

Current Approaches to Teaching Reading

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Abstract. The paper considers reading for comprehension and developing reading culture, showing how reading habits are constantly changing with new technologies dominating our life. Learning English being the focus of attention, the author comments on the way reading contributes to language acquisition and language learning. A particular reference is given to types of reading, reading for comprehension being the essence of any. The author reviews reading strategies, stressing the necessity of introducing them to the students. The author analyses some of the language courses and gives examples of work on reading skills at the lessons of English using both the above courses and the ones developed by the teachers of the Ural State University of Economics.

1 Introduction

One of the greatest achievements of the 20th century was universal literacy. Hardly ever can we meet now a person who has never read a line. The role of reading cannot be overestimated as it expands our mind and develops creative thinking to say nothing of improving concentration. However, teachers now complain that younger people do not like reading and psychologists have proved that they cannot read big novels due to unsteady concentration. Millennial and Generation Z are characterized by their dependence on technology. They are accustomed to reading messages in the social networks and commands in computer games. These generations won't bother to translate themselves relying on electronic translators. They consider it to be obsolete in the epoch of digitization. According to the latest research about reading habits representatives of Generations Y and Z do read all the time, being unaware of the fact that surfing the Internet can also be reading. Of course, there is a great difference between reading books or blogs and chats. Still one should know and practise different reading strategies depending on the purpose of reading.

The role of reading at the lessons of English has changed over the last forty years. In the past, when the grammar-translation method dominated in teaching English, students were focused on translating, answering questions, with further discussion held only in English language-oriented schools. Textbooks in secondary schools offered abridged extracts from novels and stories by English and American authors, thus providing pupils with patterns of the so-called royal or standard English and enabling them to communicate with foreigners though there was no or very little listening or speaking practice at that time. However, quite a lot of students considered the word-by word processing of texts boring and time-

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consuming. At universities students continued to develop this skill not only in class, but also outside of the classroom doing “extensive reading”. Actually, there was practically no difference between intensive and extensive reading as students had to translate the materials word-by word. Such a situation is quite ambiguous and these terms require further consideration.

The communicative approach to language teaching having substituted the grammar-translation method, the percentage of reading at the lesson has reduced. Moreover, it has turned mainly into a teaching tool. It goes without saying that discussing what you have read is a natural way of communication, contributing both to communicative and linguistic competences of students. The communicative approach has given teachers a different understanding of the role of reading in general and the type of texts in particular. The purpose of this paper is to study the potential of reading as a skill and a tool used to master the English language with a particular reference to extensive and intensive reading.

2 The rationale for reading at the lessons of English

If we now look at two complementary definitions of reading, we will see that the dual nature of this process allows us to kill two birds with one stone, i.e. to get information and improve our language, the latter done most often subconsciously

“Reading is a complex activity that involves both perception and thought. Reading consists of two related processes: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition refers to the process of perceiving how written symbols correspond to one’s spoken language. Comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text”. [1]

“Reading is a complex “cognitive process” of decoding symbols in order to construct or derive meaning. Reading is a means of language acquisition, communication and of sharing information and ideas.” It is the purpose of reading that determines the appropriate approach to reading comprehension. [2]

Reading is one of the skills that can contribute greatly first to learning and only then acquiring any language. Stephen Krashen distinguishes two independent ways to develop linguistic skills: acquisition and learning. Language acquisition is a subconscious process. This process starts with our birth or even earlier as the baby being in the mother’s womb listens to the sounds of the world. We start developing our listening and then speaking skills.

Reading comes after listening in the order of receptive communication skills. When the time of learning comes, we add reading and writing to the arsenal of our competences. Learning is a conscious process involving formal instruction. The process of learning could be facilitated by immersing a learner into a real or simulated target language environment. Wiland (2000) writes: “Next to living in the target language environment, extensive reading of literature combined with good language models in the classroom can give an acquisition situation in the school context” .[3]

Reading authentic or abridged materials has a practical value and a motivating/educating potential. It encourages language acquisition. First of all, such sources can give examples of good English for the learners to be able to speak and write correctly. At schools and universities students get acquainted with a wide range of styles, registers, and different types of texts expanding their language awareness. Besides while reading they can get an access to the cultural background of the native speakers. And of course we can’t but mention the motivating factor, which is perhaps the most important from the point of view of a student as their most popular question today is, “Why? Why should I read this or that?” Young people today are too pragmatic. They may be engaged in any activity if only it is beneficial for them. Reading activities must resemble real-life reading tasks, so reading

materials must be authentic that involve meaningful communication. They must be connected with what students need now or in the nearest future, i.e. travelling, studying abroad, or using the language in other contexts outside the classroom as well as materials connected with their future jobs. .

3 Teaching Reading at Universities

The principal aim of the course of English at university is to equip students with skills and abilities to operate effectively on those occasions in their future life when they need English. Reading is a universal skill that one needs throughout the whole life. First and foremost we try to orient our students to the goals and methods of extensive reading though of course intensive reading is always in the focus of our attention especially at the lesson.

To improve reading skills, reading strategies should be explained and types of reading should be practiced from the early stages of schooling. Unfortunately now at schools home reading is not widely practiced though now we have graded readers (abridged versions of English and American classics). Home reading is the only way to introduce extensive reading which is in the long run our ultimate goal. We want learners to read whatever they are interested in and enjoy this process. [4]

It is necessary to contrast extensive with intensive reading for students to realize that these processes are completely opposite in the goal, purpose, focus, material, amount, speed, method. [5]

Authentic textbooks used at schools and universities now do not always contain adequate texts that can be used to acquire necessary reading skills. They use plenty of authentic texts to present grammar and vocabulary that is then extracted and practiced in isolation. [6] Texts are accompanied by different kinds of reading activity, which focus not only on comprehension, but most often on exam-type tasks preparing students for an international exam. [7] However, it is necessary to provide the information on how one should cope with such things. Some teachers simply use these reading materials as the bases for discussion or translation, students being unaware of reading strategies.

For example *New First Certificate Masterclass* by Simon Haines and Barbara Stewart precedes each task with step-by-step guidance, reading included. [8] It was a source of inspiration and a real help when I was working out a course called *Fundamentals of Management*. The textbook is a kind of reader for manager-to be, acquainting them with their future job and upgrading their reading skills. All exam training sections contain materials introduced by guidelines. Below you can see a sample of the latter for matching headings [9].

Do	Don't
Read the instructions carefully. They include some information about the text.	Don't start reading until you know what to do.
Skim the text quickly for its general meaning.	Don't read the text word for word
Read the list of possible headings for each section of the text	Don't omit this stage. It is important to know what you are looking for before you start working through the text.
Read the text section by section and underline any words which go with a heading.	Don't spend too long doing this and don't worry if you don't understand every word.
Check that each heading fits before you make a final choice of answer. You may need to read some sections more carefully.	Don't leave any answer blank – if you don't know, make a sensible guess.

We can't but mention here the so-called specialist books, e.g. *International Management* by Adrian Pilbeam, which is focused on reading skills and vocabulary development for managers-to-be. [10] The above courses help us develop competences students need to work with a wide range of materials.

In the beginning of the university course most of the attention is paid to revision of what the students have learnt (grammar, use of vocabulary, listening and speaking). As for reading, it is limited to the materials similar to the ones they studied at school. Starting with the second term students are supposed to do a lot of reading in order to prepare for a presentation and/or write a paper on the theme connected with their future job, which is highly motivating. Actually it cannot exactly be called extensive reading, but it has characteristics of the latter. Students select materials themselves. They are supposed to read fluently trying to minimize their usage of dictionaries

Students are quite familiar with intensive reading as at school they devoted much time to it. When they are asked to read the text, they often think that it is necessary to translate it, but they don't know the fundamentals of translation. They should realize that their task is not to read not for translation, as they are not translators, but for comprehension or paraphrase [11].

For our students to be able to paraphrase and summarize they do a lot of reading preceded with and followed by exercises showing how to collect the information they need. They are taught to find the necessary information looking through on-line search databases containing abstracts. By the way when reading abstracts they are also prepared to write them. Then they skim the articles they need choosing those relevant for their research. Then time for scanning and searching reading comes [12].

4 Conclusion

So, teaching reading is quite challenging. It is not so easy, as it may seem. Teachers are supposed to help their students to become more effective readers by teaching them how to use strategies before, during and after reading. Comprehension is the only reason for reading. Without comprehension, reading is frustrating, pointless. It is no exaggeration to say that the way students will be able to comprehend what they read will have a profound effect on their entire lives.

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