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READING AS A PRODUCTIVE SKILL AND VISUAL RESPONSE AS A READING STRATEGY

The paper discusses visual response to text as a reading strategy employed to determine which parts or main ideas of the text the reader focuses on while reading. It starts with an assumption that every reading is a unique experience to which readers bring their previous experiences, cultural and social backgrounds, as well as general or specific knowledge. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to provide a better insight into active reading (Carillo 2017) and present results of a case study that, through visual responses to reading, also addresses text processing in a multimodal setting. The methodological framework comprises a visual response task which requires that the readers draw or sketch a visual interpretation of the text. In this way, sketching in response to reading is used as a complementary component and a visualization tool in the reading process (Wilhelm 1995; Fernandes 2018). Based on the results of the research, it is proposed that visual response to reading can be used to enhance multimodal creativity, vocabulary acquisition and fully immerse readers in to the reading process.

Key words: active reading; reading strategy; receptive and productive skills; visual response to text

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading in one's first language (L1), second language (SL; L2) or a foreign language (FL) is a complex language skill alongside metacognitive strategies employed in reading. Every reading is a unique experience to which readers bring their previous ex-

periences, cultural and social backgrounds, as well as general or specific knowledge (Mikulec 2016; Carillo 2017). In the process, the writer and the reader negotiate meaning in the way that the reader is expected to understand the properties and the purpose of the text as intended by the writer (Nystrand 1989). Furthermore, the writer and the reader are interconnected by means of a meaning-making activity and decoding, which is in psycholinguistic research explained through interactive models based on the premise that the text originates in the mind of the writer where it is encoded.

In relation to the meaning-making activity, Pinker (2014) discusses cohesion and coherence and how to ensure that, in the decoding process, the readers grasp the topic and see how one idea follows from another. For instance, when previewing or skimming a text, the readers read the text to get a general idea about its genre and structure. In some cases, it is difficult to make sense of the text unless the topic is provided earlier on as “coherence begins with the writer and reader being clear about the topic” (Pinker 2014: 146).

A well-known study on comprehension and recall quoted in both Pinker (2014) and Carillo (2017) is the experiment conducted by Bransford and Johnson (1972) to show that without the schema or the topic introduced earlier on, readers would find it difficult to understand or store in their long-term memory a text such as the following one:

“The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange things into different groups depending on their makeup. Of course, one pile may be sufficient depending on how much there is to do. If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities that is the next step, otherwise you are pretty well set. It is important not to overdo things. That is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many. In the short run this may not seem important but complications from doing too many can easily arise. A mistake can be expensive as well. The manipulation of the appropriate mechanisms should be self-explanatory, and we need not dwell on it here. At first the whole procedure will seem complicated. Soon, however, it will become just another facet of life. It is difficult to foresee any end to the necessity for this task in the immediate future, but then one never can tell.” (Pinker 2014: 147)

In this particular experiment, Bransford and Johnson (1972) investigated whether the two groups of participants would recall the text in a similar fashion if they were given the following instruction: “This text is about washing clothes” to support the theory behind the strength of schemas.

Unlike previewing or skimming, which is more often used as a term for online reading (Carillo 2017), the terms “active reading” or mindful reading are used when referring to a setting in which the reader actively reads and pays closer attention to

certain parts of the text to create meaning from text. Other approaches to reading mentioned by Carillo (2017) are the “says/does approach”, “rhetorical reading”, “reading aloud to paraphrase” and “mapping” (19). In rhetorical reading, for instance, the reader, while reading the text, pays attention to how the text is influencing him/her (e.g., argumentative essay or political campaigns) or how the text appeals to credibility and trust, logic, reason, or emotions.

In this paper, a reading strategy referred to as “visual response to reading” will be given special attention to discuss reading as both a receptive and, potentially, a productive skill, especially for reluctant readers. Visual response to reading allows for a creation of one’s own “landscape of action” (Wilhelm 1995) and has been discussed in recent scholarly findings (see Barone & Barone 2017) but needs to be given more attention, especially when it comes to terminology. Taking into consideration the theoretical framework presented above, one aim of the paper is to provide a better insight into active reading as a unique and personalized experience. Another aim of the paper is to present a case study that, through visual responses to text, addresses micro and macro levels of word and text processing in a multimodal setting.

2. READING AS A PRODUCTIVE SKILL AND VISUAL RESPONSE TO READING

In textbooks on psycholinguistics, reading and listening are classified as receptive skills in terms of the input whereas writing and speaking, in terms of the output, are classified as productive skills. Online reading could be considered as a separate skill since it involves working with hypertext(s). This type of reading is unique and specific in itself since “the online nature of it essentially modifies its reading, meaning and comprehension” (Szabó in Benedek & Veszelszki 2016: 107).

In terms of the reading strategies employed, Roessing (2021, para. 2) states that good readers visualize as they read a text, i.e., that readers construct mental images that represent the ideas from the text thus comprehending the text at deeper levels. A visual response strategy, also known as the “sketch-to-stretch strategy”, is a strategy used to visualize a passage and then interpret it through drawing and sketching (Harste, Short & Burke 1988).

An advantage of this strategy is that generating sketches or drawing while reading requires the reader to be actively engaged with the text. Some readers will draw literal representations and some will draw symbolic representations of the text, which is why it is important to emphasize that the readers are not expected to produce works

of art but rather – they are focusing on important events, words, or the main idea in the text.

Readers personalize and assess what is important in the text and the drawing makes the text more memorable. This strategy may also help in memorizing new words as the readers will retain more information in the long-term memory if using a visual response to text. Furthermore, cognitive research as well shows that visuals are more easily remembered and that more information is retained if the visual component is maximized (Carrillo 2017). In this way, the reader is actively involved in processing information visually, kinaesthetically and semantically (Fernandes 2018). In the paper, these three components will be taken into account in relation to using visual response as a reading strategy to enhance creativity, vocabulary acquisition and to fully engage readers in the reading process. The visual response strategy may be used with different texts and for different levels of L1, L2 or FL. Any text that needs to be discussed in terms of main ideas and other details may be selected for research.

3. VISUAL RESPONSE TO READING – A CASE STUDY

3.1. Method and aims

In the present case study, a visual response task was used as a reading strategy to enhance creativity, motivate the students to read more actively, as well as to improve vocabulary acquisition during practicals in Contemporary English 4 (CEL4) classes delivered online (March 2022). In total, 30 students at the Department of English Language and Literature (University of Sarajevo – Faculty of Philosophy) attended the visual response class and eight visual responses were provided in real time.

One aim of the task was to engage all the students in active reading online. Another aim of the task was to obtain the visual responses and prepare the students for briefly comparing the visual responses to a translation of the excerpt which was provided after the reading task. In the discussion that followed, all the participants in the session confirmed that the visual response task was useful for gaining a better insight into the content.

3.2. Procedure

The students were asked to read an excerpt (see Appendix, Excerpt 1) from George Orwell's *1984* as this text was included in their syllabus (reading comprehension and

translation). One aim of the task, as stated earlier, was to motivate the students to be more involved with the text and an episode describing a room was chosen for the visual response task. As they were reading the selected part, the students were asked to provide a visual interpretation of the text imagining they were in the room described in Excerpt 1. The students were not required to write a short description of their sketches and could also leave comments to accompany their visual response. They worked individually as the classes were delivered online and sent their responses by email. The task had not been previously announced and the possibility that not everyone had access to a pen and a piece of paper was also taken into consideration. The instructor shared the visual responses with the whole class before asking text comprehension questions and comparing the students' sketches to a translation equivalent of the excerpt provided in the study materials. The sketches of Excerpt 1 collected in real time are given below:

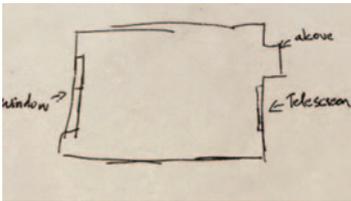


Illustration 1. P1 visual response



Illustration 2. P2 visual response



Illustration 2. P3 visual response

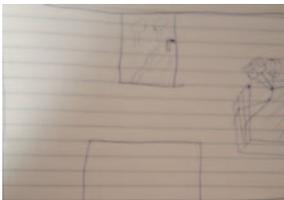


Illustration 4. P4 visual response



Illustration 5. P5 visual response

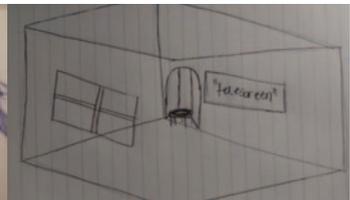


Illustration 6. P6 visual response

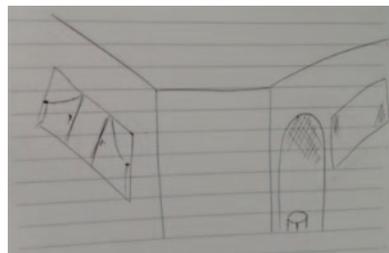


Illustration 7. P7 visual response

3.3. Results and discussion

As can be seen from illustrations 1-7, the participants paid attention to different details from Excerpt 1 and focused on the layout of the room. The decisions made were discussed when reading the translation, e.g., when focusing on the prepositions in the text while comparing the original text and the translation, as well as when describing Winston's position in the room.

In terms of word recognition, the strategy applied in the visual responses for the word "alcove" was to visually represent the alcove in several ways: as an arched niche (1 response), as a part of the wall (2 responses), or simply as a separate space (3 responses). As for the word "telescreen" (a *Newspeak* word), the strategy applied in the visual responses was to represent the telescreen as: a face (1 response), an eye (1 response), write the exact word "telescreen" to label or point to the object drawn as rectangular in shape (2 responses), or to draw a rectangular shape without labelling it (3 responses). One participant (P8, Illustration 8) used a digital application (*Dream, Wombo Art*) that allows one to insert the words of a passage into the application which then creates a visual representation of the text as shown in the illustration below:



Illustration 8. P8 response using Wombo Art

Illustration 8 does not depict the details as those provided in the actual visual responses but can be used for other purposes, for example to discuss how the text is processed by a *text-to-image model* and for vocabulary activation (see Saharia et. al. 2022). The application was tested during the same class for another excerpt from Orwell's *1984* (see Appendix, Excerpt 2) and the following result obtained:



Illustration 9. Excerpt 2 response, Wombo Art

As assumed earlier in the paper, visual responses to reading can be used to demonstrate that reading is a unique experience to which the readers add their own impression of the text. The responses obtained from the application can also be used to engage the readers in active reading. For these reasons, reading comprehension accompanied by a visual response task can be observed as an act of creation itself, providing a personalized response to the text that may assist in the reading process for readers who are reading in a foreign, second, or first language.

3.4. Limitations of the study

It should be noted that there are general conclusions about reading as a process when it comes to eye movement in reading such as that efficient readers may predict many words from the context in which they appear and that reading involves a series of rapid eye movements (*saccades*) followed by periods of *fixation* when eyes rest upon a point in the text (a saccade typically lasts from 20-30 milliseconds and a fixation may last from 150 to 50 milliseconds or longer) (Field 2003). In this study, however, it was not possible to measure eye movement as the computer screen was the only interface used for exchanging and sharing the visual responses. In addition, the participants were not in the same (class)room while reading but in a virtual classroom.

Another limitation of the study is the number of the participants. However, even though only eight visual responses were provided, the whole group actively participated in the discussion that followed. The sketches and drawings were used as a graffiti board via share screen options to discuss the translation equivalent provided in the study materials and in relation to the sketches. In this way, it was ensured that all the readers were fully engaged in the reading process during which vocabulary ac-

quisition and getting familiarized with the main idea of the excerpt was enhanced. Creative responses of those participating in sketching as a visual response to reading were thus used for engaging the whole class in active and mindful reading.

4. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In this case study, reading was observed as input that needs to be decoded by means of a visual response and in relation to the theory that “input comprehensibility increases as learners interact and use different types of interactional modifications (comprehension checks, confirmation checks, and clarification requests)” (Long 1996 in Karimvand 2011: 1268). Furthermore, word recognition, although not considered a special skill, is strongly connected with the result of reading (Daller, Milton & Treffers-Daller 2017:) and was, therefore, taken into consideration during the discussion.

As can be concluded in relation to reading strategies, the reading process is not only a process of understanding individual words or sentences but a process in which meaning is constructed. In this process, the reader needs to move between scanning and active reading, top-down and bottom-up processing, but also activate background knowledge, general knowledge and other related or specific knowledge necessary for meaning construction. Providing a visual response to text, as a landscape of (further) action, may serve as a useful complementary insight into this process.

APPENDIX

Excerpt 1

For some reason the telescreen in the living-room was in an unusual position. Instead of being placed, as was normal, in the end wall, where it could command the whole room, it was in the longer wall, opposite the window. To one side of it there was a shallow alcove in which Winston was now sitting, and which, when the flats were built, had probably been intended to hold bookshelves. By sitting in the alcove, and keeping well back, Winston was able to remain outside the range of the telescreen, so far as sight went. He could be heard, of course, but so long as he stayed in his present position he could not be seen. It was partly the unusual geography of the room that had suggested to him the thing that he was now about to do.

Excerpt 2

Winston turned round abruptly. He had set his features into the expression of quiet optimism which it was advisable to wear when facing the telescreen. He crossed the room into the tiny kitchen. By leaving the Ministry at this time of day he had sacrificed his lunch in the canteen, and he was aware that there was no food in the kitchen except a hunk of dark-coloured bread which had got to be saved for tomorrow's breakfast. He took down from the shelf a bottle of colourless liquid with a plain white label marked VICTORY GIN. It gave off a sickly, oily smell, as of Chinese rice-spirit. Winston poured out nearly a teacupful, nerved himself for a shock, and gulped it down like a dose of medicine. Instantly his face turned scarlet and the water ran out of his eyes. The stuff was like nitric acid, and moreover, in swallowing it one had the sensation of being hit on the back of the head with a rubber club. The next moment, however, the burning in his belly died down and the world began to look more cheerful. He took a cigarette from a crumpled packet marked VICTORY CIGARETTES and incautiously held it upright, whereupon the tobacco fell out on to the floor. With the next he was more successful. He went back to the living-room and sat down at a small table that stood to the left of the telescreen. From the table drawer he took out a penholder, a bottle of ink, and a thick, quarto-sized blank book with a red back and a marbled cover.

CORPUS

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ČITANJE KAO PRODUKTIVNA JEZIČKA VJEŠTINA I VIZUELNA INTERPRETACIJA TEKSTA KAO STRATEGIJA ČITANJA

Sažetak:

Rad se bavi vizuelnom interpretacijom teksta kao strategijom čitanja radi utvrđivanja na koje je dijelove ili sadržajne ideje teksta čitalac obratio posebnu pažnju tokom čitanja. U radu se polazi od pretpostavke da je svako čitanje teksta jedinstveno iskustvo koje čitalac obogaćuje svojim prethodnim iskustvima, kulturološkim ili društvenim okvirima, kao i općim ili posebnim znanjima. S tim u vezi, cilj rada je detaljnije predstaviti proces aktivnog čitanja (Carrillo 2017) kao i rezultate studije slučaja koja se bavi vizuelnom interpretacijom teksta pa se, s tim u vezi, razmatra i procesiranje teksta u multimodalnom okruženju. Kao metodološki okvir rada koristi se tekstualni zadatak na osnovu kojeg čitalac teksta skicira i dostavlja vizuelnu interpretaciju teksta (engl. visual response to reading). Na ovaj se način vizualizacija teksta, kao strategija čitanja, koristi i kao dopunski metod za interpretaciju teksta (Wilhelm 1995; Fernandes 2018). Na osnovu rezultata istraživanja, u radu se predlaže da vizuelna interpretacija teksta kao strategija čitanja može pospješiti kreativnost u multimodalnom okruženju, usvajanje vokabulara i uključenost u proces aktivnog čitanja.

Ključne riječi: aktivno čitanje; receptivne i produktivne jezičke vještine; strategije čitanja; vizuelna interpretacija teksta

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