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სოხუმის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი

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კითხვისას უკეთესი და ეფექტური შედეგების მისაღწევად კონტექსტის მეშვეობით

აბსტრაქტი. ათწლეულების მანძილზე ინგლისური ენის სწავლებისას გამოიყენება სხვადასხვა მიდგომა და მეთოდი ენის ყველა უნარის სწავლებისა და გაუმჯობესების მიზნით. ეს მიდგომები განსხვავდებიან იმით, თუ რამდენად უზრუნველყოფენ მასწავლებლები სტუდენტებს სწორი მიმართულებებით ახალი უნარების შესწავლისას, რამდენად გასაგებად და სწორად ხსნიან ამ უნარებს, აკეთებენ თუარა იმის დემონსტრირებას, როგორ გამოიყენონ ზუსტად კონკრეტული უნარი და ისწავლება თუარა ეს უნარები გააზრებული თანმიმდევრობით.

ერთ-ერთი ამ უნართაგანია კითხვა, რთული პროცესი, განსაკუთრებით უცხო ენაზე. წაკითხულის გაგებაზე, როგორც EFL-ში, ასევე ESL-ში (უმაღლეს სასწავლებლის დონეზე) გავლენას ახდენს მრავალი ფაქტორი. მათ შორის ერთ-ერთი ყველაზე მნიშვნელოვანია ლექსიკის ცოდნა.

უნდა აღინიშნოს, რომ სიტყვანის (ლექსიკის) ცოდნა არ არის პროცესი, რომელიც შეიძლება ოდესმე სრულყოფილად დასრულდეს. ეს უწყვეტი პროცესია და ბოლო დროს სულ უფრო და უფრო იზრდება ლექსიკის სწავლა-სწავლების მნიშვნელობა. სიტყვანის დაუფლების ერთ-ერთი ყველაზე სასარგებლო სტრატეგია არის ლექსიკის შესწავლა კონტექსტის მეშვეობით.

წინამდებარე სტატიის მიზანია მიმოიხილოს მკვლევართა მიერ შემოთავაზებული აზრები და წინადადებები იმ ფაქტორების შესახებ, რომლებიც გავლენას ახდენენ ლექსიკის ათვისებაზე კონტექსტის მიხედვით, რაც კითხვის გაუმჯობესების საწინდარია. კერძოდ, ხაზგასმულია კონტექსტის მეშვეო-

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ბით უცნობი სიტყვის მნიშვნელობის გამოცნობის აუცილებლობა როგორც ერთ-ერთი სასწავლო სტრატეგიისა და ნაჩვენებია, მაგალითებზე დაყრდნობით, თუ როგორ ხდება ეს ეფექტურად. კითხვისას უკეთესი შედეგების მიღწევის თვალსაზრისით მეცნიერთა აზრები ზოგჯერ იყოფა, თუმცა თანხმდებიან საკომპენსაციო (ვარაუდი, მიხვედრა) სტრატეგიების აუცილებლობაზე.

იმის გასარკვევად თუ რამდენად ეფექტურად და ხშირად გამოიყენება სტატიაში განხილული სტრატეგიები სოხუმის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტის ინგლისური ფილოლოგიის მიმართულებაზე ენობრივ ჯგუფებში, ჩატარდა მინი კვლევა. დაკომპლექტდა კვლევის ჯგუფი ინგლისური ენის სამი სრულ განაკვეთზე მომუშავე მასწავლებლისა და ექვსი სტუდენტისაგან. იმის დასადგენად, თუ როგორ ასწავლიან მოსწავლეებს ზემოჩამოგანხილულ სტრატეგიებს, გამოვიყენეთ თვისობრივი კვლევის მეთოდი.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: ზემოქმედების ფაქტორები, სიტყვანის ცოდნა, მნიშვნელობის გამოცნობა, ტექსტის გაგება.

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To better and effective reading in EFL through context

Abstract. For decades different approaches or methods have been used to teach and improve all skills while teaching English. These approaches differ in how much guidance or direction teachers provide as their students are learning new skills, how clearly and directly teachers explain new skills, whether they demonstrate exactly how to use a specific skill, and whether the skills are taught in a thoughtful sequence. One of these skills is reading, a complex process, especially in a foreign language. Reading comprehension in both EFL and ESL (at university levels) is affected by many factors. One of the most important among them is vocabulary knowledge. It is worth mentioning that vocabulary knowledge is not something that can ever be fully mastered. It is a life-long process and recently the importance of vocabulary teaching-learning is increasing more and more. One of the most useful strategies for developing vocabulary knowledge is vocabulary learning through context.

The purpose of the present article is to overview the different suggestions of the researchers about factors that affect vocabulary acquisition through context which leads to better reading.

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To find out how effectively and often the strategy in question is used in language groups at Sokhumi State University, the research team was composed of three full-time English teachers and six undergraduate students of English Philology. A qualitative (interview) approach was used to study how the learners are taught the strategies discussed in this article in an ordinary classroom. Each participant in the study was given open-ended questions.

Keywords: affecting factors, vocabulary knowledge, guessing of the meaning, comprehension of a text.

Discussion. For understanding academic content areas reading is the most useful language skill. In the process of teaching foreign languages reading is both a teaching means and a teaching goal. Reading as a tool involves teaching/learning reading technologies, while reading as a teaching/learning goal deals with reading comprehension (Mohammad and Mohammadi, 2009: 1-22).

Language (reading, writing, listening & speaking) skills are essential and particularly critical in the area of education. Through language abilities students understand the academic content areas. Success is grounded in students acquiring solid knowledge & skills in order to:

- ✓ become fluent readers, writers, speakers;
- ✓ be able to communicate effectively, coherently & imaginatively;
- ✓ be at ease communicating in an increasingly technological world.

In this respect reading is the most useful for language acquisition. In the process of teaching foreign languages reading is both a teaching means and a teaching goal.

Reading as a tool involves teaching/learning reading technologies, while reading as a teaching/learning goal deals with reading comprehension.

Numerous studies have been carried out on teaching/learning strategies considering age, level, background, culture, individual differences, abilities, interests, environmental factors, etc. that impact the reading process.

Researchers hold different views towards the classification and defining of learning strategies. A dictionary definition of strategy refers to a “clever plan or method; the art of employing plans towards achieving goals”.

Oxford defines learning strategies as specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that students employ often consciously to improve their progress in internalizing, storing, retrieving, and using the second language (Oxford, 2011:167-180).

“Development of language learning strategies has become essential in language teaching due to the importance of continuous/lifelong learning. Vocabulary of such a developed language as English is above two million lexical units and it is constantly growing, which makes it an unattainable goal to master it totally. Grammar

is more limited, however, there are some subtleties which are may go on learning till the end of life. This puts in front of us more attainable goals - to provide learners with strategies which will help them continue successfully learning/using a language lifelong. To raise fluent readers right reading-learning strategies are to be taught.

Of all the reading strategies commonly recognized today in both L1 and L2 reading, arguably the most widely studied and encouraged is the *guessing of the meaning of unknown words from context*" (Danelia,2010:109-114).

Compensatory (guessing the meaning) strategies are necessary for reading comprehension. Unfortunately, though, these strategies along with many other reading strategies are widely discussed in ELT (English language teaching) literature, language course books practically do not offer tasks for their development. Clarke and Nation in the following example suggest how to guess the meaning from a context: "***Typhoon Vera killed or injured 218 people and crippled the seaport city of Keelung***".

The students may understand that "Typhoon Vera" did something to Keelung and it is likely that Typhoon had some kind of undesired influence upon a city. The verb *cripple* may be unfamiliar, *but* can be given a negative value since. The precise meaning of *cripple* cannot of course be reached by this type of guessing, but learners should be able to produce such ideas as 'damage' or 'destroy'. Later sentences may help to show exactly how negative *crippled* is by telling about the amount of damage involved. However, the fact is that for a general understanding of a reading passage it is often sufficient to appreciate the general meaning of a word (Clarke and Nation,1980: 211).

The tasks should warn students not to try using dictionaries when they come to a word that they don't know as these words are not there and try to guess the meaning from the context without stopping reading. Otherwise the words may be familiar for some students.

The words will be in the bold letters. Students will work in groups (brainstorming) trying to identify their meaning. Then groups will have a joint discussion giving their arguments & describing their strategies.

So, by telling students unfamiliar words as they encounter them, they can focus on constructing meaning and reading fluently. During initial readings, the reader may be required to devote more working memory to decoding unfamiliar words. These efforts at word recognition build mental connections that enable the reader to recognize those words more rapidly when they are encountered again. This allows more working memory to be used for comprehension during subsequent readings.

According to Liu and Nation, amongst many advantages the guessing strategy involves generalizable skills of interpreting surrounding text, predicting, and

testing predictions while reading, which enhance reading skills as a whole (Liu and Nation, 1985: 133 - 42).

The piece of research conducted by Lui Na and Nation was an attempt to discover some of the factors that make guessing difficult and to see the potential of the guessing strategy. The occurrence of the low frequency words is mainly unpredictable and it is not possible to learn them in advance.

Because there is low probability of meeting them again soon they do not deserve much effort in learning them, it's better to use context clues (guessing words, collocations or paraphrases) to infer their meaning than to spend time learning them.

If learners work as a group and share their guesses a high proportion of the words in the passage guessed successfully and learners can share information about the clues they use. As learners improve in handling the strategy, the work can become more individual.

Regardless of the exact size of a native speaker's vocabulary, it is clear that the average second or foreign language learner faces a major challenge in trying to match it.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the main reason given for encouraging use of the **guessing strategy** is the perception that it is the only reasonable way for learners to learn enough words to form suitably large active and passive vocabularies.

Liu and Nation-state that some guessing may be useful to teach because it encourages readers to make and test predictions, a useful generalized reading skill. But the evidence discussed in their study dictates a *selective approach*, by the reader and the teacher.

Instruction should include training in what contexts provide the best opportunities for successful guessing and must avoid urging the use of the guessing strategy in all cases where readers encounter unknown words. Otherwise, guessing can easily become a strategy for frustration and demotivation instead of improved reading and learning (Liu & Nation, 1985: 133-142).

What is context in real reading?

Researchers often offer different types of contexts to their subjects which have then conflicting results for readers'. For example, *context* in which the unknown word appears may have been the reason for the contrasting results.

In Rott's (1999 : 589-619) study, the texts were created with enough contextual clues for the learners to be able to infer the meaning of the target words. Whereas, in the study by Hulstijn (et. al,1992: 113-125) the text was authentic, and the researchers had determined that it was extremely difficult to infer the exact meaning of the target words from the context.

Of the many theoretical descriptions of the elements and nature of context, Bialystok (1978: 69-83) cited in Barnett, (1988: 150-162) has important implications

for any discussion of context and the guessing strategy. She proposes that context exists in relation and proportion to the reader's implicit knowledge, other knowledge (knowledge of other languages and world knowledge), and context (linguistic and physical aspects (in this case, of a text) which provide clues to meaning.

From this perspective, context is not an absolute presence in a text, but is *instead created* by the reader, and is therefore influenced by the reader's linguistic and world knowledge.

More and more studies show that a key factor affecting readers' ability to make use of context is *vocabulary knowledge*.

To this list, we can add points from Barnett's (1988) discussion of research on *the guessing strategy*:

- Usable context varies from rich to poor, and is affected by the proportion of known to unknown words.
- Readers with larger active vocabularies can use available context better than those with smaller vocabularies.
- Beginning readers and advanced readers have been shown to use guessing strategies more than middle level readers.

These findings have some important implications.

First, they support Bialystock's proposition that context is created by the reader in proportion to preexisting knowledge, and show that vocabulary is an important part of that knowledge.

Second, they make it clear that a critical level of vocabulary and general language mastery is essential, not only for successful use of the guessing strategy, but also for the transfer of L1 strategies to L2 reading (Laufer, 1997: 20-34).

Laufer's (1997:20-34) summary of research on this topic provides some interesting conclusions regarding the importance of vocabulary in reading comprehension and strategy use:

L2 learners tend to rely heavily on words as landmarks of meaning in text, less so on background knowledge, and to virtually ignore syntax.

Vocabulary knowledge has been consistently shown to be more strongly related to reading comprehension than other components of reading.

Even if a reader has and uses good metacognitive strategies in L1, they will not be of use in the L2 until the reader develops a solid language base.

Third, the seemingly paradoxical fact that low- and high-level L2 readers use the guessing strategy more than middle-level readers is, in fact, another indication that level of linguistic development plays an important part in guessing. All of these points have direct implications for L2 reading instruction.

Studies and discussions lead us to the question of whether or not we should teach and encourage L2 readers to use the *guessing strategy*. The answer is "Yes,"

but not at all times, not with all learners, not with all contexts, and certainly not as the main means of learning vocabulary.

As long as not all contexts are equal it is found that guessing using local context (required reference to immediate sentence context) is superior to guessing using global context (depended on textual elements farther away from the target word) (Beck & McKeown, 1983: 83, 177–181).

Accordingly, *if guessing requires global context*, the guessing strategy should be abandoned and the dictionary or other resource should be used instead.

A Mini Research Conducted

Therefore, in order to find out how effectively and often is the strategy in question used in language groups at Sokhumi State University, the research team was composed of three full-time English teachers, and six undergraduate students of English Philology.

Qualitative interview was the best way to collect data. It is sometimes the only way to collect the right data for a smallscale study like described in this article.

We met about 2 hours. Informal conversational type of interview was offered. Topics, questions or wording to be covered were not specified in advance. Each participant in the study was asked open-ended questions such as:

1. In your opinion, what difficulties do learners have with reading in English?
2. How sufficiently do teachers explain about different types of context clues?
3. In your opinion, how much guidance or direction should teachers provide as their students are learning new skills?
4. How do teachers bring students into an area of reading in which they are interested (age appropriate)?
5. How often is a reading strategy *guessing of the meaning* used with authentic texts?
6. Can you name strategy/ strategies that may cause frustration and demotivation instead of improving reading and learning?

At the beginning of the interview students had a very poor understanding of how to read an authentic foreign language text. The only strategies they could use to understand a text were the ones from the bottom-up model (bottom-up reading is the mechanical, word-driven process in which readers move from lower-level processes, (e.g., interpreting graphic symbols) to higher level processes (e.g., assigning meaning to words) and translating the meaning of every individual word and sentence.

The answers of all the participants I interviewed were recorded and analyzed. With limited resources and time, I came to the decision that the questions raised in this article still are important concern in today's classrooms as the results revealed that the teachers mostly preferred traditional practices and strategies.

Conclusion. The results of all analyzed studies, as well as abovementioned study, allow us to state that the *compensatory (guessing meaning)* strategy is the most

acceptable among teaching/learning strategies to improve learners' comprehension of a text. However, sometimes the ideas differ and it is very reasonable considering the level, frequency, background, local or global context, etc. that may have an impact on the reading/guessing process.

To understand a text, a reader needs to know much of the words used in that excerpt, i.e. the student must have a vocabulary size needed to cover that text in order to have a better understanding.

In this perspective, we may conclude, that to facilitate the comprehension of a text, vocabulary knowledge is essential. If students do not understand the meanings of the words they encounter in a context, their comprehension of the context is likely to fail.

To develop reading fluency and increase reading efficiency guessing the meanings of words from context is significantly useful. New words presented in isolation are hard to learn but words in context help learners to deduce meaning from context and learners see how new words are used grammatically in a sentence. To continue reading without interruption, guessing meanings of words from context is a useful skill.

In regard all the above, I'd like to cite the linguist David Wilkins (1972:-111), who provides a good description of the importance of vocabulary. He stresses that "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed."

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