The impact of Information Processing and Discourse Comprehension Strategies on materials design in teaching English

Abstract

  The pedagogical task of designing and developing language teaching materials is a consequent implementation of a language course. Language teachers should be involved in this task by taking into account learning objectives, information processing stages, and discourse functions, in order to satisfy learning needs. Such a task requires the design of learning activities which encourage learners to develop learning strategies.

  Teachers' commitment in the task of implementation, by developing their own language materials, makes them aware of their role in promoting learners' strategies. This task, then, provides teachers with autonomy of analysis, selection, design and development of their materials.

HAMADA Hacène
Département d'Anglais
Université Mentouri
Constantine (Algérie)

ملخّص

إن المهمة البيداغوجية الخاصة بتصميم وتطوير الأدوات التعليمية للغة الأجنبية هي نتيجة حتمية لكل برنامج دراسي لذا فهي تستدعي مشاركة الأستاذ في هذه المهمة بحيث يأخذ بعين الاعتبار أهداف التعلم، محتوى المعلومات ونوعية الخطاب المقدم للمتعلم. أن هذه المهمة تتطلب من الأستاذ وضع أهداف تعليمية تشجع المتعلم على تطوير استراتيجيات التعلم ويمكن للأستاذ تنمية هذه القدرة على تصميم وتطوير أدواته البيداغوجية حتى يصبح واعيا بدوره الايجابي في تنمية استراتيجيات التعلم لدى المتعلم. تصبح هذه المهمة نوعا من الاستقلالية و القدرة على تحليل ، اختيار، تصميم وتطوير الأدوات البيداغوجية.

Introduction

Teaching English as a foreign language requires the design and implementation of a syllabus for learners who will learn that language and achieve a level of proficiency. Learners' achievement of any proficiency depends, to a great extent, on the quality of the implemented syllabus and the learning procedure they follow while learning. Implementation is the design of teaching/learning materials most adequate to learning styles and strategies, and most appropriate to communicative needs of the learners. We are here concerned with two basic qualities of teaching/learning procedures that make learning a foreign language an enjoyable and useful task .

One is concerned with learning as information processing, the other is related to discourse processing as a communication activity. One is concerned with learning as information processing, the other is related to discourse processing as a communication activity.

Our task, in this paper, is to investigate the impact of information processing strategies and communicative discourse functions on teaching/learning materials designed by teachers and teacher-trainees of English as a foreign language at Constantine University. This study can be useful to teachers and course textbook designers who want to design language teaching materials based on authentic texts. It attempts to satisfy the needs of students of English for academic purposes by providing their teachers with a materials design procedure that takes into account learning strategies and discourse organisation (functions and notions)

Our concern, then, is to clarify the meaning of learning and information processing, and the functions of discourse, in order to use them as major guidelines for the design of teaching/learning materials with teachers and teacher-trainees of English at the University of Constantine.

1- Situation analysis:

In the study of any particular case of learning, the analysis of learners' needs helps the researcher determine learning objectives. But learning objectives themselves depend on the learning expectations expressed by the educational institution and the requirements of the subject being learnt.

On one hand, almost all Departments of Constantine University provide an English course which is taught by teachers who recently graduated from The Department of English of the same university. They received a general course in teaching English as a foreign language without any focus or particular training in materials design. They represent the control group of the experiment.

On the other hand, the Ecole Normale Supérieure for teacher trainees in Constantine and a postgraduate course at the Department of English, University of Constantine, provide a training course in materials design. Attendants of this course represent two experimental groups.

Our investigation about learning and teaching objectives was based on questionnaires addressed to a random sample of first-year undergraduate students at the departments of social sciences, a random sample of their teachers, and a random sample of postgraduate students and decision-makers of these Departments.

The two experimental groups attended a course among which a curriculum and material design subject was taught. In this subject, focus was put on adopting a procedure in the design of authentic materials as an experiment. Focus of instructional and tutorial work was based on:

-the analysis, definition and writing of achievement objectives;

-the definition of information processing stages and learning strategies;

-the analysis of authentic texts according to discourse functions and notions

used by the authors.
-the analysis and criticism of already designed materials according to a
 learning procedure.
An evaluation of the experiment was conducted through a project which the participants undertook as a pair work. They had to design a language teaching unit based on authentic materials, like newspaper articles, for reading comprehension purposes.

2-Theoretical and practical issues of implementation:

Practical implications of any course design lead straight away to the design of learning achievements, procedures, and content. The design (planning and writing) of learning achievements concerns purposes and objectives, the choice of a learning procedure concerns styles and strategies learners will practise, and the selection of content concerns the types of learning materials provided to feed the course with texts and activities.

2-1.Learning objectives:

Planning and writing objectives is not an easy task teachers have to deal with. It has always been a great concern among educational scholars to write educational purposes, goals, and objectives. Since the milestone work of Bloom in 1956, there has been a huge amount of contributions attempting to avoid focus on production objectives and insist on process objectives.

Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives is not only a study of educational objectives as a product, terminal, behavioural outcome, as many would think. Bloom (1956: 25-43) devoted a whole chapter to the impact of defining educational objectives on curriculum design and implementation in order to achieve those objectives.

'By educational objectives, we mean explicit formulations of the ways in which students are expected to be changed by the educative process. That is, the ways in which they will change in their thinking, their feelings, and their actions. There are many possible changes that can take place in students as a result of learning experiences, but since the time and resources of the school are limited, only a few of the possibilities can be realized. It is important that the major objectives of the school or unit of instruction be clearly identified if time and effort are not to be wasted on less important things and if the work of the school is to be guided by some plan'. (Bloom, 1956:26)

Bloom (1956:201-207) determined specific details of the educational objectives in the cognitive domain as six major levels the learners achieve in their learning experience. They are: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation. The impact of these six levels on

47

curriculum design and implementation is quite clear in the extract quoted above. It is in fact 'the ways in which the students are expected to change; their thinking, feelings and actions' through the 'learning experiences' reflected in 'unit of instruction', representing a whole learning plan which make those objectives attainable.

The participants of both experimental groups had to examine Bloom's taxonomy and its specific details in writing appropriate objectives to each level. The participants had to write first general objectives of learning English as a foreign language in order to make them aware of the confusion they can make between objectives and general goals. For example:

-I learn English in order to be a teacher;

-I learn English to travel abroad;

-I learn English in order to master the language

All these statements represent general goals which reflect learners' motivation, interest, and even career plans. They had to focus their practice of writing objectives on a performance in the language which shows what they can exactly do with it, after a learning experience. Their statements, then, became much more appropriate. For example:

-I learn English in order to read books, newspaper, etc…

-I learn English in order to write letters, essays, etc…

- I learn English in order to listen to music, radio or watch TV channels.

Although these statements represent objectives of what any person learning English would like to do, they in fact lack the pedagogical criteria of being included in a plan as an achievement after successful learning which can be observed and measured. Participants had to write statements which can be achieved as a performance, at the end of a learning plan of a unit, which can be observed (heard or seen), and corrected by the teacher. They were given instruction to start their statements this way: 'at the end of the unit or lesson, learners will……………….'

The following examples of their statements show to a great extent the change that was brought to their understanding, conception and writing of educational objectives in terms of Bloom's taxonomy:

-learners will look at the picture of a famous person and describe his/her physical appearance orally and in writing

-Learners will tell their friends a joke and then write it down in a paragraph

-learners will write a letter to a friend inviting him/her to visit their home town.

48

Further practical implications of Bloom's taxonomy lead us to consider whether already designed materials do clearly define learning objectives. Every participant had to examine whether a teaching/learning unit provided in Algerian English textbooks defines an objective, or specifies some activities as being an act of performance, achieved by the learners after successful learning. This practice was carried in class as workshops where every participant presented his/her analysis to the whole group for further discussion.

2.2-Learning and information processing:

Learning as a mental activity requires either an incidental or intentional context. We are here concerned with intentional learning of a foreign language which is part of a school or university course. It is thus a purposive matter to teach English as a foreign language because it is supposed to serve a pedagogical, instructive and intellectual goal. Purpose in learning is of capital importance. The process through which learners learn has to care for the achievement of that purpose. Hence our concern of information processing is a core element in teaching/learning English since every language teaching/learning material contains to a large extent a sum of information items learners have to process.

Information processing is 'information progressing through the system in a series of stages, one step at a time' (Matlin.2003:10). This general and concluding, one sentence, definition requires a lot of explanations of the whole process. Many works -and to cite but a few- (Anderson.1995:12-18, Slavin.2003:173-187, Woolfolk.2004:239-271) in fact, studied the subject by and large and determined these stages as: perception, rehearsal, storage, and retrieval. These stages require more or less time according to learners' background knowledge, attention and motivation to learn. When carried out all together, these stages represent a whole schematic procedure of thinking which involves both working and long term memory; a procedure which is often qualified as thinking and problem solving.

While learning a foreign language learners are often exposed to general knowledge (cultural, scientific) items and specifically linguistic (language knowledge) items. They are supposed to process the knowledge –information- they are exposed to through pedagogical stages which reflect information processing. These aspects are often identified as learning styles and strategies. Oxford (1990:11-21), for example supplies the language teacher with an exhaustive list of direct strategies related to information processing (memory, cognitive and compensation strategies) and a list of indirect strategies (metacognitive, affective and social strategies). These strategies can serve as a guideline for both analysis and design of language teaching materials. A close link is then made between Bloom's taxonomy and learning strategies. The most obvious work one can rely on is that of Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) who

revisited and supplemented the taxonomy with relevant teaching/learning instructions most appropriate to classroom use.

Given the importance of these features in the learning process, participants of both experimental groups had to analyse already designed materials again. This time, they had to check whether the activities, tasks or exercises provide stages of perception, rehearsal, understanding and storage, retrieval and problem solving. In each workshop, pairs of participants came with an analysis of the material starting from the supposed designed objective and going through the procedural information processing –learning strategies- progression. They had to check whether or not the material at hand provides learners with activities (tasks) that help them learn and achieve the designed objective.

2.3-   Learning and discourse processing:

The huge amount of research work achievements in discourse analysis are the results of investigation in the study of language from a sociolinguistic point of view. Since the work of Austin (1962), *How to do Things with Words*, and many other contributions – Searle (1969) and Grice (1975), to cite but a few - the study of language focused on social action and social conversation which developed into a theory of speech acts, conversational maxims and pragmatics.

These developments biased language study and language teaching in many ways. Their earliest impact was the notional functional analysis of language and language teaching in terms of functional and semantico- grammatical categories (cf. Wilkins 1976). For Wilkins, functional categories represent the functional social needs of European foreign language learners, while semantico-grammatical categories represent the meaning of grammatical relations and terms required for the expression of functional meaning. Thus, for example, if the learner needs to describe a past event, the functional meaning of narrating requires the use of the notion of time to express the past tense. This analytical study of language and language teaching remained insufficient as far as it limited the scope of notional/functional analysis to the needs of the learners.

Foreign language learners do not only need to express their needs, but also need to understand the discourse they are exposed to in communicative contexts. Discourse comprehension is a process of the mind which requires an analysis of information structure (information processing) and an analysis of language structure most specific to the author's intention and communicative context. Research findings of Widdowson (1983), Trimble (1985), Schiffrin (1987), McCarthy (1991), and Nunan (1993) provide a thorough study of discourse organisation and functional types which help language teachers

determine what their learners really need to understand. Discourse processing involves adjusting background knowledge to new information. In Widdowson's terms, this represents schematic processing of knowledge and information while using language. Basing his analysis and description of discourse processing on schema theory, Widdowson (1983:34-41) determines schematic knowledge as:

'(…)cognitive constructs which allow for the organisation of information in long-tem memory and which provide a basis for prediction. They are stereotypic images which we map on to actuality in order to make sense of it, and to provide it with a coherent pattern.' (Widdowson.opcit:34-35)

Schematic knowledge, knowledge of new information and knowledge of language, needs procedures of meaning negotiation which role is:

'(…) to match up and adjust schemata in the discourse processing: they are the interactive negotiating activities which interpret the directions provided and enable us to alter our expectations in the light of new evidence as the discourse proceeds. And it is this procedural ability which realizes schematic knowledge.' (Widdowson.opcit:40-41)

If we consider that each stage of schematic knowledge is an established background knowledge which helps us predict new information, the interactive negotiating procedures help us digest new information and establish a new schematic knowledge. These two extreme stages of knowledge correspond to Bloom's (1956) levels of *Knowledge (remembering)* and *Evaluation (judgement)*. The procedures that stand between the two extremes correspond to *comprehension, Application* and *Analysis*. Schematic procedures do also correspond with stages of learning (see 2.2 above) which help learners perceive, understand, store and retrieve. Processing discourse in this sense cannot be isolated from processing information.

Language functions in social, academic and/or scientific and academic settings clarified the commitment which the language teacher should have towards teaching. In the categories of a notional syllabus, Wilkins (1976:21-54) provided semantico-grammatical, modal and functional categories of a syllabus on which language teachers should rely to analyse and design materials to help learners develop communicative abilities according to an analytical learning procedure. Schiffrin (1987:07-19) analysed the organisation of stories and arguments and came out with a series of discourse moves that writers make while telling stories or arguing. In story telling, Schiffrin (ibid.17) distinguished four major tasks or moves a writer makes; initiating the story, reporting events within the story, conveying the point of the story, and accomplishing an action through the story. Trimble (1985:53-54 and 70) analysed the patterns of development and the rhetorical functions most

51

frequently found in the academic paragraph and provided a typology of rhetorical functions most frequently used in the academic fields. According to Trimble, writers in the academic world use rhetorical techniques which reflect natural patterns related to the subject area;

-time order: chronology, process;

-space order: general, specific;

-causality and result, and logical patterns are, however, imposed by the writer and, in addition to causality and result, they include:

-order of importance;

-comparison and contrast;

-comparison: relates similarities;

-contrast: relates differences;

-analogy: compares things basically dissimilar;

-exemplification;

-illustration: reference to a visual aid

According to Trimble, writers of academic and scientific discourse generally choose the following rhetorical functions:

-description: physical, functional and process description;

-definition: formal, semi-formal, non-formal, and expanded definition;

-classification: complete and partial classification;

-instruction: direct instructions, indirect instructions, and instructional Information.

-visual-verbal relationships – text information, text placement, and placement

of visuals.

Discourse processing is the main task a language teacher has to practise first, before designing any kind of language teaching materials. Designing a scheme of discourse, the learners will be exposed to, is a preliminary step for the design of tasks which learners will practice while learning. Foreign language teachers who implement a language course, either by using already designed materials or by designing their own materials, are supposed to be able to distinguish discourse functions, authors' intentions, rhetorical devices and grammatical notions used by authors to express their intentions.

For this purpose, our informants in this study (teachers and teacher-trainees) attended several workshops where they had to examine authentic texts in order to determine the language function(s) expressed in the authors' discourse and the rhetorical, grammatical devices frequently found in a variety of texts.

52

3-Experimental Issues of implementation:

As we said above, the informants of both experimental groups attended a series of workshops where they had to analyse and write learning objectives, analyse and evaluate already designed materials, and analyse a number of authentic texts from a discourse point of view. The most significant results of these workshops were mainly two**:**

-the ability to describe and analyse already designed materials according to a learning procedure which respects learning stages and discourse features in order to achieve a learning objective- and

-the ability to design and develop a language learning material, based initially on discourse analysis of an authentic material, in order to develop learning activities which would lead to achievement of a learning objective.

3.1-Description and analysis of materials:

At this stage of the experiment, informants were trained to use what they learnt about objectives, discourse and information processing to analyse already designed materials provided in Algerian secondary school textbooks. Even if they used these materials to learn English themselves at school, they have now to look at them with a critical eye. During workshops, pairs of informants presented each a description and an analysis of a language teaching material. An example of such a task can be given here: the material analysed was entitled *Murder Publicity Executed: The shooting squad gunned him down* (in *My book of English* N° 8 For Second Year Secondary school: 135-137. see Appendix)

Our informants considered that this is an authentic text- which seems to be a newspaper report- but its source is not indicated. They considered that the author is narrating a past event by reporting on the public execution of a criminal. They sorted out the rhetorical devices and grammatical notions most frequently used by the author as: time (past tense), order of events (sequencing and passive form), and notions of quality, quantity and manner (adjectives and adverbs). They estimated that the learners using this material would have a pre-intermediate level of proficiency and would achieve the following objective: narrating and reporting about past events.

Their comments on the material were consequently very critical towards the type, procedure and number of learning activities. The negative features can be summarized as follows:

-the material does not define or provide any objective to be achieved by the learners;

-there is no pre-reading or warming up activity;

-the first activity –a few words explained- is a spoon feeding exercise because learners do not look for meaning in context;

-the third activity –rewriting sentences- is too short and is not supplied with any kind of explanation of exemplification;

-the fourth activity –true/false statements- has got a confusing phrase in the instruction itself "don't you know?"

-the fifth activity –word meaning in text- is odd. The designer provided the meaning of almost all difficult words in the first activity but now he/she is providing only three easy items;

-the sixth activity –cross the odd man out- is inappropriate as the text itself does not provide a variety of comparative contexts;

-the last activity –words of the same family- is ambiguous as the terms "same family" may be interpreted as same class, same meaning, or same root.

The negative comments were too severe as our informants came to conclude that the designer of this material did not respect stages of a learning procedure because normally true/false statements should come before comprehension questions and not after a grammatical pattern exercise. Further, search for word meaning in context should be an effort made by the learners in attempting to understand new words not the easiest ones which they already know. Lexical relationships or word association should be very precise about the type and context of word association or elimination.

The most critical comment about this material is that it does not provide for any kind of production activity where the learners can perform a certain language skill or production. Hence there is no achievement of any objective whatsoever. It seems that the material was originally written as a language test which has been transformed into a teaching/learning material.

Of course, not all the materials analysed were so negatively judged as the informants presented a variety of them from the wide range of Algerian secondary school textbooks.

3.2-Designing materials:

As the informants gained command of description and analysis of already designed language learning materials, they developed a high level of comprehensive thinking towards the tasks they were undertaking. Their value judgements towards each step of design and development of language learning materials had to be put into real practice. Each pair of informants had to select an authentic text –identify its source or author-, analyse it according to a discourse processing strategy and plan it to be taught according to information processing stages. Hence, they had to design and develop their own teaching materials as teachers.

Similarly to the first stage of materials analysis, informants had to consider first the discourse functions, authors intentions, rhetorical and grammatical devices found in the authentic texts. This is a preliminary stage to

adapt the text to learners' proficiency level and to design an achievement objective in terms learners' performance as an outcome.

The design of learning activities/tasks has to respect norms of information processing by providing each stage of learning with a number of activities for each stage. Language teaching materials have to be generous in the sense of providing learners with sufficient exposure to, and rehearsal of, the material being studied. The diversity of activity type is also of capital importance; informants had to get rid of fossilized, stereotypic, activities that prevail in already designed materials. Innovation, appropriateness, and relevance of the suggested activities had to respect the norms of discourse functioning and information processing.

Each pair of informants had, then, to present their 'project' to the whole group for criticism. Collaborative evaluation of the materials was highly appreciated by the informants as further suggestions came from their peers. As the process of presenting these projects increased, the informants gained confidence and audacity in their suggestions. In addition to traditional comprehension activities, the informants suggested a variety of tabulated information activities which involve tasks of completion, transfer, and matching items. These are very relevant to schematic mapping of knowledge by providing learners with columns (background knowledge) they have to complete, fill in or match, with new information. Language practice activities are also improved by exemplification, covert and overt explanation of rhetorical devices and grammatical structures. Enough tasks are provided for learners to manipulate and handle language forms and structures needed for later production tasks. Guided and free production activities are designed at the end of each material in order to evaluate the achievement objective which has been designed at the beginning of the material being developed.

4-General interpretation of the results and conclusion:

The findings of our investigations determined that undergraduate and postgraduate students and decision-makers of the academic departments want to learn/teach English in order to cope with readings in the academic field they are supposed to study. Though at undergraduate level, students expressed a limited number of needs related to social needs (listening to music, writing e-mails to friends, etc…), the most common need expressed among all the academic community is to learn about the subject field they are studying from various sources such as specialised textbooks, journals, periodicals, and internet sites.

Hence, we assume that the general objective of an academic English syllabus is to make learners able to read, understand, extract, and use the required information. Our assumption confirms what has already been determined by previous studies in the field, mainly Ph.d theses (c.f. Miliani.M 1984) and Magistere dissertations (c.f. Hamada.H 1990), which came to the

55

same results for objectives and suggested syllabus and course implementation procedures.

The problematic issue which hinders teaching such syllabuses is the procedure adopted by teachers when using authentic materials. Our investigation revealed that teachers' procedures of design and implementation of such courses are characterized by a lack of methodological analysis of the materials and a stereotypic design of learning activities. Reading comprehension texts are all analysed and consequently treated the same way and implemented by the same learning activities; a text is generally followed by comprehension questions (wh questions and true/false statements), a word meaning search (synonyms and antonyms), structural patterns of grammar (pronouns, tense, voice and indirect speech, etc..). The designed materials in such a case look like language tests rather than language learning materials; they exclude all aspects related to information structure and discourse aspects which are required in the comprehension of academic discourse.

This experimental study was basically conducted under two major principles: observation and tracking of informants while they had to change their attitude towards the analysis, design and development of language teaching materials. It does not claim for quantitative, statistical, results because the value and validity of language teaching materials can only be revealed if the materials are used with learners in appropriate classes (where affective and social strategies of learning can add a lively atmosphere to the materials).

It is hence a qualitative, empirical, study which required the implementation of materials design and development. It focused on teachers and teacher-trainees awareness of the importance of information and discourse processing tasks. A good language teaching material is one that takes care of these two principles in order to help learners learn and develop language abilities. All informants achieved more or less this level of design and development and the publication of their projects, within this space would be impossible. For further information and examination of these projects, as final achievements of the informants, please contact by e-mail: hacene.hamada@caramail.com.

The concluding remark we can make is simply a positive improvement of teachers and teacher-trainees metacognitive knowledge of their task. A teacher who designs and develops language teaching materials is one who is going to influence learners' styles and strategies of learning. Our informants had to be aware of this challenging responsibility because each step of materials design and development required explanatory principles of pedagogy: objectives, procedures and outcomes. Achieving this maturity in thinking and acting by a teacher is the first step towards his/her autonomy to select, improve, design and develop materials whenever needed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. **Anderson,J.R.** 1995 (4th Edn). *Cognitive Psychology and its Implications*. W.H.Freeman and Company

2. **Anderson,L and D,A.Krathwohl** .2001.*A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching and Assessing. A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. Longman

3. **Bloom,B.S** (etal) 1956. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. The Classification of Educational Goals.* Handbook 1 Cognitive Domain. David McKay Company

4. **Grice,H.P.** 1975 *'Logic and Conversation.'* In Peter Cole and Jerry L.Morgan (eds), *Syntax and Semantic 3: Speech Acts*. New York: Academic Press, 41-48

5. **Hamada.H.**1990. *Designing a Reading Comprehension Syllabus for Students of Economics. A Case Study.* Unpublished Magistere Dissertation. University of Constantine.

6. **Matlin,M.** 2003 (5th Edn). *Cognition*. Wiley. John Wiley and Sons, Inc

7. **McCarthy,M.** 1991. *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers*. Cambridge University Press.

8. **Miliani.M.** 1984. *Objectives, Curriculum Design and Methods for the Teaching of ESP with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Institute of Economics Sciences.* Unpublished PhD dissertation. University of Wales.

9. *My Book of English N°8.* 2001. Second Year Secondary School Textbook. Office National des Publications Scolaires

10. **Nunan,D.** 1993. *Introducing Discourse Analysis*. Penguin

11. **Oxford,R.** 1990. *Language Learning Strategies. What every teacher should know*. Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

12. **Schiffrin,D**. 1987. *Discourse Markers*. Cambridge University Press.

13. **Searle,J.R.** 1969. *Speech Acts*. Cambridge University Press

14. **Slavin,R.E.** 2003 (7th Edn). *Educational Psychology. Theory and Practice*. Pearson Education

15. **Trimble,S.** 1985 *English for Science and Technology. A Discourse Approach* Cambridge University Press

16. **Widdowson,H.G.** 1983. *Learning Purpose and Language use*. Oxford University Press

17. **Wilkins,D.** 1976. *Notional Syllabuses*. Oxford University Press

18. **Woolfolk,A.** 2004 (9th Edn). *Educational Psychology*. Pearson Education

Appendix: *The shooting squad gunned him down*

(My Book of English N°8 2ème AS)

A 25-year-old man convicted of murdering a pregnant woman was publicly executed on Tuesday by a five-man army squad on the Indian Ocean Comoro Islands. Youssouf was given a bottle of soft drink at his request before being tied to a post at the port in the capital Maroni. Magistrates turned down his request to speak to reporters.

He was told to say his final prayers and then his head was covered in a hood. The five-man shooting squad climbed out of a car which was parked nearby, took up their firing position and gunned him down. The squad returned to the car and drove out of the port at a high speed to cheers and applause from thousands of on-lookers who witnessed only the second public execution in Comoran recent history.

President Mohammed Taki, elected in March, has ordered the death penalty to be carried out for murder in a crackdown on crime. "Someone who is tempted to kill a fellow human being will think twice before carrying his foul enterprise," Taki said last month when he ordered the death penalty to be enforced.

A few words explained

Army squad	A group of soldiers
Carried out	Executed, applied, done
cheers	Loud sounds of pleasure
convicted	Condemned, found guilty
Crackdown on crime	Decide to start war on crime
Gunned him down	Shot him with a gun
pregnant	A woman expecting a baby
Soft drink	Not alcoholic
Turned down	Refused, rejected
witnessed	Saw, were present at

Answer the following questions according to the text
1. What was Youssouf's crime?
2. What was his last wish?
3. What was he told to do?
4. How was he executed?
5. Was that the first execution in the Comoran Islands?
6. Why did president Taki order the death penalty to be enforced?

Rewrite sentence (b) so that it means the same as sentence (a)

1a) A 25-year-old murderer was publicly executed by a five-man army squad.

1b)Afive-man army squad……………………………………………….

2a) His head was covered in a hood

2b) They ………………………………………………………….

Are these statements true, false, not mentioned or don't you know?

Statements	T	F	NM	?
1. The man killed a pregnant lady in the Comoran Islands.				
2. He was executed publicly in the next day.				
3. He was shot by a five-man squad.				
4. The witnesses of the execution were shocked.				
5. This is going to be the last public execution in the island.				
6. President Taki wanted to stop the death penalty.				
7. The number of murders has decreased ever since.				

Find in the text words, phrases or expressions that are closest in meaning to the following:

a) demand   b) not very far   c) shot

59

Cross the odd man out.

convicted	jailed	sentenced	judged
magistrate	lawyer	judge	tribunal
car	bike	automobile	taxi
action	enterprise	party	operation
order	command	instruct	perform
executed	accomplished	started	achieved
murder	crime	assassination	fire

Find words of the same family as:

Give			
Speak			
Cover			
Execute			
Enforce			

.

60