

СТУДІЇ З ЛІНГВОДИДАКТИКИ

372.881:[371.322.1:028]

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HOW TO MAKE HOME READING CLASSES MORE EFFECTIVE

Summary

It is the purpose of this article to discuss ways to improve the efficiency of foreign language teaching in general and home reading in particular. The necessity of creating an integrated, scientifically and methodologically well thought-out system of home reading classes for the 1st – 5th- year students of foreign language departments at universities on modern linguistic material is substantiated. Some efficient methods for developing speech competence of students in the four major language skills are suggested.

Key words: home reading, methodology, optimization of teaching, system of exercises, classroom procedures, literary text.

Анотація

У статті розглядаються шляхи підвищення ефективності навчання студентів іноземної мови взагалі та домашньому читанню зокрема. Аргументована необхідність створення цілісної, науково та методично обґрунтованої системи занять з домашнього читання на 1–5 курсах мовних ВНЗ на сучасному мовному матеріалі. Запропоновано ефективні вправи для підвищення мовленнєвої компетентності студентів у основних видах мовленнєвої діяльності.

Ключові слова: домашнє читання, методика, оптимізація навчання, система вправ, спосіб організації заняття, художній текст.

The modern concept of foreign language learning provides for the formation of a high level of students' communicative competence that is one of the key components of higher schoolreform, since the current phase of Ukrainian science development requires its greater integration into the context of European and global values. It can be done only when your level of a foreign language is sufficiently high. This guideline requires finding and implementing the best ways to improve the quality of foreign language teaching at universities. Since speech competence is an important component of the communicative competence, (that provides for the development of all four major language skills), which include reading in general and home reading in particular.

One of the ways of improving the quality of foreign language teaching is an integrated support of foreign language aquisition when learning all linguistic disciplines and ways of their presentation are combined into a comprehensive system that ensures the high quality training. The Practice in Oral and Written Language occupies a special place in this system.

Analyzing each of the four major language skills (reading, listening, speaking and writing), one can note their theoretical and practical importance as well as their complementarity. Besides, home reading is an important

integrating component in this list combining practically all philological disciplines that are commonly taught at universities.

The analysis of belles-lettres, scientific and special texts revealed that it is fiction that has significant linguistic and methodical potential for teaching grammatical phenomena, enriching vocabulary, developing oral communication skills and forming sociocultural competence of students. However, despite its considerable importance, far too little attention has been paid to home reading both by researchers and methodologists. So its potential has not been realised fully [3; 4]. In recent years the problem of organization and support of home reading has not been paid much attention, which lead to the insufficiency and unsystematic character of the existing methodological support and conducting home reading classes according to outdated patterns. Students were used to ask to read a certain work of fiction (or its part), and then there was either a group discussion or (in our opinion, even a worse option) an individual narration of the content by each student. The effectiveness of such classes can hardly be considered high [6], with the result that the quality of teaching of this aspect is low which adversely affects the level of language training of students. Recently, however, the attempts have been made to adopt a different approach to this academic discipline, which would allow to optimize the use of time in class and improve its efficiency [1; 3; 4; 6]. This paper is written within the framework of these researches, which makes it relevant.

So the question is how to make home reading classes more effective? Responding to it – by asking new questions as much as by offering solutions – is the purpose of this paper.

The process of reading is a specific activity. In itself, it synthesizes involuntary acquisition of linguistic phenomena in the process of indirect communication with a writer. In addition, you will know exactly in which situations those phenomena should be used because you contact a real modern language and not a conditionally educational one. So it is much better to learn a language directly from authentic texts than just to swot up on the textbook.

There are many different classifications of reading. Different principles form the basis of each of them (according to psychological peculiarities of perception of the material read, the amount of the material read, conditions of a text reading, methods of a text reading, the place and time of reading, etc., which, in turn, are divided into subgroups). However, within the framework of a practical course of a foreign language an “intensive” reading (the reading of small-scale texts) is predominantly present. Among the texts that are intended for such a reading, there can be sections from works of fiction, but many students will not read any book in a foreign language in full during the years of their training. Quite often the prospect to be left alone with a book in a foreign language frightens those who learn this language because an unusually large amount of a text, unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar as well as confusing realities of a different culture can be serious obstacles to individual reading.

Teachers of foreign languages are very much aware of the problem of shortage of coursebooks for reading modern literature. The existing coursebooks by both domestic and foreign authors are mainly based on the material of classic stories and novellas. A few methodological works based on the works of contemporary Anglo-American literature are far from satisfactory for a number of reasons. They are often limited to a brief methodological text support that is insufficient for a comprehensive study of a text.

According to the teaching load of the program subject area 6020303 Philology, while teaching the *Practical Course of a Foreign Language* it is stipulated to allocate a certain amount of hours for the lessons of home reading that is an integral part of qualitative training of future professionals in the field of the English language. The volume of the texts that are recommended for reading are regulated by the requirements of a syllabus for a certain year of study (an average of 240 000 printed characters for an academic year (about 30 pages of an authentic text per month). The selection of literature for reading is made with regard to the level of students' language training.

The suggested home reading coursebook [1] is intended for upper-intermediate or advanced college students in the third, fourth or fifth year of study at Foreign Languages Departments or Philological Faculties who have chosen English as a major. It can also be used in parallel with the existing textbooks as supplementary class material or as independent reading. The coursebook can be used on the course for advanced undergraduate students of law. It may also appeal to students of all ages who are concerned with the problems of environmental protection and law (with the level of English not lower than B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages).

The development of reading and speaking skills as well as expansion and development of active vocabulary of students as well as their intercultural competence is the main purpose of this coursebook. The coursebook contains the system of wide variety of practice exercises to the original text of the novel *The Pelican Brief* by John Grisham, a famous master of modern American criminal novel and the novel in the genre of a legal thriller. The work is well organized in terms of plot. There are several unexpected twists in the plot before the murderers are revealed, as the plot unfolds.

The coursebook comprises 13 units which provide practice in reading, use of English, speaking and writing. Each unit includes 2 – 4 chapters of the novel (1 unit is about 60 000 printed characters). A typical sequence begins with *Comments* on the text of the unit (providing interesting factual information of country-specific character), *Comprehension Check* exercises (testing how well the learners understand the course of the story, *Active Vocabulary and Grammar Work* exercises (giving the targeted vocabulary special emphasis, including both individual words and common phrases. There is a deliberate focus on word building) and *Additional Activities* (offering more challenging and contrastive practice in speaking or guided writing).

Among the ten rather big exercises there are open and closed task formats, namely:

Comprehension check:

- for each statement (1 to 15) the learners must choose one correct answer (true, false, or doesn't say. In addition, students must correct the wrong statements;

- to give answers to the questions on the text.

Active vocabulary and grammar work:

to find correspondence, to remember the situations in which certain lexis from the active vocabulary was used and give their own examples with it, to fill the gaps, to find English or Ukrainian equivalent phrases, to find in the text certain nouns, adjectives or adverbs relating to the to the given word with a common root, and to do a crossword puzzle. The latter task is dedicated to the mastery of legal terminology.

Additional activities:

tasks to develop speaking skills and teach students the basics of literary text analysis. Here the main emphasis is put on tasks, the aim of which is individual work. They stimulate thinking process and, therefore, develop communication skills of students while expressing their personal attitude to a text and its characters orally or in writing. That is each unit ends with a creative activity task (talk about a certain event on behalf of a certain character, to hold a press conference, to tell a sensational news story (to write a news ticker or a short reportage, etc.). Based on the content of the Comprehension Check section, it appeals to students' personal experience and opinions, invites to discuss polemical topics. Many questions require the search for additional country-specific information, broadening reader's cultural horizons.

The originality of the coursebook resides in the presence in the exercises of colloquial words and expressions that are common in modern English. This layer of vocabulary is largely absent in classical university textbooks, but it is commonly used in everyday life, literature, films, the Internet, etc.

The assessment of reading comprehension and speech skills development is carried out by doing all the exercises (or selectively – at the discretion of a teacher) orally or in writing and may include: formative assessment of homework (oral or vocabulary test), oral answers of students in class, independent work, written creative activity tasks, presentations and projects. Of course, the range of tasks can be expanded, taking into account the level of language proficiency of each separate group of students (see, for example, a great variety of practice exercises, interesting ideas and useful tips for working with home reading coursebooks in the materials of the British Council, Macmillan Publishers, Penguin Readers and many others [7; 10; 11; 12; 13]. In particular, the following types of tasks are suggested:

1. Before reading

- Familiarize the reader with the title of the book, show the pictures on the cover and inside to the class; the students are offered to guess with what the book is about, its genre, who the main characters are, where the story is set, write short summaries of the imaginary plot (these could be kept until you have read the book to see which one was closest to the real story), etc.;

- give strips of paper with the chapter titles to students in pairs or groups. They decide the best order for the chapters and think about the possible story. Compare the answers with the other groups and then look in the book to see who was closest;

- you can also photocopy the illustrations and familiarise the students with the main characters. They can read the introduction page or the back of the book to guess who is who. You can also ask the students to put the pictures in the correct order to predict how the story will develop. It would be a good idea to elicit and explain the key vocabulary using the pictures;

- if the book is accompanied by an audio / video recording, play a passage (for example, the beginning of the book or a key scene) and ask the students to comment / predict what will happen in the story;

- and, finally, when you see that you have created interest before starting the book, it is time to find out about the author (ask students what they know about him / her, ask them to write some questions about the author that they would like to know the answers to; use the Internet to search for the answers to the questions. If you don't have access to the internet for the students try to print off some information yourself and have it stuck around the room for the students to skim read and try to find the answers.

2. While reading

- You can assign tasks to check the reading comprehension of the unit read (*true / false*, put the sentences in the correct order, write out the characters' remarks and ask the students to recall who they belong to. You can also prepare vocabulary and grammar exercises (e.g. to give a few key verbs and ask the students to find in the book these verbs in a certain tense or make word families, using a dictionary to help). On the material of a unit lexis – to prepare such exercises as crosswords, word searches or jumbled words; to make up students' own sentences with new words or phrases, etc.;

- if there are many dialogues, students act out them between the characters and include a narrator for the non-dialogue chunks. The students can make radio plays (record their own work as an audio file or video and listen back). It would be great to publish their plays on the Internet afterwards. If there are no dialogues, they can make them up.

- the students can retell certain parts of the book as if they were a main character of a story, using “I...”, make important character descriptions or predict how the story unfolds;

- if the reader you are using in class has a film version use this to spot the differences in the plot between the book and the film;

- students role-play an interview with one of the characters;

- students become journalists and report on part of the story. Choose a piece of action and students write it up as if it were to be published in a national or local paper;
- choose a suitable chapter or chapters that can be broken down into chunks to make a comic strip. The last three activities can also be done when you have finished reading the book.

3. After reading

Apart from the three activities mentioned in 'while reading' part, you can:

- discuss the story that the students have just read and the main characters; you can think of the alternative ending to the story (with the voting for the best alternative ending);
- ask to draw new illustrations and describe what is depicted in them;
- write a letter to the main character or on their behalf or a letter to the author of the book;
- turn the story into a screenplay;
- make a board / quiz game based on the book (with questions about the text in different squares (about events, character reactions to different events, who said what, vocabulary and grammar, etc.);
- write a review of the book. Get students to give the book a star rating from one to five;
- write a sequel to the book or its background;
- prepare the book (video) presentation or information for the web page.

Part one of the coursebook ends with *A Short Glossary of Legal Terms Used in the Novel* that can be really useful for law majors or those who has been actively interested in law problems.

Part two of the coursebook [2] contains answers keys to all the exercises with a direct reference to the relevant pages of the novel, which greatly facilitates the work on the educational material.

As you know, the *Practical Course of the English Language* does not provide for "extensive reading", i.e. reading for pleasure, although its importance as part of learning a foreign language can hardly be overestimated because the creation of learner's keen interest in reading is a means of cognition of other cultures. Therefore, this coursebook also tries to help to solve this problem too.

The coursebook was prepared, written and tested at the Department of Foreign Languages and Teaching Methods of the Institute of Philology and Social Communications at Berdyansk State Teacher Training College. The materials of the coursebook correspond to the Curriculum for the English Language Development in Universities and Institutes as well as to the English Language Syllabus for the students of Romanic and Germanic Department of the Institute of Philology and Social Communications at Berdyansk State Teacher Training College. While working with the text of the novel, elaborating activities, exercises and comments the following dictionaries were used: Cambridge Dictionaries Online, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English,

5th edition, New Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8th edition; ABBYY electronic dictionary Lingvo x5 and educational resources of the global Internet.

Further work needs to be done to design educational and methodological home reading complex for college students (year 1 to 5) of language departments consisting of the works of contemporary authors which would combine the study of the original works in different genres in a foreign language, taking into account the level of complexity of a text and peculiarities of their teaching in different groups. This point will be elaborated further in the next papers.

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Стаття надійшла до редакції 27 серпня 2016 року