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A TASTE OF HONEY

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# 0 INTRODUCTION

When you look at language coursebooks, you often get the impression that learning a language is merely an academic exercise. Structures and lexis have been carefully graded and are administered in small portions. The texts (both spoken and written) are made-up texts produced by imaginary speakers or writers for an imaginary audience and designed to practise specific language points, rather then convey real information. Let us look at an example: ALI AND BERT ARE BROTHERS. EVERY MORNING THEY GET UP AT 5 O'CLOCK AND WASH THEIR HANDS AND FACE. THEY HAVE BREAKFAST AT 6 O'CLOCK. THEY HAVE AN EGG AND A BANANA FOR BREAKFAST. THEY HAD AN EGG AND A BANANA FOR BREAKFAST YESTERDAY MORNING. THEY ARE HAVING AN EGG AND A BANANA FOR THEIR BREAKFAST THIS MORNING AND THEY WILL HAVE AN EGG AND A BANANA FOR THEIR BREAKFAST TOMORROW MORNING.

We no doubt recognize this as artificial language data which have been

contrived for demonstation purposes.

Ever since the 1970s there has been a focus on the treaching of languages that involves communication or communicative competence on the part of the learner. Therefore the learner must be taught to *use* the language, to understand both written and spoken texts and to make himself understood. He must be able to appreciate English television and radio programmes, laugh at English jokes, sing English songs, read English newspapers and enjoy English literature.

This implies that in general language courses much more attention need to be paid to the acquisition of receptive competence and that an important feature of material designed to produce such a competence would be Authentic Language Materials.

# 1 A DEFINITION

The first meaning of authentic is genuine/real, as opposed to fake/made-up/artificial. In the context of language material authenticity means the language at it is produced by native speakers for native speakers, in order to establish communication. So it contains a message, information unknown to the receiver.

This definition is not complete until we have defined the term 'native speaker'. In doing so, we should bear in mind that

- English is being used by native speakers of many countries all over the world: Great Britain, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, South Africa etc.
- there are numerous varieties in use among native speakers of English, even in one country; in communicating with each other, native speakers often

adapt and modify the language they use and sometimes 'translate' from one kind of English into another.

 English is used in situations in which native speakers communicate with non-native speakers, and this is clearly not of marginal importance.

— there is the English in which non-native speakers try to communicate with other non-native speakers, and English being the world language such speakers predominate.

### 2 TYPES OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

Since we have defined authentic material as material used by native speakers to communicate — that is to inform, persuade, instruct etc. — it is obvious that there is an enormous supply of these materials available:

TYPES OF MATERIAL	WRITTEN	AUDIO	VISUAL
Newspapers/Magazines	x .		(x)
Letters/Postcards/Telegrammes	`x		
Advertisements/Travel brochures	x		` (x)
Crossword puzzles	. x		
Instructions/Directions	X		(x)
Specialized articles/Reviews	x		
Pamphlets/Summaries	X		
Public notices	X		(x)
Leaflets handed out in the street	X		
Handbooks/Textbooks/Guideboo	ks x		X
Recipes	x		(x)
Dictionaries/Encyclopaedias	X		X
Posters/Signs/Forms/Menus	X		<b>X</b> .
Pricelists/Timetables/Tickets	x		x
Cartoons	X		X
Statistics/Maps	X		X
Telephone directories/Yellow pa	ges x		
Reports/Reviews	X		
Dialogues		X	(x)
Slogans	X	X	X
TV - Radio Commercials	_ (x)	X	X
Interviews		X	. x
Instructions		X	X
Songs		X .	(x)
Feature Films		X	X
Documentaries		X	X
Poems	x -	X	
Short Stories	X		
Novels	X		
Plays	X	X	X

# 3 REASONS FOR USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

#### A. General

- 1. Motivations: learners often lose all motivation for language learning after a number of years. This may be attributed to the following:
- a. students realize that the language learning situation in schools is an artificial one. There will always be a demand on the learner's willingness to play a role. The use of authentic maetrials materials written with the purpose to communicate will facilitate this role playing considerably.
- b. when we take a close look at coursebooks, we notice that textbooks continue to be products, conspicuous for their neutrality, blandness and lack of innovation, as well as their eagerness to please a large number of potential users (or buyers). Generally speaking no textbook can possibly satisfy a great variety of interests, and teachers will have to provide extra materials if they want to comply with the learner's needs in this respect.
- 2. Exposure to non graded material, especially in the advanced stages but also in the early stages of language learning is a linguistic necessity. Learners should be traned in deducing the meaning of unknown words from known items in a context. The problems faced by learners who have only encountered carefully graded materials are enormous.
- 3. a. Creating familiarity with the idiosyncratic use of especially language in newspapers. In his introduction to *What's in the News?*, Geoffrey Land dwells on this aspect: »This last wish (viz. to read English newspapers) often gives rise to some disappointment, when, for example, the student who has passed his exams with top marks and who has earned the commendation of his teacher finds he is quite unable to understand the newspapers which he knows people read every day. He realizes he lacks something.«
- b. Enable students to read literature needed for study in higher education. A complaint often heard from university teachers is that students cannot 'read'. They do not know how to deal with handbooks and articles (in a foreign language) which they must read for their studies.
- c. Very often students are at a loss when visiting a foreign country and when they are confronted with the language they hear and see all round them and are unable to make themselves understood in intelligible and reasonably accepted Englisch on essential day-to-day matters, as when shopping, travelling, visiting and so on. We must prepare our students to cope with such materials when confronted with them in real life.
- 4. Offering a realistic picture of the country where the target language is spoken. The culture of a country and its people is not always what people wish you to believe with the highlights in the field of literature, architecture, history or with description of folkloristic events. »Never trust the artist, trust the tale«, D.H. Lawrence said. And that tale is to be found in the reflection of everyday life in TV and radio programmes, newspaper articles, advertisements and the like.
- 5. Philosophy of life: it is the teacher's task not only to teach his/her students a foreign language, but also to help them to grow and mature. A fo-

reign language teacher has failed if his/her students have gained nothing beyond the language, or, in other words, has not become a fuller person who can play a really useful role in international communication between cultures, which of course goes far beyond mere linguistic exchange.

6. A Miror of Society: we should open our students' minds to the world, make them aware of what is going on in the world and cultivate a concern with the living world around them.

7. Variety/modernity. The use of autentic materials enables the teacher to bring a lot of variety of stimulating subjects into his/her language course, often geared to the needs and interests of the students. By definition coursebooks - even when using authentic materials - are dated and often not interesting to modern students.

## B. Linguistic

1. Extension of vocabulary/syntax. One of the problems teachers are faced with is how to extend the learner's vocabulary in a contextualized way. By listening to/reading authentic language data on all kinds of topics and doing well-constructed assignments, they will get round some unfamiliar vocabulary or structural items so as to comprehend or express meaning by relying on the context.

2. Practising different reading and listening skills — such as intensive and extensive reading/listening. Depending on the situation, people read/listen in a different way. Students must be taught these skills, so that they can

cope with them when the needs arise.

3. Reading/listening for information. One of the natural impulses for reading/listening is to get information for various reasons <utility, pleasure,

4. Reading/listening for meaning. In daily life people often have to be able to understand written or spoken instructions etc. in order to carry out

certain tasks.

- 5. Reading/listening for pleasure. Reading/listening to a variety of real texts - fiction and non-fiction - from different sources, such as books, magazines, comics, brochures, television programmes, songs, radioplays etc.
  - 6. Practising certain techniques, such as

a. sensitizing: teaching students how to cope with unfamiliar words and complex or obscure sentences. It should ensure that they do not stumble on every difficulty or get discouraged from the outset. The exercises should be devised with an eye on using the context for solving the problems.

b. predicting/anticipating: the faculty of predicting or guessing what is to come next, making use of grammatical, logical and cultural clues; also making use of the knowledge students have of the subject, using titles and pic-

tures, key words, the first part of an utterance etc.

c. skimming/scanning. These are both specific reading techniques necessary for quick and efficient reading. When skimming we go through the text quickly in order to get the gist of it, to know how it is organised, or to get an idea of the tone or the intention of the writer. When scanning we try to locate specific information.

d. summarizing: a tecnique used in both listening and reading.

- e. paraphrasing: this is the reproduction of a (spoken or written) text in a different form. We must bear in mind that this is a relatively difficult technique, even for native speakers.
- f. note-taking: students should be able to take notes, especially of lectures and articles.
- g. gap-filling; especially useful in listening. Students are asked to fill in missing phrases or sentences, using hints given before and after the gap; they must not only predict, but also reconstruct in retrospect <e.g. in telephone conversations>.
- 7. Practising language functions, such as giving information, asking questions, asserting, denying, offering, attracting attention etc.

It is obvious that one will often deal with more than one aim at a time.

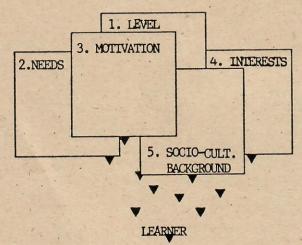
#### 4 CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

A very important aspect in the use of authentic materials is the criteria for selection. There are four important elements teachers should pay attention to:

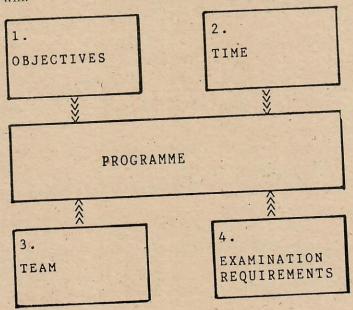
- a. the learner
- b. the programme
- c. the teacher
- d. the material

Let us look at these elements in detail.

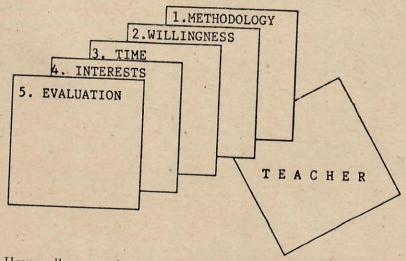
a. The *learner* is the most important element in deciding what materials to choose. In a communicative approach the learner takes the central role. This is first of all embodied in the design of the syllabus. The objectives are geared to the short-term and long-term needs of the learner. It is designed in such a way that the learner is given a chance to do the learning himself, instead of having everything done for him by the teacher. The important thing is that full rein is given to his initiative and he is actually involved in communicative activities, requiring listening, reading, writing and *thinking*.



- 1. level: it is obvious that authentic materials will meet fewer problems at advanced stages than in the initial stages of foreign language learning. On the other hand it is necessary to use them even at an early stage. At an early stage it might be necessary to exploit the materials in a different way, so that the wider context is clear. Experience has taught teachers not to overestimate pupils' abilities, but certainly not to understimate them.
- 2. needs: short-term needs are often programmed by examination requirements. We should however also try to meet the long-term needs of our students.
- 3. motivation: I pointed out before that motivation of the learner is a very important element. The learner is often disappointed by the contents of the foreign language course. By exposing them to the real thing, the learners might find back their motivation.
- 4. interests: in a learner-centred approach the learner should have a say in the selection of the materials, directly or indirectly. A class discussion or questionnaire might be used to find out their interests. Where this was done, the mere fact that the teacher bothered to consult the pupils, was willing to comply with their wishes, proved to be a stimulating factor. Granted, it will be very difficult to find out what will really move each individual learner. But the teacher's attitude, his willingness to allow them to express themselves as freely as possible, is very important. A questionnaire, although imperfect, might still be very useful in this context.
- 5. socio-cultural background: we all know that pupils from lower social classes are not in the habit of reading or listening for any reason. It will be a very difficult task for the teacher to motivate them, so that they will start reading and listening and keep it up. It is a fact that there is hardly any profession in which communication does not play an important role. If students do not start forming this habit during their secondary school period, they never will.



- b. The programme. One of the elements the teachers can usually not do much about is the programme, examination requirements etc. In selection materials it is essential to keep an eye on these requirements.
- 1. Objectives give meaningful direction to the organisation of learning. They should specify what the learner will have to be able to do after having completed the learning process. Objectives should be formulated as explicitely as possible. It is not sufficient to say e.g. that the learners will have an adequate oral command of the foreign language. Such descriptions can be interpreted in hundreds of ways. Ideally an objective should be formulated in such a way that only one single interpretation in possible.
- 2. A very important question is how much time is available, per week, per year.
  - 3. Team of teachers: Is there a consensus on methodology in the team? Are team members willing to share materials? How free is the individual teacher to develop his/her own materials?
  - 4. Examination requirements: How are examinations organised? Can schools/teachers decide the contents of the exams? What form does the exam take? Are there separate tests for the four skills?
  - c. The teacher.



- 1. How well are teachers trained in the methodology of foreign language teaching, especially in writing their own additional materials? Are there any in-service-training courses for them?
  - 2. Willingness. Is the teacher willing to adopt a different approach? Is he/she willing to play a different role? Is he/she prepared to do such a demanding job? Is he/she prepared to change his/her methodology? Is he/she prepared to do in-service-training courses in the field of methodology?

3. How much *time* can teachers spend on writing their own (additional) materials?

Are the authorities prepared to give teachers time to do so?

- 4. Is the teacher really *interested* in his/her students or is he/she just doing a job?
- 5. It is absolutely necessary for the teacher to *analyse* the reasons for the success or failure of certain materials and of his/her teaching methods in general.

d. The material

	1. UP-TO-DATE		3. MULTI- DIMENSIONAL	AUTHENTIC RESPONSE		
MATE	R I A L >>>>>	5. ACCEPTABLE	6. OBJECTIVES	7. MOTIVATION		
8. AVAILABILITY		9. COSTS	10. DUPLICATING FACILITIES	11. INTEGRATION		

- 1. *Up-to-date*. Especially with newspaper articles and recordings from radio and television we should be careful not to use texts which are definitely dated. Otherwise they will lose their appeal to our students.
  - 2. Appropriate. a. Is the material appropriate as to language, content, situation and role?
    - b. Is the material relevant to the short-term or long-term needs of our students? We should not ask them to do things which are not relevant e.g. reading encyclopaedias for student nurses.
- 3. Multi-dimensional. Authentic materials should be multi-dimensional, which means that all sorts of forms may occur naturally as occasion requires. Manipulating authentic texts in order to fit them into a grading framework actually hinders the development of communicative competence in the learner.
- 4. Authentic response. We should not exploit authentic material for the traditional kind of comprehension questions, structure exercises etc. In that case the text loses its authenticity. Each authentic text contains a message and the receiver should be able to interpret the author's intentions. Otherwise the relationship between the sender and the receiver of the message will be distorted.
- 5. Acceptable. The content of the text must be acceptable, linguistically and/or educationally. There are many things a native speaker says or writes that are not suitable for classroom use: letters to the local newspaper are often written by people who are not accustomed to writing. Their language often tends to be rather strange, pompous and ungrammatical. Sometimes it is the actual content of what people say that is objectionable. Some people

are sexist, racist or have some other types of prejudice. Should such authentic materials be introduced into your classroom?

- 6. Relationship to coursebook/objectives. There should be some kind of relationship to the coursebook and the objectives of the course.
- 7. Motivation. As said before, the materials selected should enhance the students' motivation.
- 8. Availability. Another important aspect is the availability of authentic materials. How easy is it to get hold of these materials both written and spoken in your country?
- 9. Costs. Can the school afford to buy newspapers, magazines etc. regularly?
  - 10. Duplicating facilities. Have you got technical facilities, such as for copying written texts?

Have you got recording facilities for audio--(visual) texts?

Are there any restrictions on these in your country?

- Integration. a. In daily life people read or listen in order to do something with it → writing, speaking, acting etc.
   Is the material suitable for integration with the other language skills.
  - b. Is the material suitable for integration with *non-linguistic subjects* taught at school, such as history, geography, physics etc.

#### 5 EXPLOITATION

A very important stage in the use of authentic materials is the exploitation phase.

N	1. NATURAL	2. APPROPRIATE	3. BEYOND EXAM	10. TECHNIQUES
OITATI	4. TASK-ORIENTED	5. OBJECTIVES	6. CHOICE	
E X P L	7. INTEGRATION SKILLS NON-LING.	8. TIME	9. EVALUATION	

The assignments devised by the teacher should

1. be natural. They should lead to the kind of activities native speakers would use for dealing with the materials. An authentic reading text, for exam-

ple, should not be used to teach some grammatical structures.

2. be appropriate, especially as to the situation and the role students can be expected to play now or later. For a student who is being trained as a secretary, for example, it is not appropriate to ask her to give a summary

3. go beyond the exam. Students should not only be trained for examination requirements, but also for things that will normally be required of them

· after graduation.

- 4. be task-oriented. The exercises should make students perform certain tasks, such as reading a text or listening to a report to get the main idea, the writer's attitude, the main message etc. At the same time they may be required to take notes, write summaries, transfer the information, carry on a conversation with a friend abroad. These tasks involve different skills, such as skimming or scanning (with ears or eyes), get round some unknown vocabulary etc. In short the assignments should guide them through the material, whereas the teacher sets the process going, observes, gives help, analyses and evaluates.
  - 5. Objectives. The assignments should clearly mirror the long-term and

short-term objectives of the course.

6. Choice. In traditional textbooks students are often instructed how to answer » give a negative, affirmative, a full or a short answer. Mostly there is no choice for the learner. This is not real communication. In real-life communication there is always an element of choice. The learner should be free to answer as he/she wishes, free to interpret the meaning of a given text, free to interpret the author's message and to respond creatively. Without this freedom there is no real communication, there in only parroting!!!!!

7. Integration. There should be integration of the four language skills and if possible also integration with non-linguistic subjects taught at school.

8. Time. It is essential for the teacher to more or less fix a certain period of time necessary to do the various assignments. Thus he can control the students' pacing and see to it that not too much time is spent on one single skill. This is part of the lesson plan, in which he/she indicates the time, skills, ob-

ectives, materials used and the procedure for each assignment.

9. Evaluation. Teachers should constantly evaluate the materials they have made. Ideally they should train their students to do so, too. Developing materials is a time-consuming and often frustrating process of self-training by trial and error. Teachers should not only realize that certain assignments do not work, they should also analyse the reasons for failure or success, from hypotheses and generalizations based on these analyses, and try again.

10. Techniques. What techniques is the teacher going to use to help stu-

dents develop understanding the text or develop certain skills?

# A. QUESTIONS

We should bear in mind that there is a great difference between questions intended for teaching and questions intended for testing. Questions for teaching are KEYS TO OPEN THE TEXT. Sometimes teaching questions do not have a right answer, because they ask for personal reactions. A very important aspects of questions is the kind of answer the teacher expects. Questions can be answered in various ways:

NON-LINGUISTICALLY by

by putting a tick

by writing yes or no by writing true or false

by choosing an alternative

LINGUISTICALLY

by writing one or more words/a phrase

by writing a clause

by writing a complete sentence

by writing one or more paragraphs

We can ask questions that

1. can be answered by copying part of the text

- 2. make the students use a number of words, phrases or structures used in the text
- 3. check whether students have some knowledge of the topic
- 4. ask after the student's personal opinion of or experience with one of the subjects mentioned in the text.

When asking questions on a text one should keep two things in mind:

- a. is the questions asked to stimulate or check comprehension of the text?
- b. is the question asked to stimulate students to use the language, either in its spoken or written form?

In the first case — comprehension — the division into four stages can be a useful tool in the hands of a teacher who wants to exploit a text for comprehension purposes. In the second case — language practice — a quite different division is possible depending on whether the teacher wants a student to find and say or write what the text really says, or, whether the teacher wants a student to 'answer in his own words'. In this case the category of anwers the student is required to use is probably more important than the question asked by the teacher.

### THE FOUR STAGES OF QUESTIONS

STAGES OF QUESTIONS	TEXT	,	QUESTIONS	ALTERNATI- VE/TICK	YES/NO	TRUE/FALSE	WORD/PHRA-SE	CLAUSE/SEN-	PARAGRAPH
STAGE ONE QUESTIONS REQUIRE KNOWLEDGE OF SYNTAX ONLY, THE ANSWER TO SUCH A QUESTION CAN BE TAKEN FROM THE TEXT DIRECTLY OR WITH MINOR STRUCTURAL CHANGES, NO REAL COMPREHENSION IS REQUIRED TO ANSWER A STAGE ONE QUESTION.	THE GIRL THE CAT;	KICKED	— DID THE GIRL KICK THE CAT?  — WHO KICKED THE CAT?  — WHAT DID THE GIRL KICK?  — WHAT DID THE GIRL DO TO THE CAT?  — THE GIRL DIDN'T KICK THE CAT.			x	x	x x x	

		The state of the s	-	-				-	T
STAGES OF QUES- FIONS	TEXT	QUESTIONS	ALTERNATI- VE/TICK	YES/NO	TRUE/FALSE	WORD/PHRA- SE	CLAUSE/SEN. TENCE	PARAGRAPH	
STAGE TWO QUESTIONS REQUIRE KNOWLEDGE OF SYNTAX AND VOCABULARY.	THE GIRL KICKED THE CAT.	— DID THE GIRL KICK A FELINE CREATURE? — WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CAT? — DID THE GIRL STRIKE THAT CAT? — THE GIRL KICKED A DOMESTIC ANIMAL. — THE GIRL USED O HER HANDS O HER FEET O A STICK O A WHIP — WHAT PART OF THE BODY DID THE GIRL USE?	x	x	x	x	x		
STAGE THREE OUESTIONS REQUI- RE UNDERSTAN- DING OF THE SI- TUATION, THUS A. A LOGICAL CON- CLUSION TO BE DRAWN	THE GIRL KICKED THE CAT JUST FOR FUN.	- IS SHE AN ANIMAL LOVER? - THE CAT FELT NO PAIN - IT WAS AN ACCIDENT THE GRIL O LIKED O DISLIKED THE CAT WHY DID THE GIRL KICK THE CAT?	. x	x	xx	x	x		
B. HISTORICAL/GE- OGRAPHICAL/TE- CHNICAL BACKAGROUND KNOWLEDGE	CAESAR LOOKED AT HIS WATCH AND TELEPHONED BRUTUS.	CAN THIS EVENT HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN 5 A.D.?  WHAT DID CAESAR DO TO CONTACT BRUTUS?  IN WHAT CIRCUMSTAN CES COULD THIS EVEN EVER BE TRUE?		x			x	1	
C. KNOWLEDGE OF THE STYLE OF THE PASSAGE	CAESAR LOOKED AT HIS WATCH AND TELEPHONED BRUTUS.	- THIS IS MEANT TO BE FUNNY THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF A. ANAPHORA B. ANACOLUTHAN C. ANACRUSIS D. ANACHRONISM	x	X					
STAGE FOUR QUESTIONS REQUIRE STUDENTS TO RELATE ITEMS FROM THE TEXT TO THEIR OWN EXPERIENCE, OR MAKE THEM EXPRESS THEIR OWN OPINIONS ON THESE ITEMS.	THE GIRL KICKED THE CAT.	- HAVE YOU EVER KICKED A CAT? - HOW DID IT REACT? - PEOPLE WHO HURT ANIMALS SHOULD BE A. FINED B. JAILED C. HURT THEMSELVE: - WHAT DO YOU THINK OF PEOPLE WHO HUR ANIMALS?		X				c	x

### ORDER OF STAGES

Stage 2, 3 and 4 questions should be asked after stage 1 questions, because it is logical to try and find out whether students understand the text, after checking whether they have read it. Mostly stage 1 questions are asked orally at a great pace going fast from one student to another. After this either stage 2, 3 or 4 questions can be asked, some types of stage 3 and 4 questions are suitable for group discussion: every member of the group can shed his/her light on the problem. Very often more than one answer is possible at stage 3, while this is always the case at stage 4.

# THE DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF ANSWERS

Quite a different matter is the division of answer categories. It is important to look at exactly how we expect the reader/listener to answer. At the simplest level he may have nothing more to do than to find a word and underline it, or to put a tick or a cross. At a more demanding level the student may be expected to write down words or phrases, and at the most difficult level to write complete sentences, paragraphs or indeed whole essays.

By far the easiest way to explain what the different categories of questions and answers are like is by means of a text with examples.

Text: Every Sunday afternoon Gilbert drives to his old grandmother, because he knows she appreciates that.

### **OUESTIONS:**

Gilbert goes to his grandmother on Mondays.

Does Gilbert drive to his grandmother in the morning? Who drives to his grandmother evey Sunday?

Who does 'Gilbert visit every Sunday?

When does Gilbert drive to his grandmother?

How does Gilbert go to his grandmother?

Why does Gilbert call on his grandmother every Sunday?

What does Gilbert do every Sunday afternoon?

How old do you think Gilbert is?

## POSSIBLE ANSWERS:

False.

No. (he doesn't).

Gilbert (does).

His (old) grandmother.

On Sunday(s).

By car.

Because he knows she likes it.

He drives to his old grandmother.

Well, he drives a car, so he must be over 18. On the other hand he cannot be much older than 50, for he has a grandmother. Now suppose his grandmother is 90; in that case one of his parents could be 70 and Gilbert himself could be 50. Gilbert may be anything between 18 and 50 years old.

It will be clear that response difficulty not only depends on the stage of the question, but also on the category of answer required.

### B. OTHER TECHNIQUES

LINGUISTIC

Completing gapped texts Completing diagrams

Completing forms/documents

Flow-charts Grids Tables

Writing a parallel text

Writing a response to a text Completing defective dialogues

NON-LINGUISTIC Making drawings/diagrams Ticking off Matching pictures/texts

Making posters

#### Literatura

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