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Helping Learners Achieve the Distinguished Level of Proficiency

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Abstract

This article proposes that a task all learners who have attained superior levels of proficiency and who wish to achieve the distinguished level have in common is the need to double the size of their vocabulary. The article suggests that instructional designs for distinguished level training should include massive amounts of input: reading, listening, and watching. It also proposes a number of ways, all vocabulary based, to evaluate whether materials are at-level for learners and advocates for materials that are appropriate to the individual learners' needs, objectives and interests.

The article takes a close look at the goals of higher-level programs and notes that not all learners working towards distinguished levels of proficiency have the same end goals in mind. Their objectives, at this level, differ from learner to learner. Their objectives and the needs of the organizations that fund their training also surely differ from the characteristics of distinguished level proficiency implied by the ACTFL standards and the ILR skill level descriptions: eloquence, membership in the cloistered elect of the well-educated, and the ability to speak in ways that approximate written texts.

The article asserts that students have a set of rights, which, when exercised, may change the trajectory of each course even midstream. It examines paths towards success, rejecting the use of Bloom's taxonomy and suggesting the use of design thinking approaches to creating an instructional program. Attention is paid to techniques for evaluating the appropriateness of materials for training, with a special focus on words, word families, and the importance of knowing the size of a learner's word bank and speed at which the student reads. When instructors know their learners well, they can, working with the learners and stakeholders, create a learning plan for each learner which meets their precise needs.

Keywords: vocabulary, objectives, rights, Bloom's taxonomy, text profiling

Εν άρχή ήν ό λόγος (In the beginning was the Word.)

"It dawns on him that this is the language of all these people around him, this mix of people who are always on the road, instead of some language carefully assembled in a single place for the benefit of a few" Tokarczuk (2022, p. 754).

Language learning for students approaching distinguished level of proficiency is challenging, interesting, and teacher-assisted. This restatement reflects nearly 40 years of programming beyond ILR 3 at the Foreign Service Institute and in a few other programs elsewhere, such as the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center and NASA. The teacher-assisted requirement, which can appear contrary to assumptions, has been confirmed by qualitative and quantitative research (Leaver & Atwell, 2002; Franke, 2020).

The program of study for students at this level should be balanced among the four strands:

- meaning-focused input;
- meaning-focused output;
- study of forms and structures; and
- work on fluency (speed and ease).

For teachers working at this level, teaching is more about planning and giving feedback than about lecturing and explaining. Planning, by far the most important thing a teacher does, ensures that materials and activities are both relevant to the students and at their levels. Level is largely determined by vocabulary, and, especially, the frequency of words and grammatical forms.

A well balanced-language study program, a concept developed by Paul Nation (2013, 2017), is essential for all stages of language learning and especially important for those moving to the Distinguished level. Nation's design for language learning and teaching, called the Four Strands, is research based. It is not a new methodology or set of teaching activities. It encourages teachers to continue doing what has worked well for them while encouraging them to think about and adjust their work to achieve balance. While all four stands, input, output, structure and fluency, get equal attention, Nation presents them in order of importance. Meaning focused input (reading and listening) comes first.

In this article, we focus primarily on the meaning-focused input strand of a well-balanced program.

Focus on Meaning

For most instructors working in traditional language programs, a focus on form (or forms) (Doughty & Williams, 1998) comes most naturally and most easily, and tends to take up most of the instructional time and energy. And while the instructors' explanations of the things they call grammar play a key role in helping students move toward higher levels of proficiency, they are not the most important aspect of a good program. The focus-on-form strand is key to a good language acquisition program since it includes a good amount vocabulary acquisition, the deliberate learning of words, which does play a key role in the student journey to proficiency. The size of a student's word bank is a key, if not *the* key, measure of her/his proficiency.

Meaning-focused input (reading and listening/watching) should be in the driver's seat, especially for students working toward the highest levels of proficiency. Through massive amounts of reading, listening, and watching videos on YouTube and like platforms, students experience words and structures in multiple contexts, at multiple registers, and with multiple neighbors. Through the experience of reading massive amounts of texts and watching and listening to videos and movies, students begin to internalize the likelihood or improbability of collocations, various meanings of words, and their registers and histories of their use. Students begin to make the transition from speaking in their own way to speaking in the ways of their new language.

Meaning-focused output ought to take up about a quarter of the students' learning time. Students at the Foreign Service Institute love to talk. One of the keys to a good output-training session, however, is to be sure that the students and instructor are focused on meaning, not on form. At lower levels of proficiency, a good meaning-focused assignment would be to ask the students to "talk about what they did over the weekend." An assignment that is not meaning-focused would be to ask the students to talk about their weekends using a specific list of five verbs in the past tense. That would be a form-focused assignment.

Fluency

The fluency strand takes up the remaining quarter of a well-balanced program. An easy and traditional way to formulate the goals of this strand is to say that students ought to be doing what they already know how to do but to do it faster and with greater ease.

Building fluency, increasing speed, especially in reading, is an essential component of the FSI program. Students need to be able to read at rates approaching 250 words a minute, the average reading speed of a typical native speaker of Russian (IRIS, 2023). Experience has indicated that many teachers do not know their students' reading speeds, but they should. If students are reading fewer than 100 words a minute, typical of FSI students, they are not coming close to having an authentic reading experience. At rates that slow, it is hard for students to remember what was happening at the beginning of the sentence when they get to the end. While not as part of this article, there are many suggestions online for how teachers can help their students increase reading speed.

Vocabulary

For learners moving from the Superior Level to the Distinguished Level, from the ILR 3 to the ILR 4, the biggest task by far is the acquisition of vocabulary. Learners successfully achieving the Superior Level, or the ILR 3, have mastered most of the grammatical patterns and most, but not all, of the structures of the language.

One of the major improvements in the new Interagency Language Roundtable's (ILR) skill level descriptions at the S/4 level is its specific reference to vocabulary frequency: "Vocabulary is consistently extensive and includes low frequency items" (ILR, 2022). Low frequency is a term of art meaning word families in the 9000-word band or higher. The first three bands of the most frequent words are considered high frequency words. The

highest frequency word in English is *the*, which makes up around 6% of most English language texts. Mid-frequency words (word families) are those that appear in the fourth to the ninth thousand bands, and low frequency words that appear in bands above nine.

The Russian Test for Foreigners (TORFL, 2023) focuses on vocabulary size, and, in the experience of this author, the Russians have come closest to getting it right. The Russians say that students at the highest levels of proficiency should know 20,000 units, with 8,000 of them being active. The Russians do not tell us what they mean by units, but their numbers seem to be in the right ballpark.

Nation and Waring (2020) claim that in order to have an authentic reading experience with unsimplified texts, which ought to be the goal of every distinguished-level program, the reader should command a vocabulary of some 9000-word families. Hacking and Tschirner (2017) found that readers at the ILR skill level 3 command some 5000-word families.

The task for students hoping to move from the ILR 3, ACTFL Superior level is daunting but clear. Learners moving from the Superior Level to the Distinguished level need to double the size of their vocabularies.

What does a learner need to do in order to achieve proficiency at the Distinguished range? In order to move from the ILR 3 to the ILR 4, moving to the Distinguished Level, the learner needs to acquire over 4000 new word families. Most of these new words will be in the mid-frequency range (3000 to 9000) and some from the low frequency range (over 9000-word families). In order to do that, the learner needs to read massive amounts of text and do substantial amounts of deliberate learning of vocabulary. The learner will need help from a good instructor in picking texts and understanding words in context. The reader will need lots and lots of time to read. This is all done in the meaning-focused portion of the FSI Beyond Three program.

Program Design

What does the instructor need to do in order to facilitate the learner's move to the Distinguished level? The instructor gathers enough information about the learner's abilities and the learner's goals in order to plan an effective course of study. The instructor gathers information about the learners' developing vocabulary bank through formative assessments, which supply the student and instructor with precisely the right information to support the kind of feedback that will enhance learning.

The instructor needs to know the size of the learner's vocabulary bank and be able to track it as it grows. The instructor also needs to have a clear picture of the size of the language, in terms of vocabulary, that the student will need once at the Distinguished level. The instructor, along with the student, needs a fairly accurate picture of the learner's reading speed (which, by the end of the program, should be approaching 250 words per minute). Finally, the instructor needs to know what kinds of texts the student will find interesting and relevant. With that information in hand, the instructor is ready to plan an outstanding program of study individualized to the needs of the learner.

Meaning-focused Reading

Meaning-focused input is, for the instructor, both the easiest and hardest part of the program. Meaning focused input requires planning and preparation on the part of the teacher. The instructor's job in delivering an outstanding meaning-focused input strand is to know the student's strengths and weaknesses, vocabulary size, command of structure and discourse, ability to pronounce words accurately, and level of critical thinking skills. The instructor also needs to know the materials available and how and when those materials will best support the learners. The instructor should know which materials are at the learner's level, which ones are relevant to the learner's future needs, and which ones might be interesting to the learner.[1]

One way to judge the probability that a learner can have an authentic reading experience with a text is to look at the vocabulary in the text in terms of word frequency. It is safe to assume that learners acquire words in some sort of frequency order. Since spaced repetition is key to learning, seeing words frequently means that they have a good chance of learning those words and learning them more quickly than ones they see infrequently.

It is important to note that learners tend to learn words in frequency order. Why does this happen? Because learners see high frequency words (the most frequent 3000 words) more frequently than they do mid-frequency words (words in the 4000-to-9000-word bands). This does not happen in lockstep. One doesn't learn the first word before the second or the fifty-first before the fifty-second. But generally, learners acquire the first thousand words before they learn the second or third thousand. Yet, as they have contact with texts, they will pick up words in the fourth and fifth, or even the fifteenth thousand-word frequency band while still working on the first or second thousand-word families. While it may be possible to learn words from reading and listening only, the use of deliberate vocabulary learning techniques can speed the process greatly.

An anecdote from my own (and not unique) experience learning Russian many years ago at a Midwest university may help to explicate the situation. The Russian teacher of our third-year class assigned the ten words in Russian ending in -мя that are neuter (имя, время, etc.) After passing the -мя test, I next saw the word вымя (udder) in a text 48 years later. I believe that I remembered that word from the first time that I saw it since I was stunned by the fact that Russian had such a common word (I grew up on a farm) when I had always thought of Russian as the language of beautiful poetry and profound philosophy. I signed up for Russian in order to read Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. I have yet to meet another of the ten words, темя (sinciput), in the wild. While I still believe all of my Russian teachers were patient and wonderful, I have come to wonder whether an assignment that set me up for a reading task 48 years in the future was a good one.

1. See related discussion (Leaver, this volume) of the zone of proximal development being used together with formative assessment to help learners move from Superior to Distinguished levels of proficiency,

Arranging Authentic Reading Experiences

In order for an instructor to judge the readability of a text for a specific student, the instructor needs to know the size of student's vocabulary and the nature of the words in the text. So, how does an instructor estimate the size of a learner's vocabulary? Or know which texts are going to be at the appropriate level for individual learners?

Hu and Nation (2000) suggest that in order to have an authentic reading experience, the reader needs to know 95% to 98% of the words in the text. At 95%, the students may need help from their instructors. Below 90%, the students are no longer having an authentic reading experience.

The concept of "at level" begins, in many ways, with Stephen Krashen's (1997) concept of comprehensible input. Krashen argues that an approach based on comprehensible input is valid and appropriate for language programs and can solve some of the problems that learners face. The challenge, of course, is to figure out a way to judge the probability that one text or another will be comprehensible to a particular student.

In a review of Krashen's work, Lichtman and VanPatten (2021) write that Krashen claimed that students could understand input that was at the i+1 level, i.e., the level that is just beyond the students' current level, but would not be able to understand input that was at *i*+5, i.e., input that was well above the students' level. They note, though, that neither *i* nor +1 were defended terms. Yet, Lichtman and VanPatten stress the essentiality of comprehensible input for language acquisition. Experience at the FSI shows that there is reason to make this claim.[2]

Determining Students' Reading Levels

A key question in designing language programs is how can the instructors and their students know what their levels are. Were it possible to know how many and which words students knew, it would be possible to judge the probability that a student could have an authentic reading experience with the text.

Knowing what words the learners know and what words are in the text they would like to read, we could judge whether a text is readable for a particular student. In other words, with two key pieces of information it would be possible to guess that a particular text might be at level. At least a couple of ways to assess students' level do exist.

A visit to the children's section of the local library may reveal one possible approach to the problem. Bookmarks designed to help young readers judge the readability of a text for themselves can serve as aids for language learners as well. Bookmarks provided by childrenslibrarylady.com suggest using the Five Finger Rule:

1. choose a book you are interested in reading;
2. read a full page in the middle of the book;

2. At the same time, one does not need *experience* to know that the *logic* holds: incomprehensible input would be a memory overload, trying to store and recall what would essentially sound or look like nonsense. Memory needs some kind of key, or coding, to store information (McLeod, 2023).

3. hold up a finger for each word you do not know;
4. when you get to the end of the page, count the number of fingers you have up.

One finger, the book is too easy, try another book. Two fingers the book is just right. Three fingers, the book will be a little challenging, but could be fun. Four fingers, the book will be difficult to read; you may need some help. And five fingers, this book is too hard for now. This is a neat, easy way to apply a sort of probability formula for the readability of a book. It is easy to see how the Five Finger Rule approximates more complex and expensive approaches to judging the appropriateness of specific texts for specific students. And, further, it moves judgements about the appropriateness of the level of the text from the course designer to the student while still retaining an individualized, yet research-based, foundation for making curricular decisions.

In *Measuring Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition*, James Milton (2009) suggests a fairly simple and reliable methodology for estimating learners' vocabulary size. Students look at lists of words selected from various frequency bands and tick the ones they believe they know. Words representing each frequency band include a small number of made-up words included to make it possible to adjust the scores for guessing. The answer shows approximately where the student is in terms of word frequency bands. With that information, the instructor can begin selecting texts that are likely to be at level. Milton gives sample vocabulary range tests at the end of his book and clear directions for producing and scoring tests.

Some instructors have argued that just ticking boxes does not give a clear picture of students' knowledge of words. They have argued for translation tests, collocation tests, multiple-choice tests and other formats, which they believe will give a clearer picture. They may be right. However, the amount of work involved in producing other kinds of tests makes them too difficult and expensive for most instructors and institutions to use on a routine and ongoing basis.

Here is another fairly reliable way to do a dead reckoning of learners' vocabulary. Learn from the students, or from their records, how many contact hours of instruction they have had studying the language and multiply that number by 4.5. If, for instance, a student has completed four semesters of intensive study at 75 contact hours per semester, the student has had 300 contact hours and will likely know somewhere in the vicinity of 1350 words. A student who has completed a basic course of study for a category 3 language[3] at the Foreign Service Institute will have had a little fewer than 1100 hours of instruction and will likely know somewhere in the vicinity of 5000 words, give or take. This means that, if Hacking and Tschirner (2017) are correct and an ILR 3, the training goal for the FSI program, comes in at some 5000 words, students will be at the entry point to attempt to achieve the Distinguished level.

3. State Department divides languages into four categories, based on difficulty of learning for a native speaker of English, as determined by research on thousands of students over three decades. Category 3 languages include Russian, other Slavic languages, and a few others that differ distinctly from English linguistically and culturally.

Can a student acquire more than 4.5 words per instructional hour? Yes, of course; if the instructional design focuses on vocabulary acquisition and includes components of dedicated study of vocabulary, student acquisition numbers can be pushed up.

Does it matter if the numbers derived using the shortcut are off? Not really. Since vocabulary size is looked at in thousand-word bands if the number is off by 500 (say the student knows 1850 words rather than the expected 1350), the student would still be working in the second thousand-word band, meaning the student still has a way to go before having acquired a significant quantity of the high frequency words in the language.

Instructors working with less-commonly-taught languages or almost-never-taught languages may be able to assume that their students know most of the words they have taught them, keep a list of those words, and use that list to make judgments about whether learners might be able to read a certain text. Instructors working with languages widely studied will have to pick a strategy for measuring vocabulary size since students will have a range of language learning experiences and may not all know the same set of words. It is also worth noting that students who spend a considerable amount of time on the Internet reading and watching, many know words not covered in their formal programs of study.

Once the approximate size of a learner's word bank has been determined, the task of selecting texts at the appropriate level can take place.

Text Selection

As we turn to consider texts, we should consider Zipf's law (see earlier reference). Put very simply, Zipf tells us that we see high frequency words more often than we see low frequency words. Zipf tells us that the most common word in English is *the*, and that, knowing it, we know 6% of most texts. If we add the second most common word, we pick up another 3% and now recognize some 9% of the texts we are reading. The next word will give us 2% (6 decided by rank yields frequency, again over simplifying), etc., etc. It is clear that the more high-frequency words a student knows, the more he/she will recognize in any text. In many languages, the top 100 most frequent words in the language give nearly 50% coverage!

One must consider, though, how many of these high-frequency words are function words that carry almost no meaning and how many others are words that have many meanings.

Learning the high-frequency words provides coverage. Learning wisely chosen mid- and low-frequency words provides meaning. Knowing the learners' subject area, teachers can help guide the learner toward those words that will supply the most meaning and avoid the thousands of words students will not likely see. (If they do see them, they can, of course, look them up.) This is an important concept when designing instruction for the superior or lower levels.

In order to achieve the Distinguished level of proficiency, learners have to have learned nearly all of the high- and mid-frequency level words, and wisely chosen low-frequency words. Learners achieving the Distinguished level need 9000-word families, minimum.

So, how to evaluate or profile texts in order to know that there is a high probability that the learner can have an authentic reading experience with the text? When working with a student beginning the journey from Superior to Distinguished levels of proficiency, it is fair to assume a foundation of 5000-words families and move up. What percentage of coverage do the most frequent 9000-word families yield for a given text? If the student is midway through the program, what percentage of coverage would the top 7000-word families give, or top 8000-word families give? If the number is 95% or higher, the text is ideal for the learner. If it is lower, the learner is not ready for it yet.

By using Lawrence Anthony's AntWord Profiler, a software program that is available free online,[4] it is possible to see how the words in a text distribute over thousand-word frequency bands. Working with frequency lists, the AntWord Profiler produces a table telling the instructor the percentages of coverage for each thousand-word band. The instructor can then make judgments about which stage in the learner's journey texts become appropriate.

Using the AntWord profiler and well-made word lists composed by instructors or, better yet, by students, any text in text format can be checked for readability. The biggest task for instructional designers for this approach to assessing readability is making or acquiring reliable word family frequency lists.

By using Lawrence Anthony's AntWord Profiler or any equivalent software (currently, none has yet appeared to have been developed), it is possible to assess any text and judge whether students can read a text fluently, whether it is going to be appropriately challenging, whether they will need significant guidance from their teacher, or whether the text is too difficult for them. In order to do this, only three things are needed: 1) a desired-for-reading text in electronic format; 2) a word family frequency list relevant to students' needs; and 3) a little experience with the software. Once these items have been assembled, the following can happen:

1. An instructor takes any text that is out of copyright (1925 publication date or earlier when this article is being written) and replace low frequency words with more frequently used ones.
2. A judgment can be made whether current news articles, following fair use rules, are appropriate for students.
3. Several documents can be examined, such as units in instructional materials, in order to see whether the type of spaced repetition learners need is being achieved.

Finding good word frequency lists is easiest for English and teachers and students of English as a second or foreign language. Word frequency lists exist for English. Once downloaded, the AntWord Profiler automatically provides lists of the top 2000-word families (alphabetized) and a list of some 750 academic words.

Many word frequency lists are available on the Internet for a wide range of languages. When employing them, it is important to consider the underlying corpus or corpora. Are the texts in the corpora the kind of texts that learners will use on the job or in the pursuit

4. The Anthony Lawrence website can be found at https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antwordprofiler.

of their language-learning interests? Do they represent written or spoken language? Is it clear where the texts come from? Is it clear when they were created?

Many corpora, like the Russian National Corpus, tend to use a larger number of freely available texts in electronic format, which include a larger number of texts from previous centuries than one might like. In the experience of FSI Russian instructors, *War and Peace* profiled very nicely and yielded the kind of results expected. President Putin's annual press conferences, on the other hand, presented with many words not on the lists, including high numbers of international cognates. This says that word frequency lists and underlying corpora may not have been updated with sufficient numbers of more recent texts or may not include texts that represent the topic set covered in Mr. Putin's press conferences. On the other hand, a student with 9000-word families should be able to read *War and Peace*!

When words in a particular 1000-word family band tend to appear in alphabetical order, it is safe to assume that the underlying corpus is not large enough to sustain at that level. When designing corpora, it is important to set out the principles first. One question will be, how many times does a word need to appear in the corpora in order for it to appear on your list? The more the better. The Russian program at FSI used 50 as the cut point. If a word appeared fewer than 50 times, it was not included in the lists. (Remember that in any given text nearly half of the words will appear only once, so one can say nothing about the frequency of those words.) In order to achieve 50 hits, a corpus of some three million tokens was required.

Since FSI students work in six or seven main topic areas, six or seven sub corpora for each language were chosen. This provided some very important information. If a word appeared in each of the sub corpora a number of times, that word would work nicely in a general frequency list. If the word appeared in only one or two lists, it presented a choice: either throw the word out or create a topic specific word list. The academic word lists created for English would be such lists. Someone training health workers might well want to create a word family frequency list specific to health care or to a topic within the health care domain, and such a sub corpus would support doing that.

A word of caution is due at this point. Program designers can be more than willing to create word lists rather than consulting the corpora. They think they know what needs to be there. So, a lesson on going to the emergency room might include the word *sprain* for situations like, "I think I sprained my ankle." In looking at word frequency lists, however, the word "sprain" appears as a fairly low frequency word.

The main question to be answered when creating word-family frequency lists is whether students can understand or guess the meaning of a word even if they have not encountered it before. If yes, then the presence of that word in a text does not make the text more difficult. If no, it does. In the Nation lists that are supplied with AntWord profiler, *walk*, *walked*, *walking*, *walks* make up a family. *Walkway*, *Walkman*, and *walkable* are not included in the family. The family for *go* includes *goes*, *going*, *gone*, and *went*. Whether to include *went* in the family depends on how likely students are to know that it is the past tense of *go*. In the first week(s) of English, they may not. Later on, they would.

In the national Welsh curriculum, the word "cyngor" (council, advice) is introduced in Chapter 14 of the Introductory course. For a word family list to be used with AntWordProfiler, the entry would include the four consonant mutations: *cyngor*, *gyngor* (*gair* o *gyngor*: words of advice), *nghygor* (*fy nghygor*: my advice), *chyngor* (*ymchwiliadau a chyngor*: investigations and advice). To that set of basic forms, one might also add the forms for *advisor*: *cynghorydd*, *gynghorydd*, *nghynghorydd*, *chynghorydd*, and their plurals *cyngorwyr*, *gyngorwyr*, *nghyngorwyr,* as well as *chyngorwyr* (councilor/ councilors) since at this point in the course students would have little trouble guessing the meaning even if they had not seen the word previously. The morphological transparency of the relationships among the words makes it possible, and therefore it is necessary to put all of the words in the entry under the head word "cyngor" for the purposes of the AntWord Profiler. Guessing that a learner probably knows the word "cyngor," it might be safe to assume that the learner will have no problem with *cyngor meddyg* (doctor's advice) and should also be able to handle *cyngor sir* (county council).

For languages with many inflections, like Russian, each entry can become quite long. Russian verbs would include the infinitive and the inflected forms. If the perfective/ imperfective pair is obvious, all of the forms for both would be included. One could also add the gerunds and participles and all of their forms. Now we are easily at some 70 or more forms.

There is as much art as linguistics to preparing the word lists. The instructional designer needs to work closely with the teachers and students in order to understand what should and what should not go into a word family list. The most significant consideration is the need to remember that the created lists must help judge the probability that a student will be able to understand a word in context without a tremendous amount of work. Deciding which words become part of the family requires a solid understanding of the learners and a solid understanding of the language. The needs and abilities of the learner are more important to the list than the specific features of the language. The language may have forms for which there is no need to account.

For a number of languages other than English, as seen with the examples from Welsh, the task can be large, especially where no word frequency lists exist. This need to create a word frequency list gives the instructional designer a wonderful opportunity to create precisely the right list which will yield optimal results for the involved learners. Creating word frequency lists may take a considerable amount of time, but it is time well-spent. Nation (2016) laid out the framework for creating word lists, suggesting strategies and requirements for underlying corpora, and reasonable cut off points. It turns out, that creating a reliable list of the most common 3000-word families in a language requires a corpus of 3.5 million tokens. It's a big job, but not an impossible one.

AntWordProfiler has limitations. It does not recognize that two words that look the same may be different. The noun *дорога* (road) and the short form feminine adjective *дорога* (expensive) look exactly the same, and the software cannot tell them apart. Fortunately for this pair, both words are in the first thousand-word list, so the profile will

not be off. The instructor may have to help the students here if they are confusing the two words.

AntWordProfiler uses the simplest definition of a word: a group of letters with a space at each end. That causes not insurmountable problems for languages like Thai and Burmese that do not put spaces between words. "I like spicy southern food" in Thai would be ฉันชอบอาหารใต้รสเผ็ด. There is word segmentation software that will split the words apart making it possible to use AntWordProfiler to profile the texts, a question which will be addressed below.

Vietnamese has the opposite problem. Groups of letters in Vietnamese represent the Chinese characters that used to represent them. Thus, if a word had two or three characters, now it has two of three groups of letters. Adventure, thus, is cuộc phiêu lưu, which would be read as three words by the software. This feature of Vietnamese has presented a problem still in search of a solution.

AntWordProfiler also read separable verbs, like "look up," as two words. These can present special problems in English and German and would require the intervention of the instructor when students experience unexpected problems.

Up to this point, we have talked about how the instructor can create precisely the right program for learners. But, as we all know, even the best laid plans often go awry. If a student doesn't do the homework, the student will fail. So, learner behavior must be taken into account.

Learner Responsibilities and Rights

The learner has many responsibilities, the most important of which is to do the reading and the listening. In the real world, however, we know that students, especially the types of adult professionals who often populate training programs at the Distinguished level, have responsibilities and obligations that distract them from their language learning intentions. Many learners have families, kids to take to soccer games, children to be put to bed, meals to prepare, etc. They also have jobs and things they may have to do for their work.[5] And the time for meaningful uninterrupted reading is gone. It is best to devote, especially in the beginning, class time to meaning-focused input.

The student has rights. Daniel Pennac (2015) proposed ten rights, which are condensed here, with commentary based on years of experience at FSI working with adults in distinguished level programs.

The Right Not to Read

One of the few guarantees in a language program is that students who never read will never read, causing major damage to the students' final learning outcomes. However, if on any particular day, a learner doesn't feel like reading, or decides that other demands are more important, then that learner can invoke the right not to read.

5. Unique to FSI is the fact that students do have work offices to which they belong and while released from work for language study can sometimes be asked to assist with a task or two, reducing the amount of time available for study.

The Right to Skip

The learner may want to skip long descriptions of nature or episodes in the book that feel irrelevant, and that's okay. That learner probably skips in English, too.

The Right Not to Finish a Book

The rule of fifty (Pearl, 2011) helps here. At about page 50, the reader decides whether the book is worth continuing. If it is not interesting, too difficult, too easy, or in some other way wrong for the reader, the readers can stop reading and move on to the next book.

The Right to Read It Again

Rereading passages, or even whole books, can bring real pleasure. It is a way to see words and constructions over again and may move the activity over into the fluency strand.

The Right to Read Anything

Teachers who thrive on chaos manage this best. Lock-step approaches have a tendency to hold learners from achieving their linguistic potential. Learning to let go is good faculty development.

The Right to Mistake a Book for Real Life

Here is the golden rule! Once the learner has achieved reading and viewing proficiency at the level of fluency that allows being swept away by the materials, getting lost in the adventure, and discovering that it is already 3 o'clock in the morning, the learner is moving into the Distinguished levels of proficiency.

The Right to Read Anywhere

The happiest moment in the meaningful input strand is when learners confess to the teacher that they have become so interested in what they were reading or watching that they took it home and finished it over the weekend. At this point, meaningful input can start to become homework, and learners, if possible, should be allowed to read in favorite venues—the library, a corner, or even outside the classroom on the steps.

The Right to Dip In

The right to dip in. When learners are focused on relevant content, they may want to read portions of a book, not necessarily starting from the very beginning. That is okay, even if not all the students in a group will be reading the same thing.

The Right to Read Aloud

Reading aloud has gotten an unfair bad rap in recent years. The difficulty of reading aloud has frequently been underestimated by instructors. On the other hand, sometimes a

text can feel so good that readers want to read it aloud (or even to memorize it—something else that has gotten an unfair bad rap in recent years).

The Right to be Quiet

Of all of Pennac's rights, this is the most challenging for instructors. The learner has the right to quietly process the reading text and not be pushed to defend ideas or answer comprehension questions. In the meaning focused input strand of the training program, the learning is focused on the meaning that is important to individual teachers. They may not have paid attention to the color of Natasha's dress or how many objects were in the drawer. So, what should the teacher ask when the student finishes reading a book? "How did you like it?" "What would you like to read next?"

The ten rights of the reader place the student in the driver's seat. When the materials are interesting, relevant, and at level to the student, the student is more likely to do the homework. When the student has the right to stop reading, or even not to read, the requirement that materials be interesting becomes critical. Neither the instructional designer nor the teacher tells the student what to read. They help guide the student toward materials that will hold their interests.

Conclusion

A properly constructed program at the Distinguished level may feel chaotic for experienced teachers. The learners in the program are most likely reading different books, watching different videos, and preparing different oral presentations. Specialists designing training programs and the teachers delivering them will have spent considerable time reading and evaluating materials to be able to answer the question, "What should the class read/watch/talk about next?" To answer that question, the instructors need to know their students well since the materials need to be interesting (to the learner), relevant (especially in the context of the learner's onward assignment or endeavors), and at level.

Not everyone agrees. Nation and Waring (2019) do not support the idea that learning materials should always be interesting. Clifford (2018) does not support the idea that learning and assessment materials need to be relevant to the learner's onward assignment.

While learners at the basic levels generally start out with the same lack of language-specific schemata and therefore have similar needs (accounting, of course, for those who are heritage learners or have studied other languages, perhaps even from the same family), each learner at the Distinguished level is unique (Mueller, 2003) in a number or respects: the specific vocabulary and grammar they have acquired, their now-honed approaches to language learning, their use of strategies, and the manner in which they have reached the Distinguished level, or close to it. Learners need feedback and guidance but may not need much in terms of instruction in the traditional sense although most report needing and wanting some direct instruction for specific items, particularly those in the area of cultural differences (Leaver & Atwell, 2002). Most significantly, learners working toward the Distinguished level need to process and produce massive amounts of text; for that they may upon occasion need guidance from instructors who have a more comprehensive

knowledge of what texts exist and which texts might best serve their immediate and long-term needs. And sometimes, learners just simply do not know what they do not know, interpreting linguistic and cultural phenomena from an English-centric point of view, and need both explanation and transformative experiences designed by instructors and program managers to push them up into the Distinguished realm.

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