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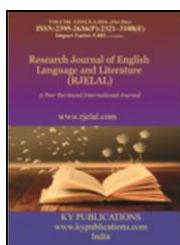
A Case Study and Pedagogy on Foreign Language Reading

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ABSTRACT

Reading processes comprise a variety of actions and routines which, as part of human mental activities, are complex and difficult to describe. But all educators agree about the centrality of reading and the importance of literacy regarding education, access to culture and information, and even inclusivity, i.e. real integration of individuals into the educational system whatever their situation, background or abilities.

Keywords: Reading processes, human mental activity, real integration

1. Introduction

The nature of reading ability and the fact that it is such a core necessity for coping with everyday life demands in modern societies has made it necessary to approach it from different angles that complement and enrich its depiction. Thus, Psycholinguistic theories gave way to Information Processing, Cognitive or Pragmatic theories, reading being connected both to the mental and to the social sides of human activity. But when dealing with the Teaching of Foreign Language Reading, the landscape gets even more complex because we must add the contrastive aspect to the already existing group of theories and evidence regarding the mother tongue. Moreover, the digital revolution has reached the reading field, which cannot be considered any longer as the ability to get information from printed sources.

In a digital environment, both the information layout and the processes themselves are changing, so that it becomes necessary to revisit the ways information is conveyed –and especially through hypertext– as well as the ways people approach it. In other words, in order to study foreign language reading nowadays, we must take into account text

and discourse changes as well as individual and social aspects –mainly in formal learning settings–, and the variations in the different mental processes that take place during the reading process.

2.Perspectives

The different perspectives towards English as a Foreign Language reading are being considered. The main EFL reading-related areas of today's research and pedagogy are informed by cognitive, sociopragmatic, knowledge management or educational theories. All of these are discussed here. Although there is a general bias towards adult language learning situations from tertiary education onwards –as this group is the commonest target for most contributors– some articles, especially those regarding foreign language reading processes, are applicable to most foreign language formal learning situations whatever the target group's age.

3.Reading Processes

Reading Processes in the New Learning Contexts, four papers address reading comprehension processes in relation to **reader- and text-related aspects**,

- i) such as memory capacity
- ii) short-term memory

- iii) word recognition or use of strategies, on one hand
- iv) type of text information support (i.e. printed vs. digital) and structure (i.e. discourse markers), on the other.

The difficult task of assessing the reading comprehension of students faced with linear, printed texts and with hypertext. The hypothesis that is on Working Memory Capacity, as a limited resource, is likely to impose restrictions on the reading process, and that this burden will be weightier in the case of L2 students' comprehension. They also hypothesize that the mental representation that subjects make of the text will be influenced by the type of support, or mode of text representation, as they call it. In the case of hypertext, the authors argue that the burden will be greater because of the fragmented nature of hypertext as compared to linear texts.

Case Study 1

Measures of reading performance and recall are used to compare reading in both cases, paying special attention to subjects' attempts to find textual coherence. Forty-two speakers of English as an L2 from two different L1 backgrounds participated in the study which shows an effect of text representation on reading recall and performance, especially in the case of lower memory span. The paper contributes to a tradition of studies which seek to find the relative weight of different variables and components taking part in the reading process, and adds evidence supporting the effect of literacy background on transfer. Results also provide further support for a construction-integration reading model which includes the construction of a propositional meaning from the text-base plus the integration process whereby readers grasp from different resources to get global coherence from texts.

Case Study 2

Within the tradition of Schema Theories, gets deeper into the role of discourse markers on the EFL reading comprehension of students. It provides evidence of the positive effect of discourse markers, as signals which guide the readers in a top-down fashion, showing the readers the text

structuring, thus helping them to find the information and compensate for the lack of other types of knowledge. The role of individual variables, such as sex, age or general learning competence (as compared to the EFL one) on reading is measured as well as the role of text familiarity. Both reader and data-driven processes are thus considered as the two parts of an interactive-compensatory model. Results add further evidence to previous research on the role of schemata and prior knowledge and offer lines for further research.

Case Study 3

The focus is on an aspect rarely studied in relation to EFL reading, i.e. **the role of the "inner voice"** on reading comprehension and learning in general. Speech recoding, as a cognitive phenomenon, is linked to thinking, learning and reading. Ridgway reviews this concept and its relation to perception and comprehension, offering ideas for classroom implementation with the aim of helping beginning and intermediate readers develop this "inner speech". The lower order processes, such as word and speech recognition, are brought into focus, in relation to working memory capacity, short term memory and information storage and retention. Ridgway claims that the development of inner voice and ear while reading in a foreign language depends on the development of an automatised phonological store in the target language. It offers sound pedagogical implications and classroom suggestions in order to achieve this aim.

Case Study 4

The phenomenon of hyperreading, comparing reader behaviour when reading hypertext and when reading printed text, but the authors examine a further component of reader's knowledge, i.e. strategy use, of special interest to foreign language learning and teaching. Many studies have already been conducted on the use of certain reading strategies and the usefulness of explicit teaching of strategy use in the EFL classroom, but most have been carried out in relation to printed texts. Participants are tertiary EFL students, as in the case study-1. Although the results do not corroborate, both the instruments and the assessment methods are different in the two

studies: they only coincide in the search for global comprehension data.

The conclusion is that “the hypertextual medium fosters strategy use” and, thus, “could be regarded as an effective tool for fostering learners’ use of reading strategies, including both top-down and bottom-up strategies”.

4. Pedagogical issues in the teaching of EFL reading

Some of the issues previously tackled in Part I, focusing on pedagogical aspects, such as

- classroom implementation of reading techniques
- the integration of reading into wholistic activities, or bringing up debates and
- controversies related to the teaching of special languages and the need of focusing on specific vs. general academic vocabulary lists for enhancing reading in the ESP classroom.

Issue:1

An extensive reading process involving the use of Internet and seeking to integrate reading in an ambitious learning process. This process takes place in first year classroom. Its goal is the gradual acquisition of autonomy by EFL learners, apart from the direct aims of reading fluency acquisition and EFL learning. The paper addresses some key pedagogical tenets and makes an account of the changes that have taken place in the evolution from the original, paper-based reading project, to the present times in which a web-based programme and the creation of a social network group have been the main tools used.

Issue:2

Now it shows how to integrate reading skills in a motivating wholistic ambitious scheme which mixes up drama playing, EFL learning and reading in tertiary education. It is not a coincidence that current research on reading makes emphasis on meeting emotional and individual learners’ needs as a way to enhance reading gains and foreign language learning in general, alongside the development of metalinguistic awareness and specific reading strategies through overt teaching.

Issue:3

The address is mainly on the emotional side of it, again based on the assumption that stimulation of both brain hemispheres will lead to a more efficient

learning attitude and communicational readiness. In line with Bathkinian learning theories which call for a dialogic approach to learning-teaching which helps learner engage in their own processes, drama offers the possibility of acting out meaningful discourse related to their own fields of specialisation (in the experiment described, the target group is composed of Business tertiary students).

Issue:4

Here it deals with academic lexis and provides further evidence for a narrow angle approach to ESP teaching (Hyland, 2002) as opposed to a wide angle approach (Huckin, 2003). The range, frequency, collocation, and meaning of items on the Academic Word List (AWL) in a large multidisciplinary corpus are examined. The items selected –generally classified as semi-technical vocabulary –are compared across different disciplines from the hard and the soft sciences. Routine patterns of expression and semi-technical vocabulary had already been found especially hard to manage when reading prose for specific purposes (Olàh, 1984).

The results obtained are thought-provoking in the sense that they show different patterns of occurrence of the terms analysed, which commonly contribute to ‘lexical bundles’ that, in turn, reflect disciplinary preferences. The authors question the widely held assumption that there is a single core vocabulary needed for academic study and suggest that “teachers should assist students towards developing a more restricted, disciplinary-based lexical repertoire”.

Issue:5

Focus is on the critical aspect of reading, i.e. **reading speed, a desirable goal for students to swiftly get information, and discusses some of the techniques used in the EFL classroom** for the development of reading fluency (e.g. repeated reading, paired reading, 4/3/2 reading, extensive reading aloud, read-and look-up, easy extensive reading, silent repeated reading). After reviewing many of the techniques connected to silent and oral reading, including some common reading modes like skimming or scanning, Nation considers practical issues regarding reading speed assessment, learning and development of reading speed over time.

Issue:6

The last paper, a review article by Piedad Fernández-Toledo and Françoise Salager-Meyer, seeks to relate reading theories and approaches from the last decades to general EFL and educational tenets, looking for new ways of meeting knowledge-based theories, pragmatic lines on teaching and the teaching of reading, and educational theories focusing on literacy and its development among students.

The evolution of the concepts of literacy, information, knowledge and reading itself is reviewed with an emphasis on the new contexts and discourse forms brought up by technologies and on the need of integrating reading into meaningful teaching approaches that pursue the development of multiple literacy, not to forget the latest research carried out on reading comprehension that points to individual factors (motivation and attitude) and metalinguistic awareness as elements to focus on and to investigate more deeply.

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