

Readability and Vocabulary Management

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1 Overview

Readability and vocabulary management are important issues in language teaching, materials writing, and documentation. In these contexts, the characteristics of the chosen language largely determine the fit between the content and the target audience. In language teaching, learners are often encouraged to tackle increasingly complex content as a means to improved production and comprehension. It is important, therefore, that instructors know or can estimate the complexity of the candidate content. In materials writing and specialized document creation, the writer needs to tailor the language complexity and comprehensibility of the materials to match the anticipated linguistic abilities of the reader. In both cases, vocabulary management is one of the major approaches used, and this has a long history both in language instruction and documentation.

2 Outline

This practical workshop will explore the issue of vocabulary management through the concept of readability. Although readability estimates developed in the 1900s can still be found in current word processors and learner support applications, we will argue that such 'traditional' metrics have limited use and may be usefully replaced by more sophisticated techniques that are based on current language technologies. A range of software tools will be introduced in hands-on computer exercises, to illustrate different methods for estimating readability and managing vocabulary level. Discussion sessions will allow attendees to consider the scope and benefits of such techniques in their own areas of interest. The workshop will focus on the following topics:

- The notion of readability and various readability metrics.
- Recent developments in readability estimation (with demonstration of several software tools developed in the UK and Japan)
- Practical software application for vocabulary management in the context of English language teaching.

3 Presenters

George Weir is a Lecturer in the Department of Computer and Information Sciences, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK. He has published numerous articles on textual analysis and readability and has also developed the Posit textual analysis toolset for use in these domains.

Laurence Anthony is a Professor in the Faculty of Science and Engineering at Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan. His research interests include corpus linguistics, educational technology, natural language processing (NLP), and genre analysis. He has developed various software tools for use in textual analysis and corpus linguistics, including AntConc and AntWordProfiler.