

ACTA BEREGSASIENSIS

**A KÁRPÁTALJAI MAGYAR TANÁRKÉPZŐ FŐISKOLA
ÉVKÖNYVE**

Beregszász, 2000

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TEACHING READING AS A RECEPTIVE SKILL

Ilona Huszti¹

Modern language teachers often find that they must also serve as reading skills teachers since emphasis on reading has become one of the primary curricular concerns in second and foreign language programs. In fact, reading is often the chief goal of learners in countries where English is taught as a foreign language (DUBIN & BYCINA, 1991).

The aims of my paper are to define reading itself, give models of the process of reading and classify the reading errors made by learners of English as a foreign language.

Thus, according to Dubin and Bycina, 'reading is one of those human capacities which tends to be taken for granted by those who do it effortlessly in their everyday lives. ... It is an activity which takes place, at least in part, as a function of the brain - as does language itself - questions about its nature are answered through constructing theoretical models of what might take place when the mind gets meaning from what the eyes see on a page of print' (DUBIN AND BYCINA, 1991, P. 196).

Kenneth Chastain determines reading as 'a receptive skill' in that the reader is receiving a message from the writer. In the past various writers have also referred to reading as a decoding skill. This terminology derives from 'the idea of language as a code, one which must be deciphered to arrive at the meaning of the message' (CHASTAIN, 1988, P. 216). Another definition of reading given by Perfetti (1984, pp. 40-41) is 'thinking guided by print'.

The reading aim is to read for meaning or to recreate the thought the writer had in mind. Reading to improve pronunciation or practise grammar structures or enrich and develop one's vocabulary do not constitute reading at all, because 'reading involves comprehension. When readers are not comprehending, they are not reading' (CHASTAIN, 1988, P. 217).

Reading is the skill in which the students will have the greatest ability at the end of a course stressing the four language skills. They will also retain it longer than the other skills. They will not be able to comprehend as much of what they hear due to the higher speed at which they are forced to process the message at the same linguistic level as the one at which they read.

Reading can be an important basis for individual learning about the country and its people. Reading can serve as a vehicle for entering into the *belles lettres* of the country's present and past civilisation. Finally, reading is the skill that students will in all likelihood have the most opportunities to use and that they can use most conveniently. They can obtain newspapers and books written in the second language

and they can read them in the privacy of their own home at their own convenience (C.F. CHASTAIN, 1988, P. 219).

There are several models of the process of reading, e.g. bottom-upreading, top-down reading, interactive models.

Basically, the bottom-up reading model fostered practices in reading instruction which built up learners' decoding abilities from the bottom up, starting with the smallest units, single letters and building up to words and phrases (DUBIN AND BYCINA, 1991).

According to the top-down reading model, the role of readers is considered to be quite active: they predict meaning as they read, they take in large chunks of text at a time, they do not attend to separate letters, rather they match what they already know with the meaning they derive from the text (DUBIN AND BYCINA, 1991).

The two views (bottom-up and top-down) were put together, and an alternative model was created in such a way during the 1980s, which is called 'interactive'. (This term was used by Perfetti and other methodologists.) Interactive theory acknowledges the role of previous knowledge and prediction but, at the same time, reaffirms the importance of rapid and accurate processing of the actual words of the text. According to this model, the reading process works like this:

clues to meaning are taken up from the page by the eye and transmitted to the brain;

the brain matches existing knowledge to the incoming data in order to facilitate the further processing of new information;

predictions are made about the content of the text, which, upon further sampling of the data, are either confirmed or revised (DUBIN AND BYCINA, 1991, P. 197).

During the process of reading, language learners make errors due to different causes. A reading error is the violation of 'speech communication' by means of printed text. The classification of reading errors can be viewed from different angles: aspecto-lingual, formal-informative, psychological.

From the aspecto-lingual point-of-view reading errors are subdivided into *phonetic*, *lexical*, *grammatical*. Stylistic errors have not been observed, though they may be marked by carrying out a more specific and detailed research.

Phonetic errors show violation in the pronunciation of separate sounds, words, word combinations, sentences. They may be especially noticed when reading aloud, though they may occur during silent reading, too. From time to time they are connected with violation of meaning. At the same time, the visual image (character) is in most cases stronger than the pronouncing one and there is no violation of meaning observed. For instance, the learner reads the phrase THE PEN IS ON THE TABLE. Incorrect articulation of sound [p] in the word PEN does not lead to incorrect understanding of the concrete meaning of the given phrase, because for the learner the visual image of the word PEN is closely connected with its meaning. Even if we

speak about loud reading, this is of importance only for the listener, and not for the reader.

The case is the same with incorrect intonation of the phrase IS THIS A BIG DOG? It does not cause any difficulty in loud or silent reading either, as it is graphically marked by the question mark acquired by the learner visually (KLYCHNIKOVA, 1972, P. 48).

Phonetic errors are quite often made while reading aloud, e. g. incorrect sounding of a given letter. Thus, learning English, students often mix words DO and GO; the preposition WITH is pronounced like [wiz] /by Ukrainian learners/ and like [wid] /by Hungarian learners/. A very typical error is when the ending of regular verbs in the past simple (-ED) following voiceless consonants is read as [id] instead of [t], e. g. instead of [laikt] students read [laikid]. At the beginner and elementary levels pupils very often change the sequence of sounds in a word, e. g. the word BIG is read as [gib], the word DOG - as [god]. The reasons for these errors are various ranging from eagerness to pronounce words, phrases and sentences faster to interference of the mother - tongue on the foreign language.

Lexical errors occur when students replace one word by another. Such examples of lexical errors have been observed when pronouncing the word RIVER instead of WINTER, BATHROOM instead of BIRTHDAY, ONE instead of OWN. (These errors were made by a pupil whose nationality is Russian.)

It has been proved that the most frequent reading errors in the process of loud reading belong to the grammatical type. They are of different nature:

agreement or concord between the subject and the predicate (a typical mistake here is omission of ending -S of the verb in the present simple third person singular), e. g. SHE PLAYS [plei] WITH HER SISTER.

omission of plural ending of nouns, e. g. THERE ARE ROSES [rouz] IN THE GARDEN.

reading the English articles². The most common errors while speaking about the article are that students do not read it, replace the definite article with the indefinite one, add an article where there is not any, e. g. THERE ARE CHAIRS IN THE ROOM [in rum].

incorrect reading of verb tenses (e. g. errors of sequence of tenses, incorrect use of aspect, etc.) Thus, instead of reading the verb in the past tense, students read it in the present, e. g. THE STORM HAS ALREADY BEEN RAGING FOR THREE HOURS BUT WE DID NOT LOSE HOPE.; instead of past time they use future, e. g. HE SAID THAT HE WILL HELP ME.; they do not read the past simple ending of the regular verbs (-ED), e. g. WHEN I WAS TWENTY I WORKED [wɔ:k] HARD ON MY JAPANESE.

It is usual that learners do not notice these errors, however, when they are asked to read a given phrase (in which they have made an error) again, they themselves correct these mistakes, without the teacher's pointing them out.

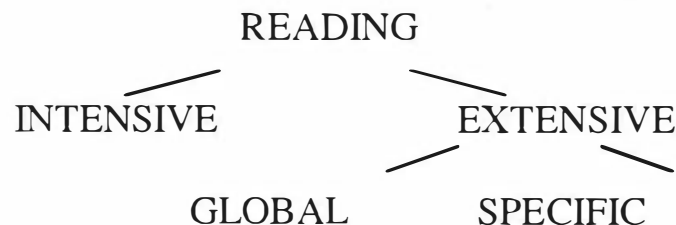
Analysing these errors we see that according to their character they may be subdivided into six groups:

- errors of replacing a speech signal;
- errors of shifting or rearranging a speech signal;
- errors of adding a speech signal;
- errors of omitting a speech signal;
- errors of distorting a speech signal;
- errors of repeating a speech signal. (KLYCHNIKOVA, 1972, P. 49).

Some of the above mentioned errors are also frequently observed when reading in the mother - tongue (e. g. shifting of letters, syllables, their omission, adding, distortion). These can be found in reading in a foreign language. Furthermore, they may be observed in both loud and silent reading.

A lot of grammar errors can be explained by incompleteness of perception, e. g. absence of the ending -S in the third person singular of the verb in the present simple or absence of the plural ending of nouns.

Now let us examine the different kinds of reading. In methodology there exist various classifications of kinds of reading: loud and silent, analytical or syntactical (with or without translation), with or without a dictionary. Before beginning reading, we set ourselves the following tasks: to carefully study the material, analyse it, express our own attitude to it, perceive the general plot of the text without going into details, determine what the text is about by quickly looking it through and perceiving certain facts. According to this, the following types of reading can be singled out:



SOURCE: Huszti I., 1998/1:19.

Intensive reading means that learners read intensively (it is an activity requiring high degree of attention), i. e. the goal of the reader is to get as much information as possible. Students, when they are reading for information, especially complicated material, they are likely to read much more slowly or at a rate that permits intensive reading (CHASTAIN, 1988, P. 220). Thus, while applying intensive reading the aims of the reader are to understand the meaning of the text, go into all of its details, form his or her own attitude to what he or she has read. A secondary task should be mentioned here, that of enriching our own vocabulary by means of the lexical units of the given text, improve our skill of automatic perception of grammatical structures. Teaching intensive reading should be taught already in the sixth form of primary or comprehensive schools, senior class pupils should read no less than five or six pages in the foreign language a week (PANOVA, 1989, P. 115).

If learners are reading for pleasure, they are likely to read toward the top of their reading speed, or at a rate that permits extensive reading. This kind of reading has two subtypes: global and specific. What do these terms mean? We often read things because we want to 'get the general picture', i. e. we want to have an idea of the main points of the text - an overview - without being too concerned with the details. When applied to reading this is often called **SKIMMING** and it entails the reader's ability to pick out main points rapidly, discarding what is not essential or relevant to that general picture (HARMER, 1994, P. 183).

Thus, when applying skimming skills, the aims of the reader are perfectly different from those when he or she uses intensive reading. When a reader skims a text, he perceives only the essential facts without going into details. It suggests a quite developed mechanism of reading, the skill to get the meaning or to skip unknown words, to find or extract the basic information, separate it from details. This kind of reading is carried out only in the senior classes of secondary schools at foreign language lessons under the guidance of the teacher, who sets a definite time limit for the students to fulfil the given tasks (PANOVA, 1989, P.115).

Very often we read something because we want to extract specific bits of information - to find out a fact or two. We may quickly look through a film review just to find the name of the star. We may largely disregard the other information in the review. We will be aware of this information and may even at some level take it in, but we do so at speed as we focus on the specific information we are searching for. This skill when applied to reading is often called **SCANNING** (HARMER, 1994, P. 183).

While scanning a text, our aim is to look it through as quickly as possible in order to determine what it is about, extracting only the basic and essential information. This kind of reading is taught in the senior classes of secondary schools when the learners' reading skills are well-developed and the mechanism of predicting is formed (i. e. learners are able to predict what will be going on) and their skills to guess the content of the text according to its title are highly developed, too (PANOVA, 1989, P. 116). It is really very important, because in fact, second language learners are not able to predict at all in the beginning stage of reading with much accuracy, since their experience with the language, in terms of both syntax and semantics, is so limited. This seems to be particularly true for children who not only are learning a second language but also are learning to read at the same time. The inclusion of teaching learners to make predictions about what they are reading as a formal part of reading instruction has been shown to be helpful to second language learners (HAWKINS, 1991, P.174).

Jeremy Harmer gives a basic methodological model for the teaching of reading as a receptive skill. It has five basic stages which are the following:

Lead-in: students prepare themselves for the task and familiarise themselves with the topic of the reading exercise; the teacher's task is to create expectations and arouse the students' interest in the subject matter of the written text.

Teacher directs comprehension task: this is where the teacher explains and directs the students' purpose for reading.

Students read for task: students read the text to perform the task the teacher has set.

Teacher directs feedback: the teacher helps the students to see if they have completed the task successfully and will find out how well they have done.

Teacher directs text-related task: the teacher organises some kind of follow-up task related to the text (HARMER, 1994, P. 189).

The above model is of great importance and help for EFL/ESL teachers who teach reading as one of the four receptive skills.

Thus in my paper I have discussed the teaching of reading as a receptive skill in some detail, paying attention to different types of reading and the reading errors made by foreign language learners, I have given their classification and reasons for these errors. The importance of the teacher's role in creating expectations for the text that is to be read has also been underlined.

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² It presents a special difficulty for students of Russian and Ukrainian nationalities as in the article as a part of speech does not exist in their mother-tongues.