



## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PROSE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: A STUDY OF THE STRATEGIES OF READING

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### ABSTRACT



Reading is a complex skill, which involves a number of psycho-physical operations. The teaching of English Prose is a major concern in our curriculum. The present day requirements call for innovative measures in teaching the prose text and a more active participation by the students in teaching – learning experiences as well as a feeling that each one is wanted in the classroom to make teaching-learning a more satisfactory experience. The present paper deals with the strategies of reading and the technicalities associated with it.

**Keywords:** *Reading, Teaching Prose, Strategies of Reading, English Language Teaching*

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## INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English Prose is a major concern of all schools and colleges, but in what shape is it and how is it poised?, if at all, to take on new tasks critical to the development of awareness and understanding the young in an age of rapidly evolving information technology. Perhaps the most dramatic development that has taken place in the field of English language teaching in the last 50 years has been the shift in its primary function from being mainly the native language of nations such as the UK or USA, to being mainly a global means of communication. The speakers of English whose L1 is another language already vastly outnumber native English speakers, and the number of such countries is growing. For most of such learners, English is no longer remaining a foreign language. This development has brought with it a number of changes in the principles and practice of English language teaching.

Methodology books of the twentieth century typically talk of the culture of the English – speaking people as the ‘target culture’ and assume that reading texts in course materials should be copied or adapted from ‘authentic’ texts from English-speaking countries. This has also changed. Courses today may include not only texts from English-speaking countries, but also those written in English, or translated into it, from anywhere in the world. And in most teaching contexts, it is inappropriate to talk about a ‘target’ culture, meaning a native-speaker one. Most learners need to become aware of an international, cosmopolitan set of cultural customs, literature, art forms and so on, rather than those of a single community.

It is therefore, more important in these days to foster multicultural awareness on the part of our students than to teach them particular codes of conduct or traditions. We cannot, obviously, teach them all the cultures of the world. However, we can expose them to a sample though our materials making them sensitive to the kinds of differences from their own cultures that they may come across and foster intercultural competence.

## TEACHING PROSE

The objectives of teaching prose are not much different from those that have discussed for

teaching reading. The basic purpose of a prose passage is to help learners comprehend its content and language so that they are able to answer the questions given at the end of the passage or in the beginning. This is possible when we provide opportunities to learners to read the passage on their own silently, without any interpretations. In this regard, the techniques of skimming and scanning should be learners’ dependent. So, the principles that we have discussed in relation to developing reading skills will be relevant for teaching any prose passage that is meant for intensive reading.

The importance of silent reading as a technique has been stressed earlier as it makes students efficient and fast readers. Loud reading slows down reading speed and diverts the attention of the reader. There are other reasons also for discouraging loud reading:

- Reading aloud involves speaking (pronunciation, intonation, pitch, accent, etc.) and nothing to do with reading comprehension.
- If the teacher reads aloud and explains the ‘meaning’ of the passage, it is listening and not reading that is being taught.
- Our eyes move faster on the page when we read silently. In listening to the passage, we are slower for we may not get all the words correctly (due to noise within or outside the class, or because of some hearing problem).
- Not all students read at the same speed: some read faster than others. If the passage is read aloud, everyone is forced to follow the text at the same pace.

What is said above does not mean that we cannot read anything aloud in the class. Perhaps, there are some activities which cannot be appreciated without reading aloud. For instance, nursery rhymes, at the elementary level, cannot be appreciated if they are not read and recited aloud. A poem can best be appreciated if it is read aloud: the purpose is to help learners understand the music that a poet creates through words. However, a prose text is best understood when it is read silently.

Teaching of prose texts for examination purposes, involves not only comprehending their content but also the language associated with that



content. Most of our English syllabuses at the school and college levels will have prescribed textbook that, among other things, contains the different prose passage relating to science, one may be for detailed and another for non-detailed study. Generally, such texts are meant to be read intensively in order to understand their content, the writer's intentions and viewpoint, which are mostly done through the 'comprehension questions' given at the end of each text. These questions can involve skimming, scanning and into the intensive reading techniques to answer. For this purpose, the teacher will have to help his students to practice these skills so that they are able to write answers to the questions correctly and within prescribed time.

One of the difficulties that students face in answering these comprehension questions is that they are not tackled in the class unless the whole passage has been read. By the time, the teacher finishes the last part of the passage students have already forgotten their previous portions. The result is that students rely on readymade answers from 'guides'. It has been customary to treat prose, criticism and language in the same manner, employing exclusively the lecture method and mostly rendering students as passive listeners. Some teachers justify this on the ground that it saves time, and ensure that all the students in a class receive uniform instruction. They believe that students should listen first to the lecture for a general comprehension of the subject matter, and later go to the texts for close reading and greater clarity of understanding. However, as the process of learning varies considerably from student to student, it is doubtful whether these claims can be met.

The present day requirements call for innovative measures in teaching the prose text and a more active participation by the students in teaching – learning experiences as well as a feeling that each one is wanted in the classroom to make teaching-learning a more satisfactory experience.

#### **TECHNIQUES OF TEACHING PROSE**

In this age of explosion of knowledge, the skill of reading plays an important role in the life of every educated man. A vast majority of our pupils will ultimately have to use English as a library language and therefore, reading or the ability to understand

the written language will be the most useful skill for them. While the importance of oral approach is recognized all over, it is to be remembered that language learning is a process where all the language skills listening, speaking, reading and writing have to be integrated; further, the skills can be mastered only by exercising the particular skill in actual communication situation. But, most classroom situations do not provide opportunities to practice the skills of listening and speaking and even if it is done in some cases, it appears to be contrived and artificial. However in spoken English is something beyond the scope of the system, reading becomes an alternative and holds the key to the development of real communicative skills in English for Indian learners.

In our schools and colleges textbooks are followed for teaching English as a second language. The textbooks are written according to the structural approach, graded with one or two new teaching items introduced with every lesson. The textbooks serve as a tool through which various language skills have to be taught. Before we go into the techniques of teaching the prose lessons, it would be appropriate to discuss the skill of reading.

#### **THE SKILLS OF READING**

Reading is a complex skill, which involves a number of operations, which go on simultaneously. Who is said to have acquired the skills of comprehending written matter will have the ability to:

- Read a passage at normal speed
- Understand the structured and lexical meanings of the words, phrases and sentences.
- Read aloud, with correct pronunciation, accent, stress and intonation.
- Guess the meaning of an unknown word from context.
- Consult a dictionary to find out the meaning of an unfamiliar word.
- Find the required information in the right places, without having to go through entire passage.
- Read silent by without moving the lips.
- Identify the 'topic-sentence' of a paragraph.
- Make a summary of the important points of the passage.



- Look at the text from the writer's point of view and infer the mood, opinion of the writer.
- Recognize the technicalities of writing punctuation, capitalization, paragraph indentation etc.
- Appreciate the figures of speech used, by the writer.

### THE PROCESS OF READING

Basically, the process of reading may be divided into three stages. They are:

- a. The recognition stage
- b. The structuring stage
- c. The interpretation stage.

The first stage called 'the recognition stage' is the stage where the learner simply recognizes the graphic counterparts of the phonological items. He recognizes the spoken words in its written form.

The second stage called 'the structuring stage' is the stage where the learner sees the syntactic relationships of the items and understands the structural meaning of the syntactic units.

The third stage called 'the interpretation stage' is the highest level in the process of reading. The learner is now at a stage, where he/she can comprehend the importance of a word, a phrase, or a sentence, in the learner can see through the inner meaning of implication of a statement- the way it is to be taken. This is the ultimate goal to be, attained in the process of reading. It is at this stage when the learner knows what he is gaining by reading-pleasure or information.

Reading skills are of two kinds- the intensive reading skill and the extensive reading skill. Though only one or two text books are used to teach all language skills, generally the intensive reading skill is cultivated through the detailed text book while the extensive reading skill is practiced through the supplementary readers.

### CONCLUSION

However, teaching prose is very important for a teacher of English to update herself/himself of the latest developments, changes and trends in language teaching and also adapt teaching methods to suit and fulfill the learners' needs. The present day requirement and trend suggests that there is a need for more creativity and innovation with regards to the

teaching procedures. Only then, language learning can become a fruitful and meaningful exercise. The method, approach or technique used in the classroom should invoke the active participation by the learners in the teaching-learning process.

The skill of reading plays a pivotal role in the life of every educated man. It is the useful skill for people who want to use it as a library language. Reading is a complex skill which involves a number of simultaneous operations. The process of reading can be divided into three stages and there are two kinds of reading, they are intensive and extensive.

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