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Take-Home Exam: 2000/2001

Introduction to Language

Module: 09 08208

Written Discourse: Question 4.

Read the extract entitled *Taking Failure by the Throat* and answer these questions:

- a) Show an analysis of the main text patterns in paragraphs 5-8. Identify the signals that indicate this pattern.
- b) Show an analysis of paragraphs 1-4 in terms of prospection and encapsulation.
- c) What is the relationship between cohesion and coherence in paragraphs 10-13?
- d) Choose one or two of the approaches you have used in a), b) and c) and discuss how it/they could be useful to students learning English.

## INTRODUCTION

This essay involves the detailed examination of the text entitled *Taking Failure by the Throat* (see Appendix 1). Various analyses of the text will be presented. Firstly, there will be an analysis of the main text patterns in paragraphs 5-8. Secondly, an analysis of paragraphs 1-4 in terms of prospection and encapsulation will be given. Finally, there will be discussion of how the approaches used in a) and b) could be useful to students learning English.

The extracts used for analysis are included in the Appendices.

### **a) An analysis of the main text patterns in paragraphs 5-8.** (see Appendix 2)

Continuing the work of Winter (cited in Hoey 1994), Hoey (1983; 1994) describes a number of different text patterns: Problem – Solution; General – Specific; and Hypothetical – Real. The following analysis will be based on the description offered by Hoey (1983, 1994) of the Problem – Solution pattern.

The main text pattern of paragraphs 5-8 is a variety of Problem – Solution, which is a very common pattern. In fact, in this part of the extract the pattern is a little more complex: Situation – Problem – Response – Evaluation, and the analysis offered below will trace the development of this four-part pattern.

The first half of paragraph 5 is Situation signalled by the use of ‘How to’, and ‘give them’, whilst the second half of the same paragraph clearly signals the introduction of the Problem part of the pattern with the use of the word ‘problems’. Words such as ‘questions’, which appears twice, ‘inevitably’, ‘mechanically’, and ‘inappropriate’, all have negative connotations, as do the phrases ‘do not cater for’ and ‘little to say’. Intuitively the reader will recognise the negativity of such language, especially when it is compounded by the use of repetition as in ‘too easy’, and ‘too hard’, and ‘feel good’, and ‘feel bad’. Repetition adds monotony and inevitability to the overall negative tone. The expression ‘pedagogic roulette’, echoing Russian Roulette, also contributes to the Problem pattern.

Paragraph 6 continues this element of the pattern with signals, such as, ‘Furthermore’, ‘compound these problems’, and ‘reducing even further’, that there will be more problems listed. ‘Add to this’, and ‘diversity’ could be neutral, but due to the overall tone of the surrounding text, their effect is negative. Further examples of negative signals in this paragraph are ‘failure’, and ‘lack’.

The Problem part of the pattern continues in paragraph 7 with near repetition of 'lack' in 'lacks', adding force to its negative use, and more negative language, for example, 'left out', 'not encourage', and 'inhibit'.

The first half of paragraph 8 shows the departure from Problem towards Response signalled by the use of 'adaptation', 'flexible', and 'facilitate success'. This positive vocabulary is reinforced by the use of comparative in 'more motivating', comparing what is being said now with what was said previously in Problem.

The final part of the text pattern, Evaluation, appears in the second half of paragraph 8, signalled by the use of vocabulary such as, 'open-ended', 'varied', 'facilitate', and 'extend'. Choice, intuitively understood to indicate something positive, is used in various incarnations: 'choose', used twice; 'chosen'; and 'own', with reference to choice. A clear sign of Evaluation in this part of the paragraph is 'dynamics', used as a signal of change and improvement.

The main text pattern of paragraphs 5-8 of the extract has been shown to be: Situation – Problem – Response – Evaluation. The signals revealing this pattern have been listed above. In parts b) and c) of this essay further analyses of parts of the extract will show how signals can facilitate text examination.

**b) An analysis of paragraphs 1-4 in terms of Propection and Encapsulation.** (see Appendix 3)

Due to the explicit instructions given, this part of the essay will focus on Propection and Encapsulation as described by Sinclair (1995), who argues that these two elements are important, and that cohesion is unimportant. However, recognition of the fact that alternative terms and approaches to this element of discourse analysis exist, brief reference will be made to other discourse analysts at appropriate points.

Propection acts as an indicator, signalling to the reader, and enabling him/her to make an educated guess as to what is to come in the text (Sinclair 1995). Encapsulation, on the other hand, summarises previous clauses and sentences.

Sinclair (1995) claims that Prospection and Encapsulation are important for discourse organisation. Paragraphs 1-4 from the extract indicate a 'good' writer in terms of Prospection and Encapsulation; there are a lot of both in the text.

Prospective signals in sentences [8], [11], [12], and [13] help the reader to read quickly and efficiently. Prospections are made and fulfilled by the writer within a few sentences.

The Prospecting Question:

'How do we move from a knowledge of what motivates people to the practical skill of creating motivating activities, thereby moving the learners from failure to success?' is included in sentence [5], paragraph 1, of this extract and answered towards the end of this extract in paragraph 4. The text in-between the question and its resolution serves to create a sense of anticipation on the part of the reader, who, expecting a response, but unsure when it will come, is encouraged to read on.

The use of 'thereby' in sentence [5] should also be noted, since it serves to Encapsulate the preceding information. This is not the only instance in this extract when both Prospection and Encapsulation can be seen working together. 'In saying such things' in sentence [3] Prospects with 'In saying', and Encapsulates with 'such things'.

Further examples of Prospection can be seen in sentences [7], [2], and [11]. Particularly clear cases of Prospection are apparent in 'Here are some things' in sentence [8], and in, 'the two I would like to examine here' [11].

At this point it would be appropriate to refer to another approach to discourse analysis which could be of benefit in this specific case. What Sinclair (1995) calls Prospection in sentence [11], could more precisely be referred to as Prediction in Tadros's terms (1983; 1994), since the response is certain: the writer has clearly stated that he will look at two things. In fact, the writer names the two things immediately afterwards in sentence [12], as was to be expected by the use of the signal 'here' in sentence [11].

The use of Prospection in sentence [11] enables the reader to approach sentence [12] prepared. Without this indication of what is to come the text becomes more difficult to comprehend at this point.

Evidence of Encapsulation is also plentiful in this text. Sinclair (1995) states that most sentences in most texts are either Prospection, Prospected, or Encapsulation, which is true of this text.

Encapsulation, as defined by Sinclair (1995), differs from Francis's (1994) anaphoric reference in that instead of referring back to just a word of a clause, Encapsulation refers back to an idea. Therefore, Encapsulation has a much wider significance.

In sentence [3] 'appeals' encapsulates sentence [2]. The demonstrative 'This' in sentence [4], encapsulates the situation outlined in sentences [1], [2], and [3]. Conjunctions are used to encapsulate as in, 'However' in sentence [7], encapsulating sentence [6], and 'therefore' in sentence [15] which encapsulates sentences [12] to [14] i.e. all of paragraph 4.

In sentence [7] 'diversity in the classroom' encapsulates 'mixed ability classes' in sentence [6]. In Winter's (1994) terms, this would be seen as an example of Matching Relations.

All of paragraph 3, that is, sentences [9] and [10], are encapsulated by 'These informal insights' in sentence [11]. The use of 'informal' serves to stress that the evidence offered is not based on empirical research.

The analysis above shows that Prospection and Encapsulation play a significant role in this text, enabling the reader to follow the argument easily.

### **c) An examination of the relationship between cohesion and coherence in paragraphs 10-**

**13.** (see Appendix 4)

This part of the essay will involve an examination of the indicated extract with reference to a number of different writers in an attempt to examine the relationship of cohesion and coherence present in detail. Firstly, general definitions of cohesion and coherence will be given. Secondly, cohesion in the text will be examined, and thirdly, coherence will be referred to. Finally, there will be comment on the relationship of the two in this part of the text.

Cohesion is the term used to describe the extent to which the individual elements of a text, such as words, and short phrases, link together to form a whole. It refers to the links within the text which unite it. Coherence, on the other hand, is the term used to discuss the extent to which a text makes sense as a whole. Coherence has been described as ‘the feeling that a text hangs together’ (McCarthy 1991: 26). For there to be coherence the reader must be able to understand the relation between clauses; thus clausal relations within the text are highly important. These aspects are discussed below.

Winter (1994) explains one facet of cohesion as ‘Clause Relations’. Within this he includes Logical Sequence and Matching Relation. There are a number of examples of both of these in the text.

The examples of Logical Sequence are as follows: in sentence [2] ‘to be practised’, ‘so’ in sentence [3], ‘In the next lesson’ in sentence [8], ‘If..., they wrote’ in sentence [11], ‘When’ in sentence [12], ‘then’ in sentence [13] and ‘By the end’ in sentence [14]. These examples indicate a clear progression through the text.

Repetition and Replacement form the two parts of what Winter (1994) terms ‘Matching Relation’. The examples of Repetition as found in the text are ‘slips of paper’ in sentences [6], [8], and [9]; ‘extracts’ in sentences [6], and [12], and ‘famous writers’ in sentences [1], and [4]. In a similar way ‘information’ in sentence [4] is repeated in sentence [9] by ‘the information’, and ‘all of the information’ appears in sentence [14].

Examples of Replacement in the text include: ‘read out’ in sentence [9] which is replaced by ‘dictated’ in sentence [12]; ‘the information’ in sentence [9] which is partially-replaced by ‘the facts’ in sentence [11], and completely replaced by ‘the description’ in sentence [11]; and finally, ‘biographies of famous writers’ in sentence [1] is replaced by ‘information about famous writers’ in sentence [14].

Halliday & Hasan (1989), whilst having been criticised for claims making it sound as if cohesion were necessary for coherence, provide a useful tool for examining the text. They believe that the links between the links between clauses are important, since they provide reference, in the form of cohesion, back through the text.

The categories for examining cohesion in a text according to Halliday & Hasan (1989) include Reference; Substitution; Ellipsis; Conjunction and Lexical Cohesion. In the extract there are various examples of Personal Reference and Demonstrative Reference as listed under Reference by Halliday and Hasan (1989).

The examples of Personal Reference are: 'my' in sentence [3], 'I' in sentences [3], [6], [8], and [13]; 'their' in sentences [4], [12], and [13]; 'they' in sentences [5] and [12] and twice in sentence [11], and 'themselves' in sentence [14]. As can be seen, Personal Reference continues throughout the text.

Demonstrative Reference, in this case, 'the', is used extensively in the text. It appears up to five times in one sentence (sentence [8]), and in the text as a whole it can be found thirty times. There are only two sentences in the entire extract where 'the' is not present: sentences [1], and [7].

The next category from Halliday & Hasan (1989) which yields interesting examples from the text is Ellipsis. In sentence [5] 'what' is used to mean the piece of work the students had to do. In sentence [6] 'them' is used to indicate the learners' texts. Finally, in sentence [10] 'it' is used to mean the information about famous people.

Conjunction, Halliday & Hasan's (1989) next category reveals a couple of examples: in sentence [5] 'but', and in sentences [1], [6], [8], [13], and [14] the use of 'and'. The conjunctions used in the text are very simple ones.

Halliday & Hasan's (1989) next category, Lexical Cohesion, has four elements: Synonym; General Noun; Hyponym/Superordinate, and Collocates. There are examples belonging to each of them in the text.

'[R]ead out' in sentence [9] is later referred to using the synonym 'dictated' in sentence [12]. The general noun 'texts' is used in sentence [4] for 'biographies' in sentence [1], and 'exercise' in sentence [3] is used for 'biographies' in sentence [1].

In sentence [3] 'topics' is used as the superordinate of 'biographies' and 'famous writers' in sentence [1]. Finally, there are a variety of collocates in the text. In sentences [6], [8], and

[9] there is 'slips of paper'. In sentence [8] 'distributed...around' appears. In sentence [8] 'write down' is used, later appearing as 'wrote it down' in sentence [10]. '[N]ext to' in sentence [10] and 'read out' also in sentence [10] are the last examples of this category.

Following Halliday & Hasan's model so far the text has been shown to be highly-cohesive. There will now be a further examination of the text using Endophoric and Exophoric Reference as criteria (Halliday & Hasan 1989; Francis 1994).

Endophoric Reference consists of Cataphoric Reference, which looks forward through the text, and Anaphoric Reference, which looks back through the text. The text yields few examples of Cataphoric Reference which we shall examine first.

In sentence [5] there is Cataphoric reference in 'The source of the texts could be in English...what they gave me had to be in English.' Another example occurs in 'If they didn't know' in sentence [11].

In contrast, there is a lot of Anaphoric Reference in the text, especially when moving from general to specific, known items. For example, 'The textbook topics' in sentence [3] presupposes 'An intermediate textbook' in sentence [1]. '[T]he texts' in sentence [4] presupposes 'biographies' in sentence [1]. '[T]he book' in sentence [4] presupposes 'The textbook' in sentence [3], and 'An intermediate textbook' in sentence [1] in turn.

'[T]hem' in sentence [6] presupposes 'the learners' texts' in sentence [6]. '[T]he slips of paper' in sentence [8] presupposes 'slips of paper' in sentence [6]. '[T]he information' in sentence [9] presupposes 'slips of paper in sentence [9], which is another form of referring to 'the information' in sentence [9] which presupposes 'the learners' texts' in sentence [6].

This chain of Anaphoric reference can be traced further. In sentence [12] 'the extracts' presupposes 'extracts' in sentence [6]. In sentence [11] 'the description' presupposes 'the facts' in sentence [11] which in turn presupposes 'the information' in sentence [9]. In sentence [14] 'table of information' presupposes 'their texts' in sentence [13].



In sentence [14] 'famous writers' presupposes 'famous people' in sentence [8], which in turn presupposes 'famous writers' in both sentences [4] and sentence [1]. '[T]he whole class' in sentence [13] presupposes 'the class' in sentences [12], [10], and [8].

'[T]he learners themselves' in sentence [14] presupposes 'the learners' in sentences [9], and [8] and they presuppose 'the class' in sentence [8]. In sentence [14] 'everyone' presupposes first 'their', and then 'them', in sentence [13], which in turn presupposes 'the whole class' at the beginning of sentence [13].

In sentence [13] 'their texts' presupposes 'their answers' in sentence [12]. In sentence [13] 'other members of the class' presupposes 'the rest of the class' in sentence [10].

Paragraphs 10-13 have been shown to display a multitude of cohesive devices which result in 'By the end' in sentence [14]. This very clearly indicates that the end of the procedure has been reached and that this is the result.

This is a very cohesive text. It has been shown that there is careful progression within the text from one idea to another, from one clause to another. Maybe this can be explained by the fact that the writer is a teacher and accustomed to giving clear instructions. Another factor could be that this extract, as part of an article, appeared in a professional journal presumably with the intention of allowing readers the opportunity to test out the writer's ideas. Whatever the reason, the result is one in which the text as a whole gives a very clear description of the writer's suggestions.

Understanding a text is 'an act of interpretation that depends as much on what we as readers bring to a text as what the author puts into it' (McCarthy 1991: 27). This means that whether two clauses make sense or not, is dependent upon the reader as well as the writer. Viewing the text in this way, as a dialogue between reader and writer, it can be seen that what for one reader is a coherent text, for another may be an incoherent text, due to different reader perceptions and expectations. The writer attempts to guess what the reader wants to know, placing signals in the text using cohesive ties, for example, so that the reader will not get lost. However, the writer cannot be sure that the questions he/she has answered are the questions that the reader had expected.

Therefore, for the text to be considered coherent it is necessary not only to examine endophoric references as have been observed above, but also exophoric references. This examination is included below.

Exophoric reference refers to elements outside the text. It cannot be classed as cohesion for this reason: it does not occur within the text and therefore there is nothing for it to presuppose, nothing for it to refer to.

In the extract given there are a number of examples of exophoric reference. 'An intermediate textbook' in sentence [1] refers to a book outside the text, which is unknown to us as readers even if we do understand the concept. Readers not involved in language teaching may find this phrase difficult to understand. The same logic applies to 'textbook topics' in sentence [3]. Such 'topics' whilst well-known among those in the language teaching world, would not be so transparent to those outside the language teaching profession.

The use of 'the past simple'[2], 'fixed expression'[2], and 'a model'[4] are also examples of exophoric reference for similar reasons to those cited above. Those unfamiliar with the language teaching classroom would find understanding these expressions difficult.

'[F]amous writers' in sentences [1]and [4], provides a further example of exophoric reference. Without direct reference to the textbook mentioned in the extract, the reader cannot know who the 'famous writers' are. 'Shakespeare and Jeffrey Archer' in sentence [4] presents a different kind of problem to the reader. I would argue that this reference presupposes a knowledge of Western, if not British, literature. Such knowledge cannot be assumed of the reader.

Finally, 'their mother tongue' in sentence [5] is an example of exophoric reference because the reader is not told the nationality of the students and therefore can only guess. There is nothing in the extract to indicate the answer to this.

It must be noted once again that originally the text was intended for an audience of teachers. This extract, as part of a longer article, appeared in a professional journal for English language teachers working in the foreign language or second language sector. Given these circumstances, it can be supposed, that the text would have been read by very few people who were not teachers in that situation. Thus many of the examples given above of exophoric

reference would have been easily understood by the readers of the text. Therefore, the text can be said to not only be cohesive, but coherent.

**d) A discussion of how the approaches used in a) and b) could be useful to students learning English.**

Research in discourse analysis now suggests that it is important to concentrate on ‘*discourse segments*’ (McCarthy 1991), like paragraphs. This marks a departure from looking at text in terms of smaller units, like individual words, and sentences.

A variety of techniques available for the analysis of text have been used in this essay. I will now be examining how two of these approaches: text patterns and signals; Prospection and Encapsulation, could be of use to students learning English. It will be explained how these techniques could help students to focus on the meaning of a text and concentrate on what they do understand, not on what they are unsure of, or do not understand. Both of these approaches could help students in recognising common markers, or signals, which they could use for text analysis.

It should be stated explicitly, that this part of the essay is in no way intended as an argument for turning students learning English into discourse analysts. Students want to learn English, not do research and, as McCarthy points out:

‘Discourse analysis is not a method for teaching languages, nor does it claim to be that’ (McCarthy 1991: 170).

However, by adopting some of the techniques of discourse analysis and adapting them to the classroom, there are benefits to be gained.

As mentioned above, different text patterns have been identified (Hoey 1983; 1994). Although it would be unrealistic, and unnecessary, to expect students at lower levels to understand and recognise these patterns, by intermediate level it is to be expected that they would be better prepared. By this point students have generally been exposed to a reasonable variety of text and are able to practise a simplified form of text analysis.

Jigsaw readings provide an example of a context in which students will have been aware to some extent of the different patterns that texts can follow. By adopting a top-down approach to studying text, students can learn to use textual clues to focus on gist and meaning before

advancing towards a more detailed understanding. This approach recognises the importance of the reader in the reading process. This will be discussed further below.

Whilst concentrating on top-down approaches for the purposes of this essay, the value of bottom-up approaches with an emphasis on individual words and short phrases for an understanding of the text is not forgotten. McCarthy (1991: 168) points out that there is evidence that successful readers utilise bottom-up and top-down approaches simultaneously.

Text is seen to be a dialogue between the writer and the reader, and the ability of the reader to understand the text, therefore, is seen as central to the process (Nunan 1991: 65). However, in many cases, texts are culture-specific and this can cause problems for students, especially those whose own culture varies greatly from that of the language they are studying. They lack the necessary background knowledge, schemata (Nunan 1991: 67), to be able to understand the cultural references of the text and take part in the writer / reader dialogue. Therefore, the ability to use text pattern knowledge, maybe in a combination with knowledge of genre theory (Nunan 1991: 73), would prove invaluable.

An attempt to increase awareness of textual patterns could be made via the adoption of activities such as matching the beginnings and endings of sentences from a text, concentrating on cohesion between paragraphs, and matching headings to paragraphs.

All of these activities would encourage from intermediate to advanced students to notice textual signals in chunks of text as opposed to just concentrating on individual words. Activities using students' own texts and requiring them to discuss their texts would be even more successful in getting them to concentrate on signalling since students tend to show greater interest in texts they have produced themselves (McCarthy 1991: 155-6).

Awareness of Prospection and Encapsulation in chunks of language would also benefit from the application of the above activities. Whilst difficult concepts for lower level students to grasp, both are very important for a clear understanding of textual structure and could facilitate student comprehension of texts if introduced at an advanced level, or maybe upper-intermediate (depending on the individual class).

Developing an awareness of text using a top-down approach would emphasise the importance of the text as a whole. Students would be engaged in trying to make sense of text via a search

for common signals. However, it should be noted that much of the material used in language teaching is not always representative of authentic texts in that either the signals or the structure adopted do not reflect authentic patterns.

Using authentic texts for this purpose in the language learning classroom could be problematic if the texts expose students to language which does not incorporate itself neatly into what they have already learnt. Finding appropriate authentic materials could be difficult. Whatever the complications, 'Discourse-organising words are best presented and practised in their natural contexts', as McCarthy points out (1991:84).

Learning how to use text patterns and signalling, and Prospection and Encapsulation to understand a text could help students not only with their reading, but also with their writing (Hoey 1994: 44). Learning about texts at macro level would help them to realise the importance of 'signposting' (McCarthy 1991: 31). By recognising key devices in the work of others, students could develop an awareness of techniques through which they could improve their own work with text, both as producers and receivers, writers and readers/listeners (McCarthy p163).

Introducing elements of discourse analysis into the language learning classroom as outlined above could be seen to form part of an initiative dedicated to students 'learning-to-learn' (McCarthy 1991: 78). Additionally, it should be recognised that an awareness of how language learning skills are interconnected could lead to increased student motivation and its attendant benefits.

## **CONCLUSION**

Various analyses of the text entitled *Taking Failure by the Throat* have been presented here. It has been shown that discourse analysis techniques can provide the means by which a greater understanding of text is achieved

Analytical techniques can be of great assistance in the language classroom despite the fact that they were not developed with that end in mind. Used in a 'learner-friendly' manner, they can facilitate understanding of text and text structure, which in turn, it is suggested, will help students to produce improved written material. Therefore, the introduction into the language classroom of such techniques should be encouraged.

## **APPENDICES**

### **CONTENTS**

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APPENDIX 1:.....I

Full extract.

From : Prodromou, Luke. (2000) Taking failure by the throat. English Teaching Professional.

October 2000: Issue 17: 39-40.

APPENDIX 2:.....VI

a)Paragraphs 5-8

(From the extract above named)

APPENDIX 3:.....VIII

b)Paragraphs 1-4

(From the extract above named)

APPENDIX 4:.....X

c)Paragraphs 10-13

(From the extract above named)

## **APPENDIX 1.**

Full Extract from : Prodromou, Luke. (2000) Taking failure by the throat. English Teaching Professional. October 2000: Issue 17: 39-40

### **PARAGRAPH 1**

Motivation is the key to success and lack of motivation a certain way to achieve failure. We often try to motivate learners by telling them they should ‘work harder’, ‘pay attention’, ‘read more’ or even ‘enjoy their lessons’. In saying such things, we are drawing on important principles of motivation and successful language learning, but in spite of our appeals, things rarely change. This is because we are ‘preaching’ motivation, not ‘teaching’ motivation. How do we move from a knowledge of what motivates people to the practical skill of creating motivating activities, thereby moving the learners from failure to success?

### **PARAGRAPH 2**

Failure is often linked to teaching mixed-ability classes. However, diversity in the classroom can be a strength rather than a weakness, an opportunity rather than a threat.

### **PARAGRAPH 3**

#### **Perceptions of failure and success**

Here are some things I have heard teachers say:

*Learners fail because...*

- *they are not interested;*
- *they are lazy;*
- *they lack motivation;*
- *they are afraid of making mistakes;*
- *they don't have the words to say what they want;*
- *teachers do not believe in their abilities.*

*Learners succeed when...*

- *they are motivated;*
- *they participate in the lesson;*
- *they enjoy learning;*
- *they are not afraid to make mistakes;*
- *they learn from their mistakes;*
- *the topics are of interest to them;*
- *the teacher encourages them and believes in them.*

These informal insights into teachers attitudes towards success and failure in the classroom raise a lot of important issues, but the two I would like to examine here are the role of errors and the importance of teacher expectations in shaping learner self-confidence.

#### PARAGRAPH 4

A humanistic approach to failure sees it as success in disguise; errors are not errors at all, but (incomplete) attempts at success. The teacher's task is to tease out these half-formed attempts at success and bring them to fruition. Every apparent failure or lack of motivation conceals the seeds of success and the desire to learn. The teacher's attitude is, therefore, the starting point for beginning to build success on the ruins of failure.

#### PARAGRAPH 5

##### **How to make learners fail**

To make learners fail, give them a questionnaire like this:

1. *Did you have more than two pieces of toast for breakfast?*
2. *Did you have sugar in your tea or coffee?*
3. *Did you drink half a litre of milk?*
4. *Did you drink any alcohol?*
5. *Did you smoke at all?*

Questions like these (taken from a real textbook!) will inevitably cause problems. The form of the questions means learners can mechanically answer *yes* and *no* without understanding. The questions are all of the same type and level and do not cater for diversity – some learners will find them too easy while others find them too hard; some learners will know the answers and feel good, others will not know and will feel bad. The exercise is a kind of pedagogic roulette. Some topics are inappropriate for young learners and will leave them with little to say.

#### PARAGRAPH 6

Furthermore, some teachers compound these problems by teaching the task in a whole-class lock-step formation, reducing even further the flexibility which may help cope with diversity in the classroom. Add to this many teachers' lack of awareness of the importance of body language and eye contact when they are sending out messages to learners and we have it – a formula for failure.

#### PARAGRAPH 7



As it stands, the task lacks flexibility and the learners are left out of the whole process of decision making. It certainly does not encourage them to speak and may even inhibit them.

#### PARAGRAPH 8

##### **How learners succeed**

Here is a simple adaptation of the exercise into a flexible task which is more motivating for the learners and will facilitate success:

1. The teacher elicits things the learners can do to keep fit, and builds up a list of key words on the board:  
*sugar, breakfast, milk, fruit, go to bed, hamburger, etc.*
2. The teacher elicits *yes/no* and *wh-* questions based on the key words:  
*Did you have sugar in your coffee? How much sugar did you have? Did you have breakfast? What did you have for breakfast? etc.*
3. The learners copy a simple, open-ended questionnaire and use it to ask and answer questions around the class.

(TABLE WAS INCLUDED HERE.)

This version of the activity is open-ended in four ways:

- language – it is more varied (learners can choose to ask *yes/no* questions, *wh-* questions or both);
- content – it has to some extent been chosen by the learners and will therefore facilitate a response;
- group dynamics – learners can choose to work on their own, in pairs, or in groups;
- timing – learners add their own questions to extend the activity.

#### PARAGRAPH 9

##### **Learner input**

In most classes most of the time, the teacher, or the textbook, chooses the topics, materials and language. By excluding learners from at least some decision making, we are losing opportunities to motivate them. Exercising some power over one's learning is motivating because it makes the learner an active subject, not merely a passive object. The more opportunities learners have to take pleasure in practising what they know, the stronger their sense of self esteem. Here are some ways I have put the principle of learner input into practice with my students.

#### PARAGRAPH 10

## **Collective dictation:**

### **‘The power and the glory’**

An intermediate textbook gave two concise biographies of famous writers – Shakespeare and Jeffrey Archer. The language to be practised was the simple past, including the fixed expression *was born in*. The textbook topics failed to motivate my learners, so I transformed the exercise as follows:

#### PARAGRAPH 11

Using the texts in the book as a model, learners collected information about famous writers from their own culture. The source of the texts could be in English or in their mother tongue, but what they gave me had to be in English.

#### PARAGRAPH 12

I corrected around ten extracts from the learners’ texts and put them on slips of paper. For example:

*He was born in Milan in 1785 and he died in 1873. He wrote the romantic novel I promessi sposi in 1827.*

*He was born in 1304 and died in 1374. He is one of the first men of the Renaissance. He is famous for his sonnets.*

#### PARAGRAPH 13

In the next lesson, I distributed the slips of paper around the class and asked the learners to write down the names of famous people, each on a separate line, like this:

*Petrarch*

*Manzoni*

The learners with slips of paper took turns to read out the information. The rest of the class wrote it down next to the appropriate name. If they didn’t know who the facts described, they wrote the description at the bottom of the page. When all the extracts had been dictated, they checked their answers with other members of the class, completing any gaps. I then elicited answers from the whole class giving them another opportunity to check both the content and language of their texts. By the end, everyone had a complete and accurate table of information about famous writers, chosen by the learners themselves.

#### PARAGRAPH 14

This 'collective dictation' differs from the traditional dictation in that the texts are chosen and read out by the learners, who are also responsible for supplying and checking the answers. So a degree of power over the learning process has been passed on to the learners. The knowledge required to initiate and complete the task also comes from them : they are the experts.

#### PARAGRAPH 15

Even the weakest learner can share in this control over content and process. The teacher's role as manager of the activity and corrector of errors ensures the participation of learners of diverse levels of ability. Error is not an obstacle to participation; it is even positive, in that the individual who made the error will get discreet feedback and the whole class will build on their collective inter-language to drive their competence forward.

## **APPENDIX 2.**

a) Paragraphs 5-8

### PARAGRAPH 5

#### **How to make learners fail**

To make learners fail, give them a questionnaire like this:

6. *Did you have more than two pieces of toast for breakfast?*
7. *Did you have sugar in your tea or coffee?*
8. *Did you drink half a litre of milk?*
9. *Did you drink any alcohol?*
10. *Did you smoke at all?*

Questions like these (taken from a real textbook!) will inevitably cause problems. The form of the questions means learners can mechanically answer *yes* and *no* without understanding. The questions are all of the same type and level and do not cater for diversity – some learners will find them too easy while others find them too hard; some learners will know the answers and feel good, others will not know and will feel bad. The exercise is a kind of pedagogic roulette. Some topics are inappropriate for young learners and will leave them with little to say.

### PARAGRAPH 6

Furthermore, some teachers compound these problems by teaching the task in a whole-class lock-step formation, reducing even further the flexibility which may help cope with diversity in the classroom. Add to this many teachers' lack of awareness of the importance of body language and eye contact when they are sending out messages to learners and we have it – a formula for failure.

### PARAGRAPH 7

As it stands, the task lacks flexibility and the learners are left out of the whole process of decision making. It certainly does not encourage them to speak and may even inhibit them.

### PARAGRAPH 8

#### **How learners succeed**

Here is a simple adaptation of the exercise into a flexible task which is more motivating for the learners and will facilitate success:

4. The teacher elicits things the learners can do to keep fit, and builds up a list of key words on the board:

*sugar, breakfast, milk, fruit, go to bed, hamburger, etc.*

5. The teacher elicits *yes/no* and *wh-* questions based on the key words:

*Did you have sugar in your coffee? How much sugar did you have? Did you have breakfast? What did you have for breakfast? etc.*

6. The learners copy a simple, open-ended questionnaire and use it to ask and answer questions around the class.

(TABLE WAS INCLUDED HERE.)

This version of the activity is open-ended in four ways:

- language – it is more varied (learners can choose to ask *yes/no* questions, *wh-* questions or both);
- content – it has to some extent been chosen by the learners and will therefore facilitate a response;
- group dynamics – learners can choose to work on their own, in pairs, or in groups;
- timing – learners add their own questions to extend the activity.

### **APPENDIX 3.**

#### b) Paragraphs 1-4

##### PARAGRAPH 1

[1]Motivation is the key to success and lack of motivation a certain way to achieve failure. [2]We often try to motivate learners by telling them they should ‘work harder’, ‘pay attention’, ‘read more’ or even ‘enjoy their lessons’. [3]In saying such things, we are drawing on important principles of motivation and successful language learning, but in spite of our appeals, things rarely change. [4]This is because we are ‘preaching’ motivation, not ‘teaching’ motivation. [5]How do we move from a knowledge of what motivates people to the practical skill of creating motivating activities, thereby moving the learners from failure to success?

##### PARAGRAPH 2

[6]Failure is often linked to teaching mixed-ability classes. [7]However, diversity in the classroom can be a strength rather than a weakness, an opportunity rather than a threat.

##### PARAGRAPH 3

#### **Perceptions of failure and success**

[8]Here are some things I have heard teachers say:

[9]*Learners fail because...*

- *they are not interested;*
- *they are lazy;*
- *they lack motivation;*
- *they are afraid of making mistakes;*
- *they don't have the words to say what they want;*
- *teachers do not believe in their abilities.*

[10]*Learners succeed when...*

- *they are motivated;*
- *they participate in the lesson;*
- *they enjoy learning;*
- *they are not afraid to make mistakes;*
- *they learn from their mistakes;*
- *the topics are of interest to them;*
- *the teacher encourages them and believes in them.*

[11]These informal insights into teachers attitudes towards success and failure in the classroom raise a lot of important issues, but the two I would like to examine here are the role of errors and the importance of teacher expectations in shaping learner self-confidence.

#### PARAGRAPH 4

[12]A humanistic approach to failure sees it as success in disguise; errors are not errors at all, but (incomplete) attempts at success. [13]The teacher's task is to tease out these half-formed attempts at success and bring them to fruition. [14]Every apparent failure or lack of motivation conceals the seeds of success and the desire to learn. [15]The teacher's attitude is, therefore, the starting point for beginning to build success on the ruins of failure.

#### **APPENDIX 4.**

c) Paragraphs 10-13

PARAGRAPH 10

**Collective dictation:**

**‘The power and the glory’**

[1]An intermediate textbook gave two concise biographies of famous writers – Shakespeare and Jeffrey Archer. [2]The language to be practised was the simple past, including the fixed expression *was born in*. [3]The textbook topics failed to motivate my learners, so I transformed the exercise as follows:

PARAGRAPH 11

[4]Using the texts in the book as a model, learners collected information about famous writers from their own culture. [5]The source of the texts could be in English or in their mother tongue, but what they gave me had to be in English.

PARAGRAPH 12

[6]I corrected around ten extracts from the learners’ texts and put them on slips of paper.

[7]For example:

*He was born in Milan in 1785 and he died in 1873. He wrote the romantic novel I promessi sposi in 1827.*

*He was born in 1304 and died in 1374. He is one of the first men of the Renaissance. He is famous for his sonnets.*

PARAGRAPH 13

[8]In the next lesson, I distributed the slips of paper around the class and asked the learners to write down the names of famous people, each on a separate line, like this:

*Petrarch*

*Manzoni*

[9]The learners with slips of paper took turns to read out the information. [10]The rest of the class wrote it down next to the appropriate name. [11]If they didn’t know who the facts described, they wrote the description at the bottom of the page. [12]When all the extracts had been dictated, they checked their answers with other members of the class, completing any gaps. [13]I then elicited answers from the whole class giving them another opportunity to check both the content and language of their texts. [14]By the end, everyone had a complete and accurate table of information about famous writers, chosen by the learners themselves.



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