

BOGDAN KRAKOWIAN

TEACHING MORE EFFICIENT READING

In order to understand a text in any language one has to know the vocabulary and the structure of that language. This means that one must know the meanings of individual words and rules of grammar determining the ways in which these words can be put together to form sentences.

If we consider advanced learners of foreign languages, for example students of neophilological departments, we must assume that they have a functional knowledge of the structure of the language. By this we mean that their mastery of the grammar of the language is of such a kind that it permits them to function, at least, as recipients of all spoken or written messages in the language they are studying while it also enables them to produce messages of a lower information content, that is, built according to those rules of grammar which have a wide range of applicability.

Things are different in the case of vocabulary: it is a practical impossibility to master the whole of it. Fortunately, there is even no need to do it since we only use a small fraction of its total in our daily concerns. One study /Kondratieva 1970:76/ reports that 4 000 of the most frequently used words in English constitute 97.5 per cent of all the words used in all English printed texts. Although this figure is encouragingly low it is necessary to stress that the remaining 2.5 per cent should not be disregarded, especially if we aim at increasing the efficiency of the receptive skills of our learners. It is a belief shared by most methodologists that the receptive skills of foreign language learners should approximate as closely as possible those of the native speakers. Native speakers, however, can know about 225 000 words in their language /Marton 1974 : 95/

From what has just been said an unavoidable conclusion

emerges: in order to increase the efficiency of the receptive skills it is necessary to enlarge learners' vocabularies. Yorkey /1970:45/ even says in connection with this: "There is a very clear relationship between vocabulary size and professional success. To a certain extent, the same is probably true for foreign students of English. A student's vocabulary will reflect his experience of the language."

In addition to what Yorkey says we should realize that it is not enough just to know the grammar of a language and its vocabulary in order to be an efficient reader /we shall limit our discussion to the teaching of only this single receptive skill in English/. Every reader needs practice in decoding meaning from the multitude of possible combinations of words in novel sentences, from combinations of sentences in bigger units, etc. In other words, every reader has to practise reading pieces of writing, starting from individual sentences, through paragraphs to complete essays or books. A functional knowledge of grammar and vocabulary plus a conscious effort to improve during reading practice are the necessary prerequisites for becoming an efficient reader.

#### Teaching Vocabulary

The problem of teaching vocabulary, or rather extending its range in a foreign language deserves a separate study. We shall only limit ourselves to a few tentative suggestions which might be useful in the teaching of more efficient reading.

An obvious thing would be to make learners aware of the fact that there are many words in English whose meaning they can easily guess. These are the so-called "international words", e.g. "telephone", "gramophone", "rocket", etc. Jan Rusiecki <sup>1</sup> compiled quite an impressive list of international words existing in Polish and he said that the list was far from being complete. The teaching of such words presents no problems /at least in reception/ since they are either identical or nearly identical in spelling with the equivalent Polish words; the only thing to teach is the

pronunciation which is, nearly always, different. The correct pronunciation of these new words, however, is not always terribly important in the teaching of reception at this level.

Another large group of words, which also present few problems in teaching is the group of words of Latin and Greek origin which are used both in Polish and in English. This group of words is, perhaps, larger than anyone suspects, especially if we include in it those Polish words which are no longer used in colloquial speech but are understood by educated speakers of Polish since they appear in many works of literature /Krakowian 1974/. Here are some examples of words of this kind: "abominacja" - abomination, "konfuzja" - confusion, "konkordia" - concord, "kondycje" - conditions, "konsolacja" - consolation <sup>2</sup>.

It is a fact that most words of this kind can be recognized in a text, especially if additional clues can be obtained from the context. In connection with this we might, perhaps, think that an English teacher's jocular remark that "English and Polish are very similar languages... when written" may, after all, be right.

It is obvious that apart from the types of words mentioned earlier the learners of English have to master many other words which in no way resemble their Polish counterparts. By far the most effective technique of teaching them is the word-formation technique. This view is shared by Marton /1974:100/ who also stresses the fact that most teaching materials ignore the problem of word formation either partly or completely.

This gap should be filled and learners should be presented with a full and systematic set of principles of word formation and then they should practise decoding the meanings of words by analysing their component parts. This could be done in three steps:

- /1/ guessing the meanings of words by analysing their component structure and choosing the right answer from a number of multiple-choice answers;

/2/ determining the meanings of words with the help of context plus word structure analysis;

/3/ determining the meanings of words from word structure alone.

Other variations could be introduced here but it should be remembered that the gradation of difficulty is important and it should be preserved.

The importance of context in the teaching of word meanings cannot be overstressed. We suggest that learners are given practice with word frames in which new words are introduced in special self-defining contexts, like in the example which follows /Yorkey 1970:68/.

She had a l e s i o n on her arm that would not stop bleeding.

an injury or wound.....

a bracelet, usually of gold.....

a headache.....

Contrary to what might, perhaps, be expected, it is not necessary to give special attention to the teaching of conventional word collocations if one is teaching for reception /Marton 1974:113/. This is due to the fact that learners are familiar with realities of the world, that they have a number of concepts internalized through their native language already in their minds, and that they make use of this knowledge during the process of decoding.

#### Teaching Grammar

To be able to decode the original message which the writer of a text put on paper the reader has to draw not only on lexical but also on syntactic information. Native speakers know the grammar of their language and they use this knowledge in their reading. Learners of foreign languages must be taught how to do it /Bratt Paulston and Newton Bruder 1976:178/ and it means that advanced students should be given practice in recognition, first of all, at paragraph level.

### Teaching More Efficient Reading to Advanced Students

The rate of reading of students reading in a foreign language is usually very low but the amount of reading that they have to do in the foreign language is often quite high. This is especially true of students of neophilological departments who, unable to cope with their reading assignment in the original, resort quite often to Polish translations. It is not necessary to argue that helping such students to increase their reading efficiency would be greatly desirable.

To achieve this end it seems necessary to incorporate a course of speed reading into the existing reading and writing programmes. A course of this kind could be introduced during the second or third term and it should last for about fifteen weeks /one full term - two hours a week/. Courses in efficient reading usually last between five and ten weeks /Fry 1965; Manya and Eric De Leeuw 1967; Wainwright 1968/ but the additional five weeks of practice can only do students good.

Basically, all exercises in speed reading make readers read faster by exerting pressure upon them. Usually it is enough to give students short timed passages to read in order to achieve a 50 per cent increase in speed without impairing comprehension /Eric and Manya De Leeuw 1967:10/.

Assuming that the course will consist of one two-hour sessions a week, and that the students will be expected to read at least two timed passages as homework plus one in the classroom per week the number of texts for the whole course will be about 45. In addition, separate test texts /at least two/ must be provided for assessing the students' progress by testing them at the beginning and at the end of the course.

Each of the fifteen lesson units should also include a topic connected with the nature of the reading process to be presented by the teacher and discussed with the students. A reading manual used for this purpose should

necessarily contain texts of this kind. Here are some suggested topics which might be used:

- /1/ acquiring information through reading,
- /2/ the visual element in reading,
- /3/ the value of eye training exercises,
- /4/ the nature of comprehension,
- /5/ skimming,
- /6/ reading and remembering,
- /7/ making notes in reading,
- /8/ reading speeds,
- /9/ organization of texts,
- /10/ dynamic reading,
- /11/ reading and thinking,
- /12/ anticipation in reading,
- /13/ critical attitude in reading,
- /14/ extensive reading,
- /15/ interpreting the results.

The most important part of each lesson unit in the reading manual should be made up of exercises designed to teach more efficient reading. We do not recognize the effectiveness of eye training exercises but we, nevertheless, think that they are worth including, if only for the sake of interest and, hence, motivation. We would, however, leave out such popular exercises as those designed for quick recognition of numbers, letters and words /cf. Yorkey 1970: 93-99; Stroud, Ammons and Bauman 1970:9-15/ because they teach recognition in isolation and not in context.

We should like to recommend the kind of exercises which make students read for meaning, starting with reading for the central idea. The technique of skimming might be very useful for this purpose.

As it is very well known, skimming is very fast reading done either for the purpose of locating one or more facts or for the purpose of getting an idea of what the text is about.

It is the latter aim for which skimming should be

utilized. Students should have much practice in reading various paragraphs with the aim of determining their themes. Teaching paragraph patterns /Yorkey 1970:101-107; Horn 1971:20-22/ is also extremely useful.

With practice students should progress to longer pieces of writing - essays consisting of several paragraphs. The aim of reading them should be the same - to determine the central idea of the text. Gradually, however, the students should also be able to notice and remember less important facts and details from reading the texts until, in the end, they can read using the SQ3R technique /Yorkey 1970:130/.

SQ3R stand for Survey, Question, Read, Recite and Review, and they are the steps which students should follow if they want to read efficiently on their own.

1. Survey. Before the students read their assignment they first should quickly skim the text to get a general idea of the material.
2. Question. After this quick survey students should ask themselves questions concerning the material surveyed. A question about the main idea of the text should also be asked here.
3. Read. This is the third step in which students should read the text as quickly as possible. Usually they will be able to read it more quickly than if they had not surveyed it and if they had not formulated questions for which they are seeking answers.
4. Recite. At the end of every section students should make a short oral summary of the most important things in the reading. Reciting helps to remember and consolidate the information obtained from the text.
5. Review. After finishing reading of the whole assignment students ought to make a review of the whole material with the purpose of integrating all elements of the text into a unified whole.

The responsibility of the reading teacher is not only to bring up the students to the level where they can read with the SQ3R technique but to convince them of its usefulness. Few students use this technique when reading on their own, without the supervision of the teacher because it requires a considerable amount of effort. Most people want to read for enjoyment and the reading teacher should convince the students that the effort of reading in this way is not spent in vain.

Concluding these fragmentary remarks we feel compelled to stress once again the importance of making students realize their own reading potential and helping them a little towards improving their reading skill.

#### NOTES

- 1 A paper delivered at a symposium organized by the Institute of Applied Linguistics of Warsaw University in May 1977 at Białowieża.
- 2 Some original quotations from "Trylogia" by H.Sienkiewicz may be of interest here.  
"Cóż to stan małżeński w taką a b o m i n a c j ę  
podało?"  
"Krzysiu ... zali ci k o n f u z j a , przeszła?"  
"Tak w moich stronach pan Deyma usiekł pana Ubysza,  
z którym dwadzieścia lat w największej żył  
k o n k o r d i i."  
"Zali Kryczyński stawia jakie nowe k o n d y c j e ?"  
"... niepomierna jest to k o n s o l a c j a grzecznej  
żensty dokonać."

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#### NAUCZANIE EFEKTYWNEGO CZYTANIA

##### Streszczenie

W artykule uzasadnia się tezę, iż dla uzyskania większej biegłości czytania w języku obcym konieczne jest rozszerzenie znajomości słownictwa. Ponadto postuluje się włączenie do programu nauczania języka kierunkowego na neofilologiach ćwiczeń z zakresu szybkiego czytania. Wśród omówionych sposobów uczenia szybkiego czytania podkreślono szczególne znaczenie tzw. techniki "SQ3R" /przeoglądanie, pytanie, czytanie, wygłaszanie i powtarzanie/.