

Reading Aloud in the Foreign Language Teaching

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Abstract

Some students, who attach no importance to reading aloud, believe that the reading and writing should follow the listening and speaking. However, “reading aloud” plays an important role in the English learning process. Why must we read aloud? First of all, English is a kind of phonic language, which uses the alphabetic writing. Moreover, English is a subject with practice. At the same time, “reading aloud” also is an important part in education for all-around development, which has several functions in English teaching. But in recent years, some English teachers paid more attention to the accumulation of reading skill than to reading itself, and neglected to foster the reading practice ability. Some teachers even believe that it is enough to make the students to open their mouths. In fact, reading aloud in English Teaching is very demanding.

Keywords: Reading aloud, Foreign language teaching, Pronunciation

1. Introduction

Jomsky, American famous linguist, ever said, when studying mother language, reading follows speaking. However, when studying foreign language without certain language surroundings, speaking follows reading. At present, we are studying English in the Chinese language surroundings. So, it accords with the regularity of language studying to learn to read English aloud firstly, in order to achieve the purpose of communicating in it. Three questions about reading aloud in the foreign language teaching will be discussed.

2. Is reading aloud necessary?

Maybe someone might consider the question itself unnecessary. But it is not the case. In ancient China, people had paid attention to the reading. Children in the private schools always read the Three-word Confucian classics. Nowadays, the students in the primary and middle schools always commence a day’s studying by reading aloud. Teachers have read aloud to young children for centuries. We know that time spent reading aloud is valuable to them. So, up to present, reading aloud is one of the efficacious and traditional methods to the mother language teaching. Most people think reading aloud is an important method in the Chinese teaching. That is the case in the foreign countries. In Great Britain, reading aloud was a usual method to the phonic training. Up to now, reading aloud is used as the major and magic way to improve students’ oral-English. In addition, reading aloud is an important teaching sector in Japan. Therefore, whether in home or in aboard, it is undoubted that reading aloud is used in the native language teaching, as well as the foreign language teaching. But it is not to say that there have no other attitudes to it, and it is also not to say that the persons who support it have proper mind to its functions and methods.

I have ever made a questionnaire about the method and purpose of reading and whether to read. The result shows that there are absolutely opposite attitudes to reading aloud in class. About 1/3 students are sure that teacher’s and students’ reading is worthwhile. Someone believes reading aloud can help us not only to practice oral-English but to improve the memory.

But most students have negative attitudes to reading aloud in class. They think reading aloud has several disadvantages. Firstly, reading aloud frequently will slow down our reading speed that we always emphasize to improve. Secondly, reading aloud only can give a few students chances of practice while the others feel bored. Thirdly, the students are easy to be embarrassed when reading. They will read worse when being corrected by teacher. Fourthly, it is too difficult to most students to read some unprepared literature. Fifthly, compared to conversation and discussion, reading aloud skill has little practical value unless the student will be the announcer in the future. Finally, this kind of reading is aimless. Every student has original material. As a result, only a few students can continue reading regardless of the embarrassment.

How do the teachers do to such absolutely different attitudes? In my opinion, as a teaching method, we can’t

neglect all of the reading aloud, nor can we believe it is all purpose. Practice in several classes proves that reading aloud is very necessary in foreign language teaching.

3. What's the function of reading aloud?

Reading aloud has five functions in foreign language teaching.

3.1 Practice pronunciation

Reading aloud is a kind of comprehensive practice of pronunciation. The material for reading aloud is the passage with certain content and circumstances. Not only should we pronounce every word properly, but we should divide the meaning groups correctly, arrange the pause based on the content. Meanwhile, we should apply suitable stress, intonation and rhythm. Therefore, reading aloud is a very good pronunciation practice. Our students come from many places of the country, some of them have strong local accent. Reading aloud can help them correct their dialect effectively.

3.2 Improve oral English

The students with perfect oral English should pronounce properly and speak fluently. Most students learn English with a focus on reading and writing skill. For some students who don't have the confidence to practice spoken English, reading aloud can help them overcome the faults of disfluency, repeat, improper pause, and develop natural and good pronunciation habit. Try to read with expression, change the pitch (high-low), tone (gentle-rough), and volume (soft-loud) of our voice to show different characters or create a mood. Reading aloud can not only help us open our mouths, but also improve our oral English evidently.

3.3 Get deeper understanding

In fact, reading aloud is reappearance of all the original content of idea, feeling, attitude and style in the form of voice. Therefore, standard reading not only can make the students keep great attention, arouse their sense and imagination, but help them understand original correctly and deeply.

3.4 Strengthen the knowledge

We can strengthen what we have learned by listening, speaking, reading and writing. Reading aloud, which has relevant to listening, speaking, reading, is the practice of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. General oral English is an important method, but it has some restriction in vocabulary and structure. As a practice, reading aloud can make up with the lack of oral English, for its material has wide range in topic, vocabulary and grammar.

3.5 Improve the classroom atmosphere

In class, especially in intensive class, students may feel tired and dull after some time. At that time reading aloud can help them back to the class. "During read-aloud, we share the excitement, the suspense, the emotion, and the sheer fun of a new book and its intriguing or annoying characters," said Nancy Lacedonia, who teaches in East Longmeadow, Massachusetts. "I read to my graduate students at the beginning of class because it gives them time to get settled and to clear their minds of the day's activities," Mary Bowman-Kruhm told Education World. "As a beginning teacher," she continued, "I quickly became aware that reading aloud to my class had benefits... my students became very quiet, they heard some good literature, and they got through an entire book. One student said it was the first book he had read in its entirety since first grade."

4. What should we pay attention to when reading aloud?

In reading aloud practice, there are some questions to which we should pay attention.

4.1 Firstly, reading aloud should not be a hit-or-miss activity, we must fully prepare before reading.

It is difficult to read the unfamiliar material. Comprehension is the foundation and prerequisite of reading. Only understanding the material, can what the author expressed be conveyed precisely by reading. Therefore, the students are required to fully prepare. They should understand the material, pay attention to the literary style, make clear the grammatical structure of complicated sentences, and analyze the pronunciation to decide its method. When talking about the reading aloud, all experts of teaching method emphasize that in order to understand the material deeply, we must think before reading, which is the most important preparation.

4.2 In addition, we must choose the reading material carefully.

The reading material must be authentic, which must be the kind of material that students will need and want to be able to read. We should not read the unfamiliar material, not read the material that is difficult to pronounce, not read the material whose pronunciation and grammar are not analyzed. I usually use the exercise one of the

College English – Reading Aloud and Memorized as the reading material, with which the students are familiar. Sometimes, I also use some modern material chosen from the English newspaper or magazine.

4.3 *The reading purpose and approach must be authentic.*

Students must be reading for reasons that make sense and have relevance to them. "Because the teacher assigned it" is not an authentic reason for reading. Students also should read the materials in a way that matches the reading purpose and the way people normally read.

4.4 *In fact, reading aloud is an activity which uses pronunciation knowledge and skill based on the written language.*

Reading aloud itself is a skill that the teachers and the students must grasp. In order to read well in teaching, the teacher's role is deciding. The teacher should comprehend the importance of reading aloud; have necessary knowledge, technique and method; know how to guide the students; be able to demonstrate; and be good at finding out the students' mistakes of reading, then analyze and correct them. Meanwhile, the students should attach importance to pronunciation knowledge and reading skill; have the patience and courage to read aloud; and imitate the foreigner's accent in class.

5. Conclusion

In a word, as the important part of language teaching, reading aloud is the primary pivot connecting reading and oral English training. Reading aloud fluently not only helps to foster reading ability and basic skill, but helps to improve oral expression. As long as we follow its principle and practice on hard, we can improve the students' integrated ability.

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