Pre-publishing Ideas

This is an abbreviated article looking at the methods of shadow reading without going into the details of theory. The complete article has been accepted by Language Teaching Research for publication sometime in 2013. The editor of that publication, Rod Ellis, has kindly allowed us to publish this short description ahead of the full article so we might use the ideas and experiment with them ourselves.

Shadow-reading in the ESL classroom: A brief report

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The aim of this brief report is to discuss our experience with shadow-reading, both as a technique we have successfully applied in the ESL classroom and as the focus of a research study we recently conducted (author & autho, forthcoming).

Shadow-reading is an adaptation of “conversational shadowing” (Murphey, 2001), a pedagogical technique in which L2 learners “shadow” their interlocutors, that is, repeat what others say, either completely or selectively, or engage in conversational interaction about what is being said. In shadow-reading, shadowing is combined with summarizing and retelling in order to encourage not only meaningful imitation of L2 models but also reading comprehension and retention of written English texts. What follows is a brief description of the procedures for shadow-reading, as we have implemented it in basic ESL classes at a private university in Puerto Rico.

Training for shadow-reading

To perform shadow-reading effectively, students first need to understand the concept of shadowing and get some practice in doing it. There are three areas of training that we think are important:

Chunking: Students need to develop the ability to “chunk”, that is, learn how to segment long utterances into meaningful shorter units. Teachers can give learners a few tips as to how to preserve syntactic and semantic unity in short segments as well as demonstrate correct chunking by reading aloud, slightly pausing after appropriate word groups, and asking students to repeat.

Shadowing short sentences: To introduce learners to the notion of shadowing, we suggest showing Murphey’s (2000) Shadowing and Summarizing video. Either through the video or teacher demonstration, students can be taught how to shadow short sentences in various ways: in complete or selective form, out loud or in low-voice private speech, and interactively (i.e. interjecting comments or questions).

Shadowing longer passages: Students need practice in shadowing longer pieces of discourse. They still chunk and shadow as above, and then summarize the passage in their own words. This implies the ability to hold larger amounts of information in short-term memory and then verbalize (summarize) what has been retained. In summarizing longer passages, learners are not required to reproduce utterances exactly as they are modeled (shadowed). Paraphrasing and summarizing are actually encouraged. To practice shadowing of longer passages, we suggest using short narrative texts organized in paragraphs so that pairs of learners can shadow, paragraph by paragraph, the story to each other in
alternate fashion. In fact, some students can shadow very well but with little retention of information. The summarizing makes them attend more to the meaning making as they shadow (Murphey, personal communication).

Procedures for shadow-reading

The shadow-reading task per se, as implemented in our classrooms and research study, consists of an interactional phase and a non-interactional phase. In the interactional phase, the students, working in pairs, read silently and aloud, shadow, and orally summarize a story. In the non-interactional phase, the students individually produce written retellings of the story on two occasions, immediately after the activity and several days later.

For shadow-reading, teachers first need to select a story text that can be divided into two equally long parts. During the activity, and for the first part of the text, one partner assumes the role of Reader (i.e., reads the text aloud) and the other partner assumes the role of Shadower (i.e. repeats and/or summarizes what he/she hears, without looking at the text). Following are the main steps in conducting the shadow-reading session.

Interactional phase

1. Students, in pairs and facing each other, are provided with Part I of the story in print form. Both partners read Part I silently. When finished, Partner A (Reader) keeps the text and Partner B (Shadower) returns the text to the teacher.

2. Students are reminded that they can make interactive comments (clarify ideas, ask each other questions, and/or engage in conversation) during the shadow-reading session if that helps them derive meaning from the text.

3. Partner A reads Part I out loud and Partner B shadows. The following sequence may be followed for each paragraph, or for all of Part I if it consists of only one paragraph.

4. • Partner A reads each sentence, chunking as necessary
  • Partner B shadows each sentence three times: out loud, in low voice, and silently
  • Partner A reads each sentence again
  • Partner B shadows each sentence selectively (i.e., repeating only key words)
  • Partner A reads the entire paragraph again
  • Partner B summarizes paragraph
  • If Part I is multi-paragraph, Partner B summarizes all of Part I

5. Roles are reversed for Part II (Partner A becomes Shadower and Partner B becomes Reader). The same procedure as for Part I is followed with Part II of the story.

Non-interactional phase

Immediately after shadowing and summarizing the story orally, the students are asked to write individually, in English, as much as they can remember from the story. Several days later, they are required to produce in writing a second (delayed) recall of the story in English. Optionally, and in order to obtain another measure of comprehension and retention, students may be invited to do a third written retelling of the story, this time in their L1

Shadow-reading and imitation

As researchers and practitioners inspired by Vygotskian sociocultural theory (SCT), we are interested in shadow-reading because we find in it multiple affordances for imitation. Within the SCT framework, imitation is viewed as the chief mechanism of internalization and a major component of developmental activity in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1986). Imitation is not, within
this framework, mere rote or mechanical repetition of models; rather, imitation involves conscious understanding of what is imitated, the intention to reproduce it in meaningful ways, and the ability to extend the reproduction creatively to new contexts. In our research study we observed the process of imitation as it unfolded in the shadow-reading activity. Specifically, we focused on those aspects of shadow-reading which helped learners internalize and creatively reconstruct a story text through imitation. A qualitative analysis of shadow-reading indeed revealed a rich gamut of imitative behaviors which seemed to contribute to language development as well as story comprehension and retention. A quantitative analysis of the retellings in which we compared the scores obtained by a group of learners that had engaged in shadow-reading to the scores of another group which had simply read the story silently yielded significantly higher scores for the students who had engaged in shadow-reading (see forthcoming article for the details). Both the qualitative and the quantitative results of the study suggest that shadow-reading effectively promotes meaningful imitation and internalization of L2 exemplars, aiding story comprehension and retention.

**Shadowing, chunking, and interaction**

A crucial skill involved in shadow-reading is chunking. The partner who reads the text orally has to “chunk” the sentences in the text into manageable meaningful word groups with adequate pauses to allow enough time for the Shadower to grasp the content and repeat it. This phonological encoding of the Reader and subsequently of the Shadower provides the opportunity to go beyond mere repetition in order to facilitate interpretation and storage of a message. As Murphey (1996) suggested, chunking facilitates adjustment in the ZPD. Our learners took advantage of the chunking strategy and explicitly requested it (“Can you please chunking?”) or offered it (“You want chunk?”). ZPD adjustment in shadow-reading is also facilitated by the possibility of interaction between partners. As learners interact for clarification purposes, request for assistance, and topic engagement, meaning can be jointly constructed and language becomes the focus of attention. Interaction between learners is, in fact, one of the essential components for the success of shadow-reading because it helps learners to make sense of the text and reproduce it with understanding.

**Reasons for implementing shadow-reading**

Results of our research study and our practical experience with the technique lead us to believe shadow-reading may be usefully and effectively applied in second or foreign language classrooms. Some of the most salient reasons we find shadow-reading to be useful are the following:

- It offers repeated opportunities for hearing, articulating, understanding, and internalizing L2 segments.
- It provides affordances for mutual assistance in the ZPD, as partners have the opportunity to monitor each other’s production, make corrections if necessary, and help each other understand and produce text.
- It promotes intelligent, transformative imitation of L2 material and transcendence (transferring learned segments to new contexts), especially as students summarize in the interactional phase and in the written retellings.
- It allows the students to engage in imitation in private speech (particularly during low voice and silent repetition), a process which might contribute to internalization.
• It can be applied at any proficiency level, depending on the complexity of the text selected. Shadow-reading is actually an excellent way to develop paraphrasing and summarizing skills among advanced L2/FL learners.

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References


