

# Adapting a Text for Testing Purposes: Approach to Academic Reading and Writing Assessment Design in the Arab World

Larysa Nikolayeva

Faculty of English Language Studies, Majan College, Muscat, Oman

**Abstract**—Current research aims to help teaching practitioners at the undergraduate level to adapt a text for the purpose of testing academic reading and writing in the Arab world. It presents a detailed description of the process of text adaptation which is done to make selected reading suitable for the nature of the module, type of the testing items, students' proficiency and cultural environment. The paper focuses on a number of areas undergoing amendments such as text length, vocabulary and terminology, style, etc. According to the mentioned areas application of particular strategies is discussed. The research has been carried out on the basis of one text.

**Index Terms**—academic reading, academic writing, testing items, text adaptation, adaptation strategies

## I. INTRODUCTION

Academic reading and writing is one of the courses that ensures students' success in their studies throughout. Mastering basic skills of formal writing and knowing how to approach an academic text for comprehension, builds a strong ground for further learning. Academic environment is rather demanding. Responding to those demands, embracing the concepts and obtaining the skills of academic reading and writing would mean excelling in learning at a required pace. The role of the tutor in helping their students' to cope with this pace is extremely important. Tutors' understanding of students' attributes and attitudes as well as careful approach to teaching, choice of strategies, matter for the class and pave learners' way to success. On the other hand, the same factors should be considered at the stage of assessing of what was taught. Preparation of testing materials requires special attention of the involved tutors to ensure meeting course requirements and expectations.

Combined academic reading and writing assessment clearly involves testing of both skills simultaneously. Hence, the test item writer is responsible for selecting and preparing the text that would match a number of conditions arising from the nature of the test as well as student related factors. Choice of the reading material and tailoring it to the test is an art. It needs the mastery of amending, adjusting, simplifying, complicating, concealing and exhibiting wherever necessary. Test item writer has a variety of tools and a set of strategies at his/her disposal to work on selected reading. Text adaptation is a challenging task in the Arab world context. Gulf students' attributes and attitudes differ from the ones of other backgrounds (for further discussion see Section III, B). Therefore, standard approaches of text adaptation should be considered very carefully and in regards to the requirements of appropriateness before application.

The current paper presents a study of one text adapted for the purpose of testing students' academic reading and writing skills at the undergraduate level. It addresses a variety of amendments and provides reasoning for selection of their particular types based on Green & Hawkey's (2011) taxonomy. It focuses on studying the process of text manipulation for the purpose of testing academic reading and writing skills in Oman. The geography of the conducted research is highlighted here to demonstrate the need to address cultural elements of reading along with its structural (lexical, grammatical, syntactical, etc.) features in the process of text adaptation.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Text amendment for English language learners is a matter of wide discussions by English as a second language (EL2) reading material designers of various disciplines. The tendency to use authentic texts is supported by numerous educators (Krashen, 1985; Devit, 1997; Larsen-Freeman, 2002) as much as the trend to adapt reading materials by others (Long & Ross, 1993; Crossley, Yang, & McNamara, 2014). The choice is often made depending on the reader. Authentic text is usually defined as any type of reading 'written in the target language for the ... target language audience' (Green & Hawkey, 2001). Daskalos & Ling (2005) also specify that an authentic text is written for native English speakers. Adapted texts, on the contrary, are frequently used for EL2 beginners and students of intermediate level (Shook, 1997; Young, 1999). Variety of approaches to text manipulation at our disposal (Crandall, 1995; Davison & Kantor, 1982; Ellis, 1993) enables reading material designer to produce a text satisfying demands of his audience/students. The job of reading based test item writers is more complicated than just adaptation as they need to

match the text to multiple requirements of the test related to testing students' skills of reading and comprehension as well as to particular course materials.

#### A. *Advantages of Using Authentic Texts*

There are a lot of arguments in favour of using authentic texts in teaching EL2. They (authentic texts) are considered to be the most suitable reading material in terms of variety of *topics* related to the current developments of the society, economy, research, etc. Moreover, the texts can be easily obtained from a wide range of sources of print and online media (Roberts, 2014; Case, 2012). This is a relevant point especially in the context of Oman where the quality of writing of English language media needs to be developed. Though, it is just a matter of time as this sectors excels a lot with the support of the government.

Authentic texts are also considered to be more *natural* in terms of their organisation, use of grammar, and lexical items (Goodman & Freeman, 1993; Kuimova, 2011). It is believed that an authentic text can sometimes be easier than a simplified one. Due to various manipulations the text undergoes grammatical and syntactical changes that complicate comprehension (Long & Ross, 1993; Roberts, 2014). Reading ease tools though prove it different sometimes. Texts from journals for example would score 30 – 50 on Flesch-Kincaid reading scale. It means professional authentic text is difficult to read and understand for a non-native language speaker.

Another advantage of an authentic text quoted by many researchers is *motivation*. Roberts (2014) claims that students are motivated by the difficulty of reading. Putting extra efforts into understanding the reading content should be rewarded with satisfaction of learning new concepts and ideas developing ones comprehension skills and enriching personal vocabulary. This 'sink-or-swim' approach (Case, 2012) does not work with Arab students though. Lempke (2016) states that culturally determined lack of reading habits and therefore low motivation to read is not a good basis for challenging reading environment.

Some researchers stress upon the importance of authentic *cultural* information available in the texts (Kuimova, 2011), that would help students to familiarize themselves with the peculiarities of the source language culture and so, broaden their mind. It is though arguable in the context of the current study as the cultural and religious norms and values of the source language differ a lot from the target language one. The difference should be considered carefully in preparing a text for testing purposes in particular to avoid unexpected reactions or disruption of the students at the time of the exam.

#### B. *Advantages of Using Adapted Texts*

Reading materials are often simplified. 'Text Simplification is the task of reducing the complexity of a text without changing its meaning. Simplification can be applied at various linguistic levels, from lexical substitution to more global operations such as sentence splitting, paraphrasing or the deletion or reordering of entire clauses' (Alva-Manchego, 2017: 295). Approaches to text simplification might vary but there are definitely common concerns to be addressed.

First of all, direct *relevancy* to students' level and needs should be considered at the time of text amendment (Roberts, 2014). A text that is too demanding in terms of its length, vocabulary, grammar or any other feature related to the content taught in class prior to the test can interfere with students' comprehension.

*Text length* is one of the issues mentioned by students as an obstacle for comprehension and further synthesis of reading. Longer texts appear to be more difficult to deal with for EL2 students (Trites & McGroarty, 2005). Manipulating the length of the text is required for testing purposes as well. It is done to avoid excessive details unnecessarily overloading the text and increasing reading time (Roberts, 2014). The reason is the time constraints of the test that is allotted to read, comprehend and integrate. Shorter text containing all the components required by specifications of the test enable proper comprehension and response to the tasks (Trites & McGroart, 2005). The claim of the same researchers that a 600-words reading can contain basic elements of the text was taken as a ground for text length amendment of the text discussed in this paper.

*Motivation* is a factor playing an essential role in reader's comprehension success. As it was mentioned above (see Section A), readers of a particular (lower) level can be demotivated by text difficulty. Respectively, adaptation is a way to improve reader's motivation. Making the text more accessible allows students to understand provided passage as well as elicit the information within the set time constrains set by the test (Duarte, 2008).

Another point of importance in the process of text simplification is local *culture*. Middle Eastern society does not always accept western concepts as similarly appropriate or ethical. It might be related to gender interaction, family matters, both work and personal ethics, politeness or code of conduct. Hence, an authentic text breaching the norms of the reader's society should be avoided. An appropriate text would ideally reflect on local content, issues, and concerns (Richards, 2018) such as current developments and achievements or problems and their solution within the context of the researched culture.

Looking back at the on-going arguments in favour or against each of the text types approaches it is worth noting that 'neither side can provide empirical evidence to support its argument' (Green & Hawkey, 2011: 18). Hence, a text-for-test material designer can rely on his/her own judgement regarding the need to use an authentic or amended material.

Text amendment allows the tutor to relate selected reading materials to students' level and needs (Roberts, 2014). It helps learner's comprehension avoiding unclear, irrelevant or inappropriate concepts. Moreover, it addresses particular skills and knowledge elements learnt during the course. Exposing the students to any new content or linguistic structures at the time of the test would interfere with comprehension and, as a result, negatively affect testing outcomes.

Apart from the benefits of simplified texts for learners, also text simplification develops tutor's expertise (Richards, 2018). In-house material designers working with particular curriculum master the art of text amendment for a particular course and purpose as well as culturally and linguistically specific groups of students.

Finding a suitable authentic text written in a target language for testing purposes is a demanding task as test item writer has to relate a number of prescribed test tasks to the selected reading. Apart from the appropriateness of the content, the text should contain a number of elements enabling the student to demonstrate skills and knowledge acquired through a particular course/course material. Therefore, the question to adapt or not is mostly inapplicable in case with test preparation. The question here is to what extent should the text be adapted?

### III. STUDY BACKGROUND

Adapting a text for testing purposes requires attention to several elements. There are dependent and independent factors that should be considered carefully in the process of changing the text. This consideration would ensure successful match of the reading material with a variety of prescribed test items and other requirements of the learner. Hence, the above considerations can be divided into dependent and independent factors. Dependent impacting factors include prescribed test items. Independent ones are interest, appropriateness and accessibility (Green & Hawkey, 2011).

Current study sheds light on the peculiarities of text adaptation for testing purposes. It was conducted in Majan University College, Oman. The test in question was designed for Business and IT undergraduate students of Level 1, semester 1 who took 16 weeks course of Academic reading and writing. The test was a mid-term summative assessment designed to identify students' progress on the module and took place on week 8.

The group included students of two departments as the same course is taught on the both for consistency. Accordingly, the test was taken by both of the groups simultaneously. It included three objective tasks and one writing question. The text was amended considering the type of the tasks and a number of non-academic impacting factors (see Sections III, A & III, B below).

#### A. *Dependent Factors*

A test item writer of any educational institution deals with a number of prescribed test items relevant to the course. Current research studies the ways to adapt a text selected by the tutor to match four tasks: three objective tasks and one writing task. The tasks are based on the text and require proper comprehension of its content to be completed successfully.

The nature of the first task requires the students to identify the author of a quotation from the text. There are five quotations where one is direct and four are indirect. Accordingly, reading material should contain more than five in-text citations for the students to demonstrate comprehension of the text, ability to identify key words and concepts and relate them to the information in the reading.

The second task requires the students to demonstrate their extensive knowledge of academic vocabulary. They have to provide synonyms to selected lexical items found in the reading. Hence, the text should contain words taught throughout the course.

The third objective task is closely related to the text and is a traditional form of testing comprehension: true-or-false statements. Here the content of the reading material should be verified and cross-checked for matching the information of the statements.

Writing task contains a text-based question to be answered by the students in 150 – 200 words. Accordingly, the length of the text should be sufficient for the learner to elicit enough information from the text to meet the word limit using their skills of summarising and paraphrasing. Prescribed reading length for the course under study varies from 600 to 700 words.

#### B. *Independent Factors*

Independent factors include interest, appropriateness and accessibility (Green & Hawkey, 2011). These might differ depending on the area of studies (business, IT, engineering, etc.), students' attributes (culture, religion, gender, etc.), and accessibility (text grammar, vocabulary, etc.).

Area of studies that students are pursuing can be considered as an independent factor impacting text selection. The current course was developed for Business and IT departments. For ethical issues the exam was scheduled for all of the groups of both the departments on the same day and at the same time. This ensured confidentiality of the test. The test satisfied the interests of both Business and IT students.

Appropriateness of reading plays an important role in text adaptation process in the Middle East. Cultural, religious and gender related attributes are to be taken into account at the time of amending reading material for testing purposes (Richards, 2018). The text has to be carefully examined as for the nature of provided information to avoid embarrassing or harmful content. Unfamiliar concepts should also be eliminated or substituted with more appropriate or clear ones to ensure students' cultural comfort and understanding at the time of exam taking.

Text accessibility is one more factor that affects item writer's choices in the process of adaptation. Though listed last here this factor is of great importance as grammatical peculiarities, vocabulary and other specifications of the text can directly affect the quality of the test. For example, inclusion of The Passive Voice requires careful consideration and

depends on if it was part of the study materials and was addressed properly in class through practice. Flesch reading ease tool provides the percentage of Passive Voice constructions in the reading, so item writer can decide upon the need to simplify the text in this area or vice versa stress upon its usage if required by the test items. Assessment of the knowledge of particular lexical items should be based on the glossary prepared by/for the students during the course on the basis of their learning aids. Words that were not included cannot be tested.

Having considered importance of both dependent and independent factors impacting text adaptation the tutor can commence test design.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

##### A. Stages of Text-for-test Amendment Process

Every text intended for testing purposes undergoes three phases of preparation: an exploratory text search phase, a concerted editing phase, and a refining phase (Salisbury, 2005).

Text search might be a time consuming process. One is expected to identify the topic of the reading to use in the assessment and only then the search can start. There were several matters of consideration in selecting a reading topic for the upcoming test. As per the requirements of the curriculum, the test was expected to assess academic reading and writing skills of students of two different departments: Business and IT. Accordingly, the topic had to address professional interests of both. At the same time, the item writer had to keep in mind that highly academic text of one specialization would be hard to understand for the other. So interests of both Business and IT students in common were considered. This blend of requirements determined the choice of texts for adaptation. Considering professional and personal interests of students of two departments for who the test was designed, the topic of smartphones impact on young people was chosen. In particular, the texts selected for amendment are related to the rising issue of nomophobia, fear of not having access to mobile phone, and its consequences. The factor of reading accessibility was addressed by choosing a popular science articles for adaptation. The selected texts were *Nomophobia: A Rising Trend in Students* by Tim Elmore (<https://www.psychologytoday.com>) and *Rise of 'nomophobia': More people fear loss of mobile contact* by Vicky Kung (<http://edition.cnn.com>). The total word count of the two texts was 1670 words. Final version of the text after adaptation was 672 words (see Table I).

TABLE I.  
WORD COUNT AMENDMENTS

Text #	Source text word count	Portion in the adapted text
Text 1	617	212
Text 2	1053	460
Total	1670	672

The need for using two texts for preparing test reading material arose due to the requirement of word limit of 600 – 700 words. Neither of the selected texts could satisfy this as both were considerably reduced in the first attempt of amendment. Hence, the decision was taken to consolidate the two omitting repeated ideas and revisiting the structure of the final version to ensure coherence and logical development of exam reading.

At the stage of concerted editing the text and test items were prepared for submission. Here the two selected texts were adapted to ensure their readability matches the requirements of the course and they are both academically and culturally suitable (see Sections III, A & III, B).

Flesch-Kincaid statistics was used to identify reading ease of the selected texts (see Table II).

TABLE II.  
READABILITY STATISTICS: BEFORE AND AFTER

Aspects	Original texts selection	Adapted text
Passive Voice	5%	4%
Flesch reading ease	55.1	57.9
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	10.1	8.8
<i>Concerns: vocabulary is not taken into consideration</i>		

According to Flesch reading ease check the reading selection score was 55.1. This places the text within a higher range of difficulty appropriate for college students. Manipulation of the text improved its reading ease to 57.9 making it more accessible for the students under study. The number of the Passive Voice constructions was reduced from 5% to 4% as amendment aimed at producing reading easier for comprehension. The identified Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level was 10.1. As Flesch-Kincaid evaluation is based on American grade system, i.e. students are native speakers, adaptation of word length and sentence length as main parameters of evaluation had to be considered. Text amendment towards its easier version is required here as Middle Eastern students study English as a foreign language. The final version of the text examined with the same tool placed it within grade 8 (see Table II).

As Flesch-Kincaid reading ease statistics is concerned it does not assess the quality of the vocabulary of the text. Hence, another tool was used to identify complexity of lexical items of selected reading material.

Lextutor.ca online vocabulary check tool was used to identify lexical accessibility of the two texts. The data provided by the online tool analyses the text lexis based on its complexity. It sorts the words depending on the frequency of their use as K1 (first most frequent) and K2 (second most frequent) lexical items. It also identifies academic vocabulary and off-list words that are of rare usage. The data presented in Table III demonstrates the initial level of text readability from the viewpoint of its vocabulary and the results of the adaptation.

TABLE III.  
VOCABULARY ACCESSIBILITY: BEFORE AND AFTER (WWW.LEXTUTOR.CA)

Type of vocabulary	Original text profile (%)	Adapted text profile (%)	Examples
K1 words	73.13	79	Experience, face, human, number, etc.
K2 words	7.48	7.59	Accident, attention, list, screen, etc.
Academic word list	5.68	4.80	Analysis, expert, <i>psychologist</i> , technology, etc.
Off-list words	13.71	8.61	<i>Abstain, afflicted</i> , addiction, internet, nomophobia, etc.

\* Lexical items in *italics* were deleted or substituted at the time of adaptation.

Table C presents statistics of the changes made to the original text to reach the required level of accessibility in comparison with the authentic version of the text. K1 percentage of words increased from 73% to 79% making comprehension of the text by the students easier. The number of K2 words increased slightly (7.48% → 7.59%) due to a variety of manipulations applied to other parts of the text not targeting its vocabulary. The number of academic words was reduced by nearly 1%. The reason for omitting academic vocabulary in the test for academic reading and writing purposes is that the deleted lexical items belonged to a different area of studies unfamiliar to Business and IT students (e.g. *psychologist, liberated*). On the other hand, the items like *survey, percentage, or technology* are part of their professional vocabulary and remained in the text unchanged.

A matter of consideration here is that *lxtutor* identifies in-text citations, i.e. names of the authors of quoted material, as off-list words. Therefore, the item writer had to apply her subjective judgement of suggested changes and the knowledge of course content in the process of text manipulation. As per the requirements of the prescribed test items (see Section III, A for details) one of the tasks needs students to demonstrate their text comprehension based on a number of direct and indirect quotes present in the reading. Accordingly, presence of in-text citations is strongly required by the test specifications. They (in-text citations) might be added to the reading material as part of text manipulations if they are not enough in the original version.

Cultural appropriateness of the text is a very sensitive matter in the Middle East. It has to be carefully approached at the stage of preparing reading materials for the students. Having a different background international academics should familiarise themselves with the rules and views of the local community. Ideas, concepts and activities acceptable for a European or an American might be a taboo in Islamic culture. For example, bad habits or pre-marital relationships are always the topics to avoid due to the cultural and religious peculiarities of Middle Eastern society.

Cultural matters can be observed at the level of vocabulary (Kuimova, 2011). In the professional experience of the present writer it is advisable to consider use of inappropriate or unfamiliar concepts as a ground for adaptation in the text. This is the area where subjective approach of the item writer is extremely important. In case if the item writer is not familiar with the local culture one has to seek help of experienced teaching team members or peers.

Having completed the search and the editing phases the test was sent to several peers for feedback. The institution under study has an effective procedure of feedback in place. According to it the materials of the test are forwarded to the teaching team members, an assigned peer reviewer and after their suggestions are incorporated, to the external examiner. This procedure ensures multiple feedback from professionals in the concerned area and successful preparation of the assessment pack. At the refining phase the item writer responded to their critical review incorporating agreed changes.

### B. Text Adaptation Procedures

Seven types of text adaptations were used in the process of preparation of the test based on Green & Hawkey's (2011) taxonomy. They included deletion, consolidation, expansion, permutation, move, substitution and insertion. Each of the types of the amendment was related to one of the following aspects: paragraph, sentence or word/phrase.

TABLE IV.  
NUMBER OF ADAPTATIONS

Aspect	Type of text adaptation							Total
	Deletion	Consolidation	Expansion	Permutation	Move	Insertion	Substitution	
Paragraph	15 44.1%	8 100%	-	-	-	9 56.25%	-	32 37.6%
Sentence	7 20.6%	-	1 100%	-	-	-	2 10.5%	10 11.76%
Word/ phrase	12 35.3%	-	-	5 100%	2 100%	7 43.75	17 89.5%	43 50.6%
Total	34	8	1	5	2	16	19	85

#### 1. Word and phrase amendment

Statistics in Table 4 shows that the text has undergone the highest percentage of changes at the level of words and phrases. 50.6% of all the amendments of various nature were made to single lexical items or phrases to meet the requirements of readability based on vocabulary accessibility identified through a *lxtutor* online tool. There were 43 words/phrases overall that required amendment. Seventeen of them were substituted.

e.g. *'accidents lurk' → 'accidents happen'*.

Substitution was made to avoid the use of an off-list word in the text prepared for EL2 students. Twelve words were deleted as part of other changes (sentence/paragraph amendment or deletion):

e.g. *'Nomophobia is everywhere in industrialised nations' → 'Nomophobia is everywhere'*.

The change makes the context more generic and allows the writer to eliminate AWL items. Seven words were inserted into the text. Most of the instances of this amendment type are in-text citations required by the structure of the test:

e.g. *'... a recent online survey of 1,000 people found that almost two thirds (66%) of respondents were afflicted, a rise of 11% when compared to a similar study four years ago' →*

*A recent online survey of 1,000 people found that almost two thirds (66%) of respondents were addicted to their phones, a rise of 11% when compared to a similar study four years ago (Kung 2017).'*

Five items underwent the change of permutation or rephrasing:

e.g. *'While teddy doesn't communicate, the phone does,' said Carr-Gregg, adding insomnia to the list of potential problems. →*

*'While teddy does not communicate, the phone does,' said Carrlow (2012:52), adding sleep issues to the list of potential problems.*

The off-list word *'insomnia'* was explained to avoid usage of an unfamiliar concept.

Move was used twice on words and phrases:

e.g. *'This is the most tribal generation of young people,' said Carr-Gregg. 'Adolescents want to be with their friends on a 24-hour basis.'* →

*'This is the most tribal generation of young people. Adolescents want to be with their friends on a 24-hour basis' (Carr-Gregg, 2012:28).*

Here in-text citation was moved to the end of the quote to ensure the clearness of acknowledgement of both parts of the quote.

## 2. Paragraph amendment

Paragraph amendment was needed 32 times that made 37.6% of all the text manipulations discussed. There were three types of adaptation of available seven involved with the current text. Fifteen cases of the paragraph deletion were observed in the two texts under study. The reason of such a high number of paragraphs in relatively short texts is that in Text 2 each sentence was a separately standing unit. Hence, deleting fifteen sentences equals deleting fifteen paragraphs as per the structure of the original text. Eight times paragraphs were consolidated due to the same reason:

*'Some people get panic attacks when they are not with their phones,' said Michael Carr-Gregg, an adolescent psychologist working in Melbourne.'*

*Others become very anxious and make all endeavors to locate the mobile phone.*

e.g.

*→ 'Some people get panic attacks when they are not with their phones, others become very anxious and make all efforts to locate the mobile (Carr-Gregg, 2012:14).'*

In nine cases paragraphs of Text 1 were inserted into Text 2 for clarification, exemplification, and completeness of the idea.

## 3. Sentence structure amendment

Sentence structure appeared to be the least impacted aspect of amendment. Deletion, expansion and substitution were the types of adaptation observed in the text. Seven sentences were deleted due to their redundancy, repeated or irrelevant ideas. One sentence was expanded to clarify the idea expressed but a lexical item unfamiliar to the students. There were two instances of sentence substitution for coherency, introduce a new idea to the reader or summarize above information.

There were seven cases of sentence deletion:

e.g. *'An increasing number of college students now shower with their cell phone. The average adolescent would rather lose a pinky-finger than a cell phone. A growing percentage text or tweet instead of actually talking to others.'*

The sentence in italics was deleted due to the fact that the meaning of the saying *'to lose a pinky-finger'* is not familiar to EL2 Omani learners. Explaining it in the text for the sake of introducing the reader to a new target language concept would unnecessarily overload the text. Hence, the sentence was deleted to avoid an irrelevant idea that could cause an issue of students' comprehension at the time of exam.

One sentence was expanded:

*'Accidents lurk while nomophobes fix their attention on phones.'*

e.g.

*→ 'The influence of using your mobile everywhere you go can be rather dramatic as accidents happen while nomophobes fix their attention on phones.'*

The need for expanding the sentence arose based on the requirement of text accessibility. Cause-and-effect relationship between the use of mobile phone and dramatic results it can lead to was explained in the text to better demonstrate the connection between its elements and provide students the ground for better comprehension.

Two sentences were substituted in the text under discussion.

‘Do you see signs of nomophobia? *What else would you add to my list above?*’ → *e.g.* ‘Do you see signs of nomophobia? *If yes, follow the expert's advice and set yourself free of the addiction.*’

In the example above, italicised sentence suggests a further discussion that would be appropriate in class and lead to students expressing their opinion on the topic. In case with the test design, the last sentence of the text is expected to conclude the reading summarising its content or giving advice as in the example above.

Incorporating the changes suggested by automated readability and vocabulary tools the item writer considered the nature of test tasks. Several amendments were made/not made to the text based on the type of the item to ensure the student can locate the necessary information, tested concepts are present in the reading, content of the course is tested properly.

## V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has reported the results of the study on text adaption for academic reading and writing course for Middle Eastern undergraduate students. It focused on the process of text amendment, which is done to make selected reading suitable for the nature of the course, directly relevant to the materials taught in class, types of the testing items and their relation to the selected test, students' proficiency gained throughout the semester and their cultural background. It aims at providing support to test item designers in manipulating the text of their choice identifying the right balance between automated and subjective adaptation as well as choosing an appropriate approach to it. Variety of strategies were exemplified based on a text and its different areas undergoing changes.

The results of the conducted survey make it possible to provide a number of recommendations for teaching practitioners in choosing a set of appropriate strategies for text adaptation in course of amending selected reading for testing purposes.

### A. Text Collection

First, it is highly recommended to *have a personal collection of reading* related to a particular course. This enables a test designer to choose text/texts to adapt within a short period of time. Reading materials selection is a time consuming process, as one has to consider multiple variables affecting the final decision. Often the texts available in course books or online do not fully match requirements of the test. Hence, the tutors would benefit from having their own text bank that would save their time on selection. Moreover, having *several texts on the same topic* in your collection is advisable as there might be a need to increase the number of words in the main text to meet the word limit, ensure comprehension of the main idea through additional explanation, or match requirements of the testing items.

### B. Choice of Approach

Another recommendation is to *balance carefully between the use of automated text adaptation tools and subjective text manipulation*. As the results of the research demonstrate, readability and vocabulary checks designed to help amending reading do not address particular issues related to style of reading or culture of reader. In case with academic reading and writing test it is a significant drawback that has to be compensated by subjective approach to the text manipulation. The main reason is that formal vocabulary has to be tested due to the nature of the course; hence the items of academic nature should not be substituted by any other on condition that they were taught in class. Passive Voice also adds to the difficulty of the text. However, test items designer should subjectively approach this matter, as formal writing style requires the skill of using this grammatical structure. So, professional subjective judgement as well as matching with the teaching materials is required for academic reading adaptation.

### C. Use of Feedback

*Peer reviewer's feedback* is a recommended procedure improving the quality of adapted text that can be used as a follow up of test item designer's work. Many institutions use the process of peer review and it is definitely a benefiting part of the whole cycle of assessment design. Experienced peers recommend changes that improve testing materials and can be considered providers of valuable support at the stage of both drafting and finalising the test paper.

### D. Team Involvement

*Engage your teaching team* into regular discussions and testing materials preparation. Academic viewpoint, background and experience of colleagues can be of great value to the assessment designer. Multicultural environment in overseas teaching institutions is enriching and should be utilised to the maximum to provide the students with better learning experience. Regular meetings of a teaching team are a platform for fruitful and enriching discussions that result in enhancing the quality of course delivery and assessment.

### E. Consideration of Test Items Nature

In addition, to succeed as an item writer one should carefully *consider the requirements of interest, accessibility, appropriateness and the nature of test items* as a condition. The three factors should make a perfect blend in a test paper to ensure students satisfaction. As assessment is a learning tool, we have to select appealing reading material that would relate to professional interest of the learner. Test designer should avoid dry and boring reading to keep the students engaged into the process of completing the assessment paper throughout the test. Accessibility is another parameter of great importance. “Sink-or swim” approach of using authentic academic texts appeared to be inapplicable for undergraduate students in the Middle East. Therefore, it is recommended to amend test related reading materials based on the attributes of the students. A factor of reading appropriateness is of paramount importance in the Middle East as it might be in other cultures as well. Accordingly, it is advisable to ensure the test item designer addresses the requirements of the culture of the reader. It helps educators of a different background to avoid misunderstanding or embarrassment at the time of the test. Last, but not the least is need to ensure reading materials contain all the information required for successful completion of the test. Confusing, vague, or lacking information should be avoided to not mislead the student. At the same time, the tasks should be challenging enough to reflect on the progress of the learner.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Alva-Manchego, F., et al. (2017). Learning how to simplify from explicit labelling of complex-simplified text pairs. *Proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Joint Conference on Natural Language Processing*, 195-305.
- [2] Case A. (2012). Advantages and disadvantages of using authentic texts in class. <https://www.usingenglish.com/articles/advantages-disadvantages-using-authentic-texts-in-class.html> (accessed 15/01/ 2018).
- [3] Crandall, J., (1995). The why, what, and how of ESL reading instruction: Guidelines for writers of ESL reading textbooks. In P. Byrd (ed.), *Material writer's guide*. New York: Erlbaum, 79-94.
- [4] Crossley, S.A., Yang, H. S., & McNamara, D.S. (2014). What's so simple about simplified texts? *Reading in a Foreign Language*, April, 26.1, 92-113.
- [5] Daskalos, K., Ling, J.J. (2005). Authentic text or adapted text – that is the question! The use of authentic and adapted texts in the study of English in two Swedish upper secondary schools and a study of student and teacher attitudes towards these texts. <https://muep.mau.se/bitstream/handle/2043/1964/authenticandadapted.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (accessed 25/02/2018).
- [6] Devit, S. (1997). Interacting with authentic texts. *Modern Language Journal* 81, 457-469.
- [7] Davison, A., & Kantor, R. (1982). On the failure of readability formulas to define readable texts: A case from adaptations, *Reading Research Quarterly* 17, 187-209.
- [8] Ellis, R. (1993). Naturally simplified input, comprehension and second language acquisition. In M.L. Tikko (Ed.), *Simplification: theory and application*. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre, 53-68.
- [9] Goodman, K., & Freeman, D. (1993). What's simple in simplified language. In M.L. Tikko (Ed.), *Simplification: theory and application*. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre, 69-81.
- [10] Green A., & Hawkey R. (2011). Re-fitting for a different purpose: A case study of item writer practices in adapting source texts for a test of academic reading. *Language Testing* 29.1, 109 –129.
- [11] Kuimova M. V., Kobzeva N. A. (2011). Advantages and Disadvantages of Authentic Materials Use in EFL Classrooms, *Молодой ученый* 3.2, 125-127. <https://moluch.ru/archive/26/2844/> (accessed 11/01/2018).
- [12] Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis: issues and implications*. London: Longman.
- [13] Larsen-Freeman, D. (2002). *Techniques and principles in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [14] Lempke, K. (2016). ESL Students from the Arabian Gulf and Their Attitudes towards Reading. Dissertation <https://search.proquest.com/openview/97f05fcd560fd589aedfacb1f3f5389/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y> (accessed 10/03/2018).
- [15] Long, M., & Ross, S. (1993). Modifications that preserve language and content. In M. L. Tickoo (Ed.), *Simplification: Theory and application*. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Center, 29-52.
- [16] Richards, J. C. (2018). Advantages and disadvantages of using instructional materials in teaching ESL. <https://www.professorjackrichards.com/advantages-and-disadvantages-of-using-instructional-materials-in-teaching-esl/> (accessed 5/03/2018).
- [17] Roberts, R. (2014). Authentic or graded? <https://elt-resourceful.com/2014/02/27/authentic-or-graded-is-there-a-middle-way/> (accessed 15/01/2018).
- [18] Salisbury, K. (2005). *The edge of expertise: Towards an understanding of listening test item writing as professional practice*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Kings College London.
- [19] Shook, D. (1997). Identifying and overcoming possible mismatches in the beginning reader-literary text interaction. *Hispania* 80, 234-243.
- [20] Trites L., and McGroarty, M. (2005). Reading to learn and reading to integrate: new tasks for reading comprehension tests. *Language Testing* April, 22.2, 174-210.
- [21] Young, D. J. (1999). Linguistic simplification of ESL reading material: effective instructional practice? *Modern Language Journal* 83, 350-366.

**Lrysa Nikolayeva** is an Assistant Professor of Faculty of English Language Studies at Majan College, Oman. She holds a PHD degree in Linguistic Typology from Donetsk National University, Ukraine. Current research areas: academic reading and writing assessment, text adaptation, test items writing.