

aid readers' comprehension of the written text. Some actions monitor readers' comprehension, and some actions help readers evaluate the information they get from the written text and adjust their reading strategies if needed" (p. 15).

Inferring the meaning of unknown words is a valuable strategy and one that can be applied to all texts irrespective of genre. However, excessive use of the dictionary slows reading speed, interrupts the reading process, and ultimately renders reading more difficult. Van Duzer (1999) argues that the ultimate goal of teaching reading should be "to enable learners to read for a sustained, uninterrupted period silently ... and without help, unfamiliar and authentic texts, at appropriate speed, and with adequate understanding". According to Wallace (1992, p. 74), texts that will promote reading as a result of their "potential in developing reading strategies" thus need to be chosen.

“There is a constant danger in the language classroom to forget that reading is a process with a distinct purpose, and reading different things requires different approaches and processes”

Use of authentic texts

There is a strong argument for the use of authentic texts in the classroom. Simplified texts often lack many of the discourse features of authentic ones and therefore will not enable learners to tackle texts they meet outside the classroom. The ability to infer meaning is a vital strategy; however, if everything in the text is too explicit, students are deprived of the opportunity to develop this skill. According to Nuttall (1996), texts should "preserve whatever in the original will appeal to the intelligence of your students, while removing those elements (new words, complex sentences) which intelligence alone cannot deal with" (p. 82). While adaptation is acceptable, Nuttall (1996, p. 82) argues that oversimplification is to be avoided since it prevents learners engaging with the text in a meaningful way. Authentic texts carry the features of texts that students will encounter outside the class, so the argument for using them as opposed to texts specifically designed for teaching English is strong. Anderson (1999, p. 105) raises an interesting point by suggesting that authenticity of task is more important than authenticity of text.

Problems and solutions

As mentioned earlier, there are cultural and experiential factors which may hinder an individual's understanding of a text. This usually goes beyond the mere understanding of the lexis. The reader may suffer from the following problems (cf. Appendix):

- writer and reader don't share the same code or the code is only partly shared
- reader has no background knowledge
- ideas are too complex

Overcoming these problems requires that the writer and reader have something in common. A familiar problem in second language reading is that of only partially shared code. Ur (1996) suggests that the construction of meaning is a combination of bottom-up processing as well as top down, the first involving understanding of words and phrases and sentences in the text, particularly when a learner has little context within which to place the reading. Grellet (1981) argues that reading should start with a global understanding and move towards detailed understanding, rather than the other way round (p. 65). If reading is to be efficient, according to Grellet (1981), the structure of longer units such as paragraphs or the whole text must be understood.

Studying a text as a series of independent units will lead learners to become dependent on understanding every single sentence in a text and reluctant to infer the meaning of sentences or paragraphs from what comes before or after. Where learners lack cultural knowledge, they need to be provided with enough information and encouraged to draw on their own experiences by making comparisons and contrasts, to help them create a context that will enable understanding.

Using both extensive and intensive reading exercises (Scrivener, 1994; Harmer, 2001; Ur, 1996; Nunan, 1988; Grellet, 1981) can overcome the bottom-up, top-down dichotomy and integrate the two approaches to reading. In my classes, I begin with a more global approach even for intensive reading exercises as I consider it important to have a general idea of what a text is about before trying to understand detail. Integration of these approaches can be accomplished by beginning a reading activity with a lead-in exercise that introduces the topic and stimulates interest in it, thereby providing motivation for learners to read the text. They can then make predictions about what they think the text is about, and/or what other lexical items might be associated with the topic. This could involve:

- looking at any pictures that accompany the text and analysing what they represent
- looking at titles and sub-headings and guessing the content

It will also help learners to understand that reading involves more than simply processing words; it involves making predictions and guessing what's coming next. After learners have a general understanding of the text, then they can complete tasks that focus on specific details:

- making lists of ideas/events presented in the text
- matching headings to sections of text

“To motivate learners and convince them that reading can be enjoyable and beneficial to language learning development, it is important that reading texts are accessible and the tasks are authentic.”

- finding places within a text to reinsert information that has been taken out

Tasks can also be given that require a more comprehensive understanding of the text:

- putting a list of events into chronological order
- acting out the dialogue/story
- discussing various interpretations of/reactions to the text
- creating the end of the story

Furthermore, after reading for meaning, vocabulary or grammar-focused exercises and tasks such as gap-fills, meaning and lexis-matching, or error correction can be used to determine learners' understanding of particular language items.

Reading skills

Rather than employing skills, learners sometimes feel that the text should simply pour ideas into their heads. (cf. Figure 2). Although they probably use these strategies in their first language, learners must learn to transfer them to their second language (Nunan, 1994; Ur, 1996). Consequently, learners need to be taught to skim, scan, preview, as well as read intensively. Providing activities and tasks that encourage a variety of reading types will also improve learners' reading efficiency. Employing both extensive and intensive reading activities will also help learners understand and make use of a variety of reading strategies (Scrivener, 1994; Harmer, 2001). We can set skimming tasks for learners to quickly read and get a general understanding of a text, encouraging them not to worry about the meaning of individual words. Setting a time limit will force learners to keep their dictionaries closed and, therefore, help them to understand that they don't need to know every word to understand the general idea and meaning of a text. To further encourage a range of techniques, we can set tasks where learners have to scan a text looking for specific information.



Figure 2: One view of reading in a language classroom

Dictionary dependence

Learners expect to understand every word. This may help improve their vocabulary and understanding of grammar but will not make them better readers (Nunan, 1994).

It is important to help learners understand that it is not necessary to understand every word or sentence. Teaching learners the skills to read quickly to gain a general