This Looks Familiar

Levels
Intermediate; English for Science and Technology course

Aims
Introduce the use of reading strategies

Class Time
1–2 hours

Preparation Time
1–2 hours

Resources
Content textbooks or academic journals

When students read a text in the target language that contains content with which they are familiar, they can focus on reading and vocabulary recognition strategies. Problem solving and translation activities can let students know how much they have understood. Although many teachers frown on using translation, if students are training for positions that will require them to paraphrase the content of an article for colleagues in their first language, translation is an authentic activity in terms of what students will eventually be required to do with material they read.

Procedures

1. Locate a chapter from a textbook or journal the technical content of which is directed at nonspecialists. Develop a vocabulary, problem solving, translation/interpretation, and main idea comprehension worksheet (see Appendix below).
2. Quickly introduce a selection of reading strategies (e.g., prediction, previewing, skimming, scanning) and explain their purposes.
3. Instruct the students to read the title and subtitles of the article and to use this information to predict the content. Write their predictions on the board and do not erase them.
4. Pass out a vocabulary worksheet. Explain vocabulary cognates that appear in the passage (e.g., method/*método*). Ask students to look for cognates that are listed on the worksheet and also to find the words in the text, trying to define them from context to make sure that they are not "false" cognates. Encourage them to find cognates not on the list.
5. Have students solve problems from the text.
6. Have students translate or paraphrase sentences from the text. Then hold a general class discussion of the information.

7. Direct the students back to their earlier predictions. Have them determine how many of their predictions were correct.

Caveats and Options

1. Repeating the activity with a similar text will help students incorporate information from different sources.
2. The example included here is derived from a course for Reading English for Science and Technology at the Universidad de Guadalajara, Facultad de Ciencias Químicas in Mexico. Consequently, the examples here are in Spanish and relate to the topic of chemistry. However, similar activities could be developed for other scientific and technological fields.
3. The application activities in the lesson are intended to become progressively more task based: Students will read technical texts in order to gain information that allows them to solve problems or explain information to other people.

Appendix: Sample Worksheet

1. Word skills. The following words appear in the article. Before you read the text, try to guess the meaning of the words. They may be cognates with Spanish or they may be defined in the context of the passage. The paragraph number for each word is given before the word.

Paragraph	Line	Word	Cognate
1	22	to adapt	adaptar
3	2	absolute	absoluto
7	2	the balance	el balance
9	2	the length	la longitud
14	2	independent	independiente
15	1	complete	completa

2. Problem solving. Solve the following problems based on the information in the text. Then write your answers below.
   a. How many milliliters are there in 3 fluid ounces?
   b. Convert 1 pound 3 ounces to kilograms.
   c. How many liters are there in 1 measuring cup (8 fluid oz.)?
   d. A gasoline tank has a capacity of 18 gallons. Express this capacity in liters.

3. Interpretation. Read the following sentences that appear in the text. Translate them into Spanish in the space provided. If you do not know the exact Spanish word, paraphrase. Try to give the meaning of each sentence.
   a. The metric system of weights and measures is used in all scientific work.
   b. The metric system is very simple.
   c. Chemistry is a quantitative science, and much of the real meaning of chemistry is lost if the mathematical relationships are omitted in its study.
   d. Mass is proportional to weight.
   e. A particular natural event is called a phenomenon.
4. Main ideas. Look at the text again. Then answer the following questions in Spanish.
   a. The authors state the following equation: "Careful observation + Persistent search for truth + Intelligent thought = Progress." What does the equation mean?
   b. What is the main idea of Paragraph 6?
   c. What is the relationship between "a phenomenon," "a hypothesis," and "a theory"?

Contributor

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