

Developing the potential of language and non-language courses, or on the significance of listening, speaking, reading and writing in education – a review of joint publication
Educational Role of Language Skills

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Having addressed the problem of language skills which, despite their importance in everyday communication, personal growth and cognitive development, are often neglected in instructed settings, the authors of the publication *Educational Role of Language Skills* (2018), Michał Daszkiewicz (University of Gdańsk), Ryszard Wenzel (University of Gdańsk) and Monika Kusiak-Pisowacka (Jagiellonian University), successfully demonstrate the fundamental role of listening, speaking, reading and writing in establishing the close connection between subjects from the curriculum as well as learners' cognition and worldview. The scholars participated in an annual international interdisciplinary conference *Educational Role of Language* organized annually since 2016 with an intention of underlining the significance of the quaternary approach to language skills, which resulted in the publication of the book under discussion. The seminal work is divided into two complementary parts. The first one consists of Introduction and two sections devoted to the presentation of recent trends in education. The second one, on the other hand, isolates four sections, each of which discusses one of four language skills in the light of Learning to (...) and (...) to Learn approaches. The book also successfully relates to two scopes of the *Educational Role of Language* (ERL) framework, Scope Major and Minor, in that it addresses the multidimensional nature of education as well as its complex socio-affective and contextual character.

In the ***Introductory section***, the authors stress the utility of axiological, psychomotor, affective and cognitive domains associated with language education in other non-language areas, arguing that inadequate language-related terminology may break the connection between language and world knowledge (Daszkiewicz et al. 2018: 21). The concept found central to the presentation of the educational role of language skills is the so-called glottodidactic paradigm, which as an interdisciplinary construct, draws from such disciplines as psychology, sociolinguistics and pedagogy (Daszkiewicz et al. 2018: 22). More importantly, however, the scholars explain that the process of diagnosing problems on the personal, or teacher- and student-related, and textual, that is language production- and reception-oriented, levels is facilitated provided that both lower and higher stages of education are organized around glottodidactic concepts.

In ***Part One***, the phenomena of learning to listen, read, speak and write are discussed from the perspective of genuine and artificial interaction. Exempli gratia, according to the authors, genuine reading is defined as a kind of information- and curiosity-driven performance in contrast to artificial reading, or a reading comprehension task, which, as a classroom activity, urges students to limit their interaction with a text to finding answers to comprehension questions. The introduction of the latter into classroom surroundings carries serious consequences since, firstly, the focus, for instance, on multiple choice or yes/ no questions directs readers' attention from appreciating the literary and aesthetic value of texts (Daszkiewicz et al. 2018: 55) and, secondly, any in-class activity providing learners with additional practice, owing to its artificiality, does not guarantee the acquisition of the skill in question.

Part Two, as already said, isolates four sections, each of which discusses one of four language skills. The first explores the relationship between listening and learning in the light of Learning to Listen and Listening to Learn approaches, at the same time presenting insights from sociolinguistic, cognitive and psychological perspectives. The authors point to the receptive and, therefore, misleading character of

the skill of listening which, according to many laypeople, does not entail any training. Furthermore, Daszkiewicz et al. (2018) follow an intercultural approach to listening, providing a distinction into low-context cultures, that is Western countries which emphasize the construction of clear and comprehensible messages, and high-context cultures, that is Asian and Middle East countries where speakers aim to make allowance for such aspects of communication as shared values and setting.

Section Two discusses the ability to read. Learning to Read and Reading to Learn present the skill as a part of language competence and a tool to learn content knowledge respectively. Another dimension of reading, the socio-cognitive model, is also provided, thanks to which reading is conceptualized as a cognitive ability. The scholars identify three types of knowledge, conceptual, domain and cultural, that can be activated with an objective of improving readers' comprehension of a text. They also investigate the effectiveness of such methodological approaches as CLIL and techniques as Krashen's idea of narrow reading that can be employed with a view to developing extensive and critical reading skills.

The oral productive language skill, speaking, is the subject of discussion in **Section Three**. Even though it is presented as a means of communication and learning, the authors point to the extra-curricular character of speaking practice procedures resulting from the belief that once the skill has been acquired, it does not have to be further worked on in instructed settings. Such a diminishing approach to speaking is questioned since 'learning is facilitated if subject matter is uttered by learners' (Daszkiewicz et al. 2018: 115). The authors rightly observe that the problem daunting the majority of classrooms concerns the so-called unuttered reflection, which means that learners remain silent when they face teachers' questions. They attribute their unwillingness to communicate to the cult of authorial self-expression under the influence of which not inventive or important enough utterances are not welcome (Daszkiewicz et al. 2018: 124).

In **Section Four** the presentation of the skill of writing takes place in the context of its two functions, descriptive-semantic and argumentative-poetic. This means that the two play an important role in broadening learners' knowledge and stimulating their creativity respectively so that writers can construct messages free of any paralinguistic or extra textual features. What is said to be the most effective way to measure learners' progress with respect to their skill of writing concerns precision of thinking, or, their ability to put in writing what is in their minds. Throughout the section, Daszkiewicz et al. (2018) provide ten examples of teaching points from such fields as science, civics, ethics and geology, investigating their usefulness in developing the skill of writing.

There are also two appendices attached to the publication. The first of them is of a more theoretical character since it gives an account of the ERL Association whose objective is to explore axiological, psychomotor, affective and cognitive domains in the light of the quaternary approach to language skills, society, culture and reality. Furthermore, the authors list the arguments for investigating language skills, offer solutions on how to achieve this and define the role of language in four educational domains. The second appendix, on the other hand, offers more practical insights into language skills. It provides a substantial number of research questions examining the four language skills from the perspective of a man, society, culture and reality, which demonstrates a wide applicability of the quaternary approach in various areas of human cognitive development.

Educational Role of Language Skills (2018) by Daszkiewicz, Wenzel and Kusiak-Pisowacka is a logically structured, truly comprehensive and potentially valuable seminal work accounting for the significance of the quaternary approach in education. The theoretical background to the concepts of education and language skills offered by the scholars in Introduction and **Part One** provides relevant information found central to the discussion of listening, reading, speaking and writing presented in four sections of **Part Two**. Extensive references to research studies and selected interdisciplinary investigations from the fields of didactics, sociolinguistics and socio-cultural studies not only ensure the reliability of the authors' analyses, but also show a true potential for increasing lay people's awareness of the educational role of language skills, which, as already said, have been very frequently taken for granted.

Given the apparent discrepancy between the simplistic approach towards language skills and their actual significance in education, the focus on language development, which in fact is possible via the practice of four skills and reliance on glottodidactic concepts, has not been sufficiently prioritized. Nevertheless, *Educational Role of Language Skills* stresses the significance of the quaternary approach, at the same time underlining the role of four language skills in identifying teachers' and learners' problems. Therefore, the stance towards listening, speaking, reading and writing adopted by Daszkiewicz, Wenzel and Kusiak-Pisowacka, in which they recommend the institutional treatment and systematic incorporation of language skills into syllabuses, teaching methods and assessment procedures, is fully justified given the fact that only education organized around language skills will help both learners and teachers achieve their objectives.