

INTENSIVE AND EXTENSIVE READING

by Vuki Tangitau

Reading is a highly complex process and it demands the knowledge of correct pronunciation, word recognition, comprehension skills, speed of reading as well as confidence on the part of the learner. According to John Waldman, we are motivated to read in order to discover how

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other people live, feel and act. We sometimes read to understand the past and project into the future. Insights we get from learning about other lives and other periods besides our own will add to our self knowledge.^{1*}

Bearing Waldman's thought in mind it is therefore necessary to recommend that all language teachers should make occasions to give the second language learner opportunities to practice and imitate new sounds correctly. The teachers should look for and commend good pronunciation, correct intonation and rhythm, speed and good diction so that improvement and progress could be effected. The learner should be encouraged to pronounce sounds that are new to him and also to be critical of his own speech and pronunciation during his daily language activities. Drills and self awareness in-so-far as good articulation is concerned, should be pursued and cultivated throughout the entire reading course.

But for the reading activity to be a profitable and pleasurable learning process it is perhaps necessary to iterate the fact that the learner should be the most important thing in the whole reading program. The

1* John Waldman: *Reading With Speed and Confidence* (New York, 1972), p.4.

materials chosen for the reading should be considered in terms of his needs, his interest and his level of reading ability. Dacanay emphasized this very point when she wrote:

The principle of sequencing units of subject matter should be observed, that is from the familiar to the new. The subject matter, presented in meaningful situations and in small doses at first, should have interest and content appeal for the learner.^{2*}

The reading materials, as suggested, should be carefully selected and graded to give the learner an interesting and challenging experience of English vocabulary and constructions. There should be, as in the case of the Church Middle Schools in Tonga, class readers, supplementary readers, books for private reading, local and overseas newspapers, posters and advertisements to aid the teaching of reading as a whole. Elliot saw the value in this when he recommended that:

the reading material must inevitably be simplified—that is to say, it must be within the linguistic range of pupils at different levels of the language. It must either be specially written within a precise range, or texts in "full—that is, unlimited English must be re-written in simplified versions."^{3*}

Before embarking on the types of reading that I am to discuss I would like to say something more pertaining to the problems involving reading. This is because the greatest difficulty the learner meets in learning to read a foreign language concerns the language itself. The language problems, as pointed out by Sutaria, that the learner is likely to encounter in his reading:

2* Fe R. Dacanay: *Techniques and Procedures in Second Language Teaching* (Philippine, 1967), p. 240.

3* A.V.P. Elliot: "Teaching the Printed Word. Reading and Literature," *Teaching English As a Second Language* (New York, 1965), p. 281.

likely to encounter in his reading:

are identical with those he meets in listening and those that he meets in reading orally. . . He tends to transfer the sounds, the stress and intonation patterns, the rhythm, the grammatical structure, and even some of the vocabulary and style of his native tongue.^{4*}

A second language teacher who is aware of these difficulties may adapt his reading program to the needs of his class. Moreover his approach to reading, as influenced by this awareness, would be geared towards assisting the learner to gain profitable experiences from the effort made. Reading then, should be regarded as a motivation and a morale booster employed principally for the purpose of familiarizing the learner with the strange mechanics of the target language, expanding his interest as well as giving him an education. Both the instructor and the instructed should review it as an important process primarily in relation to what they are doing at the moment and what they want to do in the future.

At this stage I need not go into a detailed discussion of the basic problems, basic skills and preliminary drills necessary for reading. I take it for granted that all are conscious of the need for the instructor to be aware of these existing problems as well as the great demand for a reasonably sound reading programme. But to the English language teachers of Tonga, to which this paper is directly addressed, I would like to discuss two major sub-divisions of the subject in discussion in terms of what Mary Finnochiaro called intensive and extensive reading.

In Intensive reading as the term indicates, each vocabulary and structural item is explained and made part of the student's active language; pronunciation and intonation are stressed; each concept or allusion is clarified. In Extensive reading, the principal aim is comprehension. Pupils are trained to get the meaning primarily from the context although

some common vocabulary items may be developed for active use.^{5*}

The intensive reading as defined above is principally an activity to help furnish the learner with a better understanding of the language. That understanding would only be accomplished if what is given does meet the needs of the learner.

Necessity comes first. The child in a home environment or in a kindergarten is driven to adopt the prevailing form of communication in order to share in the activities around him and thus be happy and contented rather than lonely and miserable.^{6*}

It should be a means of motivating the learner's interest to study the language and also to assist in establishing his confidence and desire to make use of this new tool for gathering information, for conversation and for communication. The reading programme should be made a profitable, pleasurable and functional activity. Profitable in the sense that the learner is gaining new knowledge from reading; pleasurable in-so-far as the learner uses this skill effectively and successfully; functional in the sense that the learner is able to put whatever information he receives into gainful means.

The reading program should have specific aims toward which the teacher should guide the learner in whatever reading activity he (learner) may chose to participate in. These aims may include things such as: learning of some important points of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation or structural words in the passage to be read. Questions from the teacher or from the class pertaining to the story or chapter to be read could be made more interesting and motivating if these are carefully worded. Difficult words and phrases should be discussed and made meaningful. This is best achieved through using the dictionary, giving antonyms and synonyms, dramatization, using objects, pictures, actions and any method which the teacher

5* Mary Finnochiaro: *Teaching English as a Second Language* (New York, 1958), p. 140.

6* E. V. Gatenby: "Conditions for Success in Language Learning," *Teaching English As a Second Language* (New York, 1965), p. 14.

4* Minda Sutaria: *Basic Readers For English Teaching* (Philippine, 1967), p. 10.

considers as appropriate in promoting and in establishing the necessary behaviour expected of the learner. For further elaboration on the need for having specific aims for reading I would like to make reference here to Minda Sutaria as pointed out:

When teaching pupils to read for any of the purposes discussed above, it is imperative that (1) the pupils know the meaning of the purpose, (2) they know what they must do to attain the purpose, (3) they be given practice in reading for that purpose.^{7*}

Setting out of specific aims for any reading programme will undoubtedly be considered, as previously pointed out, on the needs of the learner. There are also different stages of reading determined by the level of ability of the learner and these shouldn't be ignored. These stages are: reading readiness stage, beginning reading stage, the developmental reading stage and the independent or rapid reading stage.^{8*} Each speaks for itself and each calls for a different aim with probably a different approach.

Activities will no doubt differ from one stage to the other but at the same time since our concern is presently with intensive reading we need to limit our discussion to those that are within the territory of intensive reading. Generally speaking activities such as answering questions based on the story; choral reading (after the teacher); vocabulary study; using new words in original sentences; retelling of the story orally or in writing are some of the activities which can help make intensive reading interesting, challenging and gratifying to the learner.

Extensive reading, according to Mary Finnochiaro, is principally for comprehension. The ability to comprehend that which the learner has read depends largely upon meanings that he acquired through experience. Because the reader relies so much on his experience in order to interpret meanings correctly, it is therefore necessary to conclude that the teacher should motivate the learner to expand his knowledge of words or otherwise. This expansion can be initiated through enriching the reading program with activities that will

assist the learner in his search for meanings and relevancy through the printed page.

Setting of specific aims will assist both the instructor and the instructed in acquiring the experience wanted. Prepared questions on the passage to be read should be ready for the learner to answer. These questions will assist the learner to read with interest, purpose and meaning. Passages taken out of text-books should be discussed orally and modifications be made to help relate the story to the interest and experience of the learner. By this method the teacher can arouse the learner's interest and curiosity about the content and the main points within the story.

Activities relating to class discussion based on the story will prove invaluable in teaching extensive reading. From experience, I have found that when students are asked to criticize a passage or write a summary they seem to read with more interest and deep concentration.

In conclusion I would like to add that the reading process, and all that it takes to make it beneficial to the learner, is not an easy task. It demands creativity on the part of the instructor. The success of it lies in both the teacher and the student; dedication and patience are necessary for each. Effective reading will therefore have a great deal to do with the effectiveness of both the instructor and the student. Each party needs to participate actively in order to successfully bring the objectives of the reading programme to fruition.

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7* Minda Cascolan Sutaria, p. 45.

8* Ibid., p. 46.