

INTERACTIVE-COMPENSATORY MODEL OF READING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING READING IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

(Mô hình “*Đọc hiểu theo phương pháp tương tác*”
và ứng dụng trong giảng dạy ngoại ngữ)

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Giới thiệu

Đọc hiểu là một trong những kỹ năng quan trọng và là nền tảng để học tốt hơn các chuyên ngành. Để giúp việc giảng dạy tiếng Anh đạt hiệu quả cao, các nhà ngôn ngữ đã đưa ra một số mô hình đọc hiểu, trong số đó “*Đọc hiểu theo phương pháp tương tác*” là mô hình được áp dụng phổ biến nhất.

Bài viết đề cập đến mô hình “*Đọc hiểu theo phương pháp tương tác*” – sự kết hợp của hai phương pháp *đọc hiểu theo từ (bottom up)* và *đọc hiểu theo tổng quan (top down)* và ứng dụng của phương pháp này trong soạn bài giảng ở trường phổ thông.

Bài viết giới thiệu hai phương pháp đọc hiểu và sự kết hợp của hai phương pháp trong mô hình “*Đọc hiểu theo phương pháp tương tác*”. Đồng thời đưa ra một số ứng dụng trong thiết kế bài giảng và minh họa thông qua truyện ngắn “*Hoa sen*” của Sherry Garland.

Introduction

Reading is an essential skill for those who speak English as a foreign or second language. It serves as a basic tool for students to achieve further progress in their academic fields. In order to help teachers obtain the optimum effect in the teaching of second language reading, researchers have provided several models of reading, among which the “interactive-compensatory” model is by far the most widely adopted by ELT teachers.

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This paper discusses the interactive-compensatory model in relation to the earlier approaches, bottom-up and top-down, and its implications for the design of reading material for foreign language learning in the context of Vietnam.

The first part of the paper starts with an outline of the two previous models of reading and the integration of these processes in the interactive-compensatory model. Within the framework of this model, suggestions for planning reading materials for secondary students in Vietnam will be discussed through a lesson plan of “The Lotus Seed” by Sherry Garland.

I. Models of reading

The understanding of the reading process has been the centre of many research studies. Theorists have provided two contrasting models of reading, different in the way of recognizing words. One theory considers reading as a data-driven process or bottom-up, in which the reader first starts with the recognition of the letter features (sounds, morphemes), continues to identify the word, comprehend the meaning of the whole sentence and links the sentences to make sense of the text. In other words, the reader, perceived as passive decoders of the text (Nuttall, 1996), proceeds with the interpretation of the text in a hierarchical order, from part to whole.

Other theorists, disagreeing with the view of the lower-level reading process, propose “top-down” or “whole to part” (Richard, 2004) approach, which emphasises the higher-level process of reading where the reader predicts the meaning of the word or phrases based on prior knowledge of the topic and structure of the text; reads to confirm the hypothesis; builds up meaning; and takes in new knowledge. Goodman (1998), a name associated with the top-down model, argues that good readers will be less dependent on visual details. The readers are viewed as active participants who construct their own meaning through five sequential processes known as recognition- initiation, making prediction, confirmation or/and correction and termination when the reading task is finished.

However, it is not realistic to assume that readers adopt one particular model of reading in decoding the meaning of the text. Depending on the type of the text, readers might need to involve different strategies, either making a prediction and confirmation of the text structure, or moving from word to word to check what the writer actually says. Urquhart and Weir (1998:46) point out “different tasks may require different types of reading and different models of the processes involved”. For example, in search reading, readers are likely to make prediction and references to get information to answer set questions; whereas in the careful

reading of new material, or “reading to learn”, readers need to acquire the ability to comprehend all aspects and ideas conveyed by the text.

Since neither the bottom-up nor top-down model of reading might seem sufficient for the readers to make use of when participating in the reading process, Stanovich (1980), among other theorists, proposes interactive compensatory model, a combination of the two earlier models. This approach explains reading as an interactive process, in which readers are differentiated in skills and knowledge, but this deficiency can be accommodated by the reader’s ability to draw on several sources of knowledge, both linguistic and background knowledge, to facilitate word recognition and interpreting the text. Linguistic knowledge includes orthographic knowledge (knowledge of letters and sounds), lexical knowledge (knowledge of word form), syntactic and semantic knowledge. Therefore, readers can benefit from both “bottom-up word recognition skills and top-down interpretation strategies” (Eskey, 1998:95) to develop good reading ability.

II. Implications for material design

With regard to classroom practice, the interactive – compensatory model has important implications for teaching reading in a second language at secondary school level, in relation to the material design.

Firstly, the content of the text selected for intensive reading, i.e. the reading procedure under the guidance of a teachers and the focus of the lesson is the text itself, (Nuttall, 1996:38) should be interesting and relevant to the students’ needs and interests. Moreover, at the secondary stage, when learners have not fully developed their cognitive maturity, texts should not be too culturally specific as they may cause difficulty for students to activate background knowledge. The findings of Steffensen, Johnson and Carrell (1998:245) emphasise the idea that “texts based on students’ own culture are easier to read and understand than texts based on a less familiar culture”.

Equally important, the reading material should allow students to make use of both the top-down approach to activate their prior knowledge and the bottom-up method, involving such knowledge as grammatical knowledge and morphological knowledge, as it is related to word recognition as well as reading comprehension.

For example, the illustrated material for a reading lesson is taken from authentic literature, a short story “The Lotus Seed” by Sherry Garland (1993). The choice of material is based on the suitability of content and the exploitability or facilitation of learning (Nuttall, 1996:174). In other words, the material should allow teachers to develop students’ reading ability through a variety of activities, in which

learners proceed with the applications of top-down and bottom-up approaches in negotiating the meaning of the text.

The objective of the lesson is threefold. First, students will be able to fully understand the text within the framework of the interactive-compensatory model of reading. Second, they will learn new knowledge, both linguistic and cultural knowledge, through reading. Finally, the work of literature, written about Vietnamese culture in the target language, will bridge the cultural gap between Vietnamese children and those living away from their homeland, both of whom share interest in maintaining their own cultural traditions.

1. Suitability of content

The story offers a high-interest content and is based on a topic familiar to all Vietnamese students – the importance of family heritage. A young Vietnamese narrator tells the story of her grandmother who, as a girl, accidentally sees the day of the emperor’s resignation. She takes a lotus seed as a remembrance of her homeland before leaving Vietnam. The treasured seed stays with her during her journey to the United States where she adapts to a new way of life. She maintains her cultural heritage and shares it with her grandchildren. This is the story of hope and continuance.

2. Applications of the interactive compensatory model in classroom activities

Taken from the interactive –compensatory perspective, the implication for the reading lessons is that students start by using a top down approach: activating all prior knowledge about the topic and type of text, exploring the text structure to make hypothesis about the writer’s purpose, then moving on to bottom-up approach at the word level: working out the meaning of each word or sentence by scrutinizing the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, and finally, reaching the interpretation of the whole text by confirming the predictions made in the first step.

2.1 Building background knowledge - Top-down applications

Class observation in my context shows that it would be better to build up background knowledge on the topic prior to reading through pre-reading activities which provide learners with a “global understanding” of the text before looking for details, rather than start with “analytical” (Nuttall, 1996:150) bottom-up word recognition as some learners often do. Background knowledge is provided through a range of activities such as text preview, thinking about the title and the

illustration on the cover page, comprehension questions (Handout 1) and text organization.

The title “The Lotus Seed” tells students the symbol of purity and beauty in Vietnamese culture. For some countries like Vietnam, the lotus is a representation of long life and growth. Traditionally, the Vietnamese Buddhists try to be like the lotus and to be as pure and beautiful in their hearts. The illustration on the cover page helps students prepare themselves to understand what they will be reading: a rice field, peaked mountains in the horizon, thatch-roofed houses and palm trees are typical features of Vietnamese countryside.

The discussions of the subject matter relevant to the story, including the history of Vietnam and immigration are of great importance to activate students’ background knowledge. Reminding students about the historical background of Vietnam (Handout 2) would help students understand the episode where the emperor cried the day he left the throne. Talking about the feelings connected to immigration and obstacles faced by immigrants such as cultural differences or language barrier will give an explanation of the grandmother’s making a decision to take with her the lotus seed from the Imperial Garden to bring along the history of her country.

Another task that “requires readers to look at the text in a top-down way” (Nuttall, 1996:158) to reach an interpretation is to understand how the text is organized, or its rhetorical structure, the purpose of the writer’s and the audience. Through activities such as organizing sequences of sentences, the students would be able to identify structural patterns in expository text: tell the difference between compare and contrast, distinguish between cause and effect and between fact and opinion, sequential or chronological order.

2.2 The study of language - Bottom-up applications

Grammatical knowledge, I believe, plays a crucial role in understanding the text, especially for non-native speakers. In the context of Vietnam, there are three aspects of grammar that students find most difficult, including morphology (or word formation), vocabulary and thematic structure (the way information is structured in communication) (Bloor&Bloor, 1995: 65). The reasons behind stem from the contrast between analytic (or isolating) language, which presents the information with word order and in which each word functions independently, and synthetic (or inflected) language, which uses inflectional forms such as suffixes or prefixes as a primary means of indicating grammatical functions of the words in the sentence. Vietnamese language belongs to the former category, while English belongs to the latter.

There is a wide range of activities to improve students' morphological knowledge, i.e. the use of affixes to negotiate the meaning of the words, and build up students' vocabulary such as alphabetical listing, synonyms, categorizing (use the vocabulary listing to find words from the story that fit under category headings: Family Members, Garden, Emperor, Nature, Flowers, etc.).

Another important factor that contributes to the interpretation of the meaning of the text is the way words are linked together in a sentence to make it coherent, i.e. the "information and thematic structure of a clause" (Halliday's, 1994:278). In English, contrary to Vietnamese, it is typical for the writers to organise their message in a way that the topic of the clause (or the Theme) is in the first position to reveal the content of the message while all interesting and important information comes in the Rheme. Therefore, it is essential that the learners work out the meaning of the clause by distinguishing the writer's "point of departure" and the focus of his message at the end of the clause.

2.3 Evaluation - Top-down applications

Judging from the reading practice at secondary level, it will make sense if students apply top-down approach at the final stage to confirm all the diagnosis made before the reading takes place through a variety of activities involving spoken language and writing such as dramatisation, writing from personal experience. These activities, relating the text to the outside world, will make the lesson more enjoyable and encourage students' creativity. For example, writing from the grandmother's perspective will deepen students' understanding of the feelings associated with immigrants and draw out their sense of preserving their own cultural heritage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are two main points to highlight.

The interactive-compensatory model, a combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches, emphasises the integration of lower level skills (the recognition of word features, both grammatical and morphological), and higher-level strategies (drawing on background knowledge) to facilitate the development of fluent reading.

Taken from this overview of the reading process, there are some implications for the design of classroom materials in the context of Vietnam. The first focus is the selection of texts, which should be interesting and motivating, i.e. encouraging students' reading habits. Secondly, the material should include activities for the

readers to make effective use of bottom-up and top-down reading models. Finally, through the reading lessons, students will be able to learn language knowledge, broaden their knowledge of the world, and draw out useful lessons learned from the texts. “The Lotus Seed”, among one of such example, raises students’ awareness of their own culture and the appreciation of family tradition and heritage.

HANDOUT 1. COMPREHENSION QUESTION

Look for the answers to the following discussion questions

1. Why is the Lotus Seed Valuable?
2. How long can a Lotus Seed grow?
3. Why was the emperor crying?
4. Why did the Grandmother take the lotus seed?
5. Why did Grandmother carry the Lotus Seed at her wedding?
6. When she had to flee her home, why did she take the Lotus Seed instead of other valuables?
7. What was the “strange new land”?
8. Why was the family living together in one big house?
9. Why did Little Brother steal the seed? Why was Grandmother crying?
10. When the flower bloomed, what did Ba say? Why did she give each of the children a seed?
11. How will the traditions be continued?
12. How are traditions retained when you move to a new country?
13. What happens when people move to another country?
14. How would it feel to move to a place where you did not speak the language?

HANDOUT 2. MAKING PREDICTION

Fill in the blank with a suitable word.

1. The lotus flower grows from a _____.
2. The seeds are in a _____.
3. The little girl _____ the seed under the altar.

4. She was _____ when she left her country.
5. She went to a new _____.
6. The boy took the seed and planted _____.
7. A beautiful flower grew in the _____.
8. The lotus flower has pink and white _____.
9. It has a sweet _____.
10. It brings good _____ and a long life.

HANDOUT 3. SYNONYMS

2. Find in the text words or expressions that can replace the following words:

A	B
	feeling as though nobody is there
	likes to have fun
	Always be yourself no matter what language you're speaking
	without speed
	able to help
	grateful
	with speed
	team member
	truly
	It belongs to this person.
	watchful

HANDOUT 4. PHONICS & MORPHOLOGY

There are four lists of words from the story, grouped according to their phonetic similarities. Supply other words from the story that contain the same sounds and spelling

Silent "e" -	Short "a":	Short "e":	"ow" as in "flower":
gave	ran	fell	crowded

Supply the correct forms of the words.

Noun	verb	adjective	Forming new adj. with affixes
	migrate		
		gold	
tradition			
	marry		
flower			
	fade		
		favourite	

HANDOUT 5. SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

Put the following events from the story in the order that they happened.

Write a number on the line. The first event is number one.

- _____ She gave the lotus seeds to her children and kept one for herself.
- _____ The young girl plucked a lotus seed from the king's garden.
- _____ She went on a boat with her children to a new land.
- _____ She wrapped the seed in a piece of silk.
- _____ Her grandson stole the seed and planted it somewhere.
- _____ She hid the seed under the altar.
- _____ She cried and cried when she found that the seed was gone.
- _____ She carried the seed in her pocket on the day she got married.
- _____ Her husband went to fight in the war as a soldier.

- _____ She saw the beautiful lotus flower and shouted with joy.
- _____ Grandmother married and her husband went to war. She raised her children alone
- _____ Grandmother sneaked into the palace and plucked a seed from a lotus pool
- _____ Grandmother hid the seed under the family altar
- _____ The seed grew and Ba gave a new seed to each of her grandchildren
- _____ Grandmother saw the emperor cry
- _____ She traveled to a new land
- _____ She traveled on a boat to escape the war

The **Lotus Seed** by **Sherry Garland**, Activities, Summaries & Reviews. Related Web Links. Harcourt Brace * Alta Murrieta * Reading.
www.murrieta.k12.ca.us/alta/grade3/lotus/

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