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І. Д. ОЛІЙНИК

РОЗВИТОК НАВИЧОК ЧИТАННЯ: АКТИВІЗАЦІЯ ФОНОВИХ ЗНАНЬ

Проаналізовано явище фонових знань при навчанні навичок читання. Фонові знання – це здобуті знання та уявлення, що використовуються в процесі сприйняття і розуміння та розвиваються в результаті нових здобутих знань. У процесі читання фонові знання змінюються, збагачуються й вписуються в ширші рамки особистого досвіду. Одне із завдань цієї статті – запропонувати різні стратегії і методи, які можна було би використовувати на заняттях для активізації фонових знань в процесі удосконалення навичок читання.

Ключові слова*: навички читання, фонові знання, фрейм, змістові, лінгвістичні фонові знання.*

И. Д. ОЛИЙНЫК

РАЗВИТИЕ НАВЫКОВ ЧТЕНИЯ: АКТИВИЗАЦИЯ ФОНОВЫ ЗНАНИЙ

Проанализировано понятие фоновых знаний при развитии навыков чтения. Фоновые знания – существующие знания и представления, которые используются в процессе восприятия и развиваются в результате получения новых знаний. В процессе чтения фоновые знания меняются, обогащаются и вносятся в новые рамки личного опыта. Одно из заданий статьи – предложить стратегии и методы,

которые можно использовать на занятиях для активизации фоновых знаний в процессе совершенствования навыков чтения.

Ключевые слова: *навыки чтения, фоновые знания, фрейм, содержательные, лингвистические фоновые знания.*

І. Д. OLIYNYK

DEVELOPING READING SKILLS: STRATEGIES FOR ACTIVATING SCHEMATA

The article deals with the notion of schemata as it is viewed in teaching reading skills. Schemata are traced as mental representations used during perception and comprehension and which evolve as a result of newly acquired knowledge. In the process of reading schemata change, enrich and fit into a broader framework of personal experience. One of the tasks of the article is to suggest various strategies and techniques that are intended to be covered in class for activating schemata in the process of developing reading skills.

Keywords: *reading skills, schemata, schema, content, linguistics.*

Developing reading skills in teaching foreign languages is considered to be an ultimate task for determining communicative proficiency. The process of reading – from decoding text massages and understanding written content to constituting personal ideas – is a complicated and covert procedure that comprises different aspects of comprehension.

This paper **aims** at observing schemata as one of major components of acquiring reading skills and suggest ways of activating individual framework, i.e. reader's personal concepts, beliefs, expectations, processes everything that comes from past experience. We argue that selecting texts for reading it is necessary to take into consideration students' level of comprehension and prior knowledge. We will provide different techniques that help activate reader's schemata and suggest various exercises to be practiced in teaching reading skills.

As fluent readers process text information, familiar ideas generate certain schemata which represent knowledge about a topic, thing, place, idea etc. that comes from past experience and learning. A schema is a package of knowledge coupled with information about how this knowledge can be used. According to Maya Khemlani David and Lynne Norazit schema theory proposes that readers possess different conceptual frameworks, called schemata, which they bring to the reading of a text and which they use to make sense of what they read. Such schemata are used by readers in interactive bottom-up and top-down processing. Competent readers use their prior knowledge of content and textual features stored in schemata to make meaning out of the text [1].

Some scholars define three types of schemata: *content,* that refers to obvious relationships between the text and one's knowledge, *formal,* that are distant connections based on understanding of generalizations and *abstract* which involve hidden factors and thematic considerations [3]. The others identify *linguistic schemata* and *content schemata.* Linguistic schemata refer to the knowledge of grammatical, syntactic and semantic systems and content schemata refer to the prior experience and background knowledge [5]. Schemata are the products of individual experiences: therefore, they vary from individual to individual. This poses a stern challenge for the teacher: he/she has to choose a text that would be placed within the boundaries of students' culture-specific knowledge. Schemata are used to cluster the memory representations of experience and information about a certain topic.

Content schemata help readers make sense of written content by providing a context or frame, or reference. Content schemata help us anticipate author's ideas and provide a cognitive framework for relating what we know to what we read. By using content schemata, readers can organize, understand, and remember content. Since they involve knowledge of the world, the content schemata are extremely important for the comprehension of content materials. Students who have not had experiences in a certain area lack the schemata necessary to understand content topics in that particular area.

Linguistic schemata together with *textual schemata* are essential for developing reading skills in mastering foreign languages as well as reading texts in the original. Thus, textual schemata are components of a reader's knowledge of the structural characteristics of written content. Textual schemata provide the general outline for the material we read. Readers use their knowledge of a particular form of writing to predict, follow, and organize the materials they read. Organization of content is an important constituent of reading comprehension. Textual schemata for stories are called

story grammars and are composed of the structural components of a story. Although they have been described in different ways by different researchers, one example of a story grammar is this: story → setting + theme + plot + resolution [4: 85].

The problem of schemata has been discussed in recent researches of Ukrainian scientists (S. Petrenko, L. Dymytrenko, S. Safaryan, Yu. Veklych, L. Vlasenko, N. Bozhok) under the term of background knowledge. The issue of schemata is traced in different fields of study from methods of teaching and literature to translation studies. All the scientists substantiate this notion as an important part of studying process that should be taken into consideration and developed in further teaching of languages, literature and translation. In teaching languages a schema theory is used as an elaborate network of abstract mental structures which represent how a person understands the world and perceives new concepts, respectively. Literature seeks to enrich schemata through giving basic information on the culture, environment, traditions, critical reviews and other kinds of information provided in a piece of literature. Translation studies mainly define how differently source and target texts treat the same notions of the reality in understanding them by a writer and a translator. In the scientific paper on the background knowledge (in our paper we treat this concept as schemata) S. Safaryan provides the following interpretation of the term. "The background knowledge comprises systematic scientific knowledge possessing informational and cultural characteristics which are not always directly relevant for the literary text. Both the writer and the reader should be able to share the background knowledge in order to establish a dialogue in the process of reading" [7]. By suggesting this definition the scientist believes that in case of possessing background knowledge in depth the reader is inclined to understand the written content better.

Several studies of second-language speakers and reading comprehension indicate that prior cultural experiences are extremely important in comprehending texts. It has been observed already that students perceive the texts related to their own cultural values better than those with obscure and distant ideas. In fact, scientists argue that students with greater prior knowledge comprehend and remember more. There are many issues that demonstrate the effect of cultural background on reading comprehension.

We now turn to the point of explaining how important it is to activate schemata and suggesting the exercises and techniques that can be used for this purpose. For activating schemata students are asked to recall and associate memories related to a specific subject. They usually recall similar texts they once read in their native language or discuss analogous experiences from their own life. Having discussed personal applications students move on to relate these schemata to the content being read. Appropriate schemata being activated, students are in better position to anticipate the author's ideas and information. Readers do not automatically use schemata to increase understanding. Activating appropriate schemata enables us to make inferences regarding content (to suggest our own thoughts and information) when the author does not concretely explain ideas.

Strategies for helping students develop schemata are initiated prior to actual reading. The purposes of these strategies are to increase knowledge and experiential background and make students aware of the relationship between their own knowledge and the text. Before and after developing these experiences, the teacher should lead discussions about experiences and relate them to text materials to help students integrate old and new knowledge. In addition to warming up a discussion, constructing bonds between what you know and what you have just got to know encourages students to participate more. Sharing their experiences in an open discussion inspires their confidence in anticipating the text reading.

Every prereading assignment to a certain degree is traced as approaching schemata activation. Traditional activities like watching films, viewing filmstrips and describing pictures can be used to build background, enrich and elaborate schemata and prepare students for reading a text assignment. Discussion, songs, role play, illustrations, visual aids, and explanations of how a piece of knowledge applies are some of the techniques used to strengthen connections between what one already knows and what he intends to learn through reading. A very simple approach to schemata development is to read the table of contents for a new chapter and then discuss the logic of chapter organization. Moreover, alternative ways of organizing the chapter might be suggested. Students might be encouraged to write down everything they know about each topic in the chapter. These lists will help

teachers identify areas of weakness that need more background development and could be a good step for further discussions and text selection process.

Brainstorming, which is another easy and effective prereading activity for schemata development, can be diagnostic in nature because it indicates areas in which we need more information in order to comprehend. Teachers can brainstorm with an individual, a small group, or an entire class. To use this strategy, the teacher may write on the board a unit topic such as *family*, for instance. Then students mention the first words that conjure up images associated with the notion of a family. To make the task more complicated, teachers can initiate providing different groups of words: nouns, adjectives, verbs, set expressions, idioms etc. Third year students, for example, brainstormed these idiomatic expressions for the word *family: tying the knot, through thick and thin, carrying a torch for sb., sweeping off one's feet, getting sth. off your chest, in the family way* and others. The teacher and students should then examine the brainstormed words to consider whether they are all relevant to the topic. If any words are removed from the list, students must be able to explain why. The task might be expanded or narrowed according to the main topic that is going to be presented in the text. After reading the text, students reexamine the list to determine any changes that should be done. Brainstorming in this particular way is a good example of activating linguistic schemata. To vary the brainstorming activity, teachers can ask students to categorize the words on the brainstormed list. For example, the list of words connected with *family* could be divided into categories of terms that are related to *marriage, divorce, co-habiting, separation* and others.

For stimulating linguistic schemata a certain list of words, fixed phrases and idioms is provided by the teacher to direct students to better understanding of the topic suggested. A model of finding an appropriate vocabulary for discussing the topic can serve as a good example of developing linguistic schemata. If the suggested text for reading is based on any specific grammatical notion a list of exercises dealing with this grammar concept might be helpful as well.

A preview guide is a written activity that is usually prepared to help readers relate past experiences to content materials. This guide may take several forms. One simple approach is to ask students to write down what they know about a topic. For example, introducing the topic of *education in the USA* students are required to write everything they know about American educational system. After reading the content selection, every student should look at the ideas written earlier to find out which ones are accurate and which need to be corrected. Differentiating the techniques for activating the linguistic and content schemata it is important to specify on *words* and *knowledgeable experience*, accordingly.

A more formal preview guide is composed of statements or questions related to the major concepts that the teacher wishes the students to understand and remember after reading. The students' responses show what information they already know about the topic that they can connect with new information in the text reading. After reading the text, students check the accuracy of their responses to the preview guide questions. Encouraging students to raise questions about the content they are about to read or that they are reading will lead them to activate their schemata. Answering the questions they raise regarding the content will encourage them to incorporate new information into their existing schemata.

Encouraging students to put questions regarding content and relate the content they are reading to the things they have already known about a subject area will help activate schemata. Teachers can use guiding or purposing questions to activate schemata. Questions of such kind should be presented to students before they read the text.

Prediction exercises help students develop their expectations for reading content and help them create a mind set for following the author's presentation of ideas and information. Therefore, prediction activities are related to activating schemata. Advance organizers and purposing questions can be used for this purpose.

David Ausubel has suggested a concept and research of advance organizers [2]. According to the researcher, advance organizers are short reading passages that precede a longer selection and deal with the same topic as the selection that is to be read. These short selections give students a conceptual framework for the content and help them predict the author's ideas as these ideas are related to the students' existing schemata. Very often these short selections contain questions that are intended for critical thinking and activating prediction.

Purposing questions can be used to build reader's anticipation of the author's ideas. These questions indicate the important ideas in the text and give students a structure for organizing content during reading. Students can relate the important ideas by providing questions to the message of the reading selection.

Questions that are discussed before reading should be broad in order to guide a reader through an entire reading selection. If the questions are too specific, students might read only until they have found ideas to answer the questions. Two or three purposing questions will be enough for reading the whole selection. It is always a good point to start with the questions after the text in order to know what to anticipate and pay special attention to while reading. Reading these questions before reading the chapter gives students a sense of the important ideas suggested by the questions. Another source for purposing questions is a text's titles and subheading. These headings point out the important ideas in the text; students can turn these ideas into questions, thus devising purposing questions that they can answer as they read. Finally, students may read the first paragraph of a selection and then formulate questions that are based on the information provided in that paragraph.

Discussing pictures in the process of schemata activation is also helpful as a prereading activity. Teachers can provide random pictures describing different people or notions. Students are asked to group the pictures in accordance with the topics that might be applicable for each picture. This usually helps students concentrate on and categorize the ideas associated with the pictures. To broaden the task it might be suggested to make up stories describing the pictures or suggest questions for further discussions in small groups. Pictures are often used as a stimulus for discussion and doing prereading activities. They intend to tell more in terms of visual effects to inspire critical thinking. In the process of reading students usually juxtapose the text with the pictures to find out what is common between the two and what is in contradiction.

Visual representation of ideas can also be a part of prereading activity. In the case suggested students are asked to provide pictures to the text they have not read yet, but the headings, titles and subtitles of the text are suggested. The tasks like this presuppose the development of critical thinking skills that are important in the reading process. For activating schemata students are inspired to share their pictures and experiences connected with what they have drawn.

One more strategy successfully used for activating schemata is asking and talking about the names. Before reading the text it is always good to start discussing what students know about its author. They might recollect some basic information about his/her life, written books, other experiences associated with a writer. No matter how limited their knowledge might be, readers' schemata constitute what the reader brings to the text is as important as the text itself. Each new experience adds more information to one's schema. Since prior knowledge is essential for the comprehension of new information, teachers need to help students build the prerequisite knowledge, or remind them of what they already know before introducing new material.

Another technique applied as a prereading activity in the process of reading is discussing quotations covered by the text. Some bright ideas that have a lot to incorporate into one's schema might be suggested by the teacher for discussion and critical evaluation. Research by schema theorists indicates that abstract concepts are best understood if explained in simple concrete foundation, relevant for the case studied. Information integrates best into schemata when established on culturally accessible material. The general knowledge provides a framework into which the newly-formed structure can be fitted.

Text planning, which is particularly helpful for activating textual schemata, presupposes discussing the components of textual material. Students are inspired to provide personal suggestions on how the text might be structured. The key components of the main modes of discourse, i.e. narration, description, exposition and persuasion, are to be assessed for better understanding of content in question.

The research raised in the suggested paper does not cover the difficulties that are usually an inseparable part of reading process. It is worth discussing possible hurdles in the process of changing schemata in different cultural areas. It would also be well worth an effort to classify the difficulties which prevent understanding of the material read when schemata vary from student to student in every class. These issues can serve as the beginning of a new research.

Being an active participant of reading process is an outcome of an accurate schemata development. Text involvement is seen through personal feedback that promotes a dominant force of shaping one's reading habits. On the contrary, poor schemata development leads to weak reading comprehension. A reader is most likely to fail if his/her cultural schema is different from the one proposed by the text. Readers' cultural orientation cannot be ignored as it puts an impact on *what* and *how* they perceive while reading.

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