

Adapting texts for ELT: intuition, analysis and authenticity

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A

As the English proverb goes, men make houses, women make homes. Being a breadwinner and earning money for the family is difficult, but being a homemaker is demanding too, though more rewarding at times.

Getting up at dawn doesn't look attractive but on second thoughts this gives you plenty of time to take a shower, brush your hair, do your makeup and enjoy a cup of freshly brewed coffee in peace and quiet. Isn't it a great way to welcome a new day?

While all other family members keep yawning and fooling around, your day is already in full swing, you are up bright and fresh and even repetitive attempts to urge your children on and make them get up and go to the bathroom are nothing but fun. Remembering how you were sending your active kids to bed the previous night makes you smile.

Many people tend to think that a housewife's daily grind is always daunting, tiring and not a piece of cake. Vacuum cleaning, washing the dishes and ironing could be anything but enjoyable. But look at the brighter side of things. You do all this to make your family happy and welcome your husband and children in a warm home and comfort them after work or study hours.

B

I've always been an enthusiastic person wanting to take every opportunity offered to me, but I was also a little unconfident. I don't like facing unexpected problems and I've always managed to avoid painful situations – I guess I've been quite fortunate most of my life. That is until I met Tim Fox, possibly one of the most dishonest people in the world. I don't think anything he ever said was truthful. I'd always had a joyful outlook on life and managed to laugh at and accept whatever came my way. But Tim Fox was an unpleasant man who took great delight in the invention of stories that made him look good and me feel bad. He made me believe that it was extremely unlikely that I'd succeed in life. Fortunately, I realised that it's my own opinion that matters most, and people like Tim are often just hiding issues with their own confidence. Today, I actually feel more confident because of him!

C

The problem of drought-affected farmers may be solved by a recent James Dyson Award winner, Edward Linacre. Linacre was inspired by Australia's worst drought in a century when he invented Airdrop. Using his system, water can be collected from the air. Linacre says the idea was given to him by the Namib beetle, which survives in the desert by collecting tiny amounts of moisture. Linacre was recently asked to develop his device by the Chinese government and companies in the Middle East, but, for now, he wants to keep working on it himself. Up until now the system has been developed in his Mum's backyard. In the future it will be taken up to a more industrial level.

This stiff grey fin was moving purposefully towards us ...

When I was eight, my parents, my younger brother, Stewart, and a girl called Margo Edwards, who was at school with us, went on holiday to Mozambique. One day, we took out a small rowing boat with an outboard motor on it, and went fishing on this vast lagoon at a place called San Martina.

It was early evening when the motor conked out, and we were stranded. We started to shout in the hope that somebody would hear us; we knew the sound could travel because of the water being very flat and calm.

Suddenly, as if out of nowhere, there was this disturbance in the water. I remember everyone initially thought it was a dolphin, but it wasn't leaping in and out of the water, and before long we could see this stiff grey fin moving purposefully towards us.

It then circled around our rowing boat, and I remember my father saying: 'Well, I think that's a shark . . .'

And then this monster started bashing our boat, which began rocking from side to side, and everyone got hysterical. We were just terrified because the boat was by now rocking so much we thought we were going to be tipped into the water and chomped up by this thing. I remember assuming that we were going to die. My mother was screaming, and father was shouting obscenities at this thing, which he was to bash back with one of the oars. I had never seen my parents in obvious terror before, and that's something which never leaves you.

For the longest time this thing kept circling around us, and ramming our rowing boat, while Dad continued fending it off, stabbing at it with his oar, which was probably the worst thing to have done because it must have made the beast even more livid than it already was.

My mother clutched the three of us around her. I remember she had a voluminous navy blue towelling robe, with huge starfishes and sunflowers on it, and us three kids gratefully huddled together inside it.

Eventually, people in a fishing boat heard us screaming, and came alongside, and a fisherman tied our boat up to his. He was very careful, or he seemed to be, and he and my father handed first us kids, and then mother, through to his boat, and our rowing boat was towed behind.

As soon as we were in the fishing boat there was this almost hysterical laughter, and I remember feeling very cold, and being unable to stop shivering.

Our story went back to the town, it spread like wildfire, everybody knew about it, and people talked about it endlessly. My father was regarded as a bit of a hero: Dad the sharkbasher. If he'd caught the thing, then I suppose he would have been completely heroic.

We all talked about it incessantly, too, and probably made out we were far braver than we were. And there was lots of re-enactment, I remember that we made mud pools, one of us would be crawling along, playing the shark, and the others screaming and shouting: 'Kill the shark!'

Two or three weeks later, near the end of our holiday, the shark was caught by one of the local fishermen, and put in the main square for people to go and see. It was real gargoyle time. This thing was strung up on a pole, and it looked horrific because they had slit its stomach open, all its innards had fallen out, and all the intestines were lying in a pile underneath it, with flies buzzing around. Everybody came to see it, and people took pictures.

We all touched it. There's no texture quite like a shark; its skin is very abrasive, like leather with steelwool attached to it. If you ran your hand hard against it, you would suffer the equivalent of stinging nettles.

My daughter likes to hear this story a lot. She's five now, so she likes monstrous or horrific tales. She hasn't seen *Jaws*, I'm keeping that for a few years' hence - besides, I nearly had a thrombosis when I saw *Jaws* - that grey fin moving relentlessly through the water, coming towards you . . .

I suppose I do go on about it. I'll come across friends I haven't seen for 20 years, and the first thing they'll say is: 'Still going on about that shark?' So I think it must have really affected me.

I've never since had a closer sense of feeling I was going to die, and so critics, job rejection, everything else daunting in life seems less frightening in relation to that.

E

Shark Attack

When he was eight, British actor Richard E Grant went on holiday to Mozambique with his parents and his younger brother. One day, they went fishing in a small motor boat on an enormous lagoon called Santa Martina. After a few hours, the motor stopped and they couldn't start it again. They shouted, but nobody heard them. Suddenly, something moved in the water near the boat.

At first they thought it was a dolphin. But then they realised it was a big, grey shark. It started knocking the boat. The boat rocked from side to side, and they nearly fell into the water. They were terrified. Grant's father tried to push the shark away, and his mother held him and his brother. They thought they were going to die.

After a few hours, people in a fishing boat heard them and took them home. Everybody in the town heard about their story and talked about it. Grant's father became a local hero. Two or three weeks later, a local fisherman caught the shark and put it in the main square. Everybody came to see the monster and took pictures of it.

Many years later, when Grant saw the film *Jaws*, he relived the terrible experience.

Inside Out Student's Book Elementary, page 37

F

What happened to wotsisname? He was one of 396 friends

Pal, mate or buddy, modern life's pressures create a high turnover in companionship, reports Lewis Smith.

COUNT them carefully. You have 33 friends now, yet within a few years you will have lost touch with all but a handful. They won't even send you a Christmas card.

Whether they are pals, mates, chums or buddies, you will go through 396 friends in a lifetime but will have only 33 at any one time, says a study.

Death, rows and disinclination all chip away at the coterie of companions surrounding you now, and it is only a matter of time before 363, 11 out of 12, are lost to you. Of the 33 people counted as friends for now, only six at most can be described as close friends in whom you can confide and trust to be there when you need a shoulder to cry on.

Best friends, according to the study of 10,000 people, are not even the ones that you see most of - you see them just once every eight weeks - but they are the ones thought of more often than any other. The remainder of the 33 are merely for social occasions and are made up of workmates past and present, old school friends, drinking cronies and the occasional neighbour.

This stiff grey fin was moving purposefully towards us ...

(*Sunday Times*, 2nd February 1997)

Genre and pattern of organisation:

Newspaper article with the socially-oriented purpose of entertaining as opposed to giving news. / First person 'narrative' / SPSE / 'Hybrid' of written and spoken account

Language choices:

Lots of **past simple** to move the story on.

Some **past continuous** to give prominence to background activity / sense of activity, duration and reader-involvement (*The boat was rocking... My mother was screaming* etc)

One instance of **past perfect** to give gravity to situation (*I had never seen my parents ...*)

Present simple / **Present perfect** to return the reader to the here and now / facilitates 'impact on now' (*It's something which never leaves you ... I remember feeling ...*)

Passive towards the end, keeps focus on protagonists (*... our rowing boat was towed behind ... the shark was caught*)

Lots of **stative verbs** in the evaluation stage (*It seemed, I thought, I was feeling*)

Lots of **hyperbole, emphatic + descriptive language** (*the monster started ... my mother clutched ... we were just terrified, in obvious terror*)

Informal language to foster familiarity and empathy (*conked out chomp up bash*)

Reference: mainly *I, we, them, it* etc / exophoric reference to 'Jaws'

Ellipsis: Simple textual ellipsis (*We took out a small rowing boat .. and ~~we~~ went fishing / I remember feeling very cold and ~~I remember~~ being unable to stop shivering*)

Conjunction: mostly temporal (*Suddenly..., It then ..., Eventually, ...*) / 'and' is only additive

Lexical cohesion: direct repetition (*boat, shark, screaming*) / lots of synonyms (*thing/monster/beast, bashing/rocking/ramming*) / meronymy (*boat/oars, shark/fin*)

Shark attack! (*Inside Out Elementary Student's Book*, Kay and Jones, 2003)

Genre and pattern of organisation:

Newspaper article adapted for elementary level EFL use / Third person 'recount' / SPSE – one eg of 'evaluation' at time of incident, no coda / Short 2-clause (max) sentences with concise, easily-identifiable theme / whole sentences/stretchers omitted.

Language choices:

All verbs in **past simple** – less texture and laying to process → more a one-dimensional recount

No passive – clearer emphasis onto 'doer'/protagonists

Simplified language/lexis (*there was this disturbance → something moved, bashing → knocking, tipped → fell, clutched → held conked out → stopped*)

Reference: all pronominal anaphora / exophoric reference to 'Jaws'

Substitution + ellipsis absent. A few examples of simple textual ellipsis (... heard them and ~~they~~ took them home) / one example of elided language reinstated: (*and they took pictures (of it)*)

Conjunction: all temporal and 'and'

Lexical cohesion: lots of direct repetition (*the shark*) one example of synonymy (*the monster*)