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PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES TO TEACHING READING AND LISTENING IN A SECOND LANGUAGE

This paper discusses teaching reading and listening in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) context through a content-based approach. Reading skills including bottom-up and top-down skills, background knowledge, and comprehension monitoring as they apply to the prereading, while-reading, and postreading stages are addressed, as well as listening skills such as word recognition, discriminating fine differences of speaking, emotional overtones, and predicting. Possible instructional techniques for each of these skills, including their advantages and disadvantages, are also considered, plus how one might compensate for the weaknesses of a given technique. Finally, an example showing how reading and listening might be integrated into a series of lessons is presented.

Key words: reading skills, listening skills, English for academic purposes

INTRODUCTION

Instructional Context

A group of twelve international students, all in their mid-twenties, have come together for the purpose of learning English in an EAP program at an American university. The students are from various countries including Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia. Each of them has studied English in his/her respective country for at least five years and is at the intermediate level of English proficiency. These students are preparing for undergraduate study at a university in the United States in a variety of disciplines.

Approach

The instructional goal is to provide this group of second language learners with opportunities for meaningful use of academic language in the skill areas of listening and reading. The learners need to be taught sub-skills which will enable them to "read and listen to learn" instead of merely "learning to read and listen" (Shih, 1992). Using a content-based approach to learning, as opposed to a skills-based approach, encourages students to build repertoires of task- and text-appropriate discourse-processing strategies that will be vital to their academic success (Mohan, 1986, as cited in Shih, 1992).

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READING IN A SECOND LANGUAGE

Reading Sub-skills

According to Ellen Block, successful reading in a content-based EAP context requires the integration of the following skills: bottom-up (language-based) and top-down (knowledge-based) skills, formal schemata (background knowledge about text structure), and metacognition (thinking about what one is doing while reading) (Block, 1992). It must be remembered that exclusive reliance on any one of these skills at the expense of the others does not lend itself to effective reading. "Thus, teachers are faced with the difficult task of balancing a variety of factors in their instructional activities and of fitting them into a given context in accordance with specified purposes" (Casanave, 1988:290). Let us take a look at how this might be accomplished.

In contemporary practice, a reading lesson is usually divided into three parts: the prereading stage which activates and builds upon the students' knowledge of the subject, the while-reading stage which helps the students understand the content and perceive the rhetorical structure of the text, and the postreading stage where students review the content, work on bottom-up concerns, and consolidate new information with the learners' knowledge (Dubin and Bysina, 1991). It is within the context of each of these stages where the student must learn to apply the sub/skills and strategies needed to aid in their comprehension and learning from the text.

Prereading Phase

During the prereading stage, a number of techniques may be taught that not only help students activate and build upon their prior knowledge, but also help them cope with texts in an unfamiliar language. Students can be taught to preview, or survey, a text by reading the title and subtitles, the first and last paragraph, and by looking at the picture or graphs (Shih, 1992). Shih also suggests using worksheets and study/discussion questions to activate what the learners know through an exchange of ideas and information (Shih, 1992). A brainstorming session in which students verbalize associations about the topic and categorize them visually into the form of a semantic map is yet another technique (Carrell, Pharis and Liberto, 1989). Techniques can also be taught to help students cope with new and unfamiliar texts: timed readings (students read a segment of the text fast, in meaningful "chunks" and not word-by-word, while being timed), scanning (students quickly look over the text, index, or table of contents for specific kinds of information), rapid recognition exercises (exercises in which the students must identify, quickly and accurately, words and phrases) (Eskey and Grabe, 1988).

Advantages and Disadvantages

Previewing is an excellent way for students to independently become familiar with the macrostructure of the text and activate personal background knowledge, but this technique does not promote the active sharing of ideas among students. This weakness can be overcome; however, by having the students work in pairs or groups as they preview the text.

Semantic mapping and discussions about the topic are ideal techniques for activating and building knowledge about the topic through the exchange of information from the class as a whole, but they do not give the students exposure to the macrostructure of the text. Having the class orally preview the text together while the instructor outlines it on the board could easily be integrated into a semantic mapping or discussion exercise.

Timed readings promote reading in chunks instead of word-by-word, but it is difficult for the instructor to know whether the student is actually doing this or not. Asking questions

will indicate if the students have comprehended what they read and can also be used as a measure of progress.

Scanning is ideal for helping students find specific information quickly, but can be frustrating since it requires great attention to detail. Making scanning exercises into fun competitions can help eliminate some of the frustration.

Rapid recognition exercises give students the notion that for the first time, they can process English in meaningful units of words and phrases (Eskey and Grabe, 1988), but they only see these words and phrases out of context and therefore may not know their meaning or part of speech. Pointing these words and phrases out in the text will eliminate this problem.

While-reading Phase

The while-reading phase requires that the student use various top-down and metacognitive, or comprehension monitoring, strategies in order to understand the specific content and rhetorical structure of the text. Students can be taught different types of signals to look for in identifying important ideas, such as graphical cues (italic), syntactical cues (word order), lexical cues (words commonly associated with a particular rhetorical pattern), semantic cues (thematic, summarizing, and introductory words/sentences), and schematic/superstructural cues (rhetorical structures) (Winograd and Bridge, 1986, as cited in Shih, 1992). Another useful technique to teach the learners is to actively monitor their comprehension of the text while reading by having them predict what will happen next and inserting questions between paragraphs that ask them to reflect on their understanding of the material (Casanave and Williams, 1987, as cited in Casanave, 1988). Helpful techniques in overcoming comprehension difficulties are restatement (a simpler paraphrase of the original), backtracking (rereading), demanding relationships (recognition of a gap that readers expect to be filled later), and problem formation (asking the instructor questions concerning the reading) (Casanave, 1988: 295).

Advantages and Disadvantages

The advantages of teaching learners signals is so they can quickly identify important ideas and text structures which increase comprehension and recall of information (Shih, 1992). However, this technique overlooks the importance of understanding the meanings of words that are equally important to the comprehension of the text. To overcome such a weakness, this technique might also emphasize guessing the meanings of words in context to add to the learners' overall comprehension.

Teaching comprehension monitoring empowers the learners to become more independent, effective readers. The problem is that it is difficult for an instructor to see what is going on inside a student's head during the metacognitive process. Therefore, determining where a student is experiencing comprehension failure is often left to intuition on the teacher's part. There is no easy solution to this problem, but by having such a student work with a "good" reader from their native country, the instructor can perhaps gain some insight into their weaknesses and devise study plans which will help them compensate for these weaknesses. A range of task-specific strategies for learning from the text, including why, when, where, and how to use them and how to vary strategies to suit specific tasks is suggested (Duffy and Roehler, 1989, as cited in Shih, 1992:294).

Postreading Phase

In the last stage of reading, the postreading stage, learners must possess skills that will enable them to review the content of the text, work on bottom-up concerns, and consolidate what they have read with what they already know. An ideal technique for reviewing purposes

is the use of summarizing skills. "It is best to teach summarizing as a step-by-step process in which marginal annotations and underlining of main ideas and key supporting points is emphasized" (Shih, 1992:307). Skimming (having the students read the text quickly for the main idea) (Eseky & Grabe, 1988) is another useful summarizing technique to be taught. A useful bottom-up skill to teach in this phase is vocabulary development (teaching students word relations by relating a word to its antonym/synonym, teaching word families by giving a word in its various parts-of-speech, teaching word roots and affixes, and guessing the meaning of a word in context) (Seal, 1991). Finally, students can best consolidate what they have learned through a writing assignment of group discussion (Dubin and Bycina, 1991).

Advantages and Disadvantages

Teaching summarizing skills by having students skim or annotate important pieces of information in the margin or by underlining main ideas and key supporting points is ideal for helping students review the main points of the text. However, by following this technique, students may be inclined to overlook details of the text that are vital to understanding its overall meaning.

To avoid this, the students could be required to read the text once through for overall meaning and then a second time highlighting main ideas.

Vocabulary knowledge is a critical feature of reading ability (Seal, 1991). However, it is not necessary to know the meaning of every word in a text in order to understand it. To avoid overburdening the students with too much vocabulary, teach key vocabulary which is critical to the understanding of the text and consolidate it into lessons so that the students receive multiple exposures to it.

Consolidating new information with known information through discussion and writing assignments gives the students the opportunity to process this newly acquired information, but it does not provide an opportunity for long term use of it. New information could be recycled into future lessons or assignments for maximum exposure.

LISTENING IN A SECOND LANGUAGE

Listening Sub-skills

Current practice in ESL listening programs often emphasizes comprehension rather than learning, treats content as uniformly informative, and encourages neither participation nor learning from interaction (Benson, 1989: 440) Therefore, listening in an EAP program should follow a content-based, task-oriented response approach in which tasks are structured to make use of the information from the spoken "authentic" text as a resource to use to achieve a communicative task outcome. The students must learn to apply some if not all the listening strategies of the native speaker in order to become effective listeners (Benson, 1989). At the intermediate level of listening, students need to practice word recognition, discriminating fine differences in word order and grammatical form, registers of speaking and emotional overtones. They are able to get the gist, find the main idea and some supporting detail and are ready to practice predicting what will happen next (Peterson, 1991:115). A combination of selective (bottom-up) and global (top-down) listening techniques can be used to assist the learners in developing these sub-skills.

At the intermediate level, students are ready to hear authentic speech. Features such as tone of voice, interruptions, and overlapping provide clues to understanding the setting. Authentic texts are easy to understand due to redundancy and repetition, which augments the listeners' comprehension (Chung and Dunkel, 1992), and they have an informational structure which conforms to their communicative purpose. Authentic texts also prepare students to listen

to normal fast speech, which is characterized by unstressed endings, articles, inflections, and function words (Peterson, 1991).

Word Recognition

Techniques for teaching listening sub-skills to intermediate learners vary. For instance, word recognition skills could be taught by having the students listen to an authentic text and circling the correct unstressed function word on an answer sheet (Peterson, 1991:117). The advantage of these types of exercises is that the students are listening to authentic forms of speech; however, if they have not been exposed to reduced forms commonly heard in everyday speech, they will not be able to recognize them. To avoid unnecessary frustration on the students' part, a lesson in reduced forms common in spoken English could be conducted before they listen to the tape.

Word Order and Grammatical Form

Discriminating the difference in word order and grammatical form can be taught by giving the students sentences on an answer sheet which vary somewhat in structure and wording from what they have heard on the tape and having them identify the one that has the same meaning (Peterson, 1991). The students could also be given cloze exercises and asked to fill in the correct form of the verb where it has been deleted on the tape. Exercises such as this are a good test of the students' knowledge of formal grammar, but the disadvantage is that the students may have adequate grammar knowledge and still miss the answer because they did not know the meaning of a particular word, could not hear the tape, or had difficulty understanding the speaker's tone/intonation. This is easily avoided by choosing a text that uses vocabulary familiar to the students and ensuring that the students are familiar with the speaker's voice by playing a little bit of the tape as a pre-listening warm-up.

Register and Emotional Overtone

Registers of speaking and emotional overtones can be taught by having the students listen to texts where people are apologizing, talking on the telephone, making an invitation, complimenting, etc. The students would listen and decide what was taking place and tell the emotion of the speakers. The students could also tape themselves and native speakers in various interactions and have the class guess what register was being used (Tarone and Yule, 1989). This type of activity is a good way for students to become familiar with various speech registers and emotional overtones, but being able to recognize it and being able to use it are two different things. It is important for students to know what to say when talking on the phone, for example. Role playing each of these situations after the students have listened to them would be a way to reinforce the proper use of registers.

Predicting

Students can be taught the skill of predicting by having them listen to one side of a conversation and predict what the other person's response will be, listen to part of a story and predict what will happen next, or listen to a mystery and predict who the murderer is. Predicting gives the students practice with higher discourse level skills. However, if skills such as getting the gist and finding the main idea have not been firmly grasped, this could easily become an exercise in futility for the students. Starting with finding the main idea and getting the gist before moving on to predicting would allow the students time to build up to predicting.

CONCLUSION

Integrated Reading and Listening Lessons

Clearly, the sub-skills of reading are similar to those of listening (Reves and Levine, 1988, as cited in Ringbom, 1992). In order to show how these two skills might be integrated and used in an EAP context, the following lessons have been prepared based on an environmental theme.

In the first lesson, the students would begin by brainstorming ideas, in groups, about water pollution, which would collectively be organized into a semantic map on the board. Next, they would do a rapid recognition warm-up exercise before looking at the text. Before beginning to read, they would preview the text by reading the title and sub-titles, the first and last paragraphs, and looking at the pictures and charts. Then, they would do a timed reading to reinforce the idea of reading in meaningful “chunks”.

In the second lesson, the instructor would introduce signal words and other cues for the students to pay attention to while reading. The students could also scan the text looking for some of these signals. Working in groups, the students would read a paragraph or two at a time and be asked questions in order to monitor their comprehension and to predict what they think will happen next. Students would also be encouraged to work together trying to guess the meanings of unknown words in context.

In the third lesson, the students would listen to an authentic text of a person talking about the hazards of water pollution. After having listened once, they would listen again filling in missing words on a cloze exercise. They would also be asked to circle the sentences on an answer sheet, which varied slightly in structure, and wording but had the same meaning as what they had heard.

In the fourth lesson, the students would work on vocabulary building exercise. First, they would make note cards with the word itself on one side. On the back of each card a sentence would be written that contains the word, its definition, and its part-of-speech. In one section of reading vocabulary notebook, the students would write the word families for the words and their antonyms and synonyms. In another section, the students would keep a record of the different affixes they had learned along with their meanings and give examples of words that had these affixes.

In the fifth lesson, the students would listen to various conversations concerning water pollution and would have to decide the register and emotional overtone of the speakers. After listening to one side of a conversation, they would be asked to predict what the other person would say. Then, in small groups, they would summarize what they had read by skimming back through the text and underlining main and supporting ideas and discussing them. Each group would write a group paper consolidating what they had learned from this unit. The students would also be given time to individually work on skills which they found problematic.

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PRISTUPI ČITANJU I SLUŠANJU U NASTAVI STRANIH JEZIKA

Sažetak

U članku je riječ o jezičnim vještinama čitanja i slušanja u sklopu nastave stručnog engleskog jezika koja naglasak stavlja na sadržaj. Govoreći o čitanju, autorica posebnu pozornost posvećuje važnosti dvaju načina procesiranja („odozdo prema gore” i „odozgo prema dolje”), predznanja o temi te kontrole razumijevanja za vrijeme triju nastavnih faza: tijekom pripreme za čitanje, tijekom čitanja i nakon završetka čitanja. Opisujući vještinu slušanja posebno se osvrće na prepoznavanje riječi, razlikovanje finih nijansi u govoru, emocionalnih prizvuka te predviđanje. Razmatra također i moguće nastavne tehnike kojima bi se uvježbale ove vještine: opisujući mane i prednosti pojedinih tehnika sugerira načine za prevladavanje određenih mana. Članak završava primjerom u kojem se pokazuje kako se vještine čitanja i slušanja mogu u nastavi integrirati.

Ključne riječi: čitanje, pisanje, nastava stručnog engleskog jezika

