

Para, mewa spada z drzewa [eva mewa spada z dźewa]

Chleb i serke jest w tym sklepie w niedzielnę niedzielę, niedzielę, niedzielę.
[Klęp i serke jest w tym sklepie w niedzielę niedzielę niedzielę]

3. To illustrate aspiration, put the aspirated English plosives in place of the unaspirated Polish 'p', 't' and 'k' in the drill below:

ten, para, kipi [t^hen], [p^hara], [k^hipi]
Ten pan to tata Tomka [t^hen p^han t^ho t^hata t^homka]

4. To illustrate the immunity of the English 'n' to palatalisation in the context of 'i:' and 'j' pronounce Polish words with 'n' very carefully, as containing sequences of 'n' plus 'i' or 'j':
oni, pani, Ania [on-i], [on-i], [pan-i], [an-ja]
Miania nigdy nic nie wie [n-ja-n-ja ni-gd-a ni-c nie wie]

In this drill attention must be paid that no break is made between the 'n' and the following 'i' or 'j':

5. To illustrate the immunity of the English "vowel-nasal-s" sequences to nasal diphthongisation, pronounce very slowly the following words:

szansa as [sensa] and not as [sawasa]
dancing as [dansiŋ] and not as [dawsaiŋ]
pensa as [pensiŋ] and not as [pawsaiŋ]
męski as [męski] and not as [mawski]
kies as [kies] and not as [kaws]

Similar drills can be designed for illustrating to the pupil the alveolar articulation of 't', 's', 'z' and 'n' in English, for all vowels and for many other secrets of correct articulation of English sounds.

We can see now that instead of being only a negative, destructive factor, the learner's native pronunciation habits can be employed as a background against which even the most minute allophonic peculiarities of English will immediately be picked up by his 'phonological' ear, with full and acute awareness of the strangeness of the alien segment in the native environment. And this seems to be an essential step towards the desired improvement of the learner's pronunciation, which can be not only intelligible but also more correct and more natural.

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Some Issues in the Testing of Reading Comprehension

The present article will be concerned with some of the problems connected with testing reading comprehension. Firstly, it will appear essential to decide what the reading comprehension test is supposed to measure: the overall performance which is the product of the processes of reading or the strategies and skills which have been used in achieving it. Secondly, the most common techniques used so far to test reading skills will be briefly presented, with special attention paid to their limitations. And lastly, it will be illustrated on the basis of a sample of the test how these techniques can be used in the most efficient ways.

The history of testing indicates clearly that reading tests are becoming more and more important. It is probably due to the common opinion that the reading skills of second language learners have the potential of more rapid development than other language skills. If so, attention should be paid to discovering what reading comprehension actually involves and what it is that we want to measure by the reading test. It has been assumed that in order to complete any global task several of the so-called enabling skills have to be activated. For example, if the task is:

"Search text for specific information",

the enabling skills involved are at least the following:

- Distinguish main point from supporting details
- Understand text relations through grammatical cohesion devices
- Understand relations within sentences
- Understand conceptual meaning
- Deduce meaning of unfamiliar lexical

/Morrow, 1979:19/

The question arises as to whether a test is to find out which of the communicative skills a candidate has mastered or rather if

he can perform a particular global task. It seems to depend on the purpose of the test. "If the purpose is proficiency testing i.e. if one is asking how successful the candidate is likely to be as a user of the language in some general sense, then it seems incontrovertible that performance tests are necessary" /Morrow, 1979:18/. In achievement tests and for diagnostic purposes a more analytic approach appears to be of greater use, as in order to plan some sort of pedagogic treatment information on the process is essential.

The problem closely connected with the above question is that of the relationship between the whole and the parts, i.e. "a candidate may prove quite capable of handling individual enabling skills, and yet prove quite incapable of mobilising them in a use situation" /Morrow, 1979:20/. Writing and speaking tests may solve this problem by measuring both overall performance and skills which have been used in achieving it. In a reading comprehension test it is more difficult to see how the global task has been completed /e.g.: why a particular answer has been given, what skills were employed/.

Furthermore, as Alderson points out, "a communicative test of reading /i.e. performance test - E.P./ would be, for example, a set of instructions leading to a behavioural outcome, linguistic or otherwise. The problem with this is that a satisfactory outcome may be reached without "adequate" linguistic performance" /Alderson, 1981:59/.

Therefore, it seems worth while to focus our attention on specific enabling skills which derive from an analysis of task performance.

- Here is the list of the most important ones ^{1/}:
- 1/ Deducing the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical items
 - 2/ Understanding relations within the sentence
 - 3/ Understanding relations between parts of text through cohesion devices /lexical and grammatical/.
 - 4/ Recognising indicators in discourse especially for introducing, development, transition and conclusion of ideas
 - 5/ Understanding explicitly stated ideas and information
 - 6/ Understanding the communicative value of sentences, e.g. definition, example
 - 7/ Understanding conceptual meaning, e.g. comparison, cause, result, purpose, means

^{1/} The list is based on Munby /1978:179-184/ and a table presented by the author during the seminar devoted to communicative testing held at Ryda in March, 1983.

- 8/ Understanding ideas not explicitly stated
- 9/ Identifying and indicating the main point of discourse
- 10/ Distinguishing the main idea from supporting detail
- 11/ Surveying to obtain the gist
- 12/ Scanning for specifics
- 13/ Extracting salient points for summary of a specific idea/topic in the text
- 14/ Reducing the text through rejection of redundant information
- 15/ Transfer of information from one medium to another /diagram/language/.

These skills are closely related and several of them will be involved at any one time in any reading task. The techniques used so far for testing these complex abilities are:

1. Intrusive-word
2. Multiple-choice
3. Gap-filling
4. Short-answer

The first one, in which a number of words, some foreign, some irrelevant English ones are inserted, and the testee's task is to underline them will not be dealt with here as it may be used to measure reading speed rather than comprehension. It's possible to identify intrusive words without reading more than an on-going sentence, for instance:

"Our British policy for speak higher education is tenable only girl on certain assumptions".

There's a danger with such tests, namely that the reader may identify other unnecessary words, improve the writer's style, e.g. he may underline the word "our" in the above sentence.

Multiple-choice tests became fashionable in the 60s because of their objectivity. D.P. Harris claimed that by a careful designing of such items "the test writer is able to test the examinee's understanding not only of the surface meaning of a passage but also of the author's purpose, attitude, and method" /Harris 1969:60/. Recently, however, such tests have become unpopular. They are claimed to be tricky, misleading and confusing - because the distractors may provide students with alternatives of which otherwise they might not think. Besides, the testee does not indicate how confident he is in his answer; it's possible that he may understand the text and yet not make the correct choice, for instance,

If the inference is not made explicit in the text as in the following items:

"The president was talking to a young woman in the crowd when Bill suddenly caught sight of a man standing several yards behind her. The man had something in his hand; it was a short stick."

Q: What made Bill notice the man in the crowd?

1. He was very close to Bill.
2. The president was talking to him.
3. He was standing in front of the woman.

/Heaton 1975:112/

Moreover, it often happens that the answer is chosen by elimination or without even consulting a text the comprehension of which the item is supposed to test.

Gap-filling tests, like multiple-choice ones, are objective. They differ from cloze tests in that the words are not deleted randomly, and as these are usually structural words most items do not require discourse comprehension. Such tests often provoke the negative reaction on the part of students because they hinder the process of reading.

Short-answer tests are not as reliable as multiple-choice or gap-filling tests: a testee may have problems with expressing his understanding of the text, and besides, he has no chance of justifying his answer. On the other hand, they use up less information than multiple-choice items while having a unique answer and so are easier to construct. /Davies 1977:84/.

From this short evaluation of the techniques presented above it is evident that there is no best technique. Rather, we should use the variety of all of them, the choice possibly dependent upon the skill we want to measure. This idea may be best illustrated by showing what techniques can most efficiently test particular skills. The presentation will be done on the passage "Kites" which was used by the Joint Matriculation Board for testing reading comprehension of the overseas students applying for the universities in UK.

Kites

Kite flying is the sport of sending up into the air, by means of the wind, a light frame covered with paper, plastic or cloth. The frame can be one of many different shapes and is

attached to a long cord held in the hand or wound on a reel or drum. With one notable exception, all present-day kites are used for sport. Kites however, have a long history of practical application and many different types of kite have been developed to serve various purposes.

The ancient Chinese used kites to carry ropes across rivers and gorges. The current folding kite which will dive and swoop excitedly is a derivative of one type of such a kite. With its flat, elongated body and single pair of bird-like wings, it looks just like a large bird in the air. The modern version is usually made of tissue-paper rather than the traditional silk.

Man-lifting kites were developed in ancient times, again by the Chinese, for spying on walled cities and forts. In fact, as recently as World War II, German U-boats flew kites from their conning-towers to lift people into the air to spy out the land. These kites, which are no longer in existence, were made of light weight canvas. They were much larger and stronger than the Chinese ones. Their design, however, was simply that of their current counterpart, the cutter kite. Smaller in size, this type of kite is still very popular as a toy for children, being easy to make with a diamond-shaped frame, no wings and brown-paper covering.

On applying the four techniques: gap-filling, multiple-choice, short-answer, and tasks, to measure the skills listed above, it turns out that gap-filling is presumably one of the most economical ways to test the skills of understanding relations within the sentence and between parts of text through cohesion devices /except for ellipsis/, e.g.:

"Kite flying is the sport ... sending up into the air /.../".

"They were much larger and stronger than the Chinese ...".

Gap-filling can also test a number of other skills, though not so efficiently as the ones mentioned above, e.g.

"Kites ... have a long history of practical application /.../"
/Recognising indicators in discourse/

"The ancient Chinese used kites to ... ropes across rivers and gorges". /Understanding explicitly stated ideas/.

"With its flat, elongated body /.../ it looks just ... a large bird in the air." /Conceptual meaning: comparison/

Gap-filling tests are, however, quite inadequate to measure higher-order skills. Multiple-choice technique is of help here. It seems to be the best technique to test skimming /Carroll, 1980:42/, e.g.:

- Q.: Which of the following most adequately describes the topic of the passage on "Kites"?
- A.: Almost all kites are used for sport.
- B. Kites serve various purposes.
- C. Kites have a history of practical application.

Although each of the options is dealt with in the passage, option C is the most adequate.

Multiple-choice tests can be used efficiently to measure such skills as: "Deducing the meaning of lexical items", "Understanding implicit ideas", or "Indicating the main point".

Though possible, it would be uneconomical to use this technique in order to test the learner's ability to understand relations within the sentence and between parts of text, e.g.:

- A. with
- B. for its flat /.../ it looks like a large bird in the air.
- C. without

Short-answer tests may be used in cases where multiple-choice and gap-filling cannot be applied or are not efficient enough, as for instance to measure the skill of scanning for specifics:

Q.: What type of kite was used during World War II and for what purpose?

It may be interesting to notice that short-answer tests can be used to check almost all abilities on the list, though because of their low reliability it would be better to substitute other tests for them wherever possible.

Finally, the passage may also be followed with various tasks, for instance, a table like the following:

	Current Kites		Their Ancestors	
	Material	Shape Use	Material	Shape Use
Cutter Kite				
Folding Kite				

The testee's task is to fill blank spaces. Such a task seems to be a good way to measure the skills of transferring information and extracting salient points, and at the same time it may test other abilities, like "Understanding explicit information" and "Conceptual meaning - purpose, means".

To conclude, one point needs to be stressed, namely that in order to decide on a specific item type we should first answer the question what it is that we want to measure and only then adopt a given technique. It is not an easy question, as the whole process of understanding is involved here. The reading ability is inseparable from general language ability, some background knowledge, personality, cognition and performance in other abilities. Therefore it is claimed by supporters of communicative testing /e.g. by K. Morrow, Ch. Alderson, C. Weir/ that the existing tests are unnecessarily artificial; they could be closer to the real world than they are and they should replicate the situations that the students will have to face in "real life". Since it is impossible for a test to be "authentic" in the sense of "mirroring reality" /Alderson, 1981:57/ we should at least make attempts to improve existing language tests so that they can cover psycholinguistic abilities, like enabling skills. In the above article an attempt has been made to present one of the possible ways to improve reading comprehension tests.

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Streszczenie

W niniejszym artykule poruszone zostały niektóre problemy związane z testowaniem rozumienia tekstu pisanego w języku obcym. Przedstawiony został pogląd, że analiza procesu czytania, jego rozbięcie na umiejętności, które umożliwiają wykonanie bardziej ogólnego zadania, może okazać się pomocne przy konstruowaniu testów czytania. Na podstawie zaprezentowanego tekstu zasugerowane zostały techniki, które mogą w sposób efektywny skontrolować stopień wyrobienia poszczególnych umiejętności czytania.

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O niektórych przyczynach niepowodzeń w nauczaniu języka rosyjskiego

Jest rzeczą ogólnie wiadomą, że uczniowie po 8 czy 9 latach nauki języka rosyjskiego w szkole /4- w podstawowej, 4-5 - w średniej/ nie osiągnęli pożądanego poziomu znajomości tego języka. Często również stopień opanowania go przez absolwentów filologii rosyjskiej pozostawia wiele do życzenia. Znane są narzekania nauczycieli szkół średnich na swoich kolegów ze szkoły podstawowej, a nauczycieli akademickich na asystentach swoich poprzedników, że nie dbają o właściwe przygotowanie językowe swoich uczniów.

Zapytani o przyczyny niepowodzeń w nauczaniu języka rosyjskiego nauczyciele zgodnie wskazują na trudne warunki pracy, co jest rzeczą zgodną z prawdą.

Jakie są czynniki utrudniające naukę języka? J. Sylwestrowicz podaje obszerną listę /15 punktów/. Najważniejsze z nich to: złe warunki lokalowe szkoły i klasy, słabe wyposażenie szkoły w dobre podręczniki i pomoce audiowizualne, brak pozytywnej motywacji ucznia się, przeciążenie ucznia nauką, zaległości z poprzednich lat.

Nie ulga w przypuszczeniach, że tego rodzaju czynniki wpływają destruktynie na przyswajanie języka rosyjskiego przez uczniów i fakolwiek niektóre trudności nauczycieli jest w stanie wyeliminować /przy odpowiednim zaangażowaniu i nakładzie pracy/, to jednak wiele z nich pozostaje, a tymczasem lekcje muszą się odbywać, muszą być ciekawe i efektywne. J. Sylwestrowicz udziela cennych wskazówek i praktycznych rad dla nauczycieli pracujących w warunkach najbardziej poważnych trudności, tzn. w bardzo licznych klasach o niżejszym poziomie znajomości języka. Do najistotniejszych z nich można zaliczyć: obowią-