A BRIEF HISTORY OF TEACHING ESL READING APPROACHES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

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All the current talk about communicative competence has eclipsed attention to the competence required for reading well in a new language. Perhaps in reaction to its apparent association with the "old-fashioned" grammar-translation method, language teachers have turned away from the reading skill. But today, especially in language programs designed to meet specific needs, many teachers realize that the skill students need most is reading.

Reading is a multifaceted, complex skill made up of a number of psychological, physical and social elements. Just as there are many sides to knowing a language, so there are many aspects to effective, mature reading. Unfortunately, in language pedagogy, too little attention is devoted to this skill. Too often language teachers have no opportunity to obtain even an overview of the vast amounts of research that has been done on the reading process.

In the first section of this paper, **The Review of the Literature**, I discuss the reading process and methodology from an historical perspective ; beginning with the audiolingual era, moving through the transition period, on into the Psycholinguisic approach of the '70s, and culminating with the current understandings about the Interactive approach to reading. This is done to show how our current views on reading instruction are connected with the views that preceded them. It is an evolutionary process, built upon a wide base of preexisting knowledge and theory. Even radical departures or seemingly revolutionary innovations in approach have their source in what was going on at the time.

In whatever changes come about, whether through dissatisfaction or through significant breakthroughs in empirical research, the link between eras, between approaches to reading methodology is never broken, but continues on, building upon itself, transforming and evolving, never remaining static for too long. Such is the nature of language instruction theory, and as educators, we owe it to our students to be knowledgeable in the literature, to be in touch, as much as we possibly can, with all the research being conducted in the field, because as educators, it is never enough to say 'this method works, so I'll just stick to it'. We must always strive to improve our methods, hone our skills, connect with each other from all corners of the globe, to raise our consciousness as teachers, to improve the standards of ESL education, and most importantly, to raise the level of achievement of our students. This is why I include an

Implications for Second Language Reading Instruction section after the Review of the Literature section. It seemed appropriate after having discussed where we have been, to also then include where we might possibly be heading.

REVIEW of the LITERATURE

Reading and Audiolingualism

Teachers trained in the audiolingual approach in general began to surface in the 1960s. That decade saw substantial debate over the role of reading instruction in language classrooms. Intensive-course teachers found themselves adapting to a changing population. In the 1940s, older ESL (English as a Second Language) students, with academic/professional reading skills in their own languages, had been expected to transfer some of their native-language reading skills. During the 1950s and '60s increasing numbers of foreign students came to the United States to study English in anticipation of attending universities. These younger students needed training in reading and study skills. Their intensive-course teachers increasingly felt the gap between students' academic goals and the aural/oral focus of many programs. David Eskey (1970) characterized the dissatisfaction of the 1960s: "One result of the structuralist dogma that 'language is speech' has been a relative lack of interest in the problems of the advanced student of English as a foreign language for whom the ability to read the written language with good comprehension at reasonable rates may be at least as important as the ability to converse." Like Eskey's, several articles focusing on the advanced reader appeared in the early 1970s. Influenced by the success of Chomskyan linguistics; these researchers approached reading as a linguistic problem; their articles spotlighted the complex syntax that characterizes unsimplified English writing. Eskey (1971) summarized this approach: "Part of our responsibility as teachers of advanced reading must thus be, first, to identify the problem structures, and, second, to find some effective means of teaching our students to read them with understanding."

Another call for change came from ESL instructors assigned to teach non-native students already enrolled in universities. These professionals preceded their intensive-program counterparts in recognizing the need for reading instruction. It was for university students that Gordon Bigelow and David Harris wrote *The United States of America : Readings in English as a Second Language* (1960). The intent was to construct a book of readings that resembled a freshman English text. In fact, the use of native-speaker texts as models for second language reading materials became a strategy for those who ventured into reading instruction before the 1970s. William Norris (1970) observed: "Teachers of reading and authors of textbooks for English as a foreign language have borrowed many ideas from materials for native-language reading improvement, revising and adapting them to the needs of the non-native speaker."

With the introduction of reading components into ESL curricula the stage was set for a significant reevaluation of second language reading instruction. In fact, a major transformation in the conceptual model of reading had already begun, announced in part, by the publication in 1967 of Kenneth Goodman's article, "Reading : A Psycholinguistic Guessing Game." During the 1970s, the impact of this view of reading proved dramatic. Second language reading came to be seen, not only as a vehicle for language instruction, but as a unique information-processing skill.

Reading and Psycholinguistics : The 1970s ; Analysis of the Reading Process

A modern psycholinguistic perspective on reading is based on insights derived from contemporary linguistics and cognitive psychology. From this perspective reading is viewed as a complex information-processing skill. The reader is seen as an active, planning decision-making individual who coordinates a number of skills and strategies to facilitate comprehension.

Goodman (1967) attacked previous views of reading head on : "Simply stated the common sense notion I seek to refure is this :

"Reading is a precise process. It involves exact, detailed, sequential perception and identification of letters, words, spelling patterns and large language units."

In perhaps the most oft-cited passsage in the psycholinguistic literature on reading, Goodman advanced a new paradigm :

> In place of this misconception, I offer this : Reading is a selective process. It involves partial use of available minimal language cues selected from perceptual input on the basis of the reader's expectation. As this partial information is processed, tentative decisions are made to be confirmed, rejected or refined as reading processes.
>
> More simply stated, reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game. It involves an interaction between thought and language. Efficient reading does not result from precise perception and identification of all elements, but from skill in selecting the fewest, most productive cues necessary to produce guesses which are right the first time.

Elaborating this position, Frank Smith (1973) emphasized two important contributions from psycholinguistic research to demonstrate that the efficient reader does not proceed in a rigid word-by-word fashion, decoding information from print to speech to aural comprehension. First, there is a severe limit to the amount of information that we are able to receive, process and remember (Miller 1967). The reader, therefore, does not use all the information on the page, but rather selects the most productive language cues. Second, research has demonstrated that reading is only incidentally visual (Kolers 1969).

More information is contributed by the reader than by the print on the page. Readers understand what they read because they are able to take the stimulus beyond its graphic representation and assign it membership in an appropriate group of concepts already stored in their memories.

Reading textbooks within a psycholinguistical framework provide students with practice in a variety of skills and strategies for comprehending. The so-called "reading skills" texts generally provide opportunities to read a variety of passages for different purposes - e.g., to obtain a general sense of the passage (skimming); to discover a specific fact or piece of information (scanning); to obtain a comprehensive understanding, as in reading a textbook ; and to evaluate information in order to determine where it fits into one's personal system of beliefs (critical reading). Critical reading skills include the ability to distinguish fact from opinion, draw inferences, and evaluate an author's point of view. Students define goals and expectations, and learn to read accordingly.

Language skills introduced within this context include comprehension strategies useful when encountering difficult syntax and unfamiliar vocabulary (guessing meaning from context, using morphological information, and using a monolingual dictionary). Increasingly, texts have focused on English discourse patterns and rhetorical conventions. Students are taught to recognize organizational patterns and relations of ideas.

Interactive Reading : The 1980s ; Interaction of Text and Reader

Building upon the notion that reading is only incidentally visual, interactive approaches emphasize that meaning is not fully present in a text waiting to be decoded. Rather, meaning is created through the interaction of text and reader. Background knowledge that facilitates text comprehension has been studied under the rubric of schema theory.

Schema Theory

This theoretical framework emphasizes the role of pre-existing knowledge in providing the reader information that is implicit in a text. (See, for example, Adams and Collins 1979, Carrell and Eisterhold 1983, and Rumelhart 1977, 1980.) Schemata are pre-existing knowledge structures, stored hierarchically in the brain, the more general subsuming the more specific. Each reader's hierarchy of schemata organizes his/her knowledge of language and the world. While reading, one forms expectations based on prior knowledge of texts and the world and seeks to confirm these on the basis of input from the text. Carrell and Eisterhold point out that efficient readers rely simultaneously on two kinds of knowledge processing. Information processing based on linguistic input from the text is called "bottom up" or "text-based processing." This occurs when information from the text is mapped against the reader's schemata. (Smith 1983 uses the term "outside-in" because the information comes from outside the reader.) This process is also referred to

as "data-driven" because it is evoked by the incoming data. "Top-down, knowledge based (inside-out), conceptually-driven" information processing occurs when readers use prior knowledge to make predictions about the data they will find in a text. Successful reading requires both top-down and bottom-up processing. Increasingly, "Interactive" reading has come to refer to the interaction of top-down and bottom-up processing. In other words, no text can be considered generically difficult or easy simply on the basis of linguistic features such as syntactic complexity or word frequencies. Texts become easier if they correspond to students' prior knowledge of language, rhetorical conventions, and the world. Hudson (1982) demonstrates the significance of background knowledge in the interpretation of texts by showing that schemata can override language proficiency as a factor in comprehension.

Implications for Second Language Reading Instruction : An Emerging Consensus

Interactive models of reading have proved quite useful in exploring the reading process and the possibilities of reading instruction in a second language. While many questions remain, there is a growing consensus concerning the broad outlines of reading theory and pedagogy. These aspects, which explore the current "state of the art," should be understood in the context of comments by William Grabe (1985):

> In exploring new theoretical positions there is always the danger of the bandwagon effect, as new theories come into vogue...Interactive models and textual interaction may not provide all the answers we seek, but they do extend the range of our inquiry and that is welcomed.

Contemporary reading theory highlights the following aspects of the reading process as they inform classroom practices.

1.*The Need for Both Top-Down and Bottom-Up Knowledge Processing*
While the need for biodirectional processing should be obvious from the foregoing discussion, Eskey and others have warned that, in practice, botttom-up processing has been deemphasized in recent discussions of second language reading. Grabe (1985) argues that the guessing-game metaphor, upon which much current theory is built, essentially implies a top-down model. Eskey (1988) points out that

> In making the perfectly valid point that fluent reading is primarily a cognitive process, [top-down models] tend to deemphasize the perceptual and decoding dimensions of that process. The model they promote is an accurate model of the skillful, fluent reader, for whom perception and decoding have become automatic, but for the less proficient, developing

reader-like most second language readers - this model does not provide a true picture of the problems such readers must surmount.

Top-down processing may be hindered by limited language proficiency, therefore, reading programs will need to give attention to grammatical skills and vocabulary building (discussed below). Beginning readers require considerable reading practice in order to develop rapid recognition of recurring words and syntactic structures. Additionally, Carrell suggests enhancing bottom-up decoding skills through classroom discussion on the cohesive devices of English (substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, lexical cohesion) and their function across sentences and paragraphs.

2.*The Need for a Large Receptive Vocabulary* Upshur and Homburg (1983) suggest that for lower-level students, comprehension of a text depends primarily upon knowledge of content words. There seems to be a growing consensus that vocabulary building has not received the attention it must if L2 students are to become effective readers. Carrell recommends teaching vocabulary in association with background information and related terms, and preteaching vocabulary and background knowledge for sets of related passages. As in Krashen's 'narrow reading', vocabulary and concepts are reinforced and recycled.

3.*The Need for Adequate Reading Speed.* It may be that slow reading is a symptom and not the cause of poor comprehension. Nonetheless, if students are to go beyond a word-by-word approach to decoding, they need to practice reading large amounts of texts rapidly. To some extent this is simply a consciousness-raising activity : demonstrating to students their success in getting the gist of a written passage, without laboriously translating every word.

4.*The Need for Individualized Reading Instruction.* In part, the argument for individual-ized instruction reflects the recognition that students bring different schemata to any reading task. Accoringly, there will be differences in the extent to which teacher input is necessary or appropriate. Moreover, Krashen and Terrell (1983) point out that different students profit from quite different amounts of "intervention" (i.e. direct teaching of aspects of the reading skill). Some readers need only a goal for their reading task and an appropriate text in order to become effective readers and language learners. Other students require a good deal of intervention.

Opportunities for individualized reading can be offered through a reading lab format (see Stoller 1986 for a full discussion on reading labs), and by what Krashen (1982) calls "pleasure reading", extensive reading of texts students would read for pleasure in their first language.

5. *The Role of the Reading Teacher.* The caricature of an audiolingual teacher suggested a combination drill sergeant and orchestra conductor. While this picture can be over-drawn, time has certainly transformed the 'teacher centered' classroom. Contemporary reading teachers assume a wide range of changing roles. Grabe (1986) provides a succint description : "Briefly, the role of the teacher is to facilitate reading, raise consciousness, build confidence, ensure continuity and systematicity, show involvement, and demand performance."

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