



Reading Aloud as a Teaching and Learning Tool

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Das Ampelmännchen





Round Robin Reading (RRR)

- = Sts reading an unknown passage around the class
- = very popular among teachers
- = BUT a widely criticised strategy among reading researchers

(see also Allington 1980; Ash et.al. 2009; Opitz & Rasinski 2008)

Disadvantages:

1. interferes with comprehension
2. lacks a real-world purpose
3. provides poor models for skilled oral reading
4. may lead to faulty reading habits and discipline problems
5. may cause stress, anxiety and the feeling of embarrassment



Rationale

“[There] are several useful activities for working on oral reading and they have **just as much value** in the second language class as in the first.” (Nation, 1998)

“There is a place for oral reading in the classroom in addition to silent reading, but it must be **done for specific, authentic purposes**: to develop comprehension, to share information, to determine strategies students use in reading, and to help a struggling reader to achieve greater fluency.” (Opitz & Rasinski, 2008)

- **Reading Aloud (RA) is a means to an end, not the end itself.**



What do we mean by READING ALOUD

- = „the learners‘ activity and not the reading out of texts by the teacher“ (Gabrielatos, 2002) ?
- = the teacher‘s reading aloud (Dhaif, 1990) ?
- = subvocalising / inner speech (Cohen, 1972; Vygotsky, 1986) ?
- = acting out a dialogue ?
- = reciting a poem ?
- = writing a recipe and reading it to peers ?
- = **the act of reading out loud any piece of written text either by the learners or the teacher**



Reading Aloud = reading + guided speech

1. RA as a **cognitive decoding process** with the aim of extracting meaning from linguistic symbols
 - > visual, phonemic and semantic processing
2. RA as an **interactive, dialogic process** to convey meaning
 - > is a form of communication
 - > major role of suprasegmentals
3. RA is active **movement**
 - > activates facial and vocal muscles
 - > sets sounds, thoughts, feelings in motion
 - > allows to grasp the words' soul (Freire, 1985)



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Flash Report

Why don't we believe non-native speakers? The influence of accent on credibility

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The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA

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ABSTRACT

Non-native speech is harder to understand than native speech. We demonstrate that this "processing difficulty" causes non-native speakers to sound less credible. People judged trivia statements such as "Ants don't sleep" as less true when spoken by a non-native than a native speaker. When people were made aware of the source of their difficulty they were able to correct when the accent was mild but not when it was heavy. This effect was not due to stereotypes of prejudice against foreigners because it occurred even though speakers were merely reciting statements provided by a native speaker. Such reduction of credibility may have an insidious impact on millions of people, who routinely communicate in a language which is not their native tongue.

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Research Interest

- **reassess** existing controversies and debates about RA
- investigate effective **alternatives to RRR**
- explore the **communicative potential** of RA
- Investigate **EFL learners' attitude** towards oral reading
- try out **oral reading strategies** that may help the learners to become better readers



Research Questions

1. What are the learners' experiences with and attitudes towards RA in the EFL classroom?
2. In what way do these attitudes change after being engaged in different communicative RA activities, designed to develop the learners' oral reading fluency and performance?
3. What criteria can be employed to effectively assess RA?
4. What is the relation between a) self-evaluation, b) peer evaluation and c) expert evaluation of the learners' oral reading performances?
5. Which implications for the EFL classroom can be drawn from these insights?



Participants and Methods

Participants

- 9 students participating in the Pre-sessional English Language Programme at Essex University

Data collection methods

- focus group discussion
- intervention-based study: “Reading Aloud Workshop”
- 2 questionnaires
- self-evaluation and peer-evaluation
- expert evaluation according to a self-developed RA assessment grid (including assessment descriptors)



Key Findings I: Focus Group Discussion

RQ 1: Learners' attitudes and experiences

- majority of the participants have experienced RA either in form of teachers reading aloud themselves or students reading **unknown** texts in parts > RRR
- majority prefers being nominated to read aloud in class rather than volunteer – but like reading aloud.
- none of the participants have been taught any strategies to improve their reading aloud
- only a few of them have heard of the IPA or work with phonics



Key Findings II: Focus Group Discussion

Perceived disadvantages of RA:

- shifts the focus away from understanding the text towards pronouncing words correctly > pro silent reading
- provokes anxiety and nervousness to speak in front of the whole class in a language that is not your own

Perceived advantages:

- useful to improve your pronunciation
- helps to speak more naturally and confidently
- helps to keep attention when reading a complex or boring text
- helps to memorise words (muscle memory)
- helps to comprehend the text even better after reading it silently
- helps to make others understand a text when reading it to them



Which activities?

Checklist for planning RA activities: (Gabrielatos 2002)

- Be clear of your aim(s).
- Check that the text used suit your aim(s).
- Provide learners with a realistic purpose for reading aloud.
- Make sure that learners are clear regarding the meaning of the text they are going to read aloud.
- Always give learners time for preparation/rehearsal before the actual reading aloud.



Workshop: Procedure

- 1. Focus group:** attitudes and beliefs about RA
- 2. “Cold reading”** (first recording + questionnaire)
- 3. Listen only**
 - Sts listen to “The Northwind and the Sun”
 - clarify basic questions: main characters, problem, moral
 - Input 1: Aesop and his Fables
- 4. Listen again:** Worksheet 1 - Snake Text
 - Sts put punctuation marks
 - Input 2: Role of punctuation marks in communication



Exercise 1: *Snake Text* – Find the missing punctuation marks!

Please put in the missing capital letters, full-stops, commas, question marks, exclamation marks and speech marks!

The North Wind and the Sun



the North Wind and the Sun had an argument about which of them was the stronger while they were disputing with much heat and passion a Traveller passed along the road wrapped in a cloak let us agree said the Sun that he is the stronger who can strip that Traveller of his cloak very well growled the North Wind and at once sent a cold howling blast against the Traveller



Workshop: Procedure II

5. Text Analysis: Worksheet 2

- Sts try and indicate pauses, meaningful chunks, most important word
- Input 3: thought groups, focus word, stressed & unstressed syllables

6. Choral Reading & Paired Reading

7. Individual rehearsal time

8. Story Reading Challenge: Performance

- Sts read the story, audience does not follow the script
- after the reading, “jury members” fill in peer-evaluation form, readers fill in self-evaluation form

9. Summary and feedback



The Prosody Pyramid

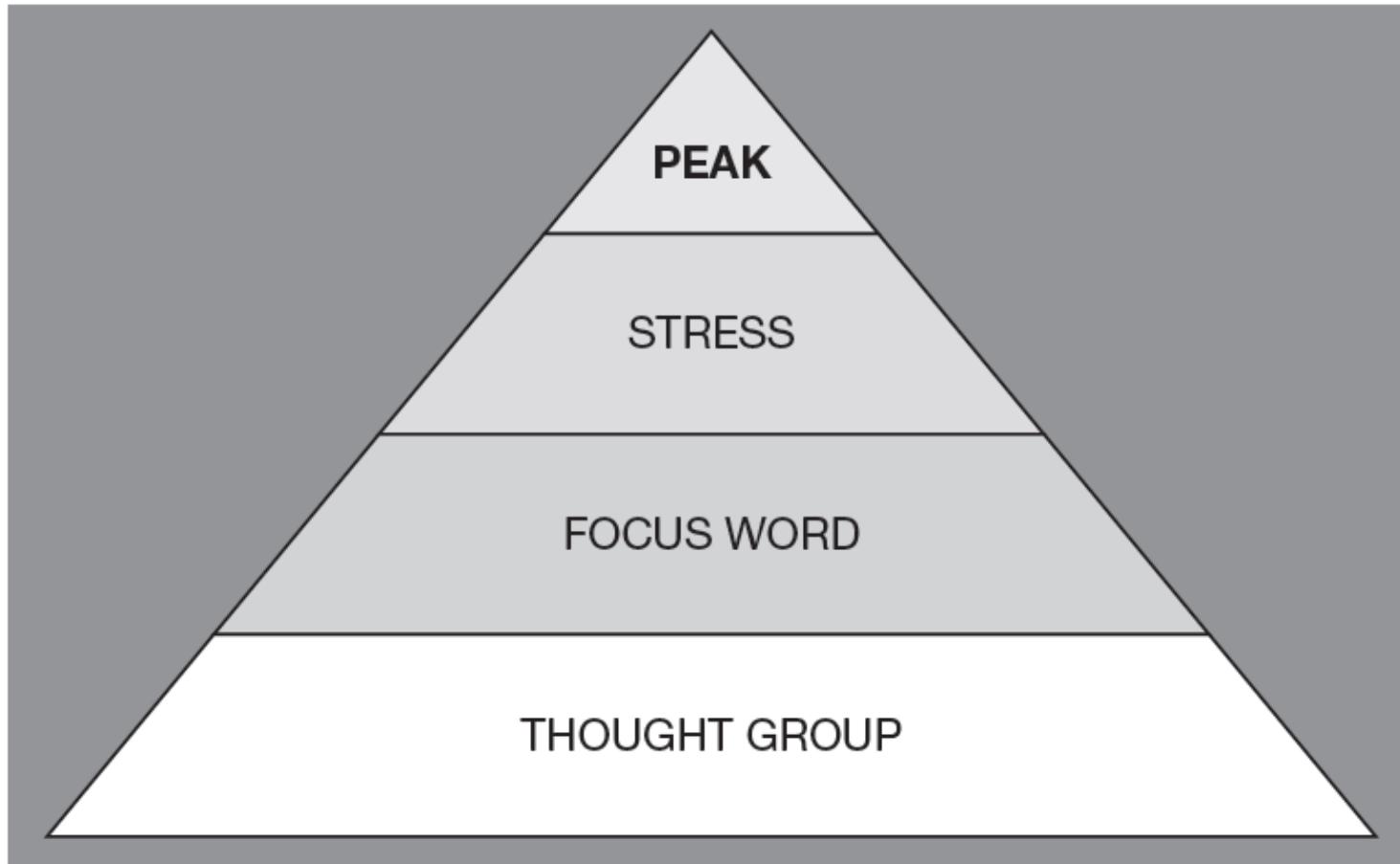


Figure 1: Gilbert, J. B. (2008). *Teaching pronunciation: Using the prosody pyramid*. CUP.



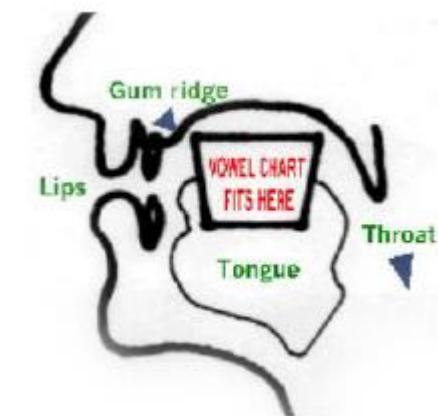
English Rhythm: Stress-Timed

HORSES	EAT	GRASS.
The HORSES	EAT	GRASS.
The HORSES	EAT	the GRASS.
The HORSES will	EAT	the GRASS.
The HORSES will have	EATen	the GRASS.
The HORSES might have been EATING		the GRASS.

Taken from: Cohen, J (2007). Suprasegmentals: Pronunciation Practice for Your EFL Classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. XIII, No. 11.



ɛ:	I	U	ʊ:	ɪə	eɪ	iː	X
e	ə	ɜː	ɔː	ʊə	ɪç	əʊ	
æ	ʌ	aː	ɒ	eə	aɪ	au	
P	b	t	d	tʃ	dʒ	K	g
f	v	θ	ð	s	z	s	ʒ
m	n	ŋ	h	l	r	w	j



Adrian Underhill's British English Phonemic Chart



Oral Reading – Peer Evaluation

Code name of reader: _____

	very good	ok	Improvable	Why?
Overall Impression (Did I understand the content of the story?)				
Pace (Speed just right? Too slow? Too fast? Many pauses?)				
Expression (Creative? With emotion? Lively?)				
Clarity (Words pronounced clearly? Mumbled?)				



Oral Reading – Self-Evaluation

My code name: _____

		Why?
Overall, I liked my reading performance..		
My pace was.. (Just right? Too slow? Too fast? Fluent? Pauses?)		
I read with expression (Creative? With emotion? Lively?)		
I read clearly (Words pronounced clearly? Mumbled?)		



Assessment Criteria (RQ 3): Case Study

Task 1:

- Please listen to the two recordings of student M.
- Which recording is that of the “cold reading”?
- In order to assess his reading aloud performance, which criteria would you apply? (on both the suprasegmental and segmental level)

Task 2:

- Please read the descriptors for RA assessment carefully.
- While listening to the recordings again, please fill in the RA assessment grid and express the final mark in words (excellent, very good, good, satisfactory, fail)



The North Wind and the Sun

The North Wind and the Sun had an argument about which of them was the stronger. While they were disputing with much heat and passion, a Traveller passed along the road wrapped in a cloak.

"Let us agree," said the Sun, "that he is the stronger who can strip that Traveller of his cloak."

"Very well," growled the North Wind, and at once sent a cold, howling blast against the Traveller.



With the first gust of wind the cloak whipped about the Traveller's body. But he immediately wrapped it closely around him, and the harder the Wind blew, the tighter he held it to him. The North Wind tore angrily at the cloak, but all his efforts were in vain.



Summary: Alternatives to RRR II

- *Text Analysis*: Working with prosodic cues
- *Choral Reading / Paired Reading*
- *Dialogues in Context*
- *Role-Play (Readers Theatre)*
- *Shadowing*
- *Draw what I am reading!*
- *Think-Aloud* (T verbalises thoughts while RA, Opitz & Rasinsky 2008)
- *Revised Radio Reading* (Opitz & Rasinsky 2008)
- *Read Around* (Sts read their favourite passage of a text + explain why)
- *Tactile or Kinesthetic Reinforcement* (Celce-Murcia et.al. 2010)



RA Activity 2: *Dialogue in Context*

- Learners practise ways in which native speakers would contribute to the development of a conversation:
 - > use of authentic expressions
 - > use of expressions encouraging the interlocutor to continue
 - > commenting and asking questions
- Learners gain hands-on experience of the following features of spontaneous speech and/or oral interaction:
 - > use of meaningful chunks instead of full, neat sentences
 - > use of sentence stress, word stress and pauses
 - > embed a text into a context (create a subtext)



Course of the Lesson

1. Sts listen to recording of the dialogue and discuss main content
2. Sts get handout of dialogue (without capitalisation and punctuation marks), listen again and are asked to correct it.
3. Sts receive new handout of the correct(ed) text
 - T explains unclear vocab / drills pronunciation
 - with the help of the T: indicate pauses (// for a long pause; / for a short pause) and thought groups, determine the focus word
4. Sts practise the dialogues in pairs
5. Sts present dialogues in front of class
6. Summary & feedback



Dialogue (no punctuation marks)

A	how are you
B	not too bad thanks im ok how about you
A	im good ive had quite a busy day you know ive got Paul coming to stay for a couple of days
B	oh really thats interesting are you looking forward to seeing him
A	oh i cant wait he is lovely
B	Listen ive got to go
A	yes sure ive got to get ready for Paul anyway
B	it was great chatting
A	yes it was see you soon

Plain text without capitalisation / punctuation (listening/spelling exercise)



Dialogue

A How are you?

B Not too bad, thanks. I am ok. How about you?

A I'm good. I've had quite a busy day. You know, I've got Paul coming to stay for a couple of days.

B Oh, really? That's interesting. Are you looking forward to seeing him?

A Oh, I can't wait. He is lovely.

B Listen. I've got to go.

A Yes, sure. I've got to get ready for Paul anyway.

B It was great chatting.

A Yes it was. See you soon.





Further Activities: Situational Context

Task: Create meaning through subtext

- Sts are actors auditioning for a role in a play/ film
- script without stage directions: Sts need to come up with a context for the dialogue (WH-questions) before acting it out
- classmates are producers who need to find out where the dialogue is set (+ answer the WH-questions) and eventually decide who to hire



Teachers' Reflections - Post-Interview

Positive:

“I think, it worked. [...] Some of them started off really quite laboured. And actually got much better in a short space of time”

“One of the students that never speaks was one of the best. He stood up and did it. I thought he did a really good job.”

Problematic:

“Some of the Saudi students found it really difficult to connect the speech up. They couldn't do it the whole phrase, but they started to do it.”



Further Observations

1. Both student participation and student motivation very high
2. Gap between receptive understanding and productive language use became obvious
3. Students became animated: they lifted the text off the page
 - helpful beyond the fun-factor
 - RA addresses a wide range of skills not limited to pronunciation
 - PROs of using RA clearly outnumber the CONs
 - fosters the use of authentic material and (inter)cultural awareness
 - real-life purpose > useful preparation for unscaffolded, spontaneous speech production



RA Activity 3: *Readers Theatre*

1. Play the **recording** of a radio play or reading (no script)
2. **Discussion**
 - Overall impression > Did the speaker manage to convey meaning and a certain atmosphere with her voice?
 - How may she have prepared for such a reading?
 - How did she make use of her voice, pauses, stress, intonation to identify different characters?
3. **Text Analysis: Hand out the script**
 - have them mark the different characters
 - have them read the whole story silently while listening again
 - have them mark thought groups, main stress of thought groups, long and short pauses, intonation patterns



RA Activity 3: *Readers Theatre*

3. (contn.) Text Analysis

- Have them retell the story (What happens next > come up with a list)
- discuss the characters > find adjectives, character traits
- discuss the situational context: Who / What / Where/ When / Why / For what purpose?

4. Rehearsal time in groups

5. Acting out in groups

6. Feedback (Jury Members & teacher)



Final Thoughts

On the growing meaninglessness of phrases like „the music of words“:

“The mere charm of words is underrated to-day. Half our words are never pronounced at all except in conversation.[...] For words need to be used, need to be articulated. Beautiful speech, beautiful voice modulation, is hardly ever an affair of nature alone, certainly not of deliberate neglect. Words form an instrument to which constant practice alone gives results.”

(Harris 1921: 349)



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Jazz Chant

Sorry I Wasn't In Class

Sorry I wasn't in class.

I said, I'm sorry I wasn't in class.

I had the flu.

My cat got sick.

My car broke down.

I lost my keys.

Sorry I wasn't in class.

I said, so sorry I missed your class.

I overslept.

I missed the bus.

I met a friend.

I had a date.

So sorry I missed class.

I know I should have come.

It's the only way to learn.

Celce-Murcia et.al (2010) *Teaching Pronunciation*. CUP, p.353