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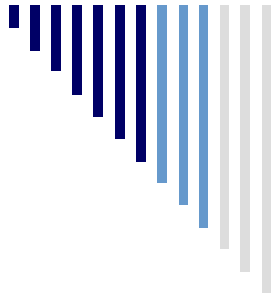


Association *for*  
Language Learning

# Making Sense of it All

Pauline Swanton  
Cecilia Rojas

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# News

- ☐ The curriculum review
- ☐ Education Bill
- ☐ The Wolf Review of Vocational Education
- ☐ Language World, Imperial College, London 7<sup>th</sup>- 9<sup>th</sup> July

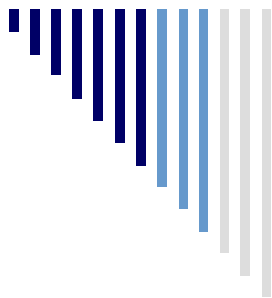


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# What are we doing today?

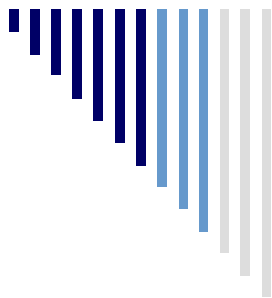
Working together to:

- ☐ Come to a common understanding of 'meaning';
  - ☐ identify some of the skills that adult learners have already that will help them to make sense of another language;
  - ☐ share ideas and activities for teaching meaning.
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# Discussion points

- ☐ How do you work out what people mean when they speak to you?
- ☐ How do you get hold of meaningful information from a holiday brochure?
- ☐ Does translation help or hinder understanding? How?

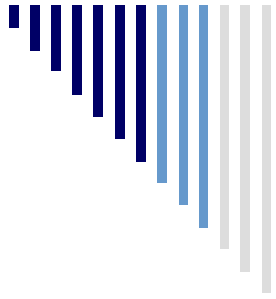


Understanding meaning is achieved by having knowledge and applying a number of skills.

‘Knowledge’ is not simply of the language; it includes cultural and contextual understanding too.

Language correctness is not necessarily a pre-requisite of the transmission of meaning.

Meaning can be lost when words are just translated.



# More than mere words - culture

What images spring to mind?

Alcazaba

Château

Castle

Schloss

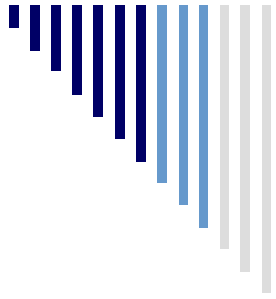
Castello

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# Cross cultural howlers

- The word "mist" seems to get many a company into trouble. Poorly thought through uses of the name in Germany has resulted in "Irish Mist" (an alcoholic drink), "Mist Stick" (a curling iron from **Clairol**), "Cashmere Mist" (deodorant from **Donna Karen**) and "Silver Mist" (**Rolls Royce** car). What the companies did not realise is "mist" in German means dung/manure. Fancy a glass of Irish dung?
  - 'Cervantes wrote "Donkey Hote".'
  - 'The government of Athens was democratic because the people took the law into their own hands.'
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# When meaning goes wrong - context

Toilet or.....

- lavatory; latrine; WC; powder room; closet; privy; loo; bathroom; bog; convenience.

In what context might these words be used  
and by whom?

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# Correct Language

Using language 'correctly' is not essential  
in the transmission of meaning.

'Ourer accent is sound as a pound. It al the  
other soft cows accents that's the  
drawback.'

Source: Black Country

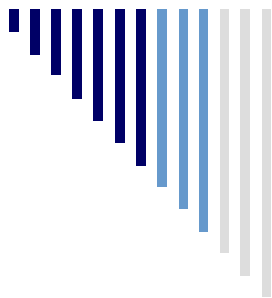
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# Does correct spelling matter?

According to research at an English university, it doesn't matter in what order the letters in a word are, the only important thing is that first and last letter is in the right place. The rest can be a total mess and you can still read it without problem. This is because we do not read every letter by itself but the word as a whole.

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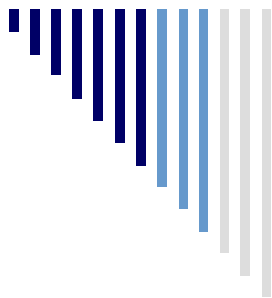


# When 'meaning' goes wrong - translation

- ☐ Allo, Sophie. Ça va?
- ☐ Non, pas du tout. Le service email ne marche pas. J'attends le technicien.
  
- ☐ Hello, Sophie. Does that go?
- ☐ Not, at all. The service email does not go. I await the technician.

Source: Babelfish

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# How are we doing with meaning?

Reflection on listening comprehension.

Is this an activity that you use?

Describe the experience of listening comprehension in your class.

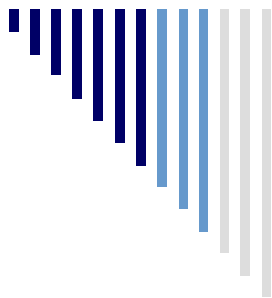
What do your learners think of it?

Why do you use listening comprehension? To what extent does it fulfil your purpose?

***How much do you like comprehension?***

You will have one chance to listen to the directions to the Post Office and mark it on your [map](#).

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# Listening

Listening is:

- ☐ A language learning activity.
- ☐ The physical gateway to the meaning of the spoken word.



# Listening as a language learning activity

Important for:

- ☐ Familiarisation with the sound of the language;
- ☐ Support for pronunciation and intonation;
- ☐ Practice in locating key words and phrases in an exchange;
- ☐ Practice in extracting key information.

## ***A Welsh Christmas***

Listen to the conversation and identify 3 desserts that are mentioned.

In Welsh what do the words for: 'sure'; 'please' and 'dessert' sound like?

Time for reflection: What helped you to get these answers right?

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# Meaning

Meaning is not just acquired through ***listening*** out for:

- words, grammar, pronunciation and intonation

We use our understanding of:

- Context
- Culture
- Experience
- Non-verbal clues

***And*** we apply key literacy skills such as prediction, inference and decoding.

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# Skills for meaning

- *Prediction*

‘This exchange is taking place at a fruit and veg stall in the market so I’m expecting to hear weights and measures and names of items that I can see are for sale.’

- *Inference*

‘There’s a lot of arm waving going on and some shouting. This must be quite a serious argument. I’ll expect to hear some words and phrases that I might not have bumped into before.’

- *Decoding signals*

‘That woman has a Google map and is looking anxious. I think she may be lost.’

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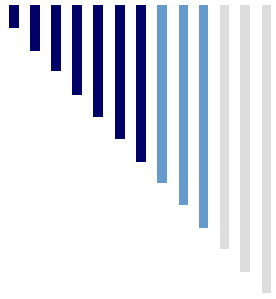


# Skills for meaning

Adults apply these skills in their own language on a daily basis to the point where they have become reflex actions.

The transference of reflex language skills relies on the learner recognising them and being enabled to apply them to the target language.

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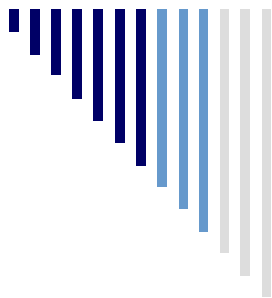
# Comprehension

*Prediction*

*Inference*

*Decoding*

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# Swop shop

One example of a listening exercise that has gone well in your classes.

Write on a post-it and stick it under either:

- ☐ Language learning activity
- ☐ Comprehension activity



# Grasping meaning

Implications for the language classroom:

- Careful analysis of the purpose of listening and reading exercises in the target language. *Are activities for language practice or for developing real understanding? Have you got the balance right?*
  - Identification and promotion of skills, besides competence in language, that help with meaning. *Opportunities to practise inference; prediction; skimming; key word identification; etc.*
  - Use of the target language. *Are learners getting enough exposure to the TL? To real TL use that challenges them to apply **all** their skills to grasp meaning?*
  - Presentation of real language in 'real life' situations. *Have you done enough to expose learners to TL material that will highlight differences in cultural and contextual use of language?*
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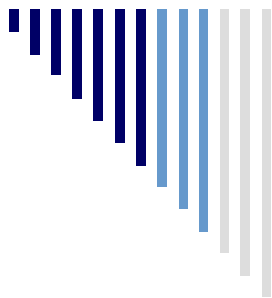


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# Risks in grasping meaning

## Learners:

- ☐ Transfer cultural and contextual understanding from their own language and infer incorrect meaning as a result.
  - ☐ Have insufficient exposure to the target language and its culture to be able to infer meaning accurately.
  - ☐ Lose confidence in their ability to grasp meaning through over-exposure to activities focusing on listening techniques.
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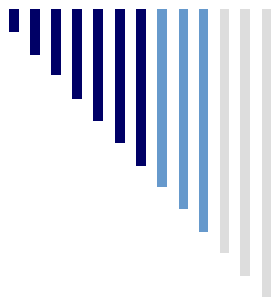


# Discussion points

What written material makes an appearance in your language classes?

What language/s do learners read in your classes?

How do learners react to reading exercises?



Reading is perceived to be the easier of the receptive skills partly because.....

most language classes are based on an assumption of literacy in the mother tongue.

Learners are expected to transfer skills for dealing with their own language to the language they are learning.

Although different scripts may complicate the reading process, success in reading still relies on the assumption of key literacy skills.

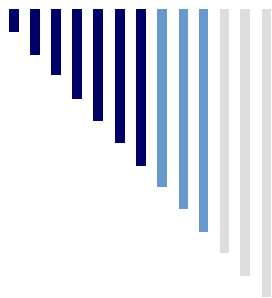
Een appel is rood,  
de zon is geel,  
de hemel is blauw,  
een blad is groen,  
een wolk is wit ...  
en de aarde is bruin.

En zou je nu kunnen  
antwoorden  
op de vraag ...  
welke kleur de liefde heeft

from *Welke kleur heeft de liefde?* by  
Joan Walsh Anglund (Zomer &  
Keuning, Wageningen, Holland)







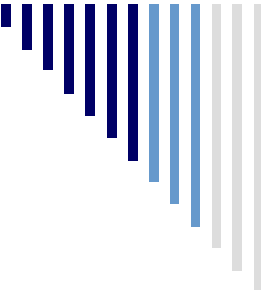
# How to cope with unknown language

You made sense of the poem NOT because you knew Dutch or had a dictionary but because you:

- ☐ Recognised letters.
- ☐ Associated writing with sound and spotted cognates.
- ☐ Inferred and transferred grammar rules.
- ☐ Recognised punctuation and its impact.
- ☐ Used visual clues.
- ☐ Used cultural and contextual knowledge.

*How do you help learners to acquire these basic skills for reading?*

*Exercises, activities....  
Answers on a post-it, please!*



# Reading that draws on experience - guess the phrase!

**Bună seara**

**La revedere**

**Vă rog să intrați**

**Încântat de cunoștință**

**Doriți o cafea?**

**Felicitări**

**Vă deranjez?**

**Cu plăcere**

**Vă rog să mă scuzați**

Good evening

Good bye

Please come in

Pleased to meet you

Would you like some coffee?

Congratulations

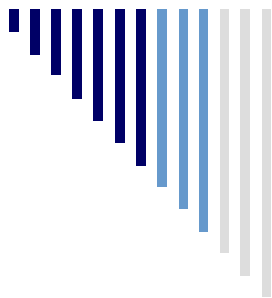
Am I disturbing you?

You're welcome

Please excuse me.

What is 'please'?

**Vă rog**



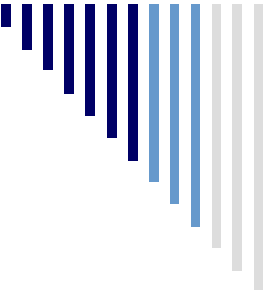
# More transferable literacy skills – how reading happens

***Skimming*** – running your eyes over a text and noting important information.

***Scanning*** – running your eyes over a text to looking for the specific piece of information you need.

***Prediction*** – guesswork based on clues drawn from context, culture, experience, knowledge.

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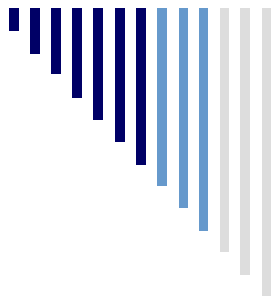
# Skimming – Is this hotel for you?

You're looking for a hotel in **Greenwich** that does **half board** and you've tickets for the **O2** arena. Will this one do?

Hotel staff very very good. Room comfortable if on the small side and I found the bed too firm. **3 course dinner** on both nights very good, as was buffet breakfast but one 4 slice toaster which you do yourself not satisfactory. Free tea and coffee on tap all day, but didn't think coffee was very nice. TV poor picture and not many channels. Very handy for the **O2** and the clipper ships excellent. Excellent location for **Greenwich** as right in the centre.

Is there anything that would put you off?

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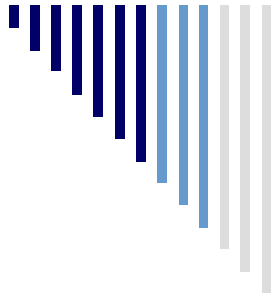


# Scanning – The Brighton marathon challenge.

Who will be fastest to tell us the date of registration for the marathon?

The Grounded Events Company is pleased to announce that the second Brighton Marathon will take place on Sunday April 10th 2011.

After the stunning success of the year-one event, it has been proposed to increase the number of entries by 25 percent from 12,000 to 15,000. Registration will open at 10am Monday May 10th.



# Prediction – What's 'glockum'?

'Tom decided that he desperately needed the glockum if he were to solve the problem.'

What do think 'glockum' might be?

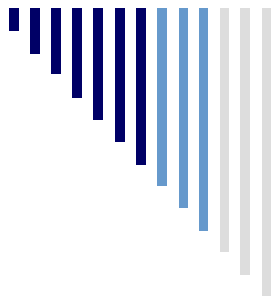
How did you reach your conclusions?

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# Key thoughts on meaning

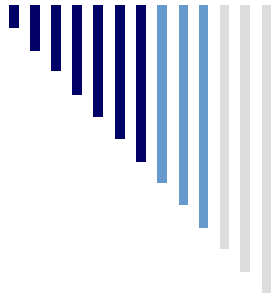
- Understanding the meaning of another language comes from a complex mix of skills and knowledge.
  - Adult learners have many of the skills they need to grasp meaning. They have acquired these through use of their own language. They are the skills that make them literate.
  - Adults will understand complex concepts of meaning – with support, illustration and practice. They need to do so in order to avoid bad practice such as word for word translation.
  - Meaning requires understanding of cultural and contextual reference.
  - Meaning is at the heart of effective communication – it cannot be ignored by teachers.
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# Practice makes perfect market place

- ☐ Call my bluff – definitions using language, culture and context.
  - ☐ Cloze – prediction; word; grammar recognition.
  - ☐ Microwave popcorn – sequencing
  - ☐ Newspaper headlines – what's the story?
  - ☐ Language antonym pelmanism – scanning.
-





# English or French – a bit of light relief!

Un petit d'un petit  
S'étonne aux Halles  
Un petit d'un petit  
Ah! degrés te fallent  
Indolent qui ne sort cesse  
Indolent qui ne se mène  
Qu'importe un petit d'un petit  
Tout Gai de Reguennes

**Humpty Dumpty  
Sat on a wall  
Humpty Dumpty had a great  
fall  
All the king's horses  
And all the king's men  
Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty  
Together again**



# For further information and reference

- <http://www.all-languages.org.uk/events-list/>
  - <http://www.ncrlc.org/essentials/listening/stratlisten.htm>
  - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/tutors/>
  - <http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/course/category.php?id=9>
  - **Teaching Learners How to Learn** by Vee Harris & David Snow, CILT
  - **Doing it for Themselves: Focus on learning strategies and vocabulary building** by Vee Harris, CILT
-