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BUILDING AUTOMATICITY OF WORD RECOGNITION FOR LESS PROFICIENT READERS

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to reveal how to build the automatic process of word recognition for those who are less proficient at reading. The article initially looks at the problems less proficient readers face and what research has revealed. It then moves to explore what teachers can do in their practice, such as reading aloud, unlocking pronunciation models, the use of audio material in reading programs, or letter-sound associations and temporary spelling methods to name but a few, to facilitate the process. Tasks are then introduced such as extensive reading, read and look up procedures, the matching of specific words with identical words, and predict and inferred meaning tasks that students can work on to develop their word recognition skills. The final part of the paper explores learner autonomous methods (learner strategies) that can be employed by students to improve their word recognition skills. These include DISSECT, the use of analogy, contextual clues, pictures semantic clues, and syntactic word order clues.

It has been postulated by some theorists like, Laberge and Samuels (1974) in Abdullah (1993), that fluent readers automatically recognize most of the words they read. At the same time, it appears that automatic lexical access frees cognitive space for constructing meaning from text. This implies that good readers are also good decoders. In fact, fluent readers characteristically seem to be able to decode, not by guessing from context or prior knowledge of the world, but by a kind of automatic identification that requires no conscious cognitive effort. Previously, other theorists have agreed. Gough (1972), states that 'when word recognition becomes automatic, the reader is not conscious of the process.' Most fluent readers then, 'read quickly, automatically recognizing letters and words, while at the same time maintaining a flow that allows them to make connections and inferences that make text understandable.' (Van Duzer, 1999). With the concept of what a fluent reader can do, the automaticity of word recognition appears as quite the contrary for the less proficient reader

Automaticity of word recognition is generally defined as the automatic "process of determining the pronunciation and some degree of meaning of an unknown word" (Harris & Hodges, 1995 in Pikulski, 1997). In relation to this, it would seem that less proficient readers of any age group are hindered by a number of factors that do not allow them to develop such a skill to the point where they can perform integrative and complex tasks of language use, communication and literacy. For example, it has been suggested by Pikulski (1997) that many less proficient readers indulge in the slow analysis of words

presented in a text, and as a result, drain memory and attention needed for comprehension. As well, it would appear that many remain where they are because of miscommunication between teacher and student. Yoshimura in 2000 writes that, 'instructors seem to assume that it is the learner's responsibility to practice what is covered in the class until they have acquired target proficiency.' However, as she further indicates, many learners 'seem to think they have practiced enough after only a few times even if they fall short of being fluent and proficient in the objective of study.' Moreover, because of this failure to see eye to eye, many of these lower proficient readers continue to stay at faltering levels of controlled processing. Yoshimura suggests that a solution for this can be found through encouraging students to 'stick it out with some practice tasks until stages of automaticity have been reached'. However, this is easier said than done. There has to be some mediation provided by the teacher through teaching and the tasks he/she provides. Additionally, less proficient readers need to be empowered to handle their struggle with the automaticity of word recognition through the acquisition of learner strategies that will further promote the motivation and confidence to progress. Without acknowledgement and application of such considerations, the discontinuity of learner development in this area will remain the same. Paran (1996) in Kopeika (2000), shows support for mediation of this matter when he says, 'If automaticity of word recognition is indeed a major attribute of an L1 reader's reading behaviour, then ways of encouraging it should be found.' Consequently, it is most essential to explore and exemplify what teaching, and tasks can be implemented and used, as well as what learner strategies can be empowered within less proficient readers in order to reveal the means to building their automaticity of word recognition.

Teaching

Teaching less proficient readers to automatize word recognition would appear on the surface as no simple task. The low motivation and lack of confidence that may be typically characteristic of such L2ers with this inability, can very often pose a serious dilemma for the teacher on just how to go about teaching and developing such a skill. However, a number of means and methods that have been explored, and examined may serve to unravel and reveal a solution to this problematic issue. Reading aloud has often been frowned upon, as being relatively unproductive and even wasteful of time and effort. Nevertheless, Bell in 1998, revealed that from a study done in Yemen, reading aloud does have its practicalities. Students that took part in the study claimed that the model of pronunciation provided by the teacher was not only a great motivator to encourage students to read, but also provided the students with confidence in silent reading because they were able to verbalize sounds that had previously been unrecognizable. This resulted in wider reading by some of the less proficient students in the class. In relation to this, Adams (1990) in Pikulski (1997), adds that it may be 'more effective for the teacher to point to the words as he/she reads them, moving from left to right across the page' thereby providing a model of pronunciation for the words while simultaneously providing a visual reference of them for the student. As a result, the student is able to access the sound of words and come to know what words look like, which further increases their chances of being able to recognize them and make progress in comprehension. Pikulski (1997) exemplifies agreement with the latter and former teaching practices when he says, 'Unlocking the pronunciation leads to the word's

meaning' and that 'constructing meaning from written text is impossible without being able to identify the words.' Therefore, it would appear that reading aloud does have an impact in motivating students to overcome their fear of decoding words in unfamiliar scripts and helping them identify and recognize vocabulary as the means to understanding what they read.

In a 1998 study, Bell reveals that there has been much success in the use of audio material in reading programs to promote automaticity of word recognition. Tape recordings of native speakers reading aloud have been widely popularized and advocated for application in Yemen. The reason being seems to lie in the fact that the materials provided the learners with a correct model of accurate pronunciation, which in turn benefited word recognition. Based on feedback from the students, such materials were found to raise student confidence and motivation in these particular classroom conditions.

In a slightly different study, Adams (1990) in Pikulski (1997) reveals that if less proficient readers are taught and consistently exposed to multiple sounds for multiple letter combinations (Ex: ph, fl, th, etc.) this can serve to 'facilitate memory for the sounds, forms and shapes of letters'. Then later, because of this memory facilitation, less proficient learners will be able to apply these 'letter-sound associations' as a way of increasing their automaticity of word recognition. In other words, if a teacher takes the time to help students make letter-sound associations and recycles those in different contexts, these associations will eventually come to be stored in memory, and through application in reading, become the means to recognize and access words, and formulate comprehension. Teachers then, should consider taking the time to check and provide some guidance on the pronunciation of multiple letter combinations, as they may well add in furthering automaticity of word recognition and in improving reading skills. Similarly, Clarke (1988) in Pikulski (1997), shows that as less proficient readers write using 'temporary spelling' (spelling words in an invented way), they have many opportunities to use the word-identification skills they are developing. As they construct sentences of their own in writing, they develop a greater sensitivity to meaning or context clues. As they utilize invented spellings, they are also reviewing and applying what they know about letter-sound associations. Consequently, teachers should encourage less proficient readers to try to write what they want to say as a means to build word identification.

There has been other research as well, that suggests the enhancing of word recognition in less proficient readers is well facilitated by the constant recycling of lexical items and consolidation with previously learned vocabulary and lexis (Yoshimura, 2000). What it takes however, is a conscious effort on the part of the teacher to make word recognition a regular part of vocabulary instruction. If this is done, it can have a tremendous impact on learner automaticity to recognize language. The means to recycle though does not come through the monotony and redundancy of repetition, but rather through the teacher's presentation of recycled and previously learned items in different contexts. Consequently, this may then serve to reduce the study load and also help L2ers to recognize the same words in future reading encounters. It has also been suggested that the automaticity of word recognition for less proficient learners is well served by pre-teaching unfamiliar vocabulary and lexical items in pre-reading tasks that specifically focus on raising language awareness of word relations such as with synonyms, antonyms and other associated words (Hood et al. 1996 in Van Duzer 1999). By drawing learners'

attention to these relations, it has been suggested that semantic clusters (clusters of words of similar meaning) will be more readily formed and consequently, if one word is encountered and recognized, so to, will others that are related. Henning (1973) and Stanovich (1981) in Abdullah (1993) echo this sentiment. They propose that all teachers need to do to see if students are forming semantic clusters is write a word like **'dog'** on the board and ask students to brainstorm words related to it. Words such **'cat'**, **'bark'** **'tail'** etc. should obviously appear and prove the existence of such formations.

Johnson & Pearson (1984) in Abdullah (1993), suggest that teachers make an effort to teach and present high frequency words in order to access and promote the automaticity of word recognition. By presenting students with vocabulary and lexis that they will encounter, see, and read on a regular basis in printed materials, the automaticity to recognize words is inductively enhanced. This of course involves, again, the teacher making a conscious effort to present what is necessary for less proficient learners to progress.

Finally, it may be important for teachers to perhaps sometimes 'de-emphasize' the top-down processing models for reading. This is due to the fact that although activating prior knowledge may be effective in getting students to predict and guess what they are going to read, it may also occasionally prevent the less proficient readers from accessing comprehension of alphabetic letters, the features of alphabetic letters, words and syntactic processing (Carpenter & Just, 1986; Perfetti, 1985; Stanovich, 1986 in Grabe, 1991). Theorists have recently begun to advocate the importance of automatic lower level processing (bottom-up processing) as essential in relieving the problem of being 'stuck' on words. Some argue that less proficient readers become fixated on words simply because they lack the right amount of bottom-up processing to understand them. As a result, less proficient readers consciously attend to graphic form, since they have no means to comprehend what they are reading through top-down processing (Eskey & Grabe, 1988).

Less proficient readers then, in some instances, cannot come to recognize what they read and thus, remain deficient and void of understanding. It may be wise then, for teachers to look deeply and consider the texts they want their students to read and question if they, indeed, have the linguistic tools to access what is presented. This is not to say that top-down processing does not have its advantages. It is an effective means to empowering L2ers to use learner strategies and take responsibility for their learning. However, because of this, it becomes easy for teachers to get 'side-tracked' and lose sight of who understands and recognizes the words they read and who does not. Consequently, the use of bottom-up processing, where attention is given to words, word forms, pronunciation, etc, should not be overlooked nor neglected for the sake of teaching style or overemphatic trends in teaching. There are both advantages and disadvantages to top-down and bottom-up processing. Based on the situation the teacher is presented with, he/she should judge and prepare for any problems less proficient readers might encounter in recognizing vocabulary in reading tasks and take the time to pre-teach/teach the necessities before these learners attempt to engage in reading. Furthermore, the teacher should maintain an awareness of a less proficient readers' progress and take the time to facilitate any needed areas in word recognition as they appear.

Tasks

There are a variety of tasks that can be given to less proficient readers that can assist them in improving their ability to recognize words. Most notably, is the use of extensive reading. Many theorists have sighted extensive reading as being, for the most part, one of the most essential and fundamental tasks that a less proficient reader can be encouraged to partake in as a means to improve his/her ability to recognize vocabulary. Grabe (1991) & Paran (1996) in Bell (1998), emphasize the importance of extensive reading in providing learners with practice with automaticity of word recognition and decoding the symbols on the printed page (i.e. bottom-up processing). Some evidence has shown that there are benefits to doing so. This was exactly the case in Fiji (Elley & Manghubai, 1983 in Bell, 1998) where schoolchildren were provided high-interest storybooks, which later revealed gains in word recognition and reading comprehension after the first year and wider gains in oral and written skills after two years. Kembo (1993) in Bell (1998), adds to this, pointing out that extensive reading further develops 'students confidence and ability in facing longer texts.' Paran (1996) in Kopeika (2000), concurs with this when he states that it is important to encourage the less proficient learner to 'read as extensively as possible... using specific exercises to encourage and develop automatic processes.' Moreover, Stoller in Eskey & Grabe (1988), states that 'learners may be motivated to read extensively by being allowed to choose their own texts based on their own interest', which will consequently lead to the kind of extensive reading they need to do if they are to 'gain any automaticity in their word and phrase recognition abilities (Eskey & Grabe, 1988).'

Consequently then, with due consideration for and validation of student interests, extensive reading can become a highly motivating task that many less proficient readers can actively engage in, while simultaneously and indirectly building their ability to recognize words. However, bottom-up processing, again, should not be ignored, as nor should the importance of focusing on lexis and grammar, particularly in the early stages, as a means to facilitate word recognition. After all, less proficient readers do require linguistic and phonological training first, before they can fully partake in tasks that are 'top-down' oriented. The focus of practice for less proficient readers needs to be on the smaller units of language, such as letters or words, so that each frequent encounter (due to the number limitation of the English alphabet) may give them ample practice in recognition.

Besides extensive reading, a number of other tasks have been developed. Samuels & Flor (1997) in Yoshimura (2000) suggest that by having the teacher read a passage to a student and later, having the student tell exactly everything he/she remembers from that, may indirectly indicate that person's ability to recognize words in a text. This is based on the assumption that students who generally auditorally attend to oral texts with accuracy, speed, and expression and do so with good comprehension, can come to be automatic at visually decoding words. Consequently, when the same text that was read to the student is given to him/ her to read aloud, and then he/she is asked to tell exactly what he/she remembers from it, the learner is provided with essential word recognition practice based on the pairing of auditory and reading skills with the task of explaining what one has read and heard. This offers an avenue for increasing word familiarity and recognition for less proficient readers through input that is the same, but presented differently. Van Duzer (1999) echoes this sentiment when she says, 'Learners

should be given opportunities to develop word recognition...with familiar texts that they have been practiced orally or heard before.'

Similarly, other types of associative tasks have been used in the past. Bruder & Henderson (1986) in Yoshimura (2000), going on West's research in 1960, suggest the traditional and familiar 'read and look-up' procedure as a means to developing word recognition. This requires the reader to look at a sentence or parts of a sentence or a passage, say it silently to himself/herself, and then look up from the page and say the sentence aloud. The learner is then, to try to say what he /she remembers reading. What the learner will say is said to directly indicate what he/she has attended to or recognized. Such a task, has been used in a variety of situations, but has more recently been found primarily in assessment. However, adaptations of this do exist. For example, one task involves putting students into groups of 5 (numbered 1-5) and showing one sentence of a 5-sentence passage to each group for 5 seconds. During these brief 5 seconds, it is assumed that each student in a group will attend to certain features in the sentence that they are shown. As a result, when each person in a group compares what he/she saw with the other members and all attempt to reformulate the sentence, the collaboration of what each person remembers and recognized will facilitate each individual member in the group in reconstructing the sentence. Likewise, the other groups will need the input of each and every member to make their sentences. After each group has constructed the sentence they saw, one member from group 1 is called to the board and writes his/her group's sentence. Then a member from group 2, soon followed by a member from 3, 4 and finally 5 are called to the board systematically to write their sentences. Once that is done, the teacher can show an overhead projection of the passage and students can see if what they formed based on their word recognition and memory is accurate or not. The task involves a lot of cooperation and collaboration, but serves to give everyone facilitation and practice at recalling and recognizing vocabulary and is especially beneficial in boosting the less proficient reader's confidence and motivation.

Such tasks like the above are indeed beneficial. However, in 1981, another linguist by the name of Francoise Grellet (1982) developed a number of unique and useful tasks for developing word recognition in hopes of improving L2er reading ability. These tasks, which attend to dealing with deficiency that less proficient readers have with automatically recognizing words, readily facilitate the needs of learners in such predicaments. For instance, in one particular task, students are required to try to recognize words as quickly as possible. They have to match specific words with precisely identical words that are hidden within a group of similar words as fast as possible.

For example:

cat : cab, cut, cap, cash, cat , cad, can,	told : bold, hold, bolt, told , sold, mold, dolt
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By doing such tasks that require speed, and precision to recognize words, allows L2ers to directly practice and improve upon their automaticity of word recognition skills.

What is most interesting about Grellet's tasks, like the one above, is that they progressively become more complex and cognitively demanding and as a result, serve to develop the degree and complexity of word recognition within the learner. This is exactly the case with the follow-up task to the one above. Students are to look at a series of two expressions that are side by side. Sometimes the expressions are the same and sometimes they are different. Students must go through the list as fast as possible and when they find expressions that are different they are to underline the word that differs in the second expression.

For example:

<p>/cat nap cat nap/ /well paid well said / /old looking cold looking/ / one-way one day/ /happy few happy few/ /self-taught self-caught/ /Can you heat the tin? Can you hit the tin? / /You startled the party. You started the party. / / They pricked my fingers. They picked my finger/ /He's bound to see the lamp. He's bound to see the lamb. /</p>

What is more, in yet, another complex task, Grellet presents an exercise where students are required to predict and infer the meaning of incomplete words from other words and the context provided.

For example:

<p><u>Student text</u></p>
<p>Hi, Ho are y ? I am rela here on the bea . The weath is wonderful and the ple are friendly. The ood is delicious and the dri stop you from feeling thirsty! I will wr y again soon. Take care.</p> <p>Stuart</p>

<p><u>Text filled in</u></p>
<p>Hi! How are you? I am relaxing here on the beach. The weather is wonderful and the people are friendly. The food is delicious and the drinks stop you from feeling thirsty! I will write you again soon. Take care.</p> <p>Stuart</p>

This particular task is quite useful, as it is something that most native speakers of English are constantly led to practice. Often, when someone receives a letter that is difficult to read because of the handwriting or the document has been damaged and some of the words are not legible, an individual is immediately put in the position to reconstruct the words by studying what he or she can make of them in order to predict what letters are likely to be missing or to study the context in order to infer the general meaning of the words. For the average native speaker, this is often done unconsciously, but for someone learning how to read and recognize words in a second language, it takes practice. This particular task is quite adept at familiarizing L2ers with recognizing words more quickly and therefore increasing their reading speed.

In relation to vocabulary driven exercises, there have been a number of tasks developed to help students build an active vocabulary, especially around words that are synonymous in meaning that also assist them in practicing building semantic clusters that inevitably facilitate automatic word recognition. Redman & Ellis (1993) illustrate this by simply providing learners with texts that require them to find words within it that are similar in meaning to vocabulary underlined within the same text. This helps students to form semantic clusters, which in turn assists them in automatically recognizing words (Example 1). Likewise, by providing students with a text, where they are required to substitute words that are similar in meaning to underlined words in a text, again, facilitates and allows students to practice building vocabulary while simultaneously adding to their ability to recognize words (Example 2).

Example 1

Holiday travelers faced long **delays** today after a French air traffic control **dispute** and a double computer **failure** threw Europe's airways into **chaos**. A number of flights were held up for more than 6 hours and 1 group of tourists was **unable to leave** Portugal today, as scheduled. So far, they have been stranded at Faro airport for more than 20 hours. An argument over working conditions is responsible for the problems with the French air traffic control, but the confusion has been made worse by, the simultaneous breakdown of important computers at Brest and Prestwick.

Example 2

well-off meat shocking money as/since trouble butcher's told me
embarrassed horrible met frightened apparently children friends
animal

I ran into an old pal of mine yesterday. His name is Oliver Knight, but he was always known as 'OK' to his **buddies**. I **bumped into** him buying liver in a shop down the road. Now this was surprising because OK is a strict vegetarian and has always felt that **liver** is

disgusting. ‘It’s for the kids,’ he explained. This too was **surprising because** OK had always been single and certainly hadn’t had time to become a father since I last saw him. ‘They’re my wife’s from a previous marriage,’ he **said** shyly. It turned out that he had married someone called Amanda, and she had come complete with a family – a boy and a girl, and a dog. I knew that OK was scared of dogs, so I asked him how he managed. **It turned out that** he had been **scared** at first, but now they were the best of friends; in fact, the huge dog I had seen waiting outside the **shop** was the **dog** in question. ‘It must have affected your finances, taking on a family,’ I said. You see, OK wasn’t a rich man. He looked a little **shy** for a moment. ‘Finance isn’t a problem. Amanda’s rather **wealthy**, and she’s got a very good job,’ he said. ‘The **problem** is that I stay at home and have to cook all this **disgusting** meat for the **kids**.’

What is most striking and useful with Example 2 is that many of the underlined words are repeated throughout the text, thus adding ample exposure to various vocabulary items, which provides the needed incidental contact to promote automatic word recognition.

Finally, Van Duzer (1999) suggests that the use of cloze exercises as tasks where examples of the target language structure (ex: prepositions) are removed from a text and the students are required to fill in as many gaps as possible, do contribute to the automaticity of word recognition. Cloze exercises of such a nature often require the learner to recognize syntactical relations between words such as in the case of collocation. Consequently, if a student encounters a sentence like ‘**He is going to get _____ the bus.**’ he/she may very well be able to recognize what is required to collocate with the verb ‘**get**’ and as a result, be able to place the preposition ‘**on**’ into that blank.

Learner Strategies

Recently, with the shift toward implementing more learner autonomous activities and tasks, and empowering learners to take responsibility for their learning, Learner strategies have come to the forefront, as a means to enabling the L2er to enhance self-development, confidence and motivation in order to function independently. However, enabling learners to automatically recognize words requires teaching them strategies that will empower them to look and discover the answers for themselves. A linguist named Deshler (1995) with the help of his associates has developed just the means to do that. What Deshler and his peers devised is known as **DISSECT**. **DISSECT** is a word identification strategy system that involves combining a number of different learner strategies in order to systematically analyze words using context and word element clues (i.e. morphological analysis). It needs to be introduced and taught to students initially, but once it is understood and learned, it can prove quite effective in empowering students to identify and gain familiarity with words. The term or mnemonic, **DISSECT** itself, stands to represent 6 combined strategies that learners can use to develop their vocabulary, while simultaneously automatizing word recognition.

They are:

<p>DISSECT</p> <p>Discover the word's context. Isolate the prefix. Separate the suffix. Say the stem or root of the word. Examine the stem or root word. Check with someone. Try the dictionary.</p>
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DISSECT may be used in any general reading assignment and in content specific texts. As well, Deshler encourages students to 'think aloud' while learning the strategy to make it more familiar. To get more of an understanding of how the strategy works, consider the following example:

A student is reading the following passage, but does not recognize the word **recurrent** in the text, and consequently, applies the **DISSECT** strategy.

“ The **recurrent** economic crises of past times were totally unnecessary and are not now permitted to happen, but other and equally large dislocations can and do happen without having political results, because there is no way in which discontent can become articulate.” (George Orwell's 1984).

First the learner tries to Discover the context: The learner concludes that the context indicates that **recurrent** describes economic crises or disasters and suggests something negative.

Next, the learner tries to Isolate the prefix: The learner concludes that the prefix is 're' and means 'again or back'.

Then the learner tries to Separate the suffix: The learner concludes the word has no suffix.

After that, the learner tries to Say the stem or root: The learner concludes the root word is 'current'.

Next, the learner tries to Examine the stem or root: The learner concludes that 'current' means 'happening now or flowing'.

Then, the learner looks to Check with someone: The learner talks with a partner and after some discussion decides that the word is not related to 'flowing', as the case is with a river, but it may mean 'happening or again'.

Finally, the learner can Try the dictionary: The learner references the dictionary to discover that the word **recurrent** means 'occurring repeatedly or returning regularly'.

By taking on an approach like the one above, less proficient readers become empowered to deal with their own word recognition crises. Each step has the learner thinking about the word and attempting to come to know it before making the last and final leap to the dictionary. However, this is not to say that the learner cannot appeal to another authority like the teacher as a substitute to the dictionary. After all, in most cases of not comprehending or recognizing a word, most native speakers are more prone to and comfortable with asking someone before referencing a dictionary to get the answer they seek.

Aside from **DISSECT**, there are other strategies, which have empowering effects as well. Take for instance, the use of contextual clues in developing automaticity of word recognition. As Dulin (1970) suggests, by teaching less proficient readers how to question the setting that words appear in and how the words are used, they can become empowered to question what the words should mean in order for the text to make sense. These questions drive a familiarity; a chance for a less proficient reader to spend time with words and therefore, increase the amount of exposure they need to recognize same or similar words in the future. Similarly, by empowering learners to use sound clues, through the phonetic analysis of words (breaking words into units of sound), learners can then check and ask themselves if the words sound familiar. In many cases, understanding the sounds of words can be the means to activate prior knowledge and recognize and recall word meanings. Furthermore, comprehension of word sounds may even allow one to infer or predict meaning.

Another empowering strategy that less proficient readers can be guided and encouraged to use, is the notion of analogy. By getting L2ers to draw analogies of words they know to words that do not know, will help them recognize words that are unfamiliar. As Pikulski (1997) indicates, encouraging learners to engage in tasks that require them to identify simple words and syllables by analogy can have highly beneficial results. For example, by simply asking students to think of as many words as they can that rhyme with the word **man**, can result in students producing a mass load of vocabulary that perhaps others, who did not initially know, come to recognize. Even more so, by using words that are loaded with vowel sounds is clearly advantageous to the less proficient reader, since they are far more stable within rhyming tasks (**EX: - eam, -ame, oan, etc.**). Likewise, by using simple initial consonant substitution exercises, for example asking the learners, **‘What word will I have, if I change the ‘m’ in man to ‘r’?’**, learners can come to build words they previously did not know or recognize. Consequently, getting less proficient readers to use analogy is not only empowering, but builds confidence, curiosity, and motivation to learn new words from old ones and eventually become automatically familiar with them.

Using pictures can have quite an effect on less proficient readers as well. By simply showing pictures, which are paired with visual representations of words, such readers can come to use imagery and the activation of their prior knowledge to recognize words in text through the images activated within their minds. The use of imagery with words very often provides the necessary scaffolding for students to remember and recall vocabulary for recognition. Therefore, the less proficient reader, who remembers seeing a cat leaping through the air, can come to accompany that image with the word **‘jump’** for example. By encouraging students to make use of pictures for the words they come to learn, can serve to facilitate their growth in identifying words on sight.

Additionally, teaching less proficient readers to look for semantic clues is also useful. By drawing learners’ attention to a word like **‘cat’** and asking them to look for and underline words in a text related to that particular word (See Example 3 below), they can come to autonomously form semantic clusters, which in turn, makes the text and future readings more accessible and comprehensible because the vocabulary is recognizable. Additionally, it is a good idea to teach less proficient readers how to group the words into word families (a grouping strategy), so that they can have the necessary

semantically related vocabulary categorized and contextualized effectively for future study and recall.

Example 3

My cat loves to chase its tail and jump all over the place. When you pet her she purrs and closes her eyes. Sometimes I like to pull her whiskers, but she gets angry when that happens. She's always looking for mice and if that won't do, then she'll come up to me looking for fish. She loves to play with a ball of yarn, scratch the door and meow when she wants to go outside.

Finally, teaching less proficient readers how to look for syntactic/word order clues also has its benefits. Pikulski (1997) suggests that by providing such readers with the insight on how to analyze and consider the syntactical relations between words (through the use of self-monitoring), they can come to understand and recognize when and what words to use. For example, if learners are presented with a sentence like, 'My cat has _____.' through the analysis of the syntax of the sentence and the words within, they can come to realize that words like **meow**, **jump**, **purrs**, **tail**, **play**, **scratch**, do not grammatically fit into the sentence because they do not function as plural nouns, as opposed to **mice**, **fish**, and **whiskers** that do. Teaching less proficient readers to use self-monitoring when moving to comprehend vocabulary within sentences, or when attempting to make use of that vocabulary, helps and empowers them to recognize what words they should attend to that will help them comprehend and complete a reading task.

Concluding Thoughts

What has been presented throughout this paper is a means to facilitating less proficient readers in their struggle to automatize word recognition. Through the suggested teaching ideas, tasks and learner strategies iterated throughout this paper, it is hoped that when such problematic issues as word recognition manifest themselves that teachers and students alike can draw on the resources available within, as advice for how to successfully grapple and conquer the task of learning to identify and recognize vocabulary. What is very important to remember in all of this is that teachers and learners need to be aware of the miscommunication that Yoshimura (2000) speaks of at the beginning of this paper. Through teacher-learner dialogue and appropriate attention, learning how to attend to and identify words automatically can be mediated and accomplished, if expectations are made apparent and explicit, rather than indirectly assumed.

What EFL/ESL teachers do in their daily practice and the tasks they present should always take into consideration L2 learner needs before implementation. Moreover, teachers should take the time to encourage learners to be diligent and responsible for their

learning. Without much consideration for this, it is easy for teachers to fall into the assumption that learners will in fact do so, when in fact, they may not know how. Consequently, EFL/ESL teachers should strive to empower their learners by teaching them strategies that will help them become more confident, motivated and most of all, autonomous in their journey towards recognizing words. Building automaticity of word recognition becomes then, a responsibility teachers must attend to, while teaching their learners how to teach themselves through the employment of cognitive, socio-affective and metacognitive strategies. Through what the teacher can facilitate and what the learner can be guided to do, success in automatizing word recognition is within reach.

For future considerations, what needs to be addressed and investigated further, is where the problem with this particular skill for less proficient readers stems from. It needs to be questioned whether the miscommunication between teacher and learner has a part in it or that this obstacle is possibly a disadvantage born out of the advantages of using top-down processing. Moreover, which part of teaching, which tasks and which strategies are most effective for building automaticity of word recognition, needs to be ascertained. Finally, understanding how one L2 reader becomes more adept at automatizing word recognition than another under the same learning conditions needs some consideration and evaluation. Personality, attitude, motivation, the learning environment, classroom setting, or the complex difference of learning styles could all be factors of great significance. These are all queries that need to be examined in order to make the skill of automaticity of word recognition one that can be readily accessed and attained.

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