Arabic as a Second Language Reading Instruction: A Method Analysis

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Abstract
This paper presents a conceptual framework underlying the analysis of Arabic as a second language (ASL) reading instructional methods within the Malaysian ASL secondary school context. The framework of method analysis presented in this paper is adapted from Sidek’s (2010), which was a revision of Richards and Rodgers’ (2001) model of method of analysis of language teaching. Sidek’s (2010) model was further revised to suit the analysis of the method for ASL reading instruction. The adapted ASL reading instruction analysis model is described at two levels of method analysis of language teaching; Approach and Design. At the level of Approach, ASL reading instruction method analysis is described in relation of theories of SLA and second language (L2) reading theories. At the level of Design, the method of ASL reading instruction is analyzed in terms of types of reading tasks and lexical diversity in reading passages.

Keywords: ASL, reading, method, approach, design

INTRODUCTION

The majority of past studies on Arabic as a second language (ASL) reading primarily focused on reading strategies (e.g., Alhaqbani & Riazi, 2012; Alhaqbani, 2008; Alosaili, 2004; Al-Khateeb, 2011; Al-Khateeb & Idrees, 2010) with the purpose to enhance reading comprehension among ASL readers. In producing effective ASL reading instruction, it is imperative to ensure that ASL reading comprehension is developed in a coherent way and constitutes important components that are critical in the training of ASL reading. Insofar, from an extant search in mainstream publications, there has not been any attempt made to analyze the ASL reading curriculum in terms of coherency and important components. Therefore, this paper attempted to propose a model for method analysis for ASL reading instruction using conventional theories.

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Richards and Rodgers (2001) state that in general, the method of language teaching comprises three levels of Approach, Design, and Procedure. Sidek (2010; 2011) revised this model to analyze English as a foreign language (EFL) reading instruction. Based on Sidek’s (2001) model, this paper presents a method of analyzing ASL reading instruction. In applying conventional theories to develop the method of analysis for ASL reading instruction at the level of Approach and Design, it is imperative to review the conventional major L2 instructional approaches and second language (L2) reading instruction and the related theories. The current ASL method analysis model for reading instruction focuses on the underlying second language acquisition (SLA) and L2 reading theories at the level of Approach and types of reading task and text lexical diversity at the level of Design. By analyzing these components, the ASL reading instructional methods proposed in an ASL curriculum documents can be inferred.

**REVIEW OF CONVENTIONAL THEORIES OF SLA AND L2 INSTRUCTION**

There are numerous theories and approaches to L2 instruction within the field of SLA. However, only theories and approaches to L2 instruction that are relevant to the Malaysian ASL educational setting will be reviewed in constructing the conceptual framework of method analysis for ASL reading comprehension. The Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) has mandated the Malaysian ASL curriculum to be a communicative curriculum. Therefore, the conventional Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches and its related theories are primarily reviewed. Nonetheless, the review of the Malaysian ASL curriculum documents indicates that the curriculum also reflects other instructional approaches such as the audio-lingual approaches. Hence, the review of these approaches is also included in constructing the conceptual framework of ASL reading comprehension instruction method analysis at the Approach level.

**THE CONVENTIONAL COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT)**

The communicative instructional approach is viewed as a learner-centered approach (Nunan, 1988). It is an indirect L2 instructional approach (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, & Terrell, 1997). CLT L2 instructional approaches are grounded in the theory of language as a medium for communication. The socio-cultural theory (SCT), one of the SLA theories, views language as a tool in a socially mediated process (Vygotsky, 1978) and a central tool that assists the development of one’s cognition. As such, the SCT underlying principle maps onto the CLT theoretical grounding in terms of the role of language.
Therefore, the CLT approach uses language as a vehicle in meaningful communicative language activities that are suited to learners’ needs in order to promote communicative competence (e.g., Savignon, 1983) since each language activity has a specific communicative intent (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). The features of CLT can be traced in major L2 communicative instructional approaches such as Task-Based Instruction (TBI) and Cooperative Language Learning (CLL).

Task-Based Instruction (TBI) in SLA
The activities in Task-Based Instruction (TBI) are collaborative in nature in which tasks are central as a means to meaningful language learning (e.g., Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 2003; Skehan & Skehan, 2002) as scaffolding for language development (Hatch, 1978). Applying the social interactionist view, within the context of L2 reading, meaningful text-based interaction may assist in developing author intended text meaning. Communicative text-based activities require readers to collaborate in the negotiation towards building text meaning as intended by the author.

Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) in SLA
Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) is a learner-centered instructional approach that highlights the role of social interaction. One of the purposes of CLL is to promote communicative functions (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Since CLL involves collaboration, learning tasks are primarily in the form of group work (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994). CLL is claimed to be effective in assisting in the development of literal and higher order reading comprehension skills (e.g., Ghaith & El-Malak, 2004; Shaaban, 2006).

Grammar Translation (GT) Reading Instruction
One reading instructional approach based on the Bottom-Up L2 reading theory is the Grammar Translation (GT) instructional approach. Bottom-up theories focuses on the processing of lower level reading components such as phonological processing, word recognition, and word identification (e.g., Nassaji, 2003). Comprehension is viewed to be highly dependent on linguistic or decoding abilities (Carrell, 1988), reflecting the structuralism view. Thus, in a GT classroom, the teacher regularly translates the L2 text, explaining grammar rules, and focusing on vocabulary (Wang, 2009). Learners’ roles are to read the text on their own and their attention is directed to process grammar rules and vocabulary in the text (e.g., Griffiths & Parr, 2001). GT method is form-focused in nature with the teacher as a director who trains students via drilling and substantially disregards the role of meaning (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1995). An ASL instruction that reflects the GT instructional method characteristics can be inferred to be grounded in the structural linguistics view.
Non-Communicative Whole Language Reading Instructional Approaches

Non-communicative whole language reading instructional approach lies in the top-down L2 reading theory which focuses on the role of higher level text processing skills such as contextual and schemata. This L2 reading theory perceives that readers’ ability to use syntactic and semantic cues undermines readers’ lacking in lower level processing skills (Nassaji, 2003). In contrast to communicative whole language instructional approach which primarily involves text-based discussion using real time communication, the main characteristic of the non-communicative whole language instructional approach is teaching reading via individual text processing which is similar to the Initiate-Response-Evaluation (IRE) teaching method of reading which is claimed to be less effective (e.g., Beck & McKeown, 2006).

Communicative L2 Reading Instructional Approach

Communicative L2 reading approaches is grounded in the L2 reading interactive theory. Unlike the bottom-up and top-down L2 reading theories, the L2 reading interactive theory denotes the concurrent processing of lower level and higher level processes (e.g., Nassaji, 2002). Interactive L2 reading theory perceives a successful reading activity as the outcome of active engagement in integrating social context and cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1987), which condition conforms to the communicative theories of SLA related to the sociocultural theory. Communicative reading instruction based on the interactive view of L2 reading facilitates discourse competence based on text using language as a tool in a socially mediated process (Vygotsky, 1978). TBI is one of the communicative reading instructional approaches that can be used in ASL reading classrooms. Applying TBI within the context of ASL reading instruction as it is applied to English as a foreign language (e.g., Sidek, 2012), the designing of the task should be based on the reading text in Arabic. In addition to TBI, CLL can also be employed in ASL reading classrooms. Jigsaw reading is a form of CLL instruction that can be used in ASL reading classrooms.

TYPES OF READING TASKS

Types of reading tasks used in classroom instruction may affect students’ reading abilities (e.g., Beck & McKeown, 2001; Scanlon & Vellutino, 1997). Hence, analyzing the types of reading tasks assists in determining whether ASL students are provided with the right training in developing their reading abilities. According to Anderson, Bachman, Perkin, and Cohen, (1991), reading tasks can be categorized into three major tasks: locating main ideas, locating details (textually explicit), and making inferences.. The ability to
process text by locating main ideas, locating details and making inferences may help readers to build mental representation of the text as intended by the author (Beck & McKeown, 2006).

Lexical Diversity
The importance to examine lexical diversity lies in the principle that a reading text that contains a varied set of vocabulary tends to provide more exposure to new vocabulary in the target language through reading experience. Thus, expand ASL readers’ vocabulary. Lexical diversity can be measured using two methods namely type-token ratio (Bates, Bretherton & Snyder, 1988) and theoretical vocabulary (Johansson, 1999). These measures can also be used in determining lexical diversity for ASL reading text.

Learner Role
Learner roles reflect the SLA and L2 reading theories and the related instructional approaches that a curriculum advocates. Richards and Rodgers (2001) contended that it is essential to analyze the roles of learners because “the instructional system will be influenced by how learners are regarded” (p. 27). Examining learner roles will also enable inference in the coherency of the curriculum at the Approach level. The analysis of learner roles as suggested by Richards and Rodgers (2001) can also be applied to ASL reading instruction in determining the theoretical grounding of the ASL reading curriculum. Although learner role is at the level of Design, it informs the coherency of a curriculum at the level of Approach.

ANALYSIS OF ASL READING INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD:
APPROACH LEVEL

Figure 1 shows the model of analysis for the method of ASL reading instruction at the level of Approach using the adapted Sidek’s (2010) revised framework. At the Approach level, the Malaysian ASL secondary reading curriculum is developed based on certain theories of SLA and L2 reading. For example, the structural linguistics theory of SLA and Bottom-Up theory of L2 reading reflects the Grammar Translation (GT) Method. The socio-cultural and socio-cognitive theories of SLA and communicative-interactive L2 reading theory would reflect communicative ASL reading instructional approaches. Nonetheless, ASL reading instruction that primarily reflect cognitive information processing theory translate to ASL reading tasks that in the form of individual text processing such as silent reading followed by individual or non-interactive whole class Initiate-Response-Evaluation method. In contrast to the communicative text-based reading approach, such reading tasks may not contribute much in producing competent ASL readers.
Analysis of ASL Reading Instructional Method: Design Level

Figure 2 shows the model of analysis for the method of ASL reading instruction at the level of Design using the adapted Sidek’s (2010) revised framework. At the design level, an effective ASL reading instructional approaches should emphasize on major types of reading tasks such as locating main ideas, locating details, making inferences, and fluency. It is important to address fluency because weakness in fluency may impede the processing of text meaning since substantial cognitive capacity is attributed to phonological processing (e.g., Cutting et al., 2009).
Figure 2: Method of Analysis of the Teaching of ASL Reading: Design Level

CONCLUSION

The method of analysis for ASL reading instruction can be determined by examining reading-related components at the level of Approach and Design. The analysis of method of ASL reading instruction proposed in this paper serves as the general guidelines to assess the fundamental coherency of ASL reading instructional methods at its theoretical grounding level and such analysis is applicable across ASL contexts. Similar applications for the analysis at the Design level across ASL contexts. Since the nature of ASL
contexts may vary, the model provided in this paper can be adapted to suit a particular ASL context and its context-specific characters.

REFERENCES


