

Functional reading skills in the information society

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Changing realities

- The context for reading and literacy has changed radically:
 - Wide use of infotechnology
 - Wide use of electronic communication
 - Predominance of audiovisual channels over print and writing
 - Sophisticated methods of persuasion
 - Information explosion
 - Service and innovation economy

Changed setting

- Information society:
 - a society where creation, dissemination, exchange, use and manipulation of information has a central role in economy, politics and culture.
- Post-industrial society:
 - a society where provision of services is a centre of economic activity, where knowledge is a valued form of capital and innovation is the predominant engine for economic growth.
- What does this mean for literacy?

Impact on literacy

- Reading for pleasure has decreased
- Descriptive vocabulary has decreased
- Exposure to correct writing has decreased
- Importance of information retrieval rising
- Importance of communication skills rising
- Importance of critical skills rising
- Importance of functional writing rising
- Emergence of new genres: blogs, podcasts, Twitter and Facebook statements, Youtube presentations

Change in mother tongue teaching

- Traditional mother tongue teaching:
 - Grammatical structure and analysis
 - Rules of ortography and standard
 - Writing of essays
- New mother tongue teaching:
 - Ortography and standard language skills
 - Development of functional language skills
 - Development of mass media skills

Mother tongue skills in Estonia

- Large quantitative study in 2009-2010
- First year university students (N=241)
- All major universities involved
- All major fields of study involved
- Test consisted of two broad knowledge domains:
 - Standard language and language structure
 - Functional reading, listening and writing

The results

Ability	Standard language	Functional skills
Good	29%	22%
Satisfactory	28%	27%
Weak	22%	23%
Unsatisfactory	21%	28%

Recommendations

- Teaching of standard language is good
- Teaching of functional skills is weak
- Test results correlated positively with the average mother tongue state examination results in the respondent's secondary school ($r=0,336$, $p<0,01$).
- Recommendations:
 - mother tongue and literacy teaching practices need change
 - teachers need additional training
 - functional language skills – goal of the whole school

Implications to minority languages

- Minority languages are less widely used in education, economy, administration and politics.
- Minority language literacy education not widespread.
- Minority language speakers are usually bilingual in dominant and minority language.
- Standard language writing skills in a minority language are often weaker.
- Functional skills needed in dominant language

Goals for minority literacy

- Minority literacy development needs to focus on electronic domains:
 - Wikipedias
 - Electronic text databases
 - Blogs
 - Social networks
- Main goal to promote electronic use of minority, emergence of user communities
- Encouragement of nonstandard writing

Conclusion

- The setting for language usage has changed
- Language has become a major tool in creation of goods and services
- Functional language skills need to be developed
- Minority languages need to create a usage space in the internet.