



***Teaching and Learning Second Language Listening:  
Metacognition in Action***

Larry Vandergrift and Christine Chuen Meng Goh  
New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2012.

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What is metacognition and how does metacognitive-skills training function in the listening classroom? This comprehensive book tells you everything you want to know about the theory of metacognition in listening and the application of metacognitive listening strategies in the ESL/EFL classroom. It investigates the least-researched second language communication skill, and while its scope is broad, the authors offer the reader many opportunities to apply their findings in the classroom.

Larry Vandergrift and Christine Goh begin by reviewing current research in listening, defining how listening instruction has been approached in the past and what the drawbacks to this approach have been, including a lack of understanding of the listening process itself and an overemphasis on comprehending input as a measure of listening skill. The writers emphasize a need for a learner-centered approach to listening, which allows for the introduction of metacognitive strategies. These strategies focus on enabling learners to understand how they learn and how to self-correct and improve the overall listening experience. Their approach is clearly expressed in their definition of teaching: "Teaching is the process by which novices learn a skill or acquire knowledge with the help of expert input, scaffolding, and guidance" (p. 189).

In Part I, the authors discuss what is known about how we listen, including top-down processing and bottom-up processing. They refer to Anderson's model of language comprehension, which involves perception, parsing, and utilization, in addition to defining what metacognition is: "Metacognition refers to listener awareness of the cognitive processes involved in comprehension, and the capacity to oversee, regulate, and direct these processes (Goh, 2008)" (p. 23). They discuss

the sources of knowledge listeners draw upon, which are linguistic, pragmatic, prior, and discourse knowledge. The authors also highlight that competent listeners engage in these processes automatically and that interactive listening competence rather than only unidirectional listening competence is the goal.

In Chapter 3, a theoretical model for listening comprehension is provided, drawing on the Levelt model for speaking, which envisions a conceptualizer, a parser, a formulator, and an articulator. The modified model imagines a processor, a parser, and a conceptualizer. Metacognition functions as a regulator here, monitoring input and creating a mental representation of it. Contrary to what researchers have believed in the past, listening is an active process, as represented by these theoretical models; however, because it is a covert process, it can be difficult to assess. The writers also discuss what exactly *beyond* input affects the listening process. In particular, they discuss anxiety, self-efficacy, motivation, and context. They note that both L2 vocabulary knowledge and L1 listening skills affect L2 listening ability.

The remaining eight chapters of the book focus on developing an instructional framework for teaching metacognitive skills in the classroom. The proposed framework has three components: knowing, sensing, and doing, which are operationalized as drawing on previous knowledge (schema), processing during listening, and employing self-regulating strategies during and after listening. Peer interaction is also emphasized. A pedagogical sequence is proposed, which comprises planning and predicting, monitoring, evaluation, and problem solving, with time for reflection and goal setting. The writers note that the application of metacognitive instruction in the classroom benefits low-proficiency learners particularly, suggesting that learners at an early stage in their acquisition would benefit the most from a metacognitive approach to listening.

In Chapter 7, the authors propose specific activities for metacognitive instruction, including listening diaries, anxiety and motivation charts, process-based discussions, guided reflections, and self-report checklists, all with the goal of making how learners learn explicit to them. They also devote discussion to developing decoding skills. Pre-listening activities that can help improve decoding skills include modified cloze exercises, dictations, reading while listening, dictoglosses, and *i-1* listening. Task-based listening lesson plans are suggested and discussed, based on the core listening-comprehension skills: listening for details, listening for global understanding, listening for main ideas, inferencing, predicting, and listening selectively. Listening texts are suggested, including interviews, lectures, conversations, news reports, and multimedia texts. Task types are also suggested, including sorting,

comparisons, jigsaws, and reconstructions, and the authors also discuss appropriate timing of the task, whether for prelistening, listening, or postlistening, as well as task selection.

Chapters 10-12 provide insightful exploration of extensive listening, that is, listening outside the classroom, when to use multimedia in the classroom, and the types of assessment available for measuring listening ability.

This is a really useful book. It provides a theoretical foundation for teaching listening and metacognitive skills; it reviews recent research in support of metacognitive instruction; it provides explicit syllabus construction, lesson planning, and task design instruction; it provides two useful appendices, one the Metacognitive Awareness of Listening Questionnaire (MALQ), and the other an outline of metacognitive practices coupled with learner explanations of those practices. It has a full bibliography and detailed index. In sum, it is an indispensable tool for the teacher of metacognitive listening strategies and listening generally. The only shortcoming of this book is that the research studies on which it drew are not summarized in a separate appendix. This would be useful for teachers and researchers who could then easily consult individual studies for comparative purposes or for their own research projects.

### ***Reading for Results* (12th ed.)**

Laraine Flemming

Boston, MA: Wadsworth CENGAGE Learning, 2014.

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Laraine Flemming's *Reading for Results* is written for L2 readers of English enrolling in English-medium universities. The book uses both authentic and adapted selections from subject-matter texts and introduces both top-down and bottom-up reading strategies. By modeling reading strategies such as SQ3R (survey, question, read, recall, review) and practices such as taking notes in the margins, Flemming shows rather than tells students how to interact thoughtfully with a text. Overall, the clear, consistent layout and thoughtful presentation of multiple reading strategies will leave teachers wishing there were a version for lower-proficiency readers as well.

The 12 chapters of *Reading for Results* progress from materials fo-

cused on understanding words in context to understanding how texts cohere. Chapters contain an average of five sections, and each section is written to illustrate a specific strategy for reading. For example, the second chapter devotes a section to the bottom-up strategy of defining words from their parts, describing briefly for students the forms and functions of roots and affixes. The 12th chapter devotes a section to top-down strategies for recognizing shaky support in persuasive writing, such as noticing generalizations that lack justifying evidence. Students are given the opportunity to practice each new skill or strategy as it is introduced, as each section is followed by one or two exercises.

Each chapter begins with a statement of learning goals. Reading tips and writing pointers appear in color-coded boxes, as do questions students are meant to research online. Blue boxes denote thematically organized lists, such as transition phrases that imply cause and effect. Red boxes are for key concepts. Details are meticulously attended to: Directions and examples for test questions and exercises are always labeled, test and exercise paragraphs are always numbered, and meta-linguistic terms are bolded. A resource manual with teaching suggestions and extra exercises is available to instructors, along with a test bank and companion website. Teachers have to register with Cengage online to access most of these supplemental tools, including a full final exam.

Key words in reading selections are glossed sparingly and selectively to encourage students to practice discovering meaning from context. Each chapter includes a “Vocabulary Round Up,” which provides comprehensive definitions and new example sentences for previously glossed words. Helpfully, the page on which each word is first introduced is noted next to the definition. Each chapter concludes with a series of review exercises that require to students to apply the strategies and schematic knowledge modeled in the sections. Students are also asked to summarize or define key concepts, and each chapter ends with a vocabulary test.

A particular strength of *Reading for Results* is the way in which vocabulary learning is reinforced throughout each chapter. Target words are introduced in context, defined, and then introduced in a new context. Flemming devotes a whole chapter to vocabulary-building strategies. The book models various methods of interacting with a text, including marginal note taking, marking up the text, and copying key information into graphic organizers.

The only drawback to this excellent book is that students who read below an intermediate-high level (according to ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012) would need adapted or replaced explanatory and example texts, because *Reading for Results* is written for students

with more advanced levels of English language ability who are preparing to enter universities and read for academic purposes. It would take extra effort on the teacher's part to find less challenging texts with which to teach these valuable skills and strategies to lower-proficiency learners.

*Reading for Results* offers pre-, during-, and postreading strategies that will be useful not only for engaging with academic genres, but also for fiction and news media. The textbook's varied and timely reading selections were deliberately chosen to capture students' interest. Teachers will appreciate the textbook's clear layout, as well as how thoroughly Flemming models the reading strategies she presents.

### ***Corpus Linguistics for ELT: Research and Practice***

Ivor Timmis

London, England, and New York, NY: Routledge, 2015.

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Throughout the last decade, researchers have been discussing how to apply corpus research to English language teaching. A corpus is “a collection of used language” (Brazil, 1995, p. 24) of a group of people, usually compiled in electronic form, and can be both written and spoken. Because corpora contain a great deal of information on the use of authentic language, they have attracted the attention of both researchers and teachers. In *Corpus Linguistics for ELT*, Ivor Timmis provides a robust and informative guide for teachers from the very basic (e.g., the definition of corpus) to creating, researching, and analyzing corpora for the classroom. The book is divided into nine chapters, including an introduction and conclusion.

In the introduction, Timmis explains the intent of the book: to promote corpus use to the point that it becomes the norm for English teachers. He then proceeds from what a corpus is and the different kinds of corpora that exist to what corpus users can do with a corpus, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The author ends the introduction with a discussion of the relevance and application of corpora in English teaching.

In the second chapter, Building a Corpus, Timmis encourages teachers to build “quick and dirty” corpora for their own purposes. Although the task is seemingly daunting, he notes that a very useful corpus with a specific purpose can be built within a couple of hours.

He guides readers through the different issues to be considered when building a corpus.

In Chapters 3 and 4, the author goes into depth about lexis and grammar. He mentions that corpora give a different perspective from the traditional division of lexis and grammar; for example, some words occur more often in present tense and some in past tense. With the findings of corpus research, the author questions whether current pedagogical practices are as well grounded as we would like to believe. He challenges the readers not to teach a structure simply because it has always been taught, or simply because it can be easily packaged to the students. He shows that corpora can help us avoid teaching a kind of English that happens only in the classroom but nowhere else.

The fifth chapter, *Spoken Corpus Research*, discusses how spoken corpora can play a role in syllabus design, sequencing, materials, and methodologies. Timmis also discusses sociological issues, the many spoken forms of language, and the validity of so-called “correct” language use. He therefore highlights how corpora provide rich knowledge of actual language use that learners will encounter when they enter the real world, and not just the prescriptive rules from many textbooks.

In the sixth chapter, *Corpora and the Classroom*, Timmis stresses the importance and usefulness of learner corpora, teaching-oriented corpora, improvised corpora for the classroom, and data-driven learning (DDL). DDL is when “learners” become corpus “researchers” and take ownership of their own learning by analyzing language data (Johns, 1991, p. 2). This can be especially effective with higher-level learners.

The next chapter, *Corpora and ESP (English for Specific Purposes)*, focuses on three main types of purposes: academic, business, and engineering. He introduces corpus resources used for these purposes, reviews literature on these topics, and examines the effectiveness of the influence corpora have on ESP programs in these three areas.

In the eighth chapter, *Corpora in Perspective*, Timmis goes over the limitations of corpora and how corpora can facilitate the teaching of English as a lingua franca. The different kinds of corpora truly enable the discussion of what kinds of English we should teach, as this information is now available through corpora. The author provides different possible options of English-language models and guides the readers into a discussion and reflection on how to decide based on their specific teaching context.

Timmis concludes the book by reminding the readers about his aims and adds that “teachers supporting learners” to “use corpora autonomously” might be the best way to achieve corpus-informed

learning (Chapter 9, para. 1). This book introduces important concepts from the corpus literature and provides discussion questions on the relevance of these concepts with English language teaching. The author often provides reflective questions to the reader when introducing resources that could be used for pedagogical purposes. It not only provides basic knowledge about operating and creating corpora, but it also goes into depth about each aspect of how the corpora tell us about language, and it asks the readers to reflect on the ways they can exploit this knowledge for teaching.

Throughout the text, the author stresses that corpora should not determine what we teach; rather, they can inform us about the nature of genuine language use that can then facilitate our teaching. The author has considered quite thoroughly the different arguments posed by corpus researchers and pedagogical researchers. This book also provides many “hands-on” exercises for readers to explore the different corpora and resources introduced in the book. “Corpus search” sections throughout the book guide the readers step-by-step with the exercises. The book also gives very clear instructions about useful ready-to-use corpora and tools such as the British National Corpus, Academic Word Highlighter, and Corpus Tagger. This book is a thorough guide for those who are new to corpora and it shows how relevant corpora are to English language teaching. While the book is nicely organized, it might be dense for some readers since the author discusses many aspects in depth, but not everything is relevant to readers all the time.

All in all, this book is especially useful for teachers who are new to corpora, and for teachers who are already corpus users but who want to reflect on more effective ways to use corpora for their classrooms. This book challenges us to consider and do more than we are used to, which is important for any teacher.

### **References**

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### ***English in Action 1* (2nd ed.)**

Barbara H. Foley and Elizabeth R. Neblett  
Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2010.

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One of the most important aspects of a textbook is how engaging it can be to students. *English in Action 1* has the potential to do fairly well in keeping students engaged with relevant exercises and some extensive exercises included in the teacher's guide. However, it suffers from a lack of appropriate illustrations and examples used in its exercises and information overload at the beginning of each unit.

*English in Action 1* is geared toward beginning and low-beginning students and is considered the first step for students who are coming into an Academic English Program. *English in Action 1* covers all four of the language skills; however, its strongest points are listening and reading exercises. The audio CD that comes with the textbook sounds authentic and unforced when conversations are presented. Also, the various reading activities use realia, such as library-card application forms and current-event clippings from newspapers. When students see these exercises they can understand them to be useful in real-life situations, and therefore they will be motivated when completing them.

*English in Action 1* shows its strongest points in its exercises that are relevant to real-life situations. If an instructor does a good job of explaining the exercises, students will be able to see the value in what they are doing. I used *English in Action 1* in an adult noncredit class with students who were low-beginning to high-beginning-level students. One of the most difficult things that became apparent right away was the difficulty of using the textbook, given the skill gaps among the students. I initially found that while most of the students would be engaged in the exercises and lessons, higher-level students would finish the exercises quickly and become bored. Lower-level students would have the problem of not understanding the material and becoming frustrated. However, I did find that the teacher's edition of *English in Action 1* had some exercises that did well to keep higher-level students engaged a bit longer as I worked to bring the lower-level students up to speed. My experience highlights the importance of effective instruction in using the textbook to its full potential.

*English in Action 1* has a few flaws, which include stale illustrations, repetitive grammar and writing exercises, and a great deal of new vocabulary at the beginning of a unit. While *English in Action*



*1* has some good exercises, one of its weak points is the illustrations introducing new vocabulary and relating to the exercises. The illustrations that are used can be confusing in some units and seemingly useless in others. One example comes from a unit focused on downtown buildings. In that unit, the illustrations were pictures of buildings that were labeled but with no distinct differences from the other buildings. With this, teachers were then challenged to use other materials to help students understand the new vocabulary that was being introduced.

When beginning a new unit students are prompted to learn new vocabulary and one of the things that students found difficult was the amount of new material that they were expected to learn. If the new vocabulary and new phrases were split into smaller parts, students would be able to manage the material much better. Obviously, the teacher can do this; however, the workbook that comes with the textbook combines all that new material, making it harder for students to complete it without knowing all the new vocabulary. Teachers would have to go into the workbook and handpick which questions would be appropriate for their students and this could take a great deal of time.

*English in Action 1* is an overall good textbook that can be used for low-beginning students. Higher-level students, however, will quickly become bored and will need extra exercises to keep them engaged. If a teacher is to use this textbook, some extra preparations or the inclusion of other material will be needed to keep classes running smoothly and to keep students engaged. That said, *English in Action 1* covers core content well and if students follow the book they will have a strong understanding of the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

