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ANALYSIS OF READING ACTIVITIES AS A SUBJECT FOR TEST DESIGN

АНАЛИЗ ЧТЕНИЯ КАК ОБЪЕКТА ТЕСТИРОВАНИЯ

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ABSTRACT

VISUAL AND AUDITORY MEDIA, BOTTOM-UP (TOP-DOWN) STRATEGIES, GENRE, SCHEMATA, READING PERFORMANCE

The article considers reading as an essential part of learning a foreign language. The role of text in terms of its style and genre is analyzed. The classification of reading performance as a subject of test design is presented.

АННОТАЦИЯ

ВИЗУАЛЬНЫЕ И АУДИОСРЕДСТВА, СТРАТЕГИИ «ОТ ЧАСТНОГО К ОБЩЕМУ» («ОТ ОБЩЕГО К ЧАСТНОМУ»), ЖАНР, СТРУКТУРА ТЕКСТА, РЕЗУЛЬТАТИВНОСТЬ ЧТЕНИЯ

В статье рассматривается процесс чтения как неотъемлемая часть деятельности по изучению иностранного языка. Представлен анализ текста по стилистической и жанровой составляющим. Предложена классификация результативности чтения как критерия, учитываемого при составлении тестов.

Even as we are bombarded with an unending supply of visual and auditory media, the written word continues in its function to convey information, to amuse and entertain us, to codify our social, economic, and legal conventions, and to fulfill a host of other functions, in literate societies, most «normal» children learn to read by the age of five or six, and some even earlier. With the exception of a small number of people with learning disabilities, reading is a skill that is taken for granted.

In foreign language learning, reading is likewise a skill that teachers simply expect learners to acquire. Basic, beginning-level textbooks in a foreign language presuppose a student's reading ability if only because it's a book that is the medium. Most formal tests use the written word as a stimulus for test-taker response; even oral interviews may require reading performance for certain tasks. Reading, arguably the most essential skill for success in all educational contexts, remains a skill of paramount importance as we create assessments of general language ability.

Is reading so natural and normal that learners should simply be exposed to written texts with no particular instruction? Will they just absorb the skills necessary to convert their perception of a handful of letters into meaningful chunks of information? Not necessarily. For learners of English, two primary hurdles must be cleared in order to become efficient readers. First, they need to be able to master fundamental bottom-up strategies for processing separate letters, words, and phrases, as well as top-down, conceptually driven strategies for comprehension. Second, as part of that top-down approach, second language readers must develop appropriate content and formal schemata – background information and cultural experience – to learn out those interpretations effectively.

The assessment of reading ability does not end with the measurement of comprehension. Strategic pathways to full understanding are often important factors to include in assessing learners, especially in the case of most classroom assessments that are formative in nature. An inability to comprehend may thus be traced to a need to enhance a test-taker's strategies for achieving ultimate comprehension. For example, an academic technical report may be comprehensible to a student at the sentence level, but if the learner has not exercised certain strategies for noting the discourse conventions of that genre, misunderstanding may occur.

As we consider a number of different types or genres of written texts, the components of reading ability, and specific tasks that are commonly used in the assessment of reading, let's not forget the unobservable nature of reading. Like listening, one cannot see the process of reading, nor can one observe a specific product of reading. Other than observing a reader's eye movements and page turning, there is no technology that enables us to «see» sequences of graphic symbols traveling from the pages of a book into compartments of the brain (in a possible bottom-up process). Even more outlandish is the notion that one might be able to watch information from the brain make its way down onto the page

(in typical top-down strategies). Further, once something is read – information from the written text is stored – no technology allows us to empirically measure exactly what is lodged in the brain. All assessment of reading must be carried out by inference.

TYPES (GENRES) OF READING

Each type or genre of written text has its own set of governing rules and conventions. A reader must be able to anticipate those conventions in order to process meaning efficiently. With an extraordinary number of genres present in any literate culture, the reader's ability to process texts must be very sophisticated. The common genres, which ultimately form part of the specifications for assessments of reading ability, are the following: academic reading, job-related reading, personal reading.

The genre of a text enables readers to apply certain schemata that will assist them in extracting appropriate meaning. If, for example, readers know that a text is a recipe, they will expect a certain arrangement of information (ingredients) and will search for a sequential order of directions. Efficient readers also have to know what their purpose is in reading a text, the strategies for accomplishing that purpose, and how to retain die information.

The content validity of an assessment procedure is largely established through the genre of a text. For example, if learners in a program of English tor tourism have been learning how to deal with customers needing to arrange bus tours, then assessments of their ability should include guidebooks, maps, transportation schedules, calendars, and other relevant texts.

Aside from attending to genres of text, the skills and strategies for accomplishing reading emerge as a crucial consideration in the assessment of reading ability. The micro- and macroskills below represent the spectrum of possibilities for objectives in the assessment of reading comprehension.

Microskills:

1. Discriminate among the distinctive graphemes and orthographic patterns of English.

2. Retain chunks of language of different lengths in short-term memory.

3. Process writing at an efficient rate of speed to suit the purpose.

4. Recognize a core of words, and interpret word order patterns and their significance.

5. Recognize grammatical word classes (nouns, verbs, etc.), systems (e.g., tense, agreement, pluralization), patterns, rules, and elliptical forms.

6. Recognize that a particular meaning may be expressed in different grammatical forms.

7. Recognize cohesive devices in written discourse and their role in signaling the relationship between and among clauses.

Macroskills:

1. Recognize the rhetorical forms of written discourse and their significance tor interpretation.

2. Recognize the communicative functions of written texts, according to form and purpose.

3. Infer context that is not explicit by using background knowledge.

4. From described events, ideas, etc., inter links and connections between events, deduce causes and effects, and detect such relations as main idea, supporting idea, new information, given information, generalization, and exemplification.

5. Distinguish between literal and implied meanings.

6. Detect culturally specific references and interpret them in a context of the appropriate cultural schemata.

7. Develop and use a battery of reading strategies, such as scanning and skimming, detecting discourse markers, guessing the meaning of words from context, and activating schemata for the interpretation of texts.

8. Use marginal notes, outlines, charts, or semantic maps for understanding and retaining information.

9. Distinguish between literal and implied meanings.

10. Capitalize on discourse markers to process relationships.

Reading could be subdivided into at least five different types of reading performance. Variety of performance is derived more from the multiplicity of types of texts (the genres listed above) than from the variety of overt types of performance. Nevertheless, for considering assessment procedures, several types of reading performance are typically identified, and these will serve as organizers of various assessment tasks:

1. Perceptive. In keeping with the set of categories specified for listening comprehension, similar specifications are offered here, except with some differing terminology to capture the uniqueness of reading.

2. Selective. This category is largely an artifact of assessment formats. In order to ascertain one's reading recognition of lexical, grammatical, or discourse features of language within a very short stretch of language, certain typical tasks are used: picture-cued tasks, matching, true/false, multiple-choice, etc.

3. Interactive. Included among interactive reading types are stretches of language of several paragraphs to one page or more in which the reader must, in a psycholinguistic sense, interact with the text.

4. Extensive. Extensive reading applies to texts of more than a page, up to and including professional articles, essays, technical reports, short stories, and books.

At the beginning level of reading a second language lies a set of tasks that are fundamental and basic: recognition of alphabetic symbols, capitalized and lowercase letters, punctuation, words, and grapheme-phoneme correspondences. Such tasks of

perception are often referred to as literacy tasks, implying that the learner is at the early stages of becoming «literate». Some learners are already literate in their native language, but in other cases the second language may be the first language that they have ever learned to read. This latter context poses cognitive and sometimes age-related issues that need to be considered carefully. Assessment of literacy is no easy assignment, and should be taken with care by teachers.

IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA SITES ON JOB PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES, JOB PERFORMANCE, PRODUCTIVITY, WORKPLACE, USER GENERATED CONTENT

This thesis is a support to North's (2010) research to examine whether social networking site use by employees influences their productivity. Some studies claim that the use of social networking sites makes employees happier and, therefore, more productive (AT&T, 2008) while other studies consider social networking site use a reason for reduced productivity since it can waste time and be addictive (Accountemps, 2010).

BACKGROUND

There is a huge debate between academic and business people on the value of using social networking sites in the workplace. Some say that their use in the workplace is a waste of time while others think that it leads to improvements in job performance. This study will try to resolve this debate by exploring the use of social networking sites in the workplace and its effect on job performance.

Like several growing technologies, social media sites, and their use in the workplace, have become a debatable issue. Many say that the use of social networking sites in the workplace leads to better employee productivity through effects on intermediate variables (AT&T, 2008). Others say that the biggest concern about the use of social networking sites in the workplace is the loss of labor productivity due to time wasted at work (Accountemps, 2010). A study by Nucleus Research (2009) reported that the use of Facebook at work results in a 1.5 percent decrease in productivity. Leidner and others (2010), on the other