

Promoting L2 Students' Vocabulary Awareness Through Bilingual Text in Reading Class: A Theoretical Perspective

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Submission date: 13-Jul-2023 11:37PM (UTC-0500)

Submission ID: 2130899552

File name: 8._C.1.6.1_Promoting.pdf (387.56K)

Word count: 3782

Character count: 20435

PROMOTING L2 STUDENTS' VOCABULARY AWARENESS THROUGH BILINGUAL TEXT IN READING CLASS: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT: This study presents a literary review on a particular way to promote L2 students' vocabulary awareness through bilingual text. As it is known, reading class is one of language skill class which challenge EFL teachers to think and plan more serious to give a good package of teaching and learning in reading class. Poor condition of reading class activity may derive from difficult material for reading activity. This condition leads poor result encouraged more by very low vocabulary mastery. Having mentioned fact, the EFL teacher should have many various material of reading text. Related to reading material, this paper proposes a way to facilitate students' awareness of vocabulary by providing a bilingual text for reading class.

Keywords: bilingual text, vocabulary awareness, reading class

Introduction

In teaching and learning process of all subject matters, reading is an inseparable activity such as reviewing the previous material, finding supporting material, and doing a particular assignment. However, students' less motivation in reading has become serious problems in the teaching of reading. The common problems can be emerged from the comprehension of the text students read, less of vocabulary size, and the most crucial problem is that the students do not have reading awareness since they are asked to read for the sake of reading grade or academic purpose.

Other problem related to students' awareness or motivation in reading is that the students prefer reading fiction genre books to non-fiction books such as novels and comics. They can sacrifice their leisure time, even lunch time to read novels rather than to read non-fiction books and subject matter books. It then causes some problems for the teachers in providing reading materials that can meet the students' preference and academic purpose.

Responding to these problems, the teachers are required to do some efforts to enhance the students' reading motivation in their teaching and learning process. Three factors may enhance the students' reading motivation. Firstly, the reading material in this case, teachers should teach students how to understand main ideas, enrich vocabulary size to summarize, have reading varied activities. The second, supporting factors such as, students' notes, the use of dictionary, school library, and private library can enhance the students' motivation. The last factor is teachers, meaning that the teachers are required to be model of a good reader. In addition to that, the teachers should have a good knowledge to read well and share their experiences to the students. It is also important to be noted that the teachers should prepare the material optimally.

Regarding the material for reading class, the presence of English textbook seems to be a riddle for teachers to choose appropriately. There are a lot of sources that can be used in reading class, however they sometimes seem to be ineffective since the students do not have

keen behavior in reading habit. It is owing to the students' L1 reading habit is very deficient. Most of them do reading activity due to the teachers' instruction.

In the sense of raising children's motivation in L2 reading, there are many bilingual books or story published to accommodate the L2 environment. Many of them are adapted from local contexts of L1. It is assumed that being familiar with the content in L1 environment may encourage students' awareness and motivation in reading activity. Moreover it is in accordance with Second Language Acquisition theory that the formal exposure in language learning environment may stimulate L2 children awareness (Dulay, Bert, & Krashen, 1982:19). In order to give a formal exposure of L2 reading material, the presence of bilingual book seems to be an effective way. This paper is aimed to give a brief view in discussing more about how the bilingual text facilitates vocabulary's mastery in L2.

L2 Reading Development

In L2 reading, it is better to see how Language Threshold Hypothesis argues that students must have sufficient amount of L2 knowledge (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and discourse) to make effective use of skills and strategies that are part of their L1 reading comprehension abilities (Grabe & Stoller, 2002: 51). The fundamental issue from L2 reading centres on the relative importance of L2 knowledge versus L1 reading abilities. This hypothesis states that L2 readers need to know enough L2 knowledge (vocabulary and structure) so that L1 reading strategies and skills can be used efficiently to help comprehend the L2 text. If the reader is devoting most of his cognitive resources to figuring out the language of the L2 text, there are few cognitive resources left over for the fluent comprehension processes that would normally support the L1 reader. Readers usually cross the threshold whenever they encounter L2 texts in which they know almost all of the words and can process the text fluently. Because L2 readers are all different in their L2 knowledge, topic knowledge and L2 reading experiences, there is no one level of general language proficiency that counts as the threshold for all readers or for all texts. The threshold will vary depending on the reader, the text and the topic.

Critics of this hypothesis have argued that there is no single set of linguistic knowledge that can be defined as presenting the necessary foundation (or the threshold). However, this objection does not represent a strong criticism because reading success varies with a number of factors. A given text may be too difficult to read because of its linguistic demands, but it also might be too hard to read fluently because of a new topic, poor organization or insufficient time to read. The idea behind the linguistic threshold is not that there is a fixed set of language knowledge that students need. Rather, a variable amount of linguistic knowledge, combined with fluency of processing, is needed to read a specific text, on a specific topic, for a specific task. Students can be said to pass above the threshold (perhaps only temporarily for one specific text) when they have enough linguistic knowledge to read the text without great vocabulary and grammatical difficulty.

As students are able to read more and more texts fluently, one can say that they are moving beyond the linguistic threshold, yet any new and difficult text might throw them back to a level of less fluent and hence inefficient reading. One major consequence of passing through the linguistic threshold is that students free up cognitive resources, which were previously used to figure out language structures and vocabulary, to read more strategically and transfer L1 strategic reading practices to the L2 setting. This hypothesis

provides a strong argument for giving students a lot of exposure to reading, focusing both on fluency and on texts that are not too difficult.

Strong generalizations can only be developed for L2 reading after several near-replications of a research study across a number of L1 groups, across L2 proficiency levels and across socio-cultural and institutional learning contexts. The differences between L1 and L2 reading contexts, however, go beyond numbers of studies and limitations of research methodology. L2 reading must account for issues that are qualitatively different from L1 issues. L2 learners, while learning to read, must broaden their linguistic knowledge at the same time, deal with transfer effects, and learn to use L2-specific resources (e.g. translation, glosses, bilingual dictionaries), among many other factors. If this were not enough, the L2 reader learns to read in the L2 with a two-language processing system. This is to say, reading in an L2 is supported by a two-language system (L1 and L2 together) rather than just an L2 system. All of these factors suggest that L2 reading can be quite different from L1 reading.

In regard to the L2 reading success, there are some other factors we should keep in mind when discussing L2 reading. Erler and Finkbeiner (2007, 197-200) categorized “culture, motivation and interest” as non-linguistic variables linked to L2 reading strategies. Motivation and interest in TL reading help learners read better, but it seems that differences between readers’ cultural backgrounds and the target cultures seriously interfere with readers’ comprehension. Cultural gaps affect comprehension more radically than the other two nonlinguistic variables. In other words, understanding the target culture helps learners read with interest, which might increase their motivation in L2 reading.

When we discuss L2 reading, the influences of L1 reading should not be ignored. L2 reading has a close and complex relationship with L1 reading. While reading in L2, learners often unconsciously try to adopt their L1 reading strategies even when the strategies do not work with the L2 reading. There are some notions that have to be considered by the teacher in L2 reading class. They are proposed by Grabe & Stoller (2002:66) as follows:

1. The need to develop reading fluency and word recognition automaticity
2. The existence of a second language proficiency threshold in reading
3. The carrying influences of L1 reading skill, strategies, and background knowledge on L2 reading
4. The importance of a large recognition vocabulary for reading
5. The importance of discourse structure and the instructional benefits of graphic representations
6. The importance of metacognitive awareness and strategic reading
7. The importance of metacognitive awareness and strategic reading
8. The need for extensive reading for reading development
9. The importance of student interest, motivation and positive attitudes for learning
10. The importance of content-based instruction and the benefits of integrating reading and writing
11. The varying but powerful influences of social-context factors on reading success
12. The varying but powerful cultural influences on reading success.

In other words, when readers are younger, teaching vocabulary and grammatical structures explicitly is important, whereas adult learners must be taught how to develop metacognitive skills. Adult due to the complexity, a variety of strategies to help learners improve reading fluency, accuracy and comprehension have been introduced and

recommended. Some deal with vocabulary or grammatical structures, and others with readers' cultural backgrounds, or learners' preferences, etc.

Content and Cultural Schema to Promote L2 Reading Awareness

Background knowledge plays a role in terms of facts known and assumptions held about the world. Prior knowledge may have a facilitating effect because a reader who already has an elaborate schema can more easily fit incoming textual information into that schema. Background knowledge can also be related to the values and local culture that may bring familiarity for L2 reading (Hudson, 2007:142). In accordance with it, there are some factors we should keep in mind when discussing L2 reading. Erler and Finkbeiner (2007:197-200) categorized "culture, motivation and interest" as non-linguistic variables that linked to L2 reading strategies.

Motivation and interest in L2 reading help learners read better, but it seems that differences between readers' cultural backgrounds and the target cultures seriously interfere with readers' comprehension. Cultural gaps affect comprehension more radically than the other two nonlinguistic variables. In other words, understanding the target culture helps learners read with interest, which might increase their motivation in L2 reading.

Erler and Finkbeiner introduced Singhal's survey (1998) in Hayati & Mohammadi (2005) in which it said that both L1 and L2 reading required knowledge of cultural content and of formal and linguistic schema. Singhal argued that the major differences between L1 and L2 reading were that L2 readers who were not familiar with content schema or did not possess appropriate L2 sociocultural knowledge would have comprehension difficulties in that they could not perceive L2 text in a culturally authentic way. Roller (1990) also discussed how familiarity of the text affected comprehension. In her study, it was suggested that familiarity of topics of texts helped L2 readers' comprehension whereas Adams and Huggins (1986) claimed that contexts that were too familiar did not help L2 readers, because the readers understood or inferred the texts even though they could not linguistically comprehend the L2 text (Roller, p. 86).

It is in contrast with what has been echoed by Malik from Goodman in Hudson that, "Because comprehension results from reader-text transaction, what the reader knows, who the reader is, what values guide the reader, and what purposes or interest the reader has play a vital role in the reading process (2007:143). Based on Lipson's study in 1982 reported by Hudson (2007:148), the ability of children to learn new information is depending upon the extent to which they had prior knowledge of the topic that was read. The effect of background knowledge has implications for how and whether readers learn new information from texts.

Vocabulary Mastery

Beginning L2 students do not have a mental resource of several thousand words stored in their heads to be matched with the newly sounded-out word. Thus, one benefit of developing accurate letter-sound correspondences as a support for reading is lost in most L2 settings; that is, L2 students cannot match a sounded-out word to a word that they know orally because they do not yet know the word orally. Knowledge of discourse organization may be very important for students who read L2 texts in more advanced academic settings, and patterns of discourse organization may need explicit attention. Sometimes, students may

know most of the vocabulary and understand the main concept(s) of a text, but they may not follow the specific development of the text, the new information being presented or the arguments being made. In some cases, L2 students may not be fully familiar with overall genre expectations of certain types of texts (e.g. newspaper stories, biographies, abstracts, reports, memos, editorials).

In most cases, the vocabulary and grammar knowledge of the beginning L2 student marks a very different starting point from that of the beginning L1 reader. One obvious implication of these differences is that having L2 students sound out a word to 'discover' its meaning is likely to be less effective than it is in L1 settings. In addition to the role of background knowledge, second language researchers have been interested in the extent to which background knowledge interacts with text difficulty. According to Johnson in Hudson (2007:156), the effects of both language complexity and cultural background on reading comprehension of conventional folk tales showed that the level of syntactic and semantic complexity had less of an effect than the cultural origin of the story.

In the terms of vocabulary mastery, the presence of cultural awareness is believed to make easier the students to memorize and recognize the word knowledge of the reading material. At least but not last, it is served the depth of world knowledge which relates to following aspects: recognizing the word in speech, recognizing its morphology, knowing and recognizing multiple meanings and functions of a word, knowing and selecting the word for the particular meaning associated with the word in the given context, and recognizing inappropriate use, knowing the concept behind the meaning of the word, knowing and activating collocations, knowing and activating the syntactic placement of the word in a sentence, being able to recognize and activate synonyms and antonyms, recognizing and using the word in an original context and recognizing and activating the correct word for the appropriate formality. To see how the depth of word knowledge can be served in a bilingual text, the following part will present it in comprehensive discussion.

Bilingual Text Promotes Vocabulary's Awareness

Bilingual program in L2 classroom instruction means that the activity in the classroom involves two languages in interaction. In most cases, the bilingual program is aimed to prepare the students to be ready to the next level of bilingualism (Celce-Murcia, 2001: 346). In the early purpose of bilingualism, it aims to serve young students who are either immigrants to a country or who are members of relatively large groups within a country and who speak a native language different from the dominant one.

To minimize difficulties in L2 reading, the teacher is supposed to provide reading material that may raise students' awareness in L2 reading. Lodging a familiar context in L2, as stated in previous description, would give some social-cultural background to language learners. Socio-cultural background knowledge behind texts is an important element in L2 reading comprehension. Knowledge of cultural background itself should be gained directly from books, teachers, the Internet and so on. And yet there are some strategies to make learners notice and compensate for cultural gaps.

The presence of bilingual text which accommodates socio-cultural content from L1 can promote the students' word of knowledge and creating familiar atmosphere. Environmental factors that apparently limit the scope and quality of second language learning include: (1) the absence of peers who speak the language natively; and (2) severely limited and often artificial conditions under which the language may be learned. It is

supported as noted by Ervin-Tripp in Dulay, Bert & Krashen (1982:109) that “learning conditions in which the second language was not the language of the learner’s larger social milieu...”

The unfortunate conditions are often inevitable in foreign language learning contexts because the target language is not a language used for communication in such situations. The total burden to provide a target language environment falls on the teacher in the often difficult environment of the classroom. Under these conditions, learners have little recourse but to fill the vacuum of second language knowledge with the structures of their first language. Being able to comprehend a text accurately and at a relatively rapid rate presupposes a rather extensive knowledge of vocabulary and grammar (Celce-Murcia, & McIntosh, 1991:198). Without a well-developed knowledge of vocabulary the process of reading might break down. In fact, reading and vocabulary have a bilateral relationship: one really is not possible without the other. In the same line of argumentation, dictionary, as an important pedagogical tool, plays a vital role in various process of language learning including reading comprehension.

A major difference for L2 reading, and one that strongly influences the linguistic knowledge differences mentioned in 2.1, is the total amount of exposure to L2 reading and to L2 print that a student experiences. In many cases, the extent of reading practice in the L2 will mark the typical L2 reader as different from the L1 reader. In terms of bringing the L2 exposure inside in reading classroom instruction, the bilingual text of reading material facilitates many aspects that can promote the students’ vocabulary mastery. By providing the L1 and L2 at the same display, the students will trained more naturally to read without parsing the discourse into small elements of linguistic devices.

In settings where L2 students are asked to read difficult, often authentic, texts, reading experiences at first glance appear to be similar to L1 students, but closer examination reveals that the texts are often much shorter in length, a recognition on the part of materials developers of the difficulties students are likely to have with authentic texts. L2 students, over a period of time, are also less likely to be exposed to the full range of text genres that are commonly read by L1 students, partly because a number of these genres are read outside of class or even outside of educational task requirements. It is not obvious what impact these differences have on L2 students, except that the range of texts that they could be reading is generally restricted.

In L2 contexts, glosses commonly provide synonyms for vocabulary that is above learners’ levels but well within the range of vocabulary knowledge expected of L1 readers. In addition, L2 students commonly write out translations of texts and do their own mental translations as ways to assist comprehension (Kern, 1994). Such translation resources are unique to L2 settings. Finally, L2 students can reference their own specific L1 cultural knowledge and text resources for L2 reading tasks (e.g. proverbs, special and sacred texts, and cultural narratives).

Closing Remark

There are many differences that exist between L1 and L2 reading contexts point out the complexities of L2 reading comprehension. Not only are L2 students and student groups as diverse as L1 student groups, but they are involved in learning goals that are even more complicated than those in most L1 literacy environments. Many of the assumptions associated with L1 reading instruction should be rethought and modified in light of these

differences. On the basis of this paper, it should also be apparent that the presence of bilingual text in reading class may facilitate the absence of bilingual dictionary. The local context contained in bilingual text also governs the vocabulary awareness which then yield the automaticity of vocabulary mastery for L2 language learners. Lastly, the writer hopes this paper may give some enrichment in supplying reading material in order to make the success of L2 reading classroom instruction.

However, the selection of bilingual text must be taken into the teacher's account and awareness to avoid the instruction failure or boredom which can cause students' anxiety.

Another notion that has to be considered that by providing a bilingual text, cultural differences can be minimized to attract more students' attention. Although it is not easy to overcome the problem, there are still some strategies to compensate or fill the gaps. With the strategies mentioned in this paper readers can facilitate L2 reading even when they encounter difficulty in comprehending cultural background behind the text.

The most important thing for teachers is to make sure not to load too many strategies on learners, which might make them reluctant readers. After all, the main purposes of acquiring strategies are "to make learning easier, faster, and more enjoyable" (Cohen, 2010:39).

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