

**A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED  
GRADED READERS AND CHINESE SECOND  
LANGUAGE LEARNERS' AESTHETIC  
RESPONSE TOWARDS SELECTED  
STYLISTIC DEVICES**

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**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA  
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by

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DR	Distinctiveness ratio
EFL	English as foreign language
EPER	Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading
ER	Extensive reading
ERF	Extensive Reading Foundation
ERP	Extensive reading programme
ESL	English as second language
GR	Graded reader
L2	Second language
LLL	Language learner literature
RQ	Research question
VA	Version A
VB	Version B

**SATU ANALISIS BUKU BERGRED TERPILIH DAN RESPON ESTETIK  
PELAJAR CINA BAHASA KEDUA TERHADAP ALAT STILISTIK  
TERPILIH**

**ABSTRAK**

Buku bergred (GR) tergolong dalam literatur pelajar bahasa (LLL). GR biasanya digunakan di dalam program membaca ekstensif. Oleh itu, adalah penting untuk GR untuk menawan pelajar bahasa kedua (L2). Kebanyakan penerbit GR mengutamakan plot dan bahasa mudah untuk mencapai tujuan ini. Walau bagaimanapun, ada pemegang taruh yang menyedari kepentingan mengekalkan wacana semula jadi yang baik. Teori transaksi respon pembaca Rosenblatt dan teori latar depan Miall dan Kuiken menyokong tanggapan bahawa alat stilistik dapat menaikkan pengalaman membaca estetik atau keseronokan membaca. Dalam mengambil kira teori tersebut, kajian ini mengkaji kesan penggunaan bahasa sastera untuk mengetahui peranannya terhadap GR yang dianggap baik. Kajian yang dijalankan mengkaji sejauh mana alat stilistik digunakan dalam GR yang dianggap baik (yang memenangi anugerah) dan yang dianggap kurang baik (yang tidak memenangi anugerah). Kajian ini juga membandingkan respon estetik pelajar L2 berbangsa Cina terhadap teks yang mengandungi dan teks yang tidak mengandungi alat stilistik. Oleh yang demikian, kajian ini mempunyai dua fasa. Untuk menyiasat GR (fasa satu), satu analisis stilistik dilaksanakan untuk membandingkan jumlah kiasan (*figure of speech*) dalam tiga teks yang memenangi anugerah dan enam teks sepadan yang tidak memenangi anugerah. Untuk membandingkan respon estetik pelajar bahasa terhadap dua versi cerita pendek GR (fasa dua), satu versi mengandungi

bahasa kiasan dan satu lagi tidak, kajian soal selidik dijalankan atas 263 mahasiswa Cina university kolej bertempat di Malaysia. Keputusan penyelidikan mencadangkan bahawa (1) bahasa sastera tidak mempunyai penyumbangan terhadap GR yang dianggap baik; (2) penggunaan alat stilistik dapat menaikkan respon membaca estetik pelajar bahasa. Oleh itu, dapat disimpulkan daripada hasil kajian ini bahawa penggunaan bahasa sastera harus diberi pertimbangan dalam GR memandangkan bahawa respon estetik pelajar bahasa dapat dinaikkan dengan penggunaan bahasa sastera. Ini dapat menimbulkan pengalaman membaca ekestetik yang lebih berjaya.

**A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED GRADED READERS AND  
CHINESE SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS' AESTHETIC RESPONSE  
TOWARDS SELECTED STYLISTIC DEVICES**

**ABSTRACT**

Mostly used in extensive reading programmes, graded readers (GRs), which come under the umbrella of language learner literature (LLL), are weighted with the obligation to engage second language (L2) learners. Many publishers of GRs focus on strong plots using reduced language code to achieve this objective; however, there are stakeholders who recognise the importance of retaining good natural literary discourse. Rosenblatt's transactional reader response theory and Miall and Kuiken's foregrounding theory support the notion that stylistic devices have the capacity to create evocation in the reader which could heighten the aesthetic or pleasurable reading experience. Taking this into consideration, the study examined the effect of literariness in GRs for them to be considered good by investigating the extent of employment of selected stylistic devices in GRs that are considered good (award-winning GRs) and that are considered less good (non-award winning GRs) to determine the importance of literariness in making successful GRs. The study also compared Chinese L2 learners' aesthetic response towards texts without and with selected stylistic devices. As such, the study was a two-phased investigation. To examine the GRs (phase one), a stylistic analysis was carried out to compare the occurrence of figures of speech, the selected style markers, in three award and six corresponding non-award winning texts. To compare the language learners' response

towards two versions of a GR short story (phase two), one without and the other with figures of speech, a questionnaire survey was carried out on 263 Diploma undergraduates of Chinese ethnicity studying in a Malaysian private university college. The findings suggest that (1) literariness has little effect in GRs for them to be considered good; (2) the use of stylistic devices does help to elevate language learners' aesthetic reading response. The findings of the present research therefore concludes that since language learners could be heightened in their reading experience with literariness, literariness should be made an important consideration in GRs to conceive a more successful aesthetic reading journey.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Overview of the study**

Graded readers (GRs) are readers with laddered language difficulty. They dominate the market of language learner literature (LLL), simplified reading material written specially for language learners. Today, tens of major publishers specialise in publishing GRs. Among them, to name a few, are Cambridge Readers, Heinle CENGAGE, Oxford Graded Readers and Black Cat. Published mainly in the UK, these books are used all over the world for Extensive Reading (ER), especially in Extensive Reading Programmes (ERPs), including Malaysia. In 2004, the Extensive Reading Foundation (ERF) was set up by Richard Day and Julian Bamford to support and promote ER. The Language Learner Literature Award, which gives out awards to the best newly published books every year, was also introduced.

Issues have been raised on what make good GRs, with the stakeholders, especially editors, publishers and writers, involved in the production and use of GRs, holding disparate views. No doubt storyline has always taken the front seat, of which whose importance cannot be denied, as sensibility dictates that a poor story cannot be a driving force for reading. Nevertheless, GRs are of a different nature, written for an audience whose linguistic world is smaller. This is what complicates matters, raising issues such as readability, authenticity and artfulness. This is when publishers, editors, writers, academicians and linguists differ in their opinions. To cater to second language (L2) learners, publishers often resort to establishing suffocating guidelines, mapping out the linguistic boundaries at every level of GRs, for writers to adhere to. This inadvertently affects language use, raising concerns of authenticity and artfulness in

the course of the compromise. Day and Bamford (1998) advocated intuitive writing, despite language limitations. “Neologists” of the term “language learner literature”, Day and Bamford (1998) were insistent on the communicative intent with the audience. The success of communicating with the audience marks the success of GRs, that is to be able to communicate with affect and impact. They surmised that authors do have the ability to do so provided they are allowed to. Therefore, Day and Bamford (p.76) praised editors who allowed the use of “unexpurgated poetic and figurative expressions” by describing them (the editors) as “sensible”. Some publishers, despite appreciating quality writing, however, are adamant that readability eclipses stylistic matters.

GRs are usually used in ER and ERPs, whereby reading has to be fast and plentiful; therefore, the element of pleasure has to take precedence. West (1964), a pioneer in simplified material, regarded it (simplified material) as an introduction to reading for pleasure with the aim of hooking learners on English books out of enjoyment. This explains why having an interesting plot or story makes plain sense, and there is little disagreement on this. However, the issue of stylistic language use in GRs has been raised (Day and Bamford 1998). Nevertheless, to the researcher's knowledge, it has received no investigation on its role in creating pleasure in its audience, even though stylistic aspects have been recognised to play an important role in readers' aesthetic response (Rosenblatt 1978; Miall and Kuiken 2002).

Rosenblatt (1978) theorised that it is the act of transaction between the text and the reader that brings about evocation. It is the evocation that makes a text literary and successful in its communication with its reader, of which Day and Bamford (1998) have stated communication should be the intent of GRs. The evocation causes the reader to be able to experience the text aesthetically. In the aesthetic state, it is the



journey that propels the reader to continue reading, and not curiosity of the content. The pleasurable stance taken by the reader was termed “aesthetic” by Rosenblatt (1978), as opposed to “efferent”, which embodies reading for content or information. When a reader assumes the aesthetic stance, he is provoked by the words, which are constructed by the use of stylistic devices (Rosenblatt 1978). This is in agreement with the foregrounding theory which generally proposes the role of foregrounded features or stylistic devices in provoking the reader. Miall and Kuiken (2002), in their foregrounding theory, stated that readers will be able to derive pleasure from their engagement with stylistic devices.

In essence, GRs as reading materials for L2 learners must be able to appeal to L2 learners for successful ER. In Day and Bamford’s (1998) view, this refers to the communicative quality. Drawing from Rosenblatt’s (1978) and Miall and Kuiken’s (2002) theory, for the appeal to work, stylistic matters must be one of the considerations.

To the researcher's knowledge of the paucity of studies conducted on the stylistic aspects of GRs, and their effects, it is therefore the aim of this study to fill the gap in the literature by examining the effects of stylistic devices in GRs, and this includes investigating the extent of stylistic devices used in GRs and L2 readers’ aesthetic response towards stylistic devices.

In the next section, the background to the study is contextualised by introducing LLL, GRs, ERPs and discussing the ideas of what make good GRs and how GRs are written. An understanding of these areas is essential to enable a grasp of the problem, which is in relation to stylistic priorities, which the thesis strives to address.

## **1.2 Background to the study**

### **1.2.1 Language learner literature**

The term language learner literature came into being when Day and Bamford (1998) coined it for reading material specially written for second language learners. The coinage of the term was an act to recognise material written for language learners as a genre of literature, and to put it on a par with other established genres such as young adult (YA) literature and children's literature. Whether or not this genre has caught on with the world as a recognised established genre like the YA genre which was coined by the Young Adult Library Services Association only in the 1960s (Strickland 2015), is not known. However, within the realm of educators, language teachers, publishers of teaching materials and books, LLL is indeed a genre in its own right. An effort that was put in to recognise its status and to ensure a good development of the literature was the introduction of the Language Learner Literature Award in 2004 by the ERF, a foundation co-set up by Richard Day to promote extensive reading (Extensive Reading Foundation). The ERF has been giving out awards for the best books every year since then.

Day and Bamford (1998) justified terming reading material for learners "language learner literature" for the reason that the material is written with the aim of communicating with the audience (who has the same reader status as any other types of audience), as with all genuine writing. What marks a piece of LLL as successful is "therefore identical to that of other writing: the response of its readers – the sense they make and the experiences they have" (p. 64). This is in line with Rosenblatt's (1978) belief that the interaction between the reader and the text is what gives a text its literary quality. Day and Bamford (1998) also based their justification on the grounds that "authentic" and "simplified" texts have no acceptable demarcations, meaning, learner

material cannot be disregarded as “literature” based on its status as “simplified”. More importantly, delineating the two terms plays no role in the issue of “literature”, since communication is the issue.

Today, this genre encompasses fiction and non-fiction, and original and simplified (adaptations and abridgements) texts (Maley 2008). These texts are usually simply called readers or GRs, as they are often classified according to their levels of difficulty. Not all LLL material, although most is, is graded; as sometimes language educators task themselves to write intuitively for their own students. One example is the nine volumes of stories and/or poems published by Pearson Malaysia whereby the writers consisted of lecturers and teachers who wrote to meet the needs of their students (Maley 2008). Other forms of LLL include magazines and newspapers specially produced for language learners, children’s books, learners’ own stories and comics (Day and Bamford 1998). Despite being an umbrella term, LLL is sometimes regarded as synonymous with GRs (Bassett 2015), and the two terms are referred to interchangeably at times, as GRs form the largest group of material under LLL. With the coinage of the term LLL, simplified materials get to enjoy the status of a genre in literature.

### **1.2.2 Graded readers**

GRs are reading material written in reduced code for L2 learners (Waring<sup>1</sup> 2012; Hill<sup>2</sup> 2008). There are no contrasting views on what GRs are, as researchers, editors, publishers, writers and teachers share the same understanding that GRs are “books of various genres that are specifically created for learners of foreign languages” (Extensive Reading Foundation), a definition used by the ERF. The vocabulary and

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Waring is an Executive of the Board of Directors of the Extensive Reading Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> David Hill is the former director of the Edinburgh Project for Extensive Reading.

grammatical structures in GRs are controlled according to the length of the text (Nation and Wang 1999). Waring (2003) stated that the plot is also controlled according to the grade, and that pictures are provided to aid the learner. For each incremental grade, vocabulary size and grammatical and structural complexities increase according to each publisher's framework.

GRs are not a new reading tool. Simplified materials have been around for a long time, and can be traced back to the late fifteenth century when they were first written for learners of Latin (Day and Bamford 1998). The English material was pioneered by West, Palmer, Hornby, Faucett and Thorndike who focussed on simplification of mainly established literary classics (Maley 2008). Today, many publishers, besides those in the UK, specialise in publishing GRs for language learners for local use. The Heinemann African Writers Series for African learners which has been very popular (Vincent 1986) and the Sing Tao Readers for Hong Kong learners are among the examples. In Japan, a Japanese-based publisher I Talk You Talk Press commits itself to publishing new GRs every month (I Talk You Talk 2013). Malaysia also has had a hand in GRs when the Tapir Readers were published by Penerbit Fajar Bakti in 1989 and the Rain3 Readers were published in the 1990s by Fajar-Oxford for primary school use. However, the publication of GRs in Malaysia had not and has not been active and at this point of writing, Malaysian publishers have ceased publishing them (Ooi Guat Kuan, Fajar-Oxford Chief Editor, personal communication, 19 June 2015).

The establishment of the ERF provided GRs published by different publishers a "centre" to congregate. This could have contributed to the stability of the divisions of levels of difficulty, with many publishers adopting the six-level divisions of A (two

levels), B (three levels) and C (one level) for the adolescent/adult category; and also contributed to producing books for two sets of learners: children and non-children.

The gaining popularity of GRs, as evident by the number of major publishers going into this business, and the aggressive production of books each year, is a testimony of the importance of GRs. What then is expected of this learner literature? The general understanding is that GRs aim to provide simple reading materials for language learners with the view that materials written for native speakers of English are deemed unsuitable. Since it is the aim for language learners to ultimately be able to read native materials, GRs act as a ladder to these materials. Every level of GR has controlled vocabulary and grammar, and this enables the learner to climb from one level of difficulty to the next with ease; until the learner eventually reaches a level advanced enough for him to digest books for native speakers. For this purpose, GRs are most popularly used in ERPs whereby according to researchers like Cho and Krashen (1994), Mason and Krashen (1997), and Renandya et al (1999), materials should be simple or even too simple to accord a pleasurable reading experience; or according to other researchers like Elley and Mangubhai (1983), Robb and Susser (1989), Nash and Yuan (1992/93), and Macalister (2008), materials are selected by the learner according to their ability (cited by Claridge 2011, p.43).

GRs are also used for Intensive Reading whereby the focus is on pre- and post-reading activities that focus on language features. They are also used to help learners understand “the story or plot, characterisation”, whereby the GR is viewed as “a piece of literature than as a tool for practising language” (Waring 2003, para. 12). This approach is called the Class Reader approach, an approach that lies between Intensive and Extensive reading methods. GRs are also useful in the Reading Skills approach,

which helps the learner acquire reading skills such as skimming and scanning (Waring 2003).

What follows in the next section is confined to discussion on ER only as this research excludes the use of GRs in other reading approaches.

### **1.2.3 Extensive reading programmes**

#### **1.2.3(a) Extensive reading**

Before discussing how GRs are used in ERPs, it is necessary to have an understanding of what ER is. ER has been called many other names: free reading, abundant reading, book flood and reading for pleasure, among the popular ones. Despite the general consensus that GRs are materials specially produced for ER, there is no common understanding of what ER is and how it is to be used in the classroom (Hill 2008; Day 2015b).

How then is ER defined? Day and Bamford (1998), in their investigation, discovered that researcher Louis Kelly traced the term extensive reading to Harold Palmer, who first used it to mean rapidly reading books continuously for the purposes of language study, and that it could achieve both aesthetic and efferent (reading for information – section 2.12.1) purposes, although the aesthetic purpose is primary in order for it to achieve the efferent purpose of acquiring language. They also cited West (1926/ 1955), known to be the first to set up the methodology of ER, as referring to it as “supplementary” reading, which carries the goal of developing the learner’s ability to enjoy reading in the targeted language, and that in this form of reading, individual differences must be taken into account and the reading habit must be encouraged. It is also important that the level of difficulty of the reading material be at *i-1* whereby *i* is the language learner's language level. This means *i-1* is the learner's comfort zone

whereby the material can be read easily and with confidence (Day and Bamford 1998). Day (2015a) thus concluded ER as an approach to second language instruction whose goal is get students enjoy reading in the English language at a level comfortable to them.

McRae (1991) viewed ER as outside-the-class reading, and materials can be anything from GRs to full-length non-fiction as long as the reading is for pleasure. Hill (2008, p.3) put forth that ER must carry the features of “quantity, reading for the gist, and fluency”. He opined that only fiction can do the work to improve a learner’s fluency since pleasure must be an element of ER. Waring (2011) presented the definition succinctly by coining the acronym READ (**R**ead quickly and **E**njoyably with **A**dequate comprehension so they **D**on’t need a dictionary). In other words, ER simply means enjoying reading quickly manageable materials.

Claridge (2011) presented various definitions of ER in her study, and sees the definitions as spanning a continuum, with one end of it taking the efferent stance and the other, the aesthetic stance. This means the element of pleasure, no matter the degree of significance, is implied to be present in *almost* all opinions. Many language educators seem to be aware of the importance of the “pleasure” element, of which common sense tells us that learners will not be motivated to read extensively, otherwise; it is, therefore, not wrong to conclude that this element must be present for ER to take place. In fact, the flow experiences – described by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) as optimal experiences – which hook students to read, have been reported to be an important motivation element in ER (cited by Day and Bamford 1998, pp.30-31; Kirchoff 2013, p.196).

Hill (1992), in drawing up a guide to ER for the massive Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading (EPER), stipulated that ER must bear four qualities: quantity,

speed, interest and language level; and that quantity surpasses all other criteria in ER, and that for this to take place, engaging materials is a condition.

In conclusion, ER denotes plentiful reading either in or outside the classroom, and what is principal and evident is that pleasure must be a compulsory element in ER to motivate reading extensively. Bright and McGregor (1970, p.59) managed to pin down the significance of pleasure when they say, “Criteria that have to be satisfied. *General*. The most important thing is that the pupils should enjoy what they read. A book that satisfies all other criteria but fails this one is a reject” (cited by Prowse 2002, p.144). This certainly resonates with simplified material pioneer West’s (1964) concept of simplified material as the doorway to forming reading habits, powered by reading pleasures.

### **1.2.3(b) Approaches to extensive reading programmes**

ERPs are reading programmes conducted, usually in or outside the classroom, to complement the teaching of language with the universal notion embraced by most language educators of the importance of reading extensively. Such programmes encourage learners to read extensively through various ER approaches. The benefits of reading in the target language have been proven through research in their contributions towards vocabulary acquisition, language competence, writing skills, reading comprehension and reading motivation (Krashen 2004; Claridge 2011; Ro 2013; Ruhil et al 2014; Davoudi et al 2016). Other than language-related benefits, the side effects yielded include developing learner autonomy and world knowledge (Maley 2009). Not even one study has been found to repudiate the good of plentiful reading.



Many methods have been employed in ERPs, but the most famous and popular are Day and Bamford's (2002) ten principles for teaching ER:

1. The reading material is easy.
2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics is available.
3. Learners choose what they want to read.
4. Learners read as much as possible.
5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.
6. Reading is its own reward.
7. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.
8. Reading is individual and silent.
9. Teachers orient and guide their students.
10. The teacher is a role model of a reader.

Thirteen years later, Day (2015b) took up the task to investigate the popularity of the principles and found that out of 44 reported ERPs, 43 relied on *some* of these principles. This interesting discovery led to Day revisiting the question of what exactly ER is, and in hatching two possible answers: that there is "no single approach to the practice of extensive reading" and that ER is a continuum (p.296).

Susser and Rob (1990) recommended the use of post-reading activities such as writing summaries and answering open-ended questions to enable teachers to check comprehension, and of which the summary writing will also act as a writing practice, and a good way of monitoring a student's progress. Despite not making it to Day and Bamford's top ten principles, it is still a common practice amongst teachers today, and post-reading exercises are included in some GRs.

In ERPs conducted by EPER, the guidelines for strategies state that 100% comprehension is not required as the focus is on understanding and enjoying the book. Even if the learner fails to understand the first page or first chapter of the book, it is not an issue as the learner will eventually grasp the meaning at the end of the book. It also discourages the act of checking out meanings of words as there is no functional need to do so. Reading at an appropriate speed, that is by capturing clusters of words, is also advocated as a strategy (Hill 1992).

A common practice of ERPs is getting a class to read the same book, guided by the teacher. It was such a common a practice that the approach earned itself a category under “Class Readers” in the *Annotated bibliography of works on extensive reading in a second language* (Jacobs et al 2000).

Another recommendation that appeared in the 1990s was by Yu (1993) who specified material appropriateness and teacher orientation as components of a successful ERP programme. Materials should be comprehensible, varied, with simple follow-up activities, and the teacher should monitor, motivate and administer the programme to ensure success.

It can be concluded that there are multiple approaches to ERPs, and some are more popular than others. Ten of these were selected to be the top principles by Day and Bamford (2002) through their years of experience with ERPs. The popularity of their recommendations cannot be denied, and it is left to be seen if the allegiance to them will continue to gain momentum. But what is elementary in making ERPs a success is the requisites that work towards the reflected meaning of the term extensive; and logical thinking dictates that for this to resonate, the reading experience must be plain sailing, pleasurable and motivating. In fact, these criteria reflect the very fundamental concept of the word “extensive”.

### **1.2.3(c) Extensive reading in Malaysia**

ERPs in Malaysian schools sometimes take the form of supplementary reading, and in some instances, are integrated into the classroom. Malaysia first took on ER in the 1970s when a programme was designed for Malaysian residential schools whereby reading took up half of the curriculum. Non-residential Malaysian school students were also introduced to ER which utilised GRs but the programme was less aggressive, with ER taking up only half of the load of ERPs in residential schools (Hill 2001). After the pioneering 1976 ERP, called the English Language Reading Programme (ELRP) – which was the first programme that utilised graded material (Mukundan and Nimehchisalem 2014) – other reading programmes such as Class Reader Programme (CRP) and Nadi Ilmu Amalan Membaca (NILAM) programmes were introduced by the Ministry of Education over the next few years, whereby GRs were used.

The CRP was introduced in 1990 due to the failure of the ELRP, especially in non-residential schools. The ELRP allowed students to choose their own reading material, but the CRP involved a common text to be used in the classroom (Mukundan and Nimehchisalem 2014). However, with the ideology that extra reading should be a tested component, literature became a school subject. Called the Literature Component, it was made compulsory in all secondary schools in 1991. In 2000, the Ministry introduced a curriculum whereby literature was also incorporated into the English language syllabus for primary school (Kanmani 2013).

At the tertiary level, ER seems to be unpopular (Ruhil et al 2014; Tan 2016), and there has been no known structured ERPs conducted for Malaysian tertiary learners. However, ER may take place on a light scale upon the personal initiative of the language educator who advocates the importance of reading materials other than the English textbook. For example, in the university college where the researcher

teaches, where there is no implementation of ERPs, in some classes which the researcher had taught, weak learners were made to read Enid Blyton's children's books in class as a form of unstructured and informal way of extensive reading. They were also encouraged to read the books on their own which were available in the library of the university college. There were no available GRs yet in the library when this was practised; hence, children's books functioned as substitutes. However, in 2016, a small collection of GRs made its way into the university library and weak students were encouraged to read these books on their own. Reading Week is also sometimes implemented as part of English Week activities held in the university college to encourage learners to read extensively on their own.

#### **1.2.4 Elements of good graded readers**

Keeping in mind how GRs are to be used, their goals, and the core principles of ERPs, what then make good GRs? Day and Bamford (1998) asserted that good writing communicates with the audience. Bassett (2005, 2015) believed that a good story and the craftsmanship of the writing define a good graded reader. It is how the writer shapes a narrative with the plot, organisation and artifices.

Claridge (2011), who considered "good" as "most motivating and useful" for the learner, interviewed four key players in the LLL publishing industry who provided some insights on the concept of good. These key players consist of editors and writers, as well as David Hill of the Edinburgh Project of Extensive Reading. They believed that the core of good materials is the story, and there is no discord among all the key players interviewed. Level and physical aesthetics of the GR are also considered important. Other elements such as glossary and other supporting aids receive different

priorities from different publishers and editors. Each of them has a different view of how supporting aids should be.

What make good GRs from the point of view of ERF can be procured from the ERF guidelines<sup>3</sup> for the judges which stipulate the considerations for good GR. “Readability<sup>4</sup>” appears to carry more weight than “quality of writing”, with it being listed second after “interest of theme or topic”. Descriptions by LLL Award judges from 2013 to 2017 with words such as “stress-free reading experience”, “simply told” and “easy to read” (ERF) testify to the importance of “readability”. How well a text complies to its level is stressed in italics under “readability” in the jurors’ guidelines. An observation of the judges’ comments from the three years reflects the significance of this criterion with some making remarks such as “written with appropriate and careful levelling” and “controlled language pitched well in terms of reading level” (ERF).

Claridge (2011, p.109), in evaluating the criteria of judges’ picks of GRs for awards for the years 2009 and 2010 under the Adolescent and Adult section, gathered that it is the enjoyment of the books that matter, and not how they function as “any stepping stone to academic accountability”. This, however, is questionable, since her conclusion is based only on a survey of two years. One of the judges in 2016 did appreciate the contribution of a grammar aspect in one of the books, and the book was made a Finalist.

No breakdown of what constitute “quality of writing” is provided, unlike the detailed subdivisions listed out under “readability”. This lack of description for “quality” denotes the subjectivity of the criterion, and it can be deduced that the

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<sup>3</sup> The template for the jurors was obtained from Professor Marc Helgesen, who is the ERF LLL Award Coordinator.

<sup>4</sup> Bassett (2015) described a suitable language level as comfortable, easy to process; whereas Waring (2013) (section 2.8) regarded readability as simple or comprehensible.

perception of it is to be left to the interpretation of the LLL Award judges, who are native and non-native speakers who hail from different parts of the world but are well-qualified in terms of their experience with learners (Marc Helgesen ERF LLL Award Coordinator, personal communication 22 January 2017).

Examining some of the comments by the judges may reflect how they view “quality of writing”. Words used by the judges from 2013 to 2017 to reflect this criterion include “well-written”, “well-told”, “authentic language”, “simple, descriptive language”, “simple, yet feels deep”, “feels natural and ungraded”, “language is appropriate and never sounds simplistic” and “writing is so good you really feel the characters” (ERF). What can be deduced from this is that the ability to use simple, natural yet effective descriptive language that is capable of evoking emotions is considered “good writing”. Little else can be derived from the description of the judges on “quality of writing” as only generalisations (e.g. well-written, well-told) are made. However, Claridge (2011, p.109) interpreted these generalisations as having literary quality. This interpretation aligns with Day and Bamford’s (1998) philosophy of “good”, whereby genuine writing communicates, not just via its simplicity (for GRs), but its merits as genuine art.

Glimpses of how learners view what appeal to them can also be solicited from the ERF website. These international online voters, which consist of both students and teachers, do not necessarily contribute to the decision of the judges as it is up to the judges’ prerogative to take them into consideration (Marc Helgesen ERF LLL Award Coordinator, personal communication 22 January 2017). It is more important to capture the learners’ view of “good” as GRs are written for them; hence, only comments which appear to come from learners are extracted. There are not many of them, and some words used are “entertaining”, “liked the element of mystery”, “could

visualise”, “easy to understand”, “eager to know” and “love the secret of the story” (ERF). “Good” for learners, therefore, could be conceived as interesting story, readability and having good description.

In Claridge’s (2011) investigation, she found that GRs that suit the reader ranks number one in her subjects’ preference. Her findings are in line with the recognition of the importance of the story. As concurred by Mukundan et al (2016), topics of interest to the reader enhance the readers’ tendency to read. The criterion “well-written” was placed seventh out of 12 criteria in Claridge’s (2011) study.

To sum up, the most important elements of good GRs are the story, readability and quality of writing. In fact, this coincidentally echoes the conclusion of Bassett (2015) of good: good story, easy to understand and exhibits good craftsmanship. The totality of all the views of “good” points to pleasurable reads that are motivating and appealing to language learners.

### **1.2.5 Approaches to writing graded readers**

GRs are a ladder to reading unsimplified materials, with an aim to appeal to learners despite its constrained language. How then do writers write GRs? What approach do they take? This section provides a background to the approaches taken by publishers and writers.

Waring (2003) gave quite a comprehensive insight in his article *Writing a graded reader*. Writers who wish to write GRs must abide by the rules and regulations stipulated by the publisher, and this could mean fitting into the publisher’s series, topics, themes and linguistic framework.

Waring (2003) hailed “the story” as the only important consideration when it comes to writing a good GR since a GR experience must be a positive one. If this is

not achieved, the reader will not be obliged to finish reading the book, which defeats the purpose of GRs. Denise Kirby, the award-winning writer of *The Bookshop*, concurred with this when she shared in her email that she relies “on the plot to keep the reader interested” (personal communication, 17 April 2016, see Appendix 1). In fact, the Macmillan guidelines for writing a GR reader states clearly that “to write a successful original Graded Reader, you must be good at telling stories ... anything which keeps the reader turning the pages and wanting to find out what will happen” (Collins 2014, p. 2).

To write a good story, the rules of writing a good GR story are no different from writing any good fiction: unpredictable plot, satisfying ending, captivating start, good use of dialogues, believable characters and setting, and a good voice (Waring 2003). However, in writing GRs, care has to be taken that the plot, characters and point-of-view are not complicated and confusing. These guidelines are especially applicable to writing beginning levels. To ensure that a good story precedes anything else, especially within the confines of limited language use, one approach is to focus on the story first, and the grading later. Another way is to engage writers who have the knowledge of how the grading works, and use the knowledge as a guide to write for their audience (Waring 2003).

An awareness of learners’ language ability is a prerequisite to handle language control. Simple, clear and short sentences that carry no ambiguity should rule language use (Waring 2003).

To control language use, every publisher has its own word lists and levels, and these word lists are based on word families<sup>5</sup>. For each level up, the size of the word

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<sup>5</sup> Word families refer to headwords and the different formations of the headwords. For example, in the word family of “help”, “help” is the headword and the inflections and derivations of the word such as “helps” and “helpful” are part of the family.



families increases and the grammatical confines loosen. Writers must consult the specifications before embarking on writing, reminded Waring (2003). But leeway is often given to vocabulary as sometimes it is not quite possible to write a story in a given-genre without the use of genre-related words (Day and Bamford 1998; Waring 2003; Claridge 2011). The use of verbs is encouraged as it is seen as essential to good sentences. However, the use of figures of speech and a high occurrence of adjectives and adverbs are considered a burden to learners. Based on this information given by Waring (2003), it can be deduced that figures of speech or stylistic devices are generally not encouraged by publishers.

For simplification of materials, again each publisher has its own methods. The process may involve shortening original texts, removing parts of texts or even characters, simplifying the story and lexical substitution. Elaborating and explaining and making the implicit explicit are also some methods employed. When it comes to style, the Macmillan guidelines advise writers to “try to retain the original author’s style” for adaptations; for example, if heavy dialogues are or humour is used, this must be reproduced (Collins 2014, p.3). However, some publishers are more rigid in their approach, insisting on presenting language only in its most literal sense (Vincent 1986). Once again, this demonstrates the reluctance of some publishers in using literary language which involves the use of figurative language.

Writers should be crucially aware that they are writing for an audience of “limited language ability”, unfamiliar with the “target-language culture” and “particular culture-specific text types” (Day and Bamford 1998, p.64). Also to be taken into consideration is that communication “with language learners involves considerations of both content and language, and in practice the two are inseparable” (p.65). How then do GR writers reconcile content and language within linguistic

confinements? It may seem that with language boundaries, writers should prioritise language, i.e. what words and what structures to use; but Day and Bamford (1998) stated that writing GRs must be intuitive, despite the language limitations. They averred that when the focus is on communication, “the language suggests itself” (p.65). Many editors concur with this notion, for example John Milnes of Heinemann Guided Readers and Tricia Hedge of Oxford Bookworm series (p.66). This is when the fitting in of the language can be done after the writing, as practised by Alan Maley, an award-winning GR writer (Alan Maley, personal communication, 29 March 2016, see Appendix 3). Day and Bamford (1998, p.66) further supported their ground by highlighting a side effect of this approach, quoting Alderson and Urquhart who postulated that a competent writer who writes a simplified version *intuitively* will produce texts that are not only easier to read but will rate easier according to readability formulae. Maley (2008) identified the *World Wide Readers* series as the best example for GRs written in this manner. Critics who support the intuitive approach to writing accuse texts written adhering to strict guidelines to be seriously impoverished and inauthentic in its language (Maley 2008).

The intuitive approach is also known to be “the most commonly used approach among simplifiers of English material”, according to Cramer (2005) (cited by Tabata-Sandom 2013, p.269), and in her research, Tabata-Sandom discovered that this is also the approach employed by six writers of Japanese GRs who wanted to focus on content and style to produce pleasurable reads. However, one has to keep in mind that using one’s intuition does not mean that there are no restraints. It is the writers’ teaching experience that guides them to work within the boundaries of the linguistic mapping of each level, and on what goes and what does not go with the audience to produce good writing (Brumfit 1985; Maley 2008), that is writing that communicates

effectively with the audience. Day and Bamford (1998) professed that communicating with language learners is not just about “conjoining content and language”. To them, producing language learner literature is not merely a technical process, just as “truly making love goes beyond a how-to manual like *The Joy of Sex*”; and thus “it is time, therefore, to consider language learner literature on its own merits, as a genuine art form” (p.67).

To consider LLL as art is to consider it as literature or vice versa (Day and Bamford 1998), as what the name of the genre suggests, and this opens up another dimension to the approach of writing GRs. It is difficult to define literature as the meaning changes in the course of history, from “elevated treatment of dignified subjects” to the creative and imaginative sense (Carter 1990, p.30). Richard Day and Julian Bamford adopted Carter and Long’s (1991, p.105) interpretation: “create an effect through words”, and McRae’s (1991): text that “will stimulate reaction and response” (cited by Day and Bamford 1998, p.74). Literariness in texts then refers to texts possessing stylistic devices or art. This means there is some unfamiliarity or unexpectedness (McRae 1991; also cited by Day and Bamford 1998). In other words, the devices foreground the language (Baldick 2008). If LLL is an art form, how then do writers achieve artistic writing or literariness with language limitations inflicted upon them? Is it possible to bring out a good story, a story with depth, affect, literariness within the confines of language?

Day and Bamford (1998, p.75) thought it is possible for GRs to be an effective art form when they said, after observing how Saki cleverly used the word “forbid” in the adapted *Sredni Vashtar*, “It is clear that authors of language learner literature can communicate with impact and affect – if they are allowed to”. They also pointed out that “the flexible approach to vocabulary and the unexpurgated poetic and figurative

expressions” (such as paradox, personification, simile) are found in the simplified versions of *Sredni Vashtar*, *A tale of two cities* and *King’s ransom*. They further observed that “sensitive editors exist”, that is editors who appreciate “poetic and figurative expressions” and allow the beauty, power and grace of such language to be retained in LLL (p.76). This is evident that there are publishers which allow and appreciate the presence of literariness in GRs. In fact, writers and Dominoes series editors Bowler and Parminter (2015, p.37) described GRs that utilise “all possible language ... resources” to be the “new type” of GRs.

On the other hand, some publishers’ insistence on rigid, literal sense of language has coursed the direction of writing away from literary language. This is evident as portrayed earlier based on Waring’s (2003) recommendations that figures of speech are considered a burden to learners. Kirby, 2015 LLL Award winning writer, concurred that stylistic devices, “in most cases” are “not able to be used” at lower levels and “this doesn’t leave a lot of room for beautifying the language”. She shared that the metaphorical expression “he gave her a dark look” is not allowed especially at lower levels. In fact, she rejects doing rewrites of classics as the text would be “robbed of much of its original beauty, rhythms, and imagery” (personal communication, 17 April 2016, see Appendix 1). Vincent (1986, p. 212) highlighted the frustrations of a published novelist in writing a Stage 1 *Longman Structural Readers* who described his experience of writing the GR as “trying to box in a telephone booth” and who shared his experience of battling to keep his “one ‘literary’ line” of “The trees on the slope wear heavy hats of snow” with the argument that all the words had already been introduced in the story. With such publishers, this means that no matter how much Day and Bamford (1998) want to view learner literature as genuine literature or an art form,

writers do face difficulties in making GRs literary, especially GRs at the lower levels, and especially when there is editorial insistence on using literal language.

The scenario presented suggests that there are publishers who are more liberal in their approach concerning language use, and there are publishers who are more rigid, who allow only the use of literal language, as also opined by Maley (2008). The philosophies of the publishers influence the writing approaches taken by writers. A more liberal policy will enable a writer to take the intuitive approach, and use figurative language which he/she deems appropriate. On the other hand, writing for a publisher with strict guidelines will only allow a writer to work within the stipulated confines of language, using language in its literal sense (Maley 2008).

In making a conclusion, it can then be postulated that the approaches taken by writers, and whether they make their writing artful lies with the publishers' or editors' philosophy.

### **1.2.6 Authenticity of graded readers**

Day and Bamford (1998) accorded GRs the status of literature, and propounded that LLL should be viewed as genuine art, with the intent of communicating, despite the many accusations that GRs do not use authentic English. These allegations stem from the belief of the communicative language teaching movement that materials not intended for language teaching are “superior to materials especially written or simplified for language learners” (Day and Bamford 1998, p.54). Despite these assertions, there is no consensus on what authentic is (Day 2015a).

The attitudes towards authenticity can vary greatly. However, a common definition is “exposure to real language and its use in its own community” (Nematollahi and Maghsoudi 2015, para. 8) This means that texts that are abridged or simplified for

language learners are not authentic. On the other hand, Nuttall (1996, p.177), cited by Day and Bamford (1998, p.55), stated that authentic texts “exhibit the characteristics of true discourse; having something to say, being coherent and clearly organised”. Authenticity could also refer to “the quality of the imagery and style ... and its corresponding aesthetic appeal”, as in a simplification study done by Honeyfield, he finds that the quality of these elements are lost in the simplified material (Sjoquist n.d., p.4). The purveyors of this notion, who are not in favour of GRs, are concerned with the lost literariness in simplified materials, which translates to the loss of their aesthetic appeal. Such texts, to them, cannot be considered authentic. To others, since the job of a text is to communicate a message to its intended audience, a text that successfully interacts with the reader is deemed authentic (Sjoquist n.d., p.1). Swaffer (1985) took this a little further when she considered “authorial cues, repetition, redundancy and discourse markers” as elements which are essential to communicate authentic messages (cited by Claridge 2005, p.145). Swaffer argued that a text whose aim is to teach language and not to communicate, therefore, does not possess these elements and cannot be considered authentic (Claridge 2005). Taylor (1994) and Yunan (1995) shared the view that language teaching material cannot be considered authentic (cited by Nematollahi and Maghsoudi 2015).

Despite the differing views on whether GRs are authentic, there are publishers such as Scholastic which try to make the text “as authentic as possible within the linguistic restraints” and to achieve this, stylistic techniques are required (Sarah Silver, Scholastic Senior Development Editor, personal communication, 22 April 2016, see Appendix 2). Oxford University Press is another publisher which takes such an approach in their Bookworms and Dominoes series (Bowler and Parminter 2015).