plosives, we move two of our speech organs against each other, obstructing the passage through which the air comes from the lungs; then the sudden force of air opens the vocal organs, resulting in a sound loud enough to hear. The production of plosives can be divided into four phases—the closure phase, in which both the speech organs close the air tract; the hold phase, in which the air is held in the lungs; the release phase, in which the air is released from the lungs, and the speech organs are opened; the post-release phase in which the air is released resulting in a plosive sound. The post-release phase does not always necessarily occur. There are altogether six plosive sounds—[p], [t], [k], [b], [d], and [g]—which can occur in any position in English words, e.g., [p] in *pin*, *paper*, and *pop*. (Roach, 2009)

English and Nepali plosives are similar, although Nepali uses contrastive plosives. Also, Nepalis do not adequately press the lips to produce [p], [k], and [t] sounds, therefore their English becomes unintelligible. Specifically, when they pronounce words with [p], [k], and [t] sounds at the beginning of words, like *pencil*, *tanker*, and *caravan*, those sounds may not be heard adequately. However, judging from Dalton and Seidlhofer's (1994) description of how the sound [p] is pronounced, the speaker needs to use significant force and muscular strength to make English plosives.

Affricates

Affricates start as a plosive and end as a fricative sound. They are the combination of plosive and fricatives and are produced in the same vocal organs. Affricates in English "begin with plosives and end with fricatives" (Roach, 2009, p. 39), and they have the same kind of articulation as plosives in that they have closure and hold phases. Accordingly, we have the rapid release of air with plosion and aspiration that lets us move our tongue to make the affricate sound. Put differently, affricates are produced when a stop has a fricative release, e.g., *push* in the beginning has a plosive sound followed by a vowel and a fricative release. English affricates are [tʃ] and [dʒ], which occur in any word position: [tʃ] in *church*, *catching*, and *match* and [dʒ] in *jump*, *pigeon*, and *edge*.

Nepali does not have the exact postalveolar affricates—[tʃ] and [dʒ] (see Table 1). However, Nepalis often pronounce them by replacing them with comparable postalveolar affricates—[ts] and [dz]. In the case of [tʃ], it may not differ much from [ts]. Khatiwada (2009) describes [ts] and [dz] sounds in Nepali produced through "laminal contact in the alveolar region" but heard as palatoalveolar sounds (p. 375). Interestingly, Nepalis might replace the postalveolar voiced affricate [dʒ] with voiced alveolar fricative [z], so they often pronounce *language* as [læŋgwɪz] or [læŋgwɪdz].

Fricatives

Fricatives are characterised as hissing sounds, which are produced as the air escapes through our mouth. While making English fricatives, the air passage of our speech organs becomes narrow at some point, and the air is expelled by pressure from the lungs "so that the escaping air produces friction" (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994, p. 15). Fricatives are noticeable because they can be continued and prolonged (like a hissing sound) while the air is in the lungs (Roach, 2009).

Seven English fricatives—[f], [θ], [s], [ʃ], [v], [ð], and[z]—occur in all the positions of English words, e.g., [f] in *fan*, *beautiful*, and *relief*. However, [ʒ] occurs only in the middle and final positions, such as *measure* and *rouge*, and [h] occurs only in the initial and middle positions, as in *honey* and *ahead*.

In making English labiodental fricatives, the lower lip is in contact with the upper teeth (Roach, 2009); the tongue is usually placed inside the teeth, with the tip of the tongue touching the inside of the lower front teeth. Indeed, the labiodental fricatives are "articulated by the inside of the lower lip making light contact with the upper teeth" (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994, p. 15). Since Nepali does not have labio-dental fricatives (see Table 1), Nepalis tend to replace these sounds with contrastive bilabial fricatives [fʰ] and [bɦ]—respectively. The former is a voiceless bilabial fricative, and the latter is a voiced bilabial fricative, thus *fan* is pronounced as [fʰæn], and *van* is pronounced as [vɦæn].

While making English dental fricatives, the tip of the tongue meets the front teeth as if the tongue was placed between the teeth (Roach, 2009). The dental fricatives of English sometimes cause intelligibility problems for Nepalis because Nepali has dental plosive sounds [t], [d], [tʰ], and [dɦ] but not dental fricatives. Usually, Nepalis replace English dental fricatives with contrastive Nepali dental plosives.

In making postalveolar fricatives as [ʃ] and [ʒ] in English, the tongue is in contact with an area slightly further back than that for [s] and [z]. In pronouncing [s] and [z], the tip of the tongue meets the alveolar, and the centre of it raises. Nepalis often replace this sound with the voiceless alveolar fricative [s]. Consequently, when Nepalis pronounce *shoes* [ʃuːz], they say [suːz].

Nepali does not have the voiced postalveolar fricative [ʒ] sound. Therefore, Nepalis cannot intelligently pronounce English words with this sound without adequate training. Whenever this sound appears, they tend to replace it with the voiced alveolar fricative [z] sound, e.g., they pronounce *measure* as [mezə]. Sometimes, they replace [z] with the contrastive voiced alveolar affricate [dz] sound, as shown in Khatiwada (2009).

Finally, Nepalis can pronounce the English voiceless alveolar fricative [s] sound without difficulty, yet they have a problem with word-initial consonant clusters. Thus, if [s] is followed by [p], [t], [k], [m], or [n], Nepalis tend to pronounce the sound by inserting [ɪ]

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before [s]; e.g., *smart* is pronounced as [ɪsmaːt]. Presumably, this problem is caused by mother tongue interference because Nepalis tend to insert [ɪ] sound before them. However, if [s] is followed by an approximant [w] or lateral [l], Nepalis pronounce the sound without any obstruction.

Other Consonants

Other consonants namely nasal, tap or flap, lateral, and approximant do not cause major intelligibility issues for Nepali ELs. To pronounce nasal sounds like [m n], the air coming from the lungs passes through the nasal cavity. However, to pronounce, tap or flap sound like Nepali [r], one articulatory organ (tongue) taps or flaps against another organ once. On the other hand, to pronounce lateral sounds like [l], the air passes through the sides of the tongue. Finally, to pronounce approximants like [w], vocal organs like lips come together, but without touching each other. Specifically, Nepalis pronounce English dental fricatives (fricatives pronounced by touching the back of the upper teeth by the blade of the tongue), nasals, lateral, tap or flap, velar plosives (plosives pronounced by raising the body of the tongue to touch the palate), and the approximant sounds (see Table 1) without intelligibility issues although they tend to replace these English consonants with contrastive Nepali consonants. In specific, they may replace English dental fricatives (fricatives pronounced by forcing the tip of the tongue against the back of the teeth) with Nepali dental plosives (plosives pronounced by placing the tip of the tongue behind the teeth and forcing the airflow out), English velar plosives (plosives pronounced by raising the body of the tongue against the palate and forcing the airflow out) with Nepali velar plosives, and English nasals with Nepali nasals. However, the bilabial approximant (approximant sounds made by partially stopping the airflow coming from the lungs and releasing it) [w] often causes intelligibility problems if it appears in the beginning of an English word starting with *wa* letters as in *water*, *Walter*, or *walk.* Usually, Nepalis pronounce *wa* as if it has [ɑː] sound. (Khatiwada, 2009; Roach, 2009)

Vowels

When we pronounce vowels, there is no sound obstruction as the air passages through our mouth (Jones, 1998; Roach, 2009). Vowels are produced at different places and manners, which determines the length and quality. As vowels are produced as long and short, opening the mouth and tongue positions are crucial in pronouncing them (Roach, 2009). Table 2 illustrates the manner and place English vowels, and the *schwa* are produced.

Table 2

Description of English Vowels and Schwa

Sound	Type	Position & Manner of Articulation	Examples
iː	*Long*	Close front; slightly spread lip position.	Sheep, beach

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ɜ:		Mid-central; neutral lip position.	Bird, fern
ɑ:		Open but not back vowel; neutral lip position.	Card, half
ɔ:		Fully back, strong lip rounding.	Board, torn
u:		Less back, moderately rounded lips.	Food, soon
ɪ	*Short*	Close front; slightly spread lip.	Bit, fish
e		Front; slightly spread lips.	Bet, men
æ		Not quite open; slightly spread lips.	Bat, man
ʌ		Central and more open; neutral lip position.	Cut, come
ɒ		Not fully back, but open mid and open in tongue height; slightly rounded lip position.	Pot, cross
ʊ		More open and closer to central; rounded lips.	Book, full
ə	*Schwa*	Mid and central; not pronounced with force	About, character

Source: Roach (2009, pp. 8-17)

English has 11 vowels (long and short vowels) and the *schwa* [ə], which is found in weak and unstressed syllables (Roach, 2009). Nepali vowels are characterised as nasal (Khatiwada, 2009). Koffi (2019) argues that Nepali does not have five English vowel counterparts: [ɪ], [ɛ], [æ], [ɔ], and [ʊ]. However, this statement is not entirely true because of the presence of two vowels—[i] and [u]—which are often used as [ɪ] and [ʊ]. For instance, when Nepalis pronounce English words like *beach*, it is heard as *bitch*—an embarrassment in many situations. Similarly, when they pronounce the word *sheep*, it is heard as *ship.* Also, they tend to favour [ʊ] over [u:]; so, when they pronounce the word *pool,* it is heard as *pull.* The other vowel problem Nepalis often encounter is related to *schwa*. Because Nepali lacks *schwa*, it causes a communication challenge to Nepalis because they stress the syllable with *schwa*, as *about* [əbaʊt] instead of [ə**baʊt**]. Khatiwada (2009) points to another issue in that Nepalis may replace the *schwa* with the vowel [ʌ], which is described as "slightly, rounded, and […] acoustically lower and more back" (p. 377).

Diphthongs and Triphthongs

Diphthongs are the fusion of two vowels in a single syllable, e.g., *day* [deɪ], which combines [e] and [ɪ]. Likewise, triphthongs combine three vowels within a single syllable, for instance, *mower* [məʊə]. English has eight diphthongs, [ɪə], [eə], [ʊə], [eɪ], [aɪ], [ɔɪ], [əʊ], and [aʊ], and five triphthongs, [eɪə], [aɪə], [ɔɪə], [əʊə], and [aʊə]. (Roach, 2009)

The most crucial aspect of English diphthongs is that it must occur in a syllable (Catford, 1988, p. 116). Indeed, there is a movement of sound from one (first) vowel to another (second) in a diphthong, meaning there are two sounds and one movement. As the sound moves, the second part remains short (Roach, 2009). Nevertheless, in a triphthong, one

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more sound with one extra movement, from the first to the third vowel. The challenge in using triphthongs is that they must be pronounced quickly. However, foreigners usually must notice whether triphthongs have two or more combined sounds (Roach, 2009).

In Nepali, there are as many as ten diphthongs [ui], [ei], [oi], [ʌi], [ai], [iu], [eu], [ou], [ʌu], and [au] (Bandhu, 1989 cited in Khatiwada, 2009) but no triphthongs. Among the diphthongs, Nepali seems to share only [eɪ] and [aɪ] with English because it lacks distinction between [i:] and [ɪ] (see Khatiwada, 2009). That said, while Nepalis may recognise diphthongs as they hear them in English, it is not necessarily easy for them to distinguish between words containing single vowels and diphthongs. Eventually, they fail to internalise and use diphthongs correctly. Also, since Nepali does not have triphthongs, Nepalis could reduce triphthongs to diphthongs. Consequently, when they say *dose*, it could be heard as [dəs], or [dʌs]; not [dəʊs]. And when they say *lower*, it could be heard as [ləwə], [lʌwʌ], [lɔwə], or [lɔwʌ]; not [ləʊə].

Word-Stress

English words (except for unstressed ones) are pronounced with distinctive force on a stressed syllable. In English, stress occurs at regular intervals between the stressed syllables even if there are many intervening unstressed ones. That said, only one syllable of each English polysyllabic word is pronounced with primary stress (Kenworthy, 1987). For example, *photographic* is pronounced as [fəʊtə**<u>græ</u>**fɪk], where the primary and secondary stresses fall on the third (bold and underlined) and first (bold) syllables. Here, the third syllable of *photographic* is pronounced with the speaker's muscular effort, suggesting that the speaker is talking about *photographic*. Nevertheless, if the word is pronounced with a stress on other syllables, it may mean something else or nothing. Kenworthy (1987) warns that if the speaker stresses the wrong syllable in English, listeners will have a problem identifying the word.

Essentially, length, loudness, vowel quality, and pitch help recognise English stress. However, Vanderplank (1993) argues that stressed syllables are not necessarily longer and louder. Roach (2009) also considers some of the four factors equally crucial and claims that sometimes a syllable can be made noticeable either by one or two factors. For Catford (1988), loudness is more associated with sound rather than stress.

Also, the pitch of the voice is higher on the stressed syllables than on other syllables in English, and the former has a different vowel quality from vowels in the neighbouring syllables. While stressed syllables can have any vowel in them (long or short), syllabic consonants, like in *listened* [lɪsnd], and, *schwa*, like in *manor* [mænə], appear only in unstressed syllables. (Roach, 2009)

In languages like Nepali, stress does not play a crucial role in speakers' pronunciation. Indeed, Nepalis do not use primary stress frequently. Even if they do, they stress any

syllable, particularly the first or second syllable of a word (Acharya, 1991), based on what they want to emphasise and how they want to do so. Sometimes, they may pronounce words with a level stress.

Also, English word-stress rules cannot capture all words, creating intelligibility problems for foreigners. While English stress does not have a fixed place, i.e., any syllable of a polysyllabic word can carry the primary stress (Kenworthy, 1987), it is "fixed in the sense that every word has [unique] stress pattern" (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994, p. 39). Interestingly, the changing nature of word-stress also applies to Nepali: When two words with primary stress on the initial syllable form a compound word, the primary stress falls on the first syllable (Acharya, 1991). Nevertheless, stress does not drastically alter the meaning of a Nepali word as in English.

Finally, English stress is mobile, so it moves from one syllable to another within semantic families of words. For example, the stress in the word *photograph* is on the first syllable, whereas in *photography*, it is on the second syllable. Thus, learners can only learn the English word-stress in a communicative context, meaning they must get chances to practise the correct stress patterns in real contexts. As Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994) warn that "incorrect word-stress decreases intelligibility" (p. 39), learners need to use word-stress approximating English norms in different communicative situations. Even though stress shifts are largely consistent on the word category change in English, teachers can decide on the classroom instructional strategies based on their expertise and curriculum requirement.

Rhythm

Rhythm in English is useful to indicate what is coming next (see Martin, 1972, 1975; Vanderplank, 1993). Rhythm is often compared to our heartbeat; it foregrounds important syllables like images on a background (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994). In English, rhythm occurs at regular intervals on the stressed syllables, so listeners expect to hear it from speakers (Kenworthy, 1987). However, whether speakers speak rhythmically could vary: "[Sometimes people] speak very rhythmically […] while at other times [they] speak arhythmically […] if [they] are hesitant or nervous" (Roach, 2009, p. 109).

Rhythm in Nepali occurs at regular intervals on stressed or unstressed syllables. However, as each syllable is articulated for approximately the same duration in Nepali (Acharya, 1991), Nepalis tend to use syllable-timed rhythm, affecting their intelligibility in oral English. This is the direct influence of the syllable-timed nature of the Nepali language.

Connected Speech

When people speak English, they pronounce phonemes of some words differently because of the neighbouring words, such as *in the* [ɪnnə] wherever the pair of words is

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used together. Indeed, assimilation changes our tongue position during conversation and prevents the tongue from reaching the ideal position, where the individual sounds are made (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994). Also, as we speak, some sounds may disappear, e.g., *looked back* [lʊk bæk], a situation called the zero realisation of sound or sound deletion or elision (Roach, 2009) where sounds like consonant clusters and the *schwa* may become weak due to elision. Sometimes people may insert extra sounds to link words, as in [miːdɪər ɪvent], which links *media* and *event*. Here, the extra sound [r] enhances pronunciation accuracy and speech fluency by allowing speakers to fill the gaps between words (Roach, 2009).

As Nepalis tend to pronounce every word and syllable clearly, it is natural for them to anticipate English speakers doing the same. That said, elision and assimilation are not uncommon in Nepali. Elision like *gako thiye* [gʌko tʰiẽ] for *gayeko thiye* (or has gone) [gʌeko tʰiẽ] and *bhako thiyo* [bʰʌko tʰijo] for *bhayeko thyo* (or has happened) [bʰʌekoː tʰijo] are commonly used in Nepali. Interestingly, people may hear [gako] and [bʰako] rather than [gʌko] and [bʰʌko] as examples of assimilation. Yet elision and assimilation of Nepali and English are unrelated, meaning the knowledge of one does not help one understand the meaning of another. As the elision and assimilation of Nepalis get influenced by their mother tongue, there are always chances of misunderstanding when they converse with other English speakers.

Intonation

Intonation is the rise and fall of voice when people speak. In natural settings, people's voices may go up, down, and stay level as they talk.

In English, speakers "can change the meaning of what they say through [intonation]" (Hammer, 1996, p. 12). This view is supported by Bradford (1988): "[People] can mean different things by using the same group of words, arranged in the same order, but saying them in different ways" (p. 1). Kenworthy (1987), too, agrees: "[Listeners] get information using pitch of the voice and speakers send information using pitch variation" (p. 19). In other words, unintelligible intonation leads to breaking up the communication because the correct information is unlikely to get conveyed to the listener.

When people interact, they show their feeling, attitude, and mood towards what they are talking about and the person they are speaking to. Such attributes can be positive, negative, or neutral and can be expressed through intonation. Specific to English, people use intonation for various purposes. They use falling [↘] intonation for finality and definiteness, lack of interest in a topic or for a closed communicative situation. Kenworthy (1987) asserts that the pitch usually drops when the last item in a list has been reached, e.g., *Bill has a daughter, two sons, and a granddaughter*. They also use falling intonation to expect a supportive response or other people to have

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the same information as *You saw my computer, didn't you?* In contrast, they use rising [↗] intonation for general questions, like *Do you like her?* or to hint at a continuation of the speech, to show interest in a topic, to show suspicion about other, and to encourage someone to do something. People rarely try to speak if the person they are talking to is still speaking with a high pitch; if they do, it could be considered an interruption (Kenworthy, 1987). However, if people actively participate in the conversation, they may use a high pitch to express *yes*, *fine*, and *okay*. Furthermore, if they wish to be polite, they use a rising intonation, e.g., *Give it to me, please.*

English speakers use fall-rise [↘↗] intonation for uncertainty, doubt, and reservation. So, it is fair to say that a fall-rise nucleus often conveys the idea of *but*, for instance, *Bob will undoubtedly win the presidential election*. Contrarily, they use rise-fall [↗↘] intonation to show (dis)approval or to convey that the speaker is impressed. On the other hand, they use level intonation [→]for sharing routine information or making neutral assertions. (Roach, 2009)

In an English conversation, speakers often want to foreground certain things and background others. In such cases, the intonation is higher on what the speakers want to underscore, or the speakers use rising and falling intonation sharply so that the important words stand out (Kenworthy, 1987), which often carry more semantic weight. Such words are nouns, verbs, and adjectives. The function words like articles, auxiliaries, and prepositions carry less weight, yet speakers could also destress content words if it takes more time to pronounce stressed syllables (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994).

If English speakers presume something is not essential or has already been known to listeners, the intonation goes down, and the new information is emphasised. Ladefoged (1982) argues that "the topic of a sentence is less likely to receive the tonic accent than the comment which is made on that topic" (p. 94) because the comment is unpredictable. Accordingly, a falling tone indicates shared information, and a rising tone indicates new information (Cauldwell & Hewings, 1996). Additionally, English speakers use a non-falling tone when they start a topic and a falling tone when they want to close the topic.

Indeed, intonation allows English speakers to communicate their purpose (Verdugo, 2005). However, the choice of tone that non-native speakers use is different, implying native and non-native speakers use distinct intonation patterns when they speak English (Verdugo, 2005). Although intonation is not as difficult as stress for Nepalis, they tend to use a narrow pitch range, which can cause intelligibility problems because it can function as a level tone and indicate uncertainty in English (Snow & Balog, 2002; Verdugo, 2005). Indeed, when speakers want to demonstrate certainty, they must use falling intonation to prevent communication breakdowns and unintelligibility between interlocutors (Verdugo, 2005). Though the context is vital to navigating the speakers'

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purpose, the contextual rules of English intonation could pose a problem for Nepalis. As Cauldwell and Hewings (1996) point out, spontaneous discourse may scantily follow the norm of new information being expressed with rising and shared information with falling intonation. Accordingly, there is always a possibility that speakers might use a level tone for familiar information (or to repeat ritualistic details) and a rising tone for the last item in a list expressed earlier if they want to add a new item (Cauldwell & Hewings, 1996).

Discussion and Implications

The current analyses reveal huge differences between English and Nepali pronunciation. Because the differences are inherent to the two languages, teachers of Nepali ELs can focus on making their pupils aware of those variations and prepare them through carefully designed lessons and assessments. So, Nepali ELs must get ample opportunities to become aware of the distinctions in pronunciation between their home language and English and receive sufficient training to enhance intelligibility. However, awareness and mechanical training would not suffice as they could overwhelm ELs with theory. Put differently, EFL and ESL teachers must use varieties of research-based activities and strategies proposed in different sources (Roach, 2009) and create an authentic learning environment, where ELs can meaningfully use and internalise the target language pronunciation. Yet the environment should allow ELs to concentrate on problematic pronunciation issues. Thus, teachers should carefully devise activities prioritising learning tasks, giving learners sufficient time to listen and practise the problems, providing them with timely feedback, and assessing their progress (Kenworthy, 1987). Also, teachers must allow learners to use their schema as suggested by Vygotsky (1978), who argued that higher order cognition is achieved when teachers scaffold learning from what learners already know to what they need to learn.

This study will serve as a resource to many. Educators, in specific, will get insights into Nepali ELs' English pronunciation issues to revisit curricula, educational materials, lesson plans, assessments, and pedagogical approaches in practice to address the oral communication issues of Nepali ELs in Nepal and other relevant situations. This study will also inform them about the potential areas of English pronunciation that could lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding with Nepali ELs. Researchers could find it as a useful model to conduct a comprehensive and comparative analysis of pronunciation elements across languages and extend this study by collecting data from ELs.

Conclusion

We examined elements of English pronunciation that could cause intelligibility issues for Nepali ELs. The current analyses suggest that Nepali ELs may need help to use both

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segmental and prosodic features of English intelligibly due to the differences in pronunciation features between English and Nepali. Nepali has far less sound inventory than English in terms of segmental features, contributing to the intelligibility challenges. Specific to consonants, English has more voiceless consonants than Nepali whereas the latter has contrastive consonants absent in the first. Also, while Nepali has fewer vowels and diphthongs than English, it does not have triphthongs at all, adding to the complexity for Nepalis to use oral English intelligibly. Finally, while English and Nepali both share specific suprasegmental characteristics like word-stress, rhythm, connected speech, and intonation, they do not complement each other because of the differences in their purpose, contexts, and functions.

Though we identified English pronunciation issues that could cause intelligibility challenges for Nepalis, the problems analysed may not fully represent and reflect the English pronunciation issues of all Nepali ELs as English is a global language, and communication strategies and awareness of these challenges may enhance communication and intelligibility even with these divergences. Second, since interactions between people are primarily held in real-life contexts, the isolated English pronunciation issues described in this paper may have less bearing on people's day-to-day interactions, but if the problems are not addressed timely, they could lead to stigmatisation and stereotyping (Vincze & MacIntyre, 2017).

The attitudes of interlocutors, acceptance of ambiguity in pronunciation (e.g., awareness and exposure to different varieties of English) and understanding the message, and willingness to collaborate positively with different users of English with different accents and pronunciations may compensate for some of these challenges (see Ates et al., 2015). Therefore, future studies need to consider social, political, and cultural issues, not just the linguistic ones addressed in this study. As this paper intends to raise awareness of English pronunciation issues among the Nepali ELs caused by differences in English and Nepali and support EFL or ESL teaching to facilitate learners' communication in international settings, we ask readers to judge these (de)merits cautiously.

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Three Dynamic Methods of Assessing the Reading Comprehension of ESL/EFL Learners

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Abstract

Reading is a complicated cognitive procedure of deciphering symbols to create meaning. It's a complicated relationship that the reader has with the text and is lead by a reader's previous knowledge, experiences, attitude, and culture. Second language (L2) reading comprehension is perhaps a more complicated procedure and there's a need to ensure that L2 reading comprehension is being properly and accurately assessed. Currently, there are several different authentic assessment methods in practice (i.e. Author, 2015), but most others are similar in nature and used for similar purposed. This article offers a brief introduction and an objective discussion regarding the strengths and weaknesses of three of the most common methods to assessing reading comprehension: the multiple-choice test, the written recall method, and cloze reading tests.

Key words Reading comprehension, multiple-choice test, written recall protocol, cloze test

Introduction

In the field of education, reading is one of the most frequently assessed skills (Collins, & Lindström, 2021; Sweet & Snow, 2013; Wixson & Peters, 1987), with the primary goal of reading being comprehension (Collins, & Lindström, 2021; Farr & Carey, 1986; Sweet & Snow, 2013). Johnstron (1983) suggests that there are two views of comprehension: a process or a product, and describes it as a *process* where comprehension is seen as the change in, or state of, knowledge which has occurred. As a *product,* it is viewed as the process by which the change, or state, comes about.

Most modern assessments of reading comprehension assume that comprehension comes from the outcome of the reader's interrelationship with a text (Meyers, 1991; Perkins &

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Parish, 1988; Seda, 1989; Sternberg, 1991). This correlates with both the top-down and interactive methods to reading, where the reader, rather than the text, is at the center of the reading activity (Nunan, 1991). A product of reading comprehension can be measured by asking readers to answer questions about the text (Johnston, 1983). However, examining a complicated and rigorous procedures involving second language (L2) reading comprehension is not always an easy task. Bernhardt (1991) states "if a test is to adequately assess L2 reading ability it must acknowledge the status of the reader's knowledge base," and "a successful assessment mechanism must be integrative in nature" (p.193).

Three of the most common methods of assessment in reading comprehension are the multiple-choice test, the written recall method, and the cloze reading test, which are discussed below.

Written Recall Protocol Method
The written recall method is now used more often in L2 reading studies for the method of assessing comprehension (Bassey, & Vogt, 2022; Dixon, Oxley, Gellert, & Nash, 2022). The recall procedure is a simple tool where the final tally comes from the summing of the individual propositions properly recalled. Therefore, item and reliability analyses compared with the ones analyzing multiple-choice tests are recommended be done on recall procedures. However, in first language (L1) and L2 reading research, there seems to be an agreement that the recall of texts is a valid and integrative method to assess the process of reading comprehension (e.g. Bernhardt, 1983, 1991; Brantmeier, 2016; Carr, 2011; Hammadou, 1991; Johnston, 1983; Lee, 1990; Heinz, 1993). Bernhardt (1991) contends that the written recall method is a well-grounded measurement of reading comprehension because it reflects modern L2 theories (e.g. the constructivist model).

First language and L2 research has shown that free recall does provide valid information (Carrell, 1993; Clark, 1982, Lee, 1990), and Johnston (1983) believes that the recall method is a direct method of assessing the text-reader interaction. The recall method can also shed light on other ways learners use to remember information and can uncover the methods of reconstruction that the learner uses to code data and words while reading. Further, Bernhardt (1991) states that the recall method can circumvent some of the pitfalls that are connected to multiple-choice tests because they are not providing key information or indications to text content and the reader must also understand the text good enough to remember it clearly and logically. Therefore, the recall method doesn't interfere with a learner's understanding. Instead, according to Bernhardt (1991), it "constitutes a purer measure of comprehension, uncomplicated by linguistic performance and tester interference" (p. 200). Bernhardt (1991) outlined 9 advantages to the use of the recall method:

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1. The reader is unable to guess answers.
2. It does not influence understanding.
3. The technique is easy for teachers to prepare.
4. It induces positive feeling because readers are not penalized for paraphrasing.
5. It provides both quantitative and qualitative data.
6. It reveals grammar weaknesses that interfere with comprehension.
7. It stresses the importance of comprehension.
8. It reveals individual comprehension strategies.
9. Teachers can customize instruction to individual needs.

Bernhardt (1991) also suggested that the best method of measuring reading comprehension is the immediate recall method procedure, and offered a six step procedure:
1. A text is selected of about 200 words.
2. Students are told to read the article as many times as they need and when they're done, they're told to write as much as they can recall from the text
3. Learners are given an adequate amount of time to read a text, more than once.
4. The learners are told to remove the text while writing things down that they recall.
5. The protocols written by the students are collected
6. The data are evaluated.

However, while there are some strengths to using the written recall protocol, there are also some practical and realistic objections to the recall method that need to be considered. A large problem with this procedure is that the rewriting of information is not necessarily the same as comprehension. A reader may understand an idea in the text, but not remember it and include it in the recall. According to Johnston (1983), nothing can be said about the understanding and memory of what is not recalled. And, a reader may also recall something they read, but not comprehend its meaning.

Another limitation of using the recall method is that there are some readers, especially English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) readers, who may have difficulty in expressing their ideas in writing (Maarof, 1998). The recall method heavily relies on production skills which learners may or may not have. A bad recall isn't necessarily because they do not understand. Instead, it may just be a reflection of poor writing productions skills. This is especially true in a L2 or foreign language. Some researchers (e.g. Hammadou, 1991; and Lee, 1990; Maarof, 1998) have suggested a solution to this by using written recall in the readers' native language. Therefore, weak language production skills should not interfere with measuring the learner's comprehension. However, there is no agreement on this point, as Cohen (1994)

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cited one study that found no significant difference between the recalls in the native language of Japanese and the L2 of English for advanced ESL students in Japan.

Schmidt-Rinehart (1994) has also questioned whether or not the recall method is an authentic method of assessing L2 learners' reading comprehension. She analyzed research that used the recall protocol procedure and came to the following conclusion: "although the advantages of this comprehension measure are well documented …one would rarely be asked to perform a similar task in real life" (p. 186). And, while other researchers (e.g. Heinz, 2004) have argued that the skill of orally describing what one reads is the same as a written description, this researcher believes that oral production and written production are different skills and should be assessed differently.

Scoring written recalls is probably the biggest problem. One means for evaluating recalls as described by Meyer (1975), involves separating the text into idea units, or units of text that contain one complete idea. These idea units are then weighted according to their importance to the text. Another means for evaluating recalls by Johnston (1970) involves a scoring system. This system uses 'pausal' acceptability units to divide up the text. Each unit is created by asking the learners to indicate where pausing occurs (i.e. the place where the reader pauses when reading orally to catch their breath, highlight something, or to enhance meaning). Each pausal unit is then evaluated by their connection to the content of the text. Generally, this is decided by a group of native (or near native) speakers who have been taught how to rate and work independently. (For a more detailed information regarding the pausal scoring system, see Berkemeyer, 1989; Bernhardt, 1991; Maarof, 1998) Both of these systems of evaluation are still being used today. However, in a cross-validation study between the two systems by Bernhardt (1991), she concluded that Johnson's system appeared to be better because it provides the same information as Meyer's system, but it is less time consuming.

More drawbacks that the recall method has are that traditional scoring is very time consuming (Alderson, 2000). Reading learners' writings could take up a considerable amount of time, especially in large classes. There could also be problems in administering the recall protocol task that could interfere with the results. Alderson (2000) and Lee (1986) both objected to the quick recall procedure, stating that it might just a test of memory instead of assessing reading comprehension.

Multiple-Choice Testing

Multiple-choice testing is probably the most well-known, and used, form of reading comprehension assessment used today (Brown & Abdulnabi, 2017; Butler, 2018; Farr, Pritchard, & Smitten, 1990; Perkins & Parish, 1988; Statman, 1988). According to

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Johnston (1983), they are the "most researched, most maligned, most difficult to construct, most abused, yet most functional of all items (when properly harnessed)" (p.59). In general, a multiple-choice reading tests will consist of a fairly short text, perhaps a few paragraphs, with a set of fixed questions or statements pertaining to the text (Butler, 2018). The test taker then chooses the answer they think matches the question or statement. In theory, if the test taker understands what they have read, they should be able to select the correct answers. As with the written recall method, multiple-choice tests have both numerous advantages and limitations.

Aiken (1987) provides a list of several advantages:
1. They are more reliable than other means because of their objectivity and their ability to be less susceptible to guessing, as compared to true/false tests.
2. They are versatile in measuring specific and complex objectives at nearly all
3. proficiency levels.
4. They can provide an adequate sampling of the domains to be tested.
5. They can be quickly and accurately scored.
6. They can enable an easy and objective item analysis.
7. They can provide diagnostic information through analyses of responses to the
8. alternatives in the items.

While there are many researchers who agree with Aiken (e.g. Farr & Carey, 1986; Oller, 1979), other researchers (e.g. Bernhardt, 1991; Perkins & Parish, 1988) have pointed out several disadvantages of the multiple-choice test. The first is that there can be only one correct answer, and because of this, good items are harder to construct. Since some multiple-choice tests consist of choices stating "all of the above", it can often be confusing for test takers, especially those with limited English proficiency. Further, if a test taker comes across this style of question and can identify two answers, possibly out of four or five, they can easily select the "all of the above" answer as being correct without actually understanding the other possible answers. Often, a longer response time is needed in order to read through the options. Another disadvantage is that the emphasis is on the recognition of the predetermined correct answer, and not necessarily on recall or organization.

Several researchers believe that the multiple-choice tests actually penalize creative readers (e.g. Perkins & Parish, 1988; Spivey, 1989). In fact, even Aiken (1987) agrees and stated that multiple-choice tests tend to indulge "shrewd, nimble-witted, rapid readers" (p. 44) and they can even encourage inferior instruction and bad study habits. Since there is an emphasis on the recognition of the predetermined correct answer, and

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not necessarily on recall or organization, it may be easy for test takers to merely use general test taking strategies instead of actually trying to comprehend the text. This point may be illustrated by the enormous amount of English language test preparation schools or courses throughout the world, and the numbers of students who are deemed *qualified* by these exams (e.g. the TOEFL or IELTS) and enter into the higher education system of English speaking countries with almost nonfunctional English abilities.

Cloze Tests
A Cloze test is intended to gage a learners' reading comprehension skills by giving the learner small texts with areas left blank where normally there be a word, and then having the learners to write in the empty spaces with appropriate, and grammatically correct, words. When taking a cloze test one must have the skills to comprehend what the text is about and the vocabulary used. One must be able to identify the correct words, or style or word, which should be entered into the blank spaces of the text. The term *cloze* comes from the spoken abbreviation of the word closure. The cloze test, in many forms, has been widely dispensed for the evaluation of both L1 and L2 learning and teaching.

There are generally five central styles of cloze reading comprehension tests that teachers can utilize: The fixed-rate deletion cloze, the selective deletion cloze, multiple-choice cloze, the cloze elide, and the C-test (Gree, 2022; Ikeguchi 1995;; Klein-Braley & Raatz 1984; Weir 1990; Zulianti, Wiratno, & Novia, 2022). In the fixed-rate deletion cloze, following a few sentences every *nth* word is taken out and left blank. Normally, it's about the sixth word. However, Brown (1983) believes that with larger articles, about the twelfth or fourteenth word should be removed so that learners whose language ability is lower. In a selective deletion cloze test, the test giver selects the words that will be deleted from a text.

The main purpose of implementing this style of test is to control how difficult the text is and/or to measure the precise awareness of grammar items and/or vocabulary items. Multiple choice cloze tests are similar in that there are words that have been deleted, but many different items to select from for every empty space are provided for the test takers. The cloze elide test is quite unique. For this style of cloze test, wrong words have been intentionally placed the text, and the test takers need to locate the wrong words and insert a correct word. The C-test is also unique, in that it is created by taking out a piece of every second word in a text. The test takers must then complete each unfinished word.

The meaning of how successful one is on a cloze test varies because it depends on the larger objectives surrounding the test. The test may be dependent on if the test is an objective test, where the test takers are given a group of words to utilize in the cloze, or a subjective test, where the test takers are supposed to write in the empty spaces with a

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word that would allow the given sentences to make grammatical sense. The score on a cloze test is generally the percentage of the correct words entered. However, since the intended objective of the cloze test is to test comprehension, synonyms and misspellings are usually allowed.

There are several advantages and disadvantages in using a cloze test. One of the main advantages of using a cloze test is the ease and speed that a language instructor can create it. Virtually any text that has been identified at a language appropriate level can be used to create a cloze test. All a teacher has to do, is omit some of the words in the text. This feature alone makes the cloze test highly popular with language teachers.

The close test is also quite versatile for language learning. Besides comprehension assessment, a cloze test can also be used as a learning activity or for classroom or individual language practice. Due to the relative ease of its design and the advances in technology, there are many cloze tests available online for individual or classroom use. And, there are even specific websites for teachers to create their own cloze tests that match their curriculum.

The procedure for taking a cloze test can also be quite simple and time efficient. In theory, since the test is assessing a learners' reading comprehension, the length of the test will be determined by the learners' reading speed. If the learner comprehends the text, they're likely to fill in the blanks and move quite quickly. If the learner does not understand the text, they would simply leave the blank spaces empty and then continue reading the text. However, theory is not always a reality in the classroom.

It might actually take the learners a long time to complete a cloze test if there are no given time constraints. Learners who do comprehend the text may still need additional time to think of, and select, their answers. In fact, one of the main disadvantages of a cloze test is that it is not merely testing a learners' comprehension, but also their amount of additional vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, the cloze test may provide inaccurate, and invalid, results for reading comprehension because learners may in fact understand the text, but still leave blanks empty because they do not know the appropriate word to place in the blank space. Learners who do understand the text may spend an enormous amount of time trying to think of an appropriate response, and this may also lead to a learners' frustration and tension level, which may also have a negative influence over the test takers' overall success.

Another disadvantage of the cloze test is the amount of time it might take to rate the test results. This depends on which style of cloze a teacher is using, but since there may be more than one correct answer given, it may take the rater a longer time to assess the

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answers given by the learner. While word choice may be limited by the test design to a specific grammatical item, like an adjective, the learners' choice of words may require a deeper evaluation. The learners' cultural background may also play a large role in the learners' word selection. It would be important to consider this while assessing the test outcomes.

A final point about cloze tests is that there is disagreement about what the tests can and cannot measure. Some researchers believe that a cloze test can assess the language learner's general communication abilities in the goal language (Ajideh, Ansarin, & Mozaffarzadeh, 2020; Hanania and Shikhani 1986 Suryani, 2014). However, other researchers contend that cloze tests can only assess the simplest of L1 and L2 reading understanding (Davood, Borzabadi, & Farahani, 2011; Gree, 2022; Shanahan, Kamil and Tobin, 1982; Zulianti, Wiratno, & Novia, 2022).

Conclusion

Reading is a complicated cognitive procedure of decoding symbols so that one can generate meaning. It's a complicated involvement with the reader and a text, and it's directed by the reader's prior knowledge, experiences, attitude, and culture. Readers may utilize several reading methods to help them understand words and decode.   Therefore, teachers and researchers should also utilize a variety of methods to evaluate and assess a learner's reading comprehension.

While all three of the reading comprehension assessment tools mentioned in this article provide their own unique advantages to both learners and teachers, they also all have their own disadvantages. Based upon these findings, it seems clear that the best approach to assessing learner's reading comprehension would be a multiple-measures approach. Several other researchers (e.g. Aiken, 1987; Farr & Carey, 1986; Johnston, 1983; Wolf, 1993a, 1993b; Zulianti, Wiratno, & Novia, 2022) have encouraged instructors to use several methods of assessing reading comprehension, using a blend of both product and process assessments. Since each student may perform differently on different assessment tools, and since there may also be something different with the quality of information one recalls as a function of text structure, using a multiple-measure approach should provide more accurate and valid information that teachers can use to assess their students and better design instruction to what their learners need. In doing so, and instructor should be creating more active and interactive student-centered instruction.

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Teaching Note
Constructing Learners' Self-Confidence Through Recorded Speech

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As schools offer more flexibility in the ways students are assessed, recording tools such as Flip, Padlet, and various learning management systems can be useful alternatives for written assignments. Students can demonstrate their learning verbally, but first they must be comfortable using recording tools so the medium does not hinder their communication.

For many English learners, recording their own speaking creates anxiety that reduces the utility of the exercise. Students with this anxiety focus on being succinct rather than showing depth of knowledge. Teachers can help students reduce this anxiety with low-cognitive load exposure to recording practice.

Use model narration from authentic sources

Mimicking the fluency of natural speech is a useful scaffolding strategy to begin building students' confidence. To find authentic examples, teachers can locate source material through broadcast resources such as Voice of America, News in Levels, or National Public Radio's Morning Edition. Next, identify a clip of recorded speech (30 seconds or less) that comes with a transcript. Divide the transcript to make Partner A and Partner B roles. As a class, read the transcript aloud in a manner that engages all learners. Echo and choral reading allow multiple opportunities for English learners to practice forming unknown words and tricky pronunciations. The goal is not for them to comprehend the story they are reading, but to read as fluently and confidently as possible by imitating the expression and tone of the original broadcaster.

Repetition and feedback are keys to constructing confident speakers

Once whole-class reading and discussion is complete, have students practice Partner A & B reading with four separate classmates. This is a great time to stand up and move, as movement can release some tension students will feel from the discomfort of reading unfamiliar words.

After practicing the transcript four times, it is time for students to record. Have them create a single recording. If they make a mistake, encourage them to not stop or re-do, just keep going. Overcoming stumbles is required to build true confidence, and fluent English is not synonymous with error-free English.

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Teachers can assess by listening for one or two key lines or words that they expect students might struggle with—listen for how they handle their errors. Did Marco stumble over a challenging word? How did he recover? Did Chaeyun read with expression similar to the broadcaster? Remember, the goal is recording their voice speaking with as much fluency and confidence as possible.

Repeat this process as many times as your students need until they all understand the purpose of the exercise. After 5-10 practices, teachers should be able to hear student fluency increase as they overcome recording anxiety. At that point, ELs are ready to have some scaffolding removed.

Increase rigor by interleaving recorded speech with content

English learners can remain focused on building confidence with recorded speech while expanding their abilities by substituting sentence frame scaffolds in place of transcripts. The sentence frames can be about any topic, but it is helpful to incorporate content as an alternative to a written assignment. For example, in language arts a teacher might ask students to practice using character voice from a specific text. The image below shows an example of a recorded speech assignment students complete after reading the beginning of *Treasure Island*. Not only does this assignment allow them an opportunity to record their speech using a natural, first person point of view, it also allows the teacher a means to assess what students understand about Jim Hawkins' character.

English learners can benefit greatly from speech recording tools if they are suitably prepared before clicking the RECORD button. Beginning with heavily-scaffolded broadcast narrations and transcripts to build familiarity with recording exposes students to the medium in a way that limits their cognitive load. Repeating this practice will reduce anxiety while building confidence and fluency necessary to speed them along their journey to full proficiency.

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Maria Cruz, earned her PhD in literacy and studied with the Fulbright Teachers for Global Classrooms program in Senegal. She teaches high school ELA and ELD where she explores the intersection of literacy and educational technology with English learners. Find her on Twitter @DrCruzerman

Teaching Note
Preparing For a Language Teaching Job Interview: 10 Tips

Laura G. Holland, University of Oregon Emirata

Here's the scenario: You are finishing your language teaching education, preparing for job interviews. Below are several suggestions based on experience both being interviewed and serving on hiring committees over the decades. This list does not include every contingency or skill area but serves as a great way to give you direction to organize your thoughts and responses. Higgins (2014) suggests deploying a model such as STAR (situation, task, action, result) to structure more coherent answers, particularly in the "heat of the moment" when nerves can interfere.

1. Do your homework
Investigate several details about the position and context for the job you seek. Practice *out loud* to guide how you will answer a variety of questions they might ask to help build confidence and fluency. Come prepared with 2-3 specific questions about the job to show your commitment.

2. Control your pacing and voice
When they ask a question, take a brief pause to gather your thoughts. Speak fluidly and as clearly as possible. Avoid rising intonation in statements, which makes us sound unsure. Breathe.

3. Give complete answers and *always* give supporting examples you might share.
Practice structuring your answers using a system such as STAR, where you discuss the:
- Situation: give a brief summary of the context
- Task: what was expected of you
- Action: what specific steps you took
- Result: what was the outcome

Practice answering in this model using the sample questions found in Tips 4, 5, 6 and 10 below.

4. Discuss active learning principles
Come with examples you learned about for discovery learning and challenge-based projects and how you will promote learner autonomy, boost critical thinking skills, and employ student-to-student communication.

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5. Sequences for (integrated) skills

You will likely be asked to describe a reading, or other skill area activity sequence. As part of your preparation, write out a detailed plan for a reading, writing, or listening sequence that incorporates multiple integrated skills (speaking pairs with everything) and details the sequence from any initial warm-up or preparation to activate background knowledge all the way through how the material will be assessed. Address how you will:

- incorporate collaborative learning and peer interaction?
- scaffold the entire process, then gently take away the support steps?
- engage learners and allow them to personalize the material?
- build in student autonomy?
- present new vocabulary?
- provide active practice?
- assess formatively? peer assessment? final summative and alternative assessments?
- promote critical thinking skills?
- Deploy available tech tools?

6. Teach pronunciation

Tritch Yoshida (2016) advises both native speaking and non-native speaking teachers should set the pronunciation bar neither too high nor too low through avoidance. Whether you speak English as L1 or L2, make the case for why and how you teach this severely under-practiced subskill and the tools and approach you will use.

7. Be ready to answer: "What is your personal philosophy of language teaching?"

Discuss how "communicative language learning" continues to reign as a *best practices* approach. Tie together your practice with their theoretical underpinnings. Prepare several examples to illustrate.

8. **Describe your areas of weakness**

Try to frame your answer through an "improvement lens" while being wholly honest, asking yourself, "what is an area you would like to improve? What are some examples of how you have already begun working on this? Some examples I've seen:

- I haven't had much training in teaching pronunciation, so I'm looking forward to doing more professional development in that area. I've been attending webinars and watching YouTube videos I find online and at conferences. I check with other teachers to share practical tips. I do peer observation with teachers I know have this expertise and keep notes to try with my own students.
- In my last school (or in my culture's educational system), the expectation was to give more lectures, so I have been experimenting with more active learning techniques to boost those skills as it's common practice in the global language learning and teaching world.

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9. Build your confidence at interviewing
Apply for everything! Jobs you are interested in, jobs you aren't sure you are qualified for or that you want, jobs you have no intention of taking *because* you will be more confident in that interview. It provides excellent practice developing your interviewing skills, and you might just find unexpected opportunities you didn't think you wanted.

10. Additional questions you might be asked
What teaching tools do you use to engage learners?
Why did you decide to become a language teacher?
How do you keep students motivated and prevent frustration?
How will you differentiate for multi-level learners?
How do you deal with low/high motivated students?
What type of teaching strategies would you use to teach children/teens/adults a language?
What types of assessments would you use and why?
How do you intend to manage behavior in your classroom?
What leadership skills do you have to offer?

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https://www.theguardian.com/careers/careers-blog/star-technique-competency-based-interview
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Book Review

Engaging Online Language Learners: A practical guide

Reviewed by Holly Satterfield, Tokyo International University

Pawan, F., Daley, S., Kou, X, & Bonk, C. J. (2022). Engaging online language learners: A practical guide. TESOL Press

Editors' Note: ORTESOL would like to thank TESOL Press for providing this book free of charge.

How instructors design their curriculum has changed greatly due to the pandemic. While online instruction has been available for years, it has not been the mainstream medium of instruction. Many current instructors did not have experience with online teaching practices before classrooms were rushed online and years after the beginning of the pandemic, online instruction is still common. A Review Of Engaging Online Language Learners - A Practical Guide helps bridge the gap for instructors looking to develop their professional skills in a new age of online teaching.

The book is divided into three sections: The Whys of Engaging Students in Online Teaching, The Whys to Engage Online Language Learners, and The Next Steps to Sustain Online Teaching Expertise. With a total of ten chapters, important points for topics such as teaching methodology, classroom practice, and future development in online instruction are highlighted. In the preface, Pawan et al. describes how emergency remote teaching left many teachers and students with uncertainty for their professional and academic lives. Each chapter is briefly summarized with the important themes highlighted. This is followed by online resource information and references for further study.

In part I, Vygotskyian research-based information for teaching frameworks and class implementation methods are provided. Current trends in education are explained alongside how online instruction has an influence on current learners and instructors. Including frameworks for principles in online learning is essential for instructors to consider their own teaching style and how it transfers to an online platform. Motivation is a common theme throughout part I and utilizing various teaching approaches to support students needs is essential to consider in order to maintain student motivation.

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Online resources and teaching approaches for educational purposes are included along with a description of its uses. For instructors transitioning to an online platform, taking advantage of the range of online language learning material available helps navigate different educational needs. Part I describes some of these challenges, summarizes current trends in education, and provides appropriate online resources for different trends.

Principles in online instruction provide educators with frameworks for curriculum development. Specific principles introduced and expanded on in part II include the community of inquiry (CoI) framework and the TEC-VARIETY framework. Considering these frameworks, classroom activity approaches are introduced to engage students in a variety of tasks focusing on language use and fluency. One approach alone is not the key to student motivation. Allowing students to partake in different approaches keeps classroom engagement diverse.
A developed list of activities stemming from the principles established in the beginning of part II are available along with detailed descriptions of purpose, methodology, age range, and scaffolding needs. These activities are all created with an online classroom setting in mind and include online programs and resources that may be used. Using previous knowledge or instructional guidance provided in previous chapters, the activities listed may be adapted for different classroom needs.

Online instruction is an effective way of learning, especially so when instructors and education administrators have knowledge in online instructional practices. Part III shows the importance of understanding online instructional practices and how they are applied to the classroom. A strong point of online instruction is the ability to view lessons (if recorded) and material again to reflect on educational professionalism, content, and development. Taking advantage of these features is beneficial for instructors and administration in the area of professional development.

Engaging Online Learners provides instructors with a wide range of topics backed by research in how to improve the online learning experience. While a detailed guide, a previous knowledge of teaching methodology and research themes is highly recommended for comprehension without further research necessary. Online learning is here to stay and developing the skills to facilitate a successful online environment is an inevitable skill needed for the present and the future of education.

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