



## **TEACHING READING SKILLS IN THE MULTICULTURAL WORLD (1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> GRADE)**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Problems of teaching reading skills are discussed beyond the context of literary classes - in Bulgarian language classes and in English language classes in Primary school. Motivation for attaining proficiency in reading is considered one of the most important questions in the process of literacy formation.*

*Some interactive techniques of teaching reading in the first (Bulgarian) language are described. Propositions of the second language acquisition theory which English teachers should bear in mind when teach reading in English as a new language are listed.*

**KEY WORDS:** *teaching reading skills, Bulgarian language classes, English language classes, Primary school, interactive techniques.*

### **1. Language in the multicultural world**

It is through language that one gets to know oneself and others. It is through language that technologies, human rights, religion, politics are realized. What is more, it is through language that one speaks about language itself. It is accepted that "...having command of a first and second language represents a single phenomenon [1], and being a bilingual is a common occurrence. Language becomes a "bridge" – a bridge for language "intercomprehension" [2].

### **2. Reorientation of existing methodological systems**

The current sociocultural situation necessitates reorientation of existing methodological systems. Teaching the first and a foreign language are perceived as being two elements of one and the same system – teaching a language. An educational ideal is to form the "talking child," prepared to "create" life and approve the "Self" - both today and tomorrow, in the world that does not yet exist.

A common belief, popular in school practice, is that after the beginning literacy stage students read mainly/only in literature classes. It is unacceptable if teachers want to achieve educational goals and outcomes, adequate to the

challenges of the modern world and to the children's needs. Students read not only in literature classes but in language classes (first language, foreign language classes), in other classes, and out of school. Problems of teaching reading skills are considered beyond the context of literary classes - in Bulgarian language classes and in English language classes in Primary school.

### **3. Motivation for attaining proficiency in reading**

In view of this, increasingly topical becomes the following question:

- where to start literacy formation in students – (1) from developing coding skills; (2) from developing understanding skills; (3) from developing synchronously both groups of skills.

In fact above all is "teaching" of desire (motivation) to read.

Motivation for learning activities is a system of motives for learning, internal incentives (that are mostly conscious) which help students perform learning activities with the purpose of personality development. Using needs of personable nature is a winning strategy for managing child's learning motivation. This process is significantly easier if it happens through interactive education.

It provides openness, diversification and democratism of educational process. The state changes from passivity (hearing retelling, etc.) into activity (wondering, exploring, listening and sharing, creating). Individual expression is encouraged and school community is built. All important characteristics of human learning are realized: positive feelings; desire to succeed; learning through action / interaction; giving meaning to knowledge. Reading skills are formed in unity with improvement of social, emotional and metacognitive competences.

### **4. Interactive teaching of reading in the first (Bulgarian) language classes (1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> grade)**

Under the conditions of Bulgarian /native/ language lesson for mastering linguistic knowledge and initial communicative abilities /title: "Adjectives" -4<sup>th</sup> school year/ in the preparatory component that defines structure, teacher directs students to read 'First books'/a short popular science text/. Through "Flash" interactive technique is looked for an answer to the question "What are three most important things you understand in text?" General conclusion is reached. A set of competences valuable for "live" practice is improved. These competences are as follows: communicative, linguistic, social, cognitive and metacognitive. Then adjectives used in the read text are differentiated. Learning and experience related to lesson's subject and type are updated .

## **5. Teaching and learning beginning reading in English as a foreign language in Bulgarian primary school**

Foreign language has become an obligatory subject in the second grade of Bulgarian primary school since 2000/2001. The English as a new language syllabus for the second grade sets students the task to get to know the Latin alphabet and to learn some basic abilities to read and write in English [3].

Since English is the most difficult European language to learn to read (according to a cross-national study conducted by Philip Seymour of Dundee University and his team which compared the reading abilities of children in 15 European countries [4]), Bulgarian education specialists discussed the following issues: What exactly should be learned to become literate in English? What are the characteristics of English spelling system? How are English spelling and pronunciation related? What are the similarities between first and second language? What are the differences? Are there any differences in developing English literacy when students speak Bulgarian (the official language of the country) as a first language and when students speak Bulgarian as a second language?

## **6. What should English teachers bear in mind when teach reading in English as a new language?**

Here are some propositions of the second language acquisition theory which English teachers should bear in mind when teach reading in English as a new language:

- If the second language acquisition starts after the child has acquired the basics of the first language (i.e. 3 years old and up), the process of second language acquisition will be different than the process of first language acquisition;
- Language acquisition / learning during the school years, when the child is becoming literate, is different from language acquisition during the pre-school years [5];
- Those whose mother tongue uses an alphabet other than Latin should acquire phonemes before graphemes; developing reading and writing skills should be done on the basis of listening and speaking skills [6];
- Reading comprehension is composed of two equally important components. Decoding, or the ability to translate text into speech, is only part of the process of reading comprehension. The other part is language comprehension, or the ability to understand spoken language [7];
- Bilingualism makes brains stronger. It is brain exercise. If you have two languages and you use them regularly, the way the brain's networks work is that every time you speak, both languages pop up and the executive control system has to sort through everything and attend

to what's relevant in the moment. Therefore the bilinguals use that system more, and it's that regular use that makes that system more efficient [8];

- If the second language consists of some phonemes and phoneme combinations that do not correspond to the phonemes which are registered in the brain then the available phoneme system functions as a filter: the new, different phonemes are perceived like the phonemes in the native language. Phonemes which are missing in the sound system of the mother tongue couldn't be recognized in the beginning of learning the new language. That is why P. Steffanova considers it is extremely important to develop and automate additional strategies for listening and articulating the new language phonemes [9].

It is therefore clear that the characteristics of the phoneme systems of the first and second language should be taken into consideration in the process of second language learning, especially in beginning reading.

### **7. Some characteristics of the phoneme systems of Bulgarian, Turkish, Romani and English language - Bulgarian students' first and second language**

A great part of Bulgarian primary students speak Roma or Turkish at home, Bulgarian is their second language and they learn English as a new language. Let's consider if there are any considerable differences between the phoneme systems of Bulgarian, Turkish, Romani and English language.

On the one hand there are 20 vocal *English* phonemes and 24 consonant English phonemes and since letters are only 26, the English spelling system is very difficult for reading and spelling, particularly at the early stages [10], [11]. On the other hand *Bulgarian* vocal system is different from the English one as regards: the number of vowels (6 vocal and 39 consonant phonemes); the quality of vocals (there are no long and short vowels, open and close vowels, diphthongs; there are no consonant clusters); complexity of articulations [12], [13]. According to Sn. Dimitrova there are some aspects of the English phoneme system which are a challenge for Bulgarians even at higher levels of learning: acquisition of the variety of vowel length; pronunciation of /p/, /t/, /k/ in initial position and stressed syllable with aspiration needed; incorrect devocalization of voiced consonants in a final position, wrong substitution of interdental consonants /θ/ and /ð/ with alveolar /t/ and /d/, etc. [13].

*Turkish* is characterized by vowel harmony, consonant mutation and agglutination. Postpositions are used instead of prepositions.

Turkish has eight vowels, four pairs (A-E, I-İ, O-Ö, U-Ü) with corresponding front/back, and rounded/unrounded sounds. A peculiarity of Turkish is the vowel harmony where vowels change in pronunciation and spelling to mirror the previous vowel in a word. There are no diphthongs in

Turkish and when two vowels come together, which occurs in some Arabic loanwords, each vowel retains its individual sound.

The Structure of Turkish differs in both grammatical structure and vocabulary from the Indo European Group, English, Spanish, French etc. It is also a phonetic language as each letter always retains its own sound. In English the sound of the letters can change, as the letter a does in fat, fate, fare etc. In Turkish there is no such pronunciation change to letters of the alphabet.

The rules of consonant mutation are typical for Turkish. In certain circumstances changes are made to the spelling of consonants. If the pronunciation of a consonant changes, the spelling also changes to reflect this. Turkish Pronunciation is Phonetic, in Turkish each letter of the alphabet always retains its basic pronunciation. Twenty-one letters represent the consonants [14]. Hr. Kyuchukov classifies *Romany* phonology and especially Erlij dialect from Sofia into 6 vowels, 9 diphthongs and 20 consonants: fricatives, nasal stops, stops and liquids. There are some aspirate consonants: kh, ph, th, ch which are typical for most of the Romani dialects. These sounds are pronounced with light aspiration of the h part. There are also two sounds /h/: laryngal /h/ as in the word *hyv* (hole) and velar /h/ as in the word *hav* (eat) [15].

Considerable discrepancies between the phoneme systems of the four languages could be summarized - both in phoneme numbers and their quality; there are considerable differences between Bulgarian and English systems. There are some similarities between Turkish, Romani and English phoneme systems: diphthongs (in English and Romani), aspirate consonants (in English, Romani and Turkish), open and close vowels (in English and Turkish). It could be expected that the differences between the phoneme systems – of Bulgarian, Turkish, Romani and English language – would cause perplexity and confusion in the process of English literacy development.

## **Conclusion**

Summing it up concisely:

- integral type of competences are built through interactive educational process and in terms of psychological comfort: these are the competences that students need to "create" life through reading and writing in the changing world;
- the characteristics of English spelling systems should be taken into consideration in the process of teaching English as a new language;
- English teachers should be fully acquainted with similarities and differences between first and second language, especially with the characteristics of the phoneme systems.

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