THE ESSENTIAL ROLES OF SKIMMING AND SCANNING TECHNIQUES IN TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION

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According to Nunan (1999), there are different types of reading: *receptive reading*, which is the rapid, automatic reading that we do when we read narratives; *reflective reading*, in which we pause often and reflect on what we have read; *skim reading*, in which we read rapidly to establish in a general way what a text is about; and *scanning*, or searching for specific information. Grellet (1981:12) also discussed four main ways that one can read a given text. These are *skimming, scanning, extensive reading* and *intensive reading*. She pointed out that these different ways to approach reading are not mutually exclusive, but may in fact be done in succession when approaching a given text. She identified three main types of strategy: sensitizing, improving reading speed, and going from skimming to scanning. The first strategy is subcategorized into making inferences, understanding relations with the sentence and linking sentences and ideas and the third includes predicting, previewing, anticipation, skimming and scanning.

Nuttall has stated that **skimming** means glancing rapidly through a text to determine its gist and **scanning** means glancing rapidly through a text to search for a specific piece of information. Aebersold & Field (1997:76) have given a more detailed definition of skimming and scanning. *Skimming* is defined as a quick, superficial reading of a text in order to get the gist of it. Although there is some question about exactly what readers do when they skim, it does appear to be a strategy for getting clues to the main ideas, divisions, points, or steps in an argument. *Scanning* involves three steps: determine what key words to look for, look quickly through the text for those words, then read the sentences around them to see if they provide the information being sought. Scanning is useful in prereading stage to build knowledge. Another possible prereading use of scanning is to check predictions that students make about the content of the text to be read. Scanning is also a useful strategy after having read a text as well. Both skimming and scanning, according to Grellet (1981), are specific reading techniques necessary for quick and efficient reading. When skimming, we go through the reading material quickly in order to get the gist of it, to know how it is organized, or to get an idea of the tone or the intention of the writer. When scanning, we only try to locate the specific information and often we do not even follow the linearity of the passage to do so. We simply let our eyes wander over the text until we find what we are looking for, whether it is a name, a date, or a less specific piece of information. Skimming is therefore a more thorough activity which requires an overall view of the text and implies a definite reading competence. Scanning, on the contrary, is far more limited since it only means retrieving what information is relevant to our purpose. Yet it is usual to make use of these two activities together when reading a given text. In actual reading performance, it is difficult to distinguish skimming and scanning because scanning inevitably involves some skimming and skimming must embrace some scanning (Nunan, 1999).

Grellet (1981), Williams (1984), and Nuttall (1996) give instructions on teaching skimming and scanning strategies. The teacher needs to help the students develop successful reading strategies. There are some students in a class who have not acquired the techniques of successful reading and are plodding through texts word by word. The teacher's task is to help them process linguistic information more efficiently and build up confidence which is the key to fluent reading. Most people accept that we can at least identify certain strategies which readers can make conscious use of when reading difficult texts. Probably the best way to acquire these is

simply to read and reread. However, there is evidence that strategy training helps. Nuttall (1996) also states that scanning and skimming are important techniques and emphasizes that certain kinds of practice seem to help students read more effectively.

Teachers need to be aware of reading strategies in order to facilitate students' reading, regardless of the approach they choose to use in the classroom. Current thinking on the teaching of second language reading strategies suggests (Richards, 2002:22):

- *The teaching of strategies should be contextualized.*
- *Strategies should be taught explicitly through direct explanation, modeling, and feedback.*
- *There should be a constant recycling of strategies over the next texts and tasks.*
- *Strategies should be taught over a long period of time.*

According to Richards (1989:20), the students are encouraged to choose one appropriate strategy of the four given below:

- *Strategy A: Read the text, read the comprehension questions, then go back and skim for answers. This is the most detailed way of reading the text.*
- *Strategy B: Read the questions, read the text carefully to find the answers, then go back and check the answers against the questions.*
- *Strategy C: Skim the text, read the questions then scan for the answers.*
- *Strategy D: Read the questions and skim for the answers. This is the fastest strategy.*

The students should be encouraged to practice skimming and scanning the text. Skimming and scanning effectively will prevent the students from inefficient reading habits such as reading word by word , reading aloud, moving lips, translating, reading for form and details. Skimming and scanning are two very useful techniques. The advantages of skimming are that the students can predict the purpose of the passage, the main topic and possibly some supporting ideas. Skimming requires a superficial reading, not an in-depth reading. The students can be trained to skim the passage by giving them a few minutes to look through the text, having them close the book and saying what they learn. The advantage of scanning is that the students can extract certain specific information without reading through the whole text and scanning is especially useful when the students deal with schedules, tables, charts and graphs.

Nunan (1999:251) points out that "skimming and scanning both involve fairly rapid superficial reading and both are aimed at searching, rather than deep processing of the text or reflection upon the content of the text". Nuttall (1996) argues that scanning and skimming do not remove the need for careful reading, but they enable the reader to select parts of the text, that are worth spending time on. Skimming to get a top-down view is valuable as a way of approaching difficult texts. Readers can often produce a reasonable hypothesis about the text after skimming it, by using a top-down approach. This means that a lesson can start on a positive note " What do we know about this text? So what do you think its message is likely to be?" instead of starting with negative factors such as unfamiliar vocabulary. It is also a good strategy, for students must learn to utilize their resources of common sense, general knowledge and experience. A global impression and a rough idea of the kind of text facilitate detailed work on the text. It is a good strategy to set a task requiring the reader to look at the text in a top-down way.

Teachers should not insist too strongly on students' understanding every word, but rather encourage them to go for the overall meaning of a text because smaller sense units are combined into bigger coherent ones and the whole is much faster to read. Students should be encouraged to improve skimming so that they can get the gist or the main ideas of the text quickly without paying attention to non-essential information. They should be made aware that they do not need to understand all the words in order to understand the meaning of the text. ESL and EFL students must be consistently encouraged to break the word-by-word reading habit, which interferes with comprehension.

In short, mastering reading skills and strategies can lead to the least time-consuming and the most effective reading. The teacher should help the students to increase reading speed by training them to employ useful and efficient reading strategies such as skimming and scanning.

References

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