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The Use of Newspapers for L2 Reading: Practical Activities

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Nowadays the acquisition of literacy skills in the foreign language is a highly demanding task cognitively speaking. To improve this learning process, this paper presents a three-fold approach using print and virtual newspapers: first, a brief theoretical revision of the issues involved in learning how to read in a foreign language or transfer L1 reading skills to the foreign language, second, a wide selection of activities to be used when working with newspapers, and third, two sessions that exploit newspapers in the classroom which can constitute part of a wider lesson plan for Students preparing the English test for the University Entrance Exam (2nd of Bachillerato in the Spanish Educative System).

Keywords: Literacy Skills; Newspapers; Second Language Learning; Spain

Reading Processes and Theories: Learning to Read an L2

Like learning how to speak, the acquisition of reading is a very complex process. Historically speaking, reading systems have progressed from concrete and simple schemes to highly abstract procedures, cognitively more demanding. The first known reading system used *pictograms* in the form of small drawings representing objects or concepts. Then, Chinese *ideograms*, also in the form of pictures, symbolized ideas or objects, but not concrete words. The following type of writing, *logograms*, was more abstract, for instance, Egyptian hierograms, which had an equivalence with words and sounds. Nowadays, syllabic systems like the Japanese *Kana* represent syllables, whereas alphabetic systems like English or Spanish represent phonemes. As can be seen, there has been a progression towards more abstract and cognitively demanding reading and writing systems. The development of literacy skills is, in most developed countries, universal, and it has been suggested (Wolf, Vellutino, & Gleason, 1999) that this process is parallel to the cognitive and cultural development of human beings: from more simple ways of knowledge, thought—and literacy—to more complex systems. Thus, nowadays, learning to read involves highly challenging phonological, visual and memorization skills.

Some of the tasks involved in acquiring the literacy skills include being able to discriminate between graphemes, (*cat* vs. *pat*), their order (*pat* vs. *tap*), the size of words, types of print and style. To carry out these tasks learners have to use a number of strategies:

- Storing rules about the order of appearance of graphemes;
- Storing rules to order graphemes within words;
- Storing representations of redundant combinations of graphemes with invariant orthography and pronunciation;
- Discriminating between visually similar words;
- Storing as units combinations of morphophonemic units smaller than words, and
- Identifying new words through the re-combination of known elements.

Besides these visual strategies, reading involves knowledge of the phonological, semantic and syntactic codes, their rules, and last but not least, abilities in the motor systems so that the learner can articulate (produce) the concepts formulated. Part of this knowledge is already established in the case of learning a second/foreign language when learners are beyond 6 or 7 years and, according to some theories, (Kong, 2006; Stevenson, Schoonen, & de Glopper, 2007) it can be transferred and used for L2 reading.

However, alphabetic systems can represent phonemes and sounds in a direct way, as in Spanish or Italian, with shallow orthographies, or the relationship might not be direct, as in English, with a deep orthography. When this relationship between orthography and pronunciation is not transparent, cognitive demands are higher, as there is a mismatch between the oral representation and its written form. Thus, a Spanish learner will be able to use his/her reading skills for learning English, but he will have to learn to compensate for the lack of correspondence between the two systems: orthography and phonology (Wolf, Vellutino, & Gleason, 1999).

L2 Reading Models

A lot has been written about L1 learning literacy skills (i.e. Arroyo, 1998). Much of that knowledge has been used to explain the same process for the L2. In general, there are two groups of reading models depending on how the processes of recognition and identification of written words are interpreted. Learning to read can be considered as a top-down process or a bottom-up one. Top-down reading is related to a global procedure, easy for native speakers or advanced learners of a language, whereas bottom-up reading is related to analytical decoding, and it is driven by a process that results in meaning and proceeds from the units to the whole. Alderson (1984) states that reading in a foreign language is possible even when the knowledge of the language is lacking provided that the reader makes usage of skills as guessing, anticipating information or inferring. In contrast, bottom-up reading results much easier for learners of a foreign language as it is a useful technique for scanning tasks or intensive reading. Whereas top-down models interpret reading as a process guided by the contextual informa-

tion, which helps the reader *deduce* the printed stimuli (textual cues: grapho-phonic information, syntactic and semantic data), bottom-up models assume that recognition is codified mainly through using the text cues or printed words, but not the context. This recognition is carried out in discrete stages, hierarchically organized: first visual data are processed, then recognized and finally interpreted (Wolf, Vellutino, & Berko, 1999).

Specifically in the case of L2, reading models also interpret the reading process as a data-driven (bottom-up) and/or conceptually driven (top-down) process. Bottom-up L2 reading models (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Gough, 1985) consider reading as a part-to-whole processing of the text. Its advocates believe the readers need to identify letter features, then link these features to recognize letters, combine letters to recognize spelling patterns, link spelling patterns to recognize words, and then proceed to sentence, paragraph and text-level processing. Dechant (1991) claims that bottom-up models operate on texts which are hierarchally organized—grapho-phonic, phonemic, syllabic, morphemic, word, and sentence—and that readers first process the smallest linguistic units to decipher the longest units later.

The second group of models, top-down approaches, assume that readers can understand a text selection without recognizing some of the words by deducing the meaning through contextual and grammatical cues, (Gove, 1983). More recent accounts assume there is an interaction between top-down and bottom-up models, and in fact teaching approaches focus on teaching using both data-driven and conceptually driven techniques (Mohamad, 1999; Alderson, 2000).

Regardless of the approach, *reading for meaning* should be the primary aim of reading, and the most important aspect of reading is the amount of information obtained through reading, particularly in the case of intermediate (A2-B1[1]) and advanced learners (B2 and beyond), such as those preparing for the University entrance exam in Spain[2].

Pedagogical Approaches to L2 Reading

In order to teach L2 reading two possibilities arise: one may assume the learner is able to transfer his/her L1 literacy skills (Goodman, Goodman, & Flores, 1979, in Kong, 2006). In that case teaching should focus on data-driven processes, to notice the differences in orthography, syntax, and so on, that is to say, the learner main task is to decode units in order to acquire meaning. On the other hand, if L1 literacy skills are only partially transferred to the L2 (Kong, 2006), teaching should focus on both bottom up and top down processes, to make learners use the help of the context and their background knowledge. Whatever the theory, learners read a language they may not understand, so both processes have to be used.

Learning to read a second language in and outside the classroom (Harmer, 1998) usually involves two types of reading, *intensive* and *extensive*. On the one hand, extensive reading,

also referred to as "supplementary reading", consists on reading rapidly, this is what advanced learners of languages, teachers, or native speakers use when reading a book, a magazine, or a newspaper: attention is focused on the meaning of the text and not on the language used. As background knowledge is used, it is a conceptually-driven or top-down process. On the other hand, intensive reading means that the readers take a text, read it line by line, and examine it in depth using dictionaries or grammar books, among others. They focus on the units to extract meaning, so this would be a bottom-up or data-driven oriented process. To facilitate the development of reading skills, both types of reading include a series of stages in which the learner either focuses on the units or on the whole: *pre-reading, during-reading, and after-reading* (Arroyo, 1998; Harmer, 1998; Mora, 2001; Wallace, 2001). These stages help learners and readers reach a better understanding of the text, transfer L1 literacy skills and improve their L2 competence.

Pre-reading is good to activate schemas and background information, and it is closely related to top-down reading. The main aim of the tasks before reading is to activate the topic and world knowledge of the learner and promote reading strategies like inference, hypothesis reformulation and use of context for the global comprehension of the text.

After the pre-reading activities, while-reading exercises can focus on the content and/or the use of language (Luque, 2011). Tasks during reading, particularly language ones (see Section 4), are closely related to bottom-up strategies. The exploitation of the text will depend on the abilities of the teacher. Several readings of the text should be carried out to acquire the proper skills. First reading in order to know what the topic is about, second reading to look for details or specific information, and third reading (in advanced levels) to analyze critically the text. The main aim of these activities is to guide the reader through the text. Different reading skills are implemented to automate the reading process in the second or foreign language. In conclusion, the main goal of tasks before and during reading is to develop the autonomous learning, so learners can pass from intensive to extensive reading with longer and less graded texts (see Hammer 1998 for more information about graded readers).

Finally, after-reading activities are aimed at developing the meta-comprehension of the reading process, to improve the oral and written production, and in general, the linguistic competence (Luque, 2011). Besides, Grabe and Stoller (2001) claim tasks after reading mean understanding the main ideas of a text (see Section 4).

Use of Newspapers for Second Language Reading: A Typology of Activities

The use of the press for teaching an L2 is not new. However, different teaching approaches have emphasized different aspects: the style, the language and its features, the communicative possibilities of the genre… The relevance, interest, topic, and varied information can turn newspapers into really motivating aids for learners. Newspapers are valuable resources; several editorials publish text books with comprehension texts, either real or simulated, extracted from real newspapers. People learn through reading, and reading about new things in one's interest subject, undoubtedly helps motivation (Sanderson, 2001). Their didactic use is wide and complex since the four language skills, together with vocabulary and grammar, can be developed and improved, aspects about the target society or

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[1]Council of Europe (2006) Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR): http://www.coe. int/t/dg4/linguistic/cadre_en.asp
[2]The University Entrance Exam in Spain includes a test for a second language (English and French are the most frequent languages) which consists of a text for reading with some comprehension questions, use of English/French with vocabulary and grammar questions, and a written composition. Its approximate level according to the CEFR is A2 or B1. This test is now in the process of being adapted in order to measure oral competence, but most Communities have not yet updated the exam.

culture are learnt, and discussions may be motivated and triggered.

The use of real newspapers as material for improving L2 reading has been so frequently used that it has become stereotyped and worn-out, overgeneralizing students' interests, using outdated pieces of news or texts which have not been adapted to the students' level of L2. After the extensive experience, researchers (Allwright, 1981; Hill, 1990; Hobbs, 2001) have determined some of the benefits and drawbacks of using the press in the English as a foreign language (EFL) class. Many teachers like the use of newspapers in the class because they are very easy to access and are a great source of information for lessons. Newspapers usually deal with more recent topics of interest for learners than course-books. There are many kinds of language in newspapers (stories, narrative, advertising, letters, and reports, among others) and they help develop the aesthetic competence, required by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages[3], and which influences our perception of the world.

Besides, most learners do not read just for developing their reading fluency or incidental vocabulary acquisition, they are more pragmatic in this sense: they tend to carry out extensive reading. The use of authentic materials such as newspapers is claimed to be a good resource for the design of activities related to both types of reading process (top-down and bottom-up) at different stages (Widdowson, 1990; Nuttall, 1996).

In addition to printed texts, which become obsolete rapidly, nowadays we can also use a wide range of free online resources. However, there are two possible drawbacks: first, some education centres are not yet equipped as ICT centres, so teachers will feel forced to adhere to their own traditional resources; and secondly, some old professionals are not updated in the use of new technologies so the introduction of Internet in their classroom planning may constitute a hindrance. Besides, these virtual materials are frequently transitory, which means that they may suddenly disappear from the site where they were located.

Finally, one more disadvantage is how demanding and time-consuming the use of printed or virtual newspapers could be for the set curriculum and busy schedule of the mainstream classroom education.

Following the pedagogical approach to L2 reading described in Section 3, which includes top-down and bottom-up processes and organizes the activities into pre, while, and after reading, the following list can be implemented making use of pieces of news as main learning resource.

A. Pre-reading activities (focus on top-down processes)
- Activate prior knowledge about the topic of the piece of news.
- Start a discussion about the topic to trigger interest and motivation.
- Refresh vocabulary up in the mother and foreign language.
- Use of the pictures appearing in the news to guess what information will provide us.
- Use of intuition answering true or false statements.
- Answer according to your opinion a multiple choice answer exercise and see if your expectations are fulfilled.
- Use of the headline to predict the content of the news article.

- Write the sub-heading for the article using the main headline as reference.
- Selection of a picture matching the headline of the piece of news (if Internet connection is available) and discuss expectations and how information can vary depending on the accompanying picture.
- Compare two different pictures or drawings about the same topic but dealing with different information to activate information and ease the comprehension of the text later.
- Do a quiz game in pairs to activate the passive vocabulary of the learner which will appear later in the text.
- Use of the radio or video to introduce the topic with general information and trigger a discussion in class.

B.1. While-reading activities for content (focus on top-down and bottom-up processes)
- Categorizing texts.
- Check if your true or false statements of the pre reading activities were correct or not.
- Check if your expectations about the content were true.
- Writing sentences using headline words cut from broadsheets or tabloids and jumbled.
- Match different headlines with their correspondent piece of news.
- Find factual information in introductory paragraphs to articles. Students should answer the wh-questions: who, what, where, and when.
- Match different parts of news times. Teacher should jumble up all the headlines, photographs, captions and opening paragraphs and give one item to each student. Each student has to read or describe them aloud and find the other students with matching photograph, headline or caption to make a set.
- Answer comprehension questions with restricted access to the article. Making use of the overhead projector, the teacher will display a transparency of the news while the students try to answer the questions they were passed before the beginning of the exercise.
- Insert missing paragraphs into the correct position.
- Find common points shared by pairs of articles.
- Find differences between two versions of the same story using one tabloid and one broadsheet.
- Reconstruct newspaper photographs captions. Students should match photographs with their corresponding captions.
- Illustrate a newspaper article with photographs after reading through them. Photographs must follow the original order of the story.
- Find partners in the Meeting place section of the classifieds ads in a newspaper. Read men and women ads carefully, match them, and explain why.
- Identify cultural differences in cartoons (objects, interior or exterior scenes, people's physical appearance, dress and hairstyle, etc.).
- Find one's way around a newspaper. Each pair should write one or two sentences indicating roughly where the story can be found (Grundy, 1993; Sanderson, 2001).

B.2. While-reading activities for language (focus on bottom-up processes)
- Rewriting ambiguous headlines to make them clearer. Students have to change some words in order to make headlines more understandable.
- Predict missing words. Read an article chosen aloud but

stop in several places before a word. Make a clear gesture to let the students call out their ideas.

- Rank jobs from most popular to the least popular.
- Rewrite strip cartoons as short narratives.
- Identify linking features in text by a name in common, a vocabulary item, or something thematic.
- Identify "potted biography"—first or second paragraph opening an article containing information about the person in the article—in broadsheets and tabloids. Check what information learners receive about the people in the articles and how the potted biographies could be expressed in a different way.
- Reconstruct a short newspaper article manipulated where grammatical words (e.g. a, the, in, to, is, was) are omitted, grammatical changes to the ends of words (e.g.'s or s' to indicate possession, -r or -er to form the comparative of certain adjectives) are omitted, and verb inflections (e.g. -s, es-, -d, -ed, -ing) are deleted.
- Rewrite negative articles about depressing, unhappy news stories to make them positive.
- Matching adjectives to large advertisements from newspapers or magazines.
- Learn vocabulary through personal association. Students should take note of useful idioms, expressions or phrasal verbs for them and should explain them in front of the class.
- Reconstruct the ending of a newspaper article. After the reading of the headline and the article, when reaching the last sentence, try to make the students figure out the conclusion of the article. When ran out of ideas, write the concluding sentence on the blackboard in jumbled order. Students should put the words in order to discover how the article ends.

  C.1. After-reading: Oral (focus on top-down processes)
- Rewriting ambiguous headlines to make them clearer. Students have to change some words in order to make headlines more understandable.
- Predict missing words. Read an article chosen aloud but stop in several places before a word. Make a clear gesture to let the students call out their ideas.
- Rank jobs from most popular to the least popular.
- Rewrite strip cartoons as short narratives.
- Identify linking features in text by a name in common, a vocabulary item, or something thematic.
- Identify "potted biography"—first or second paragraph opening an article containing information about the person in the article—in broadsheets and tabloids. Check what information learners receive about the people in the articles and how the potted biographies could be expressed in a different way.
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C.2. After reading: Writing (focus on top-down and bottom up processes)
- Offer a brief resume of the article.
- Invent stories and listening to them to decide which is true. Each group should prepare a short oral summary of their real article, previously given by the teacher. Once students are ready, one group should tell the other their newspaper headline and tell them three possible stories accompanying them. The other group should decide which of them is true.
- Understand information-packed sentences. Students should make a list of all the facts an article contains in one long paragraph.
- Write suitable paragraph headings.
- Shorten a long newspaper article to fifty words.
- Write profiles of famous people. Spread out photographs and each student should write two characteristics about the character in the picture. Once all the students have written something, they should read all the information provided and write a short profile of the person.
- Write the thoughts of people with unusual or interesting expressions on their faces in photographs.
- Dictate and miming horoscopes. In pairs, one student should dictate his/her partner's horoscope miming those words underlined previously by the teacher.
- Write a letter to a newspaper in small groups about a topic of common interest.
- Write different endings to dialogues in strip cartoons.

Exploitation of the Press in the Classroom: A Brief Example

The press constitutes itself a magnificent resource of information not just for the general acquisition of foreign cultural notions but for the learning or improvement of a FL/L2, as it was explained above. Taking into account the different reading skills involved when reading complex texts, the main objective of the following example is to show how one cross-curricular topic as the environment can be exploited within a didactic unit making use of the press and some of the activities recommended in Section 4. These two sessions can be part of a whole and more complex lesson plan designed for students with an intermediate or upper-intermediate level of English (around B1). According to the Spanish curriculum for non-compulsory Secondary Education, we could include this session, considering the difficulty of the activities detailed below, within the first course of *Bachillerato*. From a pedagogical point of view, the next two sessions fulfil the nine basic competences established by the Spanish Ministry of Education[4].

Session 1

Warm up
Have a look at the pictures in **Figure 1** and answer the fol-

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Figure 1.
Recycling containers.

lowing questions:

1) *What can you see*?

2) *Are you familiar with their use*?

3) *What are they used for*?

4) *Are recycling containers in Spain as in England*?

5) *Do containers keep the same colours for paper, drink cans and glass*?

Reading

1) *Before reading the passage, reflect on the following questions. Discuss them in groups of three or two.*

a) Does your family recycle at home?

b) What type of products do you recycle?

c) If not, have you ever thought about recycling?

d) What containers can you find in your living area?

e) How would you feel if you had to pay every time you do not recycle?

HOUSEHOLDERS who fail to separate rubbish for recycling could face £50 fines.

*They may also be given wheelie bins with **LOCKS** to stop neighbours dumping trash to escape the levies.*

But there will be cash incentives for those who abide by new "pay-as-you-throw" schemes [...]

Some 27 *per cent of household waste was recycled last year? well up on* 7.5 *per cent in* 2005-06.

*Under a new Waste Strategy, Environment Secretary David Miliband said he plans to boost the level with cash rewards. But town halls must pay them, leading critics to believe they will be offset by council tax rises. Mr Miliband said any authority bringing in the scheme must offer effective ways to recycle. Lockable wheelie bins and pre-paid sacks were among options to stop waste being dumped in neighbours' bins. Mr Miliband also backed **WEEKLY** collections of food waste* [...] *He announced plans to cut plastic bag use by* 25 *per cent by the end of* 2008, *and hopes to persuade supermarkets to scrap them. He also revealed plans to help householders opt out of receiving junk mail. He said*: "*We need not only to recycle and re-use waste but to prevent it in the first place. Despite the progress we have made, England's waste performance still lags well behind much of the rest of Europe. Other countries landfill far less and recycle and recover energy from waste much more.*

"*All countries face a challenge in reducing of waste? And it is waste reduction which produces the greatest environmental benefits.*" [...]

The Sun, 26/05/2007

2) *Complete the information in **Table** 1. Please, underline the answer in the text.*

3) *What do the following numbers refer to*?

25, 50, 27, 7.5, 2008

4) *Where would you find this passage? In…*

a) An encyclopaedia b) a newspaper c) an advert

Vocabulary

*Complete **Table** 2*:

Table 1.
Choose the right answer and circle it.

Reducing household waste is one of the worst practices to benefit the environment.	T	F
Law-abiding citizens will be required to pay for a fine.	T	F
Wheelie-bins and sacks may stop dumping waste into neighbours' bins.	T	F
Town halls will have to compensate economically cash rewards.	T	F
Supermarkets will be encouraged to reduce the amount of waste.	T	F
England's waste performance is going ahead the rest of Europe.	T	F

Table 2.
Match these words and phrases to their definitions.

Sack	Rubbish
Wheelie bin	Getting rid of large amounts of rubbish by burying it, or a place where rubbish is buried.
Junk mail	A large bag made of strong cloth, paper or plastic, used to store large amounts of something.
Landfill	To throw away.
Dispose	A container for rubbish which has wheels so that it can be moved easily.
Trash	To post, usually advertising products or services, which is sent to people although they have not asked for it.

Speaking and writing

Write and discuss in pairs the reasons why people should or not pay a fine for not recycling.

AGREEMENT POSITION: you will have to support recycling and give all the necessary arguments for it. The main argument is going to be the environmental problems. Your composition has to prove that recycling really helps to preserve our environment and the application of fines would be really useful. DISAGREEMENT POSITION: there are a lot of people who do not consider recycling to be so significant. Their main arguments are the economical aspect of the process, there are no resources close home for recycling like containers, and having to pay for a fine would be an abuse. In your composition on recycling you can exploit these arguments.

Note: a chart with useful language on agreeing and disagreeing should be available to students.

Session 2: WHAT IF…?

Warm up

*Read the following headlines from different newspapers and match them with the pictures in **Figure** 2*:

What do you think the news is about in each headline? Why such natural disasters happen? How would you react in such situations? Does your country experience natural disasters? If so, what kind and how often?

Tsunami strikes after Chile quake.

The Sun[5]

Haiti earthquake left 100,000 *dead in* 60 *seconds*

Mirror[6]

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[5]Spanish https://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=Tsunami+strikes+ after +chile+quake (February 27th, 2010)

[6]https://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=Haiti+Earthquake+left+100%2 C000+dead+in+60+seconds (January 14th, 2010)

Figure 2.
Natural disasters.

Houses damaged and power cut as tornado hits Stornoway
The Times[7]

Chile earthquake: Pacific nations brace for tsunami
Guardian[8]

Hurricane Katrina victims to sue oil companies over global warming
Telegraph[9]

Spectacular sunsets, dirty cars... and a change in the weather: It's all down to that volcano
Dailymail[10]

Reading

1) Before reading reflect on the following questions and discuss them in class: Have you ever been a victim of a natural disaster? What would you do in case of an earthquake in your city? How would you feel after the catastrophe?

2) Read the declarations from some real victims of natural disasters, can you identify the type of catastrophe?

"I was lying in bed, I had been there for about an hour, and the whole house shook, the whole house was moving," Peter said.

"The front of my chest of drawers fell out and my candles fell on the floor and broke. I thought it was a ghost," Mary declared.

"There was lots of lightning, and thunder, and rain. I can remember one time, a big bolt of lightning hit nearby. There was a huge flash, even bigger sound. The next morning, there was a lot of branches, twigs, leaves, and puddles everywhere," Matthew stated.

"I feel sick to my stomach and extremely worried and anxious even when a storm hasn't reached my location yet. Just knowing it's out there scares me really bad. I feel physical effects as well as mental. I feel sick, I either can't eat, or am very hungry, and I have a bit of trouble breathing," little Liam explained.

"The scene ashore was chaotic. All the hundreds of beach umbrellas and chairs were gone. Everything on the beach was being sucked out to sea," Mao said.

Vocabulary

*1) How many types of natural disasters can you think of? Rank them from the most frightening (1) to the least frightening (4) in **Table 3**. You can add as many words as you already know about natural disasters.*

Listening

1) Have you ever watched a movie about natural disasters? In this exercise, you are going to watch the trailer of the

[7]https://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=Houses+damaged+and+power+cut+as+tornado+hits+Stornoway (July 29th, 2009).
[8]https://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=Chile+earthquake%3A+Pacific+Nations+brace+for+tsunami (February 27th, 2010).
[9]https://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=Hurricane+Katrina+victims+to+sue+oil+companies+over+global+warming (March, 4th, 2010).
[10]https://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=Spectacular+sunset%2C+dirty+cars+and+a+change+in+the+weather%3A+it's+all+down+to+that+volcano (April 16th, 2010).

Table 3.
Ranking of natural disasters.

	1	2	3	4
Tornadoes				
Tsunamis				
Earthquakes				
Volcanic Eruption				
Thunderstorm				
Avalanches				
Floods				
Sandstorms				
Other Phenomena: ...				

American movie "The day after tomorrow".[11]

2) Write a composition answering the following points:

a) What happens in this movie?

b) Where is this natural disaster happening?

c) What is the language used to communicate what it is occurring to the rest of the world?

d) Can you describe the characters appearing in the scenes?

Discussion

These two sessions are organized, (Kong, 2006), in the assumption that L1 literacy skills have been already partially transferred to the L2: students already know how to read and write in the first language and have also transferred this knowledge to the second language. In this way, students will be able to concentrate on the differences between the two languages and cultures, as can be seen in questions such as "*Are recycling containers in Spain as in England?*" (Session 1) "*What do you think the news is about in each headline? Does your country experience natural disasters?*" (Session 2) and the references to places in different parts of the world (*Stornoway, Chile, Haiti…*) in the headline activity (Session 2). Pedagogically speaking this is an example of data-driven intensive reading (Harmer, 1998) which aims at promoting reading skills through the three steps mentioned in Section 3: pre-reading activities, to activate background knowledge, during-reading activities, focusing on the content, and after-reading, focusing on written and oral production (Arroyo, 1998; Wallace, 2001; Luque, 2011). Thus, we find photographs (**Figure 1**), personal questions and pre-reading questions to activate knowledge in Session 1. In Session 2 there is a set of headlines supported with pictures (**Figure 2**) and several personal questions which relate students' knowledge to the topic of the reading. While learners read, there are several questions students have to answer. In Session 1 students will complete comprehension questions and true-false questions (**Table 1**) and then find specific information concerning different numbers that appear in the text (skimming and scanning skills). In Session 2, while reading, students need to find a word that summarizes the general meaning of each short paragraph. Both reading texts and comprehension questions (including true/false ones) will improve

[11]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JQDSAiPiEDU

students top-down, comprehension based skills (Alderson, 2000). After reading there are several activities that focus on other skills and components, such as speaking (*for and against*: Session 1), writing or listening (Session 2) and vocabulary (Sessions 1 and 2: **Tables 2** and **3**). Besides learning and using conceptually-driven processes, these follow-up activities will help students improve their analytic, bottom-up skills while getting familiarized with newspaper language and format (Dechant, 1991).

Conclusion

These specific examples were created for *Bachillerato* students in Spain in order to cater for two special educational aims addressed in the Spanish official documents[12]: the first one deals with transversal competences, that is to say, issues concerning sexual and environmental education, equality, etc. which have to be contemplated throughout Primary and Secondary Education and which, according to these orientations, have to be integrated in different subjects, such as language, mathematics, history or sciences. The activities within these sessions address environmental issues within the English classroom.

These Spanish official decrees have emphasized the acquisition of competences such as life-long learning or autonomous learning. Both can be carried out by reading newspapers. Besides, most virtual readings, essential for another competence, the digital one, are in the second language. In addition, content reading (such as the type found in magazines and newspapers), in paper or virtual form, is essential for University students and bilingual higher/secondary schools (Loranc-Paszylk, 2009), as mentioned in such documents.

The second aim this type of newspaper-based sessions fulfil relates to the University Entrance Exam for students finishing *Bachillerato*, which includes an English (second language) exam with four points out of a total of 10 devoted to reading comprehension. Thus, promoting the reading skill is completely justified. Again, this Entrance exam includes a vocabulary section (one point) and a writing section (three points). Both issues, vocabulary and writing, are considered in the two sessions above.

Going beyond Spain, a more general aim that supports the use of newspapers in the classroom concerns the role of language learning in Europe. According to the Common European Framework for language (CEFR, for short), learners "... *Can scan quickly through long and complex texts*, *locating relevant details. Can scan longer texts in order to locate desired information*, *and gather information from different parts of a text*, *or from different texts in order to fulfil a specific task*" (Council of Europe[13]: 2006).

Concerning learning tasks, reading newspapers is mentioned as a useful resource in the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2006: 143[14]).

"In general, how are learners expected to learn a second or foreign language (L2)? Is it in one or more of the following ways?

1) By direct exposure to authentic use of language in L2 in one or more of the following ways:
- Face to face with native speaker(s);

- Overhearingconversation;
- Listening to radio, recordings, etc.;
- Watching and listening to TV, video, etc.;
- Reading unmodified, ungraded, authentic written texts (*newspapers, magazines*[15], stories, novels, public signs and notices, etc.)".

In addition, for the B2 level, the CEFR asserts that learners "… Can quickly identify the content and relevance of *news items, articles and reports*[16] on a wide range of professional topics, deciding whether closer study is worthwhile…" (Council of Europe[17], 2006).

The CEFR summarizes very well the need to use authentic materials in the form of newspapers and magazines, but there are additional reasons for their use:

Reading improves subskills that promote further reading and increase linguistic competence (Nuttall, 1996: p. 127). Furthermore, they are close to students' interests and open up the possibility of learning about the culture of the second language countries.

Reading increases implicit vocabulary knowledge (Pigada and Schmitt, 2006) and recognition of grammatical patterns (Chio, 2009) using a linguistic model which is up-to-date. Furthermore, reading comprehension tasks constitute an average of 40% in university entrance exams, as mentioned in the discussion (Bueno & Luque, 2011).

As a conclusion, the use of newspapers in the classroom should not be forgotten or believed to be out-dated.

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