

# SZEMLE: IDEGEN NYELVŰ KÖZLEMÉNYEK

HAJDICS-SZÜCS, ESZTER CECILIA

## The use of self-designed materials on language lessons

### – Language skills related tasks –

*In the past decades English language teaching (and generally we might say foreign language teaching) has changed a lot. Communicative language teaching has become the most popular and widely recognized form of teaching and learning. This approach emphasises interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. In Central-Eastern Europe foreign language teacher training hardly deals with communicative approach, it is mostly about old theories and a little practice. Those who wish to learn how to teach in a communicative way enrol a CELTA Teacher Training (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages issued by University of Cambridge ESOL) organized worldwide.*

*Recently I have taken part in a CELTA Teacher Training course. One of the course requirements was writing an essay on a self-designed teaching material for our practice teaching groups (my students' level was upper-intermediate).*

#### **Part 1: Justification of material choice**

One of the several reasons why we should teach students reading is to help them reading English texts for their careers, for study purposes or simply for pleasure (Harmer, 1999:68). I use a magazine article as authentic material. An authentic material is normal, natural language used by native – or competent – speakers of a language. This is what our students encounter in real life if they come into contact with target language speakers, and, precisely because it is authentic, it is unlikely to be simplified (as some text book language has a tendency to be)(Harmer, 2001: 205). My main reason for choosing a magazine article is that they can have the possibility also in their everyday life to read magazines or newspapers in English.

The upper-intermediate group is highly-interested in conventional topics and New Year's Resolutions may raise their interest. The original text is too long for a 45 minute lesson but as the parts are not connected to each other I shortened it. I tried to sort out those parts which assume cultural background knowledge on the UK. The language and vocabulary used in the text is neither below nor above their EFL level (see Appendix 1.).

The group has very good general understanding on written texts and they try to avoid analyzing and translating the text word by word. That is why tasks that require top-down reading process (Goodman, 1970) are suitable for them. However

as Harmer says it is probably the most useful to see acts of reading as interactions between top-down and bottom-up processing as sometimes it is the individual details that help us understand the whole, sometimes it is our overview that allows us to process the details (*Harmer, 2001: 217*).

## **Part 2: Receptive skills task**

Receptive skill: reading

Sub-skills: fast read for gist (skimming) and read focusing on meaning (answer questions about meaning) (*Scrivener, 1994: 188*).

### 2.1.

Lead in:

I show a picture about chocolate (Quality Street as it may cause misunderstanding in the text) that is crossed and ask what they think my New Year's Resolution was this year. Students then come up with their own New Year's Resolutions (S, S-S, OCFB). I write them on the whiteboard. Have you ever given up your resolutions? (S-S, OCFB) 5–6 min.

Orientation:

There is a text that helps you keep your resolutions (1 min).

Gist task:

Read the text and find out if any of your resolutions are mentioned in the text (6-7 min) (search for the subtopics of the text). Check the answers with pairs then OCFB.

Pre-Teach:

to crave, tittle, binge, teetotal

Detailed task:

Read the text and try to find the answers for the questions 1-7 (10-12 min).

Comprehension questions.

Check answers with pairs then OCFB.

### 2.2.

A good reader is able to take in a stream of discourse and understand the gist of it without worrying too much about the details. We use skimming to encourage students to have a quick look at the text before plunging into it for detail; we help them to get a general understanding of what it is all about (*Harmer, 2001: 202*). The authentic material I have chosen for this lesson matches the criteria of a good reader.

My *gist task* is a reflection to the lead-in where students come up with own ideas on the topic. According to *Harmer* (1999: 70) teachers should give students hints so that they can predict what's coming too. It will make them better and more engaged readers. In this case they are the hints that make my students more engaged readers.

This text is very suitable for the skimming task as it focuses on 5 topics and students probably come up with more ideas during the lead-in so they have to find the subtopics in the text therefore they have a good reason to read the article. Students probably find at least 1-2 main ideas they have come up with. That makes them even more interested in on one of the main topics of the lesson: how to keep our New Year's resolutions. This task does not require detailed information so it is ideal for the students to get general information on the topic. As for *Harmer* (2001: 202) it is the main goal of a skimming task.

A key feature in the successful teaching of receptive skills concerns the choice of comprehension tasks. Sometimes they are rather testing the students than helping understand the text (*Harmer*, 2001: 207). My *detailed task* is a comprehension task that is vital to be well-prepared because they may be too easy or too difficult. As I think the key element in this text is to understand the resolution resolve parts my questions focus on understanding these parts. As students probably have found several resolutions in the text that they have already had in their life, they must be very interested in how they can keep them.

It is also very important to exploit the topic. Follow up questions can personalize the topic for the students: Is there any resolution that you haven't mention but you would like to make next year? Which advice have you found the most useful? Have ever realized that your resolution can't work and needs to be changed?

### **Part 3: Productive skill task design**

#### 3.1.

Follow up activity: Let's work in pairs! Chose one of the topics and try to write a similar resolution resolve that we have read this lesson.

Draft (come up with ideas): 2 min

Writing the piece of article: (6–7 min)

Change you resolution resolves with the pair next to you. Do you think they have made a good suggestion?

OCFB: Whose suggestion is the best?

#### 3.2.

This task focuses on students' using the genre of the text they have read during the lesson. As they have already had the possibility to speak about their own opinion of the text it is more challenging for them to write a similar piece of article. As for

Harmer (2001: 258–259) ‘If we want them to write newspaper articles we have them study real examples to discover facts about construction and specific language use which is common in that genre’. During the lesson they have had the possibility to read and study the language of the magazine article so it is a very good follow up activity to ask them write something similar.

One of the disadvantages of writing on lessons is that it takes time (*Harmer*, 2001: 258). That is why must be prepared with a task that they are familiar with, we show them a sample to follow and let them time to brainstorm ideas so when they start writing they have already had the main ideas to write about. It is also vital to give them a communicative goal. In this case we are looking for the best suggestion.

The students in the upper-intermediate group can work very well in pairs and when they had writing task as a follow up activity they really liked the idea and finally it became a very successful task and lesson.

The whole lesson has been designed around the topic of New Year’s Resolutions and the resolution resolves. All the tasks are in connection with it and they relate to each other.

#### REFERENCES

- Goodman, K.S. (1970): Reading: a psycholinguistic guessing game, International Reading association  
Harmer, Jeremy (1999): *How to Teach English*, Longman  
Harmer, Jeremy (2001): *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, Longman  
Scrivener, Jim (1994): Learning teaching, Heinemann

#### APPENDIX

#### **Appendix 1.**



After stuffing yourself with chocolate over Christmas, it's easy to start the New Year free from Quality Street. But after a week or so, chances are you'll start craving chocolate. Research shows that depriving yourself of the foods you love makes you binge on them.

**RESOLUTION RESOLVE** Don't ban chocolate – just eat less. Size matters, so opt for smaller, lighter bars such as a Milky Way or Flake. Keep it in the fridge, too. It'll take longer to melt in your mouth so you'll savour every mouthful for longer. Find other chocolate fixes, too – a mug of low-cal hot chocolate or a teaspoon of chocolate spread mixed into porridge may satisfy you for just 50 calories, compared to 250 calories in a standard bar.

### 'I'll just eat a lot less'

Eating tiny portions – or skipping meals – will help you lose weight because it cuts calories, but it also cuts vital nutrients, so your health suffers, too. In addition, you'll be tired, irritable and unable to concentrate. Hunger will eventually leave you bingeing on the foods you've missed.

**RESOLUTION RESOLVE**

Most women will lose weight on 1,250 calories a day (more if you're very overweight). Go below this and your body starts using its muscles to provide it with energy, and that lowers metabolism, making it even more difficult to lose weight. If you're already on a high-fat diet, you may find you can eat a bigger quantity of food by cutting out fatty foods and adding lots of low-cal fruit and veg.

### 'I'll give up drinking alcohol'

Going booze-free may seem a good option when you're hungover on New Year's Day, but if you're used to drinking regularly, by mid-January you'll miss a tipples so much, you'll compensate by drinking more – and potentially ending up in a binge/teetotal cycle.

**RESOLUTION RESOLVE**

Alcohol is high in calories, so it makes sense to drink less if you want to lose weight, but you don't have to avoid it completely. In fact, studies show small amounts of alcohol – one or two units a day – help boost heart health in post-menopausal women by increasing HDL or 'good' cholesterol levels and reducing the stickiness of blood, which helps prevent blood clots that can cause heart attacks or strokes. Stick to government recommendations of no more than 2-3 units of alcohol daily, and to lose weight, choose lower-cal options such as spirits with diet mixers or white wine with soda water.

### 'I'll join the gym and go every day'

We might fork out on a gym membership, but good intentions are often short-lived. Experts agree daily gym sessions are unrealistic for most people, and may even increase the risk of injury as muscles and joints become overworked by doing the same repetitive exercises. Gym workouts can also get boring, so you start to go less often and eventually stop altogether.

**RESOLUTION RESOLVE** Work out how many planned exercise sessions you can comfortably fit into your week and vary your activities to prevent boredom. As well as traditional exercise, such as going to the gym, jogging or swimming, try Popdance or martial arts – anything that gets you moving and you enjoy. Or take up a team sport such as netball or hockey – you'll be more likely to attend as you won't want to let other people down.

### 'I'll buy some exercise equipment'

The idea of exercising at home is a nice one – especially in the depths of winter. It's no surprise then that one survey found women, on average, spend £181 on fitness equipment, dumbbells, trainers, clothes and exercise DVDs in a year. Sadly, the same survey showed they were rarely used.

**RESOLUTION RESOLVE** Think carefully about whether you really will get the opportunity – and the motivation – to work out at home. Bear in mind, too, that you don't need to spend a fortune on equipment and gadgets to exercise effectively. Try to walk more, and if you love gadgets, buy a pedometer and aim for 10,000 steps a day. Or download a walking app such as Walk Tracker Pro, to track your route, time, pace, speed and calories burned.



## **Appendix 2.**

### **Detailed task**

*1, Why is it good if you take chocolate bars into the fridge?*

It'll take longer to melt in mouth and the taste keeps longer.

*2, What is a good alternative of eating chocolate?*

Drink low-cal hot chocolate or eat porridge with chocolate spread.

*3, How does alcohol help menopause women?*

Help increase good cholesterol level.

*4, Why is it good if the good cholesterol level is high?*

It reduces the stickiness of blood and helps prevent blood clots.

*5, What are the bad sides of cutting calories?*

We'll be tired, irritable and unable to concentrate.

*6, What kind of exercises are good to try?*

Popdance, martial arts, team sports (netball, hockey)

*7, What is the most useful everyday exercises? Why?*

Walking, cheap and effective.

### **Follow up activity**

I will cook every day.

I won't eat any more bread.

I will do a detox diet and only drink for a week.

I won't go out with friends any more.