

PEDAGOGICAL SCIENCES

TEACHERS APPROACHES TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE READING IN THE MILITARY INSTITUTE

Mammadova M.,

*Azerbaijan, Military Institute named after Haydar Aliyev
Ph.doctor, associate professor*

Novruzova Z.,

*Azerbaijan, Military Institute named after Haydar Aliyev
Senior teacher*

Aliyeva M.

*Azerbaijan, Military Institute named after Haydar Aliyev
Senior teacher*

ABSTRACT

It is difficult to assess an invisible skill, but that is exactly the dilemma language teachers face when they test their cadets abilities to reading. We cannot actually see what is going on in cadets minds when they read, so we design assessment based on constructs. This article examines current ideas about reading-including its subskills and strategies- before exploring techniques for assessment.

Keywords: assessment, improve, critical thinking, major reading, minor reading.

Reading is a key skill for the learners of English language. Our Institute is eager to improve reading results on examinations. Some of the things we do to ensure valid and reliable reading assessment are:

- we cover a range of reading skills from gist comprehension to scanning for detail and inferencing for implied information.
- we choose different text topics and types and uses several passages per test.
- we employs a range of different task types but ensures that cadets are familiar with them.
- we expects cadets to distinguish between main ideas and supporting details.
- we ask cadets to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words from context.
- we treat grammar as an important part of reading comprehension.
- we test discourse-level aspects of texts, including text types and discourse markers.
- we ask cadets to recognize the purposes and audiences of texts.
- we encourages critical-thinking skills such as distinguishing fact from opinion.

What exactly is reading? In daily life, we certainly encounter a wide range of reading material and tasks, yet it is difficult to define exactly what we mean by reading. Is reading mainly taking in new information with what we already know? Is reading a matter of decoding symbols to form words and sentences, or is it understanding how arguments are presented and recognizing typical texts used for certain purposes, such as a narrative story or assembly instructions for a bookcase? In fact when we think of texts, do we think of prose passages, or do we consider advertisement, maps, graphs, and cartoons as texts, too?

Today most English language teachers would agree that reading includes both bottom-up skills-recognizing and making sense of letters, words, and sentences- and top down processing that deals with whole texts. They would also agree that text applies to both

linear passages of prose as well as a wide variety of non-linear sources of information such as maps and pie charts. Reading is widely regarding as an interactive skill in which the background knowledge or schemata that the reader brings to the task is constantly interwoven with the new material. There are many processes involved in reading, but also important are products or results of reading.

With a skill as complex as reading, it is challenging to choose what to assess. In his comprehensive overview of reading assessment, Alderson[1,page 47] argues that the place to start is the target skills we want our cadets to develop. In a particular teaching setting, what kind of reading cadets need to do, and what subskills and strategies are important in that context? We see the construct of reading as a mental model that translates more abstract theories of reading ability into tasks that can be operationalized in assessment. Once we have defined the construct of reading that applies to our teaching situation and its curricular outcomes, we can then move on to designing reading specifications for assessment.

Most language teachers assess reading through the component subskills. Since it is not possible to observe reading behavior directly, we can only get an idea of how cadets actually process texts through techniques such as think-aloud protocols. For classroom assessment, we normally focus on certain important skills that can be divided into major and minor reading skills. These categories are based on whether the skills pertain to large segments of the text or focus on local structural or lexical points.

Major reading skills include:

- reading quickly to skim for gist, scan for specific details, and establish overall organization of the passage
- reading carefully for main ideas, supporting details, authors argument and purpose, relationship of paragraphs, and fact versus opinion
- information transfer from non-linear texts

- drawing inferences from both stated and implied content

Minor-enabling reading skills include:

- understanding at the sentence level(vocabulary, syntax, cohesive markers
- understanding at inter-sentence level(identifying what pronouns refer to, recognizing discourse markers
- understanding components of nonlinear texts(the meaning of graph or chart labels, keys, and the ability to find and interpret intersection points

Vocabulary and grammar

Increasingly, grammar and vocabulary are contextualized as part of reading passages instead of being assessed separately in a discrete point fashion. For example, older versions of the TOEFL examination contained a grammar editing section where the cadets had to identify grammar errors. In the most recent version of the TOEFL, language skills are integrated, and grammar is subsumed within other skills. Similarly, vocabulary is tested within context in each of the skills. In other words the cadets skills in these areas are assessed as they produce written and spoken responses.

However, there are times when it is appropriate to assess structure and vocabulary separately. Some testers such as Hughes [2, page 138] advocate separate testing of grammar and vocabulary because of the washback effect on learning if these underlying skills themselves are not tested. [3, page 172-179]

Remember, washback is the influence of testing on teaching and learning. If you stress something in teaching, but you do not assess it, cadets get a mixed message about its importance. Vocabulary research has shown that language learners benefit from both explicit instruction and incidental learning, so if your program includes an explicit vocabulary –building component, it clearly makes sense to assess it separately.

Consideration in Designing Tasks

Reading tests use many of the formats discussed in the article. Recognition or selective-response formats include multiple choice questions, true/false/not given, and matching and cloze-all formats where the cadets selects from a range of provided answers. When we move to gap-fill or short answer formats, cadets must produce an answer. With these limited production formats, remember that the emphasis is generally on meaning. It is clear that the cadets understood the task, mechanical mistakes such as spelling that do not interfere with meaning should not be graded as wrong. However, for authentic tasks such as reading directions for filling in a form, accuracy is important. Make sure that your question are written at a slightly lower level than the reading passages. Reading comprehension questions should be in the same order as the material in the passage itself. Mixing up the order of questions substantially increases the difficulty level. If you have two types of questions or two formats based on one text with different colored markers to check that you have evenly covered the material in sequence. Make all statements positive. If you phrase a statement negatively and an option is negative as well, cadets have to deal with the logical problems of double negatives. Whenever possible, rephrase material using synonyms to

avoid cadets scanning for verbatim matches. Paraphrasing encourages vocabulary growth as positive washback.

Texts

There are many sources for reading texts. Texts can be purpose written, taken directly from authentic material, or adapted. The best way to develop good reading assessments is to constantly watch for appropriate material. Keep a file of authentic material from newspapers, magazines, brochures, instruction guides—any suitable source of real texts. You can find material on particular topics in an encyclopedia written at an appropriate readability level or use an internet search engine. Whatever source you use cite it properly on the exam paper as a model of cadets. An exception would be when you have a question about the source of the text, such as, Where would you find this reading? With supplied responses such as an encyclopedia, a dictionary, a telephone book, a guide book etc. Another expectation would be if the information is publicly available in many sources.

Reading texts include both prose passages and non-linear texts such as tables, graphs, schedules, maps, advertisements and diagrams. Whenever possible, present them in a realistic manner. For instance, a scanning task might involve reading six or seven short advertisements similar to those in the classified section of a newspaper. Be sure that all texts are clear and legible.

Avoid texts with controversial or biased material. For example, do not use a paragraph with on religion or international disputes. Although such texts might generate enthusiastic classroom discussions, they are not suitable for assessment because they can upset cadets and affect the reliability of test results. Remember that texts should be as culturally neutral as possible to avoid offense. To the end, people in a passage should not be dating or discussing any taboo subjects.

You should check the language of your reading texts. This can be done quite easily. At the most basic levels of second language literacy, it may be important to focus on decoding skills and the ability to recognize letters and words. Assessment of early literacy is best accomplished with the simplest formats that involve minimal instructions to read, ideally using picture cues whenever feasible. The focus should be on the content, not on the complexities of the task. The same holds true for testing very young learners, especially those who lack literacy in their first language. Context is especially important if your focus is on grammar or vocabulary since structures and words do not occur in a vacuum. A paragraph that tests structural items or vocabulary is far more valid because the items appear in context. Moreover, in contextualized gap fills, cadets can attend to the surrounding words to choose appropriate collocations. Here is an example of contextualized multiple choice cloze focusing on certain grammar points such as articles, prepositions, pronouns, verb tense, and agreement. It is an example of rational deletion where certain words have been omitted in order to test specified points.

Example of Rational Deletion Cloze for Grammar in Context

Read the paragraph, and decide which words from the chart are best for the spaces.

Mark Twain was one of the most popular writers in America. His real name Samuel Langhorne Clemens, and he was born __1__1835 in the state of Missouri. For most of his life, he __2__near the great Mississippi River,__3_when he was thirty, he traveled to California. He became famous the following year when he Circle the word that is best for each space.

wrote a short story called “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County”.After that, he traveled__4_the world and continued__5_writing career. Twains__6_known book was The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, a story of a young boys life on the Mississippi River. By the 1880, Twain had become__7__important name in US literature. Even today, long after his death, Mark Twain__8_famous for his skill at writing the same way people talk.

Space number	Choice a	Choice b	Choice c
1	on	at	in
2	lived	lives	living
3	because	or	but
4	upon	around	into
5	her	his	its
6	better	best	bigger
7	an	the	a
8	was	is	be

Source: Adapted from K.S. Folse, Intermediate Reading Practices; University of Michigan Press,2004,p.27

References

1. Alderson J.C., Bachmen L, Series Editors preface. Language test construction evaluation Cambridge University Press

2. Hughes A., Testing for language teachers. Cambridge University Press, page 138

3. Hughes A., Testing for language teachers. Cambridge University Press, page 172-179