Reading in Self-access Material: What Can We Learn from Self-instructed Learners and Their Reported Experience?

Alessandra Belletti Figueira Mulling
University of Portsmouth

Peter Watkins
University of Portsmouth

ABSTRACT

This research set out to evaluate the reading material contained within the ELT coursebook English M1 which was designed for self-access use. There is relatively little research carried out after the use of materials and even less which draws on learners' reports about how they engaged with self-access material. This research addressed the end-users: the learners. Five aspects in the reading material were chosen for evaluation: the information provided in the texts (USA-centred), the fact that no follow-up activities or comprehension checks were provided, the use of glossaries, the illustrations, and the oral renditions of the text. The study adopted a qualitative research design. Twenty-four beginner level English learners were addressed through semi-structured interviews about how they engaged with the reading material and their reasons for doing things in the way they did. This research concluded that self-access reading materials must provide learners with a component of learner guidance and information concerning the affordances of what is delivered. The article ends with recommendations for the design of reading material particularly concerning situations in which learners are studying without the support of a teacher.

INTRODUCTION

The practice of materials evaluation can lead to important contributions towards materials development (Graves, 2019). However, evaluations of materials that draw on the learners and on how they used the material is scarce (Graves, 2019; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018; McGrath, 2016). This is also true, and certainly more worrying, when it comes to self-access materials designed for self-instructed learners (Yamaguchi et al., 2019; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018; McGrath, 2016; Reinders & White, 2016; Hubbard, 2013, 2009). Reasons for that include the difficulty of contacting the learners and also a post-use stage scenario in which evaluators (such as material designers) might no longer have it within their power (or interest) to make any changes to the material that has been delivered. The problem of this scenario is that we do not know what self-instructed learners want or need from self-access materials. There is very little information on how to design self-access materials that will engage learners cognitively and affectively (Tomlinson, 2011). This study addressed self-instructed learners on their views about the reading material Catching a Glimpse (henceforth CaG) in the coursebook

English M1 designed for self-access. It brings a detailed account of learners' reactions to this self-access reading material and evaluates it from their perspective. It provides an initial, but an important, broad picture of the type of guidance that needs to be embedded in self-access reading material.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review in this paper discusses two aspects that are relevant for the evaluation of the reading material, CaG. The first one focuses on how reading material can be designed to facilitate comprehension and language learning. The other one discusses the importance of delivering learner guidance through self-access materials.

Good practice in reading material

Reading is both an opportunity for reading skills development and language learning. There are ways in which reading materials can be designed to enhance comprehension and promote language learning. For instance, activation of background knowledge through explicit teaching of text-appropriate information before reading can facilitate comprehension (Shin et al., 2019; Grabe, 2009). At the same time, successful retrieval of background knowledge is dependent on learners having enough linguistic knowledge in the L2 so they can identify and relate what they already know with what is written in the L2. It is often thought that a minimum of 95% of word awareness is needed for adequate comprehension (Van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2012; Laufer & Ravenhorst-Kalovski, 2010), particularly when reading is expected to be pleasant (Hirsh & Nation, 1992). For low-level learners, this might more easily be found in simplified texts. In this sense, whilst authentic texts are needed for learners to successfully learn a language (Gilmore, 2007; Mishan, 2005), in order to have learners learning from meaning-focused reading at all levels (including lower levels), they generally need to have access to simplified reading material (Nation, 2001). For instance, in extensive reading programs where learners read texts at or below their level (such as graded readers), for a long time, frequently and for their own reasons, measurable learning gains and reading development have been identified (Renandya, 2017; Macalister, 2015; Nakanishi, 2015).

In language classrooms, intensive reading motivated by bottom-up activities is traditionally the main mode of teaching reading (Jeon & Day, 2016; Renandya, 2007). Even in reading classes there can be little reading and reading-skills development and a lot of (1) oral discussion of comprehension questions, (2) vocabulary-building and (3) personalization (learners' personal lives are connected with the topic of the text) (Grabe and Stoller, 2020). There is a focus on closely analysing texts under teachers' supervision to construct detailed meaning and enhance vocabulary and grammar knowledge, through identifying main ideas, text connectors, word order, verb tenses, to name a few (Renandya, 2017, 2007). This is also true about how reading materials are designed (Freeman, 2014), and such practices end up influencing what teachers, and other stakeholders view as 'best practice' in language teaching (see, for instance, Forman, 2014, Bosompem, 2014 and Augusto-Navarro et al., 2014 about Thailand, Ghana and Brazil, respectively). The idea of 'best practice' also means that global material influences the design of local material, as well as the way in which that material is exploited by teachers and learners. Although the classroom environment authenticates bottom-up approaches and they are undoubtedly also part of the reading processes needed for successful comprehension, exposing learners to intensive reading styles only is not likely to help them develop reading skills and reading fluency.

In this sense, experts have advocated against reading that is solely about meeting a specific language learning goal or to have comprehension tested only through the use of

questions that have a single correct answer, which is explicitly stated in the text, such as in the case of multiple-choice questions. These types of questions can deny the learners an opportunity to interpret the overall meaning of the text, or the implied meaning conveyed (Watkins, 2018). Reading-related activities that rely solely on testing also tend to push learners to that style of reading, as opposed to freely activating bottom-up and top-down processes as a response to what the reader perceived as needed (Masuhara, 2013). The following section discusses aspects related to illustration, glossaries and listening while reading (henceforth LWR) because they are particularly relevant to the evaluation of CaG.

Reading-related features: Illustrations, glossaries and listening while reading

This section considers how illustrations, glossaries and listening while reading might enhance learners' comprehension and language learning when reading.

Illustrations

It is consensus that visuals in texts are likely to positively impact reading (Lin & Hsieh, 2018; Luo & Lin, 2017) because they can supplement the information in the text and improve comprehension (Pan & Pan, 2009; Mautone & Mayer, 2001; Tang, 1992; Purnell & Solman, 1991) and increase remembering capacity (Donald, 1983). However, it is not any type of visual input. In Luo and Lin (2017), illustrations with an explaining function (the visual was closely related to the text) and a promotion function (the visual served the meaning of the text and provided extra information promoting readers' critical thinking) played an important role in improving reading performance of EFL learners. However, decorative illustrations (visual not closely related to the text) did not play a significant role. Learners should also have their attention explicitly drawn towards the visual information before reading otherwise they might not pay enough attention to it or not be able to infer what it is that the visual information is anticipating about the text (Lin & Hsieh, 2018; Zhao et al., 2014).

Glossaries

Glossaries can assist reading comprehension when they minimally disrupt the reading flow and provide readers with context-specific meaning (Nation, 2001). Learners prefer glossaries with clear, easy to understand information, which do not increase the cognitive load, and allow them to use their working memory resources in the process of making sense of the text (Ramezanali & Faez, 2019; Garrett-Rucks et al., 2014; Chen & Yen, 2013; Bell, 2005; Laufer, 2000). Also, for glosses to be able to assist reading comprehension, texts cannot be too difficult (Cheng & Good, 2009; Ariew & Erçetin, 2004).

Because glossaries promote conscious noticing of the meaning of a word (Nation, 2013, 2001) they can also lead to vocabulary acquisition (Chen & Yen, 2013; Watanabe, 1997). Dual-as opposed to single-mode glosses have been found to lead to more efficient learning of word meaning (Ramezanali & Faez, 2019; Abraham, 2008; Akbulut, 2007; Yoshii & Flaitz, 2002). This is particularly true when combining L1 text and pictures (Yoshii & Flaitz, 2002; Kost et al., 1999) and when the words have easy (concrete) visual representations (Ramezanali & Faez, 2019), an argument also supported by the Dual Coding theory (Sadoski & Paivio, 2001). Studies have also stressed the importance of informing learners about the affordances of glosses for a more positive impact (Cheng & Good, 2009; Bell, 2005).

Listening while reading (LWR)

LWR is an instructional practice where the reader listens to an oral rendition of the text while reading (Tragant et al., 2019). In this practice, the listener must be able to automatically process every word in order to listen comfortably. LWR is believed to promote a more holistic

approach to texts than reading alone because the audio pace guides readers' focus to larger chunks of text and a more global comprehension rather than attempting to confer meaning to words in isolation (Brown et al., 2008). Especially for low-proficiency readers, who may tend to break the text into small incoherent parts, LWR can serve as a model of parsing sentences, or breaking sentences into meaningful units. This can lead to better understanding (Chang & Millett, 2015; Brown et al., 2008; Day & Bamford, 1998; Amer, 1997; Dhaif, 1990). LWR has also shown a positive impact on vocabulary acquisition. This is because the bimodal input provides greater context and better chances to consolidate learners' previous and new knowledge of words (Tragant et al., 2019). Learners tend to develop auditory discrimination skills, refine word recognition and gain awareness of form-meaning links when exposed to the aural-written verification in LWR (Teng, 2018). For significant results, however, LWR must be frequent and consistent (Teng, 2018; Chang & Millett, 2015, 2014; Chang, 2012, 2011, 2009; Han and Chen, 2010), word encounters must be high and processing speed comfortable (Brown et al., 2008). Learners' conscious effort to, and awareness of how to learn from LWR have also been found to make a positive difference (Teng, 2018; Tragant et al., 2016).

Everything that has been discussed about reading and related features in this literature review drew on classroom learning environments where learners can count on teachers to make contributions as required. For instance, if during LWR practice teachers realise the audio pace is too fast for learners, they can scaffold the content, pre-teach vocabulary, slow down the speech rate, show encouragement, because (ideally) the teacher is familiar with these good teaching strategies and can provide learners with the adequate help when needed. When designing materials for self-access, this type of scaffolding needs to be reconsidered, as presented next.

Self-access materials and self-instructed learners

Whilst self-access suggests a type of learning where the learner is responsible for managing all aspects related to the learning experience (Cooker, 2010), the reality shows that the efficiency of such experience is hardly met (Tomlinson, 2011) for reasons such as not knowing how to make use of what is available (Hubbard, 2013, 2009; Stubbé & Theunissen, 2008) or time constraints (Associação Brasileira de Educação a distância [ABED], 2016, 2013). This is because, as problematized back in 1991 by Sheerin's 'state-of-the-art' paper, self-access is not simply the idea of learners working on their own on tasks they can select and receive feedback (such as answer key). Self-access materials should help learners become better learners through delivering learner training (Tomlinson, 2011). Reinders (2011) recommended self-access materials should teach learning strategies of three different types: cognitive (e.g. ways of memorizing vocabulary), meta-cognitive (e.g. being able to self-assess and monitor progress), and social-affective (e.g. being able to motivate oneself through, for instance, using the language or keeping a list of new things learned). Besides providing such strategies, learners also need help in identifying which strategies they need (Reinders, 2011). McLoughlin (2020) recommended triggering learners' interest, helping them set goals and monitor progress for motivational purposes. Drawing on learners' opinions, Reinders and Lewis (2006) also recommended that materials should provide information regarding how to learn (learning strategies), the learning process (how to interact with the material) and opportunities to verify learning development (feedback).

Not surprisingly, the lack of self-access materials evaluation means that there is little recommendation for the design of self-access materials beyond the important, but fairly general, recommendations that self-access materials should deliver guidance, opportunities for raising self-awareness about learning strategies, and motivational triggers. Besides that, studies involving self-access materials are usually concerned with the context of self-access centres (it

is understandably more practical for researchers when it comes to finding participants) where there is some type of human support (for instance, Yamaguchi et al., 2019; Yamaguchi, 2017; Dominguez-Ganoa, 2012; Tomlinson, 2010; Reinders and Lewis, 2006). Also, the learners accessing such centres are likely to have other moments of formal learning moments, where they can also draw on a teacher for matters related to the language itself and how to learn.

There is little research covering what and how self-access reading material for self-instructed learners should be designed. Despite extensive search, only Tomlinson (2011) referred to principles for the design of a reading unit for self-access material, but this was also part of a self-access centre. The literature does not tell how learners use or interact with these features (such as an audio tool) when using self-access materials. In addressing learners' reports about CaG and their reasons for doing the things they did, this study contributes to the field of self-access reading materials development in the sense that it shows the type of information that would benefit self-instructed learners, at low levels, when accessing reading materials on their own.

DESCRIPTION OF CATCHING A GLIMPSE

English M1 is self-access material designed in Brazil for local learners (young adults) and members of staff (adults) in vocational schools at beginner-level. It was delivered digitally, on Moodle and on a DVD, through PDF files and also on print. It contains eighteen units. The reading material CaG is the final section in the units. It contains no instruction of any kind. It does not tell learners to "Read the text" nor give them a reason to do so. There are no follow-up activities. CaG (1) (see Figure 1 for numbering references) consists of a text title (2) and an image (3) designed to provide visual representation of the text and make reading more appealing. The texts (4) are in prose. They recycle the syntactic structures and vocabulary of the corresponding unit. The texts get progressively longer through the units (the shortest being 116 words and ending with 579 words). The information in the texts is related to the USA and includes topics like the American weather, tipping in restaurants, American universities and gap year for Americans. There is an oral rendition of the text (5) which is user-activated, but cannot be paused. It also does not contain a control button for reduced speech speed. Voice actors were American volunteers who received no direction as such into how they should record the reading of the text. There is an English-Portuguese glossary (6). The words listed were chosen based on the developers' own intuition of which words were important for comprehension and that target learners, for being at initial levels, were unlikely to know.

Figure 1. The Reading section Catching a Glimpse

Catching a glimpse **1**

4. No hugging, please! **2**

3
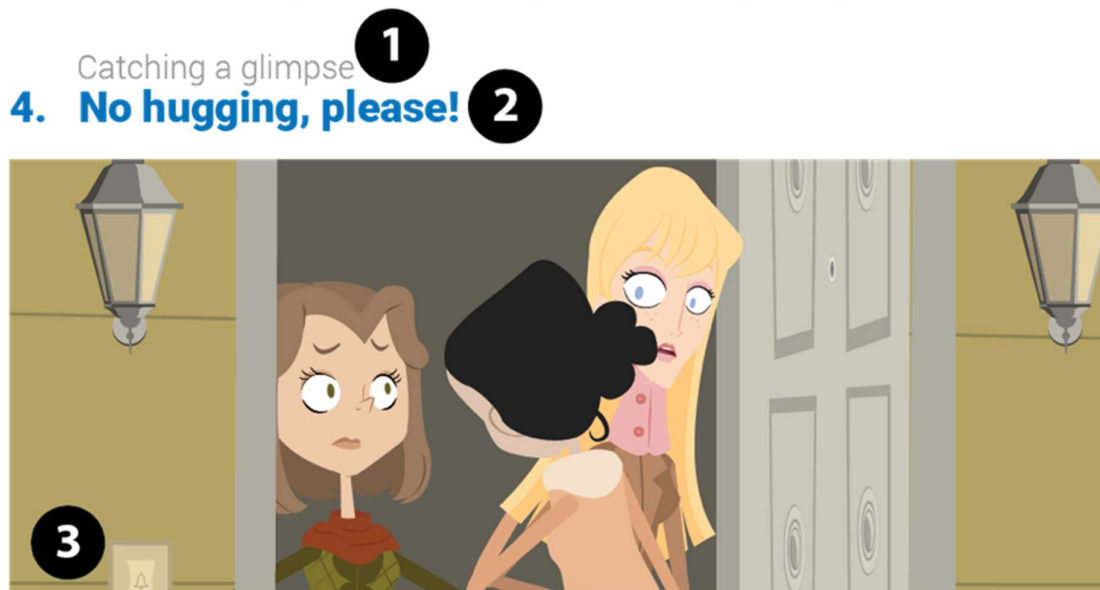
Brazil and the United States are different not only in terms of their languages, but also in their customs. One important area in which the two countries are different is **physical contact**. Brazilian people are often very affectionate: they touch, hug or kiss people when they meet. American people usually only hug or kiss family members and close friends. If you watched the episode, you probably noticed how uncomfortable Carly felt when Rosa hugged her the moment they first met. **4**

So, when you meet someone - and especially when you meet a person for the first time or you are introduced to someone -, no hugging or kissing, please! Brazil and USA deal with physical contact in a different way, so, just a wave or a handshake is OK.

5

A-Z **6**

Glossary
Not only: não só/não apenas
Customs: costumes
In which: na qual
Often: frequentemente
Usually: normalmente
Affectionate: afetuoso
Close: próximo
To touch: tocar
To hug: abraçar
To kiss: beijar
To meet: encontrar(-se)
Someone: alguém
Just: apenas
Wave: abano; aceno
Handshake: aperto de mão

The focus of this article is to show what the learners who used this material reported about their experience with CaG as well as what they need and expect from reading material in a self-access material.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study addressed the learners use of the reading material CaG, in English M1. Semi-structured, in-depth, interviews were used, conducted in the participants', and author 1's own language. Participants' responses were probed for enhanced clarity and detail. During the interviews, participants were prompted with the reading material on a computer screen for aided recall (Lavrakas, 2008). Data analysed followed a systematic description of patterns and trends (codes and categories) (Cohen et al., 2018). Coded data were obtained primarily from

categories formed by grouping similar ideas. Interviews were recorded and data was analysed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo for efficiency in organization and display of data selection and analysis.

Participants

Twenty-four Brazilian learners of English (Portuguese speakers) as a foreign language were interviewed. Although learners' previous English learning experience varied greatly in terms of length and mode (such as independently or teacher-led), all learners considered themselves at beginner level of English proficiency and opted for using this material (targeted at beginners), which was offered for free by the government. Participants' age range varied from young adults (of about 18 years old) to middle-aged adults (of about 40 years old). Most participants were members of staff in vocational schools (such as Portuguese, Spanish and PE teachers and administrators) Some participants were students in these schools. The following section presents and analyses the data collected in the interviews.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

In line with the nature of semi-structured interviews (Cohen et al., 2018), four questions were defined a priori:
1. Did you read the texts?
2. Did you observe the image?
3. Did you use the glossary?
4. Did you listen to the audio tool?

These questions pre-defined the main themes in the evaluation of CaG. They follow a hierarchical focusing strategy (P. Tomlinson, 1989) and address learners' experience (what they did) as an initial step before moving towards their reasons, motivations (related to their attitudes or feelings), as advised in Ritchie et al. (2014). The following sections report and comment on learners' opinions. Participants are identified by their allocated number.

Interest in the content of the texts

Overall, participants said that the information in the texts was engaging and they considered it appropriate to their context as Brazilians. Most participants referred to the relevance of the cultural information and how it would help them in the future if they ever visited the USA. For instance, P04 said that the content was "useful" as it would help her not to be disrespectful when interacting with English speakers. P10 said that it is important to learn "some characteristics of the country" where the learned language is spoken. This is evidence that most of these learners wanted culture-related information to be part of their English learning materials.

Some of the comments also made direct reference to the fact that the texts were concerned with the USA. Thirteen participants expressed a positive opinion about this choice. For example, P04 said that English learners are interested in "the two main cultures of English", he meant American and British cultures. For one participant, the connection between English and The USA was so strong that she seemed to ignore other countries that also use English. She was slightly confused when asked whether there were other countries she would like to learn about. She answered: "Look, I guess that talking a little bit more about what happens there [paused], in European countries [pause] that speak in English rrr". Her voice became softer as she mumbled the last words as if not sure of what to say. P12 did not seem able to cite other countries where English is used as the L1, which, we suspect, may have led her to speak less confidently in comparison to how she spoke in other parts of the interview. In order to avoid any possible discomfort, she was asked whether having read all texts about the USA had

been good, to which she replied yes. Later in the interview, P12 enthusiastically said: "I have barely any contact with my own culture because I like theirs more, you know?". She made a quick pause and laughed. She seemed to consider what she had said too exaggerated, and added: "No, this is nonsense, I like my culture as well".

Some participants expressed their belief that American culture influences Brazilian culture. For instance, laughing, as if about to confess something funny, P19 said that although other English-speaking countries would be interesting, everybody associates English with the United States because ultimately what matters is the USA. The takeaway is that reading about the USA did not surprise the participants. They felt that it was a natural choice.

Although also acknowledging the strong link between English learning in Brazil and the USA, a few participants seemed less pleased about having all texts concerned with the USA and referred to other countries as their personal favorites. For instance, P26 said that in Brazil, English learning is strongly associated with American culture. She naturally dislikes content that advocates for American culture but she did not feel this to be the case in CaG. She would have preferred, however, to learn about Ireland and Scotland because they are "older" countries with "more history". P21 said that the USA "supremacy" in English learning environments is unfair (which is evidence that like the majority of the participants, she acknowledges that English learning in Brazil and the USA are highly linked). She explained that it is not about the USA being a bad choice, but other countries, such as England or former colonies, are equally important. Besides not being particularly interested in the USA, both P21 and P26 enjoyed reading in CaG. P21 enthusiastically claimed: "The best part for me… the best part for me". P21 was particularly enthusiastic about the reading flux that the texts offered, different from the sentences and vocabulary lists in other parts of the material.

It is interesting to note how P21 and P26 differ from the other participants not only in what comes to their opinions about the USA-based texts but also their background. They are foreign language teachers (of Spanish and French) and they have been in other countries where English is not the L1 (P21, for example, lived in France for three years). It is possible that they interacted with other L2 English speakers in non-English speaking countries and this might have motivated their preferences to be more global and less American-centred. In light of their reports, it is arguable that those thirteen learners welcoming of the American culture in CaG cannot be entirely explained by a genuine interest, that is, the result of having been exposed to many cultures and chosen the USA. Their preference is, perhaps, just sensible pragmatism. As P24 explained "we live in a country that copies the American style, the cinema, the television", suggesting that the American influence goes beyond anyone's personal preference.

The background such as the ones identified in P21 and P26 might, but not necessarily will, translate into a more open view of what is relevant when it comes to the English language and culture. Two other participants who also lived abroad (P04 lived in Portugal, P10 spent some time in Haiti and both expressed to have used English with native and non-native English speakers) declared preference for reading about the USA culture in CaG because they see the USA as the main English-speaking country. The takeaway is that materials must seriously consider their role in nurturing awareness of the many countries/contexts where English is used (notions that English is used as a lingua franca in many places, that many cultures can be associated with L1 English speakers). This is because materials are likely to be, for many learners, the only way to gain a better sense of discernment of the cultures that can be associated with the English language and access a more nuanced view of what constitutes English. This is important not only from a cultural perspective, but also, because this is likely to help learners set more realistic and likely-to-be useful goals, such as, aiming at intelligibility and successful communication, than sounding like the native English speaker from a specific country.

Interpretation of the texts

The overall sense of satisfaction about the information in the texts can also be identified in the fact that eleven participants used the words "I remember" to refer to one or more texts. During the interviews, participants were not directly asked whether they could remember the texts as it could make them provide an answer that they believed to be more desirable, even if not accurate. Indications that they remembered the texts came spontaneously and often as an explanation to whether they had enjoyed CaG.

The most remembered text was No hugging, please! (this is the text presented in Figure 1 above). Delving into learners' reasons for remembering this text it seems that the interest was related to the practical nature of the content of the text. It provided concrete (not fictional, not subjective) information that could actually contribute towards who they are as English speakers. For example, P06, P16 and P04 said that in a future visit to the US they would know how to greet people appropriately because of this text. They said that because of this text they learnt that when meeting Americans for the first time, shaking hands is likely to be the most appropriate greeting and not hugging, which would be acceptable in Brazil.

Other participants, however, interpreted the information in this text differently. P06 9:00 said that she learned that in the USA "you don't even see a father hugging, kissing [his child]", showing that she generalised the information, creating the stereotyped view that Americans do not hug or are cold. Also P05 said that the text explained Americans "hug much less" and "don't have as much physical contact" in comparison to Brazilians, which is not the content in the text because it was being specific about first encounters. P09 said that she remembered how this text explained Americans are not "very affectionate" people. These reports are evidence that although the vast majority of the learners were able to grasp the general idea of the text, some of them could not fully comprehend it or perhaps misremembered it. These reports reveal an inherent limitation of self-access material as misinterpretations or inaccurate information cannot be easily avoided or corrected since learners are on their own and seem to accept the things materials say as truths.

The texts were easy to read

Six participants expressed awareness of the fact that the texts were contrived to match their English level. For instance, P02 said that the texts were "very consistent with what I had learnt" in the unit and P05 (a Portuguese teacher) said that "the structures, the words, the whole syntax were chosen". P21 (the French teacher) said that the texts had been "created" to "educate" and that this was "good". These participants said that this was important for motivational purposes. For example, P05 said that although he finds the information he reads online in places such as BBC News more appealing to his interest, he never reads the articles to the end because of the effort they demand, whilst the texts in CaG he could read and felt good about it. Also P05, P21 and P26 said that being able to read in CaG motivated extra reading. P24 said that "to begin, this is how it should be". This shows that the prejudice experts often attribute to non-authentic materials because of how they sanitise language did not apply to these respondents when they factored in the motivational benefits of being able to read comfortably in English as well as the fact that they feel they still need input to be adjusted to their capabilities.

Reading related activities: good and bad

Half of the participants interviewed expressed that they would not like this reading material to have a follow-up activity. Eleven of them used "relaxing" to express how CaG felt. P05 described it as a "pause after work [the work being the other parts of the unit], a text to relax, to read as if reading in the newspaper", which suggests he focused his attention on a global comprehension of the information. P10 said that the texts were different from the rest of the unit because they did not demand a learning effort. In his words:

Look, I liked it the way it was, because it was there as something extra, something to enrich, not something mandatory 'oh I have to read this because I have to do this activity' ... no, it was an extra, right? a bonus... for us to get to this point [of the unit]... read... For me it was like that, I finished everything in this unit, now I will relax a little bit reading this text, you know? (P10 15:00)

Participants also expressed what difference it would make if there was an activity related to the reading of the texts. On the negative side, learners said that an activity would hinder a "more casual" reading experience and they would feel guilty about not doing it (P09). The reading would not be as entertaining (P08, P09, P10). It would transform the reading experience into a moment of learning (P25), which suggests learners perceive learning as deliberate and conscious attention to language. Respondents also raised positive aspects about having an activity in CaG. The challenge of correctly answering questions could be motivating (P13, P20), compel reading (P17) and legitimise the reading effort (P02). P06 argued that because there were no text-related activities, she "only read the texts", her "understanding was not tested". P02 expressed that not having to adopt a reading style to get an answer right led her to feel as if "reading a text in Portuguese." At first, she sounded very determined about not wanting a follow-up activity in CaG. She then paused and reconsidered: "but for tests we need them", referring to traditional assessments. Although she identified that just reading feels nicer than reading to answer questions, she thinks that just reading will not help her to pass her exams.

These reports are evidence that learners enjoy reading for global comprehension, without the added pressure of having to get answers right or having to contrive their reading experience to attend to the demands of a task. At the same time, there is a feeling that reading in this way is not as efficient as reading with a deliberate learning attitude or having their comprehension tested. Whilst learners enjoy a relaxed reading moment, they want their time spent in the material to be learning efficient and hence, identifying the learning that resulted from reading provides a sense of efficiency.

Both P02 and P11 expressed their views of a good follow-up activity. The first said that the questions should not have "too obvious" answers and motivate thinking. The latter said that such an activity should give assurance that the text was properly understood. The reality shows that this type of activity is not easily designed in self-learning environments where automatic feedback is often the only possible feedback. Although these activities can be good and foster the development of declarative knowledge (i.e. conscious knowledge of the forms, meanings and system of the language), the danger in this is that it might push writers into designing poor quality questions, the only criterion being 'is there only one indisputable correct answer?', rather than designing questions that would help readers focus on a key part of the text or motivate thinking on aspects related to knowledge of how the language is used to achieve intended effects. This is evidence that self-access materials should deliver optionality in terms of follow-up reading activities.

Learners' opinions about the glossary

Learners provided positive comments about the glossary, saying that they constantly resorted to it when reading the texts. Twenty-two (out of twenty-four) participants expressed that it enhanced comprehension. A few participants also said that they used Google Translate too. Whilst the search for word meaning suggests that reading comprehension was not fluent, this is not reasonable considering their reports that reading was easy and relaxing. Learners' reasons for constantly using the glossary can be understood in light of their comments that a reading-related activity would make reading a more learning efficient moment. This suggests

that learners who opted for using the glossary did so as a vocabulary learning strategy. A moment to pay conscious attention to word meaning through combining the L1 translation provided and the textual contextualisation. Although learners' views are correct and indeed intentional learning is needed in L2 learning, a large part of their vocabulary will be acquired in a less conscious way (Krashen, 2008; Ellis, 1994), and reading for global comprehension (the original objective intended for CaG when it was designed) might be an opportunity for that (Horst, 2009; Waring & Nation, 2004). But learners did not seem to know that and the material did not provide them with this type of information.

P11 08:00 explained she is aware that a glossary cannot possibly cater to all learners in their lexical deficiencies when reading a text, however, in a very frustrated tone, she shared: "I don't memorize, you know? ... 'What does it mean?' ... And then, a week later, I have to ... look it up again." She explained that she understands learners are expected to remember words already studied, the reason why glossaries only cover new words. However, she shared in a frustrated tone that she can hardly remember words previously studied and that glossaries never contain all the words she needs. P11 carries an unnecessary burden since it is unlikely that she would remember the meaning of a word just because she looked it up once (Hulstijn, 1992). This learner would benefit from the awareness that many other variables are needed for vocabulary acquisition, such as meaningful and repeated exposure (Webb & Nation, 2017) and that the purpose of the glossary was to support fluent reading. Also, she seems to believe that when reading she must know all the words in the text, which reveals she is not used to reading for the gist of the text where a few unknown words can be ignored. Although not knowing these things may be attributed to P11's low level of proficiency, this points to the need to make the affordances of materials obvious for learners and to deliver, particularly in self-access materials, components of learner guidance.

Learners' opinions about the illustrations

What stood out from learners' reports about the illustrations was that, although a few of them considered the visual input played an important aesthetic role (P04, P05, P07, P16) and motivated reading, similar to "food packaging", as referred to by P07, which convinces people to buy food or not, it didn't really help towards comprehension. The Portuguese teacher (P05), who is likely to be familiar with reading comprehension strategies, said that he could not relate the visuals to a specific idea in the text. That is, although he attempted to benefit from the image for activation of background knowledge this did not result in actual help for comprehension. This is evidence that awareness of how to explore an illustration for comprehension assistance is not enough, as illustrations must mirror the content of the texts for efficient support or more explicit links between image and text are needed.

The ambiguity of the illustrations came up in a few reports. For example, P03 explained that when she looked at the illustration (see Figure 1 above) of two girls hugging at the porch, she thought it was depicting a visit, which is a reasonable way of interpreting it. However, the text is informing learners about the differences between Brazilians and Americans. The image is meant to depict the Brazilian character (dark hair) meeting her American roommates for the first time and hugging them. Again, this shows that unless learners have a clear idea of what the image represents (such as through providing explicit information about how the image links with the text), the visual input may actually hamper activation of adequate background knowledge. Even amongst the few who attempted to benefit from the image for anticipation of background knowledge, reports showed that predicting text content based on an image can be very misleading because of the different interpretations it allows. In the classroom, teachers can usually help learners to anticipate text content (or vocabulary) drawing on the visual input of a text, but this is only because they read the text first. In self-access materials, where learners

are on their own, a different and explicit approach must be employed, one to guide learners towards observing the image as well as making the right interpretation of it.

Learners' opinions about the oral rendition of the text

Learners used the audio tool very little or not at all. The few who did, when they did, aimed at pronunciation practice. Two learners were not even sure whether they had noticed it before asked in the interview. P26 said that she was not interested in the audio tool. She explained that, after reading the texts for comprehension, she read the texts out loud and practised pronunciation recording her own reading, but not listening to the audio tool. When asked whether listening to the text could have improved comprehension, P21 seemed surprised and explained that she did not consider this. She seemed rather sceptical of this possibility. For her, the audio tool could only improve pronunciation. Still, she did not think it could make a real difference: "speaking is the most difficult part of the language (…) it isn't me, who, in a distance-learning course, in one semester, will learn how to speak English. P21 claimed that she was being realistic and that reading is the only skill she was likely to improve in CaG. Her comments also denote the drawbacks of self-access learning as there is hardly any opportunity for oral interaction. She added that she "loved" CaG because it was about reading but the audio tool had simply no use for her.

Likewise, P05 did not see a reason to use the audio tool. He said: "my objective (...) was the reading part (...) listening and speaking are more complex than reading and writing", which suggests he also perceived the audio tool only as an opportunity to practice pronunciation, but since this was not part of his objective, he completely dismissed it. Similarly, P23 reasoned that the learning that might result from the effort to learn the pronunciation of words (through the audio tool) would not receive any feedback, since there was no opportunity for interaction to allow her to identify and improve problems in her output, which meant that listening to the oral rendition of the text did not make much sense.

P08 and P11 also only considered the audio tool as input to practice pronunciation. After silently reading the text for comprehension, they sometimes read the texts out loud and mimicked the voice actor. Taking into account that knowing how to pronounce a word is part of knowing a word, focusing on pronunciation while listening might have led to some increase in P08 and P11's vocabulary depth (Nation, 2001). However, because learners had no opportunities to practice and LWR was not extensive, it is unlikely that they would have actually developed pronunciation skills.

For P06 15:00 the audio tool was too difficult to follow. She explained: "it ran over my thinking a little bit, the audio, it mixed my understanding of the text with my understanding of pronunciation (…) that was strange for me, not comfortable." Although one's reading rate must be slightly slower than the speech rate in the audio recording for benefits such as weaning learners away from word-by-word reading (Hill, 2001), P06's description indicates her reading fluency rate was a lot slower, as she struggled to match the sequences of sound with her comprehension of the written words. This is not surprising, particularly because, at an initial level, learners need a slower pace for comfortable, meaning-focused listening (Field, 2008; Chang & Read, 2006) and no careful consideration was given to matters of intonation, pace or clarity when recording the texts. This shows that even if P06 intuitively tried to benefit from the oral rendition to help her read and comprehend the text, this was not possible because of the speech speed, which suggests that some level of adjustment of pace should be made available to learners. It became clear from learners' reports that they were not used to LWR as an instructional practice. They considered that an oral rendition of a text could only possibly promote pronunciation practice but, given the little exposure and actual practice (output production) they did not consider it would significantly improve pronunciation.

Data presented in this section showed aspects concerned with what low-level learners expect in terms of reading material and what it is that they need to know to read better and make appropriate use of reading-related features when they are on their own. The following section makes a few recommendations based on what has been found in the analysis of the data.

CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

While studies have evaluated materials, this one was unique in that it evaluated it from the perspective of the end-users: the learners. This is important because through understanding learners' beliefs about language learning and how they interacted with CaG and their rationale for doing the things they did we can gain an insight into what it is that they need to know in order to become better learners and what it is that self-access materials should deliver so learners can have a better learning experience.

Although learners expect materials to deliver cultural content because of their relevance as factual information, their views seem to be biased in terms of what type of culture they should be exposed to. Preference for reading about the USA is triggered by a sense that the USA is the most important English speaking country. This seems to be caused both by contextual influence and also by low awareness of other cultures also related to the English language (such as places that use English as a lingua franca, or as a second language). From a materials development perspective, this calls for the role of materials to help promote a richer understanding of the world and also a more critical view of the values that materials promote, such as through exposing learners to other native and non-native English speaking cultures.

It was also found that the learners in this study are willing to work hard and like it in the sense that it makes them feel good, as it provides a sense of accomplishment. Although learners were pleased with just reading and not having to answer follow-up questions, just reading challenged their perception of efficient learning and so they engaged in vocabulary learning and pronunciation development. The evidence suggests learners might have become better readers and learned some language as a result of reading in CaG, after all, they read the texts (Grabe and Stoller, 2020). However, learning development was probably low since reading was not sufficiently extensive (Renandya, 2017; Macalister, 2015). Also, learners do not seem to have become better learners of the language as an outcome of CaG.

It has been found that self-instructed learners must be informed of the affordances of the material delivered and guided on how to learn best. It is not sufficient to deliver a set of self-access reading material (no matter how good they are in terms of content appeal, level adequacy) if these are not accompanied by learner training and ongoing support on how to use the resources. The evidence suggests that learners using self-access materials need to receive training via the material. Information should be built around the material, explicit, contextualised and intervene in situations when the default interaction is identified by the learner as not satisfactory. Hence, some recommendations for the design of reading materials for self-instructed learners can be made.

1. Reading materials need to inform learners about what is expected of them in terms of engagement with the text (such as reading to find a specific information, or reading for global comprehension). This also calls for the need to inform learners of the benefits of reading for general gist, guiding them towards reading development skills (such as in extensive reading).
2. Learners must be informed of the principal role of the glossary. For instance, in CaG it was designed to support comprehension in a straightforward manner, not to increase vocabulary knowledge. However, it may also be useful to include advice on other

affordances the glossary offers, so that learners who wish to use it for vocabulary development can do so efficiently. This might lead to information on what it means to 'know' a word (common collocations, pronunciation and so on) as well as learning advice, such as the need for spaced practice. This mirrors the type of information a skilled teacher may provide in a classroom setting.

3. Illustrations that are meant to support reading comprehension must be accompanied by an indication of their role as well as explicit information regarding how it links with the text. That is, learners need to be told to observe the image, what to look for and in what ways it anticipates text content. In the case of materials targeted at low-level learners who share the same L1, which was the case of CaG, such information might be delivered partially in learners' L1.

4. Learners need to be told how to benefit from LWR when an oral rendition of a text is provided. Besides that, particularly for lower level learners, designing a control button for learners to pause and manage speed seems necessary for learners to be able to actually listen while reading.

One limitation in this study is the fact that in volunteer sampling there is always the possibility that the respondents do not accurately reflect the population because the individuals who choose to participate in interviews might have a more positive attitude to the material than those who chose not. This profile may not represent many of the self-instructed learners who often find it difficult to have the discipline to study on their own. Future materials evaluation should also address participants who withdrew the material in order to feature in their experience.

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Alessandra Belletti Figueira Mulling *is currently a PhD candidate at the School of Languages and Areas Studies at the University of Portsmouth. Her main research interests are in English teaching materials development and evaluation.*

Email: alessandra.mulling@port.ac.uk

Peter Watkins *is an ELT teacher, teacher-educator and materials writer. He currently works at the University of Portsmouth, UK. He has published widely and his research interests include ELT methodology, how teachers learn, and materials design.*

Email: peter.watkins@port.ac.uk