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## **Learning in Italian as a second language<sup>1</sup>**

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### **0 Introduction**

This paper reports on an experiment on enhancing second language reading comprehension through textual modification. The study aims to verify if textual modification can be a useful pedagogic strategy in teaching school subjects to immigrant students at a low proficiency level. Students of Italian as a second language entering the school system need to achieve a proficiency level that can enable them not only to communicate with teachers and peers, but also to learn school subjects and participate in classroom activities as soon as possible. The production of comprehensible texts specifically thought out for immigrant students could constitute one response to the problem. Working in the direction of facilitating their access to texts with academic content implies a general understanding of what precisely are the teaching practises which help comprehension. Research on the reading process and text difficulty is therefore highly relevant, as it can offer useful insights both for drawing up guidelines on how to modify existing texts or prepare new ones, and for teaching more effective strategies to approach a text.

The latest survey for the school year 2006/2007 reports the presence in Italy of 500.000 immigrant students, that is, 5,6% of the total school population (Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, 2007). These figures show that immigrant students are now a structural presence that teachers and educators cannot ignore. Furthermore, one of the crucial problems for immigrant students in Italy is the reduced success in education when compared to Italian peers. In secondary schools in particular, 25% of

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<sup>1</sup> A first version of this study appeared in Ferrari (2003).

immigrant students are at least one year behind, compared to 13% of Italian speaking students (Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, 2007).

In the school context in particular, as well as in our society in general, the acquisition of information is highly dependent on reading. Consequently, in order to participate actively in classroom activities, all students need to acquire the abilities of reading, comprehending, studying, and learning from written texts, and immigrant students in particular need to do so efficiently using a second language as a medium of instruction. Too often teachers describe cases of students who are left out of classroom activities for a long time, unable to access textbooks or classroom materials. Failures and delays in the acquisition of school subjects are immediate consequences, after which frustration, lack of motivation, early abandonment, and low literacy can easily follow (Pallotti, 2001; Ferrari & Pallotti, 2005).

Cummins (1981, 1989) reports that immigrant students need at least two years to develop appropriate Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills in an L2 (BICS), and from five to seven years to develop Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). This means that textbooks and classroom materials meant for native speaking pupils risk being linguistically too demanding for these students in their first years of attendance. As a consequence, immigrant students with low language proficiency levels (A1-A2, on the Common European Framework of Reference, CEFR) who are enrolled in regular mainstream classes often require additional instruction in reading to allow their participation to classroom activities. When students are of secondary-school age, there is the added problem of the relevance and appeal of the texts they are given to read: while school texts directed to their age are often beyond their language proficiency, those they can easily read are usually meant for younger learners, and may be not only boring but possibly also embarrassing for them. Writing specific texts which are both accessible and suitable is one of the solutions which has been proposed.

Studies investigating the effectiveness of textual modification on reading comprehension support the assumption that modification can enhance comprehension, and consequently acquisition. Thus language programmes could improve greatly from the use of specific materials addressing the learning of school subjects and the increase of reading proficiency, without losing the interest, motivation and self-esteem of the students.

The interest in input interpretability for comprehension has motivated a number of studies, both descriptive and quasi-experimental, on various textual modification approaches, and their effects on reading comprehension. Three are the main approaches reported in the literature:

- simplification,
- elaboration, and
- simplification combined with logical-conceptual re-organisation.

Let us present them briefly. Simplification generates texts which have shorter and less complex sentences, a limited range of verb tenses, and fewer modifiers. This often entails some loss of semantic content. Since the removal of unfamiliar or complex linguistic items cannot help learners to acquire those items, second language researchers are interested in determining if it is possible to modify target language samples in other ways, so that comprehension can be enhanced without denying the learner exposure to new complex elements. Research on adjustments occurring in conversation between native speakers and non-native speakers has suggested that elaboration could be a useful alternative. When elaborative modification is adopted, linguistic complexity is compensated through interactional adjustments, so that texts can maintain their syntactic and lexical complexity, and sometimes even increase it. A third approach to textual modification originates from studies on comprehensibility which underline the importance of schemata activation for comprehension. This approach concentrates more on the rhetorical organisation of the text, shifting the attention from sentence level to text level. Vocabulary and syntax are kept close to the reader's linguistic competence, while the text is organised so that its objectives are clear, and there is no need to activate background knowledge or cognitive processes superior to the reader's capacity.

As mentioned above, the present study intends to investigate experimentally whether or not textual modification can improve reading comprehension for secondary school immigrant students with a low L2 reading proficiency (A2, on the CEFR). It also aims to determine which types of modification suggested in the literature – simplification, elaboration, or a combination of simplification and logical-conceptual re-organisation – are most effective.

In § 2 below, I will present a brief overview of the literature on the effects of input modification. In §§ 3 and 4, I will describe the methodology of my study and discuss the results. Finally, in § 5, I will draw some conclusions.

## **1 Experimental research on the effects of input modification: a brief literature survey**

In the literature there is general agreement on viewing reading as a language activity which involves interaction and transfer of information between the text and the reader. The ability to understand a text requires some linguistic knowledge, as words and sentences are the materials the reader uses to achieve comprehension. However, text interpretation is always the result of an interaction of the meaning of words and sentences with the reader's knowledge of the world (cfr. Alderson & Urquhart, 1984; Urquhart & Weir, 1988; Singer & Donlan, 1989). Thus the language dimension is a necessary but not sufficient condition for reading comprehension in both L1 and L2. However, it is also true that, to a certain extent, a text can be processed with less than native-like language proficiency. Research on text readability and comprehensibility shows how both complex language and the distance between text and reader in terms of background knowledge can be obstacles to comprehension. Complex syntax, obscure lexis, and the request of a high number of inferences are the fundamental difficulties a text can present to poor readers.

Starting from the assumption that, on removing these obstacles, comprehension can be enhanced, a number of studies have investigated the effects of different textual modification approaches on L2 reading. Generalisations from these studies must be taken cautiously because there are great differences in their methodologies. Nevertheless, results clearly indicate that modification can enhance reading comprehension for ESL (English as a Second Language) university and high school students.

Most studies on the effects of textual modification on comprehension focus primarily on the role of syntax, both at sentence and text levels. Using readability formula, they indicate words and syntax as factors affecting text difficulty, and suggest that short sentences are easier to understand than longer ones. Blau (1982) challenges this assumption, and tests experimentally the hypothesis that oversimplified syntax is

inappropriate for mature ESL students. In her study, she submits 18 short passages in three different versions to college students and eighth grade students. In all three versions, vocabulary and content are held constant, while syntax varies. Version 1 consists of short and simple sentences, version 2 of complex sentences with explicit clues underlying relations left intact, and version 3 of complex sentences without such clues. Results show that shorter sentences do not aid comprehension; as a matter of fact, often they impede it. In line with Blau (1982), Anderson & Davison (1988) find some evidence for the fact that longer sentences can be equally, sometimes more, comprehensible, provided attention is paid to highlighting important concepts and discourse organisation.

Certainly a knowledge of syntax is a requirement for reading comprehension, but it appears to play a minor role relative to other factors. Research shows that the correlation between reading achievement and recognition of words is higher than between reading achievement and knowledge of grammar. This is particularly the case when ESP (English for Special Purposes) is considered (Weiss, 1985). Furthermore, cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics emphasize that texts are processed by using schema-based and conceptually-guided strategies. This implies that high order elements, such as text structure and content words, allow a reader to build a conceptual representation of the text, while syntactic structures are less sensitive to the constitution of this representation. Ulijn & Strother (1990) investigate the effect of syntactic simplification in reading EST (English for Science and Technology) texts, and support this view that syntactic simplification is not a real simplification. In their experiment, which involves native and non-native university students of both the sciences and the humanities, modified syntax does not affect either comprehension or reading time, while background knowledge facilitates comprehension. These authors point out that syntactic simplification may have an effect on other reader types, such as low proficiency language users, but not on those at an advanced level. Background knowledge, on the other hand, is a significant independent factor in both native and non-native reading comprehension. To sum up, textual and lexical rewriting might be more effective, and simplification should be a matter of textual and lexical revision rather than of syntactic revision.

Parker & Chaudron (1987) review 14 investigations on the absolute and comparative effectiveness of simplification and elaboration on L2 comprehension, in both aural and written modes. The format of these studies is similar, in the sense that a text is

first modified in two or three different versions, which are then presented to high-school or university students, and finally comprehension is assessed objectively. Generalisations from all these studies nevertheless remain difficult to draw because they differ with respect to modification types, and ways of assessing comprehension. It emerges, however, that:

- linguistic simplification enhances literal comprehension generally, even though simple sentences alone can sometimes limit comprehension (Blau, 1982);
- simplification and elaboration often co-occur in these studies, but when they can be distinguished, simplification does not appear to be consistently superior to elaboration (Yano, Long & Ross, 1994; Sun-Young Oh, 2001);
- input modifications (i.e. reductions) are more useful to low proficiency L2 students (Blau, 1982; Sun-Young Oh, 2001);
- isolated input or interactional adjustments generally do not improve comprehensibility of a whole text (Parker & Chaudron, 1987);
- non-native speakers achieve greater comprehension when the text is modified (Yano, Long & Ross, 1994).

## **2 The study**

As mentioned above, the aim of the present study is to investigate experimentally the effects of different forms of textual modification on the reading comprehension of written passages guided by the following research questions:

- (1) What is the effect on reader's comprehension of textual modification, as shown by scores on a 12 item multiple-choice comprehension test?
- (2) Which of the three textual modification approaches discussed in the literature is more effective for my particular group of students?

This study involves 36 young immigrant with low Italian L2 proficiency (A2) living in the Reggio Emilia region, and enrolled in intensive summer courses of Italian L2.

They were selected by means of a screening test submitted to all students in the summer courses. Besides ensuring the same low proficiency level of all participants, this initial test also had the function to provide a covariate for the reading

comprehension measures and a basis for examining possible interactions between language proficiency and text type.

As there are no available reading tests for Italian L2 specifically thought out for students of secondary-school age, for this initial screening test, I used some exercises from two widely-used language tests for adult learners: *CELI 2* and *CILS, first level*, suitably selected for topic interest and familiarity.

Thus selected, the 36 participants were randomly divided into four groups, of 9 students each (see below § 3.2).

Four passages are used for the experimental reading test, taken from two books about animals written for students of secondary-school age; the books are *La zebra, Il leone, L'elefante* (by Arturo Aruffi, 2000), and *Il varano delle steppe* (by Isabella L. Coifmann, 2000). These passages deal with topics that are well known to the students; consequently they do not require the activation of specific background knowledge, and limit the influence of *schemata* on their reading performance. They are descriptive passages, providing information about the physical aspect, living habits and peculiar characteristics of one animal each: the zebra, the lion, the elephant and the monitor lizard. There is also a picture of the relevant animal before each passage, so that ignorance of the Italian very word for them did not inhibit comprehension greatly.

These original passages are made up of one or two paragraphs. On average, their length is 152 words, distributed in 9.5 sentences, while the sentence length is 17.16 words. Low frequency words, such as *striature*, *individuare*, *frastornato*, *intimorire*, and *possenti*, constitute circa 9 % of the four texts. Their Gulpease index<sup>2</sup> indicates a mean readability level of 59.97. For all these reasons, the students participating in the study should find these texts difficult. Here is a brief excerpt from the zebra passage:

***Original version***

*La zebra è famosa per le caratteristiche strisce nere e bianche del mantello. Le striature sono utilissime per sfuggire ai predatori. Quando le zebre fuggono, le strisce scorrono davanti agli occhi del leone, che rimane frastornato non riuscendo ad individuare bene la sagoma della zebra.*

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<sup>2</sup> The Gulpease index is calculated following Eulogos CENSOR (cfr. [www.eulogos.net](http://www.eulogos.net)).

In order to investigate the effects of input modification on reading comprehension three new versions of each passage are prepared, and tested among three of the participant groups. The fourth group is tested on the original version:

- Group 1 – Elaborated (EL),
- Group 2 – Simplified (SI),
- Group 3 – Simplified and re-organised (S+R),
- Group 4 – Original (OR).

Let us briefly illustrate the same excerpt of the zebra passage reproduced above in its three new versions.

When elaboration is applied (EL) to the original text, complex passages are modified through redundancy, repetition, and paraphrase.

#### ***Elaborated version***

*La zebra è una specie di cavallo, ed è famosa per le caratteristiche strisce nere e bianche del mantello, cioè la zebra è bianca e nera. Le striature, che sono le righe bianche e nere della zebra, sono utilissime per sfuggire e non farsi prendere dai predatori. Quando le zebre fuggono e corrono via, le strisce si muovono velocemente e scorrono davanti agli occhi del leone. Il leone non vede più bene e rimane frastornato, non riuscendo così a vedere e individuare bene la sagoma della zebra.*

Here, *è una specie di cavallo* is added to clarify the word *la zebra*, and *cioè la zebra è bianca e nera* is a reformulation of *è famosa per le caratteristiche strisce nere e bianche del mantello*, stated in the first sentence. Analogously, in the second sentence, *striature* is explained through rephrasing, and *sfuggire* by adding *e non farsi prendere*. The last sentence is divided into two clauses, and its difficult words explained through rephrasing. Not surprisingly, the four elaborated versions are longer. The average number of words has increased from circa 152 to 256, and also the numbers and length of their sentences have increased. The Gulpease index of 59.70 shows this elaborated version is as difficult as the original version.

When the reading passages are modified through simplification (SI), low frequency words are substituted with more frequent ones, sentences are kept brief, and syntax becomes simpler, that is, coordination substitutes subordination, and SVO is the preferred word order.



### ***Simplified version***

*La zebra è come un cavallo, ed è famosa perchè è a righe bianche e nere. Le righe servono alla zebra per scappare dagli animali che la vogliono mangiare. Quando le zebre corrono via, le strisce passano davanti agli occhi del leone, il leone non vede più bene e non capisce più dove è la zebra.*

Here, difficult words, such as *strisce*, *mantello*, *striatura*, *sfuggire*, *scorrere*, *rimanere frastornato*, *individuare* and *sagoma*, are substituted by more frequent ones. In the third sentence, the relative clause is changed into a coordinate clause. In this simplified version, all four texts are almost the same length as their respective original version, with an average number of 174 words. However, the number of sentences has increased (on average from 9.5 to circa 15), at the expense of their length (on average from circa 17 to 11). The Gulpease index is 71.83, showing that this version is easier than the original one.

When conceptual re-organisation is applied (S+R), modification affects the textual structure. In the passage about the zebra, the original version has two paragraphs, the first providing information about this animal's characteristics, habitat and family, and the second information about the food it eats. In the S+R version, the text has three paragraphs. The first provides general information about the zebra, such as what kind of animal it is, and the habitat it lives in, the second gives detailed information about food it eats, and the last tells us about the animal's peculiarities. Furthermore, like with the simplified version, the complexity of both syntax and vocabulary is reduced.

### ***Simplified and re-organised version***

*La zebra è famosa perché è a righe bianche e nere. Le righe servono alla zebra per scappare dagli animali che la vogliono mangiare. Ad esempio, il leone vuole mangiare la zebra e le corre dietro. La zebra allora corre via veloce, e anche le sue righe bianche e nere si muovono veloci davanti agli occhi del leone. Il leone non vede più bene e non capisce più dove è la zebra: mentre il leone è confuso la zebra può scappare via.*

The S+R versions of all four passages are longer than their respective original ones (on average circa 233 words vs 152.50), their number of sentences has increased, and their sentence length is reduced. Their Gulpease index of 66.38 indicates that they are more readable than the original versions.

Table 1 sums up the average linguistic complexity of the separate four versions for all the four passages together.

<i>Table 1. Eulogos CENSOR Analysis for all four passages – Text Type</i>				
	<b>OR</b>	<b>EL</b>	<b>SI</b>	<b>S+R</b>
<b>Gulpease</b>	59.97	59.70	71.83	66.38
<b>Total words (Tw)</b>	152.50	256.75	174.00	233.25
Different words (Dw)	108.75	145.25	100.50	118.75
Tw/Dw	1.40	1.77	1.73	1.98
<b>Total sentences</b>	9.50	14.50	15.25	16.75
Sentence length	17.16	17.65	11.31	14.12
Word length	4.83	4.66	4.43	4.43
<b>Low-frequency words (n.)</b>	13.75	18.25	8.50	11.75
Low-frequency words (%)	9.08%	7.11%	4.89%	5.06%

Reading comprehension is assessed by means of a short questionnaire with 12 multiple-choice questions, three for each passage (cfr. Appendix 2). This format was chosen for two main reasons: it is often used in similar studies (cfr. § 2), and is easy to use. Regarding the scores, three points were given for each correct answer. Correction-for-guessing was applied, and –1 point was assigned for each incorrect answer. Text scores therefore ranged from –12 to 36. A split-half reliability check of this measure indicates a reliability of 0.79 on the Spearman-Brown Prophecy formula. For the experimental reading test, each group is assigned a booklet containing all four passages, in one of the same four versions: Original, Elaborated, Simplified, and Simplified and Re-organised. Students were asked to read the four passages, and answer the 12 multiple-choice questions. They were given 30 minutes to do so, a time which had been found reasonable in a pilot test.

### **3 Results**

As shown in Table 2 by the mean scores on the reading test, students who read the simplified versions scored highest (M= 26.22), followed by students who read first the

simplified and re-organised versions ( $M = 25.33$ ), and then the elaborated ones ( $M = 17.56$ ). Those who read the original versions scored the lowest ( $M = 16.44$ ).

Text types		Central Tendency			Dispersion			
	n	mean	mode	median	low	high	SD	range
<b>OR</b>	9	16.44	4; 12; 20	16	4	32	9.68	28
<b>EL</b>	9	17.56	24	20	-4	36	12.19	40
<b>SI</b>	9	26.22	28	28	20	32	4.06	12
<b>S+R</b>	9	25.33	24	24	12	36	7.75	24
<b>Total</b>	36	21.39	28	20	-4	36	9.64	40

When these data are statistically controlled via the ANOVA procedure with alpha set at .05, there is a significant effect for text type (cfr. Table 3, where  $F = 3.03$ , and  $df = 3; 33$  ). However, the number of participants is not very large, and the distance of  $F$  from the minimum critical value is not very far. Consequently, replication studies will be necessary, and caution must be taken in drawing conclusions from these results. Nevertheless, they support the hypothesis that textual modification can enhance comprehension, and are consistent with those of previous studies (e.g., Brown, 1987; Tsang, 1987; Yalo et al., 1994; Sun-Young Oh, 2001).

	SS	df	MS	F
<b>Between Groups</b>	701.76	3	233.92	3.03
<b>Within Groups</b>	2550.80	33	77.30	

On the other hand, not in line with some of these studies (i.e., Yano et al., 1994; Sun-Young Oh, 2001), elaboration does not seem to improve comprehension. Elaborated texts are made up of longer sentences with redundant information added through rephrasing and repetition. This is what may have worked against comprehension, especially for young learners who are thus required to keep a larger amount of information in their short term memory. Furthermore, reading longer texts takes away time from answering questions.

Students who read the simplified and re-organised versions scored significantly better than those reading the original versions. Use of simpler vocabulary and syntax, and attention paid to the text organisation, taken together, are therefore likely to improve the reader's comprehension. Mean scores on these versions are not significantly different from scores obtained in the simplified versions. It is necessary to remember, however, that both versions were linguistically simple, and the difference between them lay mainly in the organisation of information. As the texts chosen are conceptually simple, close to readers' knowledge, and therefore not very demanding in terms of background knowledge and schemata activation, it could be that they were not sensitive enough to the possible effects of textual re-organisation. For this reason further research on this modification approach would be necessary to better verify its outcomes on cognitively more demanding texts.

#### **4 Conclusion**

In the past 10 years, Italian schools have seen an increasing number of immigrant students who need to learn Italian as a second language while continuing their education through Italian as a medium of instruction. The ability to read and comprehend written texts in L2 as soon as possible is therefore essential.

When encountering difficulties in understanding written texts, immigrant students risk accumulating delays in learning the same disciplinary competences as their peers are acquiring. The consequent exclusion from classroom activities cannot only cause a loss of motivation and self-confidence, but also deprive them of input which could help their interlanguage development. In order to try and solve these problems teachers and researchers need to work out new strategies to facilitate L2 students' participation to classroom activities.

My work attempted to investigate experimentally the effects of textual modification in the direction of elaboration, simplification alone, and simplification combined with logical and conceptual re-organisation. The study involved 36 low proficiency immigrant students, reading four passages in one of four versions (a) original, (b) elaborated, (c) simplified, and (d) simplified and re-organised, and then tested by means of a 12-item multiple-choice comprehension test.

As the number of subjects involved is limited, results cannot be conclusive and further replication studies are certainly necessary. However, they suggest that written textual modification in the direction of simplification, and simplification and logical re-organisation combined can improve comprehension for low L2 proficiency immigrant students enrolled in secondary school. The use of more easily comprehensible texts could therefore be a good instrument to transmit new and more complex contents to these students. The use of modified texts however should not to be considered a sort of special pedagogy, an end in itself. Rather, they are a useful pedagogical tool to start a process of learning that will gradually lead students to independent access to the same school texts read by their peer native speaking students.

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## **Appendix 1: reading texts**

### **La zebra**

#### *Original version*

La zebra è famosa per le caratteristiche strisce nere e bianche del mantello. Le striature sono utilissime per sfuggire ai predatori. Quando le zebre fuggono, le strisce scorrono davanti agli occhi del leone, che rimane frastornato non riuscendo a individuare bene la sagoma della zebra. Vive pascolando nella savana spostandosi alla ricerca di pascoli verdi, molte volte in compagnia degli gnu. Si riunisce in gruppi familiari formati da un maschio chiamato stallone e da alcune femmine che rimangono insieme per tutta la vita.

La zebra si nutre di vari tipi di erbe, di cui mangia solamente l'estremità superiore, lasciando il resto agli altri animali. Si ciba anche delle foglie degli arbusti e delle cortecce degli alberi. Ogni tanto assaggia il terreno, probabilmente per soddisfare il bisogno di sali minerali. Pascola volentieri con le antilopi, gli struzzi e le giraffe.

#### *Elaborated version*

La zebra è una specie di cavallo, ed è famosa per le caratteristiche strisce nere e bianche del mantello, cioè la zebra è bianca e nera. Le striature, che sono le righe bianche e nere della zebra, sono utilissime per sfuggire e non farsi prendere dai predatori. Quando le zebre fuggono e corrono via, le strisce si muovono velocemente e scorrono davanti agli occhi del leone. Il leone non vede più bene e rimane frastornato, non riuscendo così a vedere e a individuare bene la sagoma della zebra. La zebra vive pascolando nella savana, spostandosi alla ricerca di pascoli verdi, dove c'è tanta erba, molte volte in compagnia degli gnu. La zebra si riunisce in gruppi familiari. Questi gruppi sono formati da un maschio, chiamato stallone, e da alcune femmine. I maschi e le femmine rimangono insieme per tutta la vita.

La zebra si nutre di vari tipi di erbe. La zebra mangia solamente l'estremità superiore dell'erba, cioè solo le punte, lasciando il resto agli altri animali. La zebra si ciba anche delle foglie degli arbusti, che sono le piante basse della savana, e delle cortecce degli alberi. Ogni tanto la zebra assaggia il terreno, cioè mangia un po' di terra: probabilmente questo serve per soddisfare il bisogno di sali minerali. La zebra pascola, mangia e sta volentieri con le antilopi, gli struzzi e le giraffe.

#### *Simplified version*

La zebra è come un cavallo, ed è famosa perché è a righe bianche e nere. Le righe servono alla zebra per scappare dagli animali che la vogliono mangiare. Quando le zebre corrono via, le strisce passano davanti agli occhi del leone, il leone non vede più bene e non capisce più dove è la zebra. La zebra vive e mangia l'erba nella savana. La zebra si sposta e cerca i prati verdi in compagnia degli gnu. La zebra ha una famiglia. Nella famiglia della zebra c'è un maschio, chiamato stallone, e qualche femmina. I maschi e le femmine vivono insieme tutta la vita.

La zebra mangia l'erba. La zebra mangia solo la punta dell'erba e lascia il resto agli altri animali. La zebra mangia anche le foglie delle piante basse e le cortecce degli alberi. Qualche volta la zebra mangia un po' di terra. Forse mangia la terra per avere sali minerali. La zebra sta volentieri con le antilopi, gli struzzi e le giraffe.

### *Simplified and re-organised version*

La zebra è come un cavallo a righe bianche e nere. La zebra vive nella savana, in Africa. La zebra vive in gruppo, cioè ha una famiglia. Nella famiglia della zebra ci sono un maschio, chiamato stallone e qualche femmina. I maschi e le femmine vivono insieme tutta la vita. Però, la zebra sta volentieri anche con altri animali, come le antilopi, gli struzzi e le giraffe. La zebra sta anche in compagnia degli gnu e spesso si sposta con loro quando cerca nuovi prati verdi.

La zebra mangia l'erba. Però la zebra mangia solo la punta dell'erba e lascia il resto agli altri animali. La zebra mangia anche le foglie delle piante basse della savana e le cortecce degli alberi. Qualche volta, la zebra mangia anche un po' di terra: nel terreno infatti ci sono i sali minerali, e forse la zebra mangia un po' di terra, proprio perché ha bisogno di sali minerali.

La zebra è famosa perché è a righe bianche e nere. Le righe servono alla zebra per scappare dagli animali che la vogliono mangiare. Ad esempio, il leone vuole mangiare la zebra e la corre dietro. La zebra allora corre via veloce. Mentre la zebra si muove veloce, anche le sue righe bianche e nere si muovono veloci davanti agli occhi del leone. Il leone non vede più bene e non capisce più dove è la zebra: mentre il leone è confuso, la zebra può scappare via.

## **Appendix 2: comprehension questions**

- 1) Alla zebra le strisce bianche e nere servono per
  - farsi vedere dai leoni
  - per farsi vedere dai maschi di zebra
  - per nascondersi tra le piante
  - non farsi vedere bene dal leone
  
- 2) In un gruppo di zebre ci sono:
  - alcuni maschi e una femmina
  - tante femmine e pochi maschi
  - un maschio e alcune femmine
  - tanti maschi e poche femmine
  
- 3) Che cosa mangia la zebra?
  - il resto di altri animali
  - antilopi e struzzi
  - le piante sotto terra
  - foglie, erbe e cortecce