

THE EXTENSIVE AND COHESIVE READING IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE / LECTURE APPROFONDIE ET COHERENTE DANS UNE LANGUE ETRANGERE¹

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Abstract: *The purpose of our paper is to highlight that extensive and cohesive reading has an important role to play in EFL learning. Extensive reading broadens and increases the students' vocabulary exposing them to various registers of the target language. Cohesion refers to the relations of meaning that exist within the text and that define it as a text. The teacher can help the students use various cohesive chains, which form the backbones of different types of texts. He also needs to monitor each student's reading and offer guidance and encouragement. Besides, the selection of the reading material should be appropriate to the learners' linguistic level and their cultural particulars.*

Key-words: *extensive reading, effective communication, cohesive chains, teacher's guidance, sources, selection of reading materials.*

Reading is an interactive process of communication. The interaction between the writer and the reader is made possible via the text. It is through the text that the writer encodes his message, and it is also through the text that the reader gets the meaning of the message by decoding it.

Reading is a skill that each language teacher has to strive to help his pupils improve so that they will be better able to benefit from learning, which is generally reading-based. If a student is poor in the target language, he will find it difficult to understand a text written in that language.

1. Individual Extensive Reading

Extensive reading refers to the less rigorously supervised reading that students will do both in and outside the class. The teacher's guidance will be crucial at the beginning, and the reading texts will usually be those of the students' choosing. They need to read extensively for the following reasons:

- Wide reading broadens and increases their vocabulary, which is important for effective communication;
- Extensive reading exposes them to different registers of the target language that they will meet in varied contexts;
- Reading a text in its entirety builds confidence, and consistent wide reading aids concentration for reading by expanding their attention span;
- In an organized system, the extensive-reading lesson provides a break from the rigour of closely supervised lessons and enables the student to get lost in a text which really interests him. It also releases the teacher to do things for the students, e.g., discussing titles, reports, etc.
- Skills learned through reading are transferred to other areas of language, such as writing or speaking;
- Reading opens up a whole new world, enabling the reader to learn about people, cultures and outlooks. It also sharpens judgment, as one's own outlook on life is broadened.

All these reasons make it imperative that language teachers should encourage extensive reading.

Before discussing how to encourage or initiate extensive reading, we must consider the resources – courses, books, magazines, etc. – that should be used. The

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teacher can ask each student to contribute with a magazine or article. These can be numbered and registered so that eventually, when each student has read all the materials, or as many of them, as his ability permits, they can be returned to the original donors. Other sources may include donors, publishing houses, Internet, colleagues, former students, or even other institutions. Once the teacher has established an efficient reading stock, he must start his students on the rewarding road of reading books in a foreign language.

2. Cohesion and the Teaching of EFL Reading

Cohesion refers to the relations of meaning that exist within the text, and that define it as a text. Cohesion occurs where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one presupposes the other, in the sense it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it. Cohesion holds segments of a text together, making it a semantic edifice, just as mortar does bricks or stones in a building. The importance of cohesion lies in the continuity it expresses between one part of the text and another. This continuity is necessary for the interpretation of texts.

Cohesion provides the main thread of a text by showing that some entity or circumstance, some relevant feature or argument persists from one moment to another in the semantic process as the meaning unfolds. It also enables the reader to supply all the missing items necessary for the interpretation of a text.

In texts, especially in spoken texts, there are generally a lot of omissions and substitutions. This is because the interlocutors are in a direct interaction, and their mutual understanding is made easily by their facial expressions, gestures, and other linguistic or non-linguistic contexts. But in reading, the reader cannot appeal to the writer for clarification of meaning. Therefore, it is necessary for him to supply the missing items himself. Besides, the continuity expressed by cohesion constitutes the context that provides the basis for making predictions and building expectations in reading.

3. Cohesive Devices in EFL Reading

An efficient reader reads faster and gets more of the message, whereas a poor reader reads slowly and gets less information. The efficient reader relies on strategies which yield the most reliable prediction with minimum use of the information available.

The major task of an EFL reading course is to cultivate efficient readers. One of the ways that the teacher can help the students is to teach them how to use cohesive devices as textual markers indicating what they should pay attention to and key words important for the minimum use of visual information. We can help our students identify different organizational patterns by analyzing a few types of cohesive chains, namely, the referential chain, the chain of ellipsis and substitution, the conjunctive chain, and the lexical chain.

- **The Referential Chain** – It is produced by a combination of reference and lexical cohesion (repetition and synonymy). It can be divided into three types: the participant chain, the circumstantial chain, and the process chain. The participant chain is formed with participants – or anything, such as objects and institution, which can have a participant role in a transitivity structure. The circumstantial chain is formed with circumstantial events, and the process chain with the process itself.

- **The Chain of Ellipsis and Substitution** – This type of chain is more characteristically found in dialogues, where the typical sequence is based on pairs or triads or longer structures that are related by interpersonal meaning. The major difference between this type and the first lies in that the first type shows the persistence of identical referents, but this type shows the constant shifting in the role relationships among the interlocutors, the sort of ‘same but different’ semantic relation. Besides, in

the other types of chain all the links of the chains can be found in the text, whereas in this type they are missing, and the reader has to supply them in order to interpret the text.

● **The Conjunctive Chain** – This type generally expresses a range of meanings in three domains: elaboration, extension, and enhancement. It is typical of description, exposition, and argumentation. Different conjunctive chains, together with other cohesive chains, form various organizational patterns of types of text. There are four types of conjunctive chain:

a. *The Spatial Chain* is generally composed of words of location and direction. It is typical of description of the location of places, objects and people in space. It is also used to describe movement through space;

b. *The Temporal Chain* may express chronological order or sequence of events, steps, etc. It is usually composed of words indicating time or sequence. It is typical of description of the history of a person or an event, or the development of a machine or an idea;

c. *The Cause-Effect Chain* consists of words indicating causes, effects, and reasons. It is typical of exposition and argumentation. It is most often used in the sciences and the social sciences;

d. *The Chain of Analysis* is also composed of words indicating order or sequence, but it expresses the pattern of thesis-example in making an analysis. It is typical of exposition and argumentation.

● **The Lexical Chain** – As lexical cohesion has three major forms: repetition, synonymy, and collocation, a lexical chain can therefore be formed with these cohesive devices. Lexical chains may be used to indicate different organizational patterns:

a. *Comparison-contrast* – This kind of pattern consists of words indicating similarity or difference. It is typical of exposition that compares or contrasts people, places, objects, or events;

b. *Definition* – This kind of pattern is typical of exposition, most often used in the sciences and the social sciences;

c. *Generalization* – This type of pattern is composed of words indicating frequency, probability, and quantity. It is typical of exposition in which different levels of generality are used.

4. How to Ignite the Students' Interest in Reading

First of all, the teacher needs to read all the books and materials, so that he can grade the students according to difficulty and provide guidance to them on what to read according to their different levels and abilities. Both of these considerations are important, because, as with any learning, there must be a sense of achievement. Success will encourage the students to desire to read more.

If the teacher notices students reading interesting texts, they can be asked to tell the class about what they are or have been reading. The teacher can make up questions to ask the students about what they have been told.

Before reading becomes a habit, the teacher needs to be able to monitor each student's reading so he can offer guidance and give encouragement. He may give the students a weekly/monthly book report, which is very useful for getting concrete information on what each student is interested, and for linking reading and utilization of the language that the students have already acquired. The teacher also needs to keep a book-report of what pupils are reading. This form is to ensure that each student is reading.

Ideally, the teacher should help his students read broadly: magazines, newspapers, fiction, biographies, stories, novels, etc. Reading different types of writing will expose students to varieties of language use according to subject and intent. Once reading is

established, there have to be ways of maintaining it and motivating students to do it on their own.

5. Selecting the Reading Material

If the selection is large enough and based on an intelligent assessment of our students' real interests, rather than on our own interests or what we believe their interests should be, the chances of hitting upon the right topics are greatly increased. The question of authentic materials is a topic for discussion in itself. The powerful overall value of employing 'real' materials, not only for their linguistic content but also for their cultural impact and interest, can hardly be denied. Whereas adapted materials may be more appropriate for the oral and written skills, as students may use their own personal style and level of competence, authentic material is essential for reading and listening.

Besides, the selection of authentic materials and what we expect our students to understand from them should be appropriate to the linguistic levels and cultural particulars of the students involved. Nonetheless, the EFL student is somewhat privileged as an authentic materials reader. Authentic specialized topics in English related to academic or scientific field may not seem complicated to the specialist.

Moreover, by using what he/she already knows, the student applies the cognitive processes so essential to making intelligent guesses on content meaning. Students are also allowed and encouraged to use their dictionaries. Since there is no pressure regarding testing, grades, or exercises, they tend to use their dictionaries much less than when under these pressures. They read for the message and only look up words that impede the reception of meaning. The specialized materials may be the perfect opportunity for both EFL and ESP students, who use a foreign language as a professional working tool in order to discover that English is a form of communication used for as many purposes as the native language is.

Except for books, courses and magazines, that can sometimes be too long for class activity time, there are a great many additional sources, like business correspondence, newspapers, catalogues, handbooks, manuals, and anything else we read in the course of our daily lives. Most publishing houses and cultural departments of embassies of English-speaking countries are willing to provide some useful material for universities and other educational institutions.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have made an attempt to present the extensive reading, to show its advantages, to discuss some means of encouraging and maintaining it, and to show how reading can be linked to other language skills. Even when the reading habit has been well established, the teacher should always take time to share with his students interesting topics from the materials he himself has read. This will make them to read more, as they can realize that knowledge gives them power and there is no time when one can say that he has read enough.

On the other hand, we have found that cohesion is quite important in the interpretation of texts and we demonstrated how the teacher can help his students improve their EFL reading by analyzing cohesive chains and using cohesive devices. From our analysis we can conclude that cohesion provides the main thread of a text by showing that some entity or circumstance, some relevant feature or argument persists in the semantic process as the meanings unfold. However, for more systematic application of the theory to the teaching of EFL reading, more research is needed in order to identify the overall relationship between different cohesive chains and organizational patterns.

The enthusiasm with which the students have become involved in reading materials can only be matched by their improvement and interest in reading English as a means of communication and not just as an academic or occupational necessity.

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