AKADÉMIAI KIADÓ

Development of the discourse competence through literary texts

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THEMATIC ARTICLE

ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to present a study of the literary text from a discursive perspective focusing on the development of the discourse competence in the English language. It is a new approach in the EFL methodology which highlights the relation between the holistic understanding of the comunication, social phenomena and the study of language structures in their use. The European educational policies favour the literary text as a key factor in boosting the students' communicative skills.

Thus, the paper presents a theoretical framework of the researches in the field and shares our vision on the discourse competence which places the discourse component on the central position in the process of developing the communicative competence. The text interpretation through a discursive approach constitutes an effective tool for examining the language correlation with the intent and sociocultural context. In this regard, in the second part of the article, we offer some concrete didactic activities related to the necessary conditions (such as the context and communicative situations) and discourse-oriented practices (activities simulating real needs outside the classroom) used for an optimal development of students' discourse competence.

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INTRODUCTION

The process of communicative language teaching covers two aspects: comprehension and meaning. If the meaning is not deduced correctly or properly understood, both the sender and the receiver can face difficulties in considering the meaning.

Thus, the communication occurs only when the reader or speaker is able to comprehend and transmit a message. Stating this, learning a foreign language represents a vital means for the communication created by more actors involved in the process which should aim at developing the communicative competence.

Among the components of the communicative competence, there is the discourse competence that is viewed as a signigicant element of the language and speech development (Cadre européen commun de référence pour les langues, 2018). Nowadays, the language methodologies focus on its practice and, as a result, the discourse competence is a constitutive part of the curricula. In all language didactics, the discourse denotes the language in context or use (Kjell H., 2006).

The context for the communication is not generated only by grammatical and linguistic patterns as it is not sufficient for language functioning in the society.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The social context requires the mastery of the discourse competence. Teachers should contribute to its development along with the other competences. Unlike Chomsky's theory that language learning occurs in the student's mind independently of the context, Canale and Swain point out the importance of the social use in the process of language learning. They distinguish four components of the communicative competence which are: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. The discourse competence supposes the learner's ability to understand and produce texts in all the aspects: listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is related to the text cohesion and coherence (Hui Pan, 2021).

The discourse competence contributes to the text construction and interpretation. It is considered to be a challenge to students as they encounter difficulties in comprehending the differences between the ways of structuring and constructing texts and discourses in their native language and those structures of the target language. The new environment may create different ambiguities for learners because of the high level of the linguistic stuff of the target language which the learners are not familiar with.

Actually, the discourse is produced due to certain organizational rules that create different subjects. According to the Council of Europe the discourse competence is defined as the learner's capacity to arrange, structure, link sentences in order to produce coherent and cohesive texts. It is characterized by the ability:

- to order the sentences according to the topic focus, temporal sequencing, cause and effect.
- to structure and build discourses regarding: *thematic organisation; logical ordering; style and register; coherence and cohesion rhetorical effectiveness* (Junaidah & Jeannet, 2014).
- Cohesion and coherence constitute the core of the discourse competence. They encourage the development of learners' receptive and productive skills.

Nevertheless, the didactic process doesn't valorize fully the formation and development of the discourse competence. It occurs due to the lack of vocabulary and knowledge related to language syntactic structures. Consequently, the ideas expressed are formulated in isolation, without fitting the context. Neglecting the discourse competence development may cause a significant hinderance to language learning. While writing or reading students may use words and understand every linguistic unit used but they may face difficulties in getting the whole meaning. When reading and discussing certain points students can render incoherent views.

Thus, the English language teaching requires that teachers pay more attention to coherence, logical ordering realized by different lexical cohesive means. The incorrect way of using the lexical cohesive devices may provoke an overuse of the connectors which may hinder the understanding of the message.

Hence, English teachers should handle admirably the problem and teach the discourse features explicitly to their students. Addressing the issue in an efficient comprehensive way generates knowledge, abilities and attitudinal behaviours in using the language (Hui Pan, 2021).

The knowledge acquired contributes to the construction of texts coherence which depends on the reader or interpreter. Therefore, the interaction is based on the connection between the text, reader and context.

Speaking about the text coherence it comprises two levels: *the global coherence and local coherence*. Global coherence supposes the connection of the data from the text and those outside the text while local coherence reflects the interpretation of the current information from the text in accordance with the context. While analysing a literary text both types of coherence will be taken into account (Thornbury, 2005).

In this regard, in the process of the English language learning students have to learn how to build oral or written messages that contain coherent ideas and thoughts. Besides, linking all their thoughts requires knowledge in terms of grammatical and lexical cohesive devices. The challenges met outside the classroom, namely, within different social environments impose on students' good command of the language (Lee I., 2012).

The teacher will propose tasks focused on developing the students' skills necessary for an effective comprehensive perception: strategies to establish cohesion between the linguistic structures of their memory and the new concepts, the use of bimodal supports (visual and auditory presentation at the same time), encouraging learners to prepare a fragment/chapter and present it in an attractive form, maintaining the continuity of understanding etc.

Therefore, the teacher should help students activate the knowledge acquired in the process of text analysis. The literary text encloses several formative valencies whose knowledge is considered to be essential in the skills acquisition.

METHODS AND APPROACHES

We would like to illustrate an example of a new literary text approach which favours the development of the learners' discourse competence. We intend to present the specificity of the discursive approach prioritizing the learning by tasks, from the simple to the complex, so that the learner can learn, act and move from mental activities to discursive activities.

The aim of the discursive approach focuses on:

- The use of different types of language and their impact on the text comprehension.

- Cultural rules, norms, etiquettes, social values in communication.
- Modalities of rendering intentions, beliefs, assumptions and opinions.
- Language relation with its social, historical and cultural context.

The discursive approach of the text highlights the relation between the narrator and the reader in building an argument which must be appropriate in social practices. It studies the way in which the readers perceive the language in context. On the other hand, the discursive analysis covers aspects as textual coherence and cohesion, as well as meaning deduction.

In the light of those mentioned above, we propose some suggestions and samples of tasks while working with the literary text focusing on the development of the discourse competence. In the didactic process we will consider the communicative activities stipulated in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: reception, production, mediation, interaction and implement them when analysing the literary text *An Incident in Ghobashi Household* by Alifa Rifaat (Kincaid, K. 1995)

Examples of tasks:

- *Identify the relationship between the husband, wife and daughter. What does their relationship reveal? (reception activity)*
- *Name the reasons Mother decided to deceive her neighbours and husband. Link her reasons to the social context (reception activity).*
- *Make-up a connotational gradation (positive > negative) in the next groups of synonyms;*
  Ex. a). Slender, Thin, Skinny, Slim *(reception activity).*
- *Match the verbs with the prepositions according to the phrasal verbs from the text. Make up new phrasal verbs using the proposed words and use them in 2-3 sentences (production activity).*
- *Paraphrase the clauses using the proper conjunctions, connectors and temporal/spatial adverbs from the list below (mediation activity).*

Paraphrasing plays a major role in learning English as it points out the learner's skill in understanding the source well enough to render it in their own words without losing its essence and logical structure. It encourages the students to use their creativity and build skills in holding a conversation with their peers and not only.

- *Identify the error in the following lines from the text and correct them;*
- *Fill in the lines with the connectors from the list.*
- *Arrange the next lines from the text into a logical order.*
- *Exemplify in what situations you would say this.*
  - I'm afraid.
  - Excuse me.
  - What?
  - No way!
  - You dont know me! I don't believe this!

- *Hold a brainstorm on the interaction between the author, reader and text.*

In the light of those related above brainstorming is a good tool to activate students' topic-related schema to boost the coherent interpretation of the literary text.

Schema denotes the way learners comprehend the world and things represented in the text. Brainstorming ideas is an efficient way to put things in context and makes students explore the material and show their views on it. It also enables students to evoke important content words in the text, to make this activity successful, the teacher may offer topic-related questions. Answering the teacher's questions learners can elicit relevant words. Through analyzing the information and the relationship reflected in the text, students can clearly perceive the text structure and the author's intent to illustrate his thoughts. Afterwards, the teacher will ask his learners to explore the literary text again and point out all the features of the discourse markers in the sentences. Then students can interpret the use of the lexically cohesive words and they will also be able to create cohesion in their own works. Having done this, students will penetrate into the text structure, topic and will underpin the relationship between the paragraphs. As a result, they can intepret the text coherently. An optimal way to help students get acquainted with the text organization is represented by graphic organizers which facilitate the process of literary text analysis.

For example:

- Fill in the graphic organizer and use it answering the following questions: What values, motivation, and priorities do I, the reader, share with the author?"; "How are we different?"; To what extent does the author's cultural background influence the decisions that he or she has made concerning word choice, the use of literary devices, and genre?"; and "How do these choices affect the way that I feel about the text?"
- Point out all the textual connectors, lexical patterns which contribute to the establishment of this relation (Fig. 1).

The teacher may ask his learners to determine the logical relationship by lexical cohesive device: references, substitutions and ellipsis. In English, the connectors are called, as well, lexical cohesive devices. the are used for creating and producing texts. Finding the meanings of reference, substitution or ellipsis learners can develop their skills in achieving cohesion (Gurala & Svetlana, 2014).

Therefore, language teachers should elaborate tasks to train such skills. They can devise tasks which may contribute to students' accuracy, cohesion and coherence. The activities have a view to help students deduce the significance of the core structures of the text and broaden their vocabulary. These exercises can not only develop students' vocabulary but also make them identify the relationship among words (Hui Pan, 2021).
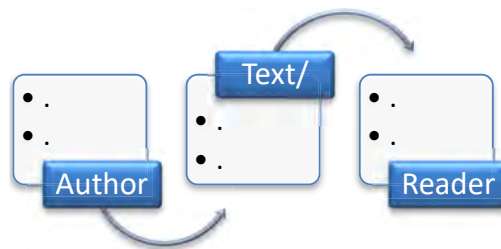

Fig. 1. The relation author-text-reader

We can use some post-reading activities which encourage students to reflect upon what they have read. At this stage, the learner goes beyond the textual meanings. The discursive interactions will concretize the learner's mental knowledge about the world he has just discovered and allow him to better position himself in a multicultural environment. The activities intend to help learners use the text for specific language study, respond to the text creatively and comprehend the text meaning. In order to remember the new information, to penetrate into its sense, the students need to go beyond simply reading.

Examples of tasks:

- Determine the author's voice in revealing the problem of the text. What are the ways of creating the tone of the text? What incident has happened in Ghobashi Household? *(mediation activity)*.
- *Role-play* the dialogue. Work in pairs (*mother-daughter/father-daughter*). According to the values shared by the culture described in the text, make up a dialogue on one of the values. Give advice about sharing and keeping it, discuss its cultural importance *(interaction activity)*.

In this regard, the dialogue engages learners' involvement in problem solving and deepens its understanding. The dialogue encourages the reflection on the content and action in the classroom. Learners can share their knowledge, feelings, attitudes and collaboration as well. The dialogue helps students structure and articulate their speech, thoughts and develops the ability to convey a coherent message (Ciorba-Lașcu T., 2021).

- *Role-play the situation*. You are in the mother's shoes. You have a discussion with your husband. Find an explanation to your lie. Bring arguments to justify your deed *(interaction activity)*.

It is an activity that improve students' speaking and listening skills. In addition, students are given the possibility to ponder over a topic and enhance creativity and imagination, fluency and problem solving skills. Using role-plays students become more confident and have the opportunity to apply the knowledge acquired during the lessons, they develop communicative skills which allow them to act out in complex real-life situations. For the realization of such tasks learners have to explore, analyse and develop social skills in the process of collaborating with their peers.

- *Web-quest project*. Open the link https://www.canva.com/ and make a media collage of photos, music and videos which represent a cultural diversity of Moldova, Libya and Egypt. Portray the similarities and differences met in their social values. Comment on them *(production activity)*.
- *Essay*: Write a coherent paragraph about the values and traditions in your family which are inherited from grandparents/ancestors *(production activity)*.
- Create a persuasive text where you can argue, explore or express your opinion on: *Women should/shouldn't be judged for giving birth to illigitimate children*. Relate things to your own sociocultural space *(production activity)*.

CONCLUSION

All types of the methodologies which exploit the literary text, including communicative, functional or discursive, comprise a series of planned tasks in order to increase the level of text

comprehension at anticipatory, while-reading and post-reading stages. In case the text has linguistic difficulties, the teacher will use different mediation strategies with tasks designed for the development of learners' comprehension skills.

If the text presents linguistic difficulties then, through different mediation strategies, the teacher will propose tasks focused on developing students' skills necessary for an effective comprehensive perception: strategies to establish cohesion between the linguistic structures of their memory and the new concepts, the use of bimodal supports (visual and auditory presentation at the same time), encouraging learners to prepare a fragment/chapter and present it in an attractive form, maintaining the continuity of understanding etc.

A correct selection of tasks for the literary text analysis contributes to the development of the discourse competence which enables as well the progress of the improvement of communication skills through the interconnected development of linguistic, pragmatic, discursive, cultural and sociolinguistic competences.

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