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### **PSYCHOLINGUISTIC APPROACH TO TEACHING ENGLISH READING TO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

*This article presents psycholinguistic views of English as a second language reading, discusses types of reading to teach, and provides the findings of the survey conducted among the university students in order to find out their reading preferences and factors affecting their reading.*

*The results of the survey and the discussions with each learner have led to the following conclusions: university students – would-be specialists in computing enjoy reading and acquiring various reading techniques ("skimming", "scanning") according to the intended purpose; they are aware of the volume of information that can be received, through the English language, in exceptional cases (hazard emergency situations) for the ship and crew safety (this depends on the speed of deciphering messages and taking appropriate measures); and that guessing the meaning of words in context is less time-consuming and even enjoyable.*

**Keywords:** *psycholinguistic approach, teaching english reading, university students.*

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### **ПСИХОЛІНГВІСТИЧНИЙ ПІДХІД ДО НАВЧАННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЮ МОВОЮ СТУДЕНТІВ УНІВЕРСИТЕТІВ**

*У цій статті представлені психолінгвістичні погляди щодо навчання читання англійською як другою мовою, обговорюються типи читання, а також викладені результати опитування, проведеного серед студентів з метою з'ясування їх читацьких переваг та чинників, що впливають на процес читання. Результати опитування та обговорення з кожним студентом дозволили зробити наступні висновки: студенти університету – майбутні спеціалісти з обчислювальної техніки із задоволенням читають і освоюють різні техніки читання ("скімінг", "сканування") відповідно до мети; вони знають про обсяг інформації, яку можна отримати англійською мовою у виняткових випадках (небезпечні аварійні ситуації) для безпеки судна та екіпажу (це залежить від швидкості розшифровки повідомлень та життя відповідних заходів); і що вгадування значення слів у контексті займає менше часу і навіть приємно. Щоб удосконалити навички читання студентів, викладач повинен перевірити: їх навички точності усного читання (з точки зору вимови, граматики та інтонації), чи є орфографічні проблеми, пов'язані з певними звуками чи інтонацією); багатство словникового запасу та різноманітність граматичних форм, швидкість читання, що допомагає адаптуватися до ситуацій та брати участь у дискусіях для досягнення ефективного спілкування; читання*

*великої кількості текстів може допомогти забезпечити незалежність – у дискусіях чи розмовах учні повинні знайти відповідні слова чи фрази, щоб зрозуміти себе, уникати довгих пауз; заохочення учнів, які уникають читання вголос у їх присутності, заохочувати ініціативу у веденні бесіди, вивчаючи тексти, які зазвичай зустрічаються в ІТ-сфері. Студенти університету повинні усвідомити мету читання, щоб вони змогли визначити правильні підходи до завдання читання.*

**Ключові слова:** *психолінгвістичний підхід, навчання читанню, англійська мова, викладач, студенти.*

Psycholinguistic approach takes its name from the field of psycholinguistics which is an integration of the two fields of psychology and linguistics. That's why it is referred to as a hybrid field. Matlin states that the central approach of psycholinguistic theory, in general, is that people, especially the young, are biologically predisposed to language learning and that what is learned is not so much a string of words but transformational rules that enable the language learner to understand the sentences heard [9]. This means that developmentally appropriate instruction must be considered in foreign language learning. However, the basic status of the psycholinguistic approach has always been disregarded in the field of foreign language teaching and learning. In our study we applied psycholinguistic approach to teaching reading skills to university students with the purpose to find out the reading preferences of students. In our study we used both theoretical (literature review) and empirical methods (questionnaire) to make it possible to answer the main questions addressed in the present paper. The study was conducted to 72 freshmen (3 groups of students) who had a similar English learning experience. The study was conducted during semester II of the 2017-2018 academic year at the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine at the Faculty of Information Technologies. The participants were required to answer all the items of the questionnaire, giving their own views about their reading preferences.

According to Titone and Danesi [14, p.31], the term psycholinguistics was coined by Pronko in 1946. However, a systematic theory was not formulated until 1950. Psycholinguistics is simply defined as the study of the relationship between human language and human mind. Psycholinguistics is a branch of cognitive science that investigates how an individual produce, comprehend and acquire language. In short, three important processes are investigated in psycholinguistics: (1) language production, (2) language comprehension, and (3) language acquisition. Carroll presents main points in psycholinguistics as followings: psycholinguistic stresses the knowledge of language and cognitive processes involved in ordinary language use [3]. Field [7, p.473] asserts that “today, psycholinguistics is a multi-disciplinary field, drawing upon cognitive psychology, theoretical linguistics, speech science, phonetics, computer modelling, neurolinguistics, clinical linguistics, discourse analysis and pragmatics”.

Being at the crossroads of linguistics and psychology, psycholinguistics actively uses the methods of both sciences [2; 10; 15]. Thus, in the analysis of specific linguistic facts, psycholinguistics draws extensively descriptive and comparative descriptive approach.

The basic status of the psycholinguistic approach has always been disregarded in the field of foreign language teaching and learning, it is a matter of fact that this field of study is the first initiator of the area of foreign language teaching and learning. The psycholinguistic approach has provided the theoretical ground for the flourishing of many second language learning theories and methods [5]. It is here that we see interconnection between psycholinguistics and language teaching.

Second language teaching and in particular has undergone a number of radical changes over the last 150 years. Richards and Rogers [12] state that methods of teaching derive from theoretical models of language and learning. Nowadays psycholinguistic theory is being applied to teaching reading and emphasizes the importance of using semantically complete readings. Research shows that reading errors change significantly as the reader progresses into a passage, supporting the position that the reader builds on a previous store of knowledge by adding

information from the reading. This finding suggests that successful reading lessons depend not only on the students' efficient use of strategies and knowledge, but also on the nature of the reading passage. Following directly from this perspective, the goals of teachers are: (a) to train students to determine beforehand their goals and expectations for a given reading activity; (b) to teach students to use reading strategies appropriate to the task at hand; (c) to encourage students to take risks, to guess, to ignore their impulses to always be correct; and (d) to give students practice and encouragement in using the minimum number of syntactic/semantic clues to obtain the maximum amount of information when reading.

In the following section we are going to discuss reading skills that intermediate and advanced students should possess to be successful readers.

**Reading skills.** At the intermediate and advanced levels we can assume that students possess a basic competence in English and that our primary task is to teach reading comprehension skills. Reading comprehension is a complex process in which the reader interacts with the text and employs students' knowledge, experience and information to extract the significant information/important information, understand the intentions of the writer, and goes beyond what is written to guess at hidden, unstated or implied meaning on the text.

Reading within a psycholinguistic framework provides students with practice in a variety of skills and strategies for comprehending. The so-called "reading skills" texts generally provide opportunities to read a variety of passages for different purposes - e.g., to obtain a general sense of the passage (skimming); to discover a specific fact or piece of information (scanning); to obtain a comprehensive understanding, as in reading a textbook; and to evaluate information in order to determine where it fits into one's personal system of beliefs (critical reading).

**Skimming.** Skimming is quick reading for the general drift of a passage. It is an activity which is appropriate when there is not time to read something carefully or when trying to decide if careful reading is merited. Since we assume that students skim in their own languages, we see our task as helping them to transfer this skill to English [11]. Although tips such as "Take advantage of chapter titles and subheadings," "Read first and last sentences in the paragraphs," and "Let your eyes travel quickly, catching adjectives and adverbs" are useful, the only way to improve this skill is to be forced to read more and more rapidly and to formulate appropriate questions before beginning.

**Scanning.** Scanning is similar to skimming in that the reader is pushing himself through a selection at an initially uncomfortable rate, but the search is more focused since the information needed is very specific-usually a date, a number, or a place [11]. Before scanning the reader forms preliminary questions such as: «When will the candidates debate the tax reform bill?» or «What was the final score of the rugby match?». In addition to teaching students to take advantage of textual clues, as they do in skimming, we should also make them aware of the graphic form the answer is likely to take: written number, numeral, capitalized word, or short phrase containing key words.

**Reading for thorough comprehension.** Reading for thorough comprehension is reading in order to master the total message of the writer, both main points and supporting details [11]. It is that stage of understanding at which the reader is able to paraphrase the author's ideas but has not yet made a critical evaluation of those ideas. This type of reading is the primary concern of most reading classes. In fact, the most common weakness of reading courses is that this style of reading the careful word-by-word approach-is practiced exclusively, without recognition of the fact that it is not necessary for some tasks and insufficient for others.

**Critical reading.** Critical reading requires us to push our students beyond the "thorough comprehension" stage of reading, to encourage them to react to readings with the same critical judgement they probably exercise when reading in their native languages [11]. This critical reading ability is often suspended when students undertake reading tasks in a second language,

perhaps because they feel a great sense of accomplishment merely at having deciphered the author's message. In order to build critical reading skills, we need to find readings which argue a point of view or which presume certain attitudes on the part of the readers.

Factors affecting reading comprehension. Research on factors affecting reading comprehension research recognized that many of the variables are related to the second language reading process [6]. Schema and vocabulary were identified as two major factors affecting reading comprehension.

Schema theory (background knowledge). Conventionally, reading comprehension is considered to only engage the learning of vocabulary and the interpretation of meaning [1]. Therefore, traditional language teaching methods involved teaching the bottom-up aspects of comprehension, such as word recognition and grammar [16]. However, following subsequent research into the effect of background knowledge on comprehension, the top-down aspects of comprehension such as schema theory became popular. Authors of informational texts presuppose that readers already have some background knowledge about the topic. They exclude information they supposed to be part of the readers' previous knowledge. Thus, they do not give readers thorough background information concerning their materials [8]. There are various types of background knowledge in reading. Formal and content schemata are considered to be the most common types of background knowledge. Formal schema or textual schema [13], can be defined as knowledge of language and linguistic rules regarding how the text is prepared and recognizing the main characteristics of a particular genre of writing. Content schema, is referred to knowledge of the content [3]. There are two various types of content schema: background knowledge and subject matter knowledge. The background knowledge may or may not be related to the content of a special text, and the subject matter knowledge is related to the text content and the topic directly.

Vocabulary knowledge. It has been proved that good readers have a higher level of vocabulary. Measures of reader's vocabulary knowledge routinely correlate highly with measures of reading comprehension, and are often, in deed, the single predictor of text comprehension. However, research has shown that in order to get sufficient comprehension, readers require knowing 95-98% of the words in the text [8]. This level of knowledge needs the reader to have a passive vocabulary of up to 20,000 words. According to R. Anderson [1], fluency requires that a reader knows between 90 and 95 percent of the words in a text, and these words need to be understood automatically with the smallest conscious effort. Thus lexical access is declared to be essential in reading because it is the central repeating process in reading.

The findings of the study. From the previous sections it has become clear that a modern psycholinguistic perspective on reading is based on insights derived from contemporary linguistics and cognitive psychology. From this perspective reading is viewed as a complex information-processing skill. The reader is seen as an active, planning decision-making individual who coordinates a number of skills and strategies to facilitate comprehension. There exists a direct relation with the premise that states reading as an active skill and as an active mental process within which the reader is able to apply and develop different intellectual capacities such as, finding the main idea of a text, inferring, analyzing, drawing conclusions, distinguishing facts from non-facts, predicting, visualizing, among others.

The hypothesis of our research was as follows: knowing the reading preferences of the would-be specialists in computing can help the teacher select motivating texts for reading and discussing activities during the English lessons and the most appropriate techniques (reading the text intensively or extensively, reading the titles of chapters and paragraphs, subtitles, the first and last sentences, the figures and pictures, reading for the gist – «skimming», looking for a certain piece of information – «scanning», etc).

The purpose was to find out the reading preferences of the students and the questionnaire included the following questions:

1. Do you like reading?
2. Do you often read to get information?
3. Do you often read for pleasure?
4. Do you read the same kind of texts in English and in Ukrainian?
5. Have you noticed any particular factors that might influence the reading speed and understanding of the English texts?

The students admitted that they enjoy reading literature in general, (on-line) newspapers and magazines in Ukrainian and English, classical literature, books of adventure and love, history books, science fiction, books on psychology and personal development. They also read professional literature about computer science, computer systems and networks, economic cybernetics, information systems, informational and distant technologies. The factors mentioned by the learners as triggering reading and understanding are: reading practice combined with listening, reading passages from books and newspapers, titles (especially those written in bold). The respondents enjoyed reading and discussing the texts linked to their profession, especially those related to the following topics: "Electrical Engineering and Electrotechnologies", "Automation and Computer-Integrated Technologies", "Building", "Transport Technologies", "Information Control Systems and Technologies", "Economic Cybernetics", "Computer Economic Monitoring", "Automation of Control Processes", "Electrification and Automation in Agriculture", "Energy in Agricultural Production", "Electrotechnical Complexes and Systems".

According to the data presented in Table 1, we can conclude that majority of students do enjoy reading (78%). However, students read for pleasure (54%) rather than to get specific information (43%). 77% of students choose different texts for reading in Ukrainian and English and only 39% of students could identify the factors that might influence the reading speed and understanding of the English texts.

Table 1

#### Percentage of Yes/No answers to questionnaire

Q	Yes	No
1	78%	22%
2	43%	57%
3	54%	6%
4	23%	77%
5	39%	61%

Among the factors affecting their reading students mentioned motivation, lack of time, prior knowledge deficit, lack of vocabulary (terminology), poor understanding of syntax, length of texts, style of the text, etc.

Thus, schema and vocabulary were identified by students as two major factors affecting reading comprehension as it had been stated before.

Conclusion. Reading is a multifaceted, complex skill made up of a number of psychological, physical and social elements. Just as there are many sides to knowing a language, so there are many aspects to effective, mature reading.

The results of the survey and the discussions with each learner have led to the following conclusions: university students – would-be specialists in computing enjoy reading and acquiring various reading techniques ("skimming", "scanning") according to the intended purpose; they are aware of the volume of information that can be received, through the English



language, in exceptional cases (hazard emergency situations) for the ship and crew safety (this depends on the speed of deciphering messages and taking appropriate measures); and that guessing the meaning of words in context is less time-consuming and even enjoyable. To improve learners' reading skills the teacher must check: their oral reading accuracy skills (in terms of pronunciation, grammar and intonation), if there are spelling problems linked to certain sounds or intonation); vocabulary richness and variety of grammatical forms, reading speed that can help them adapt to situations and take part in discussions in order to achieve effective communication; reading a great amount of texts can help ensure independence - in discussions or conversations learners have to find the appropriate words or phrases to make themselves understood, to avoid long pauses; encouraging learners who avoid reading aloud in the presence of their to encourage initiatives in conducting a conversation by studying texts commonly found in IT field.

Moreover, the purposes of reading should be the same in class as they are in real life: 1) to obtain a specific fact, or piece of information (scanning), 2) to obtain the general idea of the author (skimming), 3) to obtain a comprehensive understanding of a reading, as in reading a textbook (thorough comprehension), or 4) to evaluate information in order to determine where it fits into one's own system of beliefs (critical reading).

University students should become conscious of the purpose for reading, so that they will be able to determine the proper approaches to a reading task.

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