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ABSTRACT

There is growing evidence that the best way to prepare students to cope with authentic oral and written texts they will encounter in actual situations is to introduce such texts into the classroom as early as possible. The selection of texts appropriate for beginning students involves examination of the texts themselves and consideration of the students' linguistic and cultural preparation for confronting them, including exposure to a number of the structures and much of the vocabulary, and possession of a "script" to help them make intelligent guesses about what they do not know. In addition, the activities in which the texts will be used should be carefully planned. One way to do this is to analyze and organize activities according to the number of productive demands they make. Tasks with few production demands include multiple-choice, fill-ins, true-false, cloze, and matching and arranging sentences in sequence. Tasks with many productive demands include open-ended questions, true-false statements in which the false statement must be changed to reflect the truth, and oral and written summaries. Level I and II texts can be treated in a purely receptive way and used very early in language instruction, and the same texts can and should be used later for more demanding comprehension activities and then for production. (MSE)

ACTFL MASTER LECTURE SERIES

Authentic Texts in the Foreign Language Classroom: Focus on Listening and Reading

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FOREWARD

For the past several years, prominent members of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) have been presenting lectures to the faculty and staff of the Defense Language Institute, Foreign Language Center. The purpose of these lectures has been to discuss recent trends and developments in foreign language learning and teaching as well as to strengthen professional contacts between DLIFLC and ACTFL.

The ACTFL Master Lecture, "Authentic Texts in the Foreign Language Classroom: Focus on Listening and Reading," by Dr. Elizabeth G. Joiner, was presented at the DLIFLC in May 1984. This paper is published to make the content of the lecture fully accessible to the DLIFLC professionals.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent an official position of the DLIFLC nor of any other element of the United States Department of Defense.

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As we focus our attention on listening and reading, let us first think about why these two skills have been grouped together and how they may resemble, or differ from, the skills of speaking and writing. To sharpen our focus even more, we will consider the processes involved in listening and reading, examine how our purposes affect the way in which we approach certain types of texts, evaluate some of these texts in the light of current linguistic and pedagogical thought, and review classroom activities that can be used to promote successful listening and reading comprehension. The key word throughout this discussion will be the word authentic. The questions we are seeking to answer are: "How do the skills of listening and reading operate in the real world?" and "How can we as teachers enable our students to listen to and read authentic foreign-language texts with genuine comprehension?"

THE RECEPTIVE SKILLS

For a number of years now we have been referring to speaking and writing as the productive skills and to listening and reading as the receptive skills. What do these labels imply? It is clear that they are used to express what the language learner or language user actually does with the language. In the case of the speaker or writer, language is produced. The language user wants to express a need or desire, for example, and employs words and structures at his or her disposal to construct a message that embodies that need or desire. The person who hears or reads the message is doing something quite different. The sounds or written symbols must be received, decoded and interpreted so that some sense can be assigned to them.

Who is more in control of the language, the speaker or the hearer, the

writer or the reader? Clearly, language producers can select the words or structures they feel comfortable with and use them to construct the message. They can paraphrase when they do not know the exact word that they need. If they are not sure of a subjunctive form, they can avoid it. These options are not possible for the receivers, who must be ready to cope with any and every word directed toward them. This, of course, means that the receptive skills need to be developed to a higher level of proficiency than the productive skills. This is true even in our native language in which we have a recognition vocabulary that is more extensive than our active vocabulary.

We have determined that the receptive skills of listening and reading resemble each other in that they both involve the reception and interpretation of messages and that the receiver of language must be capable of dealing with linguistic material over which he has no control. These skills are also alike in that listening and reading are covert activities, a fact that can be frustrating for language teachers, who are forced to try to guess what must be going on inside students' heads as they listen to or look at a text. We know that errors produced by students in writing or in speaking can be clues to their problems or evidence of their learning strategies, but errors of reading or listening are much harder to identify. If a student chooses the wrong answer on a multiple-choice listening or reading test, do we really know why he or she chose that particular answer rather than the correct answer or rather than the other incorrect answers? Our information about what caused this choice is much less than we would like it to be. New discoveries in psycholinguistics and brain research may in the not so distant future help us to get inside our students' heads, but until that time we will have to tolerate more

uncertainty when we work with the receptive skills than when we work with the productive skills.

LISTENING AND READING: PROCESSES AND PURPOSES

Even though listening and reading are covert and receptive, we must not make the error of thinking of them as passive processes. Not long ago I heard an elementary school teacher define listening for very young children as "hearing plus thinking." It is the thinking, of course, that transforms sounds, as well as marks on paper, into meaningful language. As Byrnes (1985) has put it, "the receptive skills center on producing understanding, taking as the input oral and written language forms" (p. 78). Above all, then, listening and reading are active processes which must engage the mind as well as the eyes or ears.

Phillips (1984) has identified linguistic knowledge, cognitive skill and general experience with, and knowledge of, the world as components that may be brought into play as one confronts a text. Individuals may draw on some or all of these resources in order to make sense of the visual symbols on the paper before them or the sounds that are reaching their ears. As they do so, they will probably be doing a considerable amount of guessing or inferencing, a special kind of thinking and one that is extremely important in comprehending any text, written or oral. Swaffar and Stephens (1981) state that students' comprehension improves when they are encouraged "...to guess and play with the language" (p. 256). Guessing is more than merely guessing the meanings of individual words important though that skill may be. It also involves anticipation and prediction of what is to come next in the text. Phillips (1984) even identifies willingness to take a risk, and every guess is a kind of risk, as a characteristic of the successful reader. How unfortunate it is that we teachers have so often directed our students to be right instead of encouraging them to make

intelligent guesses!

Intelligent guesses as to the meaning of an oral or a written text seem to be largely dependent upon vocabulary knowledge, especially at the earlier stages. Adams (1982) cites studies in both first and second language reading that support this assertion and Rivers (1983) describes the process of listening as one of perceiving essential semantic cues and then assigning roles to them based upon knowledge of the real world. If, for example, one hears the sentence "My dog is wearing this awful plastic collar today because he has fleas" and understands only the words dog and collar, he can use his knowledge of the canine condition and the sight of the scratching dog to supply the information that he does not understand. The process here is one of active construction of meaning, with lexical items serving as the starting point. As Bolinger (1970) has stated, "...the lexicon is central, ...grammar is not something into which words are plugged but is rather a mechanism by which words are served.... The quantity of information in the lexicon far outweighs that in any other part of the language...." (p. 125). The message is clear. If we want to produce better listeners and readers, we must concentrate on vocabulary building.

Although knowledge of words is an important aspect of comprehension, it is no more significant than a knowledge of scripts. According to Richards (1983), "Script or schema knowledge is what we know about particular situations, and the goals, participants, and procedures which are commonly associated with them" (p. 223). Typical scripts would be "a visit to the doctor" or "a trip to the supermarket" or "dinner with the family." Knowledge of what generally happens on such occasions can serve as an important aid in arriving at the meanings of words that might

otherwise not be understood. Richards makes use of script theory in his design for a course devoted to listening comprehension, and Adams (1982) has documented the importance of scripts in the comprehension of written material.

We have seen that the successful reader or listener does not have to know every word in a given text in order to comprehend it. Indeed, a word by word approach to certain kinds of texts would be a waste of time. We quite frequently "tune out" or "blot out" what we perceive to be unnecessary or unwanted information in both oral and written texts. We may, for example, listen to the news with only half an ear because what we really are interested in is the weather report or run our eyes over the front page of the paper until we find an item that captures our interest. Even then we may read the item with a greater or lesser degree of attention, depending on our purposes. As Swaffer and Stephens (1981) so aptly point out: "Reading all texts in the same manner and with the same attitude is like assuming that we really read novels and legal contracts in the same way, or that a theologian, for example, will read the Bible and the sports page with equal care, interest, and expectations." They believe that students should learn to identify what kind of text they are reading so that they can make more accurate predictions concerning its content and probable range of vocabulary.

Students must be sensitized, too, to the various types and purposes of listening and must realize that different skills must be brought into play depending on whether they are listening in a conversational setting, in a classroom, at a movie theatre or at a rock concert. As a partner in a conversation, for example, the listener must use at least two micro-skills identified by Richards (1983): the ability to make use of facial, paralinguistic and other clues to work out meanings and the ability to

signal comprehension or lack of comprehension, verbally and non-verbally. These skills would be of no use to someone listening for specific information in a radio broadcast. In the real world we approach different texts with different attitudes and expectations. Should our objectives for listening and reading comprehension not reflect the different ways people really use texts? Guntermann and Phillips (1982) have identified common purposes for which we use the language skills. This list would be a useful starting point for a set of objectives geared to the specific purposes of the Defense Language Institute.

AUTHENTIC TEXTS FOR LISTENING AND READING

Koko, the gorilla who has become rather famous for her 500-word sign-language vocabulary, recently made the news for quite another reason. She had seen some kittens and asked for one. Seeking to placate her, her trainer offered her several cute and cuddly stuffed replicas of kittens, all of which she totally rejected. Finally, Koko through persistence got her pet, a tailless kitten that she named "All Ball," and the two became great friends. By insisting on the real thing, Koko displayed a concern for authenticity that characterizes our society, a society in which more and more people are turning away from what is canned and plastic and searching for what is natural and true.

In our profession, too, there has recently been been increasing criticism of the kinds of artificial texts and materials that we use, especially in the beginning levels of instruction. In the past, we have typically reserved authentic listening and reading materials for our most advanced students and, consequently, given to beginners texts that are no more like real language than the stuffed kittens given to Koko were like a real cat. Notable among the many critics of this practice are Belasco

(1981), Swaffer and Stephens (1981), Gilman and Moody (1984), Meyer (1984), and Stevick (1984). They suggest the use of authentic texts in place of, or in addition to, contrived texts at a significantly earlier level than is now the case.

At this point, a brief definition of these types of texts is in order. A contrived text is a text designed to include certain structures and vocabulary with a pedagogical purpose in mind. The best known contrived text is the dialogue that so often begins a foreign language lesson. In their zeal to present new structures, the creators of dialogues frequently create totally unrealistic language in which, for example, the present participle is used six times in a brief exchange. Another type of text used for pedagogical purposes is the controlled text, an authentic text that has been simplified in order to make it more accessible to students. In contrast, the authentic text is one that is unaltered either linguistically or culturally and would be perceived as genuine by members of the language and cultural group for which it was intended.

There are a number of reasons for using authentic texts in addition to, or in place of, controlled and contrived texts. Gilman and Moody (1984) have observed that real materials "are more culturally rich and interesting and, in addition, tend to provide the learner with more cues such as redundancy" (p. 333), and Byrnes (1984), referring specifically to oral texts, asserts that the "classroom ... often tidies up language, thereby burdening the listener unnaturally and unnecessarily" (p. 324). In addition to being richer and more redundant than contrived and controlled materials, authentic texts are more likely to reflect the complexities of language. At one time linguists thought that it was possible to describe languages and to use these descriptions as the basis for scientifically-designed classroom and laboratory materials. As our knowledge of language

increases, however, there is growing skepticism concerning this position. Winitz (1981) states that at the present time "there are no rules that adequately describe for all instances the correct use of articles in English or German" and goes on to say that: "Almost all grammatical descriptions that are provided in introductory foreign language texts are limited in their descriptive capacities" (pp. xi-xii). Belasco (1981) elaborating further on this theme, contends that "no one has ever determined what elements of linguistic structure--involving the phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, lexicon of a language--must be internalized in order to insure second language acquisition " (pp. 14-15). If these observations are correct, we may, by relying solely on texts based on inadequate descriptions, be depriving students of important grammatical and lexical information.

If we asked our students why authentic texts should be used, their answers would probably reflect an instinctive preference, much like Koko's, for what is real, and they might also mention the fact that, if they were in the foreign country, they would have to cope with such texts from the day of their arrival. Real texts, perhaps for these very reasons, are highly motivational. All of us have noticed an observable positive response on the part of students when they know they are dealing with a real text such as a menu from a French restaurant, or a timetable from Lufthansa or a map of Chile. Suddenly, the language is no longer foreign and remote but immediate and real.

Sometimes foreign language teachers with the best of intentions take a perfectly good authentic text and decrease its value as a teaching tool by simplifying or controlling it. If, for example, I take a menu from a French restaurant and decide to adapt it for the classroom, I may with the

very best of intentions, leave out something of potential importance to the students. I may decide, for example, to delete the word coca-cola under boissons, thinking that there is no use to expose the student to a word he already knows. In the real world, however, the traveler who sees coca cola listed under a heading, may use that information to make intelligent guesses as to what the other words under that same heading might be. Orangina should not be hard to figure out if one has coca-cola to use as a clue. In simplifying the menu, I may also be tempted to omit items that would provoke a negative reaction such as escargots or call for a lengthy explanation such as tournedos Henri IV. In so doing, I would be leaving out some of the culturally rich and interesting material referred to by Gilman and Moody. As Swaffar and Stephens (1981) have observed: "Both linguistic and content simplification seem to lead to a reduction of communicative structure of a text" (p. 271). In order to qualify for the term authentic, a text must be both culturally and linguistically whole and complete.

CHOOSING AND USING AUTHENTIC TEXTS

As we have seen, there seems to be considerable support within the profession for using real, unaltered texts at the elementary level, but the decision to follow this practice implies still other decisions concerning the selection and use of these texts. All experienced teachers know how demoralized students would be if, on the first day of class, we brought in a newspaper written in the foreign language and expected them to be able to read it with full comprehension. They might, on the other hand, be pleasantly surprised if we gave each of them a paper and asked them to locate, for example, the weather forecast, the food section, and the sports page. By using visual clues to make intelligent guesses, they might even figure out the meaning of most of the words in the weather report.

A weather report is a text with a very limited range of vocabulary and a highly predictable content. Meyer and Tetrault (1984) classify such texts as Level I[1] texts in their three-stage system of classification for authentic texts. Other Level I texts are maps, menus, hotel bills, train schedules and the like. Level II texts are less predictable but completely factual texts such as news reports, directions, recipes in which no emotion or opinion is expressed. Texts in which the writer defends opinions, expresses sarcasm or irony, or reveals emotions or feelings are classified at Level III. Students can be introduced to Level I texts from almost the very first day of class, particularly if they have only to recognize, not to produce, the message or messages of the text. Level II and III texts should be introduced gradually and may need to be accompanied by pre-listening or pre-reading preparation.

The selection of texts appropriate for beginning students involves more than an examination of the texts themselves. Teachers should also take into consideration the students' linguistic and cultural preparation for confronting the text. Obviously, unless the text is one of the highly predictable Level I texts identified by Meyer and Tetrault, students will be more successful in dealing with it if they have already been exposed to a certain number of the structures and a great deal of the vocabulary of the text and if they have a "script" that will help them make intelligent guesses about what they do not know. In cases where the native culture is at variance with the foreign culture, the teacher may have to provide the student with a new and more appropriate script. Adams (1982), in an experimental study involving reading, found that students who received script activators earned significantly higher reading scores than those who received none.

Because we are concerned with making authentic texts accessible to beginning students, we must not only select the texts with care but must also carefully plan the types of activities in which these texts will be used. As Richards (1983) so aptly puts it: "We can either manipulate the input, ...controlling for selected features such as grammatical complexity...or we can manipulate the tasks we set for the learner" (p. 232). Having chosen not to manipulate the text, we must organize the tasks in such a way that the learner will feel not frustration but rather satisfaction at dealing with authentic material at least in a limited way.

One way to simplify the learner's task is to analyze activities according to whether they have many or few productive demands. Byrnes (1984) has identified the following as tasks having few production demands: multiple-choice, fill-ins, true-false, cloze, matching and arranging sentences in their proper sequence; tasks with many production demands are open-ended questions to be answered in the target language, true-false statements where the false statements must be changed to reflect the truth, and oral and written summaries. Since comprehension generally preceeds and exceeds production, students will have the least difficulty with activities that do not require them to produce language. This is significant not only because the students will be more likely to experience success in performing receptive-type exercises but because these exercises give the teacher a more accurate estimate of the students' ability to understand the foreign language than do exercises involving production.

Let us look now at a Level I text and at a receptive activity that might be built around it. Students are given a copy of a map of Versailles (Figure 1). They then listen to, or read, true-false statements about the places indicated on the map and determine the correct answer. The teacher might say, for example, in the foreign language, "The bus station is on the

Avenue De Gaulle" or "To go to Paris, take bus number 161." To make this purely receptive activity a bit more communicative, students could be asked to raise their hands when the statement is true or they could be encouraged to answer questions that can be answered "yes" or "no" or with only one word such as: "Does the Avenue de Sceaux cross the Avenue De Gaulle?" or "How many train stations are there in Versailles?"

The focus in the exercise described above is on comprehension rather than production, and it is built around a highly predictable text. Such exercises enable us to expose students to authentic language much earlier than has usually been the case. The text in question and others like it, while not written in sentences and paragraphs, can provide students with an initial experience in using contextual cues plus their knowledge of the world to make intelligent guesses as to word meanings and thus can serve to lay the groundwork for comprehending the more complex and less predictable texts classified at Level II.

We have said that Level II texts are strictly factual. This makes them ideal for a procedure known as scanning. In contrast to skimming, which is reading or listening to a text in order t[illegible] a general, overall impression of it, scanning refers to reading or listening for certain specified details. Since we used a reading text at Level I, let us move now to a Level II listening text in order to illustrate the scanning procedure.

With my second-semester French students, I have used very successfully selected extracts from a recorded program called Champs-Elysees[2]. Most of us would agree that comprehending an oral text delivered at normal speed is more difficult than reading that same text; yet students who have had approximately sixty hours of instruction meeting for only one hour four

days a week are able to comprehend, at least in a limited way, the lively, fast-paced patter of Georges Lang, an announcer and disk jockey for Radio-Tele Luxembourg, who makes no effort to control vocabulary or structures used in this program of cultural information and music.

A good example of an excerpt from Champs-Elysees that is particularly suited to the scanning procedure is a brief passage on the Louvre (Series 1, Number 1, January 1984) that contains quite a lot of purely factual information such as the number of visitors per year, the price of entry, the number of paintings, etc. In reading and listening to this text (each cassette comes with a transcription), I noted that my students had studied numbers, the days of the week, the names of various languages and that they should be able to recognize most of the key words, although by no means every word, in the text. I then prepared a scanning guide (Figure 2) in the form of a fill-in exercise to distribute to the students during the pre-listening period. The actual exercise proceeded as follows:

1 Pre-listening. The students were given scanning guides and instructed to read them. This refreshed their memory concerning some of the vocabulary that they would be hearing and alerted them to what details to listen for. One of the sentences contained a new word, gratuit, which had to be explained. Before listening to the tape, students were also encouraged to guess at some of the answers for the fill-ins.

2 After looking over the fill-in exercise together, we listened to the tape. During this first hearing, I instructed them not to write in the answers but rather to use the statements as a listening guide. The second time, however, they did fill in the answers. Since this exercise involved writing, I paused the tape to give them additional time. The only fill-in that was really difficult was the

telephone number which was reeled off with lightning speed.

3 During the post-listening period, the students heard the tape still another time in order to check their answers. Then, they were given the text of the passage that they had listened to and instructed to underline all the information that had been included on the scanning guide. This gave them visible proof that they had understood most of the information contained in a real, unaltered text and resulted in a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment on their part.

In the above examples, we have seen that by treating Level I and Level II texts in a purely receptive way we can utilize these texts very early in language instruction. That is not, of course, to say that texts used in comprehension-type exercises should afterwards be retired from service. Quite the contrary is true. The same texts can and should be used later in more demanding comprehension activities and still later in activities involving production. In a comprehension-based German course at the University of Texas at Austin, "a given piece of material is presented in a sequence from comprehension...to self-generated production" (Swaffer and Stephens, 1981, p. 257). To illustrate, the map used in the true-false (or yes-no) exercise could later serve in an activity that would require the student to listen to a description of the visit to Versailles of a certain Lieutenant Jones (Figure 3) and to indicate by drawing a line on the map the itinerary taken by this officer. Still later in the course sequence, the map could serve as the basis of a role-play situation involving Lieutenant Jones and a passerby, who answers her questions concerning the town and chateau. Such a progression from comprehension to production reflects the natural order of first language learning and moves the student progressively closer to the way in which the text would probably be used

in real life. Needless to say, using the same text for a variety of exercises is a time-saver for the instructor as well.

Preparing students to deal with real language in the real world is a challenge for all foreign language teachers, and this is especially true of those teaching at the Defense Language Institute. It is vital that your students be able to cope with the authentic oral and written texts that they are sure to encounter in their future work. In this discussion, we have seen that there is growing evidence that the best way to begin this preparation is to introduce the students to authentic texts as early as possible in the language sequence. This is not to say that there is no place for contrived and controlled materials in language instruction; however, as Belasco (1981) has observed, such materials "must be generously-most generously-supplemented by 'live' materials" (p. 18). As teachers, we know that the gap between the classroom and the real world is a wide one. Should we not begin bridging this distance in the very first days of foreign language training?

Notes

1. These levels reflect text difficulty and do not correspond to established DLI Proficiency Levels.

2. A subscription to this taped series, published fourteen times a year, can be obtained by writing to Champs-Elysées, Inc., P.O. Box 158067, Nashville, TN 37215. The publishers plan to launch a similar program in German in the near future.

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Figure 1. Map of Versailles

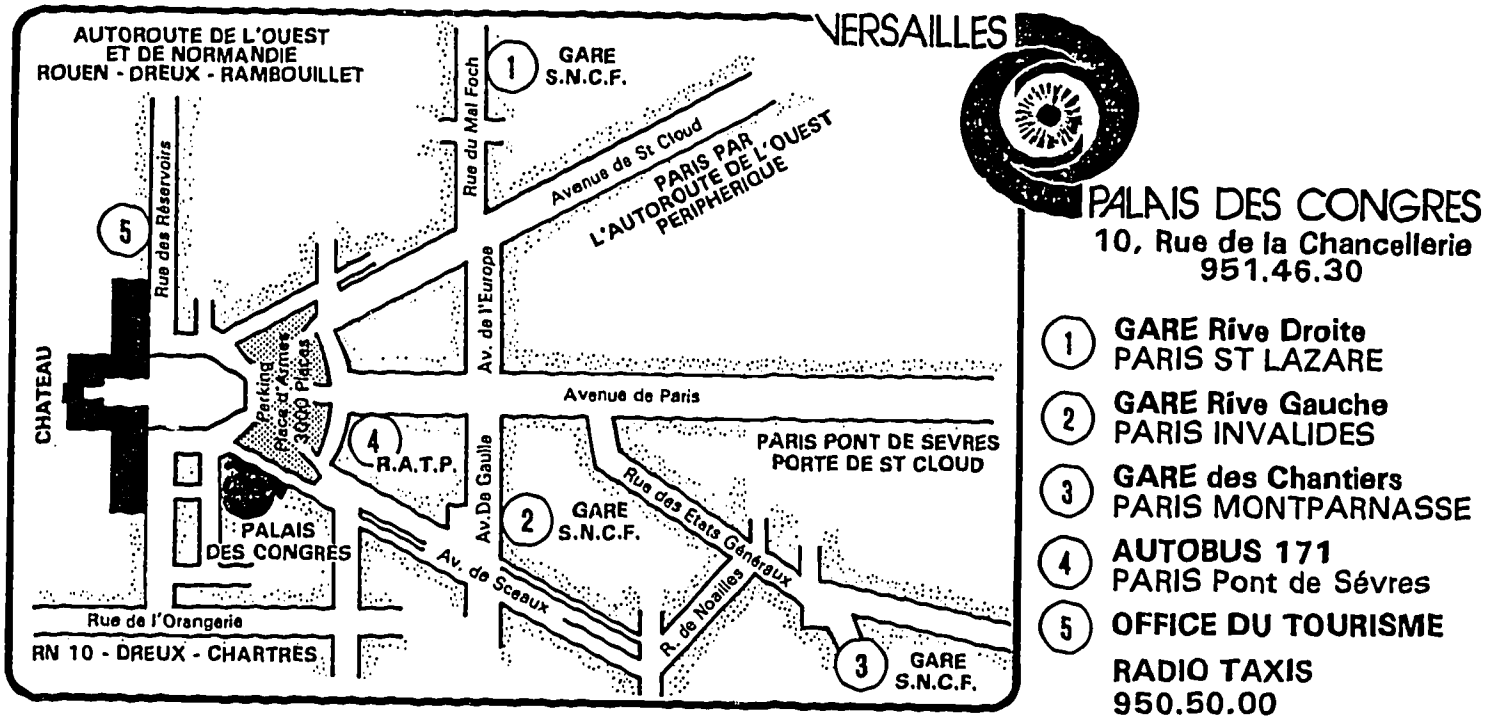

Figure 2. Scanning Guide

LE LOUVRE

1. Il faut _____semaines pour tout voir et regarder au Louvre.
2. Il y a, à peu près, _____ peintures au Louvre.
3. Il y a _____ salles au Louvre.
4. La longueur de la Grande Galerie est de _____ mètres.
5. _____ visiteurs viennent chaque année au Louvre.
6. Pour téléphoner au Louvre, composez le _____ _____ _____
7. Le Louvre est ouvert tous les jours sauf le _____.
8. Il est ouvert de _____ du matin à _____ de l'après-midi.
9. En semaine on paie _____ pour visiter le Louvre.
10. Le Louvre est gratuit le _____ et le _____.
11. Il y a des visites guidées tous les jours, sauf le _____ , de _____ du matin à _____ de l'après-midi.
12. Il y a des visites en _____,en_____, en_____, en_____, en_____ et en_____.

Champs-Elysées, Série 1, No. 1

Figure 3. Script for Listening Comprehension Activity
(This would be done in the foreign language.)

Lieutenant Jones arrives from Paris by bus and gets off the bus at the bus stop just in front of the chateau. He decides to visit the Tourist Bureau before visiting the chateau and, after asking directions, sets off across the Place d'Armes to the Rue des Réservoirs. Equipped with maps and brochures, Jones retraces his steps and enters the right wing of the chateau. After visiting the interior of the chateau, he decides to look for a place to eat lunch. He leaves the chateau by the left wing, passes by the Palais des Congrès, and follows the Avenue de Sceaux until it crosses the Avenue De Gaulle. There is a little cafe on the right just before the intersection and Jones decides to eat there. Sincė he is so near the train station, he decides to return to Paris by train. Once inside the station, however, he discovers that the trains that leave from this station all go to the Left Bank and he needs to go to the Right Bank. Disappointed, Jones returns to the bus stop on the Avenue de Paris only to find that the 171 bus has just left. He decides to take the train and so goes back down the Avenue de Paris, turns left at the Avenue de l'Europe, crosses the Avenue de St. Cloud, and finally arrives at the station in the Rue Maréchal Foch.