

Selecting Authentic Material and Designing Tasks for Comprehension

Zha, Xinhua

CLTAC Conference

March 5, 2011

Purpose

Instruction and Assessment



- How much did students learn?
- How well did they learn it?
- How well did we teach it?

What is authentic material?

- Native speaker created
- For native speakers
- Communicative purpose
- Not specifically produced for language teaching

真实语料，是在母语使用者之间为了交际而生成的语料，目的并非为了语言教学。

(Wilkins, 1976; Morrow, 1977;
Porter & Roberts, 1981; Nunan, 1989)

Common Problems with Test Items

- “One - size - fits - all” Stem
 - What is the main idea of the passage?
 - 5 Ws.
- Stem too vague
 - What are they talking about?

Common Problems with Test Items

- Key Guessable/Stands Out
 - Background Knowledge
 - Distracter Implausible (not based on possible misunderstanding)
 - Key directly translated from the text
- Not focus on the core
- Level Mismatching

Challenges in selecting material and designing tasks

Text

- What types of authentic material are suitable?

Task

- Where are the testable points?

Begin with the End in Mind

"To begin with the end in mind means to start with **a clear understanding of your destination**. It means to know where you are going so that you better understand where you are now so that the steps you take are always in the right direction."

(Covey, 1989)

Learn from Backwards Curriculum Design Model

It requires that teachers **determine acceptable levels of assessment** as they begin to plan.

Task Types Based on ILR Descriptors

Level 1

- Main idea
- General purpose of information
- Intended Audience
- Details

Designing Stems for Level 1

Global Comprehension

- What is the topic of the passage?
- What is being advertised?
- What is being announced?
- What are people being instructed to do?

Comprehension of Details

- What is one activity mentioned in this passage?
- What is one feature of the product?

Task Types Based on ILR descriptors

Level 2

- Main idea
- Sequence of events
- Major details/Minor details
- Cause and effect

Designing Stems for Level 2

Global Comprehension

- What incident/event is reported?
- What decision was made by X?
- What caused the incident to happen?

Comprehension of Details

- What fact is reported about . . . ?
- What was one effect of the incident?
- What happened immediately before/after . . . ?
- What was the outcome?

Task Types Based on ILR descriptors

Level 3

- Author's concerns, justifications, conclusions
- Underlying principle
- Author's attitude
- Inference & implications
- Vocabulary in context

Designing Stems for Level 3

Global Comprehension

- What opinion does the author express about X?
- What underlying principle guides the author's argument ?
- What conclusion does the author make?

Comprehension of Details

- What is the author implying with the reference to . . . in the third paragraph?
- What prediction does the author make?

Level 2 + Text Characteristics

- More advanced factual material with supporting details
- Organization of info may be less predictable
- Concrete topic may take an unexpected turn
- More complex structures; broader (concrete) vocab
- Beginnings of ‘author presence’ in the text
- The ‘plus’ represents more than a ‘half-level’

Designing Stems for Level 2 +

Global Comprehension

- What problem did the X encounter?
- According to the author, what is significant about the ...?
- According to the author, what common viewpoint exists about...?

Comprehension of Details

- What realization did the author come to?
- What suggestion does the author make?

Things needed to be taken into consideration

- Do the materials cover a variety of FLO topics?
- Will the material become dated?
- What type of question (task) will match the level of the passage?
- Is the question made clear, concise to elicit content that is at level?
- Does it give away vocabulary from the passage?
- Have I avoided testing excessive memory skill (in listening)?

Reference

- Covey, S.R.(1989) The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. Simon & Schuster, Rockefeller Center, New York 1989.
- Morrow, K (1977) Authentic Texts in ESP in S. Holden, ed. English for Specific Purpose. London: Modern English Publications, 1977.
- Nunan, D. (1989), Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom. Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Porter, & Roberts, J (1981), Authentic Listening Activities. English Language Teaching Journal, v36 n1 p37-47 Oct 1981.
- Wilkins, D. A. (1976) National Syllabasses. Oxford University Express, 1976.