

GIVING VOICE TO WRITTEN WORDS

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Abstract: *The article aims to present the role of reading aloud in a foreign language class. Why is this ability to read important in student learning? What is its place and function in learning? How? 'or' What to do so that reading aloud can serve expression not only oral but also written? We assume that learning foreign languages is very useful for those who need to acquire basic communication skills in a short period of time. Nevertheless, it must also be appropriate for those who learn the foreign language with a professional purpose, and who will have to communicate correctly and to pronounce well in specialized contexts. We consider reading aloud to be a good technique for memorizing certain information over the long term. In addition, it opens up a cultural, social and emotional dimension of the language. Unfortunately, this activity has been wrongly overlooked. Therefore, in the first section of the paper, we will try to rehabilitate the reading aloud activity in the foreign language class. The next section discusses the implications and benefits of reading aloud for advanced students. The final section presents activities and objectives of reading aloud, as well as certain strategies used to facilitate the initiation of spontaneous speech and communication.*

Keywords: reading aloud, understanding, communication, strategy

1. Introduction

Learning a foreign language is a complex process, because not only do you learn new words, new grammar rules, and another culture but, on top of that, you have to learn to articulate new sounds in a spoken chain, that involves new gymnastics for your mouth. At the same time, when speaking the language, you no longer fully recognize your voice because the frequencies of each language are different. To feel at ease quickly, it is essential for learners to read aloud, whether it is lessons, texts, or anything else that interests them in the target language.

Reading aloud has a very ancient use. Since the beginning of modern civilisation, alphabetic writing was merely a "canning" of speech, and reading had no other purpose than to reproduce this word as faithfully as

possible, for the benefit of those who could not read. The ancients read aloud. In the Middle Ages, when a king received a written message, he had a clerk at his disposal to make up for his noble ignorance of the alphabet and translate the silent signs into sounding words [1].

According to the definitions given by the *Cambridge English* dictionary [2], reading is the skill or activity of getting information from written words, an occasion for a literary work or a formal text to be read aloud to a group of people, or the way in which one understands something. *Le Petit Robert* dictionary [3] also gives several definitions of *reading*: an action of deciphering what is written; the act of becoming aware of the content of a writing; the interpretation of a text according to one or more of the codes it implies, in other words, an art.

2. Reading aloud, an activity to be rehabilitated

Reading aloud is not a fashionable activity and may never have been. Research in this area is rather scarce. The act of reading outloud is done especially in the English-speaking world, and it is limited to reading in the mother tongue and reading done aloud to small children. Several authors [4] have experimented with young children, often at pre-school age or very soon after entering primary school. The experiments consisted in reading stories by the teachers, following different approaches such as different types of texts, texts read once or repeated; questions asked before, during and after reading or only after reading, etc. All the authors note a positive influence of these readings, which one can especially see in the enrichment of the vocabulary.

We are convinced that this is a very appropriate activity for an effective foreign language class and with advanced level learners. In the social practices of this activity, those who read aloud do not just read. In reality, they communicate to others, orally, the reading they have done before [5].

3. Implications and benefits of reading aloud for advanced students

Helene Huot, in an article published in *School Psychology*, writes that "as much as mastering silent reading, the conquest of reading aloud intelligent, that is to say linguistically significant, is a goal to which school should not renounce"[6].

There are very functional and very interesting reading aloud situations. You can read for yourself or for others. The first case, reading for yourself, is that of an actor repeating his role or of a student learning his course by heart. The ability to read aloud for others is not a mechanical consequence of learning to read. Reading for others is not limiting, there are many situations of this type, and it would be highly recommended to consider them in teaching reading in the foreign language class.

Reading is a specific activity, always

secondary to the act of silent reading: you must have read and understood the text to be able to read it aloud, you must have decided what you want to bring forward, the feeling you would like to convey to your audience.

When we ask students to read aloud, we have them do three main things:

- first, a silent visual reading operation on a piece of text, less, equal or greater than a sentence, with attribution of meaning: I read, I understand;

- second, a diction operation: I say what I have read and understood;

- third, a feedback operation which takes into account the effect produced by the reader's diction either on him/herself (in the case of reading for oneself), or his/her audience (in the case reading for others).

Reading aloud is subject to a specific learning process, linked, of course, to classroom activities, without losing sight of the objective of improving students' communication skills. Therefore, students should never be asked to read a text aloud at the outset, but they should always be given time for personal reading beforehand. Reading aloud is a good technique for retaining certain information over the long term, as it requires you to slow down, focus and think about the content. What students in English, German or French, languages, where the pronunciation differs greatly from written language, usually want, is to be able to quickly communicate, get the message across. Nevertheless, they lack accuracy and precision in form and pronunciation. The question that arises is the following: is it only important to get the message across, or should we also think about how to get it across? It certainly depends on the learners' goals; for students who learn the language only to be able to communicate during holidays abroad, being able to get the message across, even if it contains errors, is enough. For those students who envisage leaving abroad for professional purposes, for courses and trainings, that is to say as future experts,

being able to get the message across is not enough; this message must also be linguistically correct and well pronounced in order to avoid serious misunderstandings.

Reading aloud multiplies this beneficial effect. Students and teachers have long known the benefits of reading a textbook in unison. Repeating facts and having the opportunity to discuss them helps to consolidate what has been learned. At the same time, this can be a real boost for self-confidence.

If reading aloud makes students more sensitive to the text, it is likely that their increased attention to tone, diction, structure and storytelling will also improve the way they write. Professional authors have long known the benefits of reading their manuscripts aloud. In the article *The Benefits of Speaking Aloud*, published in the Harvard Business Review [7], Jerry Weissman recommends recording oneself. Simply speaking the text solves common problems such as awkward use of phrases and poor punctuation. The natural rhythm and pauses of the language thus reveal themselves.

4. Strategies used to facilitate the initiation of spontaneous speech and communication

How to build reading aloud so that it can help improve the oral and written expression of foreign language students?

When we talk about reading in a foreign language class, we use this expression mainly as a synonym for written comprehension. But this is not always the case: when a teacher talks about a student who "reads well", he or she probably does not ask him or herself the question of comprehension, but focuses mainly on what he or she hears, that is to say, on the sound production of the student, on the pronunciation. Why? Because when learning a language, it is best for students to first focus on the pronunciation rules, then read quietly while listening to their teacher

or the audio model. Once they feel ready, students can start reading the same text aloud. Listening to the target language regularly will allow them to better imitate the sounds and melody of the language. For reading to be of good quality, the teacher has to think about the learner's participation as well as their cognitive process, says Sally Schauwitz, an American researcher: "Words are only identified, understood, stored or found in memory after having been broken down into phonemes by the phonological module of the brain". [8] Reading is therefore both an act of decoding and understanding. [9] You have to take into account these two dimensions in language teaching from the start of learning.

This complex activity allows the teacher to do a diagnostic or formative assessment concerning students' comprehension of the writing, their gaps, the assets, the progress they make. As Annie Pourtier said, "reading aloud opens the door to educationally exciting perspectives, provided the teacher gives up the idea that reading aloud is used primarily to test reading skills. On the other hand, it must become a learning object in itself and beyond the support of an aesthetic experience"[10].

When reading aloud, students themselves become aware of their own mistakes more easily as they have to follow both their eyes and their voice.

Anyone who wants to progress in this type of reading must be aware of the conditions and qualities that improve its efficiency. Teaching interventions must have for objective this awareness. The teacher's criticism will carry mainly on diction: voice volume (loud enough, but not too loud), clear articulation, tone, fair and pleasant. Furthermore, the teacher must ensure that criticism remains constructive, appropriate and moderate, helping the reader become aware of what improves reading.

How? or what to do so that reading aloud can serve to improve both students' oral,

and their written expression and communication skills? The most difficult mastery to acquire is probably that coordination between the (silent) reading of a piece of text and its diction.

Oralizing a text facilitates the students' correct representations of the relationship between sound and the grapheme. It also helps students discover punctuation, evidence of the syntactic division, the value of certain keywords, the style effects, at the same time as they learn the written language. So, they have to build a representation of the different signs and their functioning. This construction is essential so that the segmentation of texts, the grouping or separation of ideas, their interpretation, are carried out in accordance with the indications given by the author. We can therefore think, even if this remains to be demonstrated, that reading aloud contributes both to improving understanding and to facilitating learning in the treatment of a text.

Moreover, students realize that reading aloud is an act of communication:

5. Conclusions

The reading aloud activities practiced are diverse: they essentially aim at developing the knowledge of the foreign language as such. We do a literal explanation of words, we translate the texts, we memorize them, we recite them aloud, we use them as a point of support for training in pronunciation.

To speak another language is to learn to become someone else. Reading aloud is a great exercise for getting comfortable with "your new self."

Reading aloud opens the door to exciting educational perspectives, provided that the teacher abandons the idea that reading aloud is primarily used to check readers' skills. On the other hand, it must become an object of learning in itself, and beyond the support of an aesthetic experience.

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