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TUDOMÁNYOS KÖZLEMÉNYEI

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НАУКОВИЙ ВІСНИК ЗАКАРПАТСЬКОГО УГОРСЬКОГО ІНСТИТУТУ ІМ. ФЕРЕНЦА РАКОЦІ ІІ.

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TARTALOM

TÁRSADALOMTUDOMÁNYI SZAKOSZTÁLY

TERMÉSZETTUDOMÁNYI SZAKOSZTÁLY

ЗМІСТ

ГУМАНІТАРНІ НАУКИ

ПРИРОДНІЧІ НАУКИ

Why teachers of English in Transcarpathian Hungarian schools apply the oral reading technique at the English lessons

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1. Introduction

Transcarpathia is one of the twenty-five administrative regions of Ukraine, with a population of approximately 1,200,000 inhabitants among which about 150,000 people are Hungarians living in a minority in Ukraine (Orosz, Csernicsko, 1999). Members of this minority have the right to attend schools with Hungarian language of instruction. There are about 100 such schools in Transcarpathia, all of which are state-supported (Bagu, 2001).

Most of the 100 schools with Hungarian language of instruction teach English as a foreign language, some of them teach German, and only an insignificant number of these schools teach French as a foreign language. Schools teaching German and French are gradually altering their curricula by introducing the teaching of English as a foreign language, having become aware of the importance of the knowledge of English in present-day Ukraine, in which there has been a boom recently.

In Transcarpathia, it is common practice to apply the oral reading method in teaching foreign languages in state-supported primary and secondary schools, despite the warning of modern methodologists not to apply it in its traditional way (Helgesen & Gakuin, 1993). Whether this technique is the 'remainder' of the Grammar-Translation Approach to language teaching widely applied in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s in Ukraine (and Transcarpathia is a part of this country) constitutes a question of puzzle. But this task is also favoured by grammar school and vocational school teachers of English in Years 10, 11 and 12 in Hungary: reading aloud was the most frequently observed reading task in a classroom observation study attempting to find out what actually happens in English language classrooms in Hungary (Nikolov, 1999).

Because oral reading is a widely applied technique, it deserves some attention on the part of the research community. As Goodman and Goodman (1980) define it, oral reading or reading aloud[1] means saying a printed text out loud. For the purpose of the study depicted in this paper, this simple definition of the construct of reading aloud was expanded to written texts, too, i.e. reading aloud in this understanding means saying a hand-written text out loud (e.g. an exercise written by the pupil during the foreign language lesson or as a home assignment) or a printed text out loud (e.g. a dialogue or other types of texts in the pupils' textbook).

The reason behind carrying out such a research is that the topic is not sufficiently investigated and it needs urgent clarification by means of attempting to answer the main research question, *For what reasons is the oral reading technique used by teachers in primary and secondary schools in the foreign language classroom?*

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[1] The two terms, oral reading and reading aloud are used interchangeably in this paper.

2. Literature review

The main focus of the research is oral reading or reading aloud which Kailani (1998) believes, in an ideal case, to be described by "clear articulation of words, flexibility in rate, volume and tone, adequate phrasing and effective use of pauses" (p. 281).

Reading aloud is mentioned in the academic literature by some of the researchers as an assessment technique by which reading is tested (Fordham, Holland & Millican, 1995; Alderson, 2000), while others attach importance to it in a different way. Panova (1989) says that reading a text aloud is important for maintaining and perfecting the pronouncing skills of the learners. It helps overcome psychological barriers and fear of starting to speak in a foreign language (Stronin, 1986). Panova's view supports that of Klychnikova (1972), according to whom by means of oral reading it is possible to master the sound system of a foreign language and it strengthens the phonetic ability to re-code signals at the letter level, as well as at the level of word, sentence and text. She considers that at the elementary stage reading aloud is an important means to develop a reading technique, while at the advanced level it mainly plays the role of control or expressive reading.

Baron and Strawson (1976) state that although reading out loud is not a technique by the use of which it is possible to make meaning, nonetheless, "it is a valuable skill in itself, particularly in providing teachers with a way of evaluating progress in reading" (p. 386).

On the contrary, Dwyer (1987) has objections to the teaching of oral reading. She considers that (cited in Kailani, 1998: 283-284):

· it reinforces the idea that reading and pronunciation are related, thereby strengthening the tendency to subvocalise when reading silently;

· it slows down reading by forcing the student to focus on each word;

· when reading aloud, a student may lose all sense of the meaning of what he is reading, a fact that defeats the very purpose of reading;

· when students mispronounce and misread some words, the teacher interrupts the reading to correct miscues, thereby further impeding the flow of meaning extraction.

Gardner (1986) assumes that reading aloud as a language activity in foreign language classrooms is time-consuming and can be of no use in learning to read. In fact, researchers seem to agree on the total appeal of silent reading when comprehension is concerned.

In contrast, advocates of oral reading stand for its use in the classroom, saying that "it is one way in which students can be systematically trained to recognise new words and articulate them correctly" (Kailani, 1998: 285), or to voice a piece of literature (e.g. poetry) before it is stylistically analysed (Ivanic, 2001, personal communication).

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The target population was made up of sixteen teachers of English in various Hungarian primary and secondary schools of Transcarpathia. Six teachers work in primary schools, five teachers work in secondary schools, four people are teachers in eight-year grammar schools and one teacher teaches in a lyceum, working with children in Years 10, 11 and 12. The teachers' age range is between 22 and 57. The questionnaires were administered to the participants either in private (in twelve cases), or by post (in four cases). The sixteen obtained questionnaires were returned by post.

3.2 The instrument

A questionnaire in Hungarian (the mother tongue of the participants) was designed for the purposes of the study. The participants' native language was decided to be used during the research in order to avoid misunderstanding between the researcher and the respondents (Seliger & Shohamy, 1990). It consisted of four sections. In the first section, teachers were asked about their using oral reading as a teaching technique at the English language classes (how often and for how long they use it). In the second section, teachers had to consider to what extent the given statements about the practice of oral reading in the classroom were true for their lessons. Section 3 asked about the purposes and reasons for using oral reading in the classroom, while Section 4 enquired about personal data.

3.3 Procedure

The research was carried out in August 2002. The participants took part in an in-service teacher-training course in Beregszasz, where they were asked to fill in the research instrument of this study. One of the teachers collected twelve filled in questionnaires. The other four were obtained in one envelope by post one week after the training course ended.

4. Results and their discussion

In this part of the present paper, the results of Section 3 of the questionnaire are presented and discussed. Items in Section 3 concerned the teachers' perceived purposes and reasons for using oral reading in the English as a foreign language classroom.

Seven such purposes and reasons, and also open-ended options, were provided, and the respondents had to decide whether they totally agree with them, or agree but have some reservations, or totally disagree, or cannot decide on which side they are.

Table 1 shows the most common purposes and reasons for applying oral reading in the foreign language classroom, in the teachers' order of preference. The questionnaire items are given in the author's translation.

TABLE 1 The most common reasons for using oral reading in the English language classroom

No	Purposes and reasons	Number of subjects mentioning this item (n=16)	Percentage
1	My learners read aloud in order to practise the proper English pronunciation.	15	93.75
2	My learners read aloud in order to practise expressive reading.	14	87.5
3	Learners' oral reading helps me in introducing new vocabulary items of a given topic	8	50
4	Learners' oral reading helps me in learning what my pupils do not know.	6	37.75
5	Learners' oral reading helps me in learning what my pupils know well.	3	18.75
6	When one learner is reading out loud, the others are listening, in this way better remembering the differences between the written and spoken forms of words.	1	6.25
7	When listening to a child read aloud, I can correct the mistakes so that the other learners will not make the same mistakes in the future.	1	6.25
8	When somebody reads aloud, he other learners pay more attention to the contents of the text being read.	1	6.25
9	My learners read aloud in the English classroom because they often read aloud in their mother tongue.	0	0
10	My learners read aloud in the English classroom because it is a requirement of the local educational authorities.	0	0

As the results show, fifteen subjects (one missing answer) agreed that the main purpose for using oral reading at the English lessons is to practise proper English pronunciation (93,75%). This is one of the most important reasons why reading aloud is applied throughout the forms 5 to 12 in Hungarian primary and secondary schools in Transcarpathia.

The second most common reason for applying oral reading is to practise expressive reading. Fourteen subjects (87,5% of the respondents) totally agreed with this, one subject agreed with certain qualifications, and one respondent totally disagreed with this.

Another purpose of using oral reading in the classroom is that of introducing new vocabulary items to learners while they are reading aloud. This means that teachers

present the unfamiliar vocabulary of a given topic with the help of a text that the learners read out loud. Only half of the participants (50%) claimed that this happened in their classrooms. Five participants (31.25%) stated that they somewhat agreed with this, but not totally. One teacher (6.25%) did not agree at all. There was one piece of missing data.

Two reasons out of the seven provided proved to be absolutely irrelevant for the participants. These were Statement 6, 'My learners read aloud in the English classroom because they often read aloud in their mother tongue', and Statement 7, 'My learners read aloud in the English classroom because it is a requirement of the local educational authorities'. This means that the practice of mother tongue oral reading does not influence reading aloud in English, and also, that this kind of activity (i.e. reading aloud in English) is not a requirement demanded by the local or regional educational authorities. Teachers apply oral reading because they believe it is useful.

Some participants mentioned a few of other reasons for applying oral reading in the classroom. One of them considered that oral reading had an important role during her lessons (mainly in the lower primary classes) because the learners could pay more attention to the contents of the text they were reading. This opinion, although not generalisable, contradicts one of the objections to reading aloud, which says that it hinders comprehension (Dwyer, 1983).

Another teacher mentioned that she used the technique of reading aloud to get her learners remember the differences between the written and spoken forms of a word. This reason can easily be associated with Statement 3 in Section 3 of the questionnaire, i.e. the use of oral reading for the purpose of practising proper pronunciation. It is of interest and importance that respondents did not take into account the possibility of practising the learners' proper English intonation. This might be explained by a lack of intonation teaching in the schools where the respondents teach.

5. Conclusions

The study described in this paper tried to shed light on the various purposes and reasons for applying oral reading in the English language classroom. It aimed at obtaining answers from teacher participants to the question why they make use of the oral reading technique at the English lessons. Having analysed the data, it can be concluded that the most common reason why teachers of English in Transcarpathian Hungarian schools have children read texts out loud is to practise proper English pronunciation. Although nearly all the subjects agreed on this item, no one mentioned practising proper English intonation in the open-ended option 'Other. Please specify'. Practising expressive reading is also an essential reason for having children read texts out loud in the classroom.

A final conclusion of the study is that the participants all claimed that they used the oral reading technique on their own will, and not because it was a demand or requirement towards them. The participants of this study believed that reading loud had a place in the English language classroom.

Резюме

Пошуки, описані в цій доповіді, мали на меті дати відповідь на питання, чому метод читання вголос так широко використовується на уроках англійської мови в угорськомовних школах Закарпаття. Термін „читання вголос" в нашому випадку означає той процес, коли учень вимовляє слова надрукованого тексту (найчастіше, текст підручника).

У цих дослідженнях брали участь шістнадцятеро вчителів англійської мови різних угорськомовних шкіл Закарпаття . Вони мали заповнити анкету на угорській мові про причини використування методу читання вголос на уроках англійської мови.

Як показали результати досліджень, найголовніша причина була надання можливості учням практикувати правильну англійську вимову та експресивне читання англійською мовою, а також викладання незнайомої лексики нової теми за допомогою цього методу. Цікаво було, що ніхто із респондентів не назвав можливість практикувати правильну англійську інтонацію за допомогою читання вголос.

Слід відмітити, що з точки зору лінгво-педагогічної науки було б важливо провести подібні дослідження серед вчителів англійської мови україномовних шкіл Закарпаття і порівняти результати та визначити подібності та відмінності між угорськомовними та україномовними школами Закарпаття.

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