<u>Factors To Consider When Selecting Authentic Texts for the Interpretive Tasks</u>

Another important aspect of preparing students for these interpretive tasks is the selection of the appropriate text for both classroom learning activities and use in the IPA (Glisan et al., 2003). Teachers can use various sources from the target language culture to find the texts (oral, printed, video) required for the interpretive tasks, both for the classroom practice that prepares students for the IPA and for the IPA itself. The texts selected should be ***authentic***; that is, **those texts "produced *by* members of a language and culture group *for* members of the same language and culture group"** (Galloway, 1998, p. 133)**.** While teachers may find it intuitively appropriate to "simplify" or "edit" authentic texts to make them easier for students to interpret, particularly for students in beginning language classes, research indicates that learners demonstrate a higher level of comprehension on texts that are read in their authentic, unedited versions in contrast to versions that are simplified through lexical changes (e.g., substituting known vocabulary for original vocabulary contained in the text); see for example: Allen, Bernhardt, Berry, & Demel, 1988; Oguro, 2008; Young, 1999. Simplifying a text for learners may in reality be counterproductive, given that natural redundancy of the authentic context facilitates comprehension (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). An alternative to changing the text and sacrificing its authenticity is to teach students strategies for interpreting authentic texts such as using their background knowledge, the context of the text, and word families to hypothesize meaning. It is important to note that oral and printed texts included as part of a textbook program are often not authentic; that is, they are prepared by textbook authors for instructional purposes.

According to Shrum & Glisan (2010), there are two types of factors that should be taken into account when selecting an authentic text: 1) reader- and listener-based factors and 2) text-

based factors. The following are several important research-based findings that deal with **what the reader/listener/viewer brings to the interpretive task:**

1. **Topic familiarity and Purpose for Listening/Viewing/Reading:** Students will have greater success if the texts selected deal with topics with which they are familiar and if they are encouraged to establish a purpose for exploring these texts.

2. **Short-Term or Working Memory:** Teachers should be aware of the load on memory that students may experience during the comprehension task, and they should plan to control for this by allowing students to have the printed text available while completing a reading comprehension task and allowing students to listen to an oral text or view a video text multiple times.

3. **Strategies in Comprehending and Interpreting/Anxiety:** Students have more success in interpreting texts if they are taught to interact with the text through the use of both bottom-up processes (comprehending pieces of the text in a linear fashion) and top-down processes (interpreting the "whole," the big ideas of the text). Students' comprehension will increase if they are trained to use strategies such as activation of background knowledge, contextual guessing, and use of nonverbal cues, which will also serve to lessen their anxiety. Teachers should encourage students to self-report periodically while listening, reading, and viewing so that teachers will be informed about the comprehension strategies their students are using (cited from Shrum & Glisan, 2010, pp. 199-200).

Selecting an appropriate text is no simple task, as the teacher must keep in mind several important considerations regarding **text-based factors**:

1. The text should be **CONTEXT-appropriate:** Texts should reflect contexts and content areas that learners are exploring in the language class or program so that background knowledge can

be activated. For example, a text on good nutrition habits would be context-appropriate within a unit on "maintaining a healthy lifestyle," while students are acquiring vocabulary on food, learning about food preparation and exercise, and exploring the perspectives of the target culture relative to staying healthy. Presentation of such a text in the absence of this contextual foundation would likely result in frustration for learners and lack of interest. In this vein, students' interest level has been found to be a key factor in text selection to the extent that students may be able to interpret at a higher level when the text is more interesting to them (Dristas & Grisenti, 1995).

2. The text should be **AGE-appropriate:** Learners in elementary school, for example, might not be able to relate to authentic soap operas, talk shows, or newspaper editorials, because cognitively these texts would be too complex and also would not capture the interest of a typical younger learner. At this age, learners might respond more effectively to stories, fairy tales, folktales, and legends; concrete descriptions of people and places; personal letters; conversations between young people or interviews.

3. The text should be **appropriate for the LINGUISTIC LEVEL** of learners: This does not mean that teachers should select only texts that have the exact grammar and vocabulary that students have learned (this would be impossible anyway)!! It means that the text should have enough language that students can recognize so that they can use these recognizable portions on which to scaffold meaning. It bears mentioning that readers/listeners/viewers may pay more attention to **words that carry content** as opposed to grammatical markers as in the case of verb endings, for example. An important factor to consider when selecting texts is the **degree of**

contextual support. For example, **longer texts may be easier** for students to comprehend because they provide more of a context from which meaning may be interpreted. Additionally, the **organization of the text** may impact ease in interpretation; **texts with story-like features** (those that have a beginning, middle, and end) and **signaling cues** may facilitate comprehension. Linguistic signaling cues such as connector/transition words (e.g., *in addition to, on the other hand*) and non-linguistic signaling cues such as charts, graphs, pictures, subtitles provide additional support to assist learners in drawing meaning from the text.

4. Learners should be able to have success in interpreting the text if the teacher *EDITS THE TASK and not the text.* That is, teachers should take great care to design interpretive tasks that are appropriate to the linguistic level of learners, while challenging them to stretch and develop further their interpretive abilities.

(For a complete review of the research that is the basis for the discussion of reader-/listener-based factors and text-based factors here, see Shrum & Glisan, 2010, Chapter 6.)

In sum, instructors may find it helpful to remember the acronym "CALL-IT" to recall these text-based factors:

C	=	**C**ontext
A	=	**A**ge
LL	=	**L**inguistic **L**evel
IT	=	**I**mportance of **T**ask

Instructors are encouraged to consider the CALL-IT factors very closely as they select authentic texts and to "edit the task, not the text."

In the first edition of this manual, we presented a dichotomy of text types according to proficiency levels. In this second edition, we have re-conceptualized this discussion to acknowledge the fact that any text can be interpreted at a variety of linguistic levels. There is nothing inherent in the text itself to make it novice, intermediate, intermediate high, etc. Consequently, a given text is not static in terms of how it might be interpreted. What enables a text to be interpreted is what the listener/reader/viewer brings to the interpretive task--i.e., how the learner interacts with the text. For instance, some authentic travel brochures may be more accessible to readers than are others based on the factors described above.

Some examples of interpretive reading tasks include but are not limited to:

- Personal letters or e-mail correspondence;

- Simple biographies or descriptions of people from a popular culture magazine or newspaper;

- Product commercials in the target language from newspaper or magazines;

- Public service announcements in magazines and newspapers such as the anti-smoking or anti-drug campaigns;

- Product advertisements or sales advertisements from a supermarket.

- Interviews or surveys from youth-oriented magazines;

- Short stories;

- "Dear Abby" columns of personal interest to students;

- Photo stories with captions such as the "fotonovelas";

- Essays or editorials in authentic target culture newspapers;

- Authentic songs or poetry by artists of the target culture;

- Comic strips.