NEOLOGISMS
AND
(E)FL READING COMPREHENSION

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20th European Conference on Literacy
August, 2019
Copenhagen, Denmark
Presentation overview

- Reading
- Neologisms
- Research
  - Aim
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  - Data collection
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Reading

**Decoding**
- Micro-processes
  - Local level
- Word recognition

**Meaning construction**
- Macro-processes
  - Global level
- Comprehension
vocabulary knowledge & reading comprehension are seen as closely related (and extensively studied)

- functionally (in)dependent as shown in studies:

(a) vocabulary knowledge enables reading comprehension, so teaching how to learn words leads to successful comprehension

(b) vocabulary development results in enhanced comprehension, just as amount of reading causes vocabulary development
L2 / FL Reading

- L2 vocabulary knowledge as the dominant predictor of L2 reading ability
- therefore, an emphasis on reading for pleasure
- English and its *lingua franca* status
- today omnipresent, especially in media
- e.g. the Harry Potter fandom
- Joanne Rowling as the linguistic innovator
Language is not static, so new terms are always coined although they may at first only be used by a subgroup that shares a common interest.
neologize, v.

Pronunciation: Brit. /ˈnɪələdʒəlaɪz/ , U.S. /niˈɔələ,dʒəlaɪz/
Forms: 18– neologise, 18– neologize.
Etymology: < NEOLOGY n. + -IZE suffix. Compare French néologiser ...

1. intr. To coin or use new words or phrases.

1840 T. De Quincey Theory Greek Tragedy in Blackwood’s Edinb. Mag. Feb. 146/1 At every step of the introvolution, (to neologise a little in a case justifying a neologism).
1895 Westm. Gaz. 25 Nov. 4/2 Prone to take strange liberties with the language, and to neologise.
1977 Hudson Rev. 30 177 Oh, flubbery flubs, I say, neologizing.
1997 R. W. McConchie Lexicography & Physicke 2 Conscious efforts to neologize or borrow have generally been made to meet a specific and immediate need.

+2. intr. Theol. To introduce or accept novel (esp. rationalistic) views or doctrines. Obs. rare.
Some authors define neologisms as lexical items which survive in the language and are in accordance with all the norms of that language, whereas others consider neologisms to be all newly created words regardless of the criteria of their creation.
Neologisms may be encountered in different areas of human existence; however, Crystal (2003, p. 132) argued that “the more creative the language context, the more likely we are to encounter lexical experiments, and find ourselves faced with unusual neologisms which is especially visible in the language of literature”.

Research aim

- to investigate the comprehension of neologisms from the Harry Potter series (books and films) in the Croatian university students learning EFL
Research questions

- Is there a relation between learners’ neologism-based EFL reading comprehension performance and their self-assessed EFL knowledge, exposure to EFL and their reading habits in EFL?

- Is being exposed to the Harry Potter books and films in Croatian (L1) related to learners’ EFL reading comprehension performance?

- Is there a relation between learners’ passive and active knowledge, i.e. recognition and comprehension, of neologisms?
**Data collection - participants**

- future primary school teachers, second to fifth year students
- 101 participants (97 females and 4 males), mean age 21.08
- 30.7% did ESP course as part of their university study programme
Data collection - instruments

- a two-part questionnaire
- reading comprehension tasks based on neologisms in Harry Potter books and films)
Data collection - instruments

a two-part questionnaire

- background information about the participants, and their EFLL and EFL reading habits (part 1)
- questions about the participants’ familiarity with the HP series (part 2)
- a table with 50 sentence-incorporated neologisms (part 2),

  e.g. There was a **Devil’s Snare**.
  I heard this phrase. Yes/No. **versus**
  I know its meaning
  (passive and active knowledge)
Data collection - instruments

neologism-based reading comprehension question tasks

- the cloze test
  (to fill in 10 gaps with the neologisms from the HP books and films)

- the summarising task
  (to sum up the reconstructed EFL text in L1)
Results

Surprisingly poor !!!
Figure 1. Primary and secondary school EFL grades and self-assessed EFL knowledge
Figure 2. Daily exposure to EFL
Figure 3. EFL reading habits
What do you read for study purposes?

Figure 4. Reading in English for study purposes
So,

- poor exposure to EFL in everyday life
- along with poor EFL reading habits
- poor self-assessed EFL knowledge
Participants’ exposure to the HP series

- 36.6% read some books in Croatian, 35.1% read all the seven books
- only 7.4% read them in English

- 62.5% watched some films in Croatian, 23.8% watched all of them
- ‘only’ 18.1% watched them in English, each film watched by 46.7% of them
Reading comprehension test

Figure 5. Cloze test score
Figure 6. Summarizing task performance
Figure 7. Passive and active knowledge of neologisms, i.e. recognition vs. comprehension
Knowledge of neologisms

- only 3 items marked as previously heard by more than 50% of the participants and another 3 by more than 40% of them.

- the best scores were recorded for:
  - *You-Know-Who* (74.3%),
  - *Chocolate frogs* (57.4%),
  - *Keeper* (54.5%),
  - *Invisibility Cloak* (43.6%),
  - *Seeker* (43.6%), and
  - *sweetums* (41.6%).
Results according to RQs

RQ 1 - Is there a relation between learners’ neologism-based EFL reading comprehension performance and their self-assessed EFL knowledge, exposure to EFL and their reading habits in EFL?

- a two-tailed test of significance (Spearman rho) indicated:
  - significant weak positive correlation with the participants’ self-assessed EFL knowledge ($r_s (99) = .38, p < .01$), length of their EFL learning ($r_s (101) = .26, p < .01$), and daily exposure to English via the Internet ($r_s (97) = .34, p < .01$) and books ($r_s (60) = .22, p < .01$)
  - very weak or negligible correlation with daily exposure to English via music ($r_s (92) = .15, p < .01$), and films ($r_s (95) = .12, p < .01$), and reading habits for general ($r_s (100) = .08, p < .01$) and academic purposes ($r_s (99) = .06, p < .01$)
Results according to RQs

So, the relation between the EFL reading comprehension performance and the tested variables was established in this case, but it was rather weak, which may be related to the overall poor results obtained by the participants.
Results according to RQs

RQ 2 - Is being exposed to the Harry Potter books and films in English related to learner EFL reading comprehension performance?

- 3 out of 6 participants who had the best cloze test performance reported reading the HP books in English.
- 4 out of 6 participants who had the best cloze test performance reported watching the HP films in English.
- None of 26 participants who had the poorest cloze test performance reported reading any of the HP books in English.
- Only 2 out of 26 participants who had the poorest cloze test performance reported watching a HP film in English.
Results according to RQs

exposure to the HP books / films and EFL reading comprehension

• 1 out of 13 participants who had the best summarising task results reported reading a HP book in English
• 3 out of 13 participants who had the best summarising task results reported watching a HP film in English

• none of 7 participants who had the poorest summarising task results reported reading any of the HP books or watching a HP film in English
Results according to RQs

- a two-tailed test of significance (Spearman rho) indicated
- **significant weak positive** correlation between the RC test results and Harry Potter books ($r_s (81)=.31, p< .01$) and films ($r_s (83)=.25, p< .01$) in English.
- i.e. those who read Harry Potter books and watched films in English achieved better results on the neologism-based reading comprehension test, although general results were rather low
Results according to RQs

RQ 3 - Is there a relation between the participants’ passive and active knowledge of neologisms?

- recognition versus comprehension
- the highest values in the passive knowledge category corresponded with the highest values in the active knowledge category, i.e. the participants understood those neologisms that they had previously heard.
All in all

- EFL knowledge not at a high level (as assessed by the participants themselves)
- it is even lower than the reported school grades show
- fairly low exposure to EFL in general
- poor EFL reading habits
- also, fairly low exposure to the HP books/films in both languages, although somewhat greater to films
- poor knowledge of neologisms
- poorer performance on both reading comprehension tasks
Limitations and recommendation

- relatively small sample size
- convenience sample
- additional instruments needed
CONCLUSION

- perhaps more attention needs to be paid to neologisms in teaching how to read in (E)FL / comprehend (E)FL
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