Reports on Classroom Experiences

READING MONOMODAL AND MULTIMODAL TEXTS

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Abstract

This paper will examine the role of literature in the language classroom before explaining the goals of extensive reading in the electronic era. I will then move on to talk about the role of the Internet (www), CD-ROMs, E-books and other multimodal texts to promote extensive reading for second and foreign language learners. Finally, I will discuss the advantages of multimodal texts after discussing the reading process involved in the reading of a narrative, a picture book and a website.

Key words: Extensive reading, literature, printed, linear, monomodal and multimodal texts.

บทความนี้จะพิจารณาบทบาทของวรรณคดีในการเรียนภาษาก่อนที่จะอธิบายถึงเป้าหมายของการอ่านอย่าง
กว้างขวางในยุคอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ จากนั้นผู้วิจัยจะพูดถึงบทบาทของ Internet (www), CD - ROMs,
E - books และข้อความต่อเนื่องอื่น ๆ เพื่อส่งเสริมการอ่านอย่างกว้างขวาง สำหรับผู้เรียนภาษาที่สองและ
ผู้เรียนภาษาต่างประเทศ ท้ายสุดจะอภิปรายเกี่ยวกับข้อดีของข้อความแบบต่อเนื่องในกระบวนการการอ่าน
แบบต่อเนื่องในการอ่านการเล่าเรื่อง หนังสือภาพและเว็บไซต์

Introduction

Many English teachers lament the declining role of literature and extensive reading in language education. The general complain is that many 'net-age' learners are hooked on to the Internet and digitally animated texts. Reading involves different levels of decoding, responding and comprehending at affective and cognitive levels, critiquing and analysing. Decoding involves using strategies of word recognition, pronunciation, vocabulary knowledge, and the recognition of graphic, morphemic and phonemic patterns. For the proficient reader these happen unconsciously. Nuttall (1996), Wallace (1992), Abersold and Field (1997) and Rosenblatt (1938) have discussed issues on reading

This paper discusses the role of extensive or experiential reading and ways to promote foreign language learners' interest in extensive reading in the digital age where most people tend to spend their leisure time before computers instead of reading printed materials. Reading for experience in a foreign language is a daunting task for many learners who think

> They have to know all the words in a text in order to understand it, rely heavily on the dictionary, are unable to transfer positive LI reading strategies or positive feelings about translation, and attribute their difficulties to a lack of English proficiency.
>
> (Masuhara, 2003: 340)

This problem is further amplified with the growing popularity of the Internet, video games and electronic books which have replaced libraries and reading clubs. Therefore, encouraging learners to read multimodal or computer-based materials is likely to promote extensive reading in foreign language contexts.

What is Extensive Reading (ER)?

Extensive reading is the reading, without overt instruction, of large amounts of material for pleasure and information. According to Day and Bamford (1998), extensive reading programmes have many names, Book Flood, Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR), Pleasure Reading, Drop Everything and Read (DEAR), and Silent Uninterrupted Reading for Fun (SURF).

The principles of extensive reading according to Day and Bamford (2002) are:

1. The reading material is easy. The materials are well within the grasp of the learner's linguistic competence. Dictionaries are rarely used while reading because the constant stopping to look up words impedes fluent reading.
2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available so as to encourage reading for different reasons and in different ways.
3. Learners choose what they want to read and have the freedom to stop reading materials that fail to interest to them.
4. Learners read as much as possible
5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding. The purposes are determined by the contents or the nature of the materials and students' interests.
6. Reading is its own reward. There are usually no follow-up exercises after reading
7. Reading speed is usually faster than slower as students read materials which they find easy to understand.
8. Reading is silent and individual, at the student's own pace and done when and where the student chooses.
9. Teachers orient and guide their students, explain the methodology, keep track of what each student reads and guide students in gaining maximum benefit from the programme.
10. The teacher is a role model of a reader who is an active member of the classroom reading community, demonstrating what it means to be a reader and the rewards of being a reader.

These principles contrast with intensive reading where students read a small amount of material through formal classroom instruction by concentrating on individual words and sentences rather than aiming for holistic understanding of the materials which turns out to be tedious, boring and eventually a negative experience for foreign language learners.

In reality, extensive reading implies reading a lot of books. The more books read, the more skillful and fluent students become in the language. Immersion in fiction, tales and narratives are the means by which students develop confidence and fluency in reading long texts.

Extensive reading for school pupils was promoted through the study of literary classics (Shakespeare, Dickens, Bronte sisters etc...) which are also

referred to as 'authentic materials'. Unfortunately, the abridged or simplified classics are not flawless and specialists have researched the weaknesses of simplified readers. According to Nutall (1996: 178), "however good a simplification is something is always lost; this is why some teachers refuse to use simplified versions". Vincent (1986: 212) observes, "too many graded readers are pale imitations of original writing, in thin, stilted language, lacking all the linguistic, emotional, and aesthetic qualities that characterize real literature."

The materials people read depend upon their purposes for reading. For instance, foreign language learners are likely to read textbooks, academic journals, online reference materials and graphic aids to learn or gain information, but they rarely read newspapers, magazines, stories and literary texts to educate their imagination and enrich their experience of the world.

Experiential reading can strengthen literary, linguistic and cultural competencies of readers. Furthermore, readers could share their reading to others through journals, blog pages, online discussions and book clubs.

Reading literary texts trains learners to think and feel in new ways. The process of reading literature and thinking about the reader's own and others' responses will exercise learners' imagination in ways which is not always the case with other disciplines.

Rosenblatt (1938) treats literature as a resource to educate people when she explains her theory of "efferent" and "aesthetic" reading. An efferent reading focuses on the meaning of the text and an aesthetic reading gives scope for feelings, sensations and assigns the reader an active role in the reading process.

According to Parkinson and Thomas (2000: 33-34), active readers integrate experiences and feelings into the fabric of literary texts and this approach is likely to stimulate learners' thinking. The following questions related to experiential reading are listed in the Literature and the Language Arts of the EMC Master Piece Series published in 2001.

- How does what I am reading make me feel?"
- What is the setting?
- When was it written?
- How do things look, sound, taste, feel or even smell?
- Do I identify with any of the characters? What would I do if I were in their place?
- Does what I am reading involve a conflict? If so, what is it? How might it be resolved?

- What are the main themes, images and symbols that appear in the text?
- What can be learned from the life experiences of the characters?

Active readers tend to predict the chain of events and think about possible consequences of the characters' actions as well. Readers do a quick summary on paper at the end of every chapter while reading longer texts as a strategy to keep track of the train of events in the story. This is likely to benefit second and foreign language learners when they deal with texts which have multiple plots or a complex structure.

Writing a journal or a diary is another valuable source to enrich the reading experience. A journal is not only useful to document the author's life and works, but it is also useful to record the salient features of the book like plot, theme and characters. The journal can also be used to record purple passages and meaningful quotations from the book. The information in journals can help learners to review books in a blog or even in newspapers and magazines. The idea of keeping a journal establishes the nexus between reading and writing as well.

Reading groups or book clubs expose readers to new ways of responding/interpreting literary works as no two readers have exact interpretations of a literary text. The sheer variety of responses leads to interesting discussions in reading groups and this experience is further enhanced if the members are from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Book clubs and reading groups promote cross-cultural awareness and camaraderie. There are many online reading groups like the British Council's 'Britlit' which is an online forum to discuss stories and narratives.

Reading group members may discuss a particular work in a detailed manner or share their responses of different works by focusing on the salient features of a text. It is possible for readers to explore a common theme from a range of genres over a period of time or for a particular session and the materials are chosen by consensus. (Hartley, 2001)

It is fair to expect reading group members to have completed the texts chosen for the session and jot down ideas preferably in a journal or in the form of notes to steer the discussion. Readers highlight/mark passages which they think are worth remembering agree or disagree in the text. Readers also note down words, phrases and events which are unclear to them.

Members of a reading group listen to others' ideas and clarify/answer when people raise questions about the material during a session. Members of

successful reading groups encourage each other to talk, keep track of the discussions and stay focused. Although, it is possible for members to enter into arguments about books, they should not be offensive. It is advisable to provide a quick summary of the discussion with follow-up questions in the end.

An evaluation in terms of members' contributions to the discussion, the success of the group and ways to improve future sessions is likely to strengthen the dynamics of reading groups.

Although teachers and learners in the pre-net age have benefited from monomodal texts/stories, the question now is how to motivate learners to read in a multimodal environment? Students' environment is filled with visual, electronic and digital texts which are also referred to as 'multimodal texts' (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress et al. 2001, Kress, 2003 and Walsh, 2003). It is worth examining some of the differences that occur in the reading of multimodal texts compared to the reading of printed texts after a brief explanation of multimodal texts.

Multimodal texts have more than one mode that is, they may incorporate spoken or written language, still or moving images, they may be produced on paper or electronic screen and may incorporate sound. Different types of multimodal texts that students commonly encounter in their educational environment in print form are picture books, information books, newspapers and magazines.

A reader of a picture book or an information book needs to process words and pictures in addition to movement and sound if the texts are digitally produced. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) have challenged the notions of traditional literacy's emphasis on print in a multimodal and digital world.

Kress and others claim that written text is only one part of the message and no longer the dominant part. New types of texts require different a conceptualisation and a different way of thinking. (Heath, 2000). In writing, words rely on the 'logic of speech' involving time and sequence, but reading multimodal texts involves more than reading words from print. (Kress, 2003).

Although many children are engaged with new forms of literary narratives, institutions tend to foster the 'logic of writing'. Contemporary students' experiences are grounded in the 'logic of the image' and the 'logic of the screen'. (Kress, 2003).

Some of the possibilities suggested by Swartz (cited in Poedjosoedarmo, 1996) include flashback narration (not in the order in

which they happened); parallel stories where two plots come together in the end. However, in reading a linear text (at least in the first instance) the reader "begins at the beginning and ends at the end". (Swartz cited in Poedjosoedarmo, 1996: 41)

Printed texts are linear because there is a fixed reading path for the reader, but in electronic texts the narration does not progress in a fixed sequence in real time. The user has the liberty to make choices at various points, and in some cases even backtrack to explore alternative paths. Multimodal or electronic materials refer to digitally processed/produced materials.

> Electronic materials are organized around simulations, where skills are developed during the course of learning a second language – through problem-solving activities, solving mysteries and games. Most of these packages are relatively self-contained and pose difficulties for teachers to integrate in a particular course. There is a plethora of online resources to access electronic texts apart from CD-ROMs and interactive/animated multimedia software which are valuable for reading in a second language. (Poedjosoedarmo, 1996). Although these packages are easy-to-use, the activities are computer driven or computer dependent – rather than open-ended which are more humanistic and evaluative.

The enduring capacity of literary narratives to engage and motivate young people is increasingly articulated with the integration of digital technology in their lives. Printed books are enhanced by various forms of digital resources and some digital narratives have companion editions in print. The phenomenal success of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter books and the Harry Potter websites, many of which are developed and managed by young readers is testimony to the power of digital narratives in the present day context.

With the emergence of online and e-literature resources there is considerable research on the interface of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), literature and language education. Teachers need frameworks that offer a springboard for thinking about the impact of ICT on literature and language education. Not everyone in developing nations may own a computer with Internet connection, but the Internet provides a great deal of reading material, for those who can afford a computer. The World Wide Web includes educational institutes, libraries and other organisations where reading materials are uploaded regularly. Usually, the

index page of the sites has number of topics which open in new pages when the icons related to the topics are clicked by readers.

Derewianka (2003) suggests useful sites for extensive reading like the electronic library (www.books.com/scripts/lib.exe) which provides a host of titles on a variety of topics like non-fiction, humour, hobbies and games. The English Server, which is managed by the students and faculty of Carnegie Mellon University, has novels, short stories, tales, fables and non-fictional texts which are suitable for children and adults.

The Online Books Page includes a number of general books related to music, religion and geography both in English and in some European languages. Project Gutenberg is a treasure trove of the literary canon, reference materials and 'light literature'. The 'light literature' section includes popular fairy tales and children's stories in English.

Derewianka (2003) recommends Reading Resources for EFL, which offers adventures thrillers, biographies, essays, folktales, fantasy, horror, science fiction, poetry and other genres for independent reading. The Children's Literature Web Guide consists of folktales, myths, classics, songs, contemporary stories and theatre stories written by young learners or children. In addition, reviews and discussions on the reading materials are posted in this site. The ESL Loop which began in 1996 is linked to sites like the ESL Cyberschool, English Online, Free EFL Materials and Virtual English.

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) site has suggestion for teaching reading and literature based on NCTE publications. The 'Teaching Reading Skills Tips' comprises articles and ideas from teachers of MIDTESOL (Mid-American Teachers of English of Other Languages). The relationships among literary materials in monomodal (printed materials) and multimodal formats on the www and in CD-ROMs or e-books can be described in three main categories.

- Electronically supplemented literary texts consist of literature that has been published in book format only, but the books are supplemented with online resources to heighten the significance of the story.
- Electronically re-constructed literary texts involve the republication of books on the Internet or in CD ROMs. Although works that are out of print have been scanned and uploaded in digital libraries for free access, online versions of contemporary books can be downloaded from the Internet at a cost.

- Digital literary texts: The great variety of literary narratives for children and adolescents on the www can be categorized as follows:
1. E-stories for young readers: These stories contain audio and hyperlinks to support children learning to decode print by providing models of oral reading of stories and the pronunciation of individual words. Stories like these are included on sites such as http://www.ebooksworld.de/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=30
2. Linear e-stories: Stories with illustrations found in printed books, but presented on a computer screen - 'linear e-stories'. The Children's Storybooks Online has several examples.
3. Interactive e-stories: These stories are similar to linear e-stories; however information about characters and links to other stories are given separately. The Relic Triangle (Matus, 2002) is an example.
4. Hypertext stories: Hypertext stories use of a range of hyperlinks, these stories focus on text instead of images Some of these stories are available on Internet sites like the 'Word Circuits'
5. Hypermedia narratives: Use hyperlinks involving text and images, often in combination. The reading process of a narrative, a picture book and a website will be discussed in the following section.

Text I

> *We lived in an old gypsy caravan behind a filling-station.*
>
> *My father owned the filling-station and the caravan and a small field behind, but that was about all he owned in the world. It was a very small filling-station on a small country road surrounded by fields and woody hills.*
>
> *While I was still a baby, my father washed me and fed me and changed my nappies and did all the million things a mother normally does for her child. That is not an easy task for a man, especially when he has to earn his living at the same time by repairing motor-car engines and serving customers with petrol.*
>
> (RoaldDahl, 1975: 1)

Proficient or experienced readers of Text I will try to predict the title of the chapter and try to raise questions about the narrator and the overall context of the story and thus enter the world of the text. Readers are likely

to focus on the use of personal pronouns like I... we etc... which is a characteristic feature of children's literature.

Readers will try to figure out the narrator's background, family situation and childhood experience through the narration of the motherless child who describes the father as a superior mortal. Meaning in Text 1 is conveyed through choice of words and the organization of information or the grammar of the text.

Picnic Time in Text 2 is the cover page of a picture book meant for children. The fonts represent the handwriting of children as opposed to normal or cursive fonts which appear in academic books and literary anthologies.

Text 2

The cover shows a girl in casual clothes sitting on a sheet with a basket in a park or in an area shrouded in greenery under a blue sky. The girl's clothes, background, blue sky and the basket with eatables indicate an ideal situation for a picnic or an excursion. The series title 'Read at home', the names of the author and the illustrator appear outside the frame.

An experienced reader will recognize this book as a narrative from the cover shown here. Although constructing meaning of this text is similar to a printed text, the reading is influenced by visual codes such as, colour, angle, frame and vectors or in other words 'visual grammar'. (Walsh, 2003). Lexico-grammar features of texts are important in reading printed texts, but visual grammar is equally important in reading picture books or graphic novels.

Text 3: Website

The information presented in a website is different from a narrative. The information is fragmented into several sections or frames which can be accessed by clicking the icons. This website is not like a narrative with a clear, beginning, middle and end. The reader is not obliged to peruse all the pages, but chooses the reading path from the 'menu' and the hyperlinks. One has to raise questions in terms of the reading process and the reader's role here. Another question that comes to mind: Is the reader likely to look at the words or images or use the mouse to navigate links without paying attention to every word in the site?

The Advantages of Multimodal Literary Texts

The availability of literature on www sites reflects the popularity of books and other forms of literary narratives, including electronic game narratives. Although, teachers may not feel confident to exploit digital resources for pedagogic purposes, more and more students use computers outside of school to access a wide range of digital texts on CD ROM and the www. They also communicate their digital experience by emails, blogs, chat rooms and social networking sites.

There is a great deal of opportunity in working with e-literature and online resources to synthesise the experience of students and teachers in the enjoyment of literature. Therefore, teachers should encourage learners to read multimodal texts which would eventually motivate them to read printed texts.

It is not enough if teachers are aware of the potential of multimodal texts, but should be able to distinguish well-formed multimodal texts from badly formed ones. Therefore, according to Poedjosoedarmo (1998: 48), teacher development programmes must:

- assist teachers to maximize the potential of multimodal literary texts.
- encourage teachers to produce language learner literature in a multimodal format.
- teach students to produce creative texts in multimodal ways
- evaluate multimodal materials

Conclusion

Printed texts, which are usually read from beginning to end in a linear way, convey meaning by dialogue and the narrator's voice apart from genre, discourse, lexico-grammatical features and organization of ideas into paragraphs and chapters.

The narrator or the writer's style in presenting information through the effective use of humour, irony, euphemism and sarcasm work in conjunction with linguistic devices such as metaphors, similes, alliteration and repetition. The physical appearance of the text in terms of spacing, fonts and punctuation attract readers' attention too.

On the other hand, multimodal texts offer wider options for readers to choose their reading path and meaning is conveyed in a multisensory way in terms of movement, sound, visual appeal, angle and spacing. The use of colour, icons, frames, hyperlinks and physical background are essentials of reading multimodal texts.

Therefore, it is advisable for language teachers to be aware of the changing role of reading in the computer era in order to prepare students to become efficient readers of multimodal texts. A conceptual framework for reading multimodal texts (like printed texts) to understand the processing of different modes is needed apart from studies that focus on how learners construct meaning from multimodal texts.

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