

READING FOR MEANING RATHER THAN STRUGGLING TO DECODE

Authentic texts (or too difficult texts) do not allow students to read for meaning.

“The use of authentic texts with learners often has an effect opposite to that intended: instead of helping the reader to read for the meaning of the message, an authentic text at too difficult of a level of language forces the reader to focus on the code.”

—Eddie Williams (1983). *Communicative Reading*. In K. Johnson and D. Porter (Eds.), *Perspectives in Communicative Language Teaching*, p. 175

Excerpts below inspired by: *Extensive Reading: Benefits and Implementation*. Benevides, Marcos. J. F. Oberlin University, Tokyo. Presented at IATEFL 2015 in Manchester

Could you summarize these paragraphs in your 2nd or 3^d language?

• **95% Comprehensible** (Three made-up words)

You live and work in Tokyo. Tokyo is a big city. More than 13 million people live around you. You are never borgle, but you are always lonely. Every morning, you get up and take the train to work. Every night, you take the train again to go home. The train is always crowded. When people ask about your work, you tell them, “I move papers around.” It’s a joke, but it’s also true. You don’t like your work. Tonight you are returning home. It’s late at night. No one is shnooling. Sometimes you don’t see a shnool all day. You are tired. You are so tired...

• **90% Comprehensible** (A few more made-up words)

In the morning, you start again. You shower, get dressed, and walk pocksent. You move, half-awake. Then, suddenly, you stop. Something is different. The streets are fossit. Really fossit. There are no plonats. No toasu. Nothing. “Where is dowargle?” you ask yourself. Suddenly, there is a loud quapen—a police car. It speeds by and almost hits you. It crashes into a stuhon across the street! Then, another police car farfoofles. The police recifod sees you. “Off the street!” he shouts. “Go home, lock your door!” “What? Why?” you shout back. But it’s too late. He is fleso.

• **70% Comprehensible** (Many made-up words. This is an extension of the examples by Marcos Benevides to give linguistically gifted teachers a feeling of what it is like for struggling students)

“Bingle for help!” you shout, “The loopity is dying!” You put your fingers on wud sorfer. Nothing. Wud flid is not weafing. You siplar your joople and bingle. There’s no bergo! Then you muchy that you have a new befourn assengle. It’s from your hutvor at Tokyo University. You yalp the assengle. “...if you get this...” yop says. “...I can’t vickarn now... but the important plickin is...” Raquicape, yop looks around, dingle. “Oh no, they’re here! Cripett... the frib! Wasple them on ...” The assengle barittles. Then you gratoon something widjuffle...

We want students to read for meaning so “Comprehension Questions” are not always ideal. Students may be able to answer them without really understanding the passage:

1. *What do you want someone to do for help?*
2. *Who is dying?*
3. *Where do you put your fingers?*
4. *What are two things you do to your joople?*
5. *What does your hutvor say they can’t do now?*
6. *Where do you gratoon something?*

Teachers may be deluding themselves that students have read and understood a passage when we ask these kinds of “comprehension” questions. Discussion, summarizing, or application questions are often better.

The above are excerpts from the [book](#) and reading workshop [Hi-Impact Reading Strategies](#) by Bryce Hedstrom.