

Some thoughts on teaching reading for new language teachers

understanding rather than worrying about individual words can help wean them away from their dictionaries and encourage them to use a variety of reading strategies. Grellet (1981) suggests that learners must be trained to infer the meaning of unknown words. This can be done by:

- beginning with words that they already know but are incomplete within the text; learners then guess the word based on the context
- encouraging learners to discover strategies for inferring unknown words through the context and use of the word; they can then practise guessing the meaning through word formation
- getting learners to be aware of how words are formed and of the value of prefixes and suffixes in order to discover the meaning of many unknown words

Motivation

Lack of motivation to read is a tricky problem because some learners simply don't like reading (Nunan, 1988). To motivate learners and convince them that reading can be enjoyable and beneficial to language learning development, it is important that reading texts are accessible and the tasks are authentic. Awareness that different texts require different reading skills and will be read for different purposes (Ur, 1996; Grellet, 1981) should be reflected in reading lessons. Requiring learners to read every detail in, for example, a page of job advertisements rather than skimming for a required piece of information could lead to boredom and frustration.

Conclusion

As mentioned, reading is not a passive skill, rather an active one that involves a wider variety of cognitive activities. Successful reading results from the understanding a reader brings to the text, e.g. contextual knowledge, knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Reading also requires constant guessing and checking. When reading, we anticipate and predict what will come next, based on what we have read and on our previous experiences with similar texts. We confirm our predictions as we read, and adjust our next predictions accordingly. This aspect of reading highlights the problems of reading in the classroom, where learners are often required to read texts with which they have no previous knowledge.

When we read in our native language, we employ many decoding strategies which, having learned them as children, have therefore become second nature to us. As adults, we employ them subconsciously, so many learners are unaware of using them.

By developing meta-cognitive strategies we can make learners aware of their own reading strategies. This is best accomplished through the process of shared reading during which learners discuss and rationalise their thought processes, making *explicit* something they do *implicitly*. In order to help learners become effective independent readers, the primary consideration of a reading lesson should be to make them understand the reading process better.

Appendix: Reasons why learners have problems with reading texts.

- Istuin eraana tammikuun loppupaivana Tiitin kanssa Kokkolasta Jyväskyläan kulkevassa linja-autossa. Oli kirjeä pakkasilma, taivas oli kirkas, ja aurinko heitti lumihangille ja tien poikki puiden pitkea sinisiä varjoja.
From Kokko, Y. 1954 *Ne Tulevat Takaisin* (Werner Söderström OY)
- In the first example, a carbon anion is formed that is stabilized by resonance (electrons delocalized over the carbonyl group and the α carbon atom). In the second case, a carbon anion is formed that is stabilized by the electron withdrawing inductive effect of the three chlorines.
From University of Malaya Language Centre 1979 *Reading Projects: Science* (University of Malaya Press/Nelson)
- Ideas imprinted on the senses are real things, or do really exist, this we do not deny, but we deny that they can subsist without the minds which perceive them, or that they are resemblances of any archetypes existing without the mind: since the very being of a sensation or idea consists in being perceived, and an idea can be like nothing but an idea.
From Berkeley, G. 1949 *Principles of Human Knowledge* (Nelson)
- Cavorting in the vicinity of the residential area populated by those of piscatorial avocation, the miniscule crustacean was enmeshed in a reticulated object with interstices between the intersections.

Source: Nuttall, C. (1996). *Teaching reading skills in a foreign language*. (2nd ed.). London, UK: Heinemann.

In **a** the writer and reader **don't share the same code**, i.e. the reader has no knowledge of Finnish. In **b** the reader may know nothing about science, i.e. they have **no background knowledge** (and looking up definitions of unknown words is unlikely to solve this problem). In **c** the language may be understood, but the difficulty lies in the **complexity of the ideas** being expressed. In **d** the vocabulary is the main source of difficulty, as the reader's and writer's **code is only partly shared**.

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Editor's Note:

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