Welcome!

to

A Simple English Lesson

This is about a

" Never Get Lost "

Reading Program

Will J. Moore

M.Ed., pbDip.

A Never Get Lost Reading Program

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a reading support technique for Arabic students of English. These students must overcome the L1 interference "reversal of reading direction." PowerPoint presentations utilizing a simple "Fade" effect with adjustable delay between words such that the text appears nicely in a left-to-right manner, line by line with voice roughly synchronized to the text to allow for emphasis, phrasing, and movement provide the support necessary to developing "fluency" in reading – and writing English. When reading fixed English texts, Arabic students who lose the thread find it extremely difficult to rejoin the sound-grapheme stream. This technique provides the support necessary to overcome that obstacle. Students can "never get lost," simply because whenever they attempt to rejoin the story, the words they hear are appearing across the page. The literature revealed no research related to the topic, suggesting an area of need.

Introduction

The following ideas are based on observations of students from all over the world and all walks of life in ESL classrooms in Canada for a period of seven years, combined with six years of classroom observations in the United Arab Emirates, mostly of eighteen to twenty year old males entering military service. Despite a fairly thorough search of the ERIC educational database, little material of relevance to this proposal is to be found. This indicates a need for more research. The following ideas are derived from repeated attempts to "reach" my students by presenting them with comprehensible input (Krashen, and Terrell, 1983). Despite objections to their ideas, "However, upon closer examination of Krashen's hypotheses and Terrell's methods, they fail to provide the goods for a workable system." (Romeo, 2009), I tried what seemed an obvious improvement, "moveable text," over "fixed text" with my students for the Reading aspect of their curriculum. Having observed countless examples of students pretending to read, pretending to know where we are in the text, yet being unable to pick up the reading from the last reader; having listened to countless students as they became lost in the fixed text readings they are constantly presented with, I took a simple short text and copy pasted it into a PowerPoint presentation, added the "Fade" Animation Effect and set it to "by word" at 25% delay [between words]. I then played the page and recorded the words as they appeared in a simple left-to-right manner, line by line [in Ariel font 24, line-spacing 1.5]. I projected this in the classroom and asked for my students simply to read along silently with the text. The reaction

was strongly positive. I have since recorded and presented hundreds of pages of text, all of which provide the Arabic student of English with important support - eye-guidance in left-to-right reading. The Arabic student of English faces many problems, but this one in particular causes them problems at very deep levels. The need to adapt from the "right-to-left" writing & reading system of Arabic to the "left-to-right" writing & reading system of English is complicated enough without changing all the symbols and conventions of their L1. Add to this strange new sounds and cultural value differences that have caused wars in the past, and you have a real problem on your hands.

The Problem

The L1 interference of this reversal of systems cannot be over-emphasized. It lingers on well into advanced levels of learning. Examples of the problem range from simple typo-type mistakes when writing – "no" becomes "on," for example - to loss of place when moving from line to line during reading [note that professional papers like this one must be 1.5 line spaces apart, but many ESL texts present beginners with single spaced texts to read – baffling]. Loss of orientation and total confusion attack the early learner as the mind simply rebels against reading backwards! Not only is the writing direction of English backwards (to the Arabic mind) but one proceeds from page to page in a backwards orientation as well.

In Saudi Arabia, when I was teaching in a Middle school in Jeddah, I introduced standard North American three pronged "duotangs." The poor students simply could not figure out how to put new pages into them. They would start out placing the duotang upside down in front of themselves, placing pages in the duotang backwards, taking out all the pages in the booklet to add a new page, (because it belonged at the front) – it was actually impossible for some of my Grade 9's to figure out even after an entire semester of trying! You try it! Try just writing on the page normally and proceeding in a backwards page order. It doesn't take long before you mess up. Then try writing backwards leave out all punctuation and capital letters, join some words together and you have a small sample of what Arabic students face when they attempt to learn English. And this all goes without considering whether or not the student is motivated, academically oriented, or in a school were there is support for the student with learning disabilities in their own language.

My absolute favorite example of this interference – which I had noted time and again in writing assignments where "on" becomes "no" and "how" becomes "who" is the one involving the number "two." It goes like this:

Teacher: Fahad, how do you spell the word for the number 'two'?
Fahad: T W O, teacher.
Teacher: Good Fahad. Now come up to the front and write the word on the board.

Fahad proceeds to the board where he diligently produces 'T O W'

Teacher: No Fahad, that is wrong.
Fahad: Why teacher? T W O – yes?
Teacher: Yes, Fahad, "T W O" is correct, but you wrote "T O W" – try again.

Teacher erases the student's first attempt.

Fahad again produces "T O W" but this time says the names of the letters as he produces them – "T W O!"
Having once again written "T O W" his fellow students now catch on to the problem he is facing and begin coaching him.

Students: No No Fahad – The "O" comes after the "W" – to the right, not the left!

Fahad looks at his writing, blinks, looks again and finally it dawns on him.

When he produced the "W" he did it backwards – as if he were writing in Arabic, from right to left – having left sufficient space between the "T" and the finished "W" to squeeze in the "O" after making the "W" backwards but following on in a right-left direction.

He now writes "T W O" and sheepishly returns to his seat amidst some laughter from his classmates.

As the teacher it is my duty to counter this and point out that the most difficult thing to do is to reverse your system of thinking and writing requires very careful thinking. Just one split second of inattention results in this kind of error. And it persists right up into advanced learners' writing.

So how do we overcome this problem? What support can we give the Arabic student of English to balance this truly difficult problem? (How many of you can nod your head "yes" while saying "no?") Be real here. What support can we offer?

The Support

PowerPoint gives us the ability to present text which appears word by word across the page in a nice left to right linear manner. We can control the speed with which it appears. We can alter the speed for any given portion of the page. And we can synchronize voice to the text. We can control line spacing, font and color.

Just try reading the paragraph above – where the letters are not reversed – word by word – backwards. ['begin "to left nice a in page…"] The biggest difficulty I face is that my eyes

don't want to go that way. And if I once get lost listening to someone reading the passage to me, I can never find my way back into the stream of words going by. A single distraction can cause total loss of ability to participate – thus the student who looks like he / she is following, but has no idea of content when asked a question, or asked to pick up the reading.

It is quite feasible to present whole stories to students, using the PowerPoint left-to-right fade-by-word with 15% - 25% delay between words – either projected onto classroom walls, or in computer labs where students can listen-and-read quietly. Pictures can be part of the stream going by – that is no problem. Students can first listen-and-read along, then replay the page and listen-and-repeat (without looking at the page), then read, listen, and repeat (actually the student should try to say the words at the same time as the speaker) using the same texts. Having students record their read-aloud session means teachers have access to permanent oral records. The same texts played without sound make excellent read-aloud test materials. Assessment can be performed by a pair of teachers, or small groups of teachers involved with each student after-the-fact, by listening to the student's oral works as collected through the term. Tests are a separate thing from assessment, but they can also form a part of any student portfolio. So rather than sit around and double mark written tests, teachers can double or triple mark oral work collected through the term on an ongoing basis.

Integration into A Curriculum

So how do we organize this reading program or technology into our current curriculum? My classroom research article, "Integrating a CALL Initiative Into a Regular Curriculum (in the Arab World)" appears in the March, 2008 TESOL Arabia SIG Series "Educational Technology in the Arabian Gulf: Theory, Research and Pedagogy." This was an initial attempt to integrate an oral component into the regular (American Headway) curriculum. It combined classroom and CALL labs. The next step was to develop reading texts in PowerPoint which could augment the Unit readings in such student texts as the American Headway series. The specific advantage of PowerPoint is that the text becomes alive. If a student's mind wanders for a moment or two – perhaps "when" is a more apt term – they can quickly rejoin the listening-reading program because the words appear as they are spoken – roughly. I find that by not paying too much attention to exactitude – sometimes being two words behind, sometimes six and sometimes right on the words – the text is less robot-like. Students do need to pay attention. In one classroom setting I began each 1.5 hour-long lesson with a five to ten minute reading session – three pages of a long story were projected onto the classroom wall. Students listened and read along. One student would then be picked to stand and read aloud when the page was completed. By keeping

the speaker unknown, every student realized they had to be prepared. As the story chosen was of interest to the students, they put a lot of effort into it. Vocabulary could be discussed after the initial presentation, but before the student read-aloud session. Details of the story could be discussed. The story brought students into the room in a timely manner, rather than ten minutes late as some had become want to do. It provided a continuity to the English task-based curriculum lessons which were otherwise quite disjointed. And it provided the students with a reading that they could follow – literally. These same students when faced with a page of single-spaced fixed-text would either sink deeply into the focus required to follow the reading, or would soon be looking around the room – lost in space. And those who actually did manage to follow the reading would often not remember anything they had read. They were so deeply engrossed with actually following the word-sound stream that meaning managed to slip by quite unnoticed. How can we help these students? Teach our teachers how to use PowerPoint to deliver simple readings – that's how. And there are many shortcuts to this initial teaching. Once a teacher has a PowerPoint reading, it can be used as a template for creating new ones. Teachers with "good voices" can produce readings for countless students. Once created they last forever. They can be shared easily and inexpensively. They are not that expensive to produce. The advantages of introducing this simple technique into the regular curriculum can become the basis for an entire oral component to your assessment and evaluation of every student's English ability. A simple filing system that preserves the student and task identity allows two teachers to sit and listen to five or ten samples of a student's oral production - spread out over an entire semester. You don't need to listen endlessly, a minute of each is too much. Randomly selecting twenty seconds of a two minute recording (ten times) will give a result that can be statistically shown to accurately represent any student's oral ability. One can develop a rubric which can be explained to – and even demonstrated to – students. Rubrics for testing look for specific speech factors or grammar points – such as the ability to differentiate between the three sounds that "ed" makes at the end of a verb – "e.g. helped, moaned, wanted," or the proper use of the Past Tense verb form. Rubrics for assessments look at broader linguistic features produced over a longer period of time, such as mid-term or term-end. Topics such as phrasing, voice modulation, clarity of speech, confidence, improvement, and scope are considered in this manner. Let's look at some specifics. Appendix A is a detailed step-by-step "how to" to set up your first PowerPoint reading. Selecting texts is quite another matter, but most schools already have reading lists appropriate for all grades, ages, levels and genders. Why re-invent the wheel – unless you can make it go faster! Instead of having to deal with expensive copyright issues, have the students create their own stories – or have the teachers create a few. Professional development sessions

can result in excellent curricular materials. Pictures from the public internet galleries can be acknowledged.

One of the specific skills you will need to develop is the "page ending." With a single page story it doesn't matter where you end your story, but with a multi-page story the break at the end of each page becomes very important. You cannot break the sentence just anywhere. And it does not look right if the last line ends half-way across the line, but not at the end of the sentence. You cannot change font or font size from page to page, so you must adjust the text box size a little or adjust the line spacing a little to get the right appearance for each page. This is a simple trick once you are aware of it – and if the line ends a word short, no problem, so long as you broke the sentence in a logical place. Remember to keep lines well spaced and in a clear font. Don't worry if it doesn't look like the pros made it – you made it – together with your students, perhaps – which is far better. Recording is also easy. It is built in to PowerPoint, and so is easy to manage once you have done it three times. Appendix B gives a detailed step-by-step procedure for making and attaching a sound file to your PowerPoint presentation. I encourage you to try this simple technique. Don't be frightened off by what seem to be lengthy explanations in the appendices. It takes a lot of words to describe a simple sweep of the hand. As this is a work in progress, I would appreciate being notified of any relevant research you might be aware of. I can be reached at: dreigo@hotmail.com.

Appendix A - Building a PowerPoint Reading Template

1. Open your text source and copy a "chunk" of text, or type in original text.
2. Open your PPT and delete the auto text boxes (never use these) –
3. Add a small "Title" text box to the top of the page. [This can be a chapter title or story title or book title]
4. Add your title text to the box, center it and treat it as you would the title that appears at the top of each page in most story books. [a small standard font without embellishment will do]
5. With the text box border visible, Click on "Slide Show" on the menu bar and select "Custom Animation"
6. Click on "Add Effect" & select "Entrance/ Fade"
7. Note the blue "effect" appears in the window below the "Task Bar Window"
8. For now, this is all that is needed, later you will attach the Sound file to this box as the sound plays after any text effects [if you attach the sound to the box the text appears in, no synchronization is possible]
9. Now add a full width normal text box to the page and keep it visible (selected)
10. Paste your text into this text box
11. Click twice, slowly on the text box border to make it hatched (fully selected)
12. Set the font, font size, font attributes, & line spacing [don't fuss too much over this until you have all the pages of your text in the PPT]
13. Click on "Slide Show" on the menu bar and select "Custom Animation"
14. Click on "Add Effect" & select "Entrance/ Fade"
15. Note the blue "effect" appears in the window below the "Task Bar Window"
16. Click on the "effect" & then click on the small black "V" on the right of this "effect"
17. Select "Effect Options" from the drop down menu & click on the "V" on the right of "Animate text" in the "Effect" window that has opened.
18. Select "By Word" & set the delay to around 20% (first estimate)
19. Play the page using the icon in the lower left of the screen (right for Vista versions) – play with the %delay – practice reading aloud at several different "delay" settings
20. Once you have what you feel is a "working" page, copy it completely [by clicking on the thumbnail] and paste several copies below page 1 in this window.
21. Now all you need to do is to copy-paste all the remaining text into each "ready-to-go" text box.
22. You are ready to "Record Narration."

Appendix B - How to Make and Attach a Sound File to your PPT

1. Open your PPT. Click on "Slide Show" and select "custom animations" This opens a Task Pane on the right. Play the page and practice reading it as it appears to get the speed and rhythm. Adjust the Effect Options/By Word/ % Delay to the correct speed.
2. To make the recording, click on "Slide Show" on the top menu bar and select "Record Narration" from the drop down box.
3. In the "Record Narration" window click on the "Change Quality" button.
4. In the "Sound Selection" window click on the "v" to the right of "Attributes" and select 11,025 kHz, 16 bit, stereo 43kb/s *(a lower rate results in a lot of hissing due to "s"es in your speech)*
5. *Click OK*
6. Click on "Set Microphone Level" and set the pointer to the 3rd bar from the left *Click OK*
7. Click on the small box in the lower left corner "Link narrations in" to tell your computer you want to store the sound file you are about to create.
8. click on "Browse" to navigate to the folder you want to save it in and click "select" *(you may need to create a folder for this)*
9. Now – as you are on the first page of your PPT, when you click OK in the "Record Narration" window, the program will begin to run and you need to make the recording
10. To stop recording just hit the "Esc" key on your keyboard - Click on "NO" where it asks you if you want to "save" your settings.)
11. Locate the yellow "sound file" icon in the lower right corner of your page – Note the "Effect" that has appeared in the "Task Pane' window. – Delete the yellow icon and note that the "effect" is deleted.
12. Navigate through your "Windows Explorer" or "My documents" window to the folder with your sound file in it *(The program has given it an automatic name)* "Rename" your sound file.
13. Now return to your PPT page and insert a small "title" text box at the top, add the title, click on the "Add Effect" button and select/Entrance/Fade" as you did for the story text box – leave this box set to appear "all at once."
14. Now click on the "v" of the title box' "Custom Animation" box in the right hand window, click on "Effect Options" and on the "v" of the "Sound" field in the new window. Scroll down to the bottom to "Other sounds" and navigate your way to your sound file for this page. Select it and you now have both reading and voice.
15. Play your page by clicking on "Slide Show/View Show" It should work!
16. For pages 2 onwards, when recording, there is an extra window before you start – allowing you to choose between "this page" and "from the first slide." Enjoy!

Appendix C* - How to Use Never Get Lost Readings in the Classroom

Need:
Computer/projector, Windows XP (best) or higher, MSPowerPoint 2003 or newer
Headset-mic
Separate audio file
X copies of story in print form
X copies of cloze exercise
X copies of vocabulary list
X copies of questions.
Highlighter

Possible Exercises:

A: Listening for Content (Intermediate level exercise)
1) Play the PowerPoint story right through (4 pages max)
2) Ask for student comprehension with a few questions about the story
3) Hand out question page and have students work in pairs to answer
4) Each pair provides answer for class for one question

B: Listening for Vocabulary: (Beginner or Int)
1) Hand out the printed story
2) Play the PowerPoint story page – by - page
3) Have students identify unknown words with highlighter
4) Hand out the vocabulary page and discuss the best meaning/example

C: Listening/Writing/Spelling (Beginner or Int.)
1) Hand out the cloze exercise
2) Explain about scanning and re-entering the sound-grapheme stream
3) Play the audio file – repeat as needed (3 – 5 times should do)
4) Have the student check their spelling against the printed story if they have it from a previous lesson, or – display the PPT for spell-checking

D: Reading/Pronunciation/Intonation
1) Prep students with volume, pronunciation and intonation examples
2) Play the audio file while they read along
3) Give them practice time working in pairs reading to each other
4) Have one from each pair come forward and read aloud to the class
5) Use headset-mic to record student performance
6) Discuss performances
- Not included in the published version

Bibliography

Krashen, Stephen D. and Tracy D. Terrell. 1983. *The natural approach: Language acquisition in the classroom*. Hayward, CA: Alemany Press.

Romeo, Ken. "Krashen's Natural Approach" retrieved July 6, 2009 from Kenji Hakuta's LAU website, Stanford University School of Education; http://www-leland.stanford.edu/~hakuta/www/LAU/ICLangLit/NaturalApproach.htm