

USING THE NEWSPAPER IN THE ESL CLASSROOM

Newspaper is a valuable teaching tool. Students can benefit from newspaper lessons related to reading, writing, content area subjects, and character development. Incorporating newspapers into the English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classroom offers the teacher authentic, practical, and easily accessible materials.

This article focuses on the medium of newspapers as a practical tool for enhancing media literacy in the foreign language classroom, and as a resource for creative task-based classroom activities. In what follows I discuss: 1. the possible benefits of using the newspaper in the foreign language classroom, and 2. practical guidelines for introducing and using the newspaper in the classroom.

There are a number of important points to make about the use of newspapers in the English-as-a-second-language classroom. Among the advantages it is necessary to mention the following: availability, variety, access to information, content, integration of enabling skills, learner independence and authenticity.

The advantages of availability of English newspapers are the following: they are inexpensive, available on a daily basis and readily obtainable. Moreover, nowadays most newspapers are available on line on the following websites (see the appendix).

So learners can easily access various English newspapers and magazines from around the world.

Newspapers contain a wide variety of text types. They are therefore a natural source of many of the varieties of written language that become increasingly important as learners develop proficiency in the foreign language¹. Moreover, the variety of topics found in the newspaper appeal to almost everybody, thereby motivating students to learn and seek further information.

Newspapers and news databases contain a lot of materials, which can be searched. By using newspapers and computerized databases students can obtain information on different topics. Thus, the use of newspapers in the classroom may help learners master skills and strategies needed to access to information.

The content of newspapers deals with the outside world, their use in the classroom bridges the gap between the outside world and the classroom. By using the newspaper students widen their horizons, learn about other cultures and societies and enrich their general knowledge.

¹ Nuttall, C. "Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language", Oxford: Heinemann 1996, pp 42

Using the newspaper in the classroom enables learners to integrate all skills necessary for learning a foreign language in a natural way. Students talk about what they read in the papers; make judgments about it; listen to the judgments their classmates have made and can write about articles they have read. Newspapers, thus, provide a stimulus to a wide range of communicative, task-based, and integrated activities. Furthermore, they contain practical vocabulary, the words students will use over and over again throughout their lives.

Using the newspaper in the classroom may support learners' independence lending itself very easily to task-based activities, e.g., research work, presentations, class debates, etc. The use of newspapers as an instructional tool may thus provide learners with opportunities to make choices about their learning, and encourage teamwork and learner autonomy in the classroom.

The use of newspapers in the classroom enables meaningful and interesting communication. Not only are newspapers authentic materials in themselves, but they also evoke an authentic personal response when we read them. By using the newspaper in the classroom the process of language learning becomes relatively natural as learners are given real-world opportunities (or simulations) to apply or adapt knowledge.

In sum, newspapers are an invaluable resource in the foreign language classroom. They provide learners with exposure to the target language as well as ample opportunities for using it.

As to the practical guidelines - before using the newspaper in the classroom, students should be familiarized with the components of the newspaper, its various sections (e.g., News, Sports, Entertainment, Opinion, Health, Arts, Books, Science, Technology, etc.) as well as with vocabulary items connected with the newspaper (e.g., editor, scoop, reporter, correspondent, feature, etc.).²

While getting acquainted with the newspaper students are suggested a list of various sections of the newspaper. They are asked to find a corresponding article and copy its headline.

The examples given below are taken from "The Daily Mirror" English newspaper.

SECTION	HEADLINE OF THE ARTICLE
News Article	"Serbs Vote to Keep Kosovo"
Education Feature	"Rediscovering the Democratic Purposes of Education"
Ecology Feature	"Climate Change and Global Warming - Global Issues"
Science Feature	"Ancient Footprints Discovered in Mexico Could Challenge History"

² Sanderson P. "Using the Newspapers in the Classroom", Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 38

Sports Feature	"Russian Figure Skating Star Plushenko to Leave Amateur Sport to Earn"
Editorial	"China Recognizes Sikkim as Part of India"
Advice Column	"A Healthy Diet"
Medicine	"How to Prevent Asthma"
Music	"New National Standards in Armenian Music Education"
Game	"Develop Your Child's Mathematical Skills"
Humor	"Man Robs Bus Using Two Dirty Rats"
Other	"Fish and Seafood May Disappear by 2048"

Then the students are asked to answer the following questions:

- When you read the newspaper which section do you never pass up on?
- Which sections do you rarely read? Write down specific comments (e.g., praise, criticism, or suggestions for improvement)

The necessity to develop metacognitive knowledge of the processes involved in reading the newspaper is stressed in a number of works dealing with the problem³. It is thus recommended to familiarize students with the elements of media texts and journalistic writing such as headlines, captions, sources, lead paragraphs, keywords, images, signs, etc. Special attention should be given to the difference between *fact* and *opinion* and the ways they are used in the context of the newspaper. Students should also be encouraged to read, analyze and criticize newspaper articles as well as other media texts (e.g., radio, television, etc.) in order to develop critical media literacy and to learn how to resist media manipulation.

After the students have been acquainted with the main features of the newspaper, and have enhanced the relevant skills and strategies, they can gradually perform more complex task-based activities based on the newspaper⁴. These kinds of activities are student-centered. The role of the teacher is primarily to guide and facilitate the activity-based learning process. Some of the main factors that the teacher should take into account when designing a task are: students' level and ability in English, contextual factors, task complexity, students' prior knowledge and experience, self access materials (e.g., dictionaries, clear reference grammar books, other media, etc.), task duration, familiarity with the text type, strategies and skills needed to perform the task,

³ Willis, J. "A Framework for Task-Based Learning". Edinburgh Gate, England: Longman. 1999.
 Sanderson, P. "Using the Newspapers in the Classroom". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1999.

⁴ Willis J. "A Framework for Task-Based Learning". Edinburgh Gate, England: Longman. 1999, pp 19.

(e.g., oral or written presentation skills), assessment tools, etc. Suggestions for classroom activities and tasks are presented below.

Each level demands specific task for using the newspaper in the classroom. This article is an attempt to sum up our experience in using the newspaper for the intermediate level. The results of classroom activities prove that the most effective tasks are the following.

Activity 1.

1. Underline key sentences in an article and/or story.
2. Fact/opinion sentences
3. Match headlines with the first sentence of the article.
4. Quotation quiz: Give the students a list of quotations. Students should read the article to find out who said them and in what context.
5. What is it? Students try to guess what something is from a description of it by asking a number of questions about it.
6. Variation: Who is it?
7. Discussing bias

The following social interaction tasks may also be used in the classroom:

Activity 2.

1. Students read an article that poses a problem and discuss it.
2. Suggest questions that a reporter could ask about a certain topic.
3. Role - play the news: Students read a newspaper article, create a role-play from it and act it out.
4. Holding a debate after having read and discussed an article that raises moral issues.

While working with the article the students can be suggested to:

Activity 3.

1. Give a new headline.
2. Rewrite an article changing one central fact or feature.
3. Write an article from a different point of view.
4. Write a biography of a famous person according to information given in one of the articles.
5. Write a letter or an e-mail to the editor expressing an opinion about an important issue.
6. Write an advertisement.
7. Write a recipe.
8. Write a greeting.
9. Write an announcement.

10. Write an editorial: Students write a short editorial on what they think are the major problems facing the country at the present.
11. Create a crossword puzzle using 7 words from the glossary (or from a certain article).
12. Write a poem and/or a song.
13. Write a story.
14. Create a comic strip.
15. Prepare a speech on a topic dealt with in the newspaper.
16. Using multimedia computer programs, e.g., Power Point, students can create multimedia presentations that are based on an article they have read in the newspaper.

Preparing tasks the teacher may concentrate on vocabulary:

Activity 4.

1. Identify cognates.
 2. Underline words from a vocabulary list.
 3. Copy at least 5 sentences where these words appear in the text.
 4. Underline words associated with a certain subject area, e.g. peace, ecology, etc.
- Students then copy the words into their notebooks in alphabetical order.
5. Classify words according to parts of speech you wish to emphasize.
 6. Scan the article for synonyms and antonyms.
 7. Give or make definitions.
 8. Prepare a vocabulary quiz based on words from the text.

While reading the newspaper the students may be asked to focus on the form:

Activity 5.

1. Underline sentences using the grammar point you would like to emphasize.
2. Discuss the meaning and/or usage of various grammatical points.
3. Discuss the possibility of changing one of the tenses and its ramifications.
4. Translate an item from the newspaper (e.g., an ad, an article, a letter, a joke, etc.) into the mother tongue paying attention at word order, idiomatic expressions, tense, gender, etc.

Among the activities which proved their efficiency in class it is worth mentioning another task which is often made use of. To help the students disclose and sensitize the most salient features of English press as compared with Armenian press, they are given an Armenian article for translation after which they are suggested the official translation of the press, the task being to evaluate the adequacy of translation.

Turkey Censors National Geographic

"Yerkir" 11.03.2006

YEREVAN. (YERKIR). - The article published in the National Geographic magazine's March issue, and titled "The Rebirth of Armenia," has angered Turkey.

As reported by the Marmara, an Armenian language newspaper published in Turkey, the Turkish press has reacted in particular to the part of the article that said that the mount Ararat is "in a hostile country."

Turkish organizations and individuals have sent letters to the National Geographic's editors, voicing their discontent.

Թուրքիայում գրաքննության է ենթարկվում միջազգային ամսագիրը

«Երկիր» 11.03.2006

ԵՐԵՎԱՆ (ԵՐԿԻՐ) - Ամերիկյան նշանավոր «Նեյշնըլ գեոգրաֆիկ» ամսագրում մարտի սկզբին հրատարակված «Հայաստանի վերածնունդը» հոդվածը զայրույթ է առաջացրել Թուրքիայում:

«Մարմարա» թերթը տեղեկացնում է, որ թուրքական մամուլն արծագանքել է հոդվածի հատկապես այն բաժնին, որում ասվում է, որ Արարատ լեռը գտնվում է «թշնամի երկրի տարածքում»:

Թուրքական կազմակերպություններն ու անհատները քողոքներ են ուղղել «Նեյշնըլ գեոգրաֆիկ»-ի խմբագրությանը: Թուրքիայում հրատարակվող ամսագրի թուրքերեն տարբերակը, հրաժարվել է հրատարակել այդ հոդվածը, իսկ իշխանությունները դեմ են եղել, որ անգլերեն հրատարակությունը վաճառվի Թուրքիայում:

For the advanced students it may be productive to suggest comparative analysis of native and British press. Such kind of work will help them to outline the differences and similarities between the two kinds of press.

Teaching students effective reading strategies is an essential element in using the newspaper in the classroom. Thus, the teacher should help students develop a complex repertoire of the necessary reading strategies (e.g., skimming, scanning, getting the main ideas and supporting details, making inferences and understanding implicit information, exploring text organization, identifying bias, identifying and interpreting imagery, summarizing the text critically etc.). Developing an awareness and understanding of the processes involved in reading the newspaper will enable students to react and respond to the newspaper in a more insightful and critical manner as well as to perform their tasks more successfully.

References

1. Nuttall, C. "Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language". Oxford: Heinemann 1996.
2. Sanderson, P. "Using the Newspapers in the Classroom". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1999.
3. Willis, J. "A Framework for Task-Based Learning". Edinburgh Gate, England: Longman. 1999.
4. "Yerkir", Armenian weekly newspaper. 11.03.2006
5. "The Daily Mirror", English daily newspaper. 14.05.2006

Appendix

I. On-Line Newspapers:

1. <http://www.cnn.com>- The CNN
2. <http://www.newsweek.com/>- Newsweek Magazine
3. <http://www.refdesk.com/paper.html>- links to on-line newspapers - USA and worldwide

II. Internet Sites for the EFL/ESL Classroom

1. <http://www.channelone.com/news/feature/1998/10/19981019/index.html>- New-York Times articles and lesson plans
2. <http://www.macomb.k12.mi.us/wq/wqjourl.htm> newspaper-world wide web project
3. <http://school.newsweek.com/> -Newsweek education program

III. CNN Educational Sites

1. <http://cnn.com/>
2. <http://www.literacynet.org/cnn/instructor.html>
3. <http://learning.turner.com/newsroom/index.html>