

# Making Connections: On Fantasy, Applied Linguistics and Outcomes-Based Education

## ABSTRACT

It is argued in this article that literature is a resource for exploring constructs in non-literary fields of study. More specifically, we selected a fictional account of an “assessment event” in Terry Pratchett’s *Pyramids* as source material for teacher training. Pratchett’s fictional rendition of authority-based facilitator-learner interaction in an “oral assessment event” indicates that the novelist has a firm grasp of the interactional rules that govern this kind of exchange. The discourse in the fictional event follows the traditional Initiation-Response exchange pattern, with Feedback (IRF) suspended until the learner has successfully concluded the entire assessment process. Moreover, the assessment event is analysed from an outcomes-based education (OBE) perspective. The fictional interactional exchange (and the subsequent hands-on performance-based assessment in the novel) – with Pratchett in satiric mode – provides sufficient information for prospective teachers to define (hypothetical) specific outcomes, assessment criteria and range statements that could apply to the training of assassins in the Assassins’ Guild on the Discworld. Several worksheets are presented to illustrate how this particular fictional text may be used to examine practical aspects and theoretical constructs in English Language Teaching (ELT).

## Introduction

For some decades, literature has been used for purposes other than literary-aesthetic appreciation; indeed, numerous works focus attention on the usefulness of literature as a resource for language development in second and foreign language classrooms (cf. Di Pietro, 1983; Brumfit and Carter, 1986; Carter and Long, 1987; Collie and Slater, 1987; Carter and Walker, 1987; Greyling, 1993b; and Lazar, 1993). It is interesting to note that literature has been used extensively in the field of psychology as a resource to explain constructs in the psychotherapeutic domain. For example, Kopp (1972) refers to some of the classics in literature to illustrate that man’s constructions of reality remain the key to a meaningful existence – his references to literature include Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, and Ginsburg’s *Howl and other Poems*. Other examples include Jungian analyses of mythical narratives such as Johnson’s 1993 *The Fisher King & The Handless Maiden*, Verena Kast’s 1995 *Folk Tales as Therapy* and Lee Wallas’s 1985 *Stories for the Third Ear*. In a recent publication, Whitney and Packer (2000) focus on the usefulness of Shakespearean drama as a context for explaining key issues in the fields of leadership and management,

such as promotion; transfers; uses and abuses of perks and privileges; the art of persuasion; the value of mavericks in business enterprises; the relevance of Polonius's paradox; and the like. Another example of the trend, encountered in a distance-education module produced by the Department of Geology at the author's institution of origin, was the use of Goldratt's 1992 novel, *The Goal*, which was specifically written to show how certain workers, tools and machines cause "bottlenecks" that undermine productivity in a factory. Goldratt's intention, articulated in the web-based advertisement of the novel, is to "bring the reader to a higher level of understanding of the Theory of Constraints, so as to allow managers to implement a real process of on-going empowerment."

It is clear, therefore, that fictional narratives may be either used or produced deliberately to illustrate constructs from other specialised domains in the individual's world of experience.

### Aim of this article

The approach in this article is meant to be consistent with this trend where literature is used for purposes other than literary-aesthetic analysis. More specifically, a section of text from Terry Pratchett's *Pyramids* (pp. 14–52) is used (a) to draw comparisons between actual interactional data from classrooms and the fictional event; (b) to show how constructs from applied linguistics and language teaching may be used to interpret the excerpt of text; and (c) to use the premises of outcomes-based education (OBE) as a framework for interpreting the fictional account of the "assessment event".

### Methodological orientation

#### Applied linguistics as mediating among multiple disciplines

The methodological orientation in this study is founded on an often-articulated view that **applied linguistics** mediates among various disciplines (cf. Kramsch, 2000: 311; Widdowson, 2000a: 28; 2000b: 5). The process of applied linguistic mediation is relevant at various levels. First, an excerpt from a fantasy novel is interpreted, not as a literary work, but as fictional "education-related discourse data". The connection made here is that a comparative analysis of the discourse from three contexts, viz. the fictional "assessment event", teacher-dominated accuracy-based teaching and teacher-structured fluency-based teaching, yields insights not only about the heterogeneity of discourse in educational interaction, but also about how the Initiation-Response-Feedback exchange is transformed in each context. In arguing the case, we refer to **Conversation Analysis (CA)** as a discipline that focuses attention on the rules that govern facilitator-learner talk in the universe of discourse tasks in educational settings (Greyling, 1995: 26–27).<sup>1</sup> **Discourse Analysis (DA)** would also be relevant, specifically when the discourse structures associated with permutations of Initiation-Response-Feedback exchanges in the three discourse settings (Greyling, 1995: 19–45) are considered.<sup>2</sup> Promoting an awareness of the heterogeneity, as well as the rules and discourse structures that inform educational discourse, intended to empower prospective

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1. For examples of applied linguistic mediation between descriptive CA studies of classrooms, as well as other settings, and pedagogic design in the South African context, the reader is referred to Brokensha (2000a, 2000b), and Greyling (1998).
  2. This process of mediation in applied linguistics involves the implications of CA and DA, both of which are subsumed by the field of Pragmatics (cf. Levinson, 1983). Mediation implies that findings from other disciplines have to be reinterpreted to become useful in solving a language teaching problem in another context.

teacher optimally to exploit discursual options in the classroom, would place this approach in the field of **Critical Discourse Analysis**.<sup>3</sup> Second, the fictional assessment event is re-interpreted from the point of view of **outcomes-based education (OBE)**, as well as a selection of constructs from **English Language Teaching (ELT)**. The basic premises of OBE are used to interpret the fictional context of learning, namely, the Assassin's Guild, where training is offered to prospective assassins. The article is therefore intended to **promote a mediating and integrative approach to findings from various disciplines in pedagogic design aimed at sensitising prospective facilitators to the similarities and differences that obtain among various instances of IRF exchanges in classroom discourse, as well as the constructs from various disciplines that may be used to interpret a fictional account of an "assessment event" from a Pratchett novel.**

### **Methodological orientation**

The **methodological orientation** in this study involved the following aspects:

- (a) **Excerpt selection:** The excerpt of text was selected deliberately as it constituted a fictional account of an authority relationship between facilitator and learner in an "assessment event". The choice of text was Pratchett's *Pyramids* (pp. 14–52), specifically the interactional exchange between Mericet, assessor, and Teppic, the learner assassin. The focus is also on text selection as a stepping-stone to explore related topics, especially Pratchett's satiric intent in criticizing society, the irony of the outcome of the assessment event, and real-life issues such as assassinations.
- (b) **Defining constructs on the basis of cues from the excerpt of text:** Kelly's construct psychology was used to define the personal constructs of Teppic and Mericet as they are manifested in the discourse of the fictional event. Constructs are viewed as dichotomous, with elements of similarity and difference that are evident when specific experiences are analysed. Kelly (1955: 59–61) suggests the following **methodology**, based on the dichotomous nature of our experience, **for identifying constructs:**

If we choose an aspect in which A and B are similar, but in contrast to C, it is important to note it is the same aspect of all three, A, B and C, that forms the basis of the construct ... In its minimum context a construct is a way in which at least two elements are similar and contrast with a third.

Some of the constructs that are referred to in this article include initiative-maximising vs initiative-minimising teacher initiations, performance-enhancing vs debilitating anxiety, hostile vs friendly, mean vs caring, style conflict vs style harmony, and the like, as they are manifested in the textual evidence. As part of defining constructs, an analysis of the discourse is performed in terms of existing knowledge of classroom discourse produced within an authority relationship, with specific reference to a comparison of similarities and differences in the exchanges in oral assessment events, as well as accuracy-based and fluency-based language teaching.

- (c) **Defining specific outcomes, assessment criteria and range statements:** These are defined

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3. For a critical-reflective study of discourse in psychotherapeutic context, the reader is referred to Greyling, Heyns and Esterhuysen (1999: 37–57) who argue that the discourse of therapy is driven by the therapeutic constructs of the therapists. Similarly, in this article the three types of discourse under review represent permutations of the IRF sequence derived from different discourse contexts and the roles of the participants.

on the basis of the information communicated in the fictional text, specifically skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that pertain to the training of assassins.

- (d) **Designing worksheets:** Several worksheets that cover the arguments in this article, are included. The actual implementation of these worksheets will be reported on at a later stage. The main aim is to ensure that learners engage in inferencing activity where given information from various sources have to be interpreted to generate new information.

### **On authority relationships and the IRF sequence**

The authority relationship that obtains in classrooms allows the facilitator to structure different configurations of learning spaces. Although Initiation-Response-Feedback exchanges (Barnes, 1977; Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; 1992; Sinclair and Brazil, 1982; Mehan, 1985; Greyling, 1995) are endemic in all instructional discourse, the exchange type is manifested in different ways in accuracy-based and fluency-based teaching. The assessment event from Pratchett's novel also involves the IRF sequence; however, the Feedback move is suspended until the entire assessment event is concluded. The aspect that these three discourse contexts have in common is the IRF sequence, albeit that each context yields a typical manifestation of the exchange.

#### **The Mericet-Teppic exchange: a permutations of the IRF exchange**

The focus in this article is on the authority relationship associated with assessment exchanges between a facilitator and a learner. As stated above, the interactions between the master assassin, Mericet, and Teppic, follow the question-answer component of the IRF sequence, and it is noticeable that Mericet omits the feedback move:<sup>4</sup>

(1)

- T1: Mericet: What is the maximum permitted length of a throwing knife? **[Initiation]**  
T2: Teppic: Maximum length of a throwing knife may be ten finger widths, or twelve in wet weather (he recited). Throwing distance is ... **[Response]**  
T3: Mericet: Name three poisons acknowledged for administration by ear. **[Initiation]**  
T4: Teppic: Sir, wasp agaric, Achorion purple and Mustick, sir. **[Response]**  
T5: Mericet: Why not spime? **[Initiation]**  
T6: Teppic: S-sir, spime isn't a poison, sir. It is an extremely rare antidote to certain snake venoms, and is obtained – is obtained from the liver of the inflatable mongoose, which– **[Response]**  
T7: Mericet: /What is the meaning of this sign? (A complex rune on a card is shown to Teppic) **[Initiation]**  
T8: Teppic: is found only / .... (pause) I haven't the faintest idea, sir, but if it were the other way up, sir, it would be the thiefsign for "Noisy dogs in this house". **[Response]**  
T9: Mericet: Is the killing rope permitted to all categories? **[Initiation]**  
T10: Teppic: Sir, the rules call for three questions, sir. **[Response]**  
T11: Mericet: Ah. And that is your answer, is it? **[Initiation]**  
T12: Teppic: Sir, no, sir. It was an observation, sir. Sir, the answer you are looking for is that all categories may bear the killing rope, but only assassins of the third grade may use it as one of the three options, sir. **[Response]**

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4. In the excerpt above, the narrator's account of Teppic's inner speech has been omitted, and only the participants' actual verbal contributions are outlined in a turn-by-turn format.

- T13: Mericet: You are sure of that, are you? [**Initiation**]  
T14: Teppic: Sir. [**Response**]  
T15: Mericet: You wouldn't like to reconsider? [**Initiation**]  
T16: Teppic: Sir, no, sir. [**Response**]  
T17: Mericet: Very well. [**Boundary marker**] [**no feedback**]  
Now, I want you to proceed at your own pace towards the Street of Book-keepers .... (Pratchett, 1989, *Pyramids*, pp. 14–16)

### Oral assessment events in educational discourse

It is clear from the fictional oral-assessment event that the assessor, Mericet, does not employ the third move that is typical of IRF exchanges in classroom discourse. However, in accuracy-based approaches, we often encounter three-turn IRF sequences. In the following excerpts from Grammar-Translation, Audiolingual and Direct Method lessons, we find that the learner's role is restricted to finding the correct answer to a known-information question, with emphasis on feedback, overt correction and linguistic accuracy:

(2)

Turn	Participant	Turn-by-turn transcription
1	Teacher:	The last one. Quodpropinqabat navis sociorum? Quo? ( <b>Initiation</b> )
2	Pupil:	Quod. ( <b>Response</b> )
3	Teacher:	No. Quo doesn't mean quod. ( <b>Feedback</b> ) What does quo mean? ( <b>Initiation</b> ) (Greyling, 1987: 343)

(3)

Turn	Participant	Turn-by-turn transcription
262	Teacher:	The whole sentence ( <b>Initiation</b> )
263	Pupils:	(in unison) The tiler hooked the roof tiles onto the wooden beam. ( <b>Response</b> )
264	Teacher:	Right. ( <b>Feedback</b> ). (Greyling, 1987: 318–319)

(4)

Turn	Participant	Turn-by-turn transcription
170	Teacher:	And in the third word, what did we add? ( <b>Initiation</b> )
171	Pupils:	(several bids)
172	Teacher:	(nominates through gaze)
173	Pupil:	(P spells) e-s-t ( <b>Response</b> )
174	Teacher:	Right ( <b>Feedback</b> ). (Greyling, 1987: 294)

In excerpts (2), (3) and (4), we notice that learner responses are restricted to single-utterances.<sup>5</sup>

5. Teacher-dominated IRF exchanges have also been found in classroom discourse in other subjects. Various studies have shown the pervasive presence of IRF exchanges in teacher-dominated classroom discourse (Barnes, 1977; Sinclair & Brazil, 1982; Mehan, 1985; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1992). In a 1987 study, the author conducted a data-based study of classrooms across the curriculum, including mathematics, science, history, geography, and English, which confirmed the pervasive presence of IRF exchanges in classrooms (Greyling, 1987).

However, the normative expectation that we have when we engage in classroom interactions of this kind is that a **Teacher Initiation** is followed by a **single-utterance learner response**, and this **Initiation-Response sequence** is expected to be followed by **Teacher Feedback**.<sup>6</sup> The following typical characteristics are therefore associated with teacher-dominated, accuracy-based IRF exchanges:

- teachers engage in initiative-minimising teacher initiations;
- learners produce single-utterance (sometimes one-word) responses; and
- teachers provide form feedback in assessing the accuracy of learner responses.

The norms that govern discourse in fluency-based activity in pair and group work activities derive from the teacher's authority to structure a learning space in which experiential learning at a discourse level has to be carried out (cf. Greyling, 1995: 24). For example, in Appendix A, taken from Greyling (1999), it is shown that a **Teacher Initiation (turn 1)** may set up a **configuration of learners who then, as a Response move (turns 2–41), have to engage in extended learner-learner discourse to complete a communicative task in the fluency-based mode of classroom discourse, whence Teacher Content Feedback (turn 42) is provided to the extended learner response**. These features may be summarised as follows:

- Teachers engage in **initiative-maximising teacher initiations**, in which they specify configurations of learners or define learner roles for activity-based learning;
- These configurations of learners produce a **response to the teacher initiation** that consists of **multiple learner-learner exchanges across several turns-at-talk**; and
- **Teacher feedback** constitutes **teacher comments on the content and effectiveness of the learner messages** (i.e. content feedback).

### **Heterogeneity in classroom discourse**

Thus, if we compare the normative expectations we have of IRF sequences in the classroom, we have to ask why, in excerpt (1), Mericet does not provide Feedback to young Teppic. Does this mean that Pratchett does not have an adequate grasp of education-related discourse? Or is the discourse in an assessment event fundamentally different from discourse in classroom teaching sequences? This researcher could not find any discourse data in the literature on assessment events, and was then forced to elicit colleagues' opinions on oral examination assessments in the Department of English and Classical Culture at the UFS. Their unanimous view was that oral examination assessments do not include feedback moves directly after each learner response (while the event is in progress). The feedback move is only given after the event, once the assessors have conferred and arrived at a consensus assessment of the student's overall performance in the assessment event. This absence of feedback and back-channelling cues – as well as the accompanying uncertainty in the mind of the learner – is probably the reason that oral examinations elicit terror in most students! What this means is that Pratchett's fictional account of an assessment event follows the normative expectations associated with the discourse in oral assessment events, namely, that **an assessor's initiations in an oral examination are expected to be followed by learner responses, with the feedback move suspended until all the assessment activities and tasks have been concluded**.

This implies that classroom practitioners have to be aware of the fact that facilitator-learner

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6. The rules for teacher-dominated, accuracy-based interaction may be found in McHoul (1978: 183–213), while the rules for fluency-based interaction are discussed in Greyling (1995: 26–28).

discourse in the educational domain exhibits heterogeneity, and that classroom practitioners and teacher trainers have to have communicative competence to function within the normative framework that governs the universe of discourse tasks in educational contexts. In sum, the Mericet-Teppic exchange exhibits the following characteristics:

- Mericet's content-focused **initiations** involve the master assassin's asking primarily known-information questions;
- Teppic's **responses** focus on the required information, and his initiative is restricted to his recalling the information that he has memorised; and
- Mericet **does not provide feedback** to Teppic at the end of this sequence of exchanges; rather, the feedback is provided at the conclusion of the performance-based assessment phase (cf. page 53 of *Pyramids*, when Mericet, on being asked by Teppic whether he had passed, answers, "That would appear to be the case").

### **The absence of feedback: the assessment event as role change for the learner**

The next question is why feedback is absent from the assessment event. Feedback is a cue to the learner (involved in teaching exchanges in the classroom) that his responses are on target and that, between them, the facilitator and the learner are engaged in establishing common ground, which will allow them to deal successfully with the material in the lesson (i.e. the process of building common ground in a cumulative sense). In the latter context, the learner is a secondary knower who has to be assisted by the teacher to achieve primary knower status (cf. Berry, 1981). However, when the learner is subjected to oral assessment, the assessor works from the assumption that the learner has concluded the course and has achieved mastery. Thus, the assessor wants to establish whether the learner has indeed achieved primary knower status; namely, that complete mastery has been achieved and the learner deserves to be assigned the desired status as primary knower. The learner is now in a position where his mastery of the knowledge has to be complete, with no room for error. Perhaps Pratchett is criticising the educational system for sub-100% passes, and he might be saying that a 65 % pass in any professional examination may result in a below-par 65 % service!

### **Assessment and mastery learning**

Several questions may be asked about the Mericet-Teppic assessment event. First, if the assessment is a one-on-one event, how does the assessor ensure that the event is fair? Perhaps, the Assassins' Guild should be reported to the Patrician of Ankh-Morpork for unfair educational practices, and that at least three master Assassins undertake assessments so that possible subjectivity may be replaced by intersubjective (and more reliable) assessments. The assassins' counter-argument would probably be that assessment in this context is indeed objective. Failure in the assessment event, it is stated in the novel (*Pyramids*, pp. 16, 17 and 44), would mean death – success implies that the learner assassin was skilled enough not to kill himself in the course of the assessment event! Perhaps Pratchett is suggesting that successful completion of any course should not be graded on a continuum but rather on a dichotomy of 100 % mastery or failure!

Mericet's construction of his role as an assessor is interesting. He views himself as the master assassin who has the right to ask misleading questions (to catch out the examinee), or who asks trick questions, casting doubt on a correct answer for purposes of checking how well established the answer is in the mind of the examinee (see turn 13). Moreover, he sees fit to ask more than the stipulated three questions (see turns 9 and 10), and in keeping with his authority role as superordinate, he interrupts Teppic in mid-sentence so that he may proceed to the next question

(see turn 6). Mericet's "hostile" approach is meant to intimidate Teppic – his aim is to establish, grudgingly and to his own sadistic satisfaction, that Teppic has indeed gained primary knower status!

Teppic is aware of the rules of assessment: he knows that not more than three questions may be asked. However, he nonetheless accepts the absolute authority of the untouchable Mericet who operates outside the rule system. Teppic's 100% mastery of his field is evident from these interactions: a) the references suggesting that he knows the correct answers, (b) he is not confused by the trick distractors that are used by Mericet, and (c) the narrator informs the reader that Teppic has committed the assassin's manual to memory (*Pyramids*, pp. 14–16). In spite of Mericet's attitude, Teppic shows, in the assessment event, that he has progressed from secondary knower (incomplete knowledge and skills) to primary knower (mastery of content and skills).

### Cognitive and social dimensions of interaction

Several classroom researchers refer to the interaction between the cognitive and the social dimensions of learners' experience in the classroom. The narrator in *Pyramids* provides an account of Teppic's inner experience of the assessment event. So, in the fictional account, the reader encounters both the actual words of the exchanges (i.e. the social and interorganism dimension) and Teppic's unspoken and subjective inner experience (i.e. cognitive experience) of the assessment process. Following the social-constructivist position, learning should indeed focus on the reciprocal relationship between subjective experience and the social dimensions of interaction, while facilitators should seek to elicit socially-significant learning (cf. Vygotsky, 1978; cf. also Au, 1990; 271–274, Oxford, 1997: 448). In the excerpt, the reader is provided with a fictional account of this interface between the cognitive and the social.

### Inner and externalised speech

Let us take a look at an excerpt where the description of inner speech is included:

(2)

'A fine night, sir,' said Teppic. The examiner gave him a chilly look, suggesting that observations about the weather acquired an automatic black mark, and made a note on his clipboard.

'We'll take a few questions first,' he said.

'As you wish, sir.'

'What's the maximum permitted length of a throwing knife?' snapped Mericet.

Teppic closed his eyes. He'd spent the last week reading nothing but *The Cordat*, he could see the page now, floating tantalizingly just inside his eyelids – they never ask you lengths and weights, students had said knowingly, they expect you to bone up on the weights and lengths and throwing distances, but they never –

Naked terror hotwired his brain and kicked his memory into gear. The page sprang into focus.  
(Pratchett, 1989, *Pyramids*, p. 14)

This excerpt signals that the learner, Teppic, perceives Mericet as hostile ('a chilly look, suggesting that observations about the weather acquired an automatic black mark'). Thus, the construct *hostile versus friendly* is activated in making sense of the facilitator's approach. We could use other labels to describe Teppic's experience of Mericet, for example, *disinterested versus concerned*, *mean versus caring*, or even *ruthless versus compassionate*. We are able only to



arrive at an account of Teppic's experience when we consider the textual evidence, namely, words and phrases such as "a chilly look" and "naked terror". Another construct that may be used here is *supportive versus defensive climate*. Du Plooy-Cilliers and Olivier (2000: 166) provide an outline of key characteristics associated with these poles in interpersonal communication. A *supportive climate* is associated with empathy, equality, spontaneity and problem orientation, while a *defensive climate* is characterized by superiority, neutrality, control and delayed evaluation. It is obvious from the account of Teppic's experience that he perceives the climate as threatening and defensive.

There are several questions that we may ask at this point: (a) How do we obtain reliable and valid information about subjective experiences from participants in educational settings? This question would lead naturally into a discussion of **research methodology**, the use of questionnaires, anxiety scales, repertory grid tests, and the like. Indeed, Horwitz (2001: 112) refers to students' "uncomfortable experiences" in language classes, alluding to the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) as an instrument that may be used to measure learner anxiety. At this juncture, one has to note the-chicken-or-the-egg dilemma. Does poor language learning lead to anxiety, or does anxiety lead to poor language learning? Or do we have here a two-directional, spiral-like interaction between the two variables (cf. Macintyre, 1995: 90-99)?

Moreover, the Mericet-Teppic interactions prompt the following questions: (a) How aware are facilitators of the impact of their teaching styles on learners' learning experiences? (b) How does one match one's teaching style and learners' learning styles? (c) How do teachers deal with and identify style harmony and style conflict in interactions with learners (cf. Oxford, 1997: 450)? (d) How do facilitators develop a critical awareness of the impact of their behaviours on learners, especially if these are anxiety-provoking and face-threatening (Macintyre, 1995; and Horwitz, 2000)? (e) What are the cues from learners that indicate to facilitators that their approach has established an environment that either supports or militates against learning, both at an affective and a cognitive level? (f) How do facilitators ensure that they foster a supportive rather than a defensive climate in interpersonal communication with their learners (Du Plooy-Cilliers and Olivier, 2000: 166)? (g) If first impressions are important (cf. the "primacy effect"), how should facilitators present themselves to avoid negative expectations (Du Plooy-Cilliers and Olivier, 2000: 46)? (h) Or should one take note of the recency effect where the latest information gleaned from interactions with a person is paramount (Du Plooy-Cilliers and Olivier, 2000: 46-47)?

### **Performance-enhancing versus performance-debilitating anxiety**

Teppic experiences performance-enhancing terror, elicited by Mericet's first question and general attitude.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, his expectations of the facilitator have been built up over some time so that his experience of the master assassin is guided by these expectations. The suggestion, it seems, is that some anxiety in the learning process may have a positive impact on learner performance. The question is, however, what the threshold is beyond which such anxiety becomes debilitating (cf. Horwitz, 2001:112-121)? Teppic may be experiencing situation-specific anxiety which is not generalised beyond assessment situations, nor perhaps interactions with the Mericets of this world (cf. Horwitz, 2001:115).

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7. The success rate in an assessment event of this kind, it is stated in the text (p. 12), is 50 %, "you had one chance in two unless you drew old Mericet as examiner, in which case you might as well cut your throat at the start". Elsewhere (on p. 53), Mericet's smile is described as "thin and dried up, a smile with all the warmth long ago boiled out of it, people normally smiled like that when they had been dead for about two years under the broiling desert sun".

## **Knowledge and skills**

The interactional exchange in (1) above is the prelude to the skills-phase in Mericet's assessment of Teppic. In outcomes-based education, it is claimed that learners are required to master the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with a specific learning field. Given the textual evidence in excerpt (1), one would be able to define the following specific outcomes, related to the **knowledge base** that an assassin would have to master; indeed, such mastery is a **prerequisite for the practical skills** that have to be exhibited in the second phase when performance-based assessment is used. The knowledge base (derived from excerpt 1, and this is not a comprehensive account) may be couched in terms of specific outcomes, outlined directly below:

**Specific Outcomes:** By the end of the oral assessment phase, the prospective assassin has to exhibit 100 % **mastery of the knowledge base** required for the profession. From the Initiation-Response sequence, it is clear that the following knowledge base is critical:

- utilising assassins' equipment;
- throwing knives;
- the weather-related use of various throwing knives;
- poisons to be administered by ear;
- the differences between poisons and antidotes;
- sources of poisons and antidotes;
- signs and insignia used by the various guilds in Ankh-Morpork;
- the various categories of assassins; and
- the use of the killing rope by the various categories of assassins.

The **oral assessment phase** is followed by what Dreyer (2000: 273) would refer to as **performance-based assessment**. The specific outcomes, assessment criteria and range statements for the second phase are presented in table form in a section below. Hamayan (1995) would prompt one to ask what other forms of assessment are available to the Assassins' Guild, and what kind of cross-validation they might introduce to promote the validity of their assessment.

In Teppic's case, he is required to survive all the traps that the assessor places in his way to the target, who then has to be "inhumed" (i.e. the opposite of exhumed, meaning: to be killed) as a final test.

Teppic passes the two-phase assessment event, albeit that his intention to fail is thwarted by what may only be described as an irony – he decides at the last moment that he is not a killer, and desires to fail, but as irony will have it, his arrow, directed away from the "victim" hits a nail and is ricocheted so that it still hits the "body" (cf. *Pyramids*, pp. 48, 49, 53). Pratchett seems to suggest here that once a good man is on the back of the tiger of evil, he cannot get off. This may be criticism levelled against society where often the individual who falls into the trap of crime finds it difficult to extricate himself from anti-social activity.

### **Specific outcomes and assessment criteria**

Given Teppic's successful and measurable behaviours in the practical assessment phase, one may backtrack from the completed assessment event to formulate the specific outcomes that Teppic was required successfully to achieve. If we had to define **specific outcomes** for the training of assassins, we might produce an outline such as the following:

- (1) Taking proactive self-protective action to prevent one's own death as an assassin;
- (2) Moving with stealth and speed along buildings, and
- (3) Taking reactive self-protective action in the face of a life-threatening act of aggression.

Next, we may generate the following assessment criteria and range statements as guidelines for establishing that the specific outcomes (1, 2 and 3 above) have been achieved.

SO1	Taking proactive self-protective action to prevent one's own death as an assassin	Range statement
AC1	Use daggers to climb up a wall, thrusting "two slivers of Klatchian steel" in between bricks (pp. 30–31);	At this level, learner assassins scale up and down walls, cut glass, oil hinges, detect traps and ambushes, recognise and disable poison traps, using their auditory and visual skills in a variety of contexts.
AC2	cut glass from a window pane with "diamond compasses" so that the building may be accessed from the outside (p. 31);	
AC3	oil hinges of windows and doors to ensure noiseless entry (p. 34);	
AC4	detect traps and ambushes by means of auditory skills (p. 34);	
AC5	check one's path for dislodged tiles on a roof (p. 42);	
AC6	check one's path for tripwires on a roof (p. 42);	
AC7	check and clear one's path of traps (pp. 43–44);	
AC8	recognise poison traps, for example, needles covered with bloat <sup>8</sup> (p. 44);	
AC9	use armoured gloves to prevent poison traps (p. 44);	
AC10	prepare an extended rod from smaller rods (p. 46);	
AC11	use an extended rod with a mirror attached to the rod to explore a room for dangers (p. 46);	
AC12	identify and disable window traps (p. 46);	
AC13	use clay, magnets and other materials in detecting poison caltraps (p. 47); and	
AC14	use priests (i.e. metal-reinforced overshoes) to protect the assassin against poison traps (p. 47).	

SO2	Moving with stealth and speed along buildings	Range statement
AC1	scale walls and buildings, using line and grapnel (pp. 12, 24, 27–28; 30–31; 43; 46);	At this level, learners have to move around with optimal stealth up and down buildings, using a variety of technical aids such as line and grapnel, knives and crampons.
AC2	hang by one hand above city streets (p.12);	
AC3	use daggers to climb up a wall, thrusting "two slivers of Klatchian steel" in between bricks (pp. 30–31); and	
AC4	use crampons to move more easily along or up a wall (p. 46).	
SO3	Taking reactive self-protective action in the face of a life-threatening event.	Range statement
AC1	deal constructively with falling down a building while the event is in progress (pp. 30–31);	At this level, learner assassins have to be able to

8. Pratchett (1989) defines bloat as an extremely potent poison, extracted from the deep-sea blowfish. The fish protects itself against its enemies by inflating itself many times its normal size. The impact on humans is dramatic and fatal as each cell in the body enlarges approximately 2000 times. The explosive impact invariably distributes the victim's flesh in many directions and onto animate and inanimate entities in the immediate environment.

AC2	use daggers to climb up a wall, thrusting “two slivers of Klatchian steel” in between bricks (pp. 30–31); and utilise the appropriate knife in self-defence when responding to an ambush (p.34).	respond to any event in progress, especially where such an event is a threat to the assassin’s life.
AC3		

### The controversial topic of assassins

A question that is likely to surface when this excerpt from Pratchett is discussed, is whether the topic of assassins is indeed acceptable in an educational setting. It is at this point that Pratchett’s use of satire has to be considered, namely, his intent to ridicule society. The sub-text that he is communicating may be formulated as questions. First, how come the best education on the Discworld is available from the Assassins’ Guild? Perhaps, Pratchett is suggesting that in modern society education has ended up in the hands of fear-inspiring killers who do not have the interests of learners at heart. Next, why have the citizens of Ankh-Morpork approved and legalised Guilds for Thieves, Bandits, Smugglers, Assassins and Beggars (Pratchett and Briggs, 1994: 115–116)? Pratchett may be suggesting that governments should not legalise nor turn a blind eye to anti-social activities because they feel that in this way they may gain some control over these activities; rather, they should take a firm stand against them. This is the point made by Bryant (s.a.:117) when he posits that Pratchett may be questioning governments’ tolerance of all kinds of criminal elements who should be put to the sword of justice.

Apart from the satiric intent to ridicule and criticise society, Pratchett’s selection of the topic of assassins may become a stepping-stone to explore the horrors of assassinations and retaliatory action, e.g. the infamous assassinations of not only Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy, but also individuals like Sifisu Nkabinde and Johan Heyns in the South African context. Moreover, learners could be prompted to reflect on the impact of fiction on society, or they may examine the impact of computer games on modern youth, for example, MIT’s Assassins’ Guild, and the consequences when the boundaries between fantasy and reality become fuzzy in the minds of individuals. This kind of debate may develop learners’ awareness of values and attitudes within their life-and-world so that they may have a realistic appraisal of a world that has produced its steady stream of deranged individuals and horrific events.

### Proposed worksheets

In the second half of the article, several worksheets on the interpretations presented in the preceding sections are included. It was argued earlier that these worksheets could be used within a range of teaching methodologies, which would require learners to engage in information management and inferencing when given information from several sources are interpreted to generate new information.

### Worksheets on the Pratchett excerpt

In worksheet 1, learners have to read (a) McHoul (1979: 183ff), Mehan (1985) and Sinclair and Coulthard (1992) to gain an understanding of accuracy-based, teacher-dominated Initiation-Response-Feedback exchanges; (b) Greyling (1995: 19–27) to gain an understanding of the similarities and differences between accuracy-based and fluency-based classroom discourse, as well as the rules that govern these modes of interaction; and (c) the excerpt from Pratchett’s *Pyramids* (pp. 14–16) so that they may compare the similarities and differences in the exchange patterns in the fictional account of the assessment event and actual classroom exchanges.

### WORKSHEET 1

Read pages 14–16 before you answer the questions that follow below:

- (1) What are the main discursive differences between discourse produced in oral assessment events and ordinary teacher-directed IRF teaching exchanges?
- (2) What are the normative expectations that participants (facilitators and learners) have when they engage in the two kinds of educational discourse that are referred to in (1) directly above?
- (3) How do the two discourse types in (2) compare with discourse from fluency-based classroom discourse?

The next worksheet focuses on the roles of participants in instructional discourse, including the role of anxiety and affectively supportive environments as predictors of learner success. The following preparatory reading has to be done, namely, (a) Macintyre (1995: 90–99) and Horwitz (2001: 112–126) on language anxiety and achievement in a second language, performance-enhancing versus debilitating anxiety, as well as the role of anxiety in the Mericet-Teppic interaction; (b) Krashen and Terrell (1983) on affectively supportive learning environments; and (c) Vygotsky (1978), Au (1990) and Oxford (1997) on the relationship between the cognitive and the social in the learning process.

### WORKSHEET 2

Read pages 14–16 before you answer the questions that follow below:

- (1) How does Mericet construct his role as an assessor and should teachers adopt this kind of role in their interactions with learners? Explain your answer.
- (2) Would you describe the relationship between Mericet and Teppic as conducive to learning?
- (3) Explain the relationship between Teppic's subjective inner experience of the assessment event and the actual discourse with Mericet.
- (4) How would you access your learners' subjective experience of your teaching and their learning?
- (5) How would you interpret the role of anxiety in the Mericet-Teppic exchange?

The next two worksheets deal with outcomes-based education, as well as the contentious topic of assassins. Consistent with the NQF documentation, learners are expected to collect and manage information related to this topic, from the following sources, namely, (a) the website: <http://www.mit.edu/activities/assassin/masters.html>, to gain background knowledge on assassins in the context of games developed at MIT; (b) search for websites on assassins, for example, Martin Luther King's or John F. Kennedy's assassinations so that the notion of assassinations may be explored as a phenomenon; (c) Bryant, C. (s.a.) on the novels of Terry Pratchett as instances of parody and satire; (d) Spady (1994) on defining outcomes in learning environments; and (e) NQF Documentation, available at <http://www.sqa.org.za/docs/index.html>, on outcomes.

### WORK SHEET 3

Read pages 14–53 before you answer the questions that follow below:

- (1) How does Mericet view mastery learning?
- (2) What specific outcomes would you define for the assassins' training course if you had to use Pratchett's account of the assessment process and activities in the excerpt of text? Define at least ten specific outcomes.

- (3) Define the measurable specific outcomes that apply to the performance-based assessment phase of the event.
- (4) The novel deals with assassins – how responsible is it on the part of the teacher to use references to a fictional work on this particular theme?
- (5) What is the relationship between fiction and reality?
- (6) What impact does fiction have (or could fiction have) on children?

As a final worksheet, one may provide students with the following integrative task so that they may focus on various aspects of assessment:

#### **WORKSHEET 4:**

Read Hamayan (1995) on alternative assessment, and Dreyer (2000) on outcomes-based assessment, before you respond to the question that follows below:  
If you had to ask Mericet ten questions (that are critical of his assessment procedure), what would these be?

### **Conclusion**

The main aim of this article has been to show that an excerpt of fiction may be used to sensitise prospective facilitators to the heterogeneity that obtains in the universe of discourse tasks in classrooms. The facilitator's communicative competence must therefore include her mastery of the rules of interpretation and interaction that govern these permutations of the IRF interactional exchange, as well as other education-related discourse events. It was also shown that an excerpt of text may be used in defining specific outcomes, assessment criteria and range statements for "learning in a fictional context". It was suggested that the worksheet-based learning process could be used to ensure that prospective facilitators engage in creative thinking within a constructivist model of learning where learners are not viewed as passive receptacles of information, but as active participants who engage in interpreting and inferencing. Learners are likely to examine their attitudes and values when they are required to respond to a contentious topic such as assassinations! As a secondary aim, the approach could prompt learners to read more – one of the most significant means of obtaining comprehensible input and developing language proficiency.

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## Appendix A: Narrative technique and interactional data

### Narrative technique

**Level:** Intermediate, advanced

**Purpose:** Practising narrative skill

Producing coherent spoken and written texts

Focusing on learner-learner interaction

**Materials:** Picture cards

**Procedure:** Learners are asked to work in groups. They are handed their cards. The cards have to be put down so that the pictures face downwards. Learner 1 picks up a picture card and tells a story based on the picture. Learner 2 picks up the next picture, continues with the story told by learner 1, and has to link the story to the second picture, and so forth, until they have all taken at least two turns at talk. The learner who has the last card, ends off the story. After the oral phase learners have to write out a coherent text based on the pictures, or script a dialogue.

### Story-telling technique: Data

#### Turn Turn-by-turn transcription

1 T: Okay, morning class. Today we are going to tell stories... uhm in front of you you will see I've handed out two cards to each one of you uhm Tami is going to start telling a story he's going to pick up a card when he starts – and you are not allowed to pick this card until its your turn. Do you understand? You are not supposed to see this card before you it's actually your turn. So Tami is going to start, Lizette is going to continue by picking up the story and just linking it to Tami's story and we are going to make one big story. Okay, Tami. **[Teacher initiation]**

#### [Extended learner-learner exchange follows]

2 P1: (Non-verbal: he picks up a card, and turns it over. Silence – 15 seconds of wait time – picture of a car)  
Uhm ... last week was my birthday and for my birthday I wished that my father could buy me a bicycle, but to everyone's surprise he bought the latest, top-of-the-range Mercedes Benz

3 Gr: (laughter)

4 P1: and I was so thrilled and I used to go to school with it

5 Gr: (laughter)

6 P1: and uhm I made many friends

7 Gr: (laughter)

8 P1: and most of them are of the opposite sex, of course

9 Gr: (laughter)

10 P1: and everyone was fond of me

11 P2: (non-verbal: student picks up the next card – 5 seconds of wait time, while student picks up her card – picture of two people in a library)

Uhm ... (laughs nervously) well, okay, in this car of mine I often went to the library because on my bicycle I could take only one or two books, but in the car I could load up the whole back seat and the bonnet and everything full of books.. so they said I'm not allowed to come to the library anymore.

12 P3: (next student picks up the next card; 5 seconds wait-time – picture of a woman)

- My mom (laughs) my mom was waiting for me after I took the car for a spin because she did not like me going too late in the night with the car and I was one who liked speed – the need for speed, I used to call it – and she always prepared waited up for me and this this particular evening I had an appointment with her because she wanted to speak to me about something and I only arrived at about after twelve o'clock in the night and she became very cross with me.
- 13 P4: (picks up the next card; 9 seconds of wait time – picture of a guitarist)  
after we had quarreled for an hour I went to my room and I listened to heavy rock.
- 14 Gr: (laughter)
- 15 P5: (picks up the next card; 7 seconds of wait time – picture of trees)  
Uhm I then went outside and have a look at the trees after listening to heavy rock.
- 16 P6: (3 seconds of wait time)  
I once had a friend who liked reading, speeding, heavy rock uhm.. and he had the biggest Mercedes Benz I ever saw – and I forgot to pick up my card/ (picks up a picture of two royals)
- 17 Gr: (laughter)
- 18 P6: uhm he had he had a uncle who was a very important man and uhm they every day had this rituals and uhm he had a big book full of photographs and he showed me uhm one of his uncle.
- 19 P7: (picks up the next card; 8 seconds of wait time – picture of paddler)  
Now this friend of mine with his very important uncle uhm he decided that he doesn't have the need for speed any more he needs something else, and that was freedom, nature, a lot of water and the sun against his bare skin. He sold his Mercedes Benz
- 20 Gr: (laughter)
- 21 P7: he bought himself/he bought himself a canoe and he became one of those Camel men uhm all he needs is nature/
- 22 Gr: (laughter)
- 23 P1: (picks up the next card – picture of a baby)
- 24 Gr: (there is immediate laughter)
- 25 P1: and he became the professional canoeist but then a couple of months later he received a letter/
- 26 Gr: (laughter)
- 27 P1: telling him that one of his girlfriends is pregnant/
- 28 Gr: (laughter)
- 29 P1: and she is expecting a baby boy.
- 30 P2: (picks up the card; 2 seconds wait time – picture of baby)  
This baby boy grew up to be a great librarian
- 31 Gr: (laughter)
- 32 P2: he fixed up the whole U uhm the University of the Orange Free State SASOL library and it became quite a landmark for Bloemfontein.
- 33 P3: (picks up the next card; 3 seconds wait time – picture of castle)  
Okay, this boy's name was John and after he finished school he uh school, he went to university and after become a library (librarian), he did a course in architecture and after passing his uhm passing his uhm exams at the end after his four years or five years, he built himself a wonderful beautiful new house which he decided to call "Die Herberg"/
- 34 Gr: (laughter)

- 35 P4: (picks up the next card; 5 seconds wait time – picture of an old woman)  
And he met uhm a kind of oldish lady, but but he decided that she would be a very good mother for his little son.
- 36 P5: (picks up a card; 4 seconds wait time – picture of wshing)  
And this mother had a friend who was fond of washing/
- 37 Gr: (laughter)
- 38 P5: and she influenced that lady to also wash their their washing.
- 39 P6: (picks up card; 5 seconds of wait time – picture of dirty boy)  
Uhm this boy whose his friend's mother was in a TV commercial for uhm OMO washing-powder and uhm they then saw her son and he had a very dirty rugby shirt on and then they used him also for the OMO commercial.
- 40 P7: (picks up a card; 4 seconds wait-time – picture of TAB girl)  
Now this whole family started doing TV commercials because uhm they realized that there is a lot of money and his sister a very beautiful young lady became the newest TAB girl/
- 41 Gr: (subdued laughter; comment in Afrikaans about the TAB girl)
- 42 T: That was well done. [Teacher feedback] Can you tell me what tense did you use? Karien. (She continues with teacher-controlled, accuracy-based IRFs.)

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