

A CASE STUDY ON VOCABULARY LEARNING THROUGH READING FAIRY TALES

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Abstract: Reading picture books and non-fiction books for early readers appeared to have a number of advantages compare to foreign language readers. For instance, children like to experience that they could read the same books which are read by children from foreign countries where the target language is used at a rather early stage. They even proved to be able to read some English picture fairy tales without any help before their first lesson in English.

Key words: non-fiction books, picture fairy tales, unfamiliar words, funny, surprising, exciting.

One of the aim of the study is to gain more information on the textual and psychological conditions in quite different circumstances. It consisted of a long-term rather loosely organized case study with Uzbek children learning English by reading and listening fairy tales. The greater part of the data was collected in a period of two months in which the children (a 13-year old girl and a 10-yearold boy) read some thirty English fairy tales: picture books, early readers written for young(native) children who are learning to read, non-fiction books and graded readers especially written for foreign language learners. A follow-up study over two years involved a third child starting with English, whereas the two older children started with Uzbek and some German. The following procedure concerning the selection of the book sand the new vocabulary was used. The children could each time choose a book which they would like to read from some 5 to 10 books (from a large and varied stock). They could inspect the books at leisure and ask questions about them; they were also encouraged to put the books in order of interest and to comment on this grading. In most cases the books were read aloud to the children. In some cases, no notice was taken of unfamiliar words (if possible); in other cases, attention was paid to these words in a variety of ways, such as translating the words, helping the children in guessing their meaning from the context and the word form or helping the children to memorize the words (by quickly going through them once or twice after reading - when necessary showing the context - or by using vocabulary cards).

The results of this study will now be discussed in so far as they throw new light on the embedding of the words in meaningful memory systems and on the textual and psychological conditions for vocabulary learning through reading. As the results of the follow-up study did not add new results with regard to the theme of this paper, I will focus here on the results of the first part of the study. Although this study centered on the textual and psychological conditions some information on the embedding of the words in memory was gained as well. In a number of cases the children appeared to remember words through recalling the situation described in the text. Often recollections of an illustration mediated recall. Again recollections of their own emotions or experiences which the words, the text or the actions of the children had evoked influenced recognition of words. In this study, in particular, the emotions connected with funny, surprising or exciting illustrations and texts exerted an important influence on recognizing words. To illustrate this with an example: the word "handsome" was first seen in the ironic "Jake beckoned to the rest

of his ugly crew». Right, me handsome" "which was said to a funnily drawn couple of nasty scoundrels. Although "handsome" had been seen only once, it proved to be remembered when it turned up in a totally different context two weeks later.

As to the "textual conditions" the results of the first experiment were confirmed, but also extended, because in this study some insight - at least for this age group - was gained into the significance of text genres for vocabulary acquisition. In particular, reading picture books and to some degree reading early readers and non-fiction books appeared to have a number of advantages compared with reading foreign language readers. The children, for instance, liked to experience that they could read the same books which are read by children from countries where the target language is used, at a rather early stage. They even proved to be able to read some English picture fairy tales without any help, before their first lesson is in English.

More generally speaking, I found the following favorable features which some of the picture books do possess and which some of the foreign language readers do not or only to a smaller degree. Early readers and non-fiction books mostly occupy an intermediate position.

1. Authenticity. The language is more lively, more natural, because it is not hampered by limits of vocabulary and structure.

2. Redundancy. Some readers for foreign language learners suffer from lack of redundancy, especially concerning the structure of the text, when compared with authentic texts. This means that an apparently easy, adapted text may be more difficult to understand than its authentic counterpart.

3. Mutual support of illustrations and text. In picture books and in some of the early readers and non-fiction books close cooperation between author and illustrator is usual (sometimes it is even the same person).

4. Artistic value. Picture books possess an obviously artistic value. This is probably precisely what makes them attractive for different age groups (they have to be attractive for adults - parents - as well as for children).

Finally, the case study suggested an additional psychological condition for learning words through reading: the importance of a wide and free choice of books. The procedure of choosing and "grading" books mentioned before contributed considerably to the motivation of the children to read the selected book and probably as well to their retention of the content.

Literature

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