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COMMUNICATIVE READING TASKS FOR THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Abstract. *This article is devoted to the problem of teaching communicative reading English texts in higher school and focuses on the factor of purpose, as determined by the reader or the instructional context.*

Key words: *text, context, reading, pre-reading activities, communication, conversation, comprehension.*

Introduction. Real-world reading is performed for any number of reasons, and the nature of reading varies according to the reader's purpose and situation. These factors inevitably determine the reader's approach to text, the amount of attention paid, the time spent, as well as what features or parts of the text are focused on.

Whether we are reading for pleasure or information, the nature of the reading depends on what we want from the text, as well as situational factors such as time available or constrains relative to place of reading. No matter what our agenda, why and where we read inevitably determine how we read.

Main text. Wherever possible, instructors should ask students directly about their interests and provide them with choices of authentic texts. But reader's interest in a text can also be a function of purpose. Educational researches have defined several different categories of interest. Individual or personal interest refers to long-standing preferences on the part of a particular reader for certain topics or related subject matter. By contrast, situational interest refers to interest generated by situational factors, including the text itself. Text-based situational interest is generally defined as interest that is elicited by text through topics or ideas that are of universal or archetypal appeal (3). Another form of situational interest, and one that concerns us here, is reading purpose.

In a study that determines the effect on interest and recall of reading with a particular perspective, Schraw and Dennison (6) found that focusing readers' attention on selected text information increases what the researches term purpose-

driven interest and that text segment that are relevant to a readers' purpose are recalled better than those are not.

Reading with a purpose means approaching texts with a specific goal. When possible, students can be asked to read a text from a specific point of view, depending on what the text might suggest. In the classroom, students can be given reason to read that approximate their purposes in a variety of real-world situations. They can read ads for apartments to find one that fits a particular set of requirements, look through movie listings and reviews to decide whether to see a particular movie, or respond to a written invitation.

Beyond these comprehension exercise types, purposeful reading can also be a part of whole communicative tasks in the foreign language classroom. Nunan defines a communicative task as a «piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on meaning rather than form» (5). Strictly speaking, in task activities the goal is nonlinguistic. The idea is to get something done via the language, to read a text and do something with the information (4). Whole tasks involve performance of reading in conjunction with other skills: listening, speaking, or writing. For example, students in a small group might read a number of texts, such as brochures, timetables, or maps, and listen to radio weather or traffic reports in order to carry out the larger task of deciding on the best method of transportation to use on a trip. In such an activity, each student deals with one category of information, and all students must communicate their information to one another to come up with the best plan for the trip.

Still other kinds of communicative tasks may be activities that would not actually occur in real-world situations. For example, a classroom reading task might involve students drawing a picture based on a written text, reconstructing a text that has been cut up into paragraphs, or, in pairs, reading slightly different versions of the same story and discovering differences through speech alone. These tasks, while not real world, are still communicative; the focus is on understanding a text to get something done.

A task approach conveys to student the value of fluent and efficient reading, because reading for a specific purpose means reading texts in different ways at different speeds, depending on the information needed and the task to be carried out. Another advantage of tasks is that students can work with authentic texts from the start. A complex, unedited text can be made accessible by adjusting the level of difficulty of the task. The same text can be used at different points during a semester, each time with a different task or purpose. In rereading the same text with a different purpose, students derive a sense of accomplishment from their progressively greater comprehension and more extended use of the text.

Recent reading research points to the benefits of working with texts for the purpose of drawing students' attention to formal features of written language as well (4). A communicative or task approach can and should be combined with analysis of text structure and linguistic features of text; however, most specialists concur that instructors should focus on textual message first. If an individual student cannot perform a task successfully due to misreading of a text, the student will need to reread problematic segment and attend more closely to the structure. If many students in a class experience difficulty with certain syntactical structures or forms of text organization, the instructor may choose to conduct a reading lesson that targets those areas.

In advanced-level courses, such as film studies or special topics in literature, the real-world uses of text are less evident; rather, the focus is on academic tasks. In most academic tasks, such as presenting a report or writing a paper, reading plays a significant role.

In discussion of the concept of critical literacy, reading and interpretation have been defined by a variety of researches as being able to talk about a text, which in turn means being able to participate in a «conversation of readers» (2). In his view, literacy is both a social and cognitive process.

Importantly, Graff situates reading within the larger communicative context of academic discourse and emphasizes the primacy of context over text.

A reader's background knowledge with respect to the text topic and genre is recognized as a significant factor in text comprehension. Conclusions. As a result, textbooks and pedagogical practice now routinely include pre-reading activities with authentic texts or other reading selections. A benefit of such activities is the focus or purpose for reading that they can provide. The value of pre-reading work for both comprehension and interest does not diminish as the advanced level. In literature courses, for example, writing and discussion can serve equally well as an entry into a whole text or text segment. Pre-reading discussion can focus on a critical argument or controversy surrounding interpretation of a text. More simply, discussion or writing tasks can elicit students' personal views or previous readings on a topic or their expectations with respect to the text content or point of view. Students familiar with American and Ukrainian newspapers can be asked to compare articles from The Washington Post or USA Today on terrorism. Prior to the reading, they can articulate their expectations about what facts will be highlighted and what perspective or political stance, if any, the articles will reflect. Discussion Of these issues before rather than after reading provides focus, which in turn creates interest in the text.

As preparation for reading authentic foreign language texts on a cultural topic, students can be engaged in peer reading and debate. In this activity, the instructor provides students with a topic for debate formulated in terms of a specific question. Each student writes a short position statement on the topic, making an argument that may or may not represent their view. In groups, students read through and discuss all statements, culling what they believe to be the best arguments for and against each side of the debate. The groups then compare their results. Again, prior discussion of the arguments provides a focal point for reading.

Writing is a particularly effective form of pre-reading activity that prompts readers to reflect on what they are about to read. Writing activities foster the development of a sense of authorship, which in turn helps make students more critical readers. An effective way to promote active response to text is through assignment of reading journals. In these, students write entries prior to each reading assignment. In addition to writing their reactions to text passages already read, they are encouraged

to write prospectively, anticipating story line or character development and formulating questions about what they are about to read. Journal entries are handed in to the instructor or exchanged with other students and form the basis for discussion or for other, more developed writing task.

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