

THINKING AND UNDERSTANDING AS IMPORTANT SKILLS IN CONTINUOUS TEACHING OF LANGUAGES

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ABSTRACT

The article raises the problem of the theory of the traditional “four skills” in continuous teaching, their permanent correlations with two more skills: “thinking” and “understanding”, the status and role of which are no less important than the others. We consider that it is advisable and necessary to teach understanding along with the other four skills. It is such an activity and ability which is no less important than the others in any learning and it should have its own procedures, methods and methodology of teaching, as well as its own time budget allotted for forming and developing understanding habits and skills in classroom, in order that teachers should have certain systematic activities in classroom or outside it and regularly and consciously form and develop these habits and skills with trainees.

Key words: four skills, “*thinking*” and “*understanding*”, interdependent and interlinked skills, thinking, skimming, scanning, meditating, concluding and understanding

INTRODUCTION

As is known, at present a continuous quality teaching is almost impossible without modern interactive methods and carefully chosen “interaction patterns” (White J. Cynthia, 1989; Medgyes, Peter, 1986; Senior, Rose, 2005; Senior, Rose, 2005a, etc.) because indeed they are the reliable means of guaranteeing a desired success in “communicative teaching” (Medgyes, Peter (1986). Senior, Rose (2005).

In such a teaching all the traditional four skills (speaking, reading, listening and writing) seem to be shadowed by or blended in with two more skills known as “*thinking*” and “*understanding*” (“which, we believe, are no less important ones in any learning, including foreign languages), and not for nothing these skills are all intentionally subordinated to one prime purpose – speaking (communication by means of language).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The role and importance of the four integrated skills permanently shadowed by or even blended in with “*thinking*” and “*understanding*” (because they are such interdependent and interlinked skills that you can’t imagine one without the other, so then we can blend them into such a skill as “*understanding*”¹ for short and hereinafter referred to as such), are great here because *trainees* feel highly motivated in learning a certain topic not only, for example, by speaking, but also by careful and purposeful integration of it with reading, listening and even

¹Compare: “smoke” + “fog” = “smog” as a good example of blending.

writing about something related to the topic under study, permanently thinking of, meditating over, scrutinizing, understanding and concluding what, why, when, where and what for these four traditional skills are being developed and taught.

When integrated, the five skills (speaking, reading, listening, writing, thunderstanding) really do wonders, as various activities are masterfully combined and blended as to the purpose and the requirements of the interactive methods of teaching foreign languages, creating an atmosphere of mutual understanding, cooperating (interacting in pairs, groups, teams), exchanging ideas and opinions, discussing, criticizing one other, prompting one another, peer learning and giving joint answers and taking joint decisions on the tasks and errands they are entrusted with in auditorium, even assessing the results of their activities.

Of course, we have more or less practice and experience of teaching the four traditional skills in language learning, there have been offered certain methodologies of teaching them, but how about “thunderstanding”? This problem seems to have slipped out of the minds of psycholinguists and methodologists, for there are, we guess, almost no researches on these two very significant skills, their importance and role in learning and teaching, to say nothing of procedures, methods and methodology of forming and developing such habits and skills.

We consider that it is advisable and necessary to teach thunderstanding along with the other four skills. So, *thunderstanding* is such an activity and ability which is no less important than the others in any learning (including languages) and it should have its own procedures, methods and methodology of teaching, as well as its own time budget allotted for forming and developing thunderstanding habits and skills in classroom, in order that teachers should have certain systematic activities in classroom or outside it and regularly and consciously form and develop these habits and skills with trainees.

Research methodology

We think that along with the traditional four skills thunderstanding as a skill should also be taught to trainees by systematically carrying out such useful activities as *skimping, skimming, scanning, meditating, concluding and understanding*. *Let's shortly characterize them.*

So, skimping is an activity and ability of performing (working, etc.) carelessly, hastily, or with inadequate materials or dealing with or treating (a subject) briefly or superficially.

Skimming (over / through) as such is an activity and ability of taking a quick look at something in search of superficial/ general, rough information on it.

As for as scanning is concerned, it is an activity and ability of looking quickly but not very thoroughly through (a document or other text) in order to identify important, interesting or relevant information.

Analysis and results

Now let's take a look into the inner organizational structure of understanding itself as a learning and teaching skill. There are, we think, certain constituent components or parts that make up understanding as a process and a skill. Here one can speak of thinking, meditating, scrutinizing and concluding as constituents of understanding which may be defined as follows:

- 1) thinking is an activity and ability of considering or reasoning about something;
- 2) meditating is an activity or ability of thinking about something very carefully and deeply for some time;
- 3) scrutinizing is an activity and ability of examining or inspecting something closely and thoroughly;
- 4) concluding is an activity and ability of making predecisions on/about something read, thought, spoken, written, listened to, discussed, perceived, etc.
- 5) “understanding” is an activity and ability of thinking of, learning, judging something and take final decisions on/about something read, thought, spoken, written, listened to, discussed, perceived, etc.

The truth is that the traditional four skills are practiced not for the sake of practicing them only, but for the sake of speaking, writing, reading and listening based on thunderstanding, here the final goal being interaction and communication.

The ever great role and importance of thunderstanding is clearly observed and perceived when reading and listening are taught, because they are always prespeaking or prewriting activities involving various interaction patterns based on interactive methods (pair work, group work, team work, etc.)

DISCUSSION

As the four traditional skills can't but be always shadowed by or blended in with thunderstanding, we can see that reading, speaking, listening and writing coexist and cofunction with the latter (thunderstanding) permanently as the underlying factor and goal in teaching the latter four, in order to pave way to various further activities in auditorium, hence we trace the permanent process of blending each of the four skills in with thunderstanding, as it is really useless to read, write, speak and listen without the latter. So here we postulate that there is a permanent process of blending of the four skills in with thunderstanding, as it may be prespeaking, or prewriting and postreading or postlistening activity.

Listening as such is a complicated activity which is aimed at eliciting the needed information from the listened material for further purposes of speaking, writing about and one can't elicit such information without “thunderstanding”. Almost the same happens when we teach reading, speaking and writing. Amongst them listening stands apart for it is fully dependent on thunderstanding without which there's no listening at all, and no other activities further following it.

When and how we virtually resort to “thunderstanding” as a skill in auditorium is very important for teaching the four traditional skills. Thunderstanding is exactly the main factor that prompts us what activity to start with when teaching language. Of course, you can't start it with listening and writing followed by speaking and reading.

So, it is right then to start teaching language with speaking first, for it involves full and permanent understanding, hence speaking is the activity served by the other activities (listening, reading and writing) and not visa versa. That is why we can't teach speaking for listening or reading purposes because it is absolutely excluded (of course, we can use speaking

for writing purposes), but we do teach reading, listening and writing for speaking purposes. So, what are the correlations between these activities?

The aforesaid shows that each type of activity has its worthy, original place and significance in learning and we can't replace one by the other ones.

Teaching thunderstanding, like teaching any of the four skills, is a long, continuous process that takes terms or semesters to cover, and, as the experience shows, it is better to start teaching thunderstanding from the beginning level up to the advanced level in order for trainees to get accustomed to understanding of more complicated texts blended in with the other four activities just to pave way to various further activities. The quality of "post thunderstanding activities" fully depends on the frequency, degree and depth of developing thunderstanding habits and skills (by exercising such skills in the strict order they are given here: *thinking, skimming, scanning, meditating, concluding and understanding*).

All these activities may lay a solid ground for involving trainees into the other useful activities such as speaking, writing, jigsaw reading, jigsaw puzzle(a puzzle in which the player has to reassemble or restore a picture that has been mounted on a wooden or cardboard base and cut into a large number of irregularly shaped interlocking pieces), etc.

CONCLUSION

Concluding all the above said, we may state that along the four traditional skills in continuous learning and teaching languages, there is one more skill that coexists and cofunctions with the latter four – thunderstanding (as blended from "*thinking*" and "*understanding*" as they are interdependent and interlinked skills), which should be taken into consideration as an important skill among the others, hence there should be worked out specific methodology of forming and developing thunderstanding habits and skills that need special time budget allotted for teaching, assessing and even evaluating the very skill in auditorium accordingly and that seems to be a matter of future.

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