

Process Approach to Reading and its Implications for Teachers and Students

E.S. Uma Maheswari, B.Jeyanthi

* Department of English, Government College of Engineering, Tirunelveli – 627 007, Tamilnadu, India

Abstract- The present article discusses the process approach to reading and its incorporation in the teaching of literary texts. This is attempted because the main project of the thesis is related to the Teaching of English. The pivot of a prose lesson is reading and unless a text is read and understood properly, it will be very difficult to carry on group-work in the classroom. Hence, this article is highlighted the teachers of reading and their implication for teachers and students.

Index Terms- Aspects of reading, Interactive process, Language of the knowledge, Schemata, Teachers and Students.

I. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The teaching of reading at the college level serves two purposes: one is Intensive Reading and the other Extensive Reading. The Intensive Reading focuses its attention on the comprehension of the text in depth, in addition to concentrating on the teaching of Vocabulary and Grammar. The Extensive Reading on the other hand, lays its emphasis on the context of the text. Learning vocabulary and grammar are only secondary. A good glossary is considered to serve more than what is necessary for this purpose. The range of reading is ultimately tested through writing. Hence it is necessary for the teacher to

enable students to read and understand what is read and then to write what he has understood.

II. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

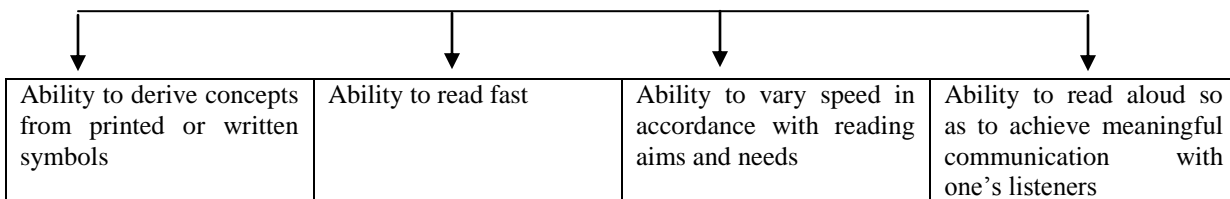
At the college level, students are expected to read essays, short stories, one-act plays, poems and novels. They are expected to read them in depth and answer questions about plot construction, characterization to an appreciation of literature. Therefore, in terms of Brumfitts' (1980) reading processes (as shown in diagram 1) the expected standard of reading at the college level refers to 'the intellectual skills and non-skills study'. In other words, they are expected to read 'between and beyond the lines'.

Reading and Writing form a group by themselves. The concept of reading and writing undergoes a change after 1970's before which they were considered in terms of products. Hence, the teaching of reading focused its attention on setting questions at the end of the lessons. Now they are considered in terms of the process involved. Liners are made to undergo the experience involved in the reading as well as writing skill.

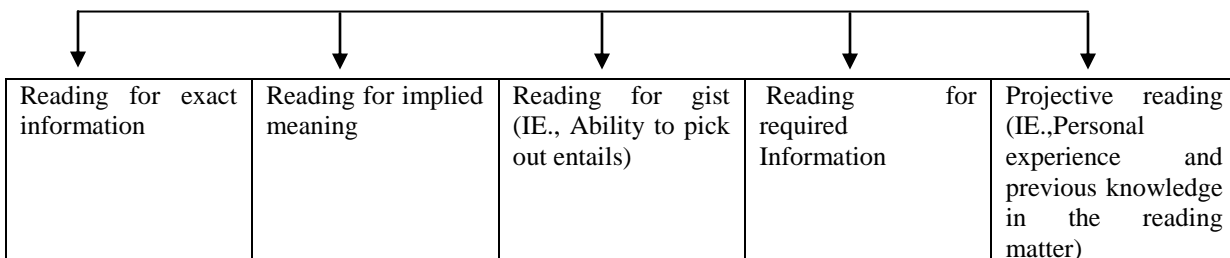
A look at the history of the development of the reading skill reveals the history behind the writing skill also. In the early 1965, these models attempted

III. READING PROCESSES

The Mechanical Skills

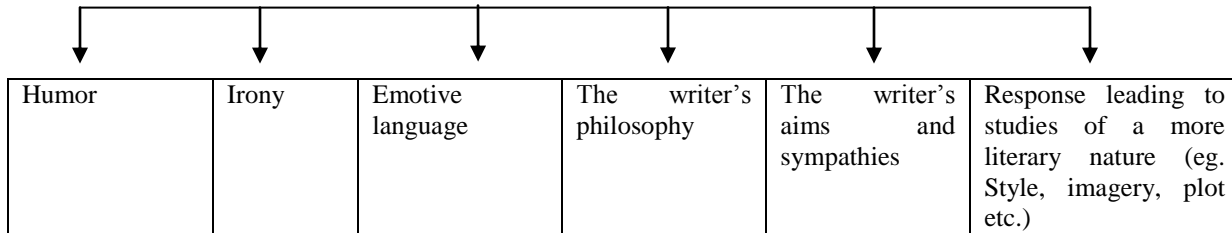


The Intellectual Skills



Non-Skills Study

Ability to respond to the language beyond plain statement



To describe how stimuli, such as word and word recognition responses become associated. Reading was thus described as a process of sight - sound - sense , and was considered to involve decoding or transforming or reconverting written symbols into spoken language (Mathews 1966 quoted by smith 1973) Moreover, it was believed that meaning was contained in the text and it was the task of the reader to extract the right meaning, various types of comprehension questions were set at the end of the reading text. So, by nature, these questions were purported to test one's comprehension of the text. If the students were able to answer all the questions correctly, (it was believed that the text had fixed meaning and there was only one right meaning of the text). They were said to have acquired the skill of reading and reading was supposed to have a number of sub skills that would be mastered independently. This was called 'skills-an approach' to reading. Samuels and Kamil (in carrel et al 1988) state that during this period behaviorism because the emphasis was on directly observable events external to the individuals, little attempt was made to explain what went on within the recesses of the mind that allowed the human to make sense of the printed page.

After mid 60s, because of the emergence of cognitive psychology, the modes of reading began to show how processes such as memory and attention which went on within the recesses of the mind played a role in reading. Reading was no more considered to be extracted meaning from the text. It began to take into account the role of the reader. It was no more considered a passive skill but became an active skill and an interactive one. It was believed that the reader was not simply a passive object, fed with letters, words and sentences, but was also able to achieve at understanding without looking at every letter and word (Williams, 1984)

Goodman's idea of whole language approach to reading was popular in the 70s along with the smith's idea of reading that the redundancy inherent at all levels of language (letter features, within words, within sentences, within discourses) provides readers enormous flexibility in marshalling resources to create a meaning for the text at hand (quoted by Samuels and Kamil in carrel et al, 1988) illustrated that reading was a psycholinguistic guessing game.

Both Goodman and Smith exhibited how readers of all ages relied on the procedure preference for the meaning (as opposed to the graphic and grophophonetic) cues available on the printed page. A subsequent development was the application of 'schema theory' to reading which depicted how the readers projected their views of the text in order to create meaning out of it. It has always happened in the field of ELT that whenever a new theory is proposed, it is always taken to its extremes. This happened in the field of structural and communicative approaches, and there

is now a talk of integrating these two approaches. Similarly when the schema theory was successfully applied to reading experts tended to associate reading with the contribution made by the reader in interpreting the message of the text. For, according to schema theory, a text does not by itself carry meaning; a text only provides direction for readers as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning from their own, previously acquired knowledge. This top-down processing of information was advanced by Steffe son, Joag dev and Anderson (1979), carrel and Eisterheld (1983) Johnson (1981, 1982) and Hudson 1982, quoted in a carrel, 1988.

The interactive approach to the reading of literary texts is concept-driven because it starts processing the information from the general level and then comes down to the word-level. Its counterpart, bottom-up processing is data driven because the information flows from the word level to the meaning level. The popularity of the top-down processing was such that, as carrel observes, lest the top-down view of second language reading be taken as a replacement for the bottom-up, decoding view, several researchers have recently emphasized that efficient and effective second language reading requires both bottom - up and top – down strategies operating interactively. Some of the main studies are by Rumel hart, 1977, 1980; Sanford and Garrod, 1981; Eskey and Grabel, 1988; Carrell and Eisterheld 1983 (quoted in a carrel, 1988).

In Britain, applied linguistics began to realize the weakness of the skills approach to reading and concentrated more on the interaction between the reader and the text. Lancer and Gardener (1979) have demonstrated that in skills approach different types of comprehension question fall to call upon different sub-skills. They have also stated that skills approach typically proceeds by giving subjects tests on their understanding of passages and yet doing a comprehension test and actually reading are not the same thing. Further knowing what a student has understood does not by itself help one to decide how he has or has not understood this and cannot provide information on how the learner might be helped to understand at a higher level, if he has failed to achieve that level. Moreover, the description of what a student has understood of the text is not the same as the description of how he arrives at such an understanding. Thus it is clear that for a complete understanding of reading the skills approach is inadequate and a knowledge of the process approach is inevitable.

The process approach considers that a text has meaning potential and it is left to the reader to make the meaning from it. As Lunzer (1979) puts it “ comprehension is not merely the outcome of a phonetic transcription of a written passage, rather it is present, at least in embryo, as reading process. Meaning occurs in the mind of the reader before words are decoded”. This pre-

supposes that the reader has to bring something to the text to make meaning out of it. What the reader brings to it goes by the name 'process' in the channel of reading. Its basic tenet is that reading is an interactive and interpretive activity. It is a kind of communication with the text. The fact that different readers get different things from the same that goes to prove that reading is a process of co-operation and negotiation.

Thus there is not much of a difference between 'Process Approach and Interactive Approach' to reading. Excepting that

they are two different labels, both lay their emphasis on what happens when a reader comes into contact with text. Definitely there is the interaction of different types: interaction between the reader and the text; interaction between different elements that constitute a text; interaction between bottom-up and top-down processes. This process has been very well illustrated by Lancer and Gardner (1929:16) in the diagram 1.

Diagram 1
Interaction between the writer and the reader

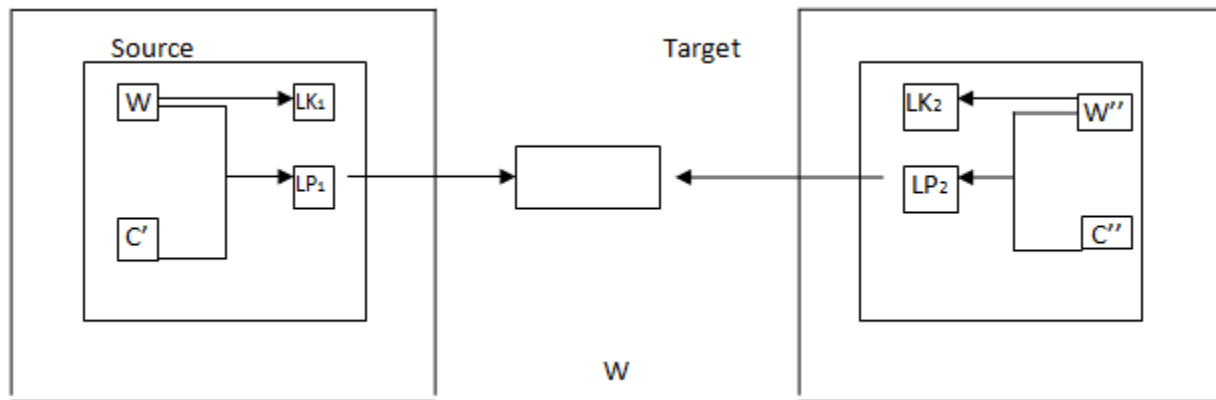


Diagram 1 shows that the difference between spoken communication and written communication. In the case of spoken communication, the speaker and the interlocutors share the common situation, that is, there is no time gap between the message produced and received. But in the case of written communication, there is a time gap. The writer produces a message at one time and place and this is received by one or more readers in another. There is however, a common experience of the world (w). The produce of communication that is the text is now permanent and not transient as in the case of spoken communication. This suggested by a double rectangle denoting the message (m). Unlike oral communication, here the verbal message cannot be supplemented, modified or emphasized by non-verbal behavior. Further, the lack of a common situation is made worse by a restriction of the context. That is, the context is limited to what has already been introduced by the writer; he cannot alter it when the reader reads it. So what the writer always does is to make his message complete and to introduce order into it. He affects this completeness and order by anticipating what knowledge (w") the reader may possess and by trying to supply all the deficiencies of the reader at the right moment, which is called editing.

Editing takes place twice in the process of producing a message; once at the thought level and then at the textual level that is the language in which it is couched. The editing is very much done by the language processor (LP) which represents the capacity to select the relevant section of the total knowledge for a specific purpose. When the reader comes across this message, he uses his knowledge of the language (LK,) knowledge of the world and the context and tries to understand the message. Through his LP, he finds the message to be easy or difficult

according to the writer's estimation of the readers LK and W. If his expectations are high then the text may prove to be difficult for the reader who fails to live up to that expectation. On the other hand, if the writers' expectations are lower than the ability of the reader, the text is understood easily. That is why an arrow marked both ways is marked between M and LP.

The same idea is expressed in 'Interactive Approach' through an interaction between 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' processes. In the bottom – up processes, the data are the input from the text which moves to the brain. The upward movement triggers off certain past experiences or perception about the topic. In the 'top-down' process, it is an attempt by the brain to find an existing knowledge structure to superimpose on to the incoming data in order to more quickly facilitate the assimilation of the new information. Both the processes are to be complementary otherwise the message of the writer will not be correctly understood by the reader.

There are two major interactions involved in reading:

1. Between reader and text
2. Between different elements within the text or otherwise called 'textuality'

IV. INTERACTION BETWEEN READER AND TEXT

A reader does not go to a text without any purpose. He reads because he wants to read. So he brings the following to the text he reads (Wallace, 1986)

1. Purpose
2. Knowledge of the language

3. Knowledge of the world
4. Opinion

V. PURPOSE

Reading depends on the purpose of the reader as no reader comes to a text without any purpose. Consider the example of a newspaper from cover to cover. First of all, one skims through it to select items of interest. Then if one is interested in sports, one reads the sports page. Even here, one reads the news about one's favorite game. Further a reader's purpose decides one's speed of reading. For example there is a substantial difference between looking at a notice board and scanning advertisements for a particular type of flat on the one hand and reading an article of special interest in a particular journal on the other.

Based on the purpose of reading, texts can be divided into 2 major categories:

1. Language texts and
2. Reading texts.

Language texts are meant for learning a language whereas reading texts are meant for enjoyment as well as for getting facts, ideas, even feelings of family community. In the latter we are interested in what the writing meant (Nuttal, 1988). Thus a text is selected according to the purpose of the readers. This affects the reading process to a greater extent especially in interrogating and interpreting the text.

VI. KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE

The second factor involved in reading is the knowledge of the language system that the reader brings to the text. A reader should have a clear idea of the writing system of the language, for it is the written material that he is to negotiate. Written discourse is a vast area that cannot be exhausted here and hence only 3 examples are given to indicate the quantity of knowledge expected of a reader with regard to the language system.

- a) Paralinguistic features of a written language refer to the punctuation marks. The punctuation marks play a vital role in indicating the nature of an idea complete or incomplete. They also express feelings and sometimes functions. For e.g. A newspaper headline during the world cup cricket tournament in 1984 was "Kapil's devils did it!" The exclamation mark at the end of the sentence conveys the feeling that something unexpected has happened. The reader must be familiar with such meanings.
- b) Knowledge of the sentence structure helps the reader predict world classes in a sentence. For e.g. In the sentence E.g.) Roma gave Krishna his pen. Here, the SV, IO, DO pattern predicts the second object.
- c) Similar the connecting devices used by the writers help the learners to relate an idea backwards and forwards in order to get its significance. For E.g.) The school was closed due to the students' strike, which was not liked by the parents. This refers to the whole sentence that goes before.

VII. KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD

The third aspect is the knowledge of the world or the 'schemata'. Widdowson (1983) defines schemata as "cognitive constructs or configurations of knowledge which we place over events so as to bring into alignment with familiar patterns of experiences and belief. They therefore serve as devices for categorizing and arranging information so that it can be interpreted and retained. Starting from Bartlett's experiments (Bartlett, 1932 quoted in Widdowson, 1983) it has had its usefulness in different fields. In the field of reading one can say that the reader places his schemata over what he reads in order to interpret it. One brings in one's knowledge of the world to interpret the text. As Carrell (1983) remarks "the text itself does not carry meaning. A text only provides guidance for listeners and readers as to how they should construct the intended meaning from their own previously acquired knowledge.

To prove this fact, Catherine Wallace (1988) cites an example:

The Great Britain pack has performed without distinction in the two tests so far. Their lack of pace has been starkly exposed by the mobility and speed of such players as Broadhurst, a magnificent open-side prop.

Despite all the words in this text are familiar to the reader and there is not much of a problem in the understanding of the construction of the passage, the reader is puzzled as to the message of the text once he is supplied the background knowledge, that is, the text is from a newspaper sports page and about rugby, football, then the text emerges meaningful to the reader. His knowledge about the game helps him to extract the meaning from the text. So what is necessary here is the knowledge of the source, genre and topic. The source refers to the medium from which it comes namely book or newspaper. The genre refers to the form of writing namely recipe, menu or newspaper editorial. A particular genre has both a distinctive content and a characteristic structure. It is this characteristic of the genre that makes readers predict the happenings in the text and confirm those predictions during the course of their reading.

Another aspect that helps the reader in his guessing is the cultural element. Knowledge of the cultural aspect of the text is a must for the reader to unearth the meaning from it. It refers to a very complex package of beliefs, knowledge, feelings, attitudes and behavior of the people. To cite an example (Wallace 1988) Sally's daddy said, "we are going to see Auntie pat in hospital". Sally and her daddy went to a shop to get some....

A British reader would fill in the blanks with flowers, but an Indian reader would fill it with oranges, apples or Horlicks because that is the routine in his culture. The point that is made here is that a knowledge of culture helps a learner to predict what to follow and interpret the situation.

VIII. OPINION

The last aspect of reading is opinion, which means the views that readers have about the world in general and the text in particular. Some readers have their own likes and dislikes about authors. Such attitudes influence the readers before they open a book or a paper. They also influence reader evaluation of the content and the author's views.

The second interaction involved in the reading process is textual interaction or textuality.

IX. TEXTUAL INTERACTION

This refers to the interactive nature of the text. Recent research by Grabe (1984 and 1985) indicates that the linguistic elements of the texts combine interactively to help create textuality (what makes a text, a text as opposed to a collection of individual sentences) that must be processed by a reader. It is a known fact that writers purposely use and manipulate different combinations of linguistic variables in different text types and genres. This interaction of variables is what Grabe (1988) calls 'textual interaction' the interaction of linguistic forms to define textual functions.

The form-function interaction is mostly effected by cohesive and coherent devices. Debangrande and Dressler (In carrel, 1987) definite cohesion as "the ways in which surface elements of a text are arranged and mutually connected within a sentence". This is a broader definition than that of Halliday and Hasan (1976) who define it as a semantic one which refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text, which factor defines it as a text.

For them a text is a semantic unit, a unit not of form but of meaning and cohesion is expressed through the structural organization of language. The 3 strata of language:

1. The semantic (meanings) strata
2. The lexico-grammatical (form) strata and
3. Phonological or orthographic (expression) strata.

What they affirm is that meanings are realized as 'forms' and 'forms' are released as 'expressions'. In other words, meaning is put into words and words are put into found or writing. So it is the readers' responsibility to find out related elements in a text in order to comprehend the text. The relationship is expressed through five ways and each way is called 'a cohesive tie'. The five ways are referenced, repetition, substitution, ellipsis and conjunction. There is one more way, which is by 'other words'. They are dealt with below:

1. References

The following example illustrates 'references' (Hedge, 1988)

The Eskimos are descendants of hunters who moved from Siberia into Northern Canada at the end of the last Ice Age, about 12,000 years ago. They still live in this area where there are arctic weather conditions for eight or nine months of the year. In such a climate it is not possible to develop agriculture. The traditional Eskimo economy was therefore based on two basic activities. The first was fishing through holes in the ice or on the open water in canoes. The second was the hunting of sea animals such as whales and seals and land mammals such as caribou.

2. Repetition. (Halliday and Hasan, 1976)

Consider the e.g.

1. Wash and core six cooking apples. Put the apples into a fireproof dish.

Here the item functioning cohesively is the 'apples' which works by repetition of the word 'apple' accompanied by the definite article as an anaphoric signal

3. Substitution (Halliday and Hasan, 1976)

Consider the sentence

He lost his way in the galleries-the same thing happened to me.

Here the substitution, 'the same thing, refers to "I also lost my way in the galleries"'.

4. Ellipsis (Halliday and Hasan, 1976)

Consider the e.g.

1. At last Stan has tried. I don't think Bob has.
2. Are you dieting? I have been for some time.

The second verbal group in the above sentences is elliptical because in the first sentence 'tried' is omitted after 'has' and in the second 'dieting' is not mentioned after 'have been'.

5. Conjunctions (Halliday and Hasan, 1976)

Consider the sentence

E.g. For the whole day he climbed up the steep mountain side almost without stopping.

1. And in all this time he met no one. (additive)
2. Yet he was hardly aware of being tried (adversative)
3. So by night time the valley was far below his (casual)
4. Then, as dusk fell, he sat down to rest (temporal)

And, yet, so and then are conjunctions here. They create cohesion through their meanings rather than by specific reference to other items in the text. Each conjunction has a category according to its function in the text. The categories are given in brackets.

6. Other worlds

Sometimes vocabulary items give cohesion to the text. One of the ways is, choosing the words in order to give consistency to the impression or point of view that one is trying to express (Williams, 1984)

Dr. James stepped into the ward and the patient attempted to lift his bleeding hand so that the visitor might get a better view. James noticed how the wretch had also suffered damages to his elbow.

The words that affect the cohesion are the 'visitor' and the 'wretch'. The visitor refers to the doctor and the wretch refers to the patient. Besides cohesion the textuality or text is affected by coherence.

7. Coherence

A text may cohere via the interaction between text presented knowledge. For e.g. (Widdowson, 1978). Consider the following dialogue.

A: That's the telephone

B: I'm in the bath

A: o.k.

A reader of this dialogue between A and B can easily understand the reason left unstated by B (that he cannot attend to the call as he is in the bathroom) because of this knowledge of the world.

Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) are of the same view when they define coherence as follows:

Coherence concerns the ways in which the components of the textual world, that is the configurations of concepts and relations which underlie the surface text are mutually accessible and relevant. Concepts are configurations of prior knowledge. (Cognitive content) in the mind and relations are links between concepts which appear together in a textual world.

Sometimes the reader's interpretation of a text depends upon his knowledge of other texts. For e.g., The text 'Every little bit hurts' can be understood and appreciated better, provided the reader knows that 'Every little bit helps'.

It has been seen that heading is a co-operative enterprise where unless the reader and the text interact purposefully, there cannot be any comprehension of the text. This has greater implications for the reader, a term which include the learning and the teachers.

X. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDENTS

Students can be encouraged to realize that reading starts even before they look at the page. This realization can be affected by focusing on what they actually do when they want to read newspaper, magazines and books in their mother tongue. Students never approach a text without purpose, both of their own and that of the author and read only what they are interested in. Further they do not read at the same time speed a novel and a notice in their mother tongue. May be because of their classroom experience where the teacher teaches the textbook, reading line by line and explaining every word, they may have developed an idea that there is only one style of reading. This idea should be eradicated from their minds and they can be made to learn that there are 4 styles of reading, namely scanning, skimming, extensive reading and intensive reading. Grellet (1981) lists 4 main ways of reading which are

1. Scanning where one goes through a text to find particular piece information.
2. Skimming which process is used by a reader while quickly going through a text to get the list of it.
3. Extensive reading which is used for reading longer texts, usually for one's pleasure. This is a fluency activity, mainly involving global understanding and
4. Intensive reading which procedure one adopts to read shorter texts, in order to extract specific information. This is more an accurate activity involving reading for detail.

The students can be made to realize that reading is a kind of interactive process where their contribution plays a major role. They should understand (Nuttal, 1987) that

The text functions like a do-it-yourself construction kit. The message in the writer's mind is the perfect piece of furniture planned by the designer. The process of breaking this down into a box with instructions for assembly is a little like the process of putting thoughts into words and organizing them into a coherent text.

XI. IMPLICATION FOR THE TEACHERS

The teachers must realize that there are 3 broad stages in reading an unfamiliar text: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. It is the pre-reading stage that often presents maximum difficulty while reading a text in a foreign language. It is of vital importance as it activates the student's expectations and predictive ability.

The teacher must expose the students to different types of texts in order to sensitize them to understand how their reading strategy changes according to their purpose of reading. Practically speaking, in Indian classrooms it is impossible, for the teachers expose the students to texts considering the student's taste. So what can be done is to arouse motivation through his handling of the text that is given to the reader so as to give learners a purpose in reading. This does not mean that he should not expose his students to different genres. A genre has distinctive content and characteristic structure. This is a week, the teacher must make it a point to expose students through different texts to different genre – how it is organized and what its contents are. It is also necessary for the teacher to point out the different purposes of headlines, captions, punctuation marks and diagrams, small prints etc. to the students. They must be trained in identifying the text and topic and recognize their purposes.

The teacher should start with a global understanding and move towards a detailed understanding rather than working the other way round. Because, it is the awareness of the general structure of a passage, that will allow the students to read more effectively later on. By starting with a longer unit and by considering the layout of the text, the accompanying pictures or diagrams etc. the students can be encouraged to anticipate what they are to find in the text. This is essential in order to develop their skills of inference, anticipation and deduction.

Reading is an active skill. It constantly involves guessing, predicting, checking and asking oneself questions. This should be taken into consideration when revising reading comprehension exercises. It is possible to develop the students' power of inference through systematic practice or to introduce questions which encourage students to anticipate the context of a text from its title and illustrations of the end of the story from the preceding paragraphs.

Students should be led to find out; first of all, whether the text aims at convincing reader, giving him information, asking him for something etc. One way of doing this is to set comprehension tasks. Comprehension tasks are different from comprehension questions in the sense that the latter tests one understands whereas the former guides the students through the reading process making them learn the strategies involved in reading.

XII. CONCLUSION

The brief analysis of the various aspects of reading shows that reading is an interactive process where the reader's intent, knowledge of the language, schemata and opinion play a vital role in the interpretation of the text, consequently the role of a teacher is that of an active participant in the reading process,

guiding, advising and evaluating readers' goals and accepting a variety of possible interpretations.

REFERENCES

- [1] Alderson, J.C. and Urquhart, A.H. (eds.) (1984). *Reading in a Foreign language*. Newark: London
- [2] Brumfit, C. (1980). *Problems and Principles in English Teaching*. Oxford : Pergamon
- [3] Carrell, P. (1983). Some issues in studying the role of schemata and background knowledge in second language comprehension in *reading in a foreign language* (eds.)
- [4] Carrol, B.J. (1989). *English for Colleges* Madras: Macmillan
- [5] Grabe, W. and D.E. Eskey. (1988). Interactive models for second language reading : Perspective on Instruction in Carrell, P. et al (1988) *Interactive approach for second language reading*, Cambridge : OUP
- [6] Grellet, F. (1981). *Developing reading skills: A practical guide to reading comprehension exercises* : Cambridge OUP
- [7] Halliday, M.A.K. and R. Hassan (1976). *Cohesion in English* . London: Longman
- [8] Lunzer, E. and Gardner, K. (1989). *The effective use of reading*: London Heinemann Educational books.
- [9] Lunzer, E. (1929). from reading to read to reading to learn in Lunzer, E. and Gardner, K (eds)
- [10] Mackey, W.F. (1964). *Language teaching analysis*. London: Longman
- [11] Nuttal, C (1982). *Teaching reading skills in foreign language*. Cambridge : OUP
- [12] Wallace, C (1986). *Learning to read in a multicultural society* . Oxford : Pergamon press
- [13] Wallace, C (1988). *Learning to read in a multifunctional society*. Oxford : OUP
- [14] Widdowson H, G, (1928). *Teaching language as communication*. Oxford : OUP
- [15] Widdowson, H, G, (1983) *Learning purpose and language use*. Oxford : OUP
- [16] Widdowson, H, G, (1975) *Stylistics and the teaching of literature*. London, Longman.

AUTHORS

First Author – E.S. Uma Maheswari, Assistant Professor
Department of English, Government College of Engineering,
Tirunelveli – 627 007, Tamilnadu, India, E-mail id. :
umases2010@rediffmail.com, Phone No.: +91 – 94862 58394

Second Author – B.Jeyanthi, Assistant Professor, Department of
English, Anna University Tirunelveli Region, Tirunelveli – 627
007, Tamilnadu, India