

AUTHENTIC READING AND ITS ROLE IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the use of supplementary authentic reading texts in teaching English as a foreign language. It aims at improving the reading skills and strategies of adult learners in a conventional classroom setting and in a computerized learning environment. The use of authentic materials is an important principle of communicative language learning and it contributes to the development of an individual learning style and learner autonomy.

Keywords: Authentic text, reading skills, reading activities, skimming and scanning.

INTRODUCTION

Developing reading skills is an important part of foreign language teaching. Foreign language textbooks offer a variety of reading texts but there is usually a one-size-fits-all approach to the way the texts are presented and to the choice of reading comprehension exercises. When that is the case, foreign language teachers try to find supplementary texts and design their own exercises. In order to achieve better results, certain issues have to be taken into account. These are the similarities and differences between reading in one's first language and reading in a foreign language, the reasons for reading and the aims of a reading programme, the advantages and disadvantages of using authentic texts at all levels of language proficiency and the criteria we use to choose appropriate texts from various sources.

Materials and methods

The following terms will be used in the article:

reading – an activity that has as its main purpose “the extraction of meaning from writing” [3,4];

reading comprehension – “Understanding a written text means extracting the required information from it as efficiently as possible.” [1,3];

authentic texts – “those which are designed for native speakers” [2,185], e.g. the articles in a newspaper or a magazine.

Traditionally, the purpose of learning to read in a language has been to have access to the literature written in that language. In language instruction, reading materials have traditionally been chosen from literary texts that represent “higher” forms of culture. This approach assumes that students learn to read a language by studying its vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure, not by actually reading it.

The communicative approach to language teaching has given instructors a different understanding of the role of reading in the language classroom and the types of texts that can be used in instruction. So, what is reading? Reading is an activity with a purpose. A person may read in order to gain information or verify existing knowledge, or in order to critique a writer's ideas or writing style. A person may also read for enjoyment. The purpose(s) for reading guide the reader's selection of texts. Reading is an interactive process that goes on between the reader and the text, resulting in comprehension. The text presents letters, words,

sentences, and paragraphs that encode meaning. The reader uses knowledge, skills, and strategies to determine what that meaning is.

Let us discuss what reading in a foreign language is. If the foreign language learners are poor readers in their mother-tongue, we can't expect them to read efficiently in the foreign language. But if they are good readers in their mother-tongue, we expect them to transfer their reading strategies to the foreign language automatically. Unfortunately, this doesn't always happen. Strategies that can help students read more quickly and effectively include:

- Previewing: reviewing titles, section headings, and photo captions to get a sense of the structure and content of a reading selection
- Predicting: using knowledge of the subject matter to make predictions about content and vocabulary and check comprehension; using knowledge of the text type and purpose to make predictions about discourse structure; using knowledge about the author to make predictions about writing style, vocabulary, and content
- Skimming and scanning: using a quick survey of the text to get the main idea, identify text structure, confirm or question predictions
- Guessing from context: using prior knowledge of the subject and the ideas in the text as clues to the meanings of unknown words, instead of stopping to look them up
- Paraphrasing: stopping at the end of a section to check comprehension by restating the information and ideas in the text

When language learners use reading strategies, they find that they can control the reading experience, and they gain confidence in their ability to read the language.

Reading the language in original today is playing more and more important role. Original or authentic texts are widely used, and there are good reasons for doing so. When students are studying in their disciplines, they have to read different authentic texts such as textbooks and journal articles, so, what exactly are authentic texts, and how should we use them? An authentic text is usually taken to mean a text which was not written for the language classroom, and which hasn't been messed with – it retains its original vocabulary and grammar, and bits of the text have not been cut out. That's why, the use of truly authentic texts is an important means of teaching students to communicate effectively. What are the reasons for using authentic texts in teaching process? We give the examples of some of them:

1 reading skills – using a difficult real life English text in class can be a good way of the teacher training students to use special reading skills such as ignoring the parts that are not important, guessing the meaning of words from context;

2 a goal – reading an authentic text can show how much students have to learn in order to understand it more fully;

3 self-study - if the teacher shows students some sources of good English texts and teaches his/her students how to read them, this can help motivate foreign learners to read English more frequently outside class.

When should authentic materials be used? When you're choosing an authentic text to use in class, there is also the question of level to consider. By 'level' we usually mean language level – whether a text is at B1 or B2, for example – but there's another crucial aspect: cognitive level. Some texts are much more challenging than others in terms of how difficult their ideas and concepts are. When selecting a text, it's important to think about what you want your students to get out of it. Do you want them to gain a comprehensive understanding of the whole text, or will they use it more superficially – for example, in order to identify key words? In this way, you can use authentic texts which are at a high linguistic level in your lower level classes, so long as you set appropriate, achievable tasks.

Reading authentic texts efficiently is a sure way of building up beginners' confidence. If the teacher grades the tasks carefully, provided the text remains within the students' general competence, the reading activity will be success-oriented and quite motivating.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

We can divide the reading activities in three groups. These are pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities.

Pre-reading activities are used to prepare the students for the more detailed understanding of the meaning in the text that is necessary for the following stages.

The choice of **while-reading activities** depends on the purpose for reading because it determines the appropriate level of comprehension. The aim of the exercises should be clearly defined; the tasks should be flexible and varied.

Post-reading activities give the students the opportunity to do something with the information they have learned from the text and again the choice of the tasks depends on the purpose for reading.

Another aspect of a reading session is assessment. The assessment of one's reading ability should correlate with the purpose for reading. In everyday reading situations, readers have a purpose for reading before they start. In order to provide authentic assessment of students' reading proficiency, a post-listening activity must reflect the real-life uses to which students might put information they have gained through reading. To develop authentic assessment activities, consider the type of response that reading a particular selection would elicit in a non-classroom situation. For example, after reading a weather report, one might decide what to wear the next day; after reading a set of instructions, one might repeat them to someone else.

CONCLUSION

What should be pointed out in conclusion is the vital importance of using authentic texts as supplements to textbook reading materials in order to prepare students for real life reading. In order for second and foreign learners to become proficient readers in English, they need access to texts that make it possible for them to respond in an authentic way to what they have read. The use of authentic materials in the classroom is highly motivating, giving a sense of achievement when understood and encourage further reading. One of the main reason for using authentic materials in the classroom is once outside the "safe", controlled language learning environment, the learner will not encounter the artificial language of the classroom but the real world and language how it is really used. The role of the teacher is not to delude the language learner but to prepare him, giving the awareness and necessary skills so as to understand how the language is actually used.

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