

DEVELOPING TASK RELATED TEXT: FROM COMPREHENSION TO COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Achmad Faizin

Dania Rahmanita

rahma.dania@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is aimed to discuss the importance of selecting the appropriate texts and tasks for reading comprehension. Different text offers opportunities for different kinds of exploitation and tasks related text. The more exploitable the text is, the more tasks can be varied. The activities include ones for pre-reading, whilst reading and post-reading forms of activities. Most of the tasks use multiple choice forms of questioning since the language and the content of the text is fairly challenging for the SLTP students. The tasks themselves take the form of comprehension practices and a communicative task at the end.

Keywords: texts, reading comprehension, communicative, practices

Introduction

One of the English teacher's duty in the classroom is teaching reading with its various implications. Taking this responsibility means that to give the greatest result of the teaching, he or she is required to carry out the presentation carefully starting from considering the text selection, supplying the students appropriate strategy to handle the text to deciding kinds of follow up activity after the reading session phase. Before selecting the text, the teacher sets the objectives he and the students will get at the end of the class. The objectives determine what type of text will be appropriate to reach the targeted teaching instructions. "A text is pick up based on the aspect of readability, suitability of content, exploitability, reading skills and strategies it demands and whether it will be better to use authentic or simplified text "(Nuttal:1985:25 – 32). In other words different text offers opportunities for different kinds of exploitation and tasks related text. The more exploitable the text is, the more tasks can be varied. It is very lucky if the teacher finds a text which can be the basis for several activities involving tasks related to listening , speaking and writing skill altogether.

Apart from the selection, a set of techniques on how to tackle reading text must be taken into consideration. In this case, the same text might be approached with different strategies or skills. To gain the gist, for example, the reader probably uses skimming technique. After having the overview of what the text contains, scanning then can be applied to look for specific information which are located in separate parts of the text. Making schemata to summarize the points is one of the alternative steps when the students have finished skimming and scanning the text. An overall technique which covers skimming, scanning and other skills to have a comprehensive understanding on the text being read from the very early stage before reading until how the students are aware of their cognitive process is also valuable for the learners to master. The teacher may choose and introduce some among many other techniques which have been developed by a number of researchers such as SQ3R and metacognitive strategy. Not equipped with sophisticated ways of handling the text, the whilst-reading activity will spend the students' time without sufficient language and content attainment.

After selecting the text and equipping the students with useful strategies to read the text effectively, the English teacher's duty is designing tasks related text. The teacher will never let the students read without doing other activities. Reading the text is not the final purpose of the session. The tasks themselves may be committed before, during and after the students read. The form is also various associated with the skills which will be focused or trained and the types of comprehension which will be evaluated. Consequently, "the organisation of an activity and the instructions the teacher gives are of vital importance since if the students have not understood clearly what they are to do they will not be able to perform their tasks satisfactorily" (Harmer:1991:240). Although types of activities are designed in different forms, but the underlying principles for pre-reading activity is to activate the students' knowledge and to be the bridge between the text's content and the reader's knowledge. Related to this reading phase, De Debbat writes "this is achieved by having the students think, write and discuss everything they know about the topic, or employing tasks and activities such as prediction, semantic mapping and and reconciled reading" (De Debbat:2006:11). Although the form of the activities might be different but during the whilst-reading activities,

students are provided with a set of instructions to give them the target and purpose for reading and the instructions also serve as guide for them when they read. Meanwhile , various activities and tasks can be applied for the post reading activity, "the teacher in this session may give short comprehension questions, vocabulary work tasks, opportunity for discussion on the topic and the author's reasoning, and also immediate creativity by relating to writing or speaking activities". (Correia:2006:17).

Based on the complexity of the teacher's job in choosing appropriate text, equipping the students with several reading strategies and designing tasks which need many considerations and theories, it can be said that those who have theoretical and practical strong basis are likely to be successful English teachers . In line with the statement, according to De Debatt (2006: 18),as stated in her article, " the teacher should have a comprehensible knowledge of teaching reading in order to posses the basis for improving learning environment and for evaluating". The brief discussion on some aspects of the English teacher's duty in teaching reading above has become the consideration for the writer to select a certain text and to design various tasks for the third year students of MTs or LTP level which involve integrated skills.

Text and Tasks

In selecting the following text, the writer considers that the passage is fairly challenging for the third year students of MTs in term of the language level. It has a fairly high vocabulary and structure. However, the students are encouraged to be brave in deducing meaning from the contextual clues. It also stimulates them to use not only one skill. Besides, information in the text is expected to be something new for them. It extends their previous knowledge on one of the members of the solar system. After discussing the text , they possibly think about a prospective profession for themselves related to the field of astronomy. In other words, it opens the students' horizon. Having compared this text and ones for the national examination, the writer finds that most of the texts used for national examination are a little bit beyond the students' current vocabulary and structural level although the understanding on the text are still

coped. Therefore, preparing the students to handle the text which is equivalent to final examination degree of difficulty is an additional purpose of presenting the text.

Text

.....

We will leave the argument about whether Pluto is a planet or a Kuiper Belt object. But the fact remains that the solar system's most remote member has an extremely strange orbit in which its distance from the sun varies by a whopping 25%. On average that distance is 3.67 billion miles. (39.5 times further than Earth), and Pluto takes 248 years to orbit the Sun.

A mission (unmanned, for obvious reasons) to Pluto is now back on the cards- but the boffins will have to pull their proverbial fingers out. Pluto reached its 'Perihelion' (closest approach to the sun) in 1989 and since then has been moving further away. The New Horizons mission is scheduled to reach Pluto in 2015, 9 years after its launching. By this time the thin atmosphere, composed mostly of Nitrogen (with a bit of Methane and Carbon Monoxide thrown in), will be getting a lot colder, dropping to around -223 Celcius degree (that's -390 Fahrenheit degree).

The problem that faces the boffins is that eventually, soon after 2016, Pluto's atmosphere will literally freeze and start to drop to the planet's surface. By 2020, this strange snowfall will be complete. So, if there is any delays, there will be no atmosphere for New Horizons to examine. (Michael Walsh – <http://weblog.cenriqueortiz.com/space>)

Pre-reading tasks

Task 1. Reading to confirm expectation

In the example of reading activity below, the task invites students' involvement to confirm their expectation about the information they think they will get in the text."This technique encourages the learners to become interested in the subject matter and to give them motivating purpose for reading" (Harmer:1991:191)

Instruction: You are about to read a text on "Pluto". But before, fill in the table to find out what have you known and what would you like to know about Pluto

| About Pluto | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| Things you know | Things you would like to know |
| Farthest planet | Temperature? |
| | |

Key answer: students' answers may vary

Task 2.

Instruction: Now, write things you know and what would you like to know on the board to share with your friends.

Key answer: students' answers may vary

Task 3

Instruction: Together with your teacher, talk and explore everything you know about the blue planet. What aspects of earth are not mentioned in your list above.

Whilst Reading Tasks

Task 4 Asking general information about the text

According to Suharmanto during his teaching of reading class on 28 December 2007, it is better for the teacher to move from general understanding about the text to the details. This strategy provides the students an overview on the text before they explore it. In other words, the learners will be more prepared to swim deeper through the text.

Instruction: Read the text in a few minutes, never worry if you find several unfamiliar words. You are only asked to pay attention to the general understanding. Then, answer the following questions.

1. How many paragraphs are there in the text?

2. "Pluto has an unusual orbit". What paragraph shows the idea?
3. "There has been a space mission to Pluto". What paragraph shows the idea?
4. What paragraph expresses the probable condition of Pluto in the future?
5. What does the text mainly about?

Key answer:

1. Three paragraphs.
2. Paragraph one. Most parts of the paragraph inform the strange orbit of Pluto.
3. Paragraph two. The sentences of the paragraph talk about a mission to Pluto.
4. Paragraph three. The prediction of the future atmosphere of Pluto is expressed here.
5. Pluto. All paragraphs talk about it.

Task 5. More on general understanding

To come to general understanding on the text, the students need to accustom themselves to use skimming and scanning techniques. The first technique is done by glancing rapidly through the text to determine its gist. The second one is done in the same way to search for a specific piece of information or to get an initial impression if the text is suitable for a given purpose. According to Nuttall, "the two are not careful reading, but they enable the reader to select the text, or the portion of the text which are worth spending time on". (Nuttall: 1985: 34)

Instruction: Choose the best answer.

1. Who possibly writes the text?
 - a. A historian
 - b. A military officer
 - c. A scientist
 - d. An ecologist

Key answer: C. A person who writes the text concerns much and knows a lot of information about Pluto. He is quite possibly an astronomist which is categorized into a scientist.

2. Who was it written for?
 - a. common readers
 - b. students
 - c. pharmacologist
 - d. travel agency

Key answer: A. The writer does not address explicitly to whom he writes the text for. It means that the information in the text is for common readers or for those who are interested in getting more information about Pluto.

3. What is the writer's intention by writing the text?

- a. To persuade people to go to Pluto c. To inform people things related to Pluto
- b. To prohibit people visiting Pluto d. To warn other scientists

Key answer: C. The text does not contain persuasion, prohibition or warning . It just tells some information about Pluto by using neutral language.

Task 6 Reading to extract specific information

A vital feature of the skill is that the students should see the questions or tasks they are going to answer or perform before reading the text. "In this way, the students read in the required way; they should scan the text only to extract the information which the questions demand" (Harmer:1991:189).

6.1 Instruction: State true or False based on the content of the text. You have ten minutes to choose the best answer.

- 1. Pluto is one of the members of the solar system. (T / F)
- 2. One year in Pluto is equal with 248 years in Earth. (T / F)
- 3. The closest approach to the sun is not called Perihelion. (T / F)
- 4. The unmanned mission to Pluto will start in 2015. (T / F)
- 5. It is predicted that at present Pluto has atmosphere. (T / F)

6.2 Instruction: Choose the best answer.

- 1. When did the Horizons mission begin?
 - a. 2006 b. 2020 c. 2015 d. 1989
- 2. What composition forms the Pluto's atmosphere?
 - a. Nitrogen c. Nitrogen, Methane and Carbon Monoxide
 - b. Nitrogen and Methane d. Nitrogen, Carbon Monoxide and Methane

3. What may happen with Pluto's atmosphere in 2007?
 - a. becoming vapour
 - b. turn to be invisible
 - c. completely burnt
 - d. freezing
4. What percentage does the Pluto's distance vary from sun?
 - a. 25%
 - b. 75% left
 - c. 10%
 - d. 15%
5. How far is Pluto from the sun?
 - a. 3.670.000 miles
 - b. 3.670.000.000 miles
 - c. 3.670 miles
 - d. 36.700 miles

Key answer:

1. a. The answer is clearly stated in paragraph 2 , the second sentence.
2. c. The answer is clearly stated in paragraph 2 , last sentence.
3. d. The answer is clearly stated in paragraph 3 , the first sentence.
4. a. The answer is clearly stated in paragraph 1 , the second sentence.
5. b. The answer is clearly stated in paragraph 1 , the third sentence.

Task 7 Recognizing the function of cohesive devices.

The next task after the students had already completed the task for general understanding, skimming, and scanning is reading for detailed comprehension which is associated with information in the text or function and discourse. In this example of task the students are asked to recognize the way in which such devices refer to information elsewhere in the text (Nuttal:1985:83)..

Instruction: Choose the best answer.

1. "... has an extremely strange orbit in which its distance".(paragraph 1 line 3)

The underlined word refers to ...

- a. Earth's
- b. Solar system's
- c. Horizon's
- d. Pluto's

Key answer: d. The solar system's most remote member is another name for Pluto.

2. "..... to reach Pluto in 2015, 9 years after its launching.". (Paragraph 2 line 9)

a. Perihelion's b. The New Horizons' mission c. Orbit's d. Sun's

3. “ We will leave the argument whether Pluto....”. (paragraph 1 line 1)

a. The writer and readers
b. The writer
c. The readers
d. The writer and the mission

Task 8 Reading for detailed comprehension

Instruction: Choose the best answer.

a. But b. And c. In other words d.

Key answer: c. The appropriate marker to express the same message in a different way of expression is by using “in other words”. This marker is classified into signal of discourse organization used for re-expressing (Nuttal:97)

9

- a. but b. although c. or d. and

Key answer: a. Two independent clauses which have two contradictive statements is appropriately joined with 'but'.

3. The mission will find no atmosphere to examine on Pluto....there are any delays.

- a. but b. if c. after d. before

Key answer: b. This marker signals the writer's point of view. According to him, there is a possibility to have a failure in examining the Pluto's atmosphere on condition that the mission is not launched in the scheduled time.

4. Until 2015. the Pluto's atmosphere will be getting a lot colder after 2006, it will literally freeze and start to drop to the planet's surface.

- a. first b. Then c. before d. after

Key answer: b. This marks sequence of events. What will happen to Pluto's atmosphere after 2016 is the continuation of its condition in the previous years. Therefore, the best marker is 'then'.

5. The Pluto's atmosphere is composed mostly of Nitrogen (with a bit Methane and Carbon Monoxide thrown in). The distance from the Sun makes the planet has extremely freezing temperature. Human beings certainly cannot survive in the planet.

- a. In conclusion b. For example c. Although d. On the other hand

Key answer: a. This marks a discourse organization. Based on the facts stated in the first and second sentence, the last gives a clear conclusion that the atmosphere and temperature in Pluto do not support the required conditions for human being to live in. Thus, the appropriate signal is 'in conclusion'.

Task 9 Inference from context

Infering the meaning of a new word from the context is one of the skills which needs repetitious practice. The students do not always open dictionary every time they meet some unfamiliar words if they are capable of applying this strategy. They can cope with difficult words by making the use of the context in which the words occur to provide them ideas of their meanings.(Nuttal:1985:70)

Instruction: Read the text and answer the questions.

1. “We will leave the argument about whether Pluto is a planet or a Kuiper Belt object. But the fact remains that ...”

The meaning of the word **leave** is ...

- a. not concern with b. consider c. explain d. Depart

Key answer: a. Leaving the argument means that the writer does not concern with the disputing status of Pluto – a planet or a Kuiper Belt object.

2. “ ... and Pluto takes 248 years to orbit the Sun”.

The closest meaning of the underlined word is ...

- a. gets b. covers c. needs d. Travels

Key answer: c. Among the four options, the word 'needs' may appropriately substitutes 'takes'.

3. “ The New Horizons mission is scheduled to reach Pluto in 2015, 9 years after its launching.”

The underlined word means

- a. leave b. depart from c. get closed to d. arrive at

Key answer: d. The mission was launched in 2006. It means that 2015 is the year when it is scheduled to arrive at Pluto.

4. “ By this time the thin atmosphere, composed mostly of Nitrogen (with a bit of Methane and Carbon Monoxide thrown in) , will be getting a lot colder....”.

The underlined word means ...

- a. structured b. derived from c. produced d. built

Key answer: a. Nitrogen, Carbon Monoxide and Methane are substances that structure the Pluto's atmosphere. Option b gives a nuance of originity and d a nuance of using big materials. Option c shows manufacturing process.

5. "... soon after 2016, Pluto's atmosphere will literally freeze and start to drop to the planet's surface".

The underlined word is best replaced with ...

- a. fall b. evaporate c. roll d. melt

Key answer: The freezing atmosphere takes place above the the Pluto's surface. The phase is followed by the next one – dropping or "falling" from the sky onto the surface. Option b indicates a change from liquid into gas. Option c shows an object moving down. Option d indicates a change from a solid state into liquid.

Task 10 Recognizing grammatical word classes; systems; patterns; rules and elliptical form

A foreign language text can be made use of not only for content – based exercises or tasks but they can also be advantageous for grammar exercise (Nuttal:1985:67).

Instruction: Choose one of the words, phrases, or expressions which you consider as the best option. Consult your teacher or your grammar book if you have any difficulties.

1. "On average that distance" is 3.67 billion miles." It can be understood that the word 'distance' has meaning.
a. singular b. plural

Key answer: a. The text shows that the singular verb (is) agrees the singular noun preceding.

2. "By 2020 the strange fall will be complete".

Which of the following sentence does not follow the pattern of verb + complement as shown in the above construction?

- a. By 2010, an unmanned mission to Mars will be realizable.
- b. By the end of the year, the condition of flood victims in Ngawi will be better.
- c. By March this year, the new super book store in this town will be open.
- d. By the end of this semester, the program of cheap computer for students will be carried out.

Key answer: d. This pattern follows a passive pattern.

3. "... that the solar system's most remote member has an extremely strange orbit in which ...".

The head of the underlined phrase is ...

- a. an b. extremely c. strange d. orbit

Key answer: d. Option a modifies "orbit". Option b modifies "strange". Option c together with a, b and c modify "orbit".

4. "Pluto reached its 'Perihelion' (closest approach to the sun) in 1989 and since then has been moving further away".

The underlined pattern shows us that

- a. Pluto did not move further away anymore.
- b. Pluto will move further away next time.
- c. Pluto is still moving further away.
- d. Pluto only moved further away in 1989.

Key answer: c. The above Present Perfect form shows that the event starts in the past, proceeds at present and will be continued in the future.

5. Which of the following words or phrases cannot be used in Future tense?

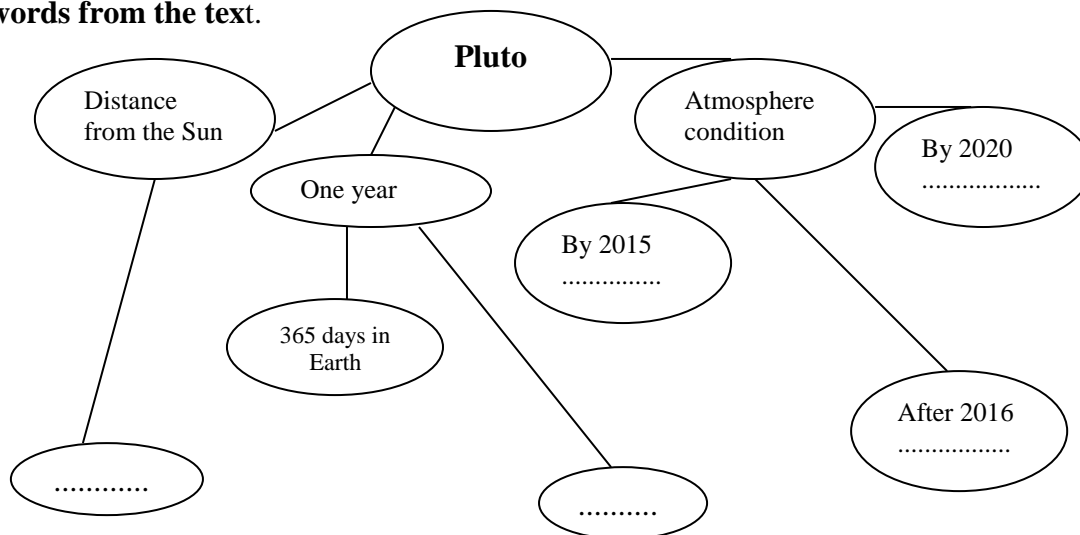
- a. by 2020 b. in 1989 c. soon after 2016 d. 2015

Key answer: b. It indicates something in the past. The other three indicates future times.

Task 12 Vocabulary

Vocabulary teaching is as important as that for structure. The activity enables the students to expand the concept to include word fields – i.e. areas where a number of words group together. (Harmer:1991:165)

Instruction: Here is a vocabulary network. Can you complete it with words from the text.



Key answer: The students' words may vary.

Post – reading activity

Task 13 Communicative activities

In communicative activities, the students are involved in such a condition that stimulates their desire to interact one another. It also functions to provide them a purpose which asks them to use the language. “The activities are important in the classroom since here the learners will do their best to practise the language as individuals and arrive at a degree of language autonomy”. (Harmer:1991:51).

Instruction: In this activity, you will have a question and answer session with your friends through a piece of paper. Pay attention on the steps.

Step 1 You will be divided into two groups – A and B.

Step 2 Write a WH- question based on the text. Remember that the answer of your question must be available in the text. If you have to answer a question, you may answer it in short form (one or two word).

- Step 3 Give your question to one of the members of the different group. If you are in group A, deliver your paper to one of the members of group B and vice versa. Don't forget to write the name to whom you address the question.
- Step 4 Write your answer in your friend's paper. Don't forget to write your name under your handwritings. Return the paper back to the person who gives you the paper.
- Step 5 Check your friend's answer. If it is incorrect according to you, cross the answer and supply the right one. Then, give it back to him or her. If the answer is right, give him or her gestures showing your satisfaction.
- Step 6 Write a question and / or answer again until you have five questions and answers. Address your new question to a different student in different group.
- Step 7 Count how many questions you can respond correctly. Multiply them by twenty. It will be your score. Finally, submit your paper to your teacher.

Conclusion

Various tasks developed from the above single text are designed to train the students' skill in handling a text. The activities include ones for pre-reading, whilst reading and post-reading forms of activities. Most of the tasks use multiple choice forms of questioning since the language and the content of the text is fairly challenging for the SLTP students. The tasks themselves take the form of comprehension practices and a communicative task at the end. Although the way the tasks are presented is simple, but they give a brief description on how a text is exploited.

References:

- Correia, R. 2006. Article: *Encouraging Critical Reading in the EFL Classroom*. English Teaching Forum. Vol 1
- De Batt, E. V. 2006. Article: *Applying Current Approaches to the Teaching of Reading*. English Teaching Forum Jurnal. Vol 1
- Harmer, J. 1991. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. New Edition. New York. Longman Publishing
- Nuttall, C. 1985. *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*. London. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.