

of individual differences in the development of reading fluency. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 16, 32-71.

Steffenson, M. S. & Joag Dev, C. (1984). Cultural knowledge and reading. In Alderson, J. c. & Urquhart, A. H. (Eds.) (1984). *Reading in a foreign language*. London: Longman.

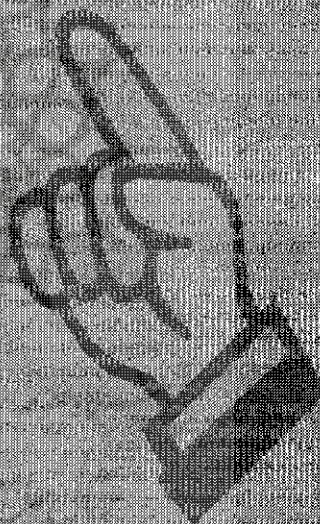
Ur, P. (1996). *A course in language teaching: practice and theory*. Cambridge: CUP.

Van Dijk, T. A. & Kintsch, W. (1983). *Strategies of discourse comprehension*. New York: Academic Press.

Widdowson, H. G. (1983). *Learning purpose and language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

(1979). *Explorations in applied linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Williams, E. (1983). *Communicative reading*. In Johnson, K. & Porter D. (Eds.), *Perspectives in communicative language teaching*. London: Academic Press: (pp. 172-183).



- 28.
- Mandler, J. (1984). **Stories, Scripts, and Scenes: Aspects of Schem Theory**. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Munby, J. (1978). **Communicative syllabus design**. Cambridge: CUP.
- Mirhassani, A. & Toossi, A. (1996). **The impact of word-formation on reading comprehension**. *Roshd FLTJ*, Vol. 12, No. 44: 59-66
- Paivio, A. (1971). **Imagery and verbal processes**. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston. Reprinted (1979). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- (1986). **Mental representations: A dual coding approach**. New York: OUP.
- Paran, A. (1997). **Bottom-up and top-down Processing**. Available on line at: <http://www.rdg.ac.uk/AcaDepts/cl/CALS/buptdown.html>. This paper originally appeared in "English Teaching professional", Issue 3, April 1997.
- Perfetti, C. A. (1985). **Reading ability**. New York: Oxford University Press.
- (1984). **Reading Acquisition and Beyond: Decoding Includes Cognition**. *American Journal of Education*, 93: 40-60.
- Perkins, K. (1983). **Semantic Constructivity in ESL reading comprehension**. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17, 19-27.
- Quinn, N. & Holland, D. (1987). **Cultural Models of Language and Thought**. New York: CUP.
- Raims, A. (1983). **Techniques in teaching writing**. New York: OUP.
- Rayner, K & Pollatsek, A (1989). **The psychology of reading**. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Rivers, W. M. (1981). **Teaching foreign language skills** (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rumelhart, D. E. (1977) **Toward an integrative model of reading**. In Dorinice, s. (Ed.). *Attention and performance IV* (pp. 573-603). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- (1980). **Schemata: The building blocks of cognition**. In Sapiro, R. J., Brruce, B., & Brewer, W. F. (Eds.), *Theoretical issues in reading comprehension*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum. (pp. 33-58).
- Sadoski, M. & Paivio, A. (1994). **A dual coding view of imagery and verbal processes in reading comprehension**. In Ruddell, R. B., Ruddell, M. R., & Singer, H. (Eds.). *Theoretical models and processes of reading*. (4th ed., pp. 582-601). New York, DE: International Reading Association.
- Sadoski, M. & Paivio, A., & Goetz, E. T. (1991). **A critique of schema theory in reading and a dual coding alternative**. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 26, 463-484.
- Sequera, W. (1995). **Construct validity in Reading Tests**. *Teaching English Forum*, Vol. 33- No.1, January-March, (p. 49).
- Smith, F. (1971). **Understanding reading: A psycholinguistic analysis of reading and learning to read**. New York: Holt Rinehart Winston.
- (1988). **Joining the literacy club**. Portsmouth, NH: Heinneinan.
- Stanovich, K. E. (1980). **Toward an interactive-compensatory model**

Carrell, P. L., Deving, J. and Eskey, D. E. (Eds.)
 Interactive approaches to second language reading. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chastain, K. (1988). **Developing Second Language Skills: theory and practice** (3rd ed.). Chicago: HBJ.

Chi, M., Glaser, R. & Farr, M. (1988). **The Nature of Expertise**. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Cook, G. (1977). **Key concepts in ELT: Schemas**. *ELT Journal*, 51 (1), (p. 86).

Davies, F. (1995). **Introducing Reading**. Longman: Penguin English.

Dubin, F. & Bycina, D. (1991). **Academic reading and the ESL/EFL teacher**. In Celce-Murcia, M. *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (2nd ed.). USA: Heinle & Heinle Publishers. (pp. 195-215).

Eskey, D. (1988). **Holding in the bottom: An interactive approach to the problem of second language readers**. In Carrell, P. L., Devine, J. and Eskey, D. E. (Eds.)

Eysenck, M. W., & Keane, M. T. (1990). *Cognitive psychology: A Students Handbook*. Hove: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Farhady, H. (1998). **Constructing reading comprehension tests**. *Roshd FLTJ*. Vol. 13-No. 49:37-48

Farhady, H. Jafarpoor, A., & Birjandi, P. (1994). **Language skills testing: from theory to practice**. Tehran: SAMT.

Garnham, A. (1985). **Psycholinguistics: Central Topics**. New York: Methuen.

Goodman, K. S. (1967). **Reading: A psycho-linguistic guessing game**. *Journal of the Reading Specialist*, 6: (pp. 126-135).

_____ (1973). **Analysis of oral reading miscues**. In Smith, F. (Ed.). *Psycholinguistics and reading*. NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. (p. 162).

_____ (1981). **Miscue analysis and future research directions**. In Hudelson, S. (Ed.) *Learning to read in different languages*. Linguistics and Literacy Series (pp. ix-xiii). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Gough, P. B. & Tunmer, W. E. (1986). **Decoding, reading and reading disability**. *Remedial and Special Education* 7: 6-10

Grabe, W. (1991). **Current developments in second language reading research**. *TESOL Quarterly* Vol.25, No.3: 375-406.

Grellet, F. (1981). **Developing reading skills. A practical guide to reading comprehension exercises**. Cambridge: CUP.

Hoover, W. A. & Tunmer, W. E. (1993). **The components of reading**. In Thompson, G. B., Tunmer, W. E., & Nicholson, T. (Eds.) (1993). *Reading acquisition processes*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Kintsch, W. (1988). **The role of knowledge in discourse comprehension: A construction- integration model**. *Psychological Review*, 95, 163-182.

Kim, H. & Krashen, S. (1997). **Why don't language acquirers take advantage of the power of reading**. *TESOL Journal*, (6)3, 26-

References

- Adams, S. (1983). **Scripts and second language reading skills.** In J. W. Oller, Jr. and P. A. Richard-Amato (Eds.), *Methods that work: A smorgasbord of ideas for language teachers.* Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, pp. 375-382.
- Alderson, C. & Urquhart, A. H. (1988). **This test is unfair: I'm not an economist.** In Carrell, P. L., Devine, J. and Eskey, D. E. (Eds.) (1984). **Reading in foreign language.** Harlow, Essex: Longman Group UK Limited.
- Anderson, R. C. & Pearson P. D. (1988). **A schema-theoretic view of basic process in reading comprehension.** In Carrell, P. L., Devine, J., &
- Alderson, C. (1984). **Reading in a foreign language: a reading problem or a language problem.** In Alderson, C. & Urquhart, A. H. (1984). *Reading in foreign language.* UK: Longman.
- Barnett, M. A. (1989). **More than meets the eye.** *Foreign language reading: theory and practice.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Bartlett, F. C. (1932). **Remembering: An Experimental and Social Study.** Cambridge: CUP, (p. 201).
- _____. (1958). **Thinking.** New York: Basic Books.
- Beech, J. & Colley, A. (1987). **Cognitive approaches to reading.** Chichester: John Wiley and Sons
- Bernhart, E. B. (1984). **Toward an information processing perspective in foreign reading.** *The modern language Journal*, 68, 322-331.
- Bloomfield, L. (1933). **Language.** New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston. In Celce-Mucia, M. (Ed.) (1991).
- Bransford, J. D. & Franks, J.J. (1971). **The abstraction of linguistic ideas.** *cognitive Psychology*, 2, 331-350.
- Carr, T. & Levy, A. (1990). **Reading and its development: Component Skills and approaches.** New York: Academic Press.
- Carrell, P. L., Devine, J. and Eskey, D. E. (Eds.) (1988). **Interactive approaches to second language reading.** Cambridge: CUP.
- Carrell, P. L. and Eisterhold, J. C. (1983). **Schema theory and ESL reading pedagogy.** *TESOL Quarterly* 17.4: 553-73 reprinted in (1988) Carrell, P. L., Devine, J. and Eskey, D. E. (Eds.) *Interactive approaches to second language reading.* Cambridge: CUP.
- Carril, P. L. (1984a). **Evidence of a formal Schema in second language comprehension.** *Language Learning*, 34: 38-112.
- _____. (1984b). **Schema theory and ESL reading: Classroom Implication and Applications.** *The Modern Language Journal*, 68: 332-343.
- _____. (1987). **Content and Formal Schemata in ESL Reading.** *TESOL Quarterly*, 21 (3), 461-481.
- _____. (1988). **Some causes of text-boundedness and schema interference in ESL reading,** in

reader's preexisting concepts about the world and about the text to be read. Into this framework, the reader first what he or she finds in any passage. If new textual information does not fit into a reader's schemata, the reader misunderstands the new material, ignores the new material, or revises the schemata to match the facts within the passage (p. 32).

Schema has received significant empirical support from studies in psycholinguistics. For example, the experiments of Bransford & Franks (1971) involved showing people pictures and asking them questions about what the story depicted; people would remember different details depending upon the nature of the picture. Schema are also considered to be important components of cultural differences in cognition (e.g., Quinn & Holland, 1987). Research on novice versus expert performance (Chi et al., 1988) suggests that the nature of expertise is largely due to the possession of schemas that guide perception and problem solving.

In spite of the fact that schema theory is not a well-defined framework for mental representation of knowledge (Garnham, 1985; Kintsch, 1988; Raynar & Pollatsek, 1989), it has been an extremely useful notion for describing how prior knowledge is integrated in memory and used in high-level comprehension processes [Anderson & Pearson, 1988, cited in Carrell, Devine & Eskey (Eds.)].

The earlier and more influential source texts for the extension and application of schema theory to foreign language learning go back to Goodman (1967), who posited that L1 reading was a "Psycholinguistic

guessing game" (Widdowson, 1983, and Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). Carrell (1988) points out that, "if students do not have sufficient prior knowledge, they should be given at least minimal background knowledge from which to interpret the text (p.103)

Therefore, the reader creates meaning on the basis of interaction between his or her background knowledge and the text. Schema theory maintains that meaning does not reside in the text itself. Instead the reader recreates the writer's intended message based on the interaction that take place in his head between the text and his background knowledge (Adams, 1983; Bernhart, 1984; Carrell, 1984a, 184b; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983; Perkins, 1983).

On the other hand, Sadoski, Paivio, and Goetz (1991), criticizing schema theory for its lack of a consistent or operational definition, its roots in idealist epistemology, and its mixed empirical support, posed "dual coding theory" as an alternative. Dual coding theory, first introduced by Paivio (1971, 1986), maintains that cognition consists of the operations of two separate but interconnected mental coding systems: a verbal system for language and a nonverbal system that deals primarily with imagery. Sadoski and Paivio (1994) present the dual coding model as it applies to reading, with examples of how it would explain the comprehension of words, phrases, and sentences in different contexts. Sadoski, Paivio, and Goetz (1991), argue that dual coding theory can more systematically explain results derived from schema theory as well as results of studies for which that model cannot easily account.

To be continued

processing (which involves skills like prediction, inference, etc.).

The claim is also that bottom-up processes influence top-down processing, and vice versa. Interactive processing is probably compensatory (Stanovich, 1980), that is, one type of processing will take over if there is a problem with the other type (pp. 32-71). Some psychologists maintain that when the quality of the stimulus (text-base factors) is good, bottom-up processing is referred, and only when the quality of the stimulus is ruined, top down processing takes over as a compensatory device (Eysenck & Keane, 1990).

Further, according to Williams (1996), there is a view that reading involves sight recognition of words, whether it be automatic and based on graphic information (Carr & Levy, 1990; Hoover & Tunmer, 1992; Perfetti, 1985; Stanovich, 1980; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983) or achieved through phonological coding (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Reading comprehension, in this model, results from an interaction of bottom-up processing (receiving orthographic information from the page) with various knowledge schemata (cf Eskey, 1988). The latter include knowledge of orthographic conventions, and of language itself, as well as cultural or academic 'background knowledge. Although schema theory has been criticized for not being a rigorously articulated "theory" (Beech & Colley, 1987: 5), the effects of background knowledge have been frequently demonstrated in ESL (e.g. Alderson & Urquhart, 1988; Steffensen & Joag Dev, 1984).

Schema Theory and Reading Comprehension

Bartlett (1932, 1958) is credited with first proposing the concept of schema (plural schemata or schemas). He arrived at the concept from studies of memory he conducted in which subjects recalled details of stories that were not actually there. He suggested that memory takes the form of schema which provide a mental framework for understanding and remembering information. Schema theory, according to Bartlett (1932), suggests that our past experience or world knowledge we have in our mind is organized into interrelated patterns. They enable us to make predictions about what we might expect to experience in a given context (P.201).

Mandler (1984) and Rumelhart (1980) have further developed the schema concept. Rumelhart (1980), describes the schema theory as follows:

According to schema theories, all knowledge is packaged into units. This units are the schemata [plural of schema]. Embedded in these packages of knowledge is, in addition to the knowledge itself, information about how this knowledge is about to be used. A schema, then, is the data structure for responding the generic concepts stored in memory (p. 34).

Cook (1997) defines the concept as "a mental representation of a typical instance" which helps people to make sense of the world more quickly because "people understand new experiences by activating relevant schemas in their mind" (p. 86). Barnett (1989), describes schemata, as:

Interactive View of Reading

The term interactive approaches can refer to two different conceptions: first, to the general interaction between reader and text, i.e., the reader makes use of information from his/her background or prior knowledge in (re) constructing the text information; and second, to the interaction of many component skills that work together simultaneously in the process. "Simply stated, reading involves an array of lower-level rapid, automatic identification skills and an array of higher-level comprehension or interpretation skills" (see Grabe, 1991, p. 383).

Interestingly, most cognitive psychologists stress the interaction-of-skills arrays whereas most L2 researchers stress the interaction between reader and text.

In an interactive model, the reader is not seen to progress in just one direction (bottom-up or top-down) in understanding the text, but as being able to alternate approaches as necessary (Barnett, 1989). The reader is seen as able to draw simultaneously from a variety of sources to understand the text such as lexical, orthographic, schematic, semantic, syntactical, and visual (Davies, 1995). Thus reading is seen as a simultaneous perceptual and cognitive process (Rumelhart, 1977). Interactive model of reading comprehension not only acknowledges the role of background knowledge, but also it stresses the significance of processing actual words of the text. This model of reading developed by Rumelhart (1977), assumes that skills at all levels are interactively available to process and interpret the text. According to him, "all of the various sources of

knowledge, both sensory and nonsensory, come together at one place and the reading process is the product of the simultaneous joint application of all the knowledge sources" (p. 588).

Goodman (1981), maintains that, "... the goal of reading is constructing meaning in response to text. It requires interactive use of graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cues to construct meaning." (p. 477). Although he is often referred to as a leading advocate of the top-down approach, his model by his own admission is interactive:

... it is one which uses print as input and has meaning as output. But the reader provides input too, and the reader, interacting with text, is selective in using just as little of the cues from text as necessary to construct meaning."

(Goodman, 1981, p. 477)

According to Dubin and Bycina (1991), the interactive model entails the reading process to be as such that, the visual data are transmitted to the brain where they are matched with existing knowledge. Then on the basis of this experience, predictions are made about the content of the text, upon which, further sampling of the data are either confirmed or revised. Although this explanation does not show how the different components of the process interact (Davies, 1995), it does provide an alternative to bottom-up and top-down models.

Sequera (1995) claims that, "many teachers now accept the view that reading is the result of a two-way communication between the reader and the text, achieved through the simultaneous interaction of bottom-up information processing (which involves word recognition, sound/spelling correspondence etc.), and top-down..... the

contribute more information to interpreting a text than the print on the page. This holds that any written or spoken text does not carry meaning, but rather only provides directions for listeners or readers as to how they should retrieve or construct meanings from their own, previously acquired knowledge (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983: p. 76). There are many types of background knowledge: **scripts** (e.g. the knowledge of what happens in a wedding ceremony), **schemata** (the knowledge of language structures), and some others (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). Thus, the better reader uses his or her background knowledge to decode less often and to predict more without fully using all the available information. In other words, reading is a process in which the reader picks and chooses from the available information only enough to select and predict a language structure which is decodable. It is not in any sense a precise perceptual process (Goodman 1973: p. 164).

Data from miscue analysis have been collected by Goodman (1981) to support the top-down model of reading. With the assumption that "oral miscues reflect the psycholinguistic process of constructing meaning through predicting, sampling, confirming and correcting" (Goodman 1981, p. ix), Goodman was able to provide some support for his model of reading based on the miscue analysis of young children reading aloud difficult texts (reported in Barnett, 1989).

Thus, according to Goodman (1967), making sense of a text is a four-step process (reported in Barnett, 1989):

1. *Predicting*: readers predict the grammatical structures based on their

knowledge of the language and semantic concepts to obtain its meaning.

2. *Sampling*: readers sample the text to confirm their predictions (this is indirect contrast to bottom-up reading because they do not need to see every word or letter).

3. *Confirming*: the readers confirm their guesses.

4. *Correcting*: the readers revise their predictions is necessary. (p.7)

Additionally, Smith (1971) adds that readers use non-visual information (prior knowledge of the subject) in making and confirming predictions. Dubin and Bycina (1991) hold that,

According to this newer model, the role of readers was considered to be quite active: they predict meaning as they read, they take in large chunks of text at a time. They do not attend to separate letters, rather they match what they already know with the meaning they derive from the text [cited in Celce-Murcia (Ed.), p.197

Chastain (1988) concludes that, "the inside-the-head view implies that reading comprehension rests primarily on the students' knowledge base and that students should therefore read materials that their background knowledge permits them to comprehend" (p. 221).

However, this model has been criticized because it fails to account for the reader who can be frustrated by a text with a large amount of unfamiliar vocabulary (Barnett, 1989) or readers who are able to understand a text for which they have little background knowledge (Stanovich, 1980).

meaning via recognizing the printed letters and words, and building up a meaning for a text from the smaller textual units at the "bottom" (letters and words) to larger and larger units at the "top" (phrases, clauses, intersentential linkages). Problems of second language reading comprehension were viewed as being essentially decoding problems deriving meaning from print. (p. 2)

This approach of reading emphasizes the language forms as the foundation for comprehension of a written text. As a matter of fact, this outdated view of reading comprehension was developed by structural linguists who favored mechanical learning fashion. Bloomfield (1933) states that: *The person who learns to read, acquires the habit of responding to the sight of letters by the utterance of phonemes. This does not mean that he is learning to utter phonemes; he can be taught to read only after his phonemic habits are thoroughly established* [pp. 500- 501; cited in Celce-Murcia(Ed), p. 196].

Thus in terms of reading, according to Paran (1997), bottom-up model claims that the reader perceives every letter, organizes the perceived letters into words, and then organizes the words into phrases, clauses, and sentences. Meaning, at any level (e.g. word or phrase), is accessed only once processing at previous (i.e. lower) levels has been completed. Thus the reader will process all the letters in a word before the meaning of the word is accessed; likewise, the reader will process all the words in a phrase or a clause before constructing its meaning.

This model, basically, postulated the teaching of reading to be started with

smallest linguistic units, single letters, mixture of letters, words and up to phrases and sentences, etc. The text-based view of reading implies that the proper approach in teaching students to read is to teach the language forms they need to know to be able to comprehend the reading (Chastain, 1988).

On the other hand, these models have not been away from criticism because of the heavy burden this process would make on the short-term memory. For example, there are more than 166 letter-to-sound correspondences in English, thus reading would be a slow and arduous process (Davies, 1995). In addition, this model does not account for the use of skimming or predicting to make sense of the text (Barnett, 1989).

Holistic View of Reading

Quite contrary to text-based view of reading comprehension, stands the inside-the-head or top-down processing view of reading. Top-down model of reading posit a non-linear view of the process in which comprehension begins with the reader's contribution, i. e. from higher levels of processing, and proceeds to use the lower levels selectively.

Thus, a top-down approach to reading is the "making of predictions about the text based on prior experience or background knowledge, and then checking the text for confirmation or refutation of those predictions (Carrell, 1988: p. 101). This approach is thus conceptually driven (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983).

The role that a reader's background knowledge has on making or modifying predictions is summarized in the schema theory. Raimis (1983) states that readers

listening and reading considered as passive skills, because they did not display any apparent manifestation of language-element-production.

However, this view did not last forever. Farhady (1998) explains that, "*with the advent of psychology and research in psycholinguistics, the long-standing position that reading comprehension was a passive skill was no longer true.*" In this regard Rivers (1981) states that, "*reading is sometimes referred to as a passive or receptive skill, but if we examine the abilities that come into play in fluent direct reading with comprehension of meaning it is clear that readers are far from passive during this activity.*"

Contemporary to the emergence of cognitive code learning theory, scholars began to study the nature of reading as a mentalistic process. In this view, two main movements developed: the first claimed that reading comprehension can be divided into many subskills, and the second maintained that reading comprehension is a general integrative ability.

Subskills View of Reading

Several models of the reading process have been developed over the years to explain how a reader derives meaning from a text. Early research in second language reading (in particular, English as a second language) assumed it was constituted of several subskills.

Munby (1978, reported in Grellet, 1981, pp. 4-5), pursuing Bloom's type taxonomy, identified the following subskills underlying reading comprehension:

- Recognizing the script of a language
- Deducing the meaning and use of

unfamiliar lexical items

- Understanding explicitly stated information
- Understanding information when not explicitly stated
- Understanding conceptual meaning
- Understanding the communicative value (function) of sentences and utterances
- Understanding relations within the sentence
- Understanding cohesion between parts of a text through lexical and grammatical cohesion devices
- Interpreting the text by going outside it
- Recognizing indicators in discourse
- Identifying the main point of important information in a piece of discourse
- Distinguishing the main idea from supporting details
- Extracting salient points to summarize (the text, an idea etc.)
- Selective extraction of relevant points from a text
- Basic references skills
- Skimming
- Scanning to locate specifically required information
- Transcoding information from diagrammatic display

This view of the nature of the reading comprehension, sometimes called bottom-up reading process, assumes that meaning resides in the text itself, that is, text-based factors determine meaning. Carrel (1988) explains:

[Second language reading] was viewed primarily as a decoding process of reconstructing the author's intended

the major focus of audio-lingual programs. Given the progress made in understanding the nature of the reading process, this mechanistic definition of reading as translation of printed symbols into oral language equivalents seems incomplete. There is widespread agreement that without the activation of relevant prior knowledge by the reader and mixing of that knowledge with the text information, there can be no reading of text.

Ur (1996) defines reading as, "*reading and understanding*". He further adds: "*a foreign language learner who says, 'I can read the words but I don't know what they mean' is not, therefore, reading in this sense. He or she is merely decoding or translating written symbols into corresponding sounds*" (p. 138).

Further, Chastain (1988), defines reading as receptive skill in that the reader is receiving a message from a writer. He further stresses that there is the implication on an active reader who intend upon using background knowledge and skills to recreate the writer's intended meaning in the description of reading process. Perfetti (1984, pp. 40-41, cited in Chastain, 1988), defines reading as "*thinking guided by print*."

Goodman (1973) has taken reading as the process of constructing meaning through a dynamic interaction among: (1) the reader's existing knowledge; (2) the information suggested by the text being read; (3) the context of the reading situation. *The reader, a user of language, interacts with the graphic input as he seeks to reconstruct a message encoded by the writer. He concentrates his total prior experience and learning on the task,*

drawing on his experiences and concepts he has attained as well as the language competence he has achieved (cited in Paulston & Bruder, 1976, p. 158).

In more elaborated terms, Eskey (1988) defines reading comprehension as a constant interaction between bottom-up and top-down processing, each source of information contributing to a comprehensive reconstruction of the meaning of the text. His model "interactive" refers to the interaction between the information provided by means of top-down analysis, and bottom up decoding, both of which depend on certain kinds of prior knowledge and certain kinds of information-processing skills. Eskey (1988) views readers as both decoders and good interpreters of texts, their decoding skills becoming more automatic but no less important as their reading skills develop.

Eskey (1988) defines reading comprehension as a constant interaction okayed by the incoming data. Whereas top-down processing occurs as the system makes general predictions based on higher level, general schemata and then searches the input for information to fit into these partially satisfied, higher order schemata (Carrel & Eisterhold, 1988).

Reading Comprehension Theories

Reading comprehension, like any other language ability, is an abstract concept, and therefore, there have been many arguments on its nature.

For many years, language skills were classified as active and passive skills. Active skills included speaking and writing, because they provided overt evidence of language production. On the other hand,

knowledge of the language" (p. 259).

The topic of reading is of great social importance because it pertains to the issue of literacy. As Smith (1988) has argued, becoming a reader in any language means joining the people who read in that language, much as someone might join a club – in this case, what Smith calls "the literacy club" – devoted to some activity that he or she enjoys and would like to engage in.

Reading is regarded as a skill of great importance to the learner because (a) it provides him with access to a great quantity of further experience of the language, and (b) it gives him a window onto the normal mean of continuing his personal education. (Mirhassani & Toossi, 1996).

Furthermore, reading reinforces the learner's other language skills. Krashen confirms that those who read more, have larger vocabularies, do better on test of grammar, write better, and spell better (Kim & Krashen, 1996). Similarly, Raimis (1983) asserts that, *"the more our students read, the more they become familiar with the vocabulary, idiom, sentence patterns, organization flow, and cultural assumptions of native speakers of the language"* (p. 50). Chastian (1988, p. 218), while accepting the significance of reading for meaning claimed that all reading activities serve to facilitate communicative fluency in each of the other language skills.

As most of foreign language learners have very little opportunity to communicate lively with foreign native speakers, reading can serve to fill this gap. Farhady, Jafarpour, and Birjandi (1994), stressing the importance of reading for EFL learners say that, "reading is the most important of all

skills for most language learners in general and for EFL learners in particular" (p. 247). According to Eskey (1970), in advanced levels of second language the ability to read the written language at a reasonable *rate* and with *good comprehension* has long been recognized to be as important as oral skills if not more important (cited in Vahdat, 1999, pp. 54-55).

Definition of Reading

It is apparent that one reads for a wide variety of purposes, thus making any global definition of reading is difficult, if not impossible. Establishing a clear definition of reading provides an important perspective for teaching and evaluating approaches.

Most educators would agree that the major purpose of reading should be the reconstruction of meaning from a written text. In fact Alderson and Urquhart (1984) state that the only certain element in a definition of reading is that there is a reader, writer and a text. Widdowson (1979) describes reading as *"the process of getting linguistic information via print"*, but Alderson and Urquhart (1984) point out that this is a simplification as it is too all-embracing to be of practical use. Davies (1995) defines reading as a private activity that *"is a mental or cognitive process which involves a reader in trying to follow and respond to a message from a writer who is distant in space and time"* (p.1).

In an older definition of reading, drawing on audio-lingual theoretical framework, Paulston & Bruder (1976, p. 157), state that reading is considered decoding speech written down, a skill which would naturally transfer from a command on the oral skills

Issues on Reading Comprehension Part One

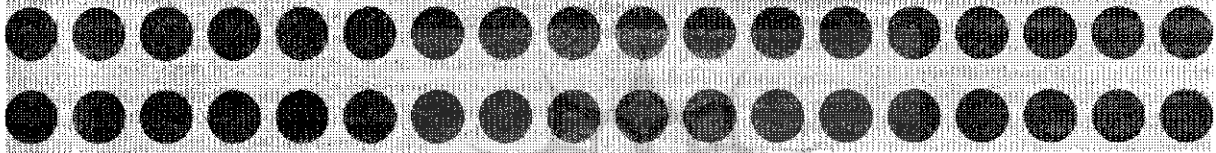
Akbar Mirhassani (Ph. D. TEFL)

Tarbiat Modarres

University

&

Ali Akbar Khosravi M.A.Islamic Kar University TEFL



چکیده فارسی:

سالیان مدیدی است که امر خواندن و درک مطلب مورد توجه مدرسین و محققین زبان های خارجی قرار دارد و از دیدگاه های مختلف مورد مطالعه و بررسی قرار گرفته است. خواندن و درک مطلب، جزء لاینفک تدریس و مهمترین و بی بدیل ترین مهارت در یادگیری زبان های خارجی محسوب می شود. مقاله حاضر به بازنگری اجمالی امر خواندن و درک مطلب از عمده ترین دیدگاه ها، بخصوص از جنبه آموزش می پردازد.

کلیدواژگان: خواندن - خواندن جزء به جزء - خواندن کلی - خواندن تعاملی - خواندن اجمالی - خواندن سطحی - سرعت خواندن

Abstract:

For many years reading comprehension has draw the attention of second or foreign language practitioners and researchers, and it has been studied from different perspectives. Reading comprehension is the inseparable part of teaching and the most important and irreplaceable skill in learning a foreign language. The present article is a review of the literature about reading comprehension from main perspective, especially from teaching point view.

Key Words: Reading Comprehension, Bottom-Up Reading Top-down Reading, Interactive Reading-Schema Theory, Scanning, Skimming, Reading Rate

Importance of Reading

Most scholars would agree that reading is one of the most important skills for educational and professional success (Alderson, 1984). In highlighting the importance of reading comprehension,

Rivers (1981) stated that, "reading is a most important activity in any language class, not only as a source of information and a pleasurable activity, but also as a means of consolidating and extending one's which are