

DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED BY AFRICAN STUDENTS  
WITH ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS AT SECONDARY LEVEL

BY

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## SYNOPSIS

The language and learning problems experienced by the majority of African pupils at Secondary level are constantly in the public eye. The cause of many of these problems lies in the primary school system, where English is introduced as the language of learning from Grade 5 onwards. At this stage pupils are expected to learn a large volume of vocabulary to cope with all the subjects in English.

This paper offers a framework for analysing language teaching issues and problems. It explores the relationship between education and the language of learning, language ability and cognitive skills, teaching styles, classroom materials and the learning process.

Arising out of these investigations are a set of guidelines as to the major factors that affect the readability and comprehensibility of textbooks. The paper ends with a set of guiding principles for a language policy aimed at providing maximum learning opportunities for all children. The ultimate hope is that the suggested approach would in the long help in overcoming some of the century old frustrations and failures and contribute to the improvement and greater effectiveness of language teaching that we all strive to achieve.

## CHAPTER 1

### 1. THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Reagan, (1990, cited in Beukes, 1991), language planning is generally understood to refer to public policy decisions aimed at solving problems relating to language use, status and development in a socio-political context. That, language planning plays an important role in most developing societies very often with education as primary target: “nowhere is language planning more crucial than in education, universally recognised as a powerful instrument of change”. (ibid).

The Language struggle has been a focus of disagreement throughout South Africa’s educational history. In contemporary South Africa, the issue of the language used as medium of instruction (MOI) has been most controversial in black education, where the government’s policy of initial native language instruction has been announced as an attempt to retribalize black South Africans.

As Hartshorne, puts it “language policies for education are highly charged political issues and seldom if ever on educational grounds alone, When they are made, they are almost invariable subject to mistrust and misunderstanding by some section of the community, as it is virtually impossible to please everyone” (cited in D. Young 1987:112).

For instance, when Njabulo Ndebele suggested that the history of the spread of the English language throughout the world is inseparable form the history of the spread of English and American Imperialism” (1987:3; cited in Wright, 1990), he meant that the English language has been, and is accompanied by a political linguistic agenda. The much more interesting point to be made is that the agenda is embedded in the language itself.

Gough (1985:123), supports this by acknowledging that the history of language policy in Africa since colonisation has been one of linguistic repression. That it is perhaps less known that in pre-colonial times this continent was one where multilingualism and multiculturalism flourished. However, it was the importation of European notions of modern nation state in which cultural and linguistic unity were equated with national unity and identity that began a history of linguistic repression in Africa.

That is true in the sense that historically, South African has fragmented itself into different racial, language and cultural groups which are further defined by the allocation of specific geographical areas. As Huwes puts it 'language is a distinguishing characteristic of the human being, it is at the heart of the culture of people, it is what makes people see themselves as different, and it is related to the issue of identify, position and power. When linked to colour, prejudice or class privilege, for example, language can become a highly emotional issue, capable of being mobilised as a powerful social instrument" (1979:116).

The NEPI (1992) report states that, in South Africa government policy in education is often in conflict with the policies' of what may be described as extra statal bodies, which have sort to exercise pressure on policy. But in the end, in education it is the 'users' (teachers, pupils, parents, the communities) who have to exert the greatest pressure on government policy within a general pattern of reaction. Lockett (1993), supports this by noting that, any top-down attempts to impose a new language policy in education are bound to fail. That language planning process has to work within constraints of our present structure and its progress will be tied to wider process of social transformation.

In Eastman's point of view, the first approach is of the so-called 'political linguistic' who 'examines' language policy at the level of the nation or the state. The second approach is that of the sociolinguist who accepts that language and language policies do not exist in a socially neutral environment, but that in language planning the underlying needs and attitudes of the speech community must be address in addition to the demand of the state or nation. The author suggests that it is the latter approach,

since it involves the least political input, which should offer the best results in a multilingual country such as South Africa (cited in Beukes, 1991).

## 1.1 Motivation

As a subject - advisor for English as a second language in the North West Province (North West In-service Training centre) having taught English as a second language for a number of years in the former Department of Education and training (DET) schools, i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary institutions and taking into account research findings in relation to education it could be noted that African students especially those in Secondary Schools, experience linguistic and learning problems resulting from their use of English as a medium of instruction.

**Such problems could be emanating from the following aspects:**

\*African students use English which is a foreign language to them as a medium of instruction (the recent terminology used - language of learning) in schools.

\*The sudden transfer from mother tongue medium of instruction to English from standard 3 onwards, brings about a sudden shock and confusion as students find themselves faced with a situation in which they have to struggle to acquire competence in the two languages i.e. mother tongue (L1) and the English language (ESL).

\*The majority of African students are taught by teachers who are non-native speakers of the target language. Some of the teachers are underqualified, whereas, others, because of the poor training they have received, are incompetent in English. As a result there is a heavy reliance on transmission modes of teaching which result in the high failure rate in schools.

\*Some of the textbooks used in secondary schools are above the cognitive and reading levels of the students. Such texts are used in large classes with a teacher - student ratio of 1:50 which makes it difficult for the teachers to attend to students individually.



Vorster, (1991) supports this by stating that “In the typical black Primary School classroom the pupil teacher ratio precludes any significant communicative use of English by any particular child; the teacher’s English typically does not even approach native-speaker competence; and the teacher-pupil relationship has much in common with that of a drill sergeant and a squad of recruits” p.55.

The researcher will attempt to back-up these presuppositions with a thorough investigation and literature review on the learning and reading problems encountered by students with specific reference to the following aspects:

\*Whether textbooks used in secondary schools cause or address such difficulties.

\*Whether there are any Academic Support Programmes offered to students, how should they be organised and in which standard(s) should they be introduced.

\*Whether there is a way in which poorly trained and underqualified teachers could be assisted to improve their quality of teaching in schools.

However, as the scope of this research paper is limited, the researcher will select one aspect from those listed above and investigate it in detail i.e. whether textbooks used in secondary schools cause or address student’s learning and reading difficulties.

### 1.3 Background to the problem

The high failure rate in African schools is still continuing in the South African education dispensation.

African students use English as the language for learning all subjects (excluding vernacular) in schools from Standard 3 onwards. Their language skills are poorly developed both in their L1 and ESL, and the learning situation in the Junior Primary phase is too limited to prepare children for the range of skills and vocabulary that underlie subjects offered in schools. As a result students experience problems such as

interlanguage that lead to poor language usage.

For example "The second language learner may apply a rule from the internalised grammar system of his mother tongue to the target language, or he may apply a rule he has learnt in the target language via analogy or for any reason to a structure where it should not be applied". Kroes, (1994)

In most South African schools, textbooks are widely used as a basis for learning and knowledge transmission in all subjects in the secondary curriculum, particularly in schools under the former DET.

There is also a demonstrable extremely close relation between the school syllabi and the content of the textbooks which creates strong teacher and learner dependencies on such texts.

Furthermore, the literature curriculum in most schools demands that a broad range of prescribed texts should be studied rather than selecting one or two texts to be studied thoroughly. Such schools are in favour of what Carter, and Long, (1991) refer to as the breadth approach as opposed to the depth approach. According to the authors, those who are in favour of the breadth approach argue that reading literature effectively depends on a wide experience of different literary texts, all of which describe varying situations in different styles and conventions.

However, it could be argued that while the breadth approach exposes students to a variety of texts, styles and conventions used by various authors, learning to read effectively depends on a detailed, close engagement with linguistic particulars of a text. The strong version of the argument is that once one text has been read accurately then greater fluency will develop, that is, the ultimate goal should be to produce fluent and competent readers and to synthesise in-depth and in-breadth approaches to reading.

Perhaps, one aspect in the education fraternity which could support the researcher's presuppositions is that of multiracial schools in South Africa. There are African students who attend schools with white students. Some of them join multiracial

schools in standard 6 or 7. These students are faced with the problem of competing with their white counterparts who are native speakers of the language used as a language of learning and also use it at home and from their first day at school.

The situation with African students is different in that they are exposed to the target language and its speakers only for a limited period of time, i.e. in the classrooms.

Kilfoil; (1995), supports this by noting that in South Africa it seems that the profile of the majority of the learners who are usually classified as ESL in fact conform more to the accepted profile of EFL learners. That is, they encounter English in the classroom only despite the fact that most of them actually receive instruction through the medium of English rather than in their mother tongue.

#### 1.4 Statement of the problem

This research paper sets out to address the reading and learning problems encountered by ESL learners in Secondary Schools in relation to their use of English textbooks and English as the language of learning.

#### 1.5 Aims of the study

The aim of the study is to investigate whether English textbooks used in Secondary Schools for ESL learners, cause or address student's learning and reading difficulties and to consider some ways in which school texts may be made more comprehensible and readable for ESL learners in the areas already outlined. The researcher will propose a text-analysis model intended for use by non-specialists in language studies e.g. subject teachers, inspectors, departmental officials etc. This paper is intended to set up a constructive dialogue with authors and their publishers rather than to perpetuate a mood of negative criticism which achieves little.

#### 1.6 Research methodology

To justify her point of view (presuppositions) concerning the quality and standard of

English textbooks used in Secondary Schools for ESL learners, the researcher will conduct a literature review on the causes of learning and reading problems experienced by learners and evaluate a few selected English textbooks used in schools focusing on the following aspects of readability and comprehensibility:

- \*Vocabulary choice
- \*explaining the meanings of newly introduced words or specialist terminology
- \*Sentence length and complexity
- \*Cohesion
- \*Coherence
- \*Punctuation

#### 1.7 Relevance of the study

As this research paper focuses on the evaluation of selected English textbooks used in former DET schools, the findings should be of value to educational planners and curriculum developers as it should inform them about the linguistic disadvantages built into the educational system. Hopefully the study will lay down some guidelines in the selection and handling of English textbooks in ESL classroom.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. Finally, numerous strategies for improving vocabulary knowledge are discussed.

Researchers have investigated the extent to which direct vocabulary instruction affects reading comprehension and are beginning to make recommendations to teachers based on their research. Also, educators have long recognised the strong relationship between vocabulary knowledge and the ability to read and write proficiently. Hence, it is generally stated that people who do not know the meanings of many words are probably poor readers.

Johnson (1986), a noted expert on vocabulary development supports this by stating that “the decade of the 1980’s could be characterised as a period of rediscovery of the importance of vocabulary instruction to reading comprehension” p.580

The many recent report studies that deplore the system of black education focus on a variety of problems. A special issue concerns the difficulties in English language skills to students whose primary or dominant language may be other than English. These aspects have their own particular characteristics but are all rooted in the connection between language and learning. For example, the socio-linguistic profile of learners are not reflected in the education system, whereas language policy in the curriculum is defined in terms of addressing the problems of ESL learners rather than from the point of view of creating a language curriculum that critically reflects the multilingual reality and resources of African countries.

Ngugi wa Thiong’o (cited in Brumfit, 1986), supports this by acknowledging that “our

children are made to look, analyse and evaluate the world as made and seen by Europeans. Worse still, these children are confronted with a distorted image of themselves and of their history as reflected and interpreted in European imperialist literature.” (p.225)

Thus, policy emanates from a seat of decision making and is dependent upon controls of the structures and institutions where decisions are taken. If the acceptance is not achieved, a crisis arises in which the authority behind the system and policy on which it is based are questioned, challenged and ultimately rejected. For example, the 1976 Soweto uprisings.

## 2.2 LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE: PROCESS AND FACTORS

Norton, in (Vipond, and Hunt, 1987) states that children learning a second language in school must gradually learn the new words of the new language along with how to pronounce and sequence them so as to convey meaning to serve a variety of functional communication goals.

Considering that the average English speaking five year old child understands an estimated 6 000 words and already knows enough English grammar to express ideas in the past and future it is clear that young EL2 learners have a large amount of territory to cover. Secondly, second language learners must also learn how to use their new language in socially appropriate ways that are effective for school learning. (Heath, 1989).

As Macdonald and Burroughs, put it “The volume which children have to learn in Standard 3 is reflected in the pile of textbooks they have (or are supposed to have): one book each for Geography, History, Health Education, and General Science, as well as a Mathematics book and books for three languages. These content subject books are in English, about 400 pages in all. If the English teacher did her job properly over three years of schooling (sub B to standard 2), learners may have a vocabulary of about 800 words. Now in standard 3, they will suddenly need a core

vocabulary of about 5 000 words in English to cope with all these new subjects. That supposes an increase of 600 %, which would be unreasonable even for first language speakers of English.” (1991:15).

It is estimated that a critical mass of some 5 000 words, acquired at an increasing rate over a period of five years, could provide the non-native speaking child with a basis from which he or she would have some chance of keeping up with native speakers. (Vorster, 1991:53)

Perhaps the first thing we can see is a distinction between studying a foreign language for one period a day in school versus language learning through immersion in a social environment including the school, where the target language is used regularly for day to day communication. The differences between these two language acquisition contexts directly impact on the language learning process.

For instance, when looking at how people process print when reading in English as a second language Peregoy, and Boyle, (1993), consistently found that the process is essentially the same whether reading English as the first or the second language. In other words, both first and second language readers look at the page, sample the print, and use their knowledge of sound or symbol relationships: word order, grammar and meaning to predict and confirm meaning. That is, the linguistic systems involved in reading commonly referred to as graphophonics (sound symbol correspondences), syntax (word order) and semantics (meaning).

In the reading process readers make use of their background knowledge about the texts topic and structure along with their linguistic knowledge and reading strategies to arrive at an interpretation. If their interpretation does not make sense they may go back and read again. However, as indicated in the introductory part of this research paper, a reader who speaks English as a second language, finds the reading task to be more difficult. The reading process may be the same, but the resources that first and second language readers bring to bear are different. The two most important differences are Second language proficiency and background knowledge pertinent to

the text being read.

Peregoy and Boyle (1993), define Language Proficiency as the ability to use a language effectively and appropriately throughout the range of social and personal situation normally required for daily living.

This definition emphasizes not only the grammatical rules governing sounds, word forms, and word orders to convey meaning, but also knowledge of social conventions of language use (e.g. how to start and end a conversation smoothly; when and how to use informal ways of speaking. Thus, judgements concerning language proficiency are rooted in social and cultural norms. For this reason the term 'Communicative Competence' is often used instead of language proficiency to emphasise the idea that proficient language use extends beyond grammar into social conventions of language use.

Conale and Swain, (cited in Torone, and Tule, 1991) describe Communicative Competence in terms of three interrelated dimensions.

- (i) Grammatical competence: The ability to produce and understand correct syntactic lexical and phonological forms in a language.
- (ii) Sociolinguistic competence: The ability to use a language appropriately in sociocultural contexts.
- (iii) Strategic competence: The ability to effectively transmit information to a listener, including the ability to use communication strategies to solve problems which arise in this process.

According to the authors an analysis of what a learner needs to know in the second language will usually reveal that the learner needs all three components of communicative competence. This is imperative in the sense that concentration on developing only grammatical competence of learners who learn ESL (which is the case



in most black schools) will not provide them with the ability to produce sentences of utterances which are appropriate to the context of use, or to interpret the appropriacy of such utterances. i.e Sociolinguistic competence. Thus, ESL learners should be in a position to cope with situations in which there is a gap between communication intent and the expressive means available.

As Macdonald (1993:70), puts it “the focus should be on meaning rather than form. This means that teachers should orientate themselves towards communication, whereas they have been occupying themselves largely with teaching English usage. The finer points of grammar”. That is, the focus should be on extracting meaning rather than on learning graded language structures.

Another difference in the reading process between first and second language readers which is pertinent to the text being read is background knowledge.

Background knowledge refers to prior knowledge or experiences that the reader brings to the text. Kilfoil, and van der Walt, (1989) support this by acknowledging that reading is an interaction between the reader’s background knowledge and the text. A text only acquires complete meaning in relation to individual readers. That defective background knowledge of either the content or the rhetorical organisation will impair comprehension. Thus, for efficient comprehension of the material including the theme and cultural background must be familiar to the reader or clarified before the text is read.

It could be noted that limitations in language proficiency and insufficient background knowledge and experiences generally makes it more difficult for a second language learner to comprehend the print.

### 2.3 THE READING PROCESS

Many students have learned to apply most of the word-recognition skills by the time they reach junior high, but many have serious gaps or deficiencies. These difficulties

must be eliminated through developmental or corrective reading programmes at high school level. The focus of this section is on the decoding process. It explores the skills needed by the reader if he is to decode the written language with ease and accuracy. However, it should be clearly understood that decoding is complete only when meaning is associated with the printed symbols.

Dechant defines reading as “the act of turning the stimulus of the graphic shapes on a surface back into speech” (1973:138). (Bloemhof, in Dechant, 1973) differentiated between the act of reading i.e recognition of grapheme - phoneme correspondences and the goal of reading as being comprehension because reading always involves comprehension.

From the definitions stated above it could be noted that if the student is ever to become a mature reader, he/she must be adept in the use of the written code of the language. Also, that unless the teacher has a formal knowledge of the nature of the target language, s/he cannot teach students to decode the written language.

“Readers approach texts actively, with certain expectations in mind. As we read words and sentences, we look for patterns and develop hypotheses, we establish context by making decisions about who we think is making an utterance, and to whom, and we draw inferences about implied meanings, filling in gaps in what is explicitly said. We also establish a relationship between the text and its genre; or we form an idea of the text’s relationship to specific places, times and other texts by attending to its explicit references and use allusion. In this sense, we creatively interpret not only aspects of the text itself, but also the text’s position in society and history. In doing so, we also need to reflect on the context of our own reading. An implicit agenda is brought to any act of reading, different situations and purposes for reading will influence the kind of questions a reader is likely to ask of a text”. Montgomery et al, (1992:7)

Carter, and Long, (1991), support this by acknowledging that training a learner to anticipate meaning, to infer an unknown word from its total context or to check the context clue with the form of the word will provide him/her with the most important

single aid to word recognition. For regardless of what word he/she perceives, if it does not 'make sense' in its setting, his/her perception has been in error. In other words, one fact of language development that could influence students in learning to read is their ability to understand syntactical patterns the denotation and connotation of words within a sentence as well as expressive mannerisms to place an appropriate word in a sentence presented orally (difficulties experienced by most ESL learners).

Goodman, (in Young, D. 1986), is much quoted for having stated that reading (in EMT) is a 'psycholinguistic guessing game'. This guessing activity was attributed to the proficient reader but poor readers are even more likely to guess. These guesses will differ in nature from those of the fluent reader because they are not based on a synthesis of the incoming data with background knowledge.

According to Goodman, reading is selective in that proficient readers do not use all the cues on the page to arrive at an understanding of a text. They read, make predictions and then sample the text further to confirm their hypothesis. If necessary they adjust them. The fact that fluent readers do not read word for word: not only implies that they might skip words but that they read in much larger units and do not pay equal attention to all textual data.

The reader makes sense of the marks on the page because s/he has prior knowledge of language (and- most importantly - the conventional ways language is used in the organisation of texts), reading the topic and other texts.

### 2.3.1 **Contrasting good and poor readers**

Much of the research conducted in the past has focused on how good readers differ from poor readers. This work has direct implications not only for the instruction of poor readers but for all learners.

Applebee, et al, (in Irvin, 1990) present a list of what good and poor readers do before, during and after reading.

**GOOD READERS****POOR READERS****BEFORE READING**

Build up their background knowledge on the subject before they begin to read

Start reading without thinking about the subject.

Know their purpose for reading

Do not know why they are reading

Focus their complete attention on reading

• **DURING READING**

Give their complete attention to the reading task

Do not know whether they understand or not.

Keep a constant check on their own understanding

Do not monitor their own comprehension

Monitor their reading comprehension and do it so often it becomes automatic

Seldom use any of the fix-up strategies

Stop only to use fix-up strategy when they do not understand

• **AFTER READING**

Decide if they have achieved their goal for reading

Do not know what they have read.

Evaluate comprehension of what was read

Do not follow reading with

Summarise the major ideas

Seek additional information from outside sources.

Coady (cited in Burmeister, 1978) went further to define reading as an interaction between a reader's conceptual abilities, his/her process skills and her/his background knowledge, although it must be admitted that he was more interested in the intellectual abilities and comprehension skills than in the background knowledge of the reader.

Evans, (1992) (Literary Reading, RAU, unpublished paper) who has done a lot of research in literary reading: when explaining the literary transaction, indicates that meaning does not reside exclusively in the text (as translationist approaches such as Practical Criticism and the New Criticism claimed). Nor does it reside exclusively with the reader (as constructionist approaches such as those of Fish and Post-structuralism maintain). Nor does it reside primarily with the reader (as interactivist approaches such as Schema theory suggest in their claims that reading is primarily top-down and essentially a "cognitive activity") Nor does it reside primarily with the text (as interactivist literary theories such as semiotics, Gadamer's Hermeneutics, and the Geneva school suggest). That meaning comes about as a result of the transaction between the reader and the text, and thus indirectly the author.

The author further states that in the reading of a literary text the reader adopts a particular stance which directs the reading process. This stance is determined by textual cues, the situational context, (including the reader's goals and tasks set for student readers by teachers). The stance in turn governs the way in which the text is read determining which features the reader will select for particular attention and how the reader will respond to textual elements.

Also that readers bring their own background knowledge and experiences to bear on the reading process. (Including knowledge of conventions). This knowledge is also

shared by writers. Groups of readers and writers share common experiences. The reader's knowledge and beliefs are changed by the reading process (background knowledge is activated, integrated with textual knowledge, accommodated and new knowledge is created). Readers contrast mental texts (representations) which are different from the printed text.

Thus from the explanation given it could be noted that the literary reading transaction is a pragmatic, inherently social activity involving readers, texts, writers and situations and embracing many of the characteristics of conversation, such as the negotiation of meaning and sharing of beliefs, values and attitudes.

It is clear that the information given above puts emphasis on the inference of meaning from the context and that a prime requisite for reading is the association of meaning with a given symbol. Unless the student can associate meaning with a symbol, he/she has not learned to read. Again, the student must also interpret meaning in its broader contextual sense. The word has meaning as part of a story.

Kilfoil, and van der Walt, (1989), support this by noting that reading is selective. The human mind has a limited ability to process information. That reading word for word is neither a natural nor a useful activity for comprehension. Reading is therefore an active process for an efficient reader involving the formulation of expectations and selective sampling of the text to confirm, amend or reject his/her hypotheses.

Furthermore, association of meaning with the printed words cannot occur unless the person has had some experiences whether real or vicarious with that which is represented by the symbol. For example, the word 'thermostat' has no meaning to a student who has never had either a first-hand or vicarious experience with a thermostat.

In most black secondary schools for instance, some few students have had sufficient experience to appreciate most of the connotations of a word. They are usually content to settle for the first meaning that comes to mind. Some students have not learned that

words can have more than one meaning. For example, the word 'run' can mean 'to run in an election', 'to run a store'; 'to go back and forth' and others. In addition we speak of 'a run of fish'; 'a run on the bank'. Also, the word 'Cricket' can refer to a jumping insect like a grasshopper or a game played by two teams of eleven players using a ball, bats and wickets.

These multiple meanings and pronunciations are not only ambiguities of language that hinder communication and that make apprehension of meaning difficult. Two words may have the same meaning; two words although pronounced alike, may have different spellings and meanings and words may have generic or specific meanings. Numerous idiomatic expressions also add to the reader's predicament.

Hence, growth in meaning and vocabulary has many levels. The student must develop precision in meaning; he/she must be acquainted with multiple meanings; learn specific and generic meanings; interpret idiomatic expressions; and for successful speech and writing he/she must be able to call to mind the word 'need', for example, and apply it correctly (Dechant, 1973). Thus, each new level of meaning requires a corresponding broadening of experience with objective reality. Also, the quality of meaning is greatly influenced by the quantity and quality of previously acquired meanings and concepts. Thus the teacher must build upon the student's previous background of experience. As Deighton, puts it "what the content reveals to a given reader will depend on the readers' previous experience" (1959:206).

## 2.4 STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE READING COMPREHENSION

As already discussed in this research paper, many students read texts passively, without comprehending the printed symbols. Proficient readers, however, know what they are looking for when reading, they engage their background knowledge and monitor achievement based upon their purpose. Problems experienced by poor readers are partly caused by lack of strategies necessary to promote reading comprehension.

Therefore, reading could be seen as a metacognitive event. Brown, (1978) defines metacognition as knowing about knowing. Whereas, Stewart and Tei, (1983), acknowledge that metacognition refers to a person's awareness and understanding of that knowledge. In other words, it is important for learners to have good metacognitive skills which will enable them to understand their own comprehension failures and to be active readers.

Kroes, (1996:288), supports this by noting that it is imperative for second language teachers to adopt the metacognitive approach in second language classrooms because it enables learners to manipulate markers such as personal pronouns and passives to develop the register of scientific writing. "In effect it means that pupils need to be able to recognise structures, and to be able to talk and think about them. They will not die of double pneumonia if they know what a personal pronoun or a passive construction is. They need to have cognitive insight into the structure of the target language. In other words, grammar".

#### 2.4.1 READING STRATEGIES



In chapter 4 the researcher will refer to START for more details.

Peregoy, and Boyle, (1993) present the reading strategies as follows:

- Pre-Reading Phase

During this phase, a purpose for reading is established and background knowledge is developed to enhance comprehension. The teacher may use anticipation guides, preview guides, structured overviews, or less elaborated methods to assist students with comprehension. Thus, when students establish a purpose for reading, they are prepared to monitor the interaction with a text. Self-monitoring assists students with their own success rather than relying solely on the teacher to evaluate their interactions with a passage.



critical practices have relied” (1992:6) “students should be made aware that they are actively involved in making meaning, that they are not ‘searching for an extractable meaning in the text’ (ibid:50). The power a text exercises over its readers must be balanced with the learners’ own perceptions of the power they have over a text.



## CHAPTER 3

### 3. READING IN CONTENT AREAS

In this chapter, the researcher will look at reading in various content subjects and the linguistic demands made by various subject texts on EL2 learners.

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

#### 3.2 Language demands

According to Dechant, (1973), as the student advances through the school grades, it becomes increasingly difficult for him/her to be weak in reading and strong in content subjects. That is, students who have difficulties in reading, also perform poorly in content subjects due to their insufficient comprehension of the language and appropriate reading skills. Thus, good readers perform well academically because they read with understanding and have a good vocabulary.

The author further states the reading abilities needed in all content-area reading. These include the ability to interpret data, apprehend the main idea, identify the sequences, organise ideas, draw conclusions, appreciate the literary devices of the writer, evaluate ideas for relevancy and authenticity, interpret graphs and charts, and to remember and use the information acquired. In addition, students should be able to survey materials, choose appropriate reading techniques, and acquire a flexible reading rate.

However, content area reading presents many problems, especially to ESL learners. For example, vocabulary in the content fields is usually more difficult; new terms are introduced faster and few repetitions, more facts are presented to the reader; and greater retention and application are expected. Specialised vocabulary, maps, tables, graphs, abbreviations, indexes, diagrams and footnotes are but a few of the problems that the reader must deal with as s/he learns to read effectively in the content areas.

Thonis, (1980), supports this by acknowledging that students in secondary schools are

expected to move from reading with a narrow context of limited vocabulary and restricted comprehension to reading within a very broad range of extended vocabulary and boundless comprehension. This emanates from the notion that in the content areas the emphasis is on purposeful reading. The specific purpose for reading should determine both the degree of comprehension that is required and the rate at which the reading is done.

Thus it becomes necessary for learners to build specialised skills which will help them unlock the fields of knowledge in content subjects such as Maths, Science, Geography, History, Literature as well as in any number of other subjects to which they may be exposed.

For example, some secondary school students may be described as learners who have learned to read well but who have not yet mastered the requirements for reading in particular subjects. They are still struggling to gain control of the elementary skills and cannot begin to add newer practices to their inadequate foundations in reading. Others may be considered functionally illiterate for their reading proficiency is so limited that the printed materials beyond the seventh and eighth Grades are virtually unintelligible to them". (Vipond, and Hunt, 1987:159).

According to Taylor, (1968), the gains to be held from extending repertoire range include increased language potential and facilitating conceptual learning of all kinds, but specifically, non-spontaneous concepts. These are those concepts which do not arise spontaneously in ordinary everyday experience but need to be presented usually through verbal functions. They are the concepts which are in the knowledge taught in the secondary schools within the subject disciplines.

Perhaps it could be noted that some content subject teachers place heavy emphasis upon content and little or no class time is devoted to skill and language development necessary for unlocking the content. This is contradictory to what is noted by Thonis, (1980:32), "During the upper elementary, intermediate, and high school years, the teacher is seen as a generalist in children, a specialist in subject-matter, and as far

removed from being a reading teacher as anyone in the school.”

It is researcher's opinion that different subjects make different kinds of demands upon students, and they are expected to come to terms with the expectations peculiar to each subject. For example, History as a subject is predominantly concerned with the transmission of a large body of facts from the text. On the other hand, a subject such as Geography deals with recalled and sometimes unrecalled reasoning. In both instances, open questions in which the student really has a choice of responses are rarer.

In a great many cases where factual and reasoning recalled questions are asked by the teacher, more praise is directed towards students giving responses in the terminology of the subject. Hence, most ESL students find the style of the language used in subjects offered to be particularly difficult and make remarks such as: 'The subject is too difficult', 'I don't like Maths', 'I don't like the Physical Science teacher', 'I don't need the subject anyway?' etc.

One aspect which is also detrimental to the development of students' concepts is that in most ESL classrooms, teachers talk a great deal more in lessons than students. This is perhaps largely because teachers do not give learners a chance to think aloud in order to generate new sequences and consider implications. Some teachers prefer to cut short any verbal contribution of a student because it might disrupt his/her plan of how the lesson should be conducted. This makes it difficult for the learner to bridge the gap between his/her frame of reference and the teacher's. In such instances, the language which should be an essential instrument, becomes a barrier to the learner.

“If errors are regarded as symptomatic of the level of achievement on the road to mother tongue expertise in the target language, teachers should not feel so upset by the errors made by their charges - particularly if they know how they are caused. In other words, it helps if the teacher knows what **causes** the error.

This does not mean, of ~~course~~ course, that the errors should always be ignored. It simply means that the communicative activities in the classroom should not be constantly

interrupted by the teacher's correction". Kroes, (1994).

As Barnes (1992:60) puts it, "They begin to take part in each new subject by taking in their teacher's behaviour as a reciprocal element of their own role as learners, so that his voice becomes one 'voice' in their own internal dialogues".

The author examines what the teacher teaches as follows:

- (a) Subject registers (i.e. the language of instruction) and (b) Classroom register (i.e. the language used to control classroom interaction).

He considers the latter to be a hindrance to learning because teachers are less aware of its existence than they are of the subject registers. He accepts that linguistic registers may have a useful conceptual function. However, he criticises their dominant use of a classroom register because it may prevent some students from identifying their purposes with those of the teacher and questions whether the language of secondary school subjects, encourages learners to acquire what is necessary.

Understandable communication, whether written or verbal, depends on the way in which words and phrases are connected according to specific rules. There are at least three broad categories of rules that are activated in creating meaningful utterances:

- rules for the organization of sounds in words and speech;
- rules governing words and vocabulary and the combination of words in grammatical sentences; and
- rules governing the combination of words into meaningful utterances

However, not all rules are adhered to in everyday practical use. Everyday speech is often characterised to a large extent by a 'breaking' of the rules. In such cases the deviation from the rules are errors that hinder meaningful communication to a larger or lesser extent. Johl, (1994).

This indicates that the problem does not only result from what is taught in schools. It also includes how different subjects are taught i.e. the teaching methodology. As indicated by Wissing and Johl 'this means that we need to change, not only what we teach, but also the way in which we teach it' (1994:339)

The difficulty in the language used in English textbooks and the quantity of information entailed in such texts is not only a problem experienced by ESL in South Africa. When analysing middle school American history textbooks in terms of organisation and the type of questions contained, Armbruster and Anderson (1984) concluded by stating that "We are struck by the complex world of middle grade social studies text structures, vocabulary used, question types, the background knowledge required, and the sheer amount of information that students and teachers face ... each of these factors come to bear on the complicated task of teaching students to read in the content areas" p.65.

### 3.2.1 **READING IN MATHEMATICS**

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Porter, (cited in Macdonald, 1993) states that reading in Mathematics requires the student to comprehend a new set of symbols. He/she must react to numerical symbols that synthesise verbal symbols and read deductively.

Balow (cited in Dechant 1973) in a study in which he analyzed errors on the Stanford Achievement Test to determine loss in Arithmetic as a result of faulty reading, noted that whenever reading skills are important in problem-solving ability, each increase in reading ability might well be accompanied by an increase in problem-solving achievement.

This is supported by MacDonald, (1993), who stated that her own experience of working on a mathematics project in the 1980s in Soweto was sobering. The purpose of the project was to give the child a great deal of practice on an individualised basis on a test-and-practice computer system called TOAM. Her findings were that the achievement levels of children at the beginning of the project were alarmingly low -

children in the sixth grade were only achieving at second grade level. A sample of maths teachers were tested on paper-based achievement test, and the results were so poor that they were embargoed by the project steering committee. According to the author, the bottom line was that teachers were not able to solve problems they were expected to teach. That interview data with teachers revealed that they were reluctant for students to solve problems in ways other than those specified in the textbooks because the teachers were not able to assess the efficacy of the children's self-generated procedures for solving problems. Again, teachers found it difficult to complete the syllabus and in the higher primary perhaps 40-60 % of the prescribed work was completed. This meant that particular areas of the syllabus were at risk, specifically; fractions, decimal fractions, money and physical quantities (length, capacity, mass and time).

For instance, the beliefs of teachers and students about what mathematics is, frequently influence what mathematics is done. If children believe that mathematics is a collection of rules, for example, then their learning might be influenced by their search for rules, to memorise and attempt to apply. If teachers think of mathematics as a rigid formal system they might remain unaware of alternative concepts or ways of perceiving maths ideas.

It could be noted that, in mathematics, one concept is built on another and can have meaning only on the basis of the understood meaning of the former (i.e. new learning depends upon previous learning).

Also reading in maths requires other rather diverse skills. Smith, (1970) identified the following writing patterns in mathematical textbooks: classification; explanation of a technical process; instructions for an experiment, detailed statement of facts; descriptive problem solving, equations and various combinations of each of these. Such patterns highlights the diverse tasks a student must be prepared to handle (cited in Dechant, 1973).

Again, such texts are full of technical terms: addend, factor, exponent, isosceles,

reciprocal. Some of these terms are peculiar to maths, others are common words used with a different meaning: axis, chord, cone, set. (ibid).

Thus, the maths teacher must develop the mathematical vocabulary, provide students with the understanding and pre-learning necessary to read maths textbooks. He/she needs to ascertain the student's readiness for the material. Wood, et al, (1992), support this by noting that, central to knowing mathematics is the development of understanding of numbers and the fundamental operations that are central to knowing mathematics, along with meaning for the mathematical symbols which are generally constituted through language. Thus classrooms which provide setting for students to interact with others while solving mathematical problems and to engage in languaging (Cobb, 1975 in press) about their thinking create possibilities for the analysis of process involved in the pedagogical encounter as they inherently arise in daily classroom life.

### 3.2.2 READING IN SCIENCE

During the pre-school and primary school years, the Science programme serves as an excellent carrier of oral language. As Thonis (1980:92) puts it "as pupils engage in their first Science explorations and discoveries, they learn to observe, experiment with real objects to discover principles, revise concepts, organise their thinking and to become familiar with certain scientific procedures".

This supports the notion that pupils have been able to make progress in these skills because good Science instruction has co-operated with the natural development progress. The concepts, vocabulary and language of science have been taught in oral language supported by pictures, objects, demonstrations and manipulative activities providing understanding and active interest for the pupils.

However, in the secondary or high school phases, Science is taught as a separate subject which may or ~~may~~ not correlate with other activities in the classroom. At this stage, reading in science requires a great deal more attention to detail, a slower more



thoughtful pace of reading, a painstaking search of meanings in the vocabulary of Science, an understanding of other graphic materials, such as charts, tables and figures, and comprehension skills.

Also, the teacher of science must determine whether the reading skills of the learners are strong enough to support the additional burden of the new vocabulary and techniques necessary to understand the materials. (Which is not always the case with ESL learners) Pearson, (1984).

Burmeister, (1978), goes further to state that one very forbidding barrier to meaning in science reading is its highly specialized vocabulary. Like maths, science has its own complement of totally new words, as well as a large number of words familiar in another context but having new meanings within the field of science. For example, the word 'solution' which in maths may refer to the result of a problem-solving activity, in chemistry may refer to a liquid substance as contracted with a solid or gaseous one.

Furthermore, Science depends upon an orderly progression of steps in thinking. Among the suggested sequences are these:

- State the purpose
- Define the problem
- Define the terms
- List the measuring instruments
- Analyse data
- Draw conclusions
- Suggest possible applications or implications for further investigations etc

In the process of engaging in some or all of these steps, the students need to know how to take notes, outline information; summarise facts, sift the evidence critically and to refine reading skills to a considerable degree beyond the rote memorisation of material and the simple level of comprehension, and most importantly be competent in the language used.

### 3.2.3 READING IN GEOGRAPHY

According to Dechant, (1973), reading Geography involves a special skill, and it is the one that the student is obliged to use innumerable times. That is, the student must learn a new vocabulary. He/she must be able to deal with detailed information in historical sequence with cause and effect relationships. Furthermore, the learner must be able to organise materials, locate facts, interpret abstract ideas, and understand concepts of time, space and chronological order. He/she must also learn to handle new symbols: maps, charts, diagrams and graphs, and be a critical reader.

Research findings (Layton, 1979), indicates that learners and teachers find Geography an extremely difficult subject. As MacDonald, puts it “By its very nature, Geography cannot be taught experientially, and it relies heavily on abstract graphic conventions in its representations that try to instantiate geographic concepts. Reading maps is one of these difficult skills” (1993: 99).

The author further states that it seems that the ability to read a map would involve at least the following skills:

- Understanding the difference between a top view (plan view), a side view and a 45 % representation.
- Understanding directionality in terms of bodily orientation as well as the orientation of abstract representation.
- Understanding the difference of drawing objects and drawing to scale; and the conception of scale where realistic representation is still possible, and scale where convention has to be used. Different sized scales require some concept of the relationship between size and distance.
- Understanding the concept of grid (matrix) and the ability to find a place on a grid using two starting reference points.

- Understanding keys where the symbols may vary from more realistic to more arbitrary sign conventions; using keys to make inferences about the properties of an environment.

This is an interpretation of the process that students have to undergo in learning skills and concepts for map reading. This creates problems to learners who struggle with the language used as a language of learning and also do not have enough exposure to geographic excursions and activities.

### 3.2.4 LITERATURE READING

Tremonti, et al, (cited in Dechant, 1973:301) states that literature is “the basis for good reading instruction when it serves as a vehicle for critical insight and aesthetic revelation” .

That is, reading literature requires special appreciation of the mood and style of the author. It requires the reader to respond to form, connotative meanings; rhyme and emotional overtones. The students should go beyond mere passive acceptance of literal comprehension, they must do something with what they read.

In literature reading, the reader should deal with such literary forms as the Sonnet, the Essay and Metaphor. He/she must analyse the characters, appreciate the style and understand the sequence of development.

#### 3.2.4.1 Point-driven reading

Vipond and Hunt’s three overlapping reading categories have become generally accepted by studies in literary reading. Their **information-driven** reading category correlates with Rosenblatt’s category of **effereent reading**, and involves what Smith (1985) refers to as the ‘shunting’ of information between the writer, the text and the reader. Vipond and Hunt (1987) split Rosenblatt’s **aesthetic reading**, into story-driven reading (in which the reader is absorbed in the plot events, characters and

settings of the world depicted in a story, and **point-driven reading** (in which the reader tries to 'make contact' with the narrator and attempts to find out what the narrator 'might be getting at'. Point-driven reading involves the literary reading event, in which the competent reader engages when reading a literary text. In point-driven reading, the reader adopts a specific stance towards the reading of the text and enters into a contract with the narrator or author, in a "pragmatic, inherently social activity" (in Vipond and Hunt, 1987). The point-driven transaction thus involves readers, texts, writers and situations. Literary reading is seen as sharing many of the characteristics of conversation, namely, negotiation, and the sharing of beliefs, values and attitudes. (in Evans 1994).

#### 3.2.4.2 EACH LITERARY FORM HAS ITS OWN MODE OF EXPRESSION

In Poetry for instance, the writer communicates through words, concepts, tone, mood, repetition, rhythm and rhyme. However, poetry presents all kinds of grammar and structural difficulties especially to ESL learners. For example, the syntax in poetry is irregular; it is sometimes difficult to identify the verb; the juxtaposition of words for auditory and aesthetic effects is peculiar, and the writing is littered with irregular constructions. Thus, it is necessary for students to understand Metaphors.

In reading drama, it is necessary for students to understand the action and the setting. The latter is largely supplied by stage directions which break up the dialogue, making it more difficult to follow the sequence of events. The student must also learn to visualise various actions going on at the same time.

In essays, the mood may take a formal, , satiric, philosophical, persuasive or political form to appreciate novels, short stories, poems and plays. The students must learn to analyse the elements of plot , characterisation, style and theme.

- **PLOT**

The student must learn to ask himself a series of questions. (e.g. Did I like the ending; How would I have changed it; Did the writer use surprise; suspense, or mystery to keep me interested; what was the conflict or the major motive of the story; Is it fanciful or realistic literature).

- **CHARACTERISATION**

The student should ask: (which character did I like best' `which one would I like to be' `were the characters true to life).

- **STYLE**

The student should ask: (what was the writer's style' `what figure of speech did he/she use' `what was the general mood or tone of writing).

- **THEME**

Questions such as: (what was the moral of the story' `which character best exemplified the morals and ideals of the writer). (How do the morals and ideals portrayed fit with the reader's morals). This is in line with Janks, (1993), that texts are constructed. Anything that has been constructed can be deconstructed. This unpacking of the text increases our awareness of the choices that the writer or speaker has made.

Thus, for students to be able to read literary texts with understanding, language difficulty has to be considered because access is restricted if students cannot attain a basic level of comprehension and as a general rule it is better to choose teaching literary texts which are not too far beyond the students' normal reading comprehension.

More important, however, is access to an experiential level Carter et al (1991) support this by acknowledging that students need to be able to identify the experiences, thoughts and situations which are depicted in the text. They need to be able to discover the kind of pleasure and enjoyment which comes from making the text their own, and interpreting it in relation to their own knowledge of themselves and of the world they inhabit "The fundamental ability of a good reader of literature is the ability to generalise from the given text to either other aspects of the literary tradition or personal or social significances outside literature" (Brumfit, 1985:108). This kind of experience and enjoyment need not always be inhibited by linguistic difficulty since an exciting text can itself be an incentive to overcome some linguistic or cultural barriers in the text. That is, a reader who is genuinely involved with the text is likely to gain most benefit from exposure to the language of literature. In this way the literary text can be a vital support and stimulus for language development.

In conclusion, while there are substantial grounds for criticising the excessive complexity of the English language to ESL, particular in relation to subject specialism, there is evidence to support the contention that the extent to which this can be done is limited by other factors.

It is the feeling of most ESL learners and teachers in most African schools that English textbooks should be simplified. However, the difficulty with the terminology used in subject areas is that in a particular context each term carries one meaning. In other words, the intention is to convey one concept. For instance, Mathematical textbooks are full of technical terms such as isosceles, exponent, reciprocal etc. which convey specific concepts. Thus, the amount of simplification possible is restricted.

Evans (1972), provides evidence from a research study concerning the contribution to the complexity of language of the technical vocabulary presented in school subjects. In discussion of the possibility of simplifying school biology textbooks, he indicates that technical terms have an essential function namely, to facilitate precise communication.

Similarly, Taylor (1968), in his deep structure in an elementary Chemistry book, concludes that students will find Chemistry especially difficult in the early stages, when they are uncertain how to assign linguistic units to correct conceptual categories. The author further states that there is a vast difference between the relationship in which any subject discipline deals and those of everyday life and acknowledge that to learn a subject is to learn the language of the subject. For instance, in the case of Science subjects much of the language concerns hypothetical and ideal states where it is possible to demonstrate the relationship between them only verbally.

Perhaps, from the information given it could be recommended that teachers should present important terms in more than one way, illustrate where possible, discuss central concepts fully without introducing many concepts simultaneously, and never use terms without explaining them. That is, complex forms may be necessary to present concepts in a simple, concise and accurate manner in an attempt to maintain a balance between simplicity and the necessary complexity which is in most instances difficult to achieve.



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Thus, in order to cope with the abstract quality of terminology used in English texts, the learner must have reached a level of cognitive and linguistic development which will allow him to understand such concepts.

## CHAPTER 4

### 4. TEXTBOOK EVALUATION

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to consider some ways in which school texts may be made more comprehensible for ESL learners in the context already outlined. The researcher's purpose for evaluating English subjects textbooks in order to indicate perhaps some of the causes of learning and reading difficulties experienced by ESL learners is done with great awareness of the Department of Education's plan in relation to the restructuring of the education system through the implementation of Curriculum 2005 in schools. Perhaps the curricula would resolve most of the problems encountered by learners who are not native speakers of English but use it as the language of learning in schools.

However, various groups in the public and private sector either criticise or support the government's decision to implement curriculum 2005 which is largely based on the tenets of outcomes based education.

Those who support it make remarks such as:

"Although the new system has apparently not worked in some instances, one cannot assure that it will not work in South Africa for there are many interpretations of outcomes-based education and we need to implement this method in such a way as to meet the unique needs of this country. This clearly indicates that outcomes-based education can work in disadvantaged areas, and that its application can lead to improvements in academic results and behaviour." Deputy Minister of Education: Smangaliso Mkhathshwa (Sunday Times 1997: August 3).

"The new education and training system introduces a lifelong education system which is people-centred. For the first time ever, high quality education will be available for



everyone irrespective of age, gender, race, colour, religion ability or language. Adequate learning support material is essential to the effective running of the system. This material will be provided and distributed by the provincial departments on an ad hoc basis where it is relevant. Learning material will include support material for the teachers, e.g. Guidance on assessment or methodology, as well as for the learners e.g. in the form of notes, textbooks or workbooks. Teachers will draw from their own experience to facilitate the development of learner support material to ensure that it is relevant and effective” National Education Department (1997).

On the contrary, those who criticise it make statements such as:

“The fact that they cannot explain the aims of outcomes-based teaching in plain language makes one suspect its aims are impractical. Outcomes-based education is controversial even in the First World Countries. It is definitely not going to be viable in South Africa” Van Eeden (Sowetan, 1997 June 1)

“They are transforming their educational systems so that their children will no longer be taught but will ‘learn’ what they want to at their own pace; they will not be tested but ‘assessed’; and they will not fail even if they are for example, unable to read or evaluate properly”. Mulholland (Sowetan, 1997 June 1).

Although one might get a feeling that perhaps the new education system will bring about an imperative paradigm shift from the rote-learning and content-driven curricula of the past to education which is learner-centred and bearing fruits such as critical and independent thinking, creativity, acquisition of skills with which learners will be able to apply in their world of work, at this stage most of the issues relating to curriculum 2005 are still unclear. For instance, no mention is made whether textbooks will still be used in schools or not. The information given is that support material will be developed for teachers and learners for them to have something tangible to work on. Practically, it is difficult to think of a situation where teachers will be provided with support material and be expected to draw from their own experience to facilitate the development of such material and ensure its relevancy and effectiveness.

The researcher's experience with ESL teachers is that most of them experience problems with augmenting whatever material they are expected to use in classrooms. It has been and is still a tendency of some teachers to rely solely on the textbooks prescribed for learners without providing any additional material.

This indicates that ESL teachers need to be trained thoroughly to acquire competence in the English language and on how to facilitate and develop learner support material. Again, that textbooks should be used in conjunction with the support material which will be supplied by the department of education. More especially the type of texts discussed in chapter 4.

Textbooks must be effectively analysed and judged for their applicability for use with students. In most instances, students' poor performance in content area classes could be traced directly to the difficulties they experience in comprehending the information in textbooks assigned for them to read.

It is also the researcher's view that students in secondary schools are probably assigned with textbooks that are too difficult to comprehend and that at the moment, there are no provisions made by the Department of Education (publishers) to evaluate the readability levels of the materials and the students' abilities and readiness to use them.

Worse still, although much research has been conducted (Macdonald 1993; Vorster, 1991; Kroes, 1996 etc) which reflects reforms in language teaching and learning especially in primary schools, and efforts taken by publishers such as Lexicon; Heinemann; De Jager etc in developing improved and appropriate materials for ESL, the adoption and implementation of such materials and teaching approaches is tremendously delayed due the Department of Education's reluctance to approve, publish and prescribe such texts to be used in schools.

Furthermore, writers are never presented with feedback as to why their materials are not published.

For instance, START: levels 1-4 (1996) is a completely new series which has been developed by Rodseth to guide teachers and pupils on how to teach and learn English content subjects with ease. The main objective being to enable ESL learners to understand the language used as this is the most important aspect required for learners to comprehend the subject-matter in texts. (START is for secondary school level):

The textbooks have these important features:

- The language has been carefully graded to suit the cognitive development of learners at a particular level.
- Definitions of key words and summaries are provided in each topic to aid understanding and learning.
- The activities are supported by themes, stories, aspects of science, mathematics etc. which draw on the pupil's everyday experience and environment.
- There are a number of colourful, black and white illustrations, diagrams and photographs which support the learning activities.
- The texts approach topics from the point of view of the learners. (which is perhaps in line with the principle of outcomes-based education).
- Each textbook has an accompanying Teacher's guide providing additional information and practical suggestion on the management of learning activities.
- The topics contain numerous practical activities which are carefully sequenced and explained, and supported by illustrations of the type of science equipment that can be used. etc.

However, as indicated earlier in this chapter, similar kinds of such appropriate materials have only been developed for primary school learners and it is the

researcher's view that similar material should be developed in secondary and tertiary levels until such time that a balance is maintained. (i.e a stage where ESL learners will be on par (which is not easy) with their white counterparts with regard to the competency required when learning through the English language in schools.

#### 4.2 NEEDS ANALYSIS

In connection with the Locus of decision making of language policy, the NEPI, (1992) report laments that historically, education policy in South Africa, has been characterised by centralised decision-making (i.e. macro-curriculum policy), and a lack of consultation between the government and communities for which the education is intended. This is true especially for black communities. For instance, during the apartheid era, South Africa had a combination of centralised and decentralised curriculum structure. Different departments in education were both racially and regionally structured, with different responsibilities. The curriculum in most schools has for a long period been Eurocentric. The white minority experienced a measure of decentralisation in curriculum development, and the same did not hold for other racially based groups (e.g. blacks), the process was in fact centralised (hidden curriculum).

Also, the curriculum was not adaptable to local needs. For instance, school boards and committees had no significant power other than to serve as the conveyers of the education department's instructions to ensure that rules were implemented. Teachers worked in authoritarian and bureaucratic education departments which largely excluded them from curriculum decision-making. The curriculum restricted their autonomy (that is, curriculum as fact). There was no national core curriculum for all South African schools.

This was in line with what was stated by Alexander, "In South Africa, we are struggling for a common vision of the future, because there are deep antagonisms, deriving from social inequalities based on colour, class, gender and language, we have to guard against jealousy our human rights to propose, even if what we propose

deviates sharply from what the central authorities would like to have implemented".  
(1992:16)

In any language teaching, for a particular target group, it is essential to assess the needs of such a group. This will enable the teacher or author to select aspects of the language which learners need to know. Establishing what the learners need to know involves determining what the learner's aims are in learning the language. For example, getting a job as a sales clerk, or earning a degree in Engineering.

As indicated in the previous chapters of this paper in most secondary schools, EL2 learners learn English by compulsion because it is used in schools as a language of learning. Also, it is the language used in advanced commercial, technological and academic fields. Hence, African students have to learn English because it is a language through which several instrumental needs can be satisfied. "A learner can be instrumentally motivated to learn a language where there is an overt value to knowing that language, or a learner may be integratively motivated if there is a strong desire to know more about members of that language" Gardner and Lambert, (1972). "The most soul-destroying approach to teaching or learning a foreign language is to do it merely because it is timetabled, without any attempt to relate it to some goal" (Morrow 1988 in van der Walt 1988:6). Thus, one must work towards some agreed and useful end. The pupil's context, and the teaching/learning process has to be so structured in such a way that each part of it clearly relates to the goal that has been established.

Furthermore, needs analysis should also include factors such as motivation, present proficiency levels etc. In fact, needs analysis should form part of the situation analysis that the teacher does whenever he designs a teaching - learning situation. One particular solution to the problem of 'general' communicative needs is the concept of the **common core**. This means that there are likely to be areas of interest common to all learners, whatever their particular situations, specialisations and interests. For example, one such area is social life: every student will need to greet, to invite, to ask for information etc in the second or foreign language. Thus, the teacher will have to

develop a model to follow, of the general learner's communication needs and the language needed to satisfy them. (ibid).

Literacy should be based on real needs of specific target groups, and the potential learners should be consulted in the determination of needs.

The recognition of relatively distinct linguistic varieties has brought about in language pedagogy many attempts to make a deliberate choice of a variety of language which is most relevant to particular groups of learners. The so-called LSP approach (for example, English for special purposes, English for Science and Technology, English for Academic Purposes) is in part an application of a view that different situations, interest, occupations, or social roles demand different uses of language". (Stevens, 1977 in Roets 1991:51)

Van der Walt, (1988) supports this by noting that the needs analysis principle derive from the **English for specific purposes** field, where communicative needs of learners are relatively easy to identify, and teaching can thus be concentrated on those needs. For example, it is easy to identify the communicative needs of, say a doctor, or a secretary working for an export company, or a lawyer specialising in international law.

As Mackey, (cited in Torone and Tule, 1991:1) puts it "selection is an inherent characteristic of all methods since it is impossible to teach the whole of a language, all methods must in some way or other, whether intentionally or not select the part of it they intend to teach."

Implicitly in Mackey's statement is the assumption that language is variable and that within any given language, there exist registers or language varieties which are conditioned by social context. As Janks, puts it "texts are constructed from a range of language options" (1993: 3).

Nuttall, (1982), states that the direct access to the knowledge encoded in textbooks is through ~~the~~ language used by the authors, as sanctioned by their editors and publishers, all of whom have strongly vested financial interests in the widespread

adoption and use of these books. That the extent to which learners are able to decode texts is in large measure a function of the appropriateness, readability and comprehensibility of such texts at a given scholastic level.

Such an investigation may reveal serious gaps between the language syllabus and the students' needs for the language. For instance, in some classrooms where learners take English as a second language, teachers sometimes realise that their students need to use the language in situations which their textbooks do not prepare them for and even in situations in which the teachers themselves haven't functioned e.g. welfare offices, banks, airports etc.

Torone, and Tule, (1991) recommend books that focus upon what they view as 'system-level' needs analysis. They suggest:

- the collection and analysis of data on the linguistic and social context of the classroom,
- the characteristics of the educational system within which language instruction will take place;
- the attitudes of all participants towards the learning process itself;
- the career goals of typical students in the program.

#### 4.3 **MATCHING STUDENTS AND TEXTS**

In any class students vary in their ability to read academic material independently. As Peregoy, and Boyle, put it "it is axiomatic in teaching that variation among students increases with each grade level. Such variation is further accentuated when students vary in English language proficiency" (1993:162).

This emphasises the importance of obtaining a variety of resources to accommodate varying levels of reading ability and English language proficiency.

For example, if an ESL class is studying European exploration of the New World, it is important to supplement any textbook the teacher may use with audio-cassettes, and

short, simple, illustrated articles on exploration of the New World. In addition this topic calls for the use of maps, perhaps student-made maps to post on the board. The supplementary materials offer a variety of ways for students to access information on the topic. In addition they build on background knowledge that may facilitate students' success in reading more difficult material.

#### 4.4 **READABILITY AND READABILITY MEASURES**

The most widely used readability formulas are the ones developed by Fry, et al (1985), Spache (1966). The developers of these formulas required evaluators to count sentence length and the number or percentage of difficult words. However, any of them did not provide for other characteristics of printed material that are considered related to the ease with which students can read the material.

Bormuth (cited in Layton 1979) listed these important elements of writing to consider when determining the difficulty of material: (a) word length. b) morphological complexity; c) grammatical complexity; d) transformational complexity. Other important variables also mentioned were: a) certain proper nouns b) concept load of certain vocabulary words c) levels of abstraction; (d) technical vocabulary words; e) acronyms; f) subject-verb distance, g) syntactical patterns, and h) modifier.

However, the readability formulas presented do not measure such things as cohesion, coherence, the number of inferences required, the dialect and background knowledge required as well as motivation, interest and purpose for reading. Perhaps, this is as a result of the fact that it is difficult to reduce such aspects to formulas. Certainly, it is clear that the task of evaluating textbooks with readability formulas and criteria listed is not simple. Yet, many writers refer to the difficulty of reading materials in schools as one possible source that prevent students from reading well and also learning the content in subject-matter areas.

The researcher will thus select a number of criteria and use them to evaluate some of the English textbooks used in Secondary schools. The widespread tendency of ESL



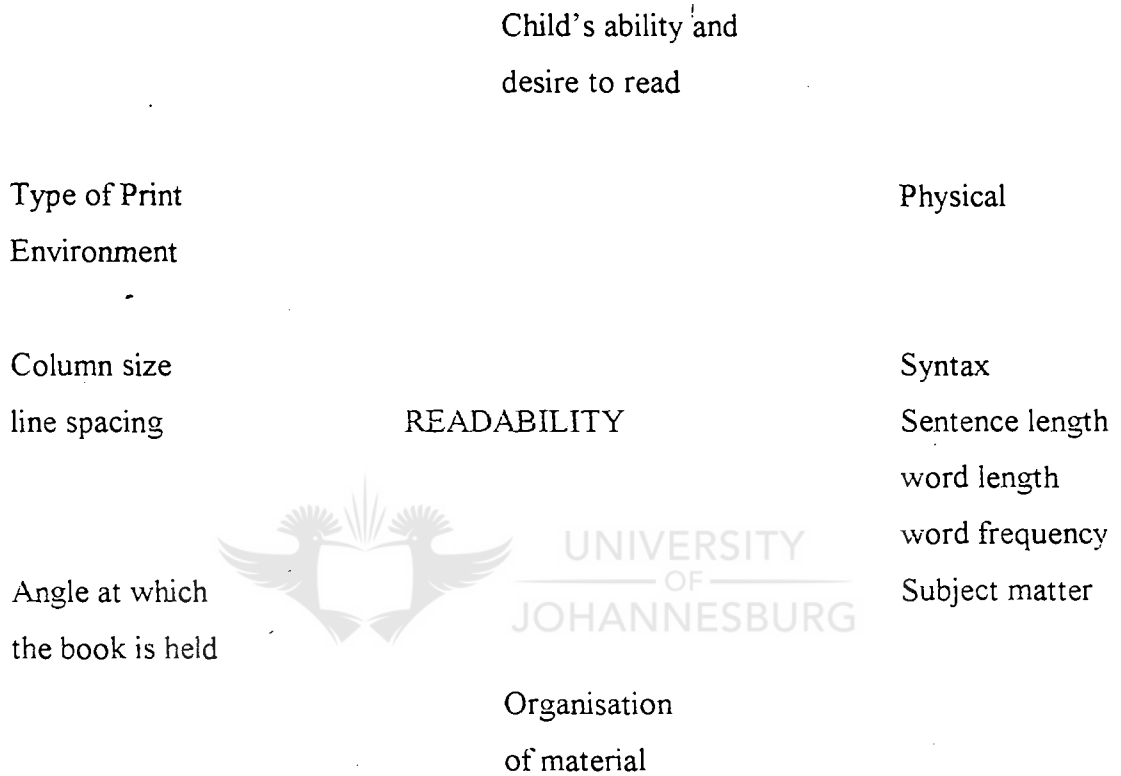
learners to reproduce rote-learned tracts from such textbooks in examinations is another factor to be considered. That is, the less well written the text, the greater will be the tendency to reproduce unselectively and uncritically large sections of that text which appear to be helpful in answering questions set, regardless of whether the text has been understood or not. Many of the textbooks used are those intended for English first language learners, especially in science and maths and as such can be shown, through readability measures, to be above the reading level of English second language learners.

Johnson, (1986) describes readability as all the factors that affect success in reading and understanding a text.

Klare,(1963) one of the classical scholars of readability, defines it as ease of understanding or comprehension due to the style of writing. Gilland, 1972 (cited in Brown, 1978) identifies three main characteristics of the readable text:

- Ease of reading
- Interest and compellingness
- Ease of understanding

Rye (1982) details the many factors affecting readability, thus:



#### 4.5 TEXT AS DISCOURSE

Following the work of Halliday, et al (1976), and Widdowson (1982) we see texts and therefore textbooks, as an instance of discourse production - a complex socio-psychological process of communicative interaction between writer and reader which draws on both textual and world knowledge to enable understanding of the text. van Dijk, (1981) captures the essence of the problem of understanding textbook as discourse:

“In order to understand textbooks about Geography, history, biology etc, world knowledge is both needed as a basis and at the same time requires extension and modification. The reader must discover the dependence of various geographical conditions on economical and political factors, the relations between historical events, or the physical characteristics of plants, animals and men. But again, this is possible only when distinctions are made between what is important and what is only detail, which conditions are crucial, how causal or argumentative relationships play a role. For these structural properties in our knowledge about the world the text will need to establish the basis, together with visual and sometimes auditory information”.

Van Dijk, goes on to state that given this inadequate knowledge we need to be clear that:

- (i) the structural connections, local coherence, missing propositions, global content and schemata should be made explicit or signalled in different ways and
- (ii) that links should be established systematically with previous knowledge and actual interests, beliefs, opinions or other cognitive information which may episodically and more generally bind the information from the text. (p.16)

Crucial also, in any discourse-based approach to text analysis is what de Beaugrande and Dressler, outline as being pre-requisites for understanding the nature function of texts as discourse . They define a text as “communicative occurrence, which meets seven standards of textuality. If any of these standards is considered not to have been satisfied, the text will not be communicative” (1981:3)

Of these seven standards, their first two, cohesion and coherence, are perhaps the most widely applied criteria for textuality. Cohesion they define as:

“... the way in which the components of the Surface Text, (i.e. The actual words we see or hear) are mutually connected within a sequence”.

Cohesion therefore, depends on grammatical dependencies and intersentential connections between words and structure within the text.

Coherence, following de Beaugrande and Dressler,

“... concerns the way in which the components of the Textual world (i.e. the configuration of Concepts and Relations which underlie the surface text) are mutually accessible and relevant” (1981:4).

Thus, coherence could be interpreted as the relationship between the text itself and the world beyond it and to which it refers and interprets in terms of sense relationships.

Their other five standards are: intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality, intertextuality, though space does not permit an elaboration on these here.



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## CHAPTER 5

### 5. EVALUATION OF SELECTED EL2 CONTENT TEXTBOOKS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate a few EL2 content textbooks to assess whether such texts cause or address reading and learning problems experienced by ESL learners in Secondary Schools.

#### 5.2 A TEXT ANALYSIS MODEL

The purpose of this model is to offer a set of guidelines as to the major factors that affect the readability and comprehensibility of textbooks. It is important to stress that the accuracy or validity of the information in the text is not being assessed. Since the range of texts used in schools is so vast, the focus will be on principles of readable writing so that individual texts may be examined and evaluated in terms of their suitability for particular groups of students. In other words, the model does not aim to provide the means for a comprehensive and detailed linguistic or conceptual analysis of texts but rather to provide teachers and researchers, writers and publishers with an instrument which will enable them to judge what sort of problems a particular group of learners might have with a particular textbook.

For the purpose of this model, a text will be considered readable and comprehensible when:

- its meaning can be quickly and easily understood by the reader for whom it is intended;
- the target reader is successful in completing the task(s) embodied or implied in the text;
- if necessary, the reader can quickly and easily recall the essentials of the text sometime after reading it.

The model will deal with the following aspects of readability and comprehensibility

- ◆ vocabulary choice
- ◆ explaining the meanings of newly-introduced words or specialist terminology
- ◆ sentence length and complexity
- ◆ cohesion
- ◆ coherence
- ◆ punctuation

These aspects will be analysed with regard to factors and characteristics that contribute to readable and comprehensible text and to factors that will make comprehension of the text problematic for ESL readers.

Throughout this paper illustrative examples will be drawn from texts approved by the former DET and currently used in schools. The texts used are the following:

1. Advance with English -9  
Cobb, D et al  
Maskew Miller, Longman, (1985)
2. New History to the point - 10  
Malan, M.S. et al  
Educum Publishers, (1987)  
Cape Town
3. English language for matriculation - 10  
Lexicon Publishers, (1992)
4. Physical Science - 10  
Brinks, B.P. and Jones, R.C.  
Juta co, Ltd, (1987)

5. Biology in Action - 10  
Austoker, J. And Jones, R.C.  
Juta & Co, Ltd, (1989)  
Kenwyn
6. Classroom Mathematics - 9  
Laridon P.E. et al  
Lexicon publishers, (1987)  
Johannesburg
7. Classroom Mathematics - 10  
Laridon, P.E. et al  
Lexicon Publishers, (1987)  
Johannesburg

Extracts used for the purpose of illustration are referenced at the end of the extract in this form: [1/142]. This refers to title 1, Advance with English - 9, page 142

## 5.2.1 LEXICAL (VOCABULARY) CHOICE

### 5.2.1.1 High frequency/familiarity vs. low frequency/ familiarity

ELS learners find texts to be readable and comprehensible when they are familiar with the concepts used in the texts. Thus, it is imperative for authors who prefer to use abstract terms to give explanations of such words. However, in most instances that is not the case as indicated in examples given below.

Given a pair of words of the same meaning in a particular context, does the text use the word of higher frequency and/or familiarity to the reader?

Example: 1

The police stormed the huge Venda and knocked him over, bludgeoning him with batons. They managed to handcuff his wrists while he was down on his back. He gave a savage grunt and, looking at his bound hands, he wrenched them apart and snapped the iron handcuffs like cotton twine [1/101].

Example: 2

The magnitude of the velocity of the pendulum bore just after the collision [4/63].

Example: 3

In experiment 11:1 the reaction between the permanganate ion ( $MnO_4^-$ ) and the iron (II) ion ( $Fe^{2+}$ ) is compared with that between ( $MnO_4^-$ ) and the iron (II) ion ( $Fe^{2+}$ ) is compared with that between  $MnO_4^-$  and oxalate ions ( $C_2O_4^{2-}$ ) [4/125].

Example: 45.2.1.2 Specialist terms

Quadrilateral, parallelogram, hypotenuse, multiplicand, parabolas, trigonometric equations, perpendicular etc. [6/138].

Example: 5

When ordered to fire on the crowds the troops of the Volinsky regiment mutinied. The Duma realized that the Tsar's regime was on the verge of collapse and induced the Tsar to abdicate which ended the rule of the Romanov dynasty after more than three centuries. [2/9].



### 5.2.1.3 Concrete vs. Abstract terms

Does the text use abstract terms where concrete alternatives exist? (Abstract words are a particular problem when used in quick succession).

#### Example: 1

With one hand she managed to hold him, and now and then the cane came down on him. He struggled, cut into his courage, till at last with a long whimper that became a yell, he went limp. She let him go, and he rushed at her, his teeth and eyes glinting. There was a second of agonizing terror in her heart: he was like a beast. A few times, madly, in a frenzy, he pulled and struggled trying to kick her. [1/14].

#### Example: 2

In each case, establish, with the aid of a thermometer if necessary, whether the chemical dissolution process proceeds endothermically or exothermically. [4/131].

#### Example: 3

Substances which act as both acids or bases are amphiprotic and are called ampholytes. [4/159].

#### Example: 4

If  $(x_1, y_1)$  and  $(x_2, y_2)$  are points of the line,  $m$  is the gradient and  $\theta$  the inclination. [6/155]/

#### Example: 5

Unless otherwise stated, the particle is assumed to be moving in a straight line relative to some arbitrary origin. Velocity is  $\vec{v} = 30 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ , but the speed simply is  $30 \text{ m s}^{-1}$ . [7/246].

Example: 65.2.1.4 Long and short synonyms

Shorter words are usually of higher frequency, and are therefore usually more familiar.  
Does the text contain a high incidence of long words which have shorter synonyms in the context?

- e.g.
1. bewilderedment - confusion [1/126]
  2. extravagant - over spend [1/151]
  3. exaggeration - to make greater [1/70]
  4. Heterogeneous - different [4/134]
  5. Tremendous - huge [2/133]
  6. Ferociously - cruel [3/104]
  7. denominations - devisor [7/407]
  8. Instantaneous - immediate [7/178]

Example 7

In 1947 President Truman announced the Truman doctrine, whereby countries in Europe were assisted against communist infiltration. [2/112].

Example: 8

While West Germany was slowly recuperating under the Marshall Plan, East Germany deteriorated economically. [2/113].

## 5.2.1.5 Register confusion

Meaning of words

Ordinary (classroom) English vs. Mathematical English

e.g. solution [6/141]

Biology - a solution refers to a mixture of two or more substances in which the molecules or atoms of the substances are completely dispersed.

English - solution refers to a specific answer to or a way of solving a problem.

The expression spherical triangle in the shape of a sphere

Maths - a triangle on a sphere.

Open and closed sets. [6/279]

### 5.2.1.6 Unnecessary use of idioms and idiomatic expressions

Idioms can cause great difficulty for ESL readers.

Does the text contain a noticeable incidence of idioms?

#### Example: 1

His second mistake was the tie. Flaming red it was, with bolts of silver lightning playing on his chest. He had bought the tie at lunch time from the Indian hawker who trundled his cart of scarves and beads and bangles and bright things to the mine gate every Friday, simply because he had never had one and it made it easy for Tsotsi to follow him at a distance as the queue shuffled on its thousand legs, like a millipede, to the ticket office.

#### Example: 2

In the cartoon the Russian Bear and Uncle Sam walk amicably to the resort of UNO where the world hoped all international disputes would be settled peacefully. [2/118].

#### Example: 3

Small wonder that many of these converts became nationalistic leaders and that the African churches played a significant role in the liberation of the continent. [[2/125].

Example: 4

Refused to act as a puppet in the hands of the government. [2/7].

Example: 5

Curves oscillating (kissing). [6/273].

### 5.2.2 EXPLAINING THE MEANINGS OF NEWLY INTRODUCED WORDS OR SPECIALIST TERMINOLOGY

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- ◆ ESL readers inevitably meet many new words, especially specialist terminology, in textbooks: the extent to which readers can cope with new information being presented will depend very much on how well new vocabulary and terminology is introduced.

Example: 1

Revision at the end of each chapter e.g. work is defined as the product of the force applied in the direction of motion, and the modification of the object. [4/49].

Example: 2

Low, K.C. valves indicate a low yield. (i.e. low concentrations of products). [4/142].

Example: 3

Capitalism may be defined as an economic and social system based on the private ownership of land, industry and wealth. [2/110].

- ◆ Familiaration strategies including restatement in more comprehensive terms e.g.

Besides being an ideological conflict or undeclared war, the cold war also carries the characteristic of small scale armed conflicts where two major powers support different factions in conflicts in various parts of the world. [2/110].

A factual statement is one that cannot sensibly be disagreed with and which can often, but not always, be proved, for example, 'steel is metal'. [3/142].

'Marital status' means you are single (that is, you have never been married), married, divorced or widowed. [1/39].

- ◆ There are four basic ways in which help is given to the reader:

Definition (often in a glossary at the end of the text).

relish: (a great deal of) enjoyment esp. of food; pleasure. [1/140]

barrage: (on all sides of an area, to prevent escape from it) [3/12].

- ◆ Explanation through analogy, synonyms, etc.

For example, synthetic (= man-made) vitamin C is often added to dried potatoe to replace that lost during drying. [1/76].

A packet of dehydrated (= dried) potatoes [1/75]

The strike leaders and representatives of the factories, regiments and socialist parties formed a soviet (council). [2/199].

The Russians were obsessed with the idea of a bipolar world (i.e. a world divided into two camps, the communist and capitalist camps). [2/166].

- ◆ Other strategies may also be used, such as taking advantage of the reader's

experience from outside the text, contrasting with a more common meaning, translation, and so on.

However, as will be seen from the above examples, the strategy employed may not in fact assist the reader in comprehending the new (term(s)). Certain questions must therefore be asked:

- In what way(s) are new terms explained?
  - Do(es) the way(s) chosen actually help?
- 
- Do the glosses contain too many abstract words, structures that would not appear in the text itself, words more difficult than that being glossed, etc?
- ◆ The other major problem for the L2 reader is, of course, when a text makes no attempt to assist with new terminology. For example;

Chinese New Year is the most important national festival in the lunar year. The worship of the kitchen God is said to have started as long ago as 133 BC. He leaves once a year on a liaison visit to Heaven when he carries back with him an annual report on the conduct of members of the household over which he presides. Before he leaves, a little ceremony is held to wish him bon voyage and to make sure he leaves in a good temper. [1/114]

### 5.2.2.1 Glossing

Texts frequently include a glossary, usually at the end. Readability aspects of glossing include:

- the standard 'dictionary' format is not always suitable e.g. how easy is it to understand the following:
- preparation: n1 the act of preparing [1/154]
- capital: punishable by death; Murder can be a capital offence. [1/43]
- box: 'n evergreen shrub or small tree of germs, Buxus, esp. one of a species with

small dark leathery leaves [3/12]

Glosses sometimes contain too many abstract words, which hamper the formation of a mental image.

### 5.2.3 SENTENCE LENGTH AND COMPLEXITY

#### 5.2.3.1 Overlong sentences are difficult to read

Generally speaking shorter sentences are more readable than longer sentences, since they make fewer demands on the reader's short-term memory. However, the following points should be noted:

A succession of short staccato sentences disrupts the flow of reading, breaks up the cohesion of the text, and hence impedes comprehension.

Long sentences often include a variety of sources of difficulty for ESL readers (see below), but the following examples illustrate the nature of the problem:

#### Example: 1

The weather had been warm when he left his wife of the side on the road, and his belly full, but with time the night grew colder, his one blanket thinner and there were days of hunger. He lived through days of vast silence, tramping along the road with the unending veld stretching away unseen on every side, tramping, through the clouds of dust left by the hurrying cars, always silent, very alone, but never without hope.

[1/124]

#### Example: 2

The Allies had various motives for supporting the white Russians. The most important considerations were: The division of German forces by re-opening the Eastern Front;

the Bolsheriks refused to repay foreign debts; to prevent military supplies in Russian ports from falling into Bolsherik or German hands; the Bolshevik treat of spreading revolution throughout Europe. [2/11].

Example: 3

The gonadotrophic hormones, FSH (Follicle Stimulating Hormone; LH (Luteinizing hormone); LTH (Luteotrophin); and ICSH (interstitial cell-stimulating hormone), are all produced by the interior pituitary and influence the activity of the reproductive organs, the development of the mammary glands in pregnancy, and the reproduction of milk after the birth of the baby. [5/175].

Example: 4

Notice that the coordinates of P1 are (Cos 0; sin 0), the coordinates of P2 are (cos 30; sin 30), of P3(cos 45; sin 45) etc. The coordinates of P3 are also (cos (-315); sin (-315), those of P2 are also (cos -330); sin (-330), etc since angles of 45 and -315 are co-terminal as are 30 and (-330), 60 and (-300) etc. Using the first coordinates (abscissae) of the points P1 to P16, draw the graph of  $f(x) = \cos$  for  $[-360; 360]$ . (Use a scale of 10 mm = 30 on -axis and 880 mm = 1 unit of the function value axis). On the same axes, using the second coordinates (ordinates) of points p1 to p10, draw the graph of  $f(x) = \sin$  for  $[-360; 360]$ . [6/264].

### 5.2.3.2 Extended subjects

For example;

- (i) the main verb occurs too late in the sentence.
- (ii) the main verb is too far away from its co-referent noun phrase.



## 5.2.4 COHESION

Cohesion in the text refers to the relationships that exist within and (principally) between sentences, and which make a text an integrated unit rather than a collection of unconnected independent sentences.

The major principal categories of cohesion are:

- Substitution
- lexical reiteration

### Substitution and lexical reiteration

For the present purposes these will be treated together, and will be defined as situation where a word (or words) or phrases is/are replaced by (an) other word(s) or phrases(s).

#### Example: 1

The Commissioner went away, taking three or four of the soldiers with him. In the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilization he had learned many things. One of them was that a District Commissioner's word is final. [3/104]

#### Example: 2

The interstitial cells among the seminiferous tubules in the testes secrete male hormones the androgens. These are essential for the development and functioning of the male reproductive system. Testosterone is the main male hormone. [5/175].

In cases such as the above there is the danger that the L2 reader will not make the connection between the original word(s)/phrase(s) and those used instead later in the passage. But by far the largest readability problem is caused when a general noun is used to replace a phrase or clause.

### 5.2.5 COHERENCE

Punctuation involves the use of spacing, size of letters and a set of standardized marks to separate structural whits in written texts and thus to clarify meaning by guiding our reading (Todd, 1995:1)

Long sentences with heavy punctuation with widespread use of commas, colons, and semi -colons make a number of demands on the reader's short term memory.

#### **For example**

At this moment I can picture Bugam Dasi, my mother, wearing a gold-embroided sari of coloured silk and around her head a fillet of brocade; her heavy tresses, black as the dark night of eternity, gathered in a knot behind her head; bracelets on her wrists and ankle, and a gold ring in her nostril; with great, dark, languid, slanting eyes and a brilliantly white teeth, dancing with glow, measured movements to the music of the sitar, the drum, the lute, the cymbal, and the horn. [1/63].

### 5.2.6 PUNCTUATIONS

Many clubs, because of horrifying accounts such as these, responded by removing their safety barriers. One cannot help but see the irony behind the move.

The safety barriers, those instruments of death at last week's match, were put there, firstly, to protect the players and the referees from the crowd and secondly but most important, to protect the crowd from themselves. [3/206]

In conclusion, textbooks are an integral part of our educational system. However, teachers who use them must proceed with knowledge and caution. It is important that teachers should be given the opportunity to accurately assess and evaluate both the difficulty of the text and the base of knowledge that students bring to the text.

The information presented in this chapter on the evaluation of some of the English

textbooks used in secondary schools, reveals that most of the text used are loaded with information and concepts which makes it difficult for ESL learners to comprehend what is taught in the classroom. It is high time that the Department of Education should revisit the issue of the type of textbooks prescribed for ESL students in secondary school. To sum up, an English textbooks used in ESL classrooms should be considerate, i.e. have a clear and unified structure, a coherent manner of presentation and an interesting and readable language and style.



## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapters (1-5) the researcher has examined notions and theories concerned with the reading and learning problems experienced by ESL learners which emanate from their use of English as a language of learning. The psychological process involved in concept formation and attainment has been provided using samples of linguistic problems embedded in some of the English subject texts through an evaluation of selected English texts used in Secondary Schools in the North West Province.

#### 6.1 CONCLUSION

6.1.1 From the literature review presented it could be concluded that the sudden transfer from mother tongue to English as the language of learning from standard 3 onwards, brings about a sudden shock and confusion as students find themselves faced with a situation in which they have to struggle to acquire competence in the two languages. (i.e. mother tongue and the English language). Furthermore, due to the large volume of vocabulary that students have to learn in Standard 3 to cope with all the new English subjects, their language skills are poorly developed in both their mother tongue and ESL. (Chapter 1, 1:2).

6.1.2 The majority of ESL teachers are underqualified and incompetent in English. As a result, there is a heavy reliance on transmission modes of teaching which lead to high failure rate in schools. (Chapter 1.1.2)

6.1.3 The other issue is the selection of texts. Some of the English subject texts used in Secondary schools are above the cognitive and reading levels of the students. One obvious difficulty is that decision - making is not always the province of the teacher. The

selection has probably been determined by a higher education authority, often regardless of its suitability for learners themselves and reflects the preference which might be inappropriate to either the language competence or the literary sophistication of the learners. That is why the phrase 'set texts' has come to have sinister overtones, and explains why the teaching of ESL has not been a very student centred process. (Chapter 4:3).

6.1.4 The socio-linguistic profile of African learners is not reflected in the education system, whereas the language policy in the curriculum is defined in terms of addressing the problems of ESL learners rather than from the point of view of creating a language curriculum that critically reflects the multilingual reality reflects the multilingual reality and resources of the South African education system. (Chapter 2:1).

6.1.5 There is a heavy reliance on the use of classroom register by teachers as opposed to the use of subject registers classroom register may have a useful conceptual function. However, the dominant use thereof by teachers may prevent students from identifying their purposes with those of the teacher and make it difficult for learners to acquire what is necessary. (Chapter 3:2).

6.1.6 In the new South African Education dispensation, most of the issues relating to the curriculum are still unclear and not well planned. Teachers are not thoroughly prepared and trained for the implementation of curriculum 2005. Also, the government has not made any proper assessment of the human resource base to support the 'transformed education'. (Chapter 4.1).

6.1.7 In most Secondary Schools where English is used as the language of learning, the needs analysis principle is not implemented. Thus, communicative needs of learners are not identified. The teaching/learning process is not structured in such a manner that each part of it relates to the goal that has been established. (Chapter 4:2)

6.8 Most of the English texts used in some of the secondary schools for ESL learners do not satisfy the researcher's criteria of readability and comprehensibility. Special issues

concern:

6.8.1 High frequency/familiarity vs. low frequency/familiarity too many texts use words of low frequency which are not familiar to learners. For example, in the Physical Science Std 10 and Mathematics Std 9 texts, words such as pendulum, permanganate, bludgeoning and wrenched are used which compels learners to memorise concepts without comprehending the subject-matter. (Chapter 5:5.2.1).

#### 6.8.2 Specialist terms

Vocabulary in the English content fields is usually more difficult for ESL learners. In some instances, authors introduce new specialist terms faster and with few repetitions. Worse still, such terms are not explained. For instance, in the Mathematics, std 9 text, specialist terms such as perpendicular, hypotenuse, trigonometric etc are used without explanations or simplifications thereof. (Chapter 5:5.2.2).

#### 6.8.3 Concrete vs. abstract terms

The majority of writers prefer to use abstract terms in quick sessions where concrete alternatives exist. For example, in the Physical Science, Std 10 text, abstract concepts such as endothermically and exothermically are used. This makes it difficult for learners to comprehend the text, hence they have negative attitude towards the subject. Instead of setting for such abstract concepts, the author could have used concrete terms with the same meaning.

e.g. endothermically

\* exothermically

(Chapter 5:5:23)

#### 6.8.4 Long vs. short synonyms

Instead of using shorter synonyms, some authors prefer to use long synonyms which confuses learners. For example, in the Mathematics std 10 text long synonyms such as

denominators and instantaneous are used rather than using shorter synonyms such as divisor and immediate which learners would find easier to understand. (Chapter 5:4.2.4)

#### 6.8.5 Register confusion

##### Linguistic vs. subject registers

It is acceptable that linguistic registers have a useful conceptual function. However, the teacher's dominant use thereof may be a hindrance to learning a subject such as Mathematics as a result of register confusion. For example, there are words which mean different subjects. For instance, the concept 'Solution' in Biology may refer to a mixture of two or more substances in which the molecules or atoms of the substances are completely dispersed. On the contrary, in English, the word 'Solution' refers to a specific answer to or a way of solving a problem. Thus, learners might experience difficulties in comprehending the subject register of a particular subject and ultimately perform poorly in that subject. (Chapter 5: 5:2.5)

#### 6.8.6 Unnecessary use of idioms

A text containing a noticeable incidence of idioms can cause great difficulty for ESL learners. Instead of using a language that learners would understand, some authors prefer to use a number of idioms perhaps with the objective of making the text interesting for readers. However, the use of many idioms in ESL texts create problems in the sense that ESL learners in most instances a faced with the problem of attempting to understand the context of the text simultaneously with the meaning of the idioms in the text (see p. (Chapter 5:5.2.6)

#### 6.8.7 Sentence Length and Complexity

Shorter sentences make fewer demands on the readers short term memory. However, overlong sentences are difficult to read. Most ESL texts contain long sentences which

often include a variety of short staccato sentences which disrupts the flow of reading. For example, the majority of ESL learners find Mathematics too difficult to comprehend. Thus, when long sentences with many punctuation's marks are used learners loose concentration and meaning while reading (Chapter 5: 5.2.7).

## 6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.2.1 The Present situation in South Africa calls for a critical re-evaluation of the language policies for instance, the syllabus for English as a subject from Grade 2 to standard 2 does not provide learners with a strong foundation for using English as the language of learning ten or more subjects in Standard 3. Thus, a syllabus which takes into account the learner's need for learning English is required for the whole of the primary and secondary school phases. The teacher can try to identify the following needs:

- i) Instrumental needs - short term  
immediate needs - what should learners be able to do in the language
- ii) Potential needs - academic, vocational and social needs
- iii) Educational needs - the second language is part of the general education of the learners. (6.1.1)

6.2.2 There needs to be change in the teaching style. Thus, the introduction of the communicative and collaborative approaches could help in solving learners' reading and learning problems. For instance, the collaborative approach focuses on the creation of personal meaning and internally pervasive understanding through dialogue and discussion. The five phases of instruction include engagement, exploration, transformation, presentation and reflection. This should be accompanied by comprehensive pre-service and in-service English training courses for ESL teachers. (6.1.2)

6.2.3 In relation to the selection of texts used in schools, part of the new dispensation for education in South Africa should be to raise the status of teachers. They should be regarded as practising an art, each in the own way and not simply instruments of an education. Teachers should therefore be involved in the decision-making process on the selection of texts as they are the ones who can better inform education authorities about



the needs of their learners (6.1.3)

6.2.4 It is advisable for teachers to use correct subject register and attempt to find out prevailing potential difficulties experienced by learners in different subject registers. This could be achieved through:

- Explanation of the meaning of specialised terms.
- Use of relatively short sentences, synonyms and fewer idioms (if necessary)
- Repetition of sentences carrying important basic concepts
- The expansion of definitions using simpler language
- The use of simpler language in explanations and in most instance the teacher should focus on relating content to context. (6.1.5)

6.2.5 All secondary teachers should also play a role in helping learners to 'master' the reading required in their subject areas of the school curriculum. For instance, teachers need to know something about level of reading difficulty, reading strategies and vocabulary instruction.

e.g. - Encouraging active involve of learners in classroom activities

- Helping learners to become independent word learners and readers.
- Providing learners with multiple expore to words. (inside and outside of the classroom)
- Increase opportunities to learn new words.

This should be accompanied by the implementation of academic support Programmes from primary to Secondary school levels. For example, English for special purposes, English for Academic Purposes, English for Science and Technology etc. (6.9)

6.2.6 Teacher training is also seen as having a role to play in bringing about the recommendations through the inclusion in the course-work in colleges of education of studies relating to the use of language in schools and textbooks. For example, emphasising the use of considerable texts in ~~classrooms~~ i.e. Texts having clear and unified structures, coherent manners of presentation, interesting and readable language and styles.

(6.9).

6.2.7 In relation to the implementation of Curriculum 2005 the government should invite experts to give assistance in translating good education policies into sound education policies into sound practice. Also, enough time should be invested in ensuring that all stakeholders commit themselves in the implementation of quality education for all learners. The socio-linguistic profile of African students should be reflected in the education system. This will enable EL2 learners to understand their history and place in the universe. Also, cultural diversity, tolerance and understanding should form part of the school curricula. (6.1.4)



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