

experience, and know the world. Indeed, she is so young at the onset of the story that when she meets her aunt, Mrs. Touchet, for the first time, she childishly says, "Oh, you must be our crazy aunt Lydia"(21). She is too young to even realize her own rudeness and does not apologize for her behavior. However, this young lady develops and learns so rapidly that only a few months later she mocks the thirty five year old English lord and she is:

*amused at small allowances he seemed to make either for her own experience or for her own imagination. "He thinks I'm barbarian", she said, "and that I've never seen fork and spoon!" and she used to ask him artless questions for the pleasure of hearing him answer seriously. Then, when he had fallen into the trap, "It's a pity you can't see me in my war-paint and feathers," she remarked, "if I had known how kind you are to the poor savages, I would have brought over my native costume" (63)!*

This young girl is surely different from Newman, who is wholly unaware that the French are ridiculing him when they ask him if the house made of rubber would stretch! She also differs from Newman in another respect. The irritating boastfulness of Newman in *The American* is removed from Isabel's character in *The Portrait*. By bestowing this quality to the peripheral and comic figure of Henrietta Stackpole, it is de-emphasized as an American trait. She is also essentially different from the timid sisters of Lord Warburton, who as one critic has noted, are "women of conservatory, delicate, fragile, always looking for support, frightened at the idea of independence and the necessity of having to decide anything on one's own account" (Liljegren 24). Isabel has ideas, beliefs, "a system, and an orbit of her own" (*The Portrait* 93).

James wrote in his notebook about Isabel, "The idea of the whole thing is that the poor girl, who has dreamed of freedom and nobleness, who has done, as she believes, a generous, clear-sighted thing, finds herself in reality in the very mill of the conventional" ("The Myth" 8). What James really means when he says "generous, clear-sighted thing" is that if Isabel (by extension, America) falls into the traps of Europe, it is not due to her gullibility and lack of intelligence; it is due to her generosity, magnanimity, and good intentions.

According to Edel, by endowing Isabel with many American qualities and beliefs, James enables us to discern the American myths that were in the background of his mind. One of the myths mentioned by Edel is the pursuit of British-titled husbands by American women. In *The Portrait*, James purged and purified Isabel from this myth. Edel points out that by Isabel's refusal of Lord Warburton, James meant to imply "America's refusal, in the

Declaration of Independence, to accept British institutions" ("The Myth", 9).

In short, glancing over the works of James' first phase one finds *The Portrait* his most patriotic book:

In *Daisy Miller*, the Americans are apologetic for Daisy's behavior in front of the Europeans.

In *Roderick Hudson*, Roderick forsakes his country when he gets to Europe.

In *The Europeans*, the Americans are in awe of Europe's culture, and Eugenia rejects America for its provinciality.

Even in *The American*, Newman, with all his virtues, "is not the 'cultivated American' who redeems us from time to time in the eyes of Europe, "to quote W.D.Howell ("James the Modern Novelist", 132).

In *The Portrait of a Lady*, however, Europe is morally rejected. Faithful to her native upbringing, Isabel "chooses" to stay with her husband. In her the ambivalence is resolved; the best of the two worlds, the Old and the New, are reconciled. Isabel, matured and imbued with culture in Europe, preserves her moral integrity acquired at home. She "triumphs" over the foreigners in her "quiet, unappreciated magnanimity". It is a moral victory, and that is why James calls her, and not the aristocratic women of Europe, "a lady".

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> It may, also, be enlightening to note that this was when America, recovered from its Civil War, was emerging as a world power and a competitor for Great Britain; manifesting its powers in the Pacific, the Caribbean, and South and Central America; and carrying with its name the might and grandeur so desirable to James.

<sup>2</sup> Graham Greene wrote "It is true the innocent figure is nearly always American (Roderick Hudson, Newman, Isabel...), but the corrupted characters—the vehicles for a sense of evil... are also American: Madame Merle, Gilbert Osmond... . His characters are mainly American, simply because James himself was American" ("*The Portrait of: Authoritative Text*", 670). To this, Arnold Kettle replies "the corrupted characters... are all expatriate, europeanized [sic] Americans, whom it is at least possible to see as corrupted by Europe"(678). The fact that in *The American*, the corrupted people are French aristocrats is another indication that James considered Europeans corrupted in comparison with Americans.

<sup>3</sup> The reason that James mostly used Europeanized Americans for his corrupted characters might have been that he did not want to offend his European readers.

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## THE DISCOURSAL ASPECTS OF READING COMPREHENSION

*Dr. Minoos Varzegar*

خواندن فرآیند پیچیده ذهنی است که مستلزم تشخیص حروف، شناسایی کلمات، تمایزات بصری و در نتیجه نمونه‌برداری از متن و پیش‌بینی مطالب بعدی است و درک مفهوم شامل استنتاج معنی از کلمات و مطالب متن است که مراحل روانی - زبانی بفرنجی را دربردارد. خواننده در حین خواندن متن فرضیه‌سازی می‌نماید که این فرضیه‌ها در طی عمل خواندن رد یا قبول می‌شوند. چنانچه فرضیه‌ها رد شوند خواننده باید مجدداً به مطالب خوانده شده رجعت نموده و سعی کند که نمونه‌برداری صحیح‌تری که منجر به درک معنی شود بنماید و اگر فرضیه‌ها قبول شوند خواننده بخواندن خود ادامه می‌دهد. درک مفهوم با مرحله نقش برگردانی آغاز و با دریافت پیام متن ادامه می‌یابد. خواننده مدام در حال خلق معنا، زمینه‌های ذهنی و اشکال ذهنی است. درک مفهوم شامل مراحل شناسایی کلمات، عبارات و جملات، دریافت مطالب، ادراک معنی، کاربرد ذهنی، فعالیت دماغی، تصورات قبلی و بعدی، طبقه‌بندی اطلاعات، ارتباط اطلاعات جدید با اطلاعات ذخیره شده در حافظه طولانی‌مدت و ربط مطالب بیکدیگر و درک که خود نیز نهائی نیست می‌باشد. درک مفهوم می‌تواند از طریق دریافت اطلاعات از متن زبانی یا دریافت مفاهیم از متن باشد. در هر صورت خواندن باید به درک مفهوم منتج شود.

**R**eadng is the identification and discrimination of graphic symbols, and comprehension is the derivation of meaning from the words in context. Reading is a complex activity which involves identification of letters, recognition of words, visual discrimination and thereby sampling of ideas, predicting the forthcoming content and decoding the intended meaning of the message. Reading is a process of idea construction, confirmation,

rejection and semantic interpretation. (Varzegar, 1978)

In comprehending the printed page, the reader has to not only recognize the words, but also interpret them in their contexts in order to relate them to each other and, hence, extract the total meaning of the message.

Kolers (1970) illustrates three levels of performance in reading: (1) visual operation, (2) sensitivity to linguistic information from its receipt until an overt decision, and (3) direct comprehension of meaning of words. (p. 113). Trabasso (1970) and Chase and Clark (1972) note two main operations in the comprehension processes: (1) encoding the information into internal representations and (2) comparing the representations. The results of the comparison process determine the reader's comprehension.

Abbott (1971) in an unpublished dissertation states that there are two conditions necessary for information processing in comprehension:

(1) a state of uncertainty and (2) reduction of uncertainty. In information processing, satisfaction of the two necessary conditions will result in reading comprehension. The first condition, the presence of uncertainty, raises questions which in turn stimulate active states (i.e., possible answers). The reduction of that uncertainty occurs when one of the active states matches with a stimulus which leads to comprehension. Smith (1988) also refers to the reduction of uncertainty as a meaning-extracting process resulting in comprehension.

Russell (1970) classifies four different levels in reading comprehension. The first level is word identification, in which the reader is concerned with words or phrases. The second level goes beyond word recognition to grasping the general essence of the paragraph, page or passage. The third level consists of reading for the exact literal meaning of a sentence, article or book. Finally, the fourth level deals with selection, interpretation and comprehension.

Coady (1960) categorizes four stages in reading comprehension: (1) perception, (2) comprehension, (3) reaction, and (4) integration. Perception is the ability to identify and recognize the word in the printed material; comprehension is the ability to extract meaning from the words in context; reaction is the confirmation or rejection of the concepts stated in the reading material; finally, integration is the ability to associate the impressions and conceptions gained to past experiences in order to contribute to the development of the individual.

Gates (1955) mentions that comprehension is a multidimensional skill which "embraces all types of thinking, evaluating, judging, imagining, reasoning, and problem solving." (p. 62) Hodges (1973) regards reading as a "two-fold process that involves the transformation of written forms of language

into meaning; that is, the decoding of and the comprehension of the printed message. \*(p.18) Reading comprehension is an active process of hypothesis-testing, ordering and generalizing. As the reader observes this information, he makes preliminary judgments which he accepts rejects or develops as he continues reading.

Goodman (1970) regards reading as a "psycholinguistic guessing game" that involves an interaction between the printed page and the mind of the reader. Efficient reading is usually the result of selecting the most suitable cues in order to make guesses. The skill of predicting and anticipating words and phrases as one reads is crucial to make reading a cumulative activity. As Reed (1970) States, "reading is a sequential process in which on going processing is affected by prior processing and will determine future processing." (p. 138)

Spencer (1970) considers the reading act to consist of four sequential, but interrelated processes of (1) stimulus, (2) reception, (3) perception and (4) response. When the reader is exposed to various stimuli he is confronted with responding to some and ignoring others. Spencer states that reading is the process of making "adaptive responses" through vision in reaction to external stimuli. These reactions to the printed page are automatically transferred to the brain, which in turn assigns to them the conceptual faculties necessary to respond appropriately.

The second level of the reading procedure may be explained by visual reception. He makes the reader aware of the distinction between sight and vision, namely that "vision is a perceptual product" and "sight a sensory receptual phenomenon." (p. 14)

The third stage of reading is perception which is in a sense comprehension. Perception is the way in which "meaning and significance are given to sensory impressions." (p. 49) Anisfeld (1966) refers to perception as "the processes initiating a response to environmental factors. "He mentions three components of perception: (1) the physical stimulus, (2) the sensory stimulus and (3) the percept. The physical stimulus exists tangibly in the environment, while sensory stimulus records only some aspects of the physical stimulus on any given occasion. These two components are combined in a one way process starting with the printed material conveyed through the senses and ending in the final percept. Perceptual interpretation of a message being shortly after exposure to sensory stimulus. As the reader actively involves himself in the reading process, he formulates hypotheses, accepting or rejecting them, and categorizes the information upon the inspection of the sensory data.

Horowitz and Samuels (1978) classify three activities in language

perception: (1) isolating word groups that form natural units of meaning, most notably phrases, (2) integrating the meaning of each unit with what came before, and (3) formulating hypotheses about what might come after (p. 220).

Reading is more than identifying or discriminating letters and transferring them into sounds. Varzegar (1979) It is a process of recognition of words and structures while associating meaning with them and understanding the contextual, conceptual, scriptural and schematic meanings which lead to more global comprehension. Comprehension of a text involves seeing the interrelationships, intrarelationship, and suprarrelationship of the sentences, paragraphs, the organization of longer passages and many other factors. The reader may read sentence by sentence and comprehend the individual sentences, but fail to extract the meaning of the paragraph because he does not grasp the relationship among sentences.

There are mainly two basic processes involved in comprehension: (1) decoding and (2) demessaging. Decoding is the linguistic aspect and demessaging is the pragmatic, schematic and scriptural aspects of comprehension. "Decoding is the process of trying to understand the meaning of a word, phrase, or sentence" Pratt and Weber (1985, p. 73). They further say that "decoding is also used to mean the interpretation of any set of symbols which carry a meaning, for example a secret code or a mere signal (p. 74). Carton (1976) maintains:

*The term decoding could successfully be retained to distinguish, the process of recognizing the phonemic counterparts of graphemes from a process of comprehending messages. (p. 113) Celce-Murcia (1985) considers decoding as chopping up the message into linguistic elements and associating semantic entities to them. Chall (1976) regards reading as a "meaning-emphasis" process which leads to comprehension. However, in demessaging, the reader goes beyond the linguistic features and brings extralinguistic, discoursal, pragmatic, scriptural, and schematic knowledge into the reading act. Demessaging is "meaning-emphasis" and encompasses global and total comprehension. Carton (1976) argues:*

*The "decoding-demessaging" distinct implies an analysis which distinguishes an element-by-element reading from approaches that are holistic. In element-by-element reading or decoding, mediation occurs by means of phoneme-grapheme correspondence; in holistic reading or demessaging, mediating cues are picked up in any order and from any linguistic level.*



(p.194)

Comprehension is viewed as an active process in which individuals construct meaning from the visual stimuli (Anderson, 1985; Byrnes, 1984; Call, 1985; Howard, 1985; Pearson, 1985; Richards, 1983. Anderson categorizes three interrelated processes in comprehension: (1) perceptual processing, (2) parsing, and (3) utilization. The processes are recursive that they may occur from one process to the next and then back to the previous process.

In perceptual processing, the reader focuses on the text while partially retaining the text in the short-term memory. Because of the limited scope of short-term memory, words and phrases cannot be retained more than a few seconds and additional information erases the previous information. However, the brain does some primary analysis on the information and perceives the appropriate cues such as punctuation and paragraph separation and selects the key words, and then chunks them into "meaningful wholes."

Comprehension involves memory, the repository for perceptual recordings. Memory is an essential aspect of the cognitive process of reading. Spencer (1970) mentions:

*Memory is a function of the brain. The brain's capacity to serve this function has been described in fantastic terms. For example, a normal brain contains about 10,000,000 cells of neuron type. Each of these cells is estimated to have an average of some 25,000 potential connections. Each neuron contains millions of RNA molecules, and each molecule may encode 1,000,000,000,000 bits of information. (pp. 50-51)*

The reader must be able to retain the knowledge he has perceived throughout the reading act and be able to recall the previous knowledge when he needs to make use of it.

In parsing, linguistic elements are used to construct iconic images of the text. The reader first decodes the individual words by matching the visual image of the word with its representation in the declarative knowledge stored in long-term memory. (Gagne, 1985) The reader makes a match between the word in the printed page and the word in his mental dictionary, which is stored in his long-term memory, and ultimately comprehends the text.

Anderson (1983, 1985) makes a distinction between declarative knowledge, what we know about, or static information in memory and procedural knowledge, what we know how to do, or dynamic information.

Declarative knowledge is retained in long-term memory in terms of meaning instead of "precisely replicated external" events. Procedural knowledge is understanding and generating language or applying our knowledge of rules to solve a problem. While declarative knowledge is acquired quickly, procedural knowledge is acquired gradually and through extensive practice.

The most rudimentary unit of comprehension is a proposition, meaning-based representation, conserved in long-term memory. Although the representation is abstract in the mind of the reader, it can create concrete meaning for the iconic images. The reader's understanding of the syntactic rules of the language provide the opportunity for him to formulate propositional representations. Comprehension takes place when propositions are elicited. When the reader develops propositional representations of words and phrases; he assimilates them with other propositions to establish a more global and holistic comprehension of the text (Gagne, 1985), which Anderson (1985) calls concatenation.

In addition to concatenation, segmentation or differentiation of language input into linguistic elements is also of importance. The size of the segment depends upon the reader's knowledge of the language, familiarity of the topic, clarity of information, prior knowledge of the topic and the type of information (Anderson & Lynch, 1988, Richard, 1983). The principle point for segmentation in comprehension processes is meaning which can be attained through syntactic and semantic features of the message (Anderson, 1983, 1985).

The third process in comprehension is called utilization. Utilization consists of associating a mental representation of the iconic images of the text meaning to the declarative knowledge in long-term memory. This process is referred to as elaboration in the reading process (Gagne, 1985). The declarative knowledge is retained in long-term memory in terms of either propositions or schemata. This knowledge is processed through spreading activation, which activates the basic unit or element of a propositional network called node. These nodes have meaningful connections with the newly-arrived and stored information. In any comprehension, there is an interaction between the previously-received and retained information and the incoming information. Anderson (1985) calls the previous information suppositions and the new information assertions.

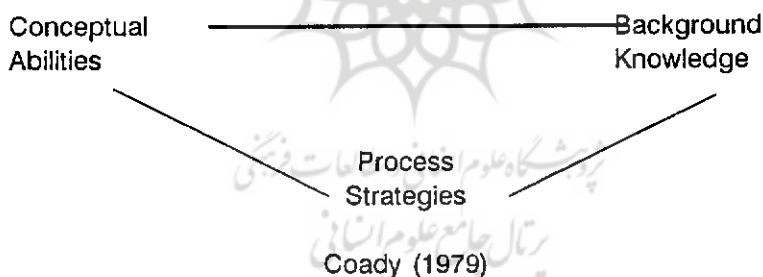
The reader employs two types of declarative knowledge to comprehend the propositions: (1) linguistic knowledge and (2) real world knowledge (Richards, 1983). The prerequisite to identify and extract the propositions is syntactic knowledge and real world knowledge. The reader must have linguistic and schematic competence in order to derive the

propositions to demessage the text with all its underlying meanings.

Linguistic knowledge consists of lexical, syntactic and semantic properties. Real world knowledge comprises facts, experiences, and impressions concerning a topic which can be stored in mind as schemata or propositions. Two special types of declarative knowledge are: (1) scripts, or special schemata consisting of situation-specific knowledge about the goals, participants, and procedures in real-life situations; and (2) story grammars, or schemata representing the discourse organization of fables, stories, and narratives.

Richards (1985) defines script as the knowledge of particular situation around which the knowledge of the world is organized. Candlin and Widdowson (1988) define schema as "a mental structure, consisting of relevant individual knowledge, memory, and experience, which allows us to incorporate what we learn into what we know." (p. 14).

Coady (1979) also emphasizes the role of background knowledge in comprehension. He mentions that background knowledge can sometimes compensate for the deficiency of linguistic knowledge. He suggests the following model:



Conceptual abilities relate to intellectual abilities and process strategies refer to the manner in which the information is processed. Background knowledge, in fact, helps the reader to construct the message and reconstruct parallel messages, which will be verified or modified later through the employment of different reading strategies. The reader brings more information to the reading act than there is in the printed material. The reader relates the information in the printed page to his cognitive structure which contains the schema and script necessary for comprehending the text. Clarke and Silberstein (1977) support this idea and contend:

*More information is contributed by the reader than the print on the page. That is, readers understand what they read because*

*they are able to take the stimulus beyond its graphic representation and assign its membership to an appropriate group of concepts already stored in their memories... the reader brings to the task a formidable amount of information and ideas, attitudes and beliefs. This knowledge coupled with the ability to make linguistic predictions determines the expectations the reader will develop as he reads. Skill in reading depends on the efficient interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of world. (pp. 136-137)*

A text only provides directions and guidelines for the reader, but the reader's background information enables him to process the material. This processing takes place in a bottom-up order, which is from the linguistic information to the concept, or a top-down order, which is from the concept to the linguistic code. Bottom-up processing initiates from the most specific data available in the linguistic form and top-down processing proceeds from the most general schemata present on the higher level. Bottom-up processing is called data-driven and top-down processing is called conceptually-driven.

Carrell (1983) makes a distinction between formal schemata (background knowledge of the formal rhetorical organizational structures of different types of texts) and content schemata (background knowledge of the content area of a text). Content schema has already been mentioned as familiarity with the topic. A reader who has background or previous knowledge about the subjectmatter will most probably understand the text better.

The reader must encompass both types of schemata in order to comprehend the text. However, Long and Richards (1985) mention that schema and script are culture-bound and not universal. Therefore, the reader's own cultural formal and content schemata intrude upon the comprehension of the text. Furthermore, at times content schemata could mislead the reader because he bases his comprehension on a preconceived, prefabricated knowledge which does not correspond to the actual knowledge. The reader uses expectations based on world knowledge and materials which violate these expectations and consequently, take longer to process (Duffy, 1983; Gibbs & Tenney, 1980; Townsend, 1983; Abelson, 1981; Adams & Collins, 1979; Rumelhart and Ortony, 1977; Schank & Birnbaum, 1984; Tyler and Marslen-Wilson 1977).

In conclusion, comprehension is an active process of mind which initiates with letter identification and word recognition and proceeds to larger meaningful chunks. Comprehension is a complicated and an implicated