

Authentic Materials and AI: Using modified elaborated input to improve vocabulary

Fernando Rubio

Yale Center for Language Study

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Goals for today

This workshop will help participants develop practical strategies for working with authentic materials and enhancing learner comprehension. By the end of the workshop, participants will be able to:

- ✓ Identify the advantages and limitations of using authentic materials.
- ✓ Implement modified elaborated input, following Long (2020).
- ✓ Integrate AI tools to support learners' comprehension of authentic texts.
- ✓ Apply and practice strategies for modifying authentic texts to increase comprehensibility and promote vocabulary acquisition.

Authentic input



Authentic input

- Became a central component of L2 teaching in the 70s and 80s with the advent of CLT (emphasis on real-world communication)
- Learners find it more **interesting and relevant**
- Provides insights into **culture**
- Exemplifies how grammar and vocabulary function in **real communicative contexts**
- Pragmatic awareness: it exposes learners to different **registers, idioms, and discourse patterns**
- It's an excellent source of input, which is a crucial ingredient for acquisition

But...

- May be psycholinguistically inappropriate due to its complexity ($i+10$ instead of $i+1$)
- It often includes **idioms, cultural references, humor, or pragmatic norms** beyond what lower/intermediate-level learners can handle
- They are not designed to facilitate progression

Possible solutions

- Simplify:

Version	Sentence
Genuine	The only witness just caught a glimpse of the driver as he fled the scene , so she could only provide the police with a rough description .
Simplified	A woman was the only person who saw the accident. She saw the driver for only a moment. The driver did not stop. He immediately drove away fast. The woman could only tell the police a little about him.

Long,
2020

Possible solutions

- Elaborate:

Version	Sentence
Genuine	The only witness just caught a glimpse of the driver as he fled the scene , so she could only provide the police with a rough description .
Simplified	A woman was the only person who saw the accident. She saw the driver for only a moment. The driver did not stop. He immediately drove away fast. The woman could only tell the police a little about him.
Elaborated	The only person who saw the accident, the only witness , was a woman. She only caught a glimpse of the driver, just saw him for a moment, because he fled the scene , driving away fast without stopping, so she could only provide the police with a rough description of him, not an accurate one.

Possible solutions

- **Scaffold:** Pre-teach key vocabulary, provide comprehension guides, build schemata, break tasks into manageable steps.
- But these are precisely the tasks that make classroom use of authentic texts inauthentic.



Modified elaborated input

- Elaborated input that turns unwieldy sentences into shorter, more readable ones
- Maintains the level of complexity of the original text
- Retains the advanced vocabulary or expressions that are the teaching targets

Modified elaborated input

- **Preserves Linguistic Complexity:** Unlike simplified texts, it keeps grammatical and lexical richness intact, crucial for language development.
- **Promotes Reading Strategies:** Learners develop skills like inference-making and contextual guessing.
- **Supports All Proficiency Levels:** Especially effective for **intermediate and advanced learners** who can handle complex input but need additional support for comprehension.
- **Vocabulary acquisition:** Explicit lexical elaboration results in increased acquisition (Kim, 2006)

An example



<https://www.bbc.com/weather/articles/cjry2q8ppllo#:~:text=For%20just%20two%20weeks%20at,first%20stumbled%20upon%20in%201973>

For just two weeks at the end of February, hundreds of people *gather* at Yosemite National Park for something very special.

With just the right conditions, the Horsetail Fall down El Capitan glows orange like *molten fire*.

This natural phenomenon was first *stumbled upon* in 1973.

There are a few things that need to come together at exactly the right time for it to happen.

At the end of February, the Sun is in exactly the right position in the sky so that five to 15 minutes before sunset, the Sun's rays pass directly through the waterfall.

Clear skies are needed for a good sunset and there needs to be enough water flowing down the side of El Capitan.

Good snow is needed through the winter so that once the late February sunshine has some strength, it will start to melt the snow.

With enough *snowmelt*, water runs over the edge of the fall.

The best views of the Yosemite firefall are possible when there is a lot of water so that the *glowing stream* is more pronounced.

However, even with a *trickle*, the area of mountain where the water falls will

still glow orange.

Chatbot Prompt

I have an authentic text that I want to make more comprehensible for language learners. Modify the text by elaborating the words or expressions that are placed between asterisks. Leave anything that is not between ** unchanged. Try to keep the resulting text at a similar length as the original (no more than 10%–15% increase in length) and maintain the same level of syntactic complexity but make the marked vocabulary more comprehensible by adding elaborations. Try to incorporate variety in modification strategies: appositions, paraphrasing, restatements, added redundancy, synonyms, and context clues, not just parentheses.

For just two weeks at the end of February, hundreds of people **gather**, coming together at Yosemite National Park for something very special.

With just the right conditions, the Horsetail Fall down El Capitan glows orange like **molten fire**, shining as if it were made of melted metal.

This natural phenomenon was first **stumbled upon**, discovered by accident, in 1973.

There are a few things that need to come together at exactly the right time for it to happen.

At the end of February, the Sun is in exactly the right position in the sky so that five to 15 minutes before sunset, the Sun's rays pass directly through the waterfall. Clear skies are needed for a good sunset and there needs to be enough water flowing down the side of El Capitan.

Good snow is needed through the winter so that once the late February sunshine has some strength, it will start to melt the snow. With enough **snowmelt**, the water from the melting snow runs over the edge of the fall.

The best views of the Yosemite firefall are possible when there is a lot of water so that the **glowing stream**, a bright, shining flow of water, is more pronounced.

However, even with a **trickle**, a thin and slow flow of water, the area of mountain where the water falls will still glow orange.

Authentic text vs. Modified elaborated version

Readability tests

Flesch Reading Ease (FRE)

Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level (FKGL)

Original

Words	Sentences	Syllables	FRE	FKGL
195	10	274	68.67	8.55

Modified elaborated

Words	Sentences	Syllables	FRE	FKGL
224	10	310	67.02	9.48

Your turn

Activity 1

1. Access the materials folder for this workshop at <https://tinyurl.com/5yp537ck>
2. Open the Activities Google Doc and download it as a Microsoft doc (File > Download > Microsoft doc).
3. Follow the instructions for Activity 1

Share out

- Share the results of your exercise with the rest of the group



Even better

- If you upload a vocabulary frequency list for your language to ChatGPT or another chatbot, you can ask it to elaborate every word beyond a certain level (e.g., the 3000 most frequent).

3000 most common according to the COCA frequency list:

For just two weeks at the end of February, hundreds of people gather at Yosemite National Park for something very special. With just the right conditions, the Horsetail Fall down El Capitan glows orange like molten fire. This natural phenomenon was first stumbled upon in 1973. There are a few things that need to come together at exactly the right time for

it to happen...

Here is the list of words from the provided text that fall outside the top 3000 most common entries in the COCA frequency list:

1.gather

2.molten

3.phenomenon

4.stumbled (from “stumbled upon”)

5.sunset

6.snowmelt

7.trickle

Notes:

- These words are either not in the top 3000 or are not present in the COCA list based on the matched frequencies.
- Terms like “El Capitan,” “Yosemite,” and “Horsetail Fall” are proper nouns or specific geographic references and are generally not included in high-frequency word lists for learners.
- Multi-word expressions like “molten fire” or “glowing stream” were assessed based on their head words.

Your turn

Activity 2

1. Download HSK list and save it locally as an Excel file
<https://tinyurl.com/7y6ssjvp>
2. Open the AI chat (e.g., ChatGPT) and upload the HSK vocab list.
3. Copy and paste prompt 1 below into the same chat.
4. Copy the Chinese text below into the chat and hit ENTER
5. Review the result and make sure you are happy with it
6. Copy and paste prompt 2 below and hit ENTER
7. Share your results with the group

Share out

- Share the results of your exercise with the rest of the group



Your turn

Activity 3

1. Keep the same AI chat open
2. Use a text of your choosing
3. Repeat the practice, modifying the prompt if needed
4. Ask the AI bot to propose some activities for your students to practice the new vocabulary

Text to audio

- New vocabulary is acquired faster if the learner is exposed to new words in different modalities (e.g., reading and listening)
- Google's NotebookLM can turn your text into a podcast

The Ephemeral Inferno: Unpacking the Science and Serendipity of Yosemite's Firefall



References

- Long, M. (2020). Optimal input for language learning: Genuine, simplified, elaborated, or modified elaborated? *Language Teaching*, 53(2), 169–182.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444819000466>
- Kim, Y. (2006). Effects of Input Elaboration on Vocabulary Acquisition Through Reading by Korean Learners of English as a Foreign Language. *TESOL Quarterly* 40(2), 341-373

Thank
you!

fernando.rubio@yale.edu