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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the role of reading in second language learning redefines reading and links it, within language learning, to a revised concept of motivation. To fulfill a more useful function in language teaching, reading should be considered a truly creative rather than basically receptive process. The three elements in the complex process of reading are reader, text, and author. The reader is at a disadvantage without the co-participant's help he might get in verbal interaction. One theory of motivation proposes that the tendency to approach an achievement-related goal is a product of three factors: need for achievement (motivation for success), probability of success, and the incentive value of success. In language learning, probability of success approaches zero when the hope of success is defined as mastering the language, particularly if the hidden agenda is to gain the skills of a native speaker. However, because written text is passive, the reader/learner can be active in "creating" the message.Reading should be considered as a truly creative rather than receptive process. The learner is supposed to find out what the author wants to say and how he says it. Sacrificing the author would put the reader in a more autonomous position. The reader determines what the text means, a position in which the motivation is based on challenge. Contains 16 references. (MSE)

Reading: Motivation Through Challenge

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Even though *reading* is currently receiving more attention from researchers in SLL and SLA, (cf e.g. AILA Review 8: 1991) and from authors of curricula and syllabuses[1], it still remains outside the mainstream interest in these areas. In this paper I will attempt to redefine *reading* and to discuss its position within the process of language learning by linking it to a revised concept of motivation. This article is not designed to give practical advice nor does it refer immediately to any classroom situation. Its aim is to discuss the broader issue of integrating a particular activity into a particular learning process: the process of learning a foreign language. If language is conceived in the Humboldtian tradition as *energeia* and not as *ergon*, the creative aspect of language use becomes central in any linguistic analysis (cf. Humboldt 1988:49). Creativity, though, is not confined to the sender/speaker/author as one might readily assume, but is also required in the receiver/listener/reader. In particular the reader has to be very creative, as a number of features which are normally associated with conveying information are absent in the reading process. The three central concepts mentioned above - *reading*, *motivation,* and *challenge* , therefore, need some clarification with regard to their interpretation in this paper, starting with the concept of *reading* or more precisely, *reading in L2*. I will not endeavour to give an overview of the different types of reading that have been identified such as *skimming*, *scanning*, *search reading* and *receptive/responsive reading* etc., in a field in which the terminology is still fairly inconsistent (cf. Schwerdtfeger 1981:270), but rather try to adopt a more general view of this *Forgotten third skill* as Kellermann (1981), almost fifteen years ago, quite appropriately

named it - within the general framework of present day language learning and teaching. I will, furthermore, attempt to define the position of the reader by looking at it from a perspective which has been developed within the various schools of structuralism and post-structuralism in the course of the past two decades.

Until recently *reading* played (at least ideologically) a rather marginal role within the framework of the *direct method* and the ensuing *communicative paradigm*. Kellermann's attempt to move it from its peripheral position in language teaching to a more central one certainly was a move in the right direction, but it remained an isolated one for quite some time. However, the term *skill*, employed by her does not do justice to the very complex activity that we call *reading*. *Reading* is far more than a skill, it is communication (cf. Schwerdtfeger 1981:260). This point of view is neither new nor does it have a claim to any originality (cf. Brinsley 1627 quoted in Kelly 1969:134). But it has not been of great concern to either practice or theory of SLL and SLA. *Reading* as an activity is tied to the written word, which, by definition, is secondary to the spoken word. In an ideological context where the spoken word is conceived of as the basic means of communication, *reading* must consequently be interpreted as a secondary activity, a skill that is useful but not essential with regards to communication.

The three elements interacting in this complex process are: the reader, the text and the author (cf. Schwerdtfeger 1981: 260). The reader is confronted not only with an array of symbols which he has to decipher, but what is far more important, he has to link the concepts he encounters with the ones he already knows, with previous experiences, with his acquired knowledge in general. Reading a text in L2 thus requires problem solving on two levels: on the level of code-breaking and on the level of the functional text. Both are, of course, closely connected (cf. Schwerdtfeger 1981: 261).

Unlike any direct-face-to-face communication, this situation seems to be slightly disadvantageous for the reader, as he is not party to the kind of help from the other participants (text and author) which he might get in verbal interaction. That is, he has to reconstruct or even construct on his own the sense or message of a text to a far greater degree than in a

face to face interaction. To put it positively: he is quite autonomous. I will discuss the implications of this perspective at a later stage in more detail.

The two other concepts mentioned are *challenge* and *motivation*, which cannot be dealt with separately as they are linked by a cause-effect relationship. *Motivation* here must not be confused with *integrative* or *instrumental motivation*, terms which refer directly to a sociological dimension (cf. Gardner/Lambert 1972) but the kind of motivation that has been the focus of research in Motivational Psychology for more than a hundred years. The basic question thus being: what makes us do things? This is certainly not the place to give even a rough account of how the analysis became more sophisticated and the approaches more philosophical rather then technical (cf. Weiner 1972:1ff). What seems to be generally agreed on is that motivation is intimately linked with *challenge*, or as Weiner (1972:195) puts it:

> 'The tendency to approach an achievement-related goal, or the hope of success (Ts) is postulated to be a product of three factors: the need for achievement, also known as the motive for success (Ms), the probability that one will be successful at the task (Ps), and the incentive value of success (Is). It is postulated that these three components are multiplicatively related:
>
> Ts = Ms x Ps x Is.'

The need for achievement (*Ms*) was defined by Atkinson (1964:214) as 'the capacity to experience pride in accomplishment'. It is an affective phenomenon and represents a relatively stable or enduring disposition to strive for success (cf Weiner 1972: 195). The second factor *(Ps)* the *probability of success* is a subjective rather than an objective variable, even though it can be influenced by beliefs or experiences in a given social environment. With regards to the learnability of languages, German for example, is generally believed to be a *difficult* language, whereas English in most countries has a reputation for being a relatively *easy* one. Hence, an individual taking an English course will generally have a much higher expectancy to achieve the set objective than in the case of a German course.

The *incentive value of success* (*Is*) is inversely related to the *hope of success* in as much as the pride experienced in the accomplishment of a difficult task is greater than that experienced at having accomplished an easier one (cf. Weiner 1972:197). Thus, within the theoretical framework of this model, mastering English normally does not entitle a subject to the kind of pride the mastery of German would. In other words, this is where the element of *challenge* comes in. That is, a goal must be believed to be attainable, otherwise the *probability of success* becomes zero with the consequece that the product becomes zero. The *incentive value* (Is) on the other hand, could have a similar effect on Ts (the tendency to approach an achievement related goal) if it is too low. In other words *a challenge* must be maintained in order to secure, together with the relatively stable factor *Ms* (*need for achievement*), a high value on the other side of the equation for the *tendency to approach* an achievement related goal *Ts*.[2]

Applying this model to the process of language learning, we can quite easily detect a basic flaw: the *probability of success* (*Ps*) will, at a certain stage go towards zero when the Ts (*the hope of success*) is defined as *mastering the language* and when, in a hidden agenda, we find the additional objective *like a native speaker*. In other words, a challenge ceases to be one when the probability of success drops to zero. The task in question then is beyond the capability of the individual.[3]

My earlier assertion that reading has become marginal in the wake of direct, audiolingual or audiovisual and communicative methods is only half true. The disregard and even contempt for language in its written form has a far longer tradition. Saussure for instance maintained that 'Writing veils the appearance of language; it is not a guise for language but a disguise.' (Saussure 1983: 51). This attitude can even be traced back as far as Rousseau who, in his unfinished essay *Pronunciation* declared:

> 'Languages are made to be spoken. Writing is nothing but a supplement of speech. The analysis of thought is made through speech' (cf. Rousseau 1986:78).

Nevertheless the written word as a medium of language instruction has dominated the classroom for quite some time. But what is known as the *grammar-translation-method* can only be superficially related to *reading* in so far as this method employs the skill of deciphering a written text, not necessarily with the intention of leading towards an understanding of the text as a whole or its semantization (cf Schwerdtfeger 1981:261). *Reading* within the framework of the *grammar-translation-method* is basically seen as a necessary prerequisite to transfer meaning from one language to another. The fact that the method in question was not at all successful as regards oral proficieny - something one should not hold against it as it was never designed to achieve such ends - is certainly one of the many factors responsible for marginalizing reading. In other words, teaching through grammar and translation was not particularly successful, it was largely based on working with texts, a kind of work which relies on reading; this leads to the logically incorrect but perfectly understandable conclusion that reading is not an important activity which involves the reader/learner as an autonomous participant in a highly complex interaction, but a mere *skill*. The fact that the above mentioned process of semantization hardly ever occurred in grammar-translation exercises (looking at certain types of textbooks and examination papers, particularly in third level language teaching in the United Kingdom, it seems that the authors try to avoid semantization at all costs) reading in general got the reputation of being useful only on a superficial level: reading is very often limited to what Westhoff (1987:21) calls *learning-reading*, i.e. the skill, which is an end in itself.

It was mentioned above that reading has to be interpreted as communication in which three elements interact: the reader, the author and the text. The first one, the reader, has already been discussed. In a communicative reading process he has to develop a reading competence, i.e. the disposition and the ability to interact with a text.

The author, the second participant, normally has only a vague idea for whom he is writing and who will eventually read what he has written. To ensure that his communicative intentions are successful the author must a) inform the reader about the subjective modality, that is his (the author's) judgement on the text, b) use metalinguistic elements to

specify the scope of his message (chapter titles for example can be interpreted as such), and has to c) maintain contact with the reader (cf. Schwerdtfeger 1981:262 and Davies & Widdowson 1975:164ff).

The text, as an intermediary between two intentionally acting subjects remains passive. And the fact that it does so is exactly what makes it so attractive as a device for language learning in general and not only as a component within the framework of a given curriculum, because the *reader* is not the passive receiver of the message but the active creator. As indicated aboved, this might to some extent hold true for any communication, but in face-to-face interaction the author/speaker has a much more authoritative position. He can force his message upon the listener. Reading on the other hand offers a far wider range of possibilities on the reader's side: he can totally or partially ignore the author's attitude, he might not be able or willing to decipher the meaning or function of metalinguistic elements and he might misinterpret the author's contact signals. In any reading process, whether L1 or L2 these phenomena occur. Some parts of the intended message may be lost and will have to be replaced by those created by the reader. They might be very similar to those the author had in mind, but there is no guarantee that they are. Under the assumption that it is the readers intention to communicate, one is inclined to believe that his constructions at least attempt to match the authors intentions. But this is by no means essential. In particular, literary texts[4] depend on the reader's creative participation because one of their constituent elements are the *blanks* which create the so called *appeals structure* i.e. the text becomes an entity which is independent of its author, his intentions and goals, its indetermination being exactly one of its main constituents (cf. Iser 1972:228ff), a process decribed by Barthes as 'the death of the author' (Barthes 1988:167). According to Barthes the author has to be sacrificed in order to give the text - and consequently the reader - autonomy. Or, as Lacan puts it even more radically: 'There is nothing outside the text'.

In a normal classroom situation in which the interaction is assymetrical by definition, communication - more often than not - is unidirectional and leaves very little room for creativity at the receiving end. The classic text-book text underlines these tendencies as they are in general

non-functional, i.e. not designed to leave room for the reader to be an active participant in a communicative process. (cf. Schwerdtfeger 1981:263, Westhoff 1987:21, Rösler 1994:120ff). And this is crucial: It is only too obvious that institutionalized language instruction is limited by various factors of economy which are very difficult to eliminate: a) economy of time, i.e. a predetermined number of classes and duration of class periods, b) economy of materials, i.e. a certain range of topics has to be covered during a course and last but most definitely not least there is c) the economy of energy, i.e. teachers and learners have only a limited amount of energy at their disposal. One of the consequences is that communication has very little space within this framework (cf. Schwerdtfeger 1981:260).

There are several other phenomena which are detrimental to goal-achievement in the classroom situation and even in an everyday face-to-face interaction in the target language, namely, the pressure to perfom well here and now. Even though it might not be felt so strongly in the rather artificial setting of the classroom, it is an immensely important element in the language wilderness of the target culture. In other words, the amount of energy and concentration spent on a task oriented performance as for instance participating in a discussion or trying to get a refund for an unused train ticket, leaves hardly any room for paying attention to the language itself.

One should, however, bear in mind, that the learners objectives vary with regard to the language they are learning. Learning English for example is certainly different from learning most other languages inasmuch as English has become a widely accepted *lingua franca*. That is, people do not learn English primarily with the goal to communicate within the framework of the target culture, which in the case of English is quite difficult to define anyhow, but to aquire a skill which enables them to participate in some kind of interaction internationally. As a consequence, the learner might favour an instrumental approach that provides him with a code rather than a language. But the learning of almost any other language is solely directed towards communication in the target culture. So while it may make perfect sense to be able to master a number of standard situations in English by having the appropriate set phrases and idiomatic expressions at ones disposal, this

is not true for other languages. Sometimes it may even have an adverse effect. For instance quite frequently foreigners feel that using English is less stressful, for example, in a Spanish speaking environment than is Spanish. I mention this here only to underline the fact that English as a foreign language certainly has a different position in terms of motivation than does for example German, Spanish or Japanese.

If the above cited formula Ts = Ms x Ps x Is for the 'tendency to approach an achievement related goal' or 'the *hope of success*' is now applied to a communicative reading process we get the following picture: Under the assumption that *Ms* (motive for success), as already mentioned, is a relatively stable factor which in this equation does not require any special attention the *probability of success* will become quite high as the goal in question, reading a text, is, compared to the higher level objective, learning a language, a well defined one. The link between the performance of an act, the instrumental action and the attainment of the goal is far more obvious. But this is only one factor. Another, even more important element in my opinion, is that the reader to quite a large extent is involved in the definition of the objective, or in other words in making his own sense of a given text.

This involves appropriate strategies on at least two levels, on the code level and on the level of the functional text. As the code has to be broken to gain access to the fuctional text, the reader will have to depend on the reading strategies which he has already developed in L1. He will have to pay closer attention to the formal syntactical and morphological structures and the access to the functional text will to some extent rely on a more or less successful performance on this level. This, however, is not the goal to be attained. It is one necessary component of a complex activity. Nevertheless, the very fact that this component exists in L2 reading requires a level of reflection, a metalinguistic approach, even if only a rudimentary one. The reader is thus forced to shape his tools as he proceeds, which again implies that he is an active and creative participant in this process.

The *incentive value of success* which is defined as being inversely related to the *hope of success* i.e. the lower the hope of success the higher the incentive value, (becoming president of the United States as a

goal has undoubtedly a very high incentive value but a very low value as regards the hope of success) can also, at least partially, be determined by the reader. The fact that time, essential in any face to face interaction (classes do not go on for ever and participants in real life communication do not have unlimited patience), plays only a minor role in reading, enables the learners to approach texts well above their 'objectively' determined or subjectively felt level of proficiency. In other words: *reading* an authentic literary text is one of the very few areas where the learner is confronted with the reality of the target language without having to run the risk of communicating unsuccessfully in that language. In other words, a literary text does not take into account that the reader has not covered a particular section of grammar or has only a very limited vocabulary and is in this respect very much like real face-to-face interaction in the target language. But unlike this type of interaction where these limitations often are responsible for unsuccessful communication and subsequently lead to what is known as as *avoidance of failure* i.e. 'the capacity to experience shame given nonattainment of a goal' (Weiner 1972:200), the text is the construction of the learner, in other words, the communication is successful by definition, because 'linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing...' (Barthes 1988:169). Thus reading must be seen as a highly challenging and persistently motivating activiy.

The conclusion which can be drawn from the afore said is that reading, to fulfil a more useful function in language teaching, should be considered as a truly creative rather than a basically receptive process. In Bühler's terminology any language sign has three principal functions: *expression* (Ausdruck), *representation* (Darstellung) and *appeal* (Appell) (cf. Bühler 1934:28). It seems to be quite obvious that the efforts in *reading in L2* are normally associated with the first two, *expression* and *representation*. The learner is supposed to find out what the author wants to say and how he says it. Sacrificing the author as Barthes suggested would put the reader into a far more autonomous position. He, the reader, determines what the text means, a position in which the motivation is based on challenge as it reflects the eternal 'struggle of men and signs' (Barthes 1988:173).

NOTES

[1] The new German Syllabus for the Leaving Certificate determines for instance under III Cultural Awareness as one of the performance targets 'identifying meaning present but not overtly expressed in such a [literary] text' and 'appreciating the "tone" of such a text.'

[2] I would like to point out at this stage that I see the formula discussed above as a valuable heuristic device, not as one that yields exact, quantifiable results.

[3] This, in my opinion, is one reason, and probably a very important one, for the difficulties we encounter in the majority of intermediate courses where normally the highest drop-out rates can also be found.

[4] Barthes (1988:169) questions the validity of the distinction between literary and non-literary texts.

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