

SYLLABLE AS THE MAIN SEGMENT WHILE TEACHING TO READ, EVER PRESENT AND IGNORED (OVER THE COURSE OF HISTORY

SUMMARY

Syllable is a language element difficult to define – there are many definitions of a syllable but linguists emphasize that it is still a problematic issue. In the first chapter of this thesis the topic of a syllable was presented in terms of linguistics. The physical attributes of a syllable had been analysed along with its structure. There are four rules determining this structure and organizing the order of speech sounds in syllables. In Polish like in all the other languages, the order of speech sounds is not accidental: there are combinations of vowels and consonants that are statistically encountered most often, those that are less common and finally those that do not exist. Native speakers can follow these rules automatically without any metalinguistic knowledge. Generally, native speakers divide words into syllables in the same or very similar way – if there are considerable differences in dividing words they are mainly due to phonology and morphonology interactions in words that are difficult to pronounce (as a result of historical linguistic changes).

When teaching how to read, a syllable was either the most important element in the method or its role was marginal as described in the second chapter of this thesis, basing on several dozens of manuals from different ages. Natural ease of dividing words into syllables is probably the reason why the syllable was so important in first Latin manuals – syllabification is a natural and innate ability. The clue lies in Europe of Middle Ages where people had been learning to read in Latin which had been the only one and official language of the Catholic Church for a long time. When finally the national languages in European countries became more important, teachers needed to prepare the first abecedaries in their native languages. They patterned the Latin teaching method that was the only one they knew and could use, so they taught how to read syllables first and then how to compose words using them. They didn't realize that there was a significant methodological difference: since pupils didn't understand Latin they didn't recognize words composed from syllables. That is why they had to learn everything by heart, without understanding. That took a long time and changed learning into an arduous and inefficient process – words composed from syllables

were unknown (words meaning was downstream processing) and pupils twisted words without memorising them many times. All in all, the only teaching method of how to read in Latin was strongly linked to syllables – the first few pages of every Polish medieval and later manuals were filled with series of syllables. First Polish medieval manuals are composed in the same way (the oldest of them date back to the 16th century). The method transposed from Latin teaching system continued until XVIII century and the Age of Enlightenment. Reformists surrounding the King Stanisław Poniatowski decided to change the education system substantially. The old teaching method was rejected and replaced by analytic method based on speech sounds. The syllable as an element of the old outdated method was doomed to oblivion.

Shortly thereafter, Poland disappeared from the map of Europe and became dependent on neighbouring countries. The fall of the state reforms including the school reform caused the old teaching method to return. New methodological propositions appeared only in the second half of the XIX century. The development of psychology (especially child psychology) re-evaluated the school system and the teaching methods. Syllables disappeared from the first pages of manuals – speech sound became the most important component when teaching to read. But there was one methodological problem: unnatural pronunciation of isolated consonants. Few pedagogues suggested coming back to syllables in teaching but in a modern way.

Analytical reading methods are applied up to the present day: school curricula have been based on them for so long now that the living generations don't know others. Present generations are facing another problem: an invasion of electronic devices created the digital world causing many changes in brain development and brain functioning. One of the most dangerous changes are the disorders of speech development. As a result, more and more children have a serious problem with learning to read. The recently developed modern syllable method of reading (based on neurological research) seems to solve this problem – even children with speech disorders (including children with autism) are able to learn to read (and acquire communication skills in this way). The syllable in this method is used in a completely different way than in the past. The method has been successful in speech therapy because of its natural structure – the syllable is more natural than speech sound even for children with disorders). Speech therapists practising this method suggest to implement it to the school curriculum.