

Learning How to Cope with Reading in English for Academic Purposes in 26 Hours

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This paper describes classroom procedures for developing a set of abilities with which Brazilian professionals can cope with reading needs in English in the shortest possible time. The approach is based on the notion that, since the students are already literate in their L1 (Portuguese), the task of coping with the new language is not as complex as it has been traditionally implied. This view stems from the reading universals hypothesis, which assumes that there are some reading strategies that can be transferred from L1 to L2. Since the typical Brazilian professional is a 'false beginner' in the study of EFL, he normally has a substantial amount of dormant lexical and syntactic competence which can be readily put to use to achieve the desired goal. Linguistic aspects involved in processing the foreign language are approached by means of a break-down technique of simplification, together with a set of reading activities aimed at developing 'the guessing game'.

INTRODUCTION

This paper describes the approach to reading for academic studies taken at the Sociedade Brasileira de Cultura Inglesa (SBCI), São Paulo, Brazil - one of the largest schools in the world dedicated to the teaching of EFL. The course 'Reading Skills for Academic Studies' is aimed at Brazilian professionals who need to read specialized materials in order to be acquainted with the latest developments in their fields of work, and who, because of work overload, are usually in no position to afford more than one 100 minute meeting per week. Given this logistic constraint, plus the fact that one semester of studies at SBCI is normally composed of 16 weeks, the total number of classroom hours was limited to 26.

Once the possible study time was defined, we embarked on the task of finding the most representative types of written discourse and the most productive activities to be employed in those 26 classroom hours. This paper is not concerned with the criteria for text selection, and will instead describe the main classroom procedures adopted, together with their underlying information processing theories.

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