

Problems of and Perspectives on Language Acquisition

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Edited by

Diāna Laiveniece

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INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH ON LANGUAGE ACQUISITION
IN LATVIA AND LITHUANIA:
OVERVIEW OF THEMES AND PROBLEMS

DIĀNA LAIVENIECE

This is the second volume of *Language Acquisition: Problems and Perspective*, compiled from a selection of articles about research done on language acquisition mainly in Latvia and Lithuania. The first volume was published in May 2016 by *Cambridge Scholars Publishing*. The results of the studies have been presented at Liepaja University's annual science conference "Language Acquisition: Problems and Perspectives" since 2000. Every year, researchers in language acquisition, experienced researchers and PhD students as well as language teachers come together to discuss the problems and possible solutions. The research range is wide; involving various aspects of language acquisition – both contents and process. During the first decade of the 21st century researchers paid more attention to such issues as language acquisition in a multicultural environment, learners' independence in setting goals, planning the learning process, and evaluation of learning outcomes as well as bilingual education and multilingualism while during the second decade researchers focused more on the acquisition of particular language skills, especially reading and writing, the importance of thinking skills related to the acquisition and application of reading and writing skills, the development of writing skills, and the importance of the text in language acquisition. More attention is being paid to learning Latvian as a foreign language. Research on language acquisition at different life stages and age periods is being carried out.

In this book, research has been grouped under five themes: text and reading, language and culture, Latvian as a foreign language, lifelong language acquisition, and language teacher's competence. As the conference is multilingual, the volume is also in several languages. Apart from

English there are also some articles in Latvian and German, with abstracts in English.

The aim of the editorial is to characterize briefly the problems touched upon in the articles compiled in the volume to help the reader become acquainted with the research in linguodidactics offered by the authors and learn about the problems in this sphere of applied linguistics. **The target audience** of the book is the scholars of language acquisition – scientists, lecturers involved in research and language teachers as well as anyone interested in research or practical activities concerning language education in Latvia and Lithuania.

Part I: Text and Reading includes research done by researchers from Latvia, Lithuania and Germany on the usage of text in the acquisition of languages to develop students' knowledge on text formation and writing skills. Both fiction and non-fiction texts are used. Closely related to the textual approach in language acquisition is reading with comprehension and according to the learning task or one's own goal. Nowadays, reading has become a basic skill in any sphere of life, studies or profession, hence reading has been paid special attention to.

Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences **Dagnija Deimante**, in her article "Challenges in Promoting the Development of Reading Skills" looks at secondary school students' reading skills that are still not good enough for the labour market. In order to help students develop their reading skills, influencing factors should be explored. At the same time, it is important to motivate students to develop reading skills outside the learning process at school and also in their further life. Taking into consideration the fact that reading is closely linked with thinking processes, cognitive and metacognitive skills should be integrated in the learning process (Koda 2005; Grabe 2009). It is the most important issue because students, even if they understand the importance of reading skills, do not link them with cognitive and metacognitive spheres.

Egita Proveja, Doctor of Philology, in the article "Knowledge of Text Formation – Tacit Competence of Language Users", puts forward a hypothesis that users of the native language are subconsciously aware of the conventions of text formation and keep to them when working on their texts. Fifty recipes, written by users of the language, from *www.receptes.lv* were chosen to analyse their microstructure and macrostructure in order to test the hypothesis. The results of the analysis show that on the one hand recipes bear similar traits with other types of electronic texts (for example, e-mail messages, on-line communication, etc.) and on the other hand, the recipe as a text type is developing and changing in the Latvian language.

The identification of text types has to become a principle of language classes (Heinemann 2001) because work with various text types activates knowledge of text formation.

Lithuanian researcher **Solveiga Sušinskienė** looks at features of popular science texts and the possibilities of application of these texts in language acquisition in her article “Teaching for Scientific Text Reading through Integration of Information and Communication Technology”. She uses suggestions made by Klaus Brandl (2002) on how to work with a scientific text available on the Internet. It has been concluded that popular science texts are exceptionally useful for content-based analysis because they are simpler than academic texts, they are not overcrowded with complicated terms and, moreover, they are easily available on the Internet.

French lecturer **Inese Veisbuka**, in the article “Literary Text in French as a Foreign Language Classes”, gives a short insight into the usage of the literary text in linguodidactics in different periods to date. Poetry written by French poet Arthur Rimbaud is used as illustrative examples. The author makes the conclusion that the literary text is going through a renaissance; it has also been promoted by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (2001), where the significance of national and regional literature in European heritage has been emphasized. Basically, the focus is on language learners from level B1 to C2. However, there is an opinion among teachers and researchers (Balazs 2005; Cervera 2009, etc.) that texts can be used at all language acquisition levels.

Scientists **Marina Novika** (Latvia) and **Larisa Petre** (Germany) in their article “Selection of Reading Texts for Russian as a Foreign Language Acquisition in Secondary School” bring up a problem related to choosing texts for reading in Russian as a foreign language in secondary school. Interest in this issue appeared when secondary school students (Forms 10–12) faced difficulties reading texts from textbooks. About 50 % of students do not understand long texts due to a large number of unknown words and complicated constructions. Moreover, reading takes up a lot of time. Therefore, the research aim is to set criteria for reading tasks in secondary school and based on them it would be possible to choose and offer texts to students with a low level of language skills, such as the third foreign language skills.

In her research, reflected in the article “Contribution of Gottfried Friedrich Stender to the Literacy of Latvian Children in the 18th Century”, **Diāna Laiveniece**, methodologist of the Latvian language as a native language and Doctor in Pedagogical Sciences, provides an insight into the history of methodology of teaching the Latvian language. The first ABC

book appeared at the end of the 17th century (possibly around 1683). However, two G. F. Stender ABC books – *New Teaching of ABC and Reading* („*Jauna ABC un lasīšanas mācība*”, 1782) and *Pictorial ABC* („*Bildu ābice*”, 1787) – occupy a special place in the history of Latvian pedagogy. At the end of the 18th century, G. F. Stenders arranged the contents of teaching and learning (letter combinations and syllables in reading tasks) and instructions for teachers on how to make the difficult learning process easier for children.

Part II: Language and Culture includes research that looks at language acquisition in the context of culture because the acquisition of a foreign language is also the acquisition of another culture – to acquire a language means to “take in” the culture of that particular country and “obey” the values of the country where the language is the language of the nation (Schumann 1978). There are many cases where misunderstandings appear not because of poor knowledge of the language but because of ignorance about the cultural facts or not being able to understand them.

Doctor in Pedagogical Sciences **Antra Roskoša**, in the article “The Role of Language in the Intercultural Communication Process of the Modern Latvian Multicultural Society”, focuses on the role of language in the context of Latvia’s multicultural society. It is still one of the most controversial and most discussed issues. The aim of the article is to analyse the role of language in the process of intercultural communication in Latvia nowadays – in situations where language functions as a bridge that promotes positive communication between different cultures and in situations where it is like a barrier to intercultural communication and hinders its development. The article researches European Union regulations on languages and their relationship to the situation in Latvia. The research also reveals students’ views on solutions to the language issues in Latvia.

In her article “Importance of Context in the Acquisition of Language and Culture Phenomena”, researcher of English language acquisition **Vita Balama** claims that knowledge of cultural facts is the first step in learning about another culture. The article contextually analyses lexical units specific to the particular culture that differ from the reader’s culture of the target audience. Translation quality has also been analysed. The analysis of the lexical units characterizing the particular cultural environment is based on texts taken from John Grisham’s novels and stories. The importance of the approach chosen by the translator in transferring cultural facts from the source language into the target language has been emphasized. The author concludes that literary works can be successfully

used in learning about language and cultural facts. When reading authentic literary works, readers usually go through several stages of language acquisition. Authentic texts that are rooted in the author's culture help to establish a link between language acquisition (word stock, style, expression) and learning about cultural facts.

Doctor of Psychology **Irina Straziņa** in her article "Language as a Tool for Developing a Sense of Humour in Preschool Children" provides an insight into her research about social psychological aspects of the development of preschool children's sense of humour. The author concludes that the development of a sense of humour in preschool children is promoted by good education and an intelligent social environment. In families that enjoy humour and fun, children grow up with laughter and jokes. A sense of humour, language and speech should be developed at the same time. However, first of all, children should acquire human values; they should be taught what is good and what is bad, what they can laugh about and what they should not laugh about. Humour is a tool to manage one's emotions, improve one's concept of emotional self, and maintain a positive attitude to people and life in general. Children with a well – developed sense of humour are happier and more optimistic; they are able to perceive non-traditional, non-stereotypical ideas and ways of thinking. A sense of humour can promote children's creativity.

Part III: Latvian as a Foreign Language is, as far as we know, the first serious attempt to introduce the audience reading in English with the acquisition of the Latvian language as a foreign language, both in Latvia and abroad. It has already been mentioned that research in this field is growing as the number of students is growing. A large number of these students are overseas students studying in the universities in Latvia. Students of linguistics and language researchers as well as descendants of Latvians who for several generations have not lived in Latvia but still use Latvian in the home, are interested in learning the Latvian language.

In her article "Learning Latvian as a Foreign Language in the Baltic States", doctoral student of Philology **Inga Laizāne** gives a historical overview of the acquisition of Latvian as a foreign language in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, pointing out that the situation has changed over the years, and what the main tendencies in acquiring Latvian as a foreign language in the Baltic countries are. The information used in the article has been obtained from teachers who teach Latvian in the Baltic countries. The research done in 2007 into the acquisition of Latvian as a foreign language in European universities (Šalme 2008) has been made use of. The author's empirical experience in teaching Latvian as a foreign

language in several higher educational establishments in Latvia, as well as in courses of informal education, has been taken into account.

Latvian lecturer **Iveta Grīnberga**, who has been teaching Latvian in the University of Washington, Seattle, USA, in her article “The Art of Teaching Latvian as a Heritage Language: Research and Practice” claims that a new type of learner has appeared, the so-called learners of ethnic heritage, who bear characteristics of learners of both the first and the second language. They are usually representatives of an ethnic minority in their home country whose grandparents or parents (one or both) are speakers of the Latvian language and have had some relationship with their mother’s or father’s language (Kagan and Dillon 2011). On the phonological level, these language learners have some advantages because they have already developed the mechanisms of pronouncing Latvian sounds in their childhood but in learning morphosyntactic forms they have no advantages when compared to other learners. These students are usually very interested and motivated to learn the Latvian language. They want to identify themselves with a definite ethnic minority and want to know as much as possible about the culture and traditions of their parents’ or grandparents’ country.

Professors of Liepaja University **Linda Lauze** and **Dīana Laiveniece** in their article “Use of Intermediary Language and Translating in Acquiring Latvian as a Foreign Language” pay attention to two categories of foreign language acquisition – intermediary language and translation. When speaking about the lexical and grammatical aspects of Latvian translation, work with a dictionary has also been characterized. The article promotes a discussion about situations where intermediary language use in the teaching and learning process is possible and how useful or intrusive it could be; what the advantages and disadvantages of translation during the process of a foreign language learning could be; and what kind of dictionaries are necessary so that the usage of the translation during the learning process of the Latvian language is most productive.

Japanese researcher **Daiki Horiguchi** in his article “Togetherness in a Language Classroom – Example from Japanese Learners of the Latvian Language” writes about his experience teaching Latvian as a foreign language in the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. Attention has been paid to the language learning group’s climate, dynamics and attitudes. One of the successful elements of language acquisition is interaction (Malamah-Thomas 1987; Dörnyei and Malderez 1999). The sense of community is created by several factors: (1) the group’s self-awareness of the acquisition of the Latvian language as a rare foreign language; (2) mutual understanding

and respect in the group; and (3) the use of Latvian names as a form of address in class.

In **Part IV: Lifelong Language Acquisition** there are mostly articles by Lithuanian researchers about language acquisition in different age groups, including schools, universities and adults. Language acquisition is part of lifelong learning that people are doing for professional reasons or simply for fun and to make their brain work more actively. Recent research on the positive impact of the process of language acquisition on the mind, which is often published on the Internet as popular science articles (for example, Mackey 2014), strengthen people's willingness to learn foreign languages after finishing school.

Doctor in Pedagogical Sciences **Vaiva Šoroškienė** focuses on primary school students' ability to build up arguments in her article titled "Primary School Students' Argumentation Skills: Statement of the Thesis". In 2015–2016, research was carried out with the objective to find out whether pupils in Form 4 can build arguments on a given topic in both spoken and written language expressing the thesis statement. Research respondents were 117 pupils from 15 schools in Lithuania. In spoken texts only 19 % and in written texts 24 % of pupils could express the thesis statement without repeating the sentence with which the topic was stated.

Doctor in Pedagogical Sciences **Daiva Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė**, in the article "Speaking and Listening Abilities: The Basis of Integrated Didactics", looks at the integration of language teaching and learning in the lessons of other subjects. The author's experience in integrated language didactics during her internship at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, (Erard and Schneuwly 2005; Pantet and Grobet 2011) gave her the idea to develop it in Lithuania, where there is little research and few examples of best practice in integrated language didactics. During the teaching of other subjects the most useful is the development of speaking and listening skills. This can be done when actions that involve active speaking and listening are carried out and tasks are focused on active learning.

Lithuanian scientist **Virginija Jūratė Pukevičiūtė**, in the article "Students' Approach to the Development of their Metacognitive Competences in Foreign Language Classes", researches the expression and significance of metacognitive competence in the process of foreign language acquisition. During the research, 356 second-term students from different universities in Lithuania were surveyed to find out the results of metacognitive competence on the following levels: skills (1) to plan, (2) to control and evaluate, and (3) analyse their own learning process. The

results of the survey show that students are able to set their learning goals at the cognitive level and choose strategies to reach these goals but face difficulties at the metacognitive level. Students often lack the knowledge or skills to evaluate the level of learning material objectively. Only one-third of language learners analyse their learning process.

Latvian scientist **Sintija Vālka**, in the article “Specifics of Teaching English to Seniors”, reveals her experience in teaching English to elderly people aged 67–82. Nowadays, elderly people are active and for various reasons start or resume learning foreign languages. The research shows the needs and problems related to learning at this age. Language teaching to elderly people in methodological literature (Formosa 2012; Ramírez Gómez 2016) is called *educational gerontology* and *geragogy of foreign languages*. The term *educational gerontology* refers to the integration of educational establishments and processes taking into consideration ageing processes and elderly people’s knowledge and needs whereas *geragogy* refers to teaching and learning strategy management when the target audience is elderly people.

In **Part V: Language Teachers’ Competence**, researchers turn to particular issues that are important in the development of language teachers’ competence. As we know, the development of teachers’ professional knowledge and practical skills is a lifelong task, which in most cases is self-education. Therefore, research in this sphere and its promotion through conference proceedings and scientific monographs are very important.

Lithuanian scientist **Roma Kriaučienė**, in the article “Development of Future Teachers’ Critical Thinking as a Precondition for Making Moral Judgements”, researches how to develop future teachers’ ability to make moral judgements during the study process (Benninga 2003; Huitt 2004). It is an action characterized by evaluation, therefore critical thinking skills (identification of problems, interpretation, analysis, making conclusions, foreseeing the possible decisions and their consequences) are necessary. It is a skill to be orientated towards ethical values. Analysis of the diagnostic research data show that during the study process not all possibilities have been used to ensure that future teachers develop the skills to make moral judgements. Students should be encouraged to think critically about the needs and interests of other people, about how to prevent ignorance of ethical values and foresee the personal and social consequences of the decisions taken.

Latvian scientist **Solvita Pošeiko**, Doctor of Philology, in the article “The Linguistic Landscape as a Tool for Mastering and Improving

Pragmatic Competence”, characterizes whether and how language signs and the linguistic landscape can promote the determination of the functions of the language and language signs and usage according to the context and communication situation so that the language user can achieve the desired goal. To illustrate and analyse the way language use and language functions, Mark Haddon’s literary work *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is used as well as interviews, observations and language signs from the linguistic landscape in Latvia and Estonia. In formal language learning, the authentic usage of the language and language signs in the linguistic landscape are replaced with made-up examples, thus creating clichés about what it should be like, what the correct way of language use is. The linguistic landscape encourages the person to carry out a particular action, including communication. Its use is necessary in planning and implementing social life activities where pragmatic competence plays an essential role.

The themes and contents of the articles included in the volume not only make readers think, ask questions and discuss the issues but also give an direction for new research in the sphere of language acquisition. As was written in the introduction of the first volume,

The content of the articles in the volume does not always provide clear answers to the questions that are brought forward, and it is not the aim of the authors of the articles on language acquisition to provide clear answers, suggest actions, or give examples and suggestions for the learning process or the organization of language learning process. [...] The aim of the literature on linguodidactics is to stimulate the readers – researchers and language teachers – to go into the details of the proposed subject, its problems, to ask questions, think of solutions, argue and propose counterarguments (Laiveniece 2016, 9).

The plurilingual approach to the concept of personality development in the 21st century gives confidence that language acquisition is and will always be a topical issue in both formal and informal education. And there will always be problems that await research and solutions that show the perspective.

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PART I:
TEXT AND READING

CHAPTER ONE

CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF READING SKILLS

DAGNIJA DEIMANTE

Keywords: reading comprehension, reading skills, reading strategies, strategic reader.

1. Introduction

Reading skills are fundamental in every sphere of life, concerning both the native language (L1) and a foreign language. Globalisation and migration have resulted in the necessity of enhancing foreign language learning. And reading skills are considered of utmost importance. More advanced readers in L1 are usually more successful in acquiring reading skills in a foreign language. This article deals with reading comprehension in English at the level of upper-secondary school students, which means that students have a good command of L1 and their proficiency in English (L2) is satisfactory, even excellent, as they have been learning English at school for 8–9 years. The acquisition of a foreign language at this stage differs from the development of the native language, although there are also similarities in these processes.

During the last decade, upper-secondary students' overall English skills have improved in Latvia. The results of the Year 12 National Exam in English demonstrate a slight rise – in 2009 the average percentage in Latvia was 49.28 %, in 2010 – 51.24 %, in 2011 – 49.94 %, in 2012 – 52.96 %, in 2013 – 54.72 %, in 2014 – 56.20 %, and in 2015 – 54.1 %.¹ At the same time, the fact that reading skills have not developed to such an extent that they could fully satisfy the needs of the labour market cannot be neglected. The goal of upper-secondary school is to help students

¹ Information from National Centre for Education of the Republic of Latvia, 2009–2015.

prepare for their studies at university and become highly qualified professionals and academics.

Hence, the aim is to research reading comprehension, factors that influence the development of English reading skills, and strategies that can be used by students so they can improve their reading skills not only in classroom settings but also outside the classroom and later in their lives.

2. Reading Comprehension

Reading in a foreign language faces multiple complexities and consequently complex skills need to be developed.

Successful comprehension emerges from the integrative interaction of derived text information and pre-existing reader knowledge. Simply – comprehension occurs when the reader extracts and integrates various information from the text and combines it with what is already known. (Koda 2005, 4)

Keiko Koda (2005) argues that comprehension success varies according to reading purposes. In less demanding gears like scanning and skimming, competence implies information extraction while in higher gears accurate and complete text understanding is more important than speed. Therefore, why and how texts are read must be considered when determining reading competence.

It is a complex task to assess the level of reading comprehension. Nevertheless, there are tests considered reliable in assessing students' reading comprehension. In Latvia it is the Year 12 National Exam in English, which consists of five parts: Reading, Listening, Use of Language, Writing, and Speaking. Preliminary research has been conducted aimed at describing the current situation concerning the reading skills of upper-secondary school students, finding out the reasons for good and poor reading skills, and determining the ways of improving students' reading skills.

First, a short insight into the results of the Year 12 National Exam in English. Research base – a secondary school in one of the towns of Latvia. Average number of students in the school – 600. Average number of students taking the English exam in their final year of studies (Form 12) – about 96.

As can be seen in Table 1, the level of the acquisition of reading skills is one of the lowest when compared with other English language skills.

Table 1: Year 12 National Exam in English

School Year	Listening	Reading	Speaking	Use of Language	Writing
2013/14	0.65	0.66	0.79	0.73	0.70
2012/13	0.64	0.59	0.76	0.62	0.71
2008/09	0.66	0.53	0.72	0.49	0.63
2007/08	0.52	0.53	0.85	0.55	0.60

At the same time, upper-secondary school students admit that good reading skills are essential for their future. They believe that good reading skills are necessary to compete in the labour market (44 %) and to study at university (38 %). Just 11 % of the respondents claim that reading skills are important when travelling and 7 % when communicating with friends. Hence, a conclusion can be drawn that students understand the importance of improving their reading comprehension of specific and academic texts. However, there should follow research on reading comprehension – how students’ beliefs on how well they have comprehended texts are correlated with reliable testing on reading comprehension.

Students were also asked to explain what they understand by “excellent reading skills”. The majority of the respondents (58 %) answered that it means understanding the main idea while 32 % claimed that excellent reading skills mean that the reader can understand every word in the text. This could testify on students’ understanding of a deep learner as the majority (58 %) claim that understanding the main idea makes an excellent reader.

It is impossible to refute that reading skills are important at any age. However, what we read in our childhood, teenage years and as adults differs. The goals of reading are basically – reading for pleasure and reading for information. It is interesting to point out that students use their reading skills in English in their everyday life, for instance, 46 % of the respondents read articles online, 24 % read books and 23 % communicate with their friends via the Internet. At this point it is difficult to determine what prevails – reading for pleasure or reading for information.

Thus, it can be concluded that reading skills are important in students’ everyday life and also for their future. Accordingly, reading comprehension needs to be paid a great deal attention both by developing appropriate strategies and monitoring the process of developing reading skills, which will result in improving reading comprehension.

3. Factors Influencing Development of Reading Skills

Reading comprehension is a very complicated process as there are a number of interactive variables involved. Readers make use of such cognitive procedures as retrieval and storage of new input (Luchini 2015). Koda (2005, 5) claims that reading success is governed by three competency groups:

- 1) visual information extraction,
- 2) incremental information integration,
- 3) text-meaning and prior-knowledge consolidation.

William Grabe (2009, 195) states that the major components that combine to build reading comprehension abilities are:

- 1) syntactic knowledge and processing skills,
- 2) reading strategies that support comprehension,
- 3) the integration of reading strategies and higher-level processing to develop the strategic reader,
- 4) the role of discourse knowledge,
- 5) the centrality of vocabulary knowledge.

In order to boost the development of students' reading skills so that their reading comprehension can improve, L2 teachers should not only pay attention to lexical units and sentence structures but also integrate cognitive and meta-cognitive skills in the teaching – learning process. It is not the inability to reconstruct the writer's message but the inability of the reader to relate the idea gained through reading to himself and the world he lives in. As Grabe (2009, 195) puts it,

in other words – reading is a thinking process and it has to be perceived by all the actors like this. It means that reading comprehension is closely linked with cognition skills and vice versa.

According to Grabe, cognitive skills that combine to form reading abilities are goal setting, inferencing, working memory, phonological awareness, and word-recognition efficiency. Moreover, Michael Burke (2011, 5) admits that reading comprehension depends on the activation and availability of experience based on prior knowledge located in the mind.

However, it cannot be denied that the development of vocabulary knowledge is an important element in learning to read. Students who have a good knowledge of vocabulary can be expected to improve in reading

and comprehension, while those who do not have certain words in their oral vocabulary may not understand them when they appear in print.

In the preliminary research, 70 % of the upper-secondary school students claimed that difficulties in reading comprehension are caused by their limited vocabulary. For students at an upper-secondary level, the development of reading vocabulary shifts to academic language and the vocabulary used to communicate concepts within and across disciplines such as mathematics, science and history. Academic vocabulary within disciplines tends to be highly specialised and differs from the everyday vocabulary that is used to communicate on a less formal level outside the classroom. Academic reading requires strategic reading. In this aspect students' background knowledge and their cognitive skills are a great help.

Hence, reading comprehension involves both linguistic and cognitive processes which interact during reading as the reader is trying to extract and create meaning from a written text. Cain (2010) claims that reading involves the coordination of a range of abilities, strategies and knowledge. First, it is word knowledge, i.e., the reader should read and access the meanings of individual words as some may be unfamiliar. Then, the words should be combined into meaningful clauses and sentences. Next, the ideas are integrated in successive sentences and, finally, the reader should make sense of the text as a whole.

4. Reading Strategies

Reading comprehension refers to the ability to go beyond the words, to understand the ideas and the relationships between the ideas conveyed in a text.

Arthur C. Graesser (2007, 4) states that

deep comprehension requires inferences, linking ideas coherently, scrutinizing the validity of claims with a critical stance, and sometimes understanding the motives of authors.

He adds that shallow readers believe they understand the text while they actually miss a lot.

Reading comprehension can be improved by teaching students to use specific cognitive strategies or to reason strategically when they encounter barriers to comprehension as they read. Teaching reading comprehension strategies should be an integral part of education both in L1 and L2. When students acquire reading comprehension strategies, they become strategic readers able to deal with complicated texts in any field in their future studies and work.

Grabe (2009) defines a strategic reader as one who automatically and routinely applies a combination of effective and appropriate strategies depending on reader goals, reading tasks and strategic processing abilities.

A strategic reader

- builds connections with background knowledge to support coherence – building inferences,
- directs attention to key words and sentences that may be sources of difficulties,
- integrates information,
- summarizes the main points,
- builds coherent interpretation of the text,
- clearly evaluates the text information. (Grabe 2009, 195)

The teacher generally explains the purpose of the strategies, demonstrates models and guides students in their acquisition and use until students are able to use them independently. Six strategies appear to be most effective for improving reading comprehension in students.

- Comprehension monitoring, where readers learn to monitor how well they comprehend.
- Cooperative learning, where students learn reading strategies and discuss reading materials together.
- Use of graphic and semantic organisers (including story maps), where readers answer questions posed by the teacher and receive immediate feedback; teachers should be trained to ask questions that not only ask to recognize and recall but also explain and evaluate.
- Question generation, where readers learn to ask and answer inferential questions themselves.
- Story structure, where students learn to use the structure of the story as a means of helping them recall story content and answer questions about what they have read.
- Summarisation, where readers are taught to summarise ideas and generalise from the text information. (Grabe 2009, 208)

Grabe (2009, 209) mentions the following reading strategies: summarizing, forming questions, answering questions and elaborative interrogation, activating prior knowledge, monitoring comprehension, using text – structure awareness, using visual graphics and graphic organizers, inferencing. The researcher makes a distinction between cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies are guessing from the context, noting discourse organisation, recognising a transition phrase, skipping a word, forming a question, and identifying a main idea while metacognitive strategies require an explicit awareness of reading

itself and most strongly support the goals of reading – learning to monitor comprehension, intention to learn information.

To summarize, strategic readers have to be aware of their goals in reading and they have to be able to use appropriate strategies effectively. Current researchers of metacognitive processes in reading comprehension take a constructivist approach and recognize the importance of motivation, self-efficacy and collaboration among students and/or between students and teachers (Israel, Duffy 2014, 379).

5. The Role of Motivation in Reading Comprehension

Cynthia White (2008, 3) argues that constructing a personally meaningful interface with the learning context and strategies plays a key role in reading comprehension. Motivation is also about believing one can influence one's own learning. White claims that it is important to raise learners' awareness and knowledge of themselves, their learning needs and preferences, their beliefs and motivation, and the strategies they use to develop TL competence.

In order to help students develop their reading skills teachers should learn about how students perceive the difficulties they have to deal with. In the preliminary research, the majority (68 %) believe that the biggest issue is vocabulary. Just 18 % admit that poor knowledge of grammar rules can be an obstacle. English sentence structure can cause difficulties for 10 % and 4 % have mentioned punctuation problems. At the same time, 72 % admit that a rich vocabulary is the main factor that promotes understanding of the text, 20 % believe that background knowledge helps in comprehension and just 8 % think that note-taking can help in understanding the text.

This could mean that students are not really aware of methods of how to improve their reading strategies because background knowledge plays an important role in reading comprehension. Moreover, taking notes using mind maps promotes the development of reading skills significantly.

Grabe (2009, 227) states that strategic readers actively engage in reading, read far more extensively, and have the motivation to read for longer periods of time; they use reading to seek out information relevant to their needs and interests; they build efficiency and automaticity in strategy use; and they have heightened levels of metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness that they can use when needed. When teachers have learned what students read and why they read, and how they assess their reading skills, they can assist in developing reading skills by maintaining students' motivation and offering them appropriate reading strategies they can make

use of. This will result in strategic reading that creates the motivation to read more extensively.

7. Conclusion

The findings of the preliminary research show that basically students consider English reading skills as important to compete in the labour market (44 %) and to study at university (38 %). And this takes us back to the importance of the acquisition of reading strategies that would enable students to develop their reading skills independently when studying at university and later as employees and employers. Therefore, it is important to meet the needs of upper-secondary school students they themselves have indicated as doing so will reduce the gap between secondary school and university education.

Moreover, nowadays, when information literacy has become a basic skill, by equipping students with good reading comprehension skills through the use of appropriate reading strategies, students will be able to enhance their information literacy.

By helping students develop reading comprehension skills we can reach the goal of education – to teach students to think.

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