

Students select the correct choice for a concluding statement about a passage. They may decide the ending was a) funny b) sad c) ironic d) surprising.

Students are told their family is going to move to Spain for a year. They list the number of people who would be living there and a maximum rental allowance. They skim through a column of rental ads to select three prime possibilities.

Students are given key phrases containing the main idea for each paragraph in a reading selection. As they skim they are to match the phrase with its paragraph.

Students receive a set of menus. They are given a reference list with food specialties (seafood, vegetarian, French, Chinese, home cooking) and price ranges (expensive, moderate, inexpensive). In a limited amount of time they skim the menus and classify the restaurant according to food specialty and price category.

Skimming can be done for various purposes: for linguistic reasons, so that a general understanding of the lexical and structural information is achieved; for building anticipation skills so that the more detailed reading to follow is conducted in the right framework; for achieving the cognitive set necessary to pursue the reading.

Scanning goes a step further than skimming, as readers locate more specific detail requiring additional amounts of comprehension. Pierce's (12) definition of the difference between skimming and scanning contrasts the search for ideas in the first instance and fact in the second. Factual information is when a student reports that the reading states: "Steve holds his book close to his face." "He cannot read easy sentences from the blackboard." "He often does not recognize his friends when he meets them in the hall." If the task had been one of skimming, the reader might have been asked to state the main idea of the selection, which would have been: "Steve probably needs glasses." These exercises present the student with specific informational tasks covering language, content, and inference. Exercises can be designed for specific readings or for types of reading. An example of the first case is an exercise tied to the exact content of a selection.

Students are told the following article contains: (a) an amount of money, (b) a date, (c) the name of a city, (d) a person's profession, and (e) the name for a criminal offense. They are to read and provide that information.

Students are given the names of the four characters in the reading passages. For each they are to provide nationality, age, occupation, future plans, and one adjective trait.

Students are given a series of phrases which describe actions in the text but they are presented in random

order. Readers reorder the phrases to reflect sequence of occurrence.

Students are given a list of familiar words for which variations occur in the text. They are to write the new word beside the familiar one and describe how it is related: for example, verb "consolidate" from adjective "solid."

Any kind of chart with categories in which information is inserted can be adapted for selections that contain information capable of summation in a patterned way.

When planning scanning exercises for use with authentic materials, one can accommodate students working with different reading selections. Phillips (9) describes a process for assuring that the information sought in the reading of authentic materials parallels real-life functions, for much of everyday reading is scanning. Sacco and Markel (13) also present practical ideas for having students skim or scan before reading the detailed information. Some examples:

Students scan a TV program section. They are to give the day, time, and channel for: (a) an American film, (b) a classical concert, (c) a sports event, (d) a documentary, (e) a variety show.

Students scan employment ads or ads for career schools. For several of their choices they list the occupation, training needed, other qualifications, salary offered or average salary, benefits of the job, and advancement potential.

For readings which are encyclopedic in nature or with tourist publicity, students list information for a particular country. (Texts often contain selections with this type of content.) They are to locate data on: capital, climate, population, language, key products, geography, form of government, etc.

Swaffar (16) advocates a process for approaching any reading which moves directly from skimming to scanning. She always asks the same basic question of a text: "What is this text about?" On a worksheet students circle either problems, people or organizations, events, or ideas, since most reading passages are based on one of these information categories. From this skimming exercise, readers move on to identify the people, events, etc., as they are located in the text. An important implication of the process is that the repetition of the procedure is one that would soon be mastered by the readers so that in a liberated reading situation, they would be more likely to ask that question of themselves before delving into the details of a text.

The skimming and scanning stages enable the reader to acquire a global view of the narrative so that the information generated between the brain and the eye is maximized. It is hoped that exten-

sive practice in these processes would render the reader more skillful in a liberated situation, for much remedial work in native language centers upon teaching these procedures. In second languages it is even more beneficial for the student to be trained in this manner, for in entering the new language some of the old, subconscious reading habits are forgotten.

Since beginning and even intermediate readers are not yet thinking in the target language, they will not automatically bring background knowledge to the reading.

*Decoding/intensive reading stage.* At this stage the assignment of meaning in a detailed and informative way becomes the main task; decoding is the key process for intensive reading. The reader has to play the "psycholinguistic guessing game" referred to by Goodman (3). Decoding is not an obvious process when one is reading fluently; it is a measure taken when there is a breakdown in the rapid, simultaneous processing of the language, with all its lexical and syntactical facets, the requisite background knowledge, and the new ideas being generated in the text. An unknown factor creeps in. Just as you paused when your eyes passed over certain words or phrases in the *Clockwork Orange* excerpt at the beginning of this paper, foreign language readers do likewise. The flow of print before them consists of strings of known, recognizable, and unknown items. As long as they are in the "learning to read" phase, decoding will be a necessary tool, because many items belong to the last two categories; of course, our goal is to reduce the amount of effort required to the minimum. With prereading activities and training in skimming and scanning, some measure of success should be achieved. But when decoding is necessary, how is it best managed?

Decoding may take place at several levels: word level, phrase level or intrasentential, and discourse level. As readers deal with larger chunks of information, their decoding becomes less tedious and necessary less often. They will begin to recognize that if the larger meaningful phrases of a text are understood, they can bypass much of the word-for-word decoding that causes them to ponder unduly over a fairly unimportant part of the discourse. However, in the classroom setting, decoding plays an instructional role as well; thus students may be asked to decode in order to expand vocabulary, to see how the cohesive elements of the discourse operate, or to learn to make generalizations based on the writing.

Since maturing readers decode more than fluent

ones, an efficient way to proceed is essential. The student who stops dead at the first unknown element and either quits or turns to the lexical reference at the end of the text is generally an unsuccessful comprehender. Supplementary materials that contain glosses with the native-language equivalency (or at advanced levels a target-language definition) assist the reader through that selection, but they do little to improve decoding skills, to sharpen contextual guessing abilities, or to lessen the amount of decoding done with future texts.

Good readers are good guessers and good problem-solvers. Students should be taught a repertoire of intensive reading strategies for those occasions when they need to decode. Mastering the "how" of successful decoding will increase their ability to read with comprehension. Glosses or study guides that force the use of a decoding strategy rather than merely provide the answer encourage this process. Wipf (17) experimented with variable glossing techniques in beginning German classes. He compared three groups with the same reading selections: the control had no special reading instruction, a second group was given readings with typical glosses (i.e. English equivalents), and the third received glosses that contained lexical, morphological, and syntactic cues to help them decode. This third problem-solving group did significantly better than the other two on the Pimsleur reading comprehension test. This writer has also developed supplementary materials with similar glosses for three semesters of French, and students react quite positively to the technique.

For example, words or phrases of potential difficulty in a passage are marked with an asterisk. The message in the margin or at the bottom of the page contains information that alerts the reader to consider the cognate value of the item, or to try to see a familiar word there, or to guess from the context. Students can be taught to read abbreviations for "opposite," "comes from," etc. Take the following examples:

"Monsieur Bertheau s'est fâché\* à cause du sarcasme\* de son épouse\*. Mais il aime sa fille et il veut l'aider. Il a laissé tomber son journal, il a éteint\* la télévision et il s'est mis à travailler avec Madeleine."

\*sarcasme—Anglais??? le sarcasme cause > fâché

\*épouse—é=s = ???

\*éteint—contexte: que fait-on à la télé? laisser tomber le journal et?

\*s'est mis à : contraire de ???

Students refer to glosses as needed; it is hoped that many of those provided are not used. Computer adaptive reading instruction based on this approach

has great potential, for individualized feedback is most beneficial during decoding and intensive reading. In the classroom, many reading problems, wrong guesses, or incorrect hypotheses are undiagnosed in large-group instruction. The computer can be programmed to provide glosses or problem-solving cues on call; readers can respond so their thought processes are revealed when the computer confirms or redirects them.

Another effective strategy students can learn is to use the syntax of the sentence to help them assign meaning more accurately. Identifying the part of speech, for example, improves the chance of correctly hypothesizing the meaning of vocabulary. In the *Clockwork Orange* passage, "lomticks" was a count noun because "two or three" preceded it; when words can be assigned as actions, places, descriptors, people, things, or function words, contextual guessing becomes more accurate.

Once students develop skills in decoding shorter units of language on their own, they begin to read the common cues of discourse in a way that highlights the relationships among parts of the text. On the sentence level, once key content words are processed for meaning, the grammatical or structural clues can be read. The reader understands much of an idea by supposing logical relationships among known lexical items. For example, if the words "man," "bite," "dog" are all that is understood in a sentence, most readers will interpret "the dog bit the man" based on logical relationships, regardless of word order or syntax. If the case were really the reverse, correct interpretation of structure would have to occur. When leading students through intensive reading or decoding stages, questions must verify that the grammar has been read. Reference, for example, is both a sentence level and a discourse level constituent that should be probed. Selection of an incorrect referent for words such as "this," "that," or "these," drastically changes the meaning of an idea. As part of the decoding process, readers might be required to identify the referential phrases. Mackay and Mountford (7) propose questions such as those in the example below:

Sentence reads: Animals treated in this way are healthier and put on weight faster.

Questions: 1) What does "this way" in line x refer to?  
 2) Line x "Animals..." healthier than what? Put on weight faster than what?

Readers should also be taught to interpret the force of connectors in sentences. "But" implies a different relationship between the clauses than does "for." An aid to contextual guessing lies in this

ability to realize when a sentence contains a contrast (clueing anonymity), a definition (synonymity), or a classification. This writer has found it useful to afford some practice in decoding and contextual guessing in English at the beginning of a course to sensitize students to this phenomenon in native-language reading, thus encouraging them to transfer the process to the foreign language. Mackay and Mountford provide a useful chart of the types of relationships that are implied by connectors, primarily on an intersentential basis. Meanings are given for each relationship through examples in English; the foreign language teacher can substitute appropriate words for the relationships which are universal to most languages. Relationships listed include: 1) enumerative (e.g. first, next, finally); 2) additive (e.g. moreover, likewise); 3) logical sequence (e.g. therefore, in short, as a result, hence); 4) explicative (e.g. namely, in other words); 5) illustrative (e.g. for example); 6) contrastive (e.g. rather, instead, conversely, nevertheless). The teacher can bring students' attention to these discourse features during class discussion of texts, through homework assignments, or by embedding them into the comprehension exercises.

The extent of decoding or close reading devoted to a given selection depends upon the purpose for which it is assigned. The aim of instruction is not solely the explication of a particular passage but also the demonstration of a process to students; in the final analysis, conscious, detailed decoding is not a common goal of reading. Fluency and rapid understanding are the desired objectives, but even advanced readers revert to the decoding stage when comprehension is thwarted by an unknown yet important word, a complex structure, or the presentation of very unfamiliar concepts.

*Comprehension stage.* This article deals but briefly with comprehension measures, for the testing articles presented later in this issue treat both formal and informal classroom assessment of the reading comprehension. The main objective of instructional checks of comprehension following a reading passage is the provision of certain types of feedback. Two guidelines for reading comprehension exercises are 1) that they not confound skills and 2) that they project the learner through several phases of the reading process.

As to the first guideline, while there are many times where skill integration is desirable, in reading comprehension it becomes misleading. Where comprehension questions require oral or written language responses, both student and teacher are inadvertently influenced by the productive skill.

Students may not answer as fully as they understand because they are concentrating upon pronunciation or spelling; in fact, a blank answer may not indicate lack of understanding at all, but rather an inability to produce an answer in the second language. Another shortcoming in open-ended questions is that they often may be answered through manipulation of the sentence elements. While valuable during the decoding process, manipulation masks potential misunderstanding when used as a comprehensive device.

If the teacher prefers a comprehension check in the target language, remaining in the reading mode has the advantage of allowing for a rearrangement of ideas based on lexical substitution, syntactical rewordings, or logical paraphrases. Consequently, true/false items and variations thereof, such as forced choice or the addition of a "no information given" category, as well as the many types of multiple-choice or completion exercises are preferable. In developing a set of exercises, the teacher should assure that a range of reading skills is assessed. Even when assessing the skills of a beginning reader, preliminary attempts may be made to see if inferencing and evaluating are occurring. "Reading between the lines," or inferencing skills, should be promoted at all levels, for that ability is only acquired if given constant attention. An analysis of questions posed assures that some deal with lexical information and the understanding of items based on synonymy, antonymy, contrast, contextual guessing, and the like. Others should deal with the correct reading of grammatical elements. Yet others should go beyond the sentence level to see how ideas are being strung together; a final group of questions might deal with main ideas and supporting detail. Finally, inference or judgment questions are essential to convince the reader to use information given as well as that which is between the lines and in the brain. Since the classroom check differs from a test grade, these latter items will keep the student alert to the higher-level cognitive skills involved in the reading process. Naturally, beginning readers do more literal decoding and less inferencing than more advanced students, but some attention to assessing a continuum of skills and proficiency levels is warranted.

The extensive research that has been done with the cloze procedure identifies it as a valuable comprehension device. Variations with a multiple-choice dimension seem preferable for beginning readers. In spite of its reliability as an integrated test, the method distracts many developing readers, and unfortunately practice seems not to make perfect.

Another option for assessing comprehension of a passage involves student response in the native language. An overview of the text can be obtained by asking questions about key ideas, supporting detail, elements of the argument, inferences about the attitude or purpose of the writer, or evaluation of the authenticity of the information. For many purposes, this is a very accurate type of assessment, permitting proof of comprehension beyond the limits imposed by the level of student production in the second language.

In classroom situations, global evaluation often suffices. In such cases, a student might respond by choosing an appropriate visual or by performing some action. For example, after reading a paragraph containing the description of a character, the reader selects from a series of pictures the one fitting the description (Sacco, 13). Similarly, if directions to a place were given in the passage, students might point out the destination on a map according to their understanding. Reading a description of a photograph and locating the correct picture from a package or choosing an item of clothing based on a description all involve the synthesis of many small pieces of information to conform to an image. Comprehension checks take many different forms in real-world reading, and the classroom can reflect this variety as well.

*Transferable/integrating skills.* A final stage in the teaching of reading necessitates some attention to those exercises that go beyond the particular features of a given passage and whose sole intent is enhancing reading skills *per se*. In other words, reading activities must incorporate the development of cognitive strategies that will facilitate the comprehension of future selections for learners. A glance at Hosenfeld's (6) views of the strategies of skillful and unskillful readers leads to an understanding of the focus of some of these practices. Her study identifies skilled readers as those who:

- \*guess at meaning from context rather than look up words in a glossary;
- \*look up words correctly when they do so;
- \*skip words that add little to the meaning rather than place equal emphasis on everything;
- \*assess the appropriateness or logic of a guess;
- \*recognize cognates (and root words);
- \*recognize the grammatical functions of words and use that information to guess at meaning, to identify unessential words, to identify words whose form must be changed before they can be located in a glossary;

- \*use many information sources in decoding, such as illustration, title, side-glosses, and knowledge of the world;

- \*circle back purposefully in the text to bring to mind previous context, to complete sentences, to correct wrong guesses, to combine unconnected words and phrases into meaning;

- \*follow through with proposed solutions;

- \*give up when appropriate;

- \*demonstrate sensitivity to different word order.

Note that most of these reading behaviors correspond to the suggested stages of prereading, skimming, scanning, and decoding. As part of a reading lesson, they were used to comprehend a specific text in Hosenfeld's study; additional practice in these procedures might accompany excerpts or multiple passages so that the focus changes from the passage to the process. Thus practice in recognizing cognates and word family patterns, grammatical referencing, identifying the cohesive features of discourse, locating main ideas in multiple texts, outlining supporting details, contextual guessing of new (or nonsense) words, hypothesizing, and inferencing enables students to become better second language readers.

The ultimate goal of implementing these stages lies in encouraging the reader to bring effective processing strategies to the text, so that understanding of language is achieved vis-à-vis the purpose of reading.

### The Issue of Proficiency Scales and Reading

The process of reading is also central to the ACTFL/ETS reading guidelines and the functional trisection contained therein. Texts often span a range of levels in terms of content; the functions which the reader carries out and the accuracy involved determine the degree of proficiency attained. Child (1) outlines the content in terms of text type when dealing with the reading skill. Novice readers (0/0+ on the Interagency Language Roundtable scale) are enumerators and perform with enumerative selections; intermediate readers (1/1+) perform with orientational tasks, advanced (2/2+) with instructive, superior (3/3+) with evaluative, 4/4+ with projective, and 5s with special purpose texts. This classification assists in assigning texts to appropriate levels of proficiency. However, for a given passage an individual reader might display a range of functions although a rating would be assigned on the basis of best sustained performance, as is the case with speaking. Consequently, it is important that in instruction, the reader not be restricted to practice aimed only

at the level of performance, for one must be challenged upward if higher-level skills are to be achieved.

In looking at reader functions, Child sees the novice reader as having no functional ability, although for classroom purposes, this reader responds to signs and isolated words and phrases in the language and also can read, on a developmental level, material constructed from familiar words and phrases. Intermediate-level readers locate main ideas (a skill related to skimming in prior discussion); advanced readers obtain facts (and can be characterized therefore as scanners, decoders, and comprehenders of information); superior readers interpret and relate ideas as they read between the lines (involving inferencing skills and intensive reading).

Research in the reading process, the application of those theories to reading instruction, and measurement in terms of reading proficiency are fields of endeavor that merge consistently in both theory and practice. Reading is a most complex process, in many ways more linguistically and intellectually challenging than other skills. Second language reading may be even more complex, for it requires information processing using language skills still in developmental stages and not firmly established in the learner's mind. Furthermore, it requires cognitive strategies that exist at various levels of mastery in the student's native language. Despite this complexity, it behooves us to begin to teach reading actively and not assume that it will just happen.

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