



Research Paper

## A Study on Developing Reading, Literary Competence and the Communicative Approach

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**ABSTRACT:** English has been taught and learnt as second language in our country for years. Language teaching in general has been viewed as teaching the four skills of language, namely LSR and W for a long time. But with the changes in the creative nature of language and its ever changing roles in the recent years, English language has acquired the status of an international language and the language of internet. The need for identifying a language for communication with the other, whose language is not one's mother tongue, has all the more become highly important. English language has been identified for this purpose as it is the language of business, used both in transacting the business of everyday living and in building social and personal relations. So our country needs English, primarily not for social survival but as an additional language. Such a language serves one's cognitive needs and in the retrieval and generation of knowledge. "We need it as a language of learning a language that can satisfy many cognitive needs" Tickoo, 1991. [4]

**KEY WORDS:** LSRW, international language, communication, cognitive needs

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Language in its natural manifestation is essentially communication. Communication therefore is what language learners have to be taught and classrooms therefore, should provide the context for users of language which are as close to authentic communication as possible. Another function that language can perform in a country like ours is the 'mathetic' Halliday, 1975, 1985 function. [10]

Having thus established the need for teaching English, the ways of promoting language acquisition and the different skills that need promotion are discussed in the following sections of this article.

Theories and models of language acquisition have tended to focus on the role of oral language. However many studies have revealed the importance of reading in the acquisition of language. Development of competence in a second language requires 'not systematization of language input or maximization of planned practice but conditions in which learners engage in an effort to cope with communication' Prabhu, 1987 [7]

Languages are acquired by understanding messages rather than merely producing them. "We do not acquire language by producing it or learning about it" Krashen, 1989.

Drawing on current understanding of language use as social behaviour, purposeful, and always in context, proponents of communicative language teaching offer a view of the language learner as a partner in learning; they encourage learner participation in communicative events and self assessment of progress. The hidden agenda in such a situation for the learner is to is take communicative risks and to focus on the development of strategies for understanding and decoding message in print.

Earlier, language teaching was looked at as teaching communication in terms of language skills LSR and W. These skill categories were widely accepted and they were collectively described as active skills, such as speaking and writing and passive skills such as reading and listening. However today, listeners and readers are no longer regarded as passive. They are seen as active participants in the negotiation of meaning. Schemata, expectations and top-down / bottom-up processing are among the terms now used to capture the necessarily complex interactive nature of this negotiation. The development of reading thus becomes important.

#### The Place of Reading:

Reading is a complex interaction of automatic and intentional cognitive processes involving all kinds of prior knowledge which the reader brings to the reading tasks. This includes bringing with him/her the knowledge of content, knowledge of 'rhetorical' structure, linguistic knowledge, knowledge of the word and so

on and thus reading becomes a function of both reader, and text variables and their interaction during reading. Reading has been looked at as the primary source of language input for learners. "Reading comprehension is a function of the interaction of the text structure with readers formal schemata" Urquart, 1984. [1]

Further, as comprehending of the new structure or a vocabulary item in input is effected by means of contextual and extra linguistic clues, it can be said that reading promotes acquisition of the target language. "Comprehensible input under the right condition is... the essential ingredient for acquisition" Krashen, 1983 Further reading has what is called the transfer of 'training effect' and is a 'general power' West, 1926 which once learned in one language can show itself in the reading of another and hence the primacy of reading in any language- teaching programs.

**'What is reading?'** is the next question that is discussed in the following section. Reading, as Frank Smith 1980 observes, is an amalgamation of the visual and non-visual experience. But this perception differs with the context and the material to be read and also with the differing purposes of reading which include reading for learning school related reading for pleasure and reading for survival to serve immediate needs, for example, a stop sign on the road. In this paper, the attempt is on looking at reading a text as the verbal record of a communicative act Brown and Yule 1983:3. [7] A text is to be seen, then as the physical manifestation of language - the data the reader works with to construct meaning which consist of actual marks on the page. These marks include the whole range of graphic features which follow generally agreed conventions and communicative purpose. While reading, the reader constructs meaning the discourse from the text and a reader may in all likelihood recover many discourses from a given text.

"Reading is a psycho linguistic guessing game" Goodman, 1967. [8] However, the learner or the reader uses a particular schema. Schemas or schematas are cognitive constructs which allow for the organization of information in long term memory Widdowson, 1983. [11] The mind, simulated by key words or phrases in the text or by the text, activates knowledge schema. The cognitive characteristics of schemas allow us to relate incoming information to already known information. The schemas may be changing with the genre of the text and topic of the text. The reader thus needs to bring together knowledge, the knowledge of how texts are constructed and familiarity with the discourses within a text besides the cultural context it is set in, for, reading comprehension is function of cultural knowledge.

### **Reading and Literature reading**

Though literature does not constitute a particular type of language in itself, it may reveal a higher incidence of certain kinds of linguistic features which are tightly patterned in the text. These features may include metaphor, simile, assonance repetition of vowel sounds, alliteration repetition of consonant sounds, repetition of a word or phrase, unusual syntactic pattern Ten thousand saw I at a glance, double or multiple meaning of a word, poetic lines and mixing of styles and registers. e.g.

1. Three grey Geese in a field grazing grey were the Geese and green was the grazing
2. She's been working on the project all week but she's starting to run out of steam. She doesn't feel that her mind is spending any more Lazar, 1993. [6]

Also the meaning of a literary text can never be fixed. Individual readers make sense of texts in very different ways, depending on the society they live in and their personal psychology.

Reading literature in English does encourage students to acquire language. "The study of literature makes literature itself the content or subject of a language course while the use of literature as a resource draws on literature as one source among many different kinds of texts for promoting interesting language activities." Then if our aim is the study of literature, developing 'the literary competence' of our students is a must. If we wish to use literature as resource, then our aim may not be to teach literary competence but it is possible that our students will begin to acquire it through their exposure to literary texts.

### **Reading and literary competence:**

Effective readers of a literary text possess 'literary competence' Culler, '1975 [5] .They have an implicit understanding of and familiarity with certain conventions, which allow them to take the words and convert them into literary in meaning. For example, when competent readers are given a novel or a play, they will be using certain literary conventions to follow the plot and recognize certain themes. The term literary competence is not easy to be defined. However it can be said of literary competence that it includes the knowledge of the tradition, attitude to the world of literature, skills in criticism of literature and the ability to respond to creative both literary and non-literary works.

Jane Spiro, 1991, offering a model of literary competence, observes that Literary Competence includes the following:

- understanding plain sense of the text
- understanding context
- learning to empathize
- learning to be creative
- learning to appreciate
- learning the critical framework

Literary competence thus is said to involve the ability to respond and also the ability to account for that response.

During the process of acquiring Literary Competence the reader is said to be interacting with the text not only for meaning and responding to the text but also for finding clues and means to account for that response. Also in the process the reader does acquire a great deal of new language. Thus the reading of literature at all levels becomes an additional source of language input besides the restricted input that the learner has in the classroom. It can be looked at as supplementing the available input for enhancing language acquisition. Developing the Literary Competence of the learner, then requires the teacher to provide opportunities for them to interact with the text, extract the meaning and react to the meaning extracted. What is more important in these three 'Acts' is the skill to extract the meaning(s) conveyed by the text. Besides acquiring what are called text attack skills the reader then will have to be exposed to "meaning extracting strategies" by the teacher of language / literature in the classroom. 'Tasks' or problem solving activities can be thought of developing the same. For example, let us consider the two lines from a poem by Thomas Hood; Past and Present.

My brother planted a tree on his birthday. The tree is living yet

- Questioning and eliciting answers (questions of all types such as inferential and evaluative ones)
- Helping the learner to relate the same to his/her individual experiences.
- Helping him/her to create an expression of his past and present in writing that includes sophisticated techniques for recognizing and interpreting the function of the cohesive devices or discourse markers used and organization of other text discourse features.

We can also think of tasks at all the three stages of reading, namely pre- reading, while reading and post reading stages.

## II. CONCLUSION

To conclude as it is strongly felt that reading promotes language acquisition, ways and techniques must be designed to promote reading as a skill, a habit and thus enhancing the process of effective language acquisition, ii) as reading at the secondary and tertiary levels means developing literary competence, tasks that will facilitate acquiring the literary competence must be thought of. Needless to say that interactive reading needs to be promoted and hence an argument for task based teaching. The role of the teacher in such situations will be that of a co- communicator, or a co-participant and a learner trainer. The role of the teacher then will be to train the learner in learning to read thus enabling him/her to acquire reading strategies. All these suggestions are made within the framework of CLT which looks at language learning essentially as a process and focuses on the use of the language productively and receptively, in un-rehearsed contexts.

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