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UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM  
SCHOOL OF ENGLISH

THE UTILIZATION OF SCHEMATA IN ESL READING

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics (With  
special reference to English Language Teaching)

DURHAM, ENGLAND

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## ABSTRACT

Reading is a crucial skill in the literate world. This fact has driven many to engage in reading research tirelessly. One of the breakthroughs in this research was the realization of the fact that schemata play a significant role in the reading process. Tied with the notion of schemata, is the fact that reading is an interactive process. The aim of this dissertation is to show that schemata play a very important role in the interpretation of texts. I look at the interaction that takes place between top-down and bottom-up processing; between writers and their texts, and between readers and their texts. Although schemata can facilitate reading comprehension, they can also cause some problems in reading. I discuss these problems because it is easier to deal with problems whose causes are known. I also make tentative suggestions on how schemata can be utilized in some lessons.

## Dedication

To the memory of my brother, Khumbhula Leslie Brother Vukela

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Arthur Brookes whose patience and guidance have been invaluable during the course of writing this dissertation. My gratitude also goes to all those who have contributed to my education from my first day at school until now. Since education starts at home, I wish to express my sincere thanks to my parents, Mandlamuke and Dubula, who are both "patience epitomized" and my family. I use the word "family" in the African sense. They have been a source of inspiration over the years.

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## INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English is riddled with problems in South Africa. The question of methodology is one of them. Teachers are forever trying out new text books in their quest to find a panacea for their problems. The problem is compounded by the fact that a lot of pressure is brought to bear upon teachers. Ndebele, quotes Butler who says:

The importance of good models of spoken and written English cannot be over-emphasized....English should be taught effectively as it used to be in the old mission schools, in which there were always devoted English speaking models... it is always particularly important that future teachers of English in Black schools should be educated and trained at institutions where a significant number of the staff use English as a mother-tongue (1986: 4).

As Ndebele remarks, this is a prescription of standards. What Butler seems to have overlooked is that the problem of teaching English in S.A cannot be separated from the Educational Policies of the country, which in turn cannot be separated from the policy of Apartheid. The aim of this quotation is to show what is expected of teachers of English. They should be good models and must teach English as effectively as it used to be taught. The conditions under which they are to teach effectively are apparently irrelevant. Another problem facing teachers of English is that English is the medium of instruction in Black Schools. It would appear that the teachers of other subjects expect the teachers of English to bear the sole responsibility for the standard of English of their learners.



An added dimension to the problem is that teachers do not decide what to teach at a given level. There are work programmes which teachers have to stick to , religiously. The level of proficiency of the learners is not not taken into consideration. One only has to go from school to school and from class to class in January and one is bound to find teachers "teaching" the present indefinite tense - with special emphasis on the third person singular. That this should be happening from Std 6 - 10 every year, has a telling effect.

I am not about to go into the problems of the Education system for Blacks in South Africa, I just want to put my topic into context. The problems are not insurmountable. The controversial B. T. Washington once told the following anecdote in one of his addresses:

A ship lost at sea for many days suddenly sighted a friendly vessel. From the mast of the unfortunate vessel was seen a signal: "Water, water; we die of thirst!" The answer from the friendly vessel came at once back, "Cast down your bucket where you are". A second time the signal , "Water, water; send us water!" ran up from the distressed vessel, and was answered, "Cast down your bucket where you are. "And a third and fourth signal for water was answered, "Cast down your bucket where you are". The captain of the distressed vessel at last heeding the injunction, cast down his bucket, and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water from the mouth of the Amazon river (p: 219).

My attitude to our multifactorial problems is that we should, each one of us, cast down our bucket where we are. We should not wait for better conditions before we can try our best. Even as we cry out for improved education, we should be using whatever resources we have. Perhaps one way would be to utilize schemata for the

development of the reading potential of our students.

Despite the educational problems in the country, Black students are still expected to hold their own against their counterparts the world over. I believe that one of the tools that our students need, is the ability to read efficiently if they are to make any headway in their studies. Reading efficiently means being able to achieve meaning from what they read. As we only have seven thirty-five minute periods a week to teach English, I propose that every lesson which involves the printed word, should help our students along along the road to fluent reading.

Our teaching is also plagued with the problem of being exam-oriented. In my discussion, I hope to show that if we strive to equip our students with reading skills, (not just skimming and scanning) we prepare them for something beyond the exam room. An ability to read fluently would definitely be a great help in pre-exam preparation, but it would also encourage them to read for pleasure. This would help them to gain knowledge through the stimulation of their imagination as well as enlarging their sympathies. Flood's quotation of Aldous Huxley seems to clarify my point:

Every man who knows how to read has it in his power to magnify himself, to multiply the ways in which he exists, to make his life full, significant and interesting (1984).

The question is, what do we mean by "How to read?" This dissertation will try to look at what is involved in reading, and

how our understanding of the reading process can help us to structure our lessons in such a way that we minimize frustration by maximizing the talents of our students.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE READING PROCESS

The interactive nature of the reading process has become a topical issue in reading research circles. This view of the reading process has contributed to our understanding of the complex nature of reading, especially reading in a second or foreign language. In this chapter I wish to show how research has progressed from linear to interactive approaches.

#### 1.1 Reading models

Describing the reading process in such a way that all the loose ends are neatly tied up, has proved difficult over the years. One only has to trace the history of reading research to realize this. Nevertheless, theoreticians have made great advances in the accumulation of important data through various studies. Research in the field of psychology has had a great influence on language research and therefore, on reading research. During the period of behaviourist psychology, reading research was based on "observable events external to the individual" (Samuels and Kamil, 1988). In keeping with the beliefs of the time, subjects in reading experiments were tested on how they responded to external stimuli. It is not surprising then that the pre-sixties models described how stimuli such as printed words became associated with word

recognition responses. Unfortunately, these experiments did not shed much light on what is really involved in the reading process. When psychological research shifted its emphasis from behaviourism, so did language research. Cognitive psychology became a major force in the mid-sixties and its proponents were interested in processes that went on within the depths of the mind. Reading comprehension researchers realized that

...the psychological processes characterizing mature reading go far beyond perception, to remembering and problem solving and organization of conceptual knowledge for better extraction of meaning.(Gibson and Levin 1975)

Within the scope of cognitive psychology, a number of reading models have been published, two of which I shall look at briefly to see how they have influenced the most recent research in reading comprehension.

In his analysis of models, Mitchell (1982) indicates that models help to put ideas into perspective. When theoretician attempts to specify the details of their models, they often see its inadequacies. They are often faced with unforeseen problems which will help him restructure the model. Models also help to communicate theoretical ideas in a succinct and relatively unambiguous way, so that the author's position is made clear . A good model should also summarize the past, help us understand the present as well being able to predict the future for us, (Samuels and Kamil 1988). On the other hand , modellers often misrepresent the reading process because they make it seem simpler than it is . They often leave out important aspects of the reading process by

oversimplifying the model for the sake of manageability. Despite the guidelines that appear in the literature, the development of models is still a debatable issue. The remarks of Gibson and Levin (1975) attest to this:

No single model will serve to describe the reading process because there are as many reading processes as there are people who read, things to be read and goals to be served. (P:454)

Although this statement smacks of pessimism, perhaps the fact that existing models leave certain questions unanswered, is a vindication for Gibson and Levin. Goodman, a modeller himself, dismisses any pessimistic views on reading by stating that:

Ironically, two opposite views were and still are widely found in the professional literature: 1. Reading is what reading is and everybody knows that; usually this translates to "reading is matching sounds so letters". 2. "Nobody knows how reading works". This view usually leads to a next premise: therefore in instruction whatever "works" is its own justification (1988: 11).

His comments on these two views is that they are both non-productive and seriously impede progress. Of his own model he says, "the model isn't yet done." Indeed the model is not yet done because a model which claims to be complete, is a model which would leave us with no unanswered questions on the reading process. Such a model would imply that reading research is no longer necessary.

The two models that I will briefly look at are Gough's and Goodman's. Like most other unidirectional models, Gough's model concentrated on the lower order skills. Reading, according to

Gough, is a question of recognizing graphemes and then decoding them into phonemes and then finally into lexical items. His model depicts a reader as someone who only needs graphic cues to make sense from a text. His model does not show how sentences and propositions "intergrate", (Mitchell,1982), nor does it give the reader a choice of strategies to deploy in different reading tasks.

On the other hand, Goodman's model concentrates on the higher level skills of selection and prediction. The reader's perception is made up of partly "what he sees and what he expects to see". That is why Goodman perceives of reading as a psycholinguistic guessing game. His model too, is a unidirectional one and is said to fall short of giving a satisfactory description of the reading process because it almost disregards the decoding part of reading.

The criticisms levelled at both types of models will be discussed later in the dissertation. In spite of the shortcomings of both models, their positive contribution to reading research is unquestionable. It is through published models, imperfect though they may be, that other researchers are made aware of the loopholes that exist, and then try to gear their research towards a direction that will give them solutions. Without models like Gough's and Goodman's, perhaps it would have been almost impossible to talk of interactive models of reading.

## 1.2 Interactive reading

An interactive model of reading is one that "permits the

information contained in higher stages of processing to influence the analysis which occurs at the lower stages of processing..."(Samuel and Kamil 1988). Rumelhart's model and other recent ones allow for this kind of interaction. Bottom-up and top-down processing are both shown to contribute to the reading process.

### 1.2.1 Bottom-up processing

Most of the earliest theories of reading were based on the principle that reading is a bottom-up process. The literature refers to phonic and word-centred approaches, where the belief was that:

Reading is a precise process. It involves exact detailed sequential perception and identification of letters, words, spelling patterns and large language units. (Goodman, 1967)

This opinion has been referred to as bottom-up processing because it assumes that reading is a passive decoding process. The reader reconstructs the author's intended meaning by working from the smallest textual units at the bottom. The "bottom" refers to letters and words. From the letters and the words, the reader moves to phrases, clauses, and then to intersentential linkages. Such theories presuppose that for a text to make sense, the reader must understand all the words in the text. Research has proved that this is not so.

The accusations levelled at bottom-up processing notwithstanding, the theory behind the models has proved useful. Researchers who

believe in the interactive nature of reading have come up with several defences for bottom-up processing. Eskey (1988) maintains that decoding is a " language structured affair ". Good readers are said to be those who know the language well, because good decoding skills are one of the causes of fluent reading. This view is supported by Carell (1988) who refers to several studies which have shown the important role played by grammatical knowledge in ESL reading. The work of Halliday and Hassan (1976) on cohesion has also indicated how processing at the grammatical level, through the use of cohesive ties, is a key factor in reading.

Consider the example below :

"Sinking down in the west, we admired the blood-red sun."

It is argued that only a person who knows the grammar of English can "spot the mistake" in his statement (Eskey:1988). I need not give the details of all the studies that prove the importance of decoding in reading. Suffice it to say that although decoding in itself does not lead to fluent reading, it does have its role in interactive reading.

### 1.2.2 Top-down processing

The publication of Goodman's "Psycholinguistic" reading model has had a great impact on reading research. This model is based on the premise that since a reader does not use all the textual cues when reading, then there should be much more to reading than mere decoding. A reader plays an active role by making predictions and confirming them. In voicing his reservations about data-based

(bottom-up) processing, Goodman argues that:

Reading is a selective process. It involves partial use of available minimal language cues selected from input on the basis of the reader's expectations...Efficient reading does not result from precise perception and identification of all elements, but from skill in selecting the fewest ... cues... (1970:260)

Some researchers received Goodman's model enthusiastically and for some time it was believed that data-driven processing was inferior to concept-driven processing. Perpetuators of the top-down model saw it as some kind of panacea for reading problems. Detractors of the model have also aired their views. Though they have acknowledged the contribution made by Goodman's model, their point of contention is that it puts no emphasis on phonics training. Again , a reader cannot always rely on prediction when reading.

Eskey made the following observation:

But top-down models do have some limitations. They tend to emphasize such higher level skills as the prediction of meaning by means of context clues or certain kinds of background knowledge at the expense of such lower-level skills as the rapid and accurate identification of lexical and grammatical cues (1988:93).

He goes on to give the example of Chinese script and shows that no matter how much background knowledge one has, if the script is not decoded first , no comprehension can take place. The example might seem far fetched but his point is that for most second language learners to be able to make predictions and confirmations, they have to be able to decode the script first. Judging by the way he argues, it is clear that Eskey believes that both bottom-up and

top-down processing are important in reading and neither can be dispensed with.

Linear models of reading, according to Samuel and Kamil (1988), cannot account for some of the phenomena which take place when we read. One of these is that more letters are captured by the mind in a given time, if they spell a word than if they spell a non-word. Take the example of "alligator" versus "rlllaagtio" . Also, in "vernalit" versus "nrveiatal" which are both non-words in English, "vernalit" is apprehended quicker than its counterpart because it conforms to the spelling rules of English. They go on to give examples of sentences. A statement like "They are eating apples" is ambiguous, but if it is read in a context it can be disambiguated. Compare the following:

A: What are the children doing ?

B: They are eating apples.

A: What are those in the basket ?

B: They are eating apples.

In these examples, meaning is constructed from the text segment and its environment, a process which can only be explained through the view that reading is an interactive process.

It should be noted that the term "interactive" does not only refer to the simultaneity of top-down and bottom-up processing, but also refers to the interaction that goes on between the reader and the text and writers and their texts. Smith (1982) says, "There are three parties to every transaction that written language makes possible; a writer, a reader, and a text."(P:87) The text is some

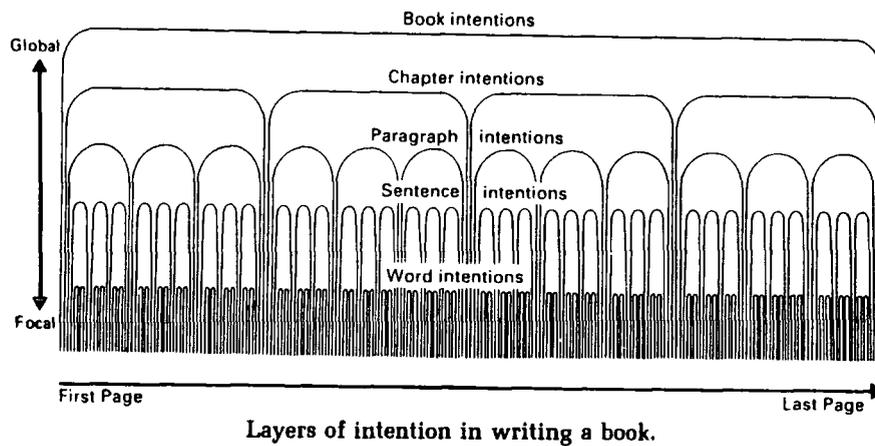
kind of fulcrum on which the reader and the writer are balanced.

### 1.2.3 Writers and their texts

Once someone decide to put pen to paper, they have a purpose, and that purpose will invariably mould the whole text that they will produce. As they write they have a target audience at the back of their mind. This is evident in the fact that there are various kinds of texts. These differ according criteria like age, sex, religion, field of study, hobbies, etc . A writer will often focus on a certain group, but this does not mean that only the target group will read the text.

Smith (ibid) calls a text "a barrier as well as a bridge between the writer and the reader ". The text is a bridge because there is no direct contact between the two, and a bridge because it permits communication. The writer produces the text and the reader interprets it. In creating a text , the writer has what Smith calls global and focal intentions. The analogy of a driver is used to explain what he means by these two kinds of intentions. At the global level, the writer is like a driver who takes to the wheel because he wants to reach a certain destination. The chapters in the book can be likened to a particular route that is taken. At the focal level, the writer is like a driver who, on the way to his destination, has to avoid potholes and obey traffic signs, but this does not mean that the destination will be changed . Figure 1, below, shows the layers of intention in the writing of a book. Even

as he compares writing to driving, Smith is quick to point out that the two are not exactly the same. Drivers might decide to change their destination, on the other hand the driver might be destination as the main reason for getting into a car. On the other hand, a writer's text does not always end in a grand finale.



Widdowson (1984a) first discusses the similarities and differences between a written and an oral discourse before he discusses the writer's text. He points out that the general aim of talking is to bring about some kind of change in the thinking of the listener. A

speaker's intention might be to instruct, deceive or persuade, but the message must be understood for the speaker's intention to be realized. The same view of oral communication is held by Sanford and Garrod who give the following example:

William : "We seem to have run out of milk".

Mary : "There's a shop around the corner".(1982: 189)

Although Mary does not seem to answer the question, she has actually given a full answer. Her reply implies that milk can be bought at the corner shop because the shop is probably open and it does sell milk, and William interprets the message as such. The illocutionary force of Mary's statement depends on William's correct interpretation. In other words if William fails to understand Mary's proposal then communication has failed, but it can be reestablished because the two are face to face.

To go back to Widdowson, he illustrates how meaning is achieved in a conversation by using the following example:

Mildred: "The man is coming on Monday."

George : "Man, which man? (No connection. The message does not mediate)

Mildred: "You know, the builder."(Circuit repair)

George : "The builder?" (Still no connection)

Mildred: "Yes, the builder. Don't you remember? He's coming to fix the leak in the box room ceiling."  
(Still repairing)

George: "Oh, yes, that's right. Good." (Message received and understood. Connection made, meaning achieved)

In the dialogue above, Mildred has an immediate interlocutor, so she can repair the circuit of communication until George grasps the illocutionary force of the proposition being made. This dialogue

shows that meaning must be negotiated. It does not come automatically. But what happens with a written text? Writers take the position of their imagined interlocutors and encode their message in such a way that readers can make meaning out of it. They keep on asking themselves questions that the reader is likely to ask in the process of reading. They also try to make sure that they do not say more than is necessary, lest they appear too effusive. In short, writers have a "conveyancing problem" because they have to anticipate the problems that might make their meaning obscure. For the meaning to be clear, both the reader and the writer must share the same background knowledge. This conveyancing problem can be so acute that it derails writers from their global intention because the interaction with the unseen reader "not only facilitates the conveyance of information, but also generates the thinking process." (Widdowson 1984a) This is a slightly different view from Smith's, who, as was mentioned earlier on, believes that the writer's intention cannot be changed once the text has been started.

I tend to lean more towards Smith's view because Widdowson, in validating his stand, says that by asking our students to write a scheme for an essay, we are constraining their creative potential. I believe a scheme is born of a clear purpose, therefore rather than restrict student, it helps them to keep to the direction they have chosen . Like the layers of intention in figure 1, a scheme is not static. Writers can manipulate it without losing sight of where they are getting to.

It is impossible to give an exhaustive analysis of what really goes on in the minds of writers as they construct their text, a text which according to Widdowson, assumes the status of a discourse as soon as somebody reads it. Writers then, play an important role in the reading process because as they create their texts, they try to put themselves in the reader's shoes. The way in which they finally put their message across, whilst they avoids "extreme predictability" determines how easy it will be for the reader to interpret it. However, as Chapman (1981) puts it, "A text without a reader is inert" (P:1).

#### 1.2.4 The dialogue between the reader and the text

Once a text gets into the hands of a reader, the negotiation for meaning begins. It is now the reader's turn to try and find out what was going on in the writer's mind as the text was being created, and in this way the reader becomes the other interlocutor. The writer is not there to repair any circuits like the two interlocutors did in the Widdowson example. Background knowledge has to come into play as the reader starts "predicting, confirming and integrating"(Goodman & Burke:1980). Readers predict what the text might say because they have their own expectations which are based on their world view. Smith (1982) says:

Readers anticipate not only what the author is likely to say - within a relatively narrow range of alternatives - they must anticipate the author's language and the author's meaning as well. (P:95)

because the reader has both global and focal expectations which need to be confirmed. If confirmation does take place, the new information will be integrated into what is already known and this becomes the meaning for the reader. It might not be the writer's intended meaning, but if the reader's predictions are confirmed, there is no reason to doubt that the author has been understood. In the event of their predictions being refuted, readers might have to reread certain portions of the text and then delve deeper into their reserves of world knowledge. They might then get some meaning from the text, but

Perfect comprehension would occur when the writer's intentions and the reader's expectations coincide completely, when every intention of the author was correctly anticipated by the reader, and when every expectation of the reader was fulfilled (Smith 1982: 96).

Given that "good writers are not completely explicit," (Flood:1985) and that "writers can never insure themselves against being misunderstood," (Smith 1982) perfect comprehension might prove elusive, though not impossible.

The reading process cannot be a passive activity, because readers also has some kind of power over the text. They may, according to Widdowson , choose to submit to the control of the author, or manipulate the text so that it suits their own world view. If they submits to the control of the writer, readers will then accommodate the writer's "conceptual scheme" into their own perception of life. They are faced with a text which is "dissociated from the discourse which created it" therefore they can either be submissive or assertive.

Many forces come into play in the reader-text dialogue, and as Chapman puts it:

We must also remember that the receivers of the message particularly readers, also have their own purpose or purposes when receiving messages...The speakers or authors may deliberately bias their communication as in propaganda, but there is also unconscious bias in both the senders and receivers of messages (1981:2).

Should readers detect some kind of bias from the text, and therefore from its writer, they might withdraw their co-operation and insist on projecting their perceptions onto the text. However readers do not have a completely free hand in the choice of whether to submit to the author or not. The kind of text that they are reading will determine the extent to which they can choose. Gremmo (1985) refers to various kinds of texts. If a reader is faced with "an informative document", a tourist brochure for instance, they will readily submit to it because they regard the writer as an authority on the subject.

The views of the reading specialists which have been presented here, clearly show that:

The text itself does not carry meaning. Rather a text provides guidance for listeners or readers as to how they should construct the intended meaning from their own previously acquired knowledge (Carrell,1983: 82).

Chapman refers to "the thorny" issue of whether meaning resides in the text or the reader by saying

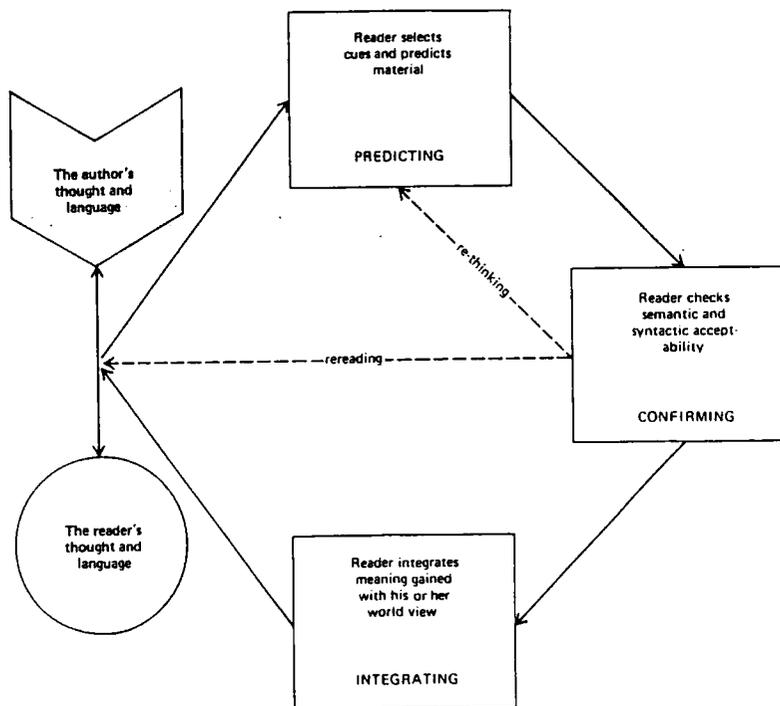
It seems likely that, if any one text is given to a number

of readers selected at random, they will, all things being equal, give renditions of the text which will be very similar. These similar meanings must originate in the text. On the other hand, individuals from the same random sample of readers are likely to bring greater or lesser amounts of knowledge to that text. This knowledge will influence how well or how easily they comprehend the text. There will therefore, be variation in Interpretation (1981: 1).

I hesitate to submit to the statement that "These similar meanings must originate from the text." There's the possibility that if all things are equal, the background knowledge of the readers is the same. If that is the case, then background knowledge has still contributed to the interpretation of the text.

The understanding of the interactive nature of reading, should help second language teachers to conduct their reading classes in such a way that they maximize their student's reading potential. The following diagram from Goodman and Burke(1980:4) should give some guidance as to what happens when we read:

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SCHEMA THEORY

In the discussion of the role of background knowledge in a discourse I deliberately refrained from calling this background knowledge, "schemata". Within the confines of this chapter, I shall try to look at how and when the schema theory began to take root and the advantages that this has had on reading research.

#### 2.1 Tracing the developmental stages of the notion of schemata

The notion of a schema seems to have emerged in 1781 when, according to Carrell and Eisterhold, Kant claimed that:

New information, new concepts, new ideas can have meaning only when they can be related to something that the individual already knows (1988)

Kant did not use the word "schema", but what he said can be related to what have since been referred to as a schema or schemata. In an article entitled, "History of the notion of a schema", Anderson and Pearson(1988) do not mention Kant, instead they attribute the concept to Gestalt psychology. In their view, the notion of a schema dates back to the beginnings of Gestalt psychology in 1921. This branch of psychology is concerned with the study of mental organization and operates on the maxim that "mental organization will always be as good as prevailing circumstances allow". In 1922, Wulf, a proponent of Gestalt psychology, carried out a research on "memory for geometric signs". The subjects were shown a drawing

which they were to reproduce after certain periods of time. As the time between the viewing of the drawing and its reproduction was lengthened, the subjects altered the original according to how they had perceived it at first. Those who had associated it with a bridge or an arch when it was first shown to them, tended to lengthen the supports during recall exercises. The drawing that was given to the subjects appears below:



*Figure 1 (From Wulf, 1922/1938, p. 140. By permission of Routledge & Kegan Paul, and Humanities Press International, Inc.)*

To use Wulf's words, "levelling " and "sharpening" took place during recall. The subjects gradually tried to smooth out what they regarded as irregular, and ended up with a drawing which they associated with something they had seen before. This phenomenon, Wulf concluded, was evidence enough that association plays a role in perception. He, too, did not use the word "schema". The first use of the word is credited to Bartlett who used the term to refer to "an active organization of past reactions". By using the term "active" Bartlett's intention was to:

emphasize what he saw as the constructive character of

remembering, which he contrasted with a passive retrieval of "fixed and lifeless" memories, (Anderson and Pearson 1988).

He believed that when receiving new information, people usually get the impression of the whole first. He substantiated his theory through a study in which he gave his subjects a story to read. He realized that after a long interval, the versions that his subjects gave, were simplified versions of the original. Somehow, the story had details added to, or subtracted from it, to fit in with each subject's conceptual background.

The conclusions reached by both Wulf and Bartlett indicate that someone's own perception of the world, plays a role in the way they remember. This view also underlies the work of some educationists like Ausubel who asserted that in meaningful learning, that which is already known forms the anchor for new ideas.

The development of the schema theory began to gather momentum in the late seventies. Since then, the term "schema" has been used with more verve, and researches based on the effects of background information in reading, are constantly being carried out. One present day reading specialist, Rumelhart, defines a schema in the following way:

A schema, then, is a data structure for representing the generic concepts stored in memory. There are schemata representing knowledge about all concepts: those underlying objects, situations, events, sequences of events, actions and sequence of actions. (1984: 2)

This definition is in keeping with views which have already been presented here, dating back to Kant.

As the theory of schema becomes more popular, the terminology that goes with it expands, and Carrell, in accordance with this expansion, identifies three kinds of background knowledge necessary for reading comprehension:

...prior linguistic knowledge (linguistic schemata)...prior background knowledge of the content area of the text (content schemata) as well as the rhetorical structure of the text (formal schemata) (1988).

However, the question of terminology seems to be directed by the personal preferences of those involved in reading comprehension research. Some consistently use the term "formal schemata" whilst others prefer to simply call it "knowledge of text structure". A schema theorist, Jean Mandler, contends that:

The phrase itself [schema theory] is perhaps misleading since no one has yet developed a coherent schema theory for any domain. A more accurate phrase might be "schema framework"... (1984).

She also uses the plural "schemas" rather than "schemata" and calls upon others in the field to do the same. The literature seems to indicate that her suggestion has not been taken up, although in the field of cross-cultural studies, authors like Robinson do use the term "schemas". In this dissertation I shall stick to the term "schemata" although I do not quarrel with Mandler's suggestion. Perhaps in future stages of the development of the schema theory, some theorists will give full attention to the question of terminology.

## 2 .2 Linguistic schemata

Put simply , the term linguistic schemata refers to one's level of language proficiency. This is the kind of schema that most teachers are aware of. In many reading lessons, teachers are aware that linguistic schemata are indispensable to the reading task at hand. This awareness has been shown by the fact that they will often ask their students to look up difficult words that are contained in the reading text, before they even start reading it. As teachers, we seem to think that :

"...the interpretation of words and syntactic structures - that is, grammar and vocabulary - seems to be the main factor in reading, in poor reading performance..."  
(Alderson, 1984).

In some lessons, teachers have been known to explain the meaning of phrases in order to equip their students with linguistic schemata. This is proof enough that there is an awareness that linguistic schemata are necessary for the interpretation of texts.

Much has been written about the role of vocabulary and sentence structure in reading comprehension. Titles like "syntactic components of the foreign language reading process" attest to the interest that has been shown on the topic. However, what has been overlooked by some teachers is that when we read, we need different kinds of schemata. It is this oversight on our part as teachers, that has prompted me to look into the studies that have been carried out on the contribution made by formal and content schemata to the reading process.

### 2.3 Formal schemata

The growing interest in the effects of formal schemata on reading comprehension has been demonstrated by the swelling number of studies conducted in this domain in the last one-and-a-half decades. Researchers have carried out different kinds of surveys based on the particular facet of text structure analysis they are interested in. Some have sought to find out whether the knowledge of different text structures can enhance reading comprehension; others have examined the role of genre analysis in ESP and EAP; and yet others have done contrastive studies based on text structure. I shall look at some of the studies that have been made.

The "pedagogic potential" (Dudley-Evans, 1980) of genre analysis in EAP and ESP classes, has caused academicians to look more closely into ways in which their students can become better readers and writers through their knowledge of genres. One of the reasons why genre analysis has gained popularity is that rather than seeking to establish the general features of all texts, only particular types of texts are analysed. This narrows the field to the analysis of texts such as journal articles, project reports, academic essays, dissertations and newspaper articles. These are the kinds of texts the knowledge of which is crucial in the programmes in which some students are involved.

Before I go on into the merits and demerits of genre analysis, perhaps it is necessary to give Swales' definition of a genre. He defines a genre as:

...a more or less standardized communicative event with a goal or set of goals mutually understood by the participants in that event and occurring within a functional rather than a social or personal setting (Swales, 1981: 10)

In an EAP or ESP situation, the participants would be learners and their lecturers, and the communicative event would be one of the type of texts that have already been listed. Swales work includes the analysis of introductions to scientific journal articles; an analysis which led him to the deduction that these introductions have the following moves:

1. establishing the field
2. summarising previous research
3. preparing for present research.
4. introducing present research

A person wishing to write a scientific journal article is likely to look at what others have written before and try to follow the same pattern. Brookes and Grundy (1990) observe that Swales is less dogmatic than he at first appears. Genres are viewed as having "observable tendencies and regularities rather than strict rules". This is an indication that the analysis of genres should not lead to the inhibition of the creative process in students or other people who wish to read or write. A genre should not dictate the form of a text at the expense of its meaning.

Unfortunately, there are cases where nothing short of the strict adherence to rules of form have been accepted. In such cases the analysis of genres has created blinkered attitudes. The onus rests upon teachers to try and avoid falling into this trap. It is not unheard of for students, and some teachers unfortunately, to

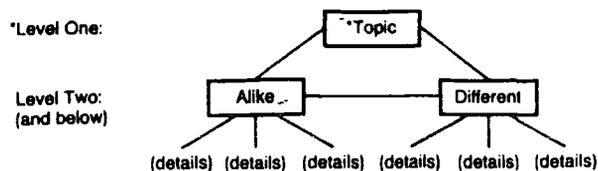
dismiss a work of art as poor, solely on the basis of it not adhering to a certain stereotypical structure. It has already been mentioned that reading or writing is shaped by its purpose, but whatever reason one might be reading for, texts should not be characterized as "lacking in depth" simply because they do not conform to E.M. Foster's "Aspects of the novel" etc. The following assertion by Brookes and Grundy provides an unbiased view on the role of genre analysis:

For ourselves, we are committed to allowing the form to develop from the struggle to express meaning...It is particularly important that the analysis of text types remains descriptive rather than (as it has sometimes become) prescriptive, and that it does not make the writer forget either his or her intended message or his or her reader... genre analysis can be an excellent servant instead of a somewhat restrictive master (Ibid).

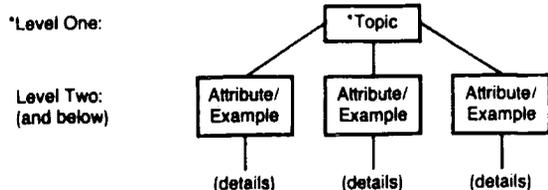
The relationship between the reader and the writer has already been discussed, so it is up to us as teachers to put genre analysis in its right perspective in our teaching of reading.

Other studies relating to the role of formal schemata in reading, have been carried out in reading research. Ridgells et. al (1987), carried out an investigation with the aim of establishing whether learners were aware of certain text structures and the effect that this awareness had on their recall. Three methods were used to test recall and these were; written recall, (short questions), composition, and response to interviews. The structural patterns that were used were based on; comparison and contrast, collection, problem/solution and causation. The graphic representation of the four appears below:

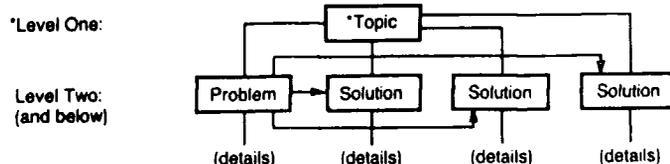
**COMPARISON/CONTRAST**



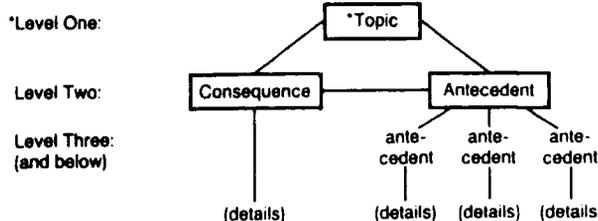
**COLLECTION**



**PROBLEM/SOLUTION**



**CAUSATION**



The results of the experiment are said to corroborate the findings of earlier researches, which findings had showed that learners who were aware of text structure recalled more information and more main ideas. They also substantiate the theory that there are strategies that effective readers use that the not-so-effective readers do not use. Ridgells et. al realized that readers who are not structure-aware, employ serial and discrete encoding of information, whereas the structure-aware use structural patterns to encode and retrieve information. The latter type of readers search for links that lead to "a cohesive whole", using the method called "structure strategy". These results have serious implications for the teaching of reading. In their quest for

better interpretation of texts, our students would perhaps do better if they were aware of the macrostructure of the texts they read.

Carrell (1984) has confirmed that formal schemata are also used by second language readers. These readers are sensitive to schematic story structure and use this structure to guide both comprehension and recall. She analyses her results according to what happens during the encoding and retrieval of information. During encoding, a schema provides a framework within which the incoming material may be structured. Information is classified according to whether it is important or not. With the knowledge of a story schema a reader knows when part of a story is complete and can be stored. He also knows when certain propositions should be kept in working memory until related material is available. To illustrate her point further, Carrell uses the phrase: "Once upon a time,..." which she says would alert the reader to the fact that what was to follow was not a recipe or a political speech.

The studies referred to above, emphasize the relevance of formal schemata in reading, but I think Urquhart's statement of the problem could be useful:

Research suggests that the substitution in a text of simpler words does not lead to genuine simplification ... Similarly, it has been shown that sentence length in itself has no measurable effect ...syntax was not a significant factor... a next stage could be to consider text organization beyond the sentence (1984).

His own study investigated how the spatial organization and

time-ordering of the details in a text affect the understanding of that text. The study revealed that time-ordered texts are much easier to recall and that subjects went as far as re-ordering the text so that it behaved as if it were time-ordered. Again recall was improved when a text had words pertaining to spatial direction like "from left to right", "from the inside to the outside", or "from the back to the front."

The results of the studies on the effects of formal schemata on reading cannot be ignored by those who teach reading. This is not to say that the emphasis should be on text structure only, but our students should be made aware of text structure.

#### 2.4 Content schemata

Content schemata are sometimes divided into "cultural" and "content" schemata in the literature, but in this dissertation I will use use "content schemata" as a superordinate term since culture and content are so inextricably linked. In my discussion of the dialogue between the readers and their text, it was indicated that meaning depends to a large extent on the background knowledge of the reader. I shall henceforth refer to this background as "content schemata."

In discussing cultural schemata, Robinson states that:

...schemas contribute in large to the interpretation and meaningfulness of particular contexts . People interpret

events as well as other people through them. They are like theories; we see other people as we expect to according to our theories, rather than simply in terms of what they actually do or are(1985: 52).

She goes on to give the examples of "people schemata". In Japan, a high school teacher is perceived of as intelligent, male, humble, and as someone with authority and a high status, whereas in America the schema would exclude traits like humility and high status. It is interesting to note that the schema for "teacher" in the South African context has changed since the riots of 1976. This would mean that a text written prior to the riots would portray a teacher in such a way that if it was read by the South African Black community now, they would have to modify their schema for teacher to fit in with the author's description. This phenomenon is well described by Smith who states that:

The meaning of any utterance depends upon the context in which it is understood, and this context will always change, if only as the consequence of the passage of time (1982: 96).

The evidence for content schemata in reading has been shown through numerous studies. One need only look at the literature published during the 80's to realize this. Anderson refers to a study by Bransford and McCarrell in which the following example was used :

The notes were sour because the seams split.

Every person capable of reading English can decode this statement, but very few are capable of comprehending it. The reason is that there is no input from concept-driven processes. This is further proof that a text does not carry meaning, but if the word "bagpipe" is added to the text, then for some, the text will be comprehensible. But it may still not be, for those who have no

idea of what a bagpipe is.

Let us consider a text from Rumelhart (1984):

Mary heard the ice cream truck coming down the street. She remembered her birthday money and rushed into the house.  
(P:1)

The conclusion we are likely to come to when we read this text is that Mary is a little girl and she rushes into the house because she wants to get her money so that she can buy some ice cream. The text does not say anything about all this. If for some reason the readers was pressed to give more information, then they would probably add that Mary liked ice cream and that she would stop the truck and make her choice and then pay. The two sentences in the text are connected into a coherent text. Suppose there was a reader who had never heard of ice cream or ice cream vendors. This passage would not make any sense. It stands to reason then that those who understand this passage activate some kind of schemata, because schemata

provide the basis for "filling the gaps" in a text: no message is explicit, and schemata permit a coherent interpretation through inferential elaboration. (Steffensen & Joag-Dev 1984)

Comprehension and schemata are therefore, inextricably entwined, and in the teaching of reading this should be borne in mind.

It has already been mentioned that content schemata are, more often than not, "culture-specific"; but learners are often given "culture-biased" texts. For this reason it is necessary to look at cross-cultural perspectives.

## 2.5 Cross-cultural perspectives

The question of teaching a foreign culture in foreign or second language classrooms has always generated hot debates. Views are as diverse as can be. There are those who believe in the wholesale teaching of the culture of the target language and some of them have written books on how and why this should be done. The context from which the authors of texts on the teaching of culture operate, often influences their views on the matter.

Robinson (1985), who is involved in TEFL, points out that:

Foreign language programmes often aim to promote an understanding of other cultures; second language programmes often aim to bridge the gap between the student's home culture and the second language culture. Bilingual education programmes are often concerned with intergrating cultural diversity into the content and methodology of instruction (P: 1).

This quotation clearly indicates that Robinson regards the teaching of culture as a part of teaching a second or foreign language, but she does indicate that it is not easy. Her students, she says, have never been a "cultural *tabula rasa*", neither has she ever been. For this reason she was never able to "step into the shoes of the other person" because she had hers on. However, as she came into contact with people from other cultures, her cultural repertoire was constantly being modified. In her discussions she gives the examples of cases of racism, where people have been called "spics" or "niggers" because of cultural ignorance. It is for this reason that she believes in the teaching of culture.

Another view is that of Byram who sees language teaching as having three interwoven strands, which are, "experience of language used for communication, awareness of the nature of language, and the study of cultures" (1989). He goes on to show that we cannot separate language from content, as communicative competence involves "an appreciation of language use which, in part at least is culture specific"(P:61) He argues that the common assumption that language learning leads to learning about the native speakers of the target language in order to "understand, accept, tolerate and even assimilate their values and way of life" may not be appropriate in some situations. His point is clear, but the view that he refers to , might be questioned by some. Obviously, there are many reasons why people would like to learn a new language, but one wonders how many of these would include the wish to assimilate the values and way of life of the native speakers. There's a reference to Alptekin & Alptekin's views:

Arguing that foreign language teaching aims to instil new values in the learner, values associated with the language and culture, Alptekin and Alptekin (1984) suggest that teaching English as a foreign language in Third World countries can lead to cultural colonisation, because the culture of the English-speaking world is implicitly contrasted with that of the learners own to the detriment of the latter. They suggest that the model which the learner is required to persue should be explicitly that of the successful bilingual rather than the monolingual and monocultural native speaker of English. In this way, the learner can be helped to operate in two cultures without devaluing either(Ibid).

I quote this at length because of the specific reference to Third World countries and the suggestion that those who learn the English language should be able to operate in two cultures.

This view conflicts with the views of Krishnaswamy & Aziz (1983) who refer to several government statements and other reports which give guidelines to the role of English as an International Language. They also refer to a conference on "English as an International Auxilliary Language" which was held in Honolulu in 1978 where it was:

...again asserted that any language that has become international in character, cannot be bound to any culture (P: 95).

The arguments presented by the two men point to the fact that although much has been said in relation to the quotation above, attitudes have still not changed. The texts that are produced for ESL and EFL still have exercises that aim to teach English culture, especially in the so called Third World countries. Although, I agree with most of the contentions here, there is a point I wish to argue. The impression I get from their thread of argument is that they believe that teaching materials should be based on the culture of the country. I may be misinterpreting them, but they say:

The government of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen believes that English is an international language and learning English is necessary...But native English is a "bourgeois language" and the materials ...are meant to propagate the middle class style of life...an attempt is being made to make English the vehicle of Yemeni culture... (Ibid).

I do not know whether this means that only texts based on Yemeni culture will be read in the country, but if that is the case, I

have a different view. Much as I do not believe that second language learners should be expected to assimilate the values and way of life of the native speakers of the target language, I believe that our learners should be made aware of the existence of other cultures. By other cultures I do not mean only English and American cultures, but cultures from other parts of the world as well. If the motives are not suspect, I do not see why learners should not be exposed to Ngugi, Shakespeare, Nadine Gordimer, Khalil Gibran and others.

Unfortunately, the question of teaching culture in "Third World" countries cannot be separated from the politics of these countries. For instance, there was a time in South Africa when everything African was criticized. People had to have "Christian" names because African names were pagan and were also difficult to pronounce. Ndebele, a South African author, makes this observation:

...change from the point of view of White South Africa, in general, is premised not on what the Whites of South Africa may have to unlearn, but on what Black people...need to be speedily introduced to... so that they can become westerners in black skins (1986:8).

Obviously, in this context, it is difficult to justify the teaching of white culture with the aim of making second language learners to operate in two cultures. Another example from the South African context is from a text book entitled "English Made Easy" (Barnes 1963). In one of the exercises, learners are asked to convert the following sentence into the active voice:

The story which has been passed on by a member of the Uys family, goes that after Piet Uys and his son Dirkie had been killed by the Zulus, soup was made from Dirkie in order that they too, might become brave and fearless (P:195)

This does not appear to have the intention of fostering cross-cultural understanding. From the same text book, students are asked to fill in the correct interjections:

.....! You are hurting me.

.....! My cat has been run over.

The exercise has ten English interjections like "Phew, Bah, Ouch, Ugh, Brr, O, Oh, Alas, Hush ". If students failed to fill in correctly in the exam, they could fail the exam. I do not see the relevance of this exercise to the learning of English because most interjections are used on reflex. When somebody gets hurt they cry out in the way it is done in the culture they grew up in, they cannot remember to use "ouch" even if they have reached native speaker competence.

The last view I wish to present is that of Ngugi, who maintains that:

For colonialism, this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a peoples culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the coloniser (1986: 16).

He contends that the African child, has through English literature, been forced to look down upon himself. This again shows that the question of the teaching of culture is entwined with the politics of that country.

Regardless of the problems pertinent to the issue of teaching culture, we are still faced with the question of how to deal with texts that have a content based on an alien culture. My stand is that we should be open-minded about our approach to the way we teach texts. As Widdowson has indicated, once a text is out of the writer's hands, readers can do what they like with it. They can either submit to the writer's control or decide to be assertive. Indicating to learners that in other cultures things are done differently, does not mean that they have to become copy-cats. All they would have to do is modify their schemata to accomodate whatever new information they gather through reading.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE MATCHING AND MISMATCHING OF SCHEMATA

Having seen the role played by schemata in the reading process, it should be noted that although schemata refer to stored knowledge, the storage is not like a library. In a library, books are arranged according to their topics. If a newly published book arrives, it is put together with the older books, but it cannot in any way merge with them. It remains its own book. Those who use the library will pick up whatever book gives the information they need, use it, and then the book goes back to its original slot in the library. Schemata do not operate in this way. The matching and mismatching of schemata depends on several factors. These factors will be discussed in this chapter with a view to illustrating that schemata, or the lack thereof, can facilitate or impair reading comprehension, depending on the task at hand.

#### 3 . 1 The nature of schemata

Schemata have been compared to computer programmes because they "are active computational devices capable of evaluating the quality of their own fit to the available data" (Rumelhart:1984). In the same breath he shows that actually, schemata are even more complex because although they can be fixed for a period of time, they are not fixed forever. They are both fixed and dynamic in nature. In

his work with Ortony, they had listed four *major features* of schemata, but in his more recent work, Rumelhart adds two more. The list of the major features of schemata reads as follows:

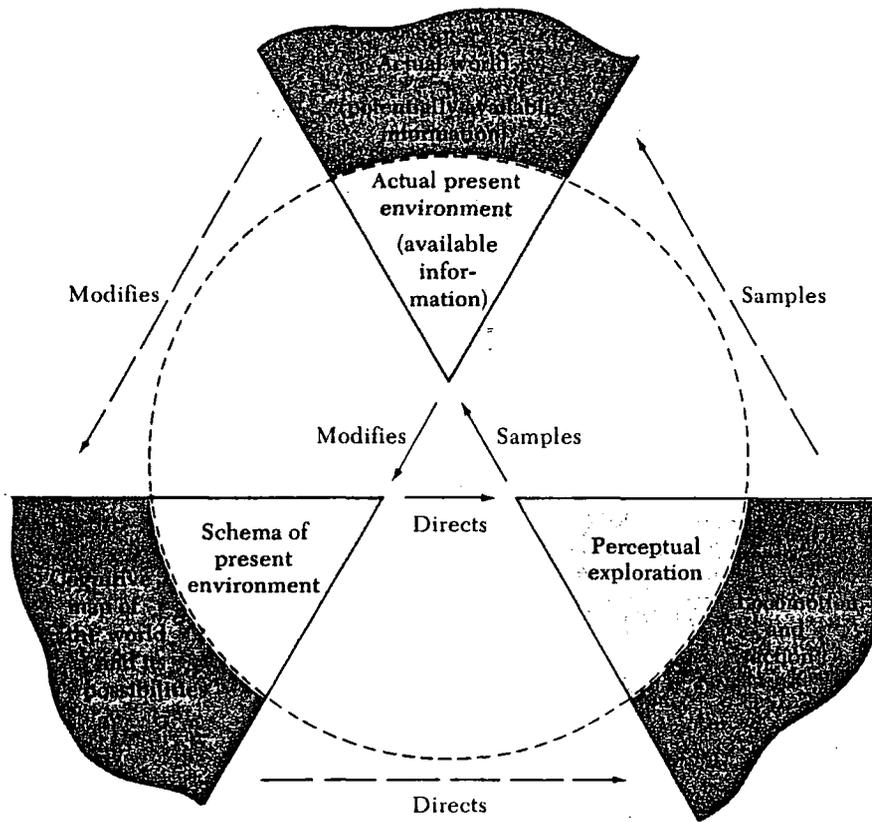
1. Schemata have variables.
2. Schemata can embed, one within another.
3. Schemata represent knowledge at all levels of abstraction.
4. Schemata represent knowledge rather than definitions.
5. Schemata are active processes.
6. Schemata are recognition devices whose processing is aimed at the evaluation of their goodness of fit to data being processed. (1985)

The discussion of text-biased and knowledge-biased processing, in 3.2 and 3.3 respectively, will indicate that schemata do have these features, although there will not be any in-depth analysis of each feature.

The complex nature of schemata is also illustrated by the fact that if one walks into an illuminated room, one does not see the lamp first and the room later. The two are seen at the same time. (Neisser:1976). But if one were to go into the same room a minute later, and found that the lamp was flickering, one's attention would be directed to the lamp. It is imperative then, to perceive of schemata as complex structures rather than fixed information waiting for retrieval so that it can fit a certain slot.

Schemata have also been said to function as a network system. Neisser (ibid) sees schemata as as "anticipations,...a medium by which the past affects the future". They are active, and form a perceptual cycle where, when information is picked up, it modifies the original schema. After modification, the schema directs further

exploration so that the new information can be assimilated. The diagram below shows how this perceptual cycle operates:



*Schemata as embedded in cognitive maps.*

The "ice cream truck" example cited in chapter one can be taken

further to illustrate how information is sampled and how it modifies the existing schemata. The original two sentences from Rumelhart read as follows:

Mary heard the ice cream truck coming down the street. She remembered her birthday money and rushed into the house.

We have already seen how we assign meaning to such a text by filling the gaps with our background knowledge. It was mentioned earlier on that most people assume that Mary wants to buy some ice cream. Carell (1988) takes the example further, to show how this interpretation can be altered if a few words are added to the original text. Suppose we add the following words:

... and locked the door.(P:78)

Our understanding of the whole text changes. We modify the original interpretation after sampling the additional piece of information. This shows that schemata are not fixed interpretations of the world. Activating and modifying them does not come automatically to some readers.

### 3 . 2 Text-biased processing.

It has been shown in previous chapters that a reader relies on both the text and background knowledge to achieve meaning. The literature refers to poor and skilled readers. The difference is shown in that:

Skilled readers constantly shift their mode of processing, accommodating to the demands of a particular reading situation; less skilled readers tend to over rely on

processes in one direction, producing deleterious effects on comprehension. (Carrell,1988:101)

The view put forward here, can be substantiated by an example which Carrell cites from Filmore:

The princess ate the jam.  
The queen slapped her  
The princess began to cry (p: 102)

If a reader relies only on the text to achieve meaning, then the three sentences are not connected. The relationship between "princess" and "queen" or the one between "princess"and "her" is not obvious. Such a reader would conclude that somewhere a princess ate some jam and somewhere else, a queen slapped a certain "her" and the princess who begins to cry is not the one referred to in the first statement. It might seem improbable that anybody would give this kind of interpretation to the text, but given the magnitude of the problems that are prevalent in reading classes,one realizes that such an interpretation can be given. Carrell continues and observe that although the reasons for unidirectional processing cannot be given with much certainty, hypotheses can be advanced.

One of the causes of text-biased processing could be the lack of relevant schemata. This does not affect less skilled readers only, even efficient readers can find themselves confused if they have no frame of reference. For instance a text meant for engineers might not make much sense to someone without the basics of Physics. In the same way, since schemata are usually culture-specific, a

student reading a text which is culture-biased from his point of reference, might have the problem of interpretation. For instance, a Black South African student might have a problem of comprehension in the sentence below:

They went into a pub to have some draught Guinness.

This same statement does not cause any problems to those living in Britain, but perhaps they too might have problems with the following text

Since it was difficult to find a shebeen which also serves samp, the boerewors had to do.

For most South Africans, "pub" and "Guinness" are concepts of an alien culture. On the other hand "samp" and "boerewors" are typically South African. Most Blacks usually go to a shebeen for a drink, just like the British usually go to a pub, but shebeens sell food as well as drinks. Even if a British reader knew the meaning of the word "shebeen" because of its Irish connections, the message would still not mediate because "samp" and "boerewors" are not drinks. Moreover, shebeens in South Africa are no longer "illegal places where liquor is sold" (dictionary definition). So in order to understand these two texts, there should be appropriate schemata with the relevant variables.

Another possible cause of text-biased processing is the lack of enough clues in a text to suggest a particular schema. The following passage, used in a study by Bransford and Johnson, is

referred to by Rumelhart:

The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange things into different groups. Of course, one pile may be sufficient depending on how much there is to do. If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities, that is the next step, otherwise you are pretty well set. It is important not to overdo things. That is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many. In the short run, this may not seem important, but complications can easily arise. A mistake can be expensive as well. At first the whole procedure will seem complicated. Soon, however, it will become just another facet of life. It is difficult to foresee any end to the necessity of this task in the immediate future, but then one can never tell. After the procedure is completed, arrange the materials into different groups again. Then they can be put in their appropriate places. Eventually they will be used once more and then the whole cycle will then have to be repeated. However, that is part of life. (1984:18)

The subjects who were given this passage, said it was extremely difficult. However, when they were told that it referred to the washing of clothes, the clothes-washing schema was activated and the text seemed as easy as any.

Text-biased processing can also be caused by the activation of the wrong schemata. Consider the following passage from Anderson (1985):

Tony slowly got up from the mat, planning his escape. He hesitated a moment and thought. Things were not going well. What bothered him was being held, especially as the charge against him had been weak. He considered his present situation. The lock that held him was strong but he thought he could break it. He knew, however, that his timing would have to be perfect. Tony was aware that it was because of his earlier roughness that he had been penalized so severely - much too severely from his point of view. The situation was becoming frustrating; the pressure had been grinding on him for too long. He was being ridden unmercifully. Tony was getting angry now. He felt he was ready to make his move. He knew that his success or failure would depend on what he did in the next few seconds.

Most of the subjects who were given this passage thought it was about a prisoner planning his escape. They were shocked when the questions that were based on the passage had nothing to do with a convict. The words "lock", "escape", and "charge", had activated a prison-prisoner schema, but the text was not based on that. It was based on a wrestling match. When this passage was given to Physical Education students, it was interpreted correctly because of their background. They understood "lock" to mean an arm tightened around Tony's neck, and "charge" to mean the attack by the opponent.

Strange though it may seem, another reason for text-biased processing is the conceptions that some learners have about reading. Carrell states that: "they suffer from what has been called a *meaning is in the text* fallacy" (1988). These readers seem to think that it is inappropriate to use background information in reading. Studies on this phenomenon have shown that some readers fail to answer questions that require extra-textual knowledge when they are asked in a formal situation, but they give the correct answers when the context is informal. This shows that what they have is a misconception about reading.

These four hypotheses about the causes of text-biased processing, can manifest themselves in both skilled and less skilled readers. This is an indication to teachers that we should be on the lookout for such problems so that we can gear our instruction towards redressing of such problems.

### 3 . 3 Knowledge-biased processing.

Reading comprehension can also be affected by over-reliance on background knowledge. Readers rely so much on prior knowledge that they fill in some details not motivated by the text. Let us consider the text we used previously:

The princess ate the jam.  
The queen slapped her.  
The princess cried.

Readers relying on background knowledge would add more details than are necessary for the interpretation of this text. They might say add that the princess had decayed teeth and therefore was not supposed to eat jam. They might also add that the princess was a thief because she took things like jam without the permission of the queen.

A possible cause for knowledge-biased processing could be related to the cognitive style of the individual because:

A reader's reading style may be part of a general cognitive style of processing any incoming information, regardless of the type of information or its modality of transmission.  
(Carroll 1988:109)

Such readers may be the type who naturally come to conclusions prematurely. In reading, they may come to a conclusion prematurely, a conclusion based on the initial sampling of information. They then fail to reevaluate their original hypothesis in accordance

with new incoming information. In some studies it has been proved that reflective rather than impulsive people, achieve significantly better reading scores. (ibid)

Culture-specific schemata can also cause a biased interpretation of a text. Steffensen and Joag-Dev carried out an experiment in which two texts were given to American and Indian students. One text was based on an Indian wedding and the other was based on an American wedding. Part of the text on an Indian wedding read as follows:

Prema's parents were very sad when she left. They were saying that now they know that everything that has been said about the sadness of giving a daughter away, is true. (1984:56)

When the subjects were requested to recall the passages, one Indian subject produced the following text:

Her parents started weeping along with her, but elders advised her parents that one day or other she should go.

This is a clear indication that over-reliance on background knowledge can lead to the distortion of facts from a text. What the subject recalls here, is what is known about Indian weddings rather than what was contained in the text. The same biased interpretation was found among the American subjects when they were tested on the American wedding text. Schemata then, can sometimes interfere with understanding rather than facilitate it.

Cultural knowledge based on the unshakable beliefs unique to that

culture, can also lead to an unexpected interpretation of texts. Carell and Eisterhold refer to a study in which the subjects were given the following passage to read:

There is a question about the extent to which any of us can be free of a prejudiced view in the area of religion. (1988)

After reading the passage, the subjects had to analyse the relation of the original text to the following one:

Because we can't be free of prejudice in the area of religion, we should not practise a religion.

Because of their beliefs, some devout Moslem students are said to have had problems with the two texts. "The texts are excellent for developing *critical* reading skills" (ibid), but the way in which religion is referred to in this context, triggers a negative response from some . A student of Islamic background refused to analyze the passage critically and simply said, "For me its false". This is further proof that background knowledge can sometimes act as a hindrance in reading lessons. I had a kind of similar experience in my own teaching situation when we read the story entitled "The Verger". There was a devout Born Again Christian in the class (she was not the only one). Her main concern was whether God would ever forgive the vicar for sacking the verger. I only became aware of the seriousness of the problem when her answer to a test question somehow included the fact that the vicar was a sinner and if he did not ask for forgiveness, God would not forgive him.

The last problem I wish to refer to, is the one where a learner's prior knowledge is inaccurate. Maria and MacGinite (1987:22) claim that young children, besides not having prior knowledge about many topics, often have inaccurate knowledge. It is also maintained that "people of all ages, but especially children, have misconceptions that affect understanding..." (ibid). In other words, learners at times assume that they have the relevant schemata, little realizing that the schemata are inaccurate. Maria and MacGinite go on to discuss tests which have shown that:

Children were more likely to answer correctly on a post-item if they had marked the item "unknown" on the pre-test, than if they had given a wrong answer. (ibid)

The implication here is that it is better to have no schemata than to have inaccurate schemata. One way of dealing with this kind of problem is to use texts which first describe the misconceptions that the learners may hold, and then later refute them.

To sum up then, there are many sides to the question of the relationship between schemata and reading comprehension. It would be in the interest of both learners and teachers if the teachers took all the variables into consideration before structuring a reading lesson.

### **3 .4 Implications for teaching**

In the two previous chapters it was indicated that background knowledge plays an important role in interactive reading. In this

knowledge plays an important role in interactive reading. In this chapter it was shown that several problems could lead to text-biased processing. These are: the lack of appropriate schemata; the lack of clues that can activate the relevant schemata; the activation of the wrong kind of schemata (with the reader being unaware of this); and finally, a reader may be having some misconceptions about reading. It was also shown that knowledge-biased processing can lead to comprehension problems. The possible causes of this kind of processing are: the cognitive style of the individual; relying on certain aspects of cultural schemata; beliefs based on cultural knowledge and prior knowledge that is inaccurate.

Being aware of the existence of a problem often leads to seeking a solution to it. We have seen that the reading process can present a multitude of problems, but some of these can be solved. Carrell suggests that one way would be to "manipulate" either the reader or the text or both.

#### 3.4.1 Text Manipulation

"Narrow reading" is one of the ways in which texts can be manipulated. In this method, learners are confined to a single author or a single topic. This allows students to adjust to the style of the author or to become familiar with the register of a particular topic. Narrow reading also allows students to "develop enough context to facilitate comprehension" (ibid.). The way in

Learners could also be given texts that have local settings. This is not to say they should concentrate on these only, but learners usually become interested in something they can relate to. Carrell also suggests that Sustained Silent Reading should be tried. Through this, students use their own resources to "seek meaning" and this prepares them for future reading tasks. A prerequisite for an SSR programme is that students should choose what they wish to read. They decide on the content, the level of difficulty and the length of the text. I think this would also help with the problem of having learners with different levels of ability.

Texts can also be simplified, but we should bear in mind that:

...it will remain important to teach students to detect or be sensitive to the rhetorical organization of texts, and also to detect *deviations* from ideal "ideal organization". This latter skill is important because students are unlikely to read only ideal texts (Urquhart:1984)

The question of simplifying texts has got its own problems. Although it might be ideal in some cases to simplify texts, we should remember that:

... different textualisations may well *mean* different things. To what extent does the reordering of ideas distort those ideas and change the message? (Ibid)

So should a teacher decide to simplify a text, it should be done in a way that it retains the original meaning most likely intended

by the author. We should also guard against falling into the trap of thinking that we have simplified texts when in fact, we have not. Under such circumstances, the exercise would be futile. An example from Bransford should clarify this point. Suppose students were given the following text to read:

The tall man bought the crackers.  
The bald man read the newspaper.  
The funny man liked the ring.

It has been proved in studies like the one in which this text was used, that students find it difficult to answer questions like: "which man read the newspaper?" A teacher might try to simplify the text by adding information to it. If this information is arbitrary, then it will still not help the students. Consider the following "simplified text" :

The tall man purchased the crackers from the clerk.

If all the sentences in the text had such arbitrary information added to them, the students might end up being more perplexed. The teacher might inadvertently have made the reading task more complicated. In order that the students get a truly simplified text the added facts must make it less arbitrary. For instance the same text can be simplified in the following way:

The tall man purchased the crackers that had been lying on the top shelf.

It would be easier for a student to remember this because of the relationship between "tall" and "top shelf". This kind of elaboration is referred to as "a precise elaboration" (ibid). The

text also becomes easier to recall because "a schema allows orderly searches from memory" (Anderson:1985)

The decision to manipulate the text in whatever way, should rest with teachers after they have carefully assessed the unique circumstances of their teaching situation.

#### 3. 4 . 2 Reader manipulation

The way to manipulate a reader is to provide the background information needed to make particular texts easier to interpret. The literature refers to various ways of doing this, some of these will be discussed in chapter four.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE UTILIZATION OF SCHEMATA IN READING LESSONS

In the previous chapters it was shown why reading is an interactive process and why schemata play an important role in reading comprehension and the problems that can be caused by the very concept "schemata". In this chapter I intend to show how schemata can be utilized in the ESL reading classroom. I start by looking at the problems that we have as teachers, and go on to show that despite these we can still teach reading successfully.

#### 4 . 1 Learner and teacher roles

The learner-centred curriculum recognizes the importance of the learner as an individual who should be given a chance to have a say in the learning situation. The teacher is seen as a facilitator rather than a "know-all". Teachers and learners can supposedly discuss issues, rather than the teachers regarding the learners as "empty vessels" which they can fill to the brim with knowledge. The curriculum also promotes self-evaluation by both teachers and learners (Nunan:1988). One of its characteristics is that it embraces the following sentiment:

With more advanced learners, it is possible not only to train learners to identify causes of learning failure, but also to suggest remedies. Such consciousness-raising activities can assist learners to monitor and evaluate their own learning process. (ibid)

activities can assist learners to monitor and evaluate their own learning process. (ibid)

Although this should be the ideal situation, it has been found that sometimes learner-expectations and teacher-aims clash as far as methodology is concerned. Whatever the situation may be it has been proved that teachers will still be needed for a long time to come. For this reason I believe that whenever we try out new methods of lesson presentation, our learners should at least have an idea of why we are not doing things the traditional way. In our reading lessons for instance, we might have to provide schemata in such a way that some of the methods might seem unorthodox. In other words we should provide our learners with "schemata" which will enable them to understand why we do certain things the way we do them.

#### 4 . 2 Prescribed texts

My aim is not to pit good texts against the bad ones, nor am I about to suggest how a reading programme should be set up. I have chosen to narrow my scope to the confines of the classroom. My reasons for this decision will become clearer as I progress with my discussion.

There have always been complaints from teachers that prescribe texts are sometimes not suitable for the classes they are prescribed for. This is true. A case in point is the use of the series "New English The Easy Way". I am not judging the series as such, I am basing my observation on the following paragraph from

the Std. 9 book of the same series:

This book , like the rest of the series, has been completely revised in accordance with the syllabus issued in June 1972. It covers every aspect of the language work for Standard Nine and is based on the patterns prescribed in the pamphlet, *English Speech Exercises for Afrikaans-Medium schools.* (Terblanche et.al,1974:1)

This quotation from the preface of the book clearly indicates that the book is meant for Afrikaans-medium schools. Afrikaans-medium schools are mostly schools for White Afrikaans speaking learners. Black or African (to use the Apartheid distinction) schools are English-medium schools. How the series I have referred to has weaved its way into Black schools, I cannot fathom. The point is that the content in the texts might have been prepared specifically with a White learner in mind. In that case the assumption would be that the learners who use these books can relate to the concepts used in the texts.

Orford (1980) made a brief assessment of Std. 6 texts books that were in use in Black schools. The following were her findings:(her comments are reproduced verbatim)

1.*English the active way*:.....The language used in the exercises is not always realistic or useful for Black South African pupils

2.*New Spoken English*.....The exercises and the comprehension passages tend to be too long, and use unrealistic language which pupils are not likely to use or hear outside of the English lessons.

3.*Advance with English* .....Work on grammatical structures has good clear explanations and useful exercises with realistic meaningful sentences. Units also have ear-training sections with good pronunciation and stress practice.

4.*Informal English*.....There are language exercise sections, but these consist of various mixed exercises with little or no explanation of the structures involved in

contexts; they are just lists of unrelated sentences.

5. *English for the Secondary School*.....There are many comprehension passages, some of which are not very relevant or interesting to Black South African pupils.

6. *Active English*.....There are many ideas for pupil's activity and speaking. In structure sections however, the oral activity is confusing and the resulting spoken language is unnatural. There is not much explanation of structures. (P: 15)

These were the books on the market for Black pupils in that year. The teachers, or whoever decides which books should be used, had to make their choice from the six. Orford has positive comments about only one of them. Now the question is whether reading comprehension is not affected by the use of these materials. I would say it is.

I wish to repeat that I am not judging any books, I only wish to indicate that some texts might be judged as unsuitable, but that, notwithstanding, teachers and learners still find themselves having to use them. It is against this backdrop that I'd like to make tentative suggestions of how to handle some texts. The texts might not look suitable but then usually the teacher is not left with much choice but to use them. It is not known whether there will be a time when all the teachers will be satisfied with all the texts that are prescribed. Some might still be dissatisfied with texts that are truly suitable. Under these circumstances, the teachers would still have to use some of these texts.

#### 4 . 3 Utilizing schemata in reading lessons

It should be noted from the outset that the suggestions that will be given here are not necessarily the best, some teachers may have already come up with better ways.

Anderson (1985) urges publishers to "employ structures that will highlight the structure of text material". This brings to mind the collection of short stories entitled, *SHADES OF FEAR*. The book was prescribed for Std. 9 students during the years 1984 to 1987. Although the publisher might have had nothing to do with it, the title of the collection suggests its content. All the short stories in the book had a theme of "fear", but the fear ranged between uneasiness and morbid dread. When one looks at this fact, one realizes that the the word "shades" is used because of the difference in the intensity of the fear in each story. A teacher could provide the relevant schemata to the content by discussing the title. The learners could be shown different shades of the same colour to help them to understand why the author chose that title. The next step would be to let the students give all the words that mean fear. Actually, a few are given in one of the exercises in the book, but more could be added to those. I need not carry on with this example, what I wanted to illustrate here is that by discussing the title of the book with them, the learners are given a frame of reference. By giving the words that the teacher has asked for, the learners have actually contributed to the creation/activation of the relevant schemata.

#### 4 . 3 . 1 Poetry

My reason for including poetry in my suggestions stems from the fact that the teaching /learning of poetry has become some kind of anathema in most Black schools. In the so called "Gazankulu" area,

of the 78 schools which had Std. 10 in 1989, only five taught poetry. The schools falling under the Department of Education and Training have three prescribed books for Std. 9. These cover three genres, namely, poetry, short stories and a novel. Each school can choose any two. Usually, the novel and the short stories are chosen. For Std. 10, there are four genres, the fourth being a play. Again each school has to choose only two. Poetry is again avoided. The general reasons given for this are that poetry is too difficult for learners to understand. This negative attitude denies our students the chance to experience one of the most powerful ways in which language can be used. We also fall into the trap of indirectly labelling our students as "dull". The situation has become so bad in some areas that teachers who attempt to teach poetry are warned that they will increase the failure rate.

I have already indicated that I do not for a moment deny that our teaching situation is riddled with problems. We have to think of the exams. We also have the problem of getting students with low levels of proficiency being promoted to Std. 9 or 10. The following passage is taken from a Std. 9 student's answer to an exam question.

(c) THE PARSLEY GARDED

The story was happening in August. Al Condraj one day he decided to go to the shop. he (sic) see a hammer. he want this hammer but the problem was not money to buy this hammer. he decided to steal it. the one who working in the shop see him. then he report to the manager of the shop. the manager ask why do you still this hammer but he said he has no money to buy it. the manager told him do not come to steal in the shop again.

The proficiency of the student might be low but there is evidence that the student was in a hurry. I am referring to words like "garded" instead of garden, which he had to copy from the question paper (the student is not dyslexic). I have reproduced part of the answer to show that the student's English is not unintelligible. Moreover, he has understood the content of the short story (according to the marking memorandum). This student was rated as one of the weaker ones in his class. Be that as it may, the point is that the student's problem does not lie in understanding the content of the text, but in using his own words to summarize the text. I am trying to show that this student has the potential to interpret a text, even if he relies on the teacher to help him along.

I have to differ with those who believe that our learners are incapable of understanding English poetry. In recent years, the lower classes have had to learn poetry. The teachers were not afforded the choice that their counterparts in Stds 9 & 10 have. Strange enough these learners in Stds. 6, 7 and 8, can understand poetry.

The poems I have decided to look at are, *DEATH BE NOT PROUD* and *DRUMMER HODGE*. I am not going to give lessons on how these poems should be taught, I merely want to show how schemata can be utilized to help students to interpret these poems. May I hasten to add that these are not the only ways it can be done.

#### 4 . 3 . 1 . 2 Death be not proud

Death be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so,  
For, those whom thou thinkst thou doth overthrow  
Die not poor death, nor yet can thou kill me.  
From rest and sleep, which are but thy pictures be,  
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow  
And soonest our best men with thee do go,  
Rest of their bones, and Soul's delivery:  
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, Kings and Desperate men  
And dost with poison war and sickness dwell,  
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well  
And better then, thy stroke; why swellest thou then?  
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,  
And death shall be no more; death thou shalt die.

This poem obviously comes from a different age, but its message is still relevant today. My intention here is to show how formal schemata can be utilized to make the poem easier to deal with. Gerhard states that "Making sense in part is creating order through categorizing" (1981:142). Breaking the poem down into manageable bits will not necessarily trivialise the seriousness of its message but will help the students to have a frame of reference as far as form is concerned.

Before the discussion of the text (or at any stage that the teacher may deem fit), the students can work in mixed ability groups to answer the following question whilst they are referring to the text:

1. What are the two words that "some" have used to describe death?
2. Does the poet agree with the description? Support your answer.
3. What happens to those whom death thinks it overthrows?
4. Two things are said to be pictures of death. Name them.
5. What do we derive from these "pictures" of death?
6. What happens to "our best men" who die?
7. Death is a slave to:.....,.....,



Yet portion of that unknown plain  
Will Hodge forever be;  
His homely Northern breast and brain  
Grow to some Southern tree,  
And strange-eyed constellations reign  
His stars eternally.

Some weeks before the the lesson on this poem, the teacher could ask the learners to observe the night sky. They will be required to pick on a prominent star or cluster and observe its movement. In the South African context, the Southern Cross would make a perfect choice. The learners would have to watch the chosen star/cluster say at 19h00, 20h00 and 22h00. Early-risers could also watch their chosen star early in the morning. The purpose of this exercise would be to help the learners to observe for themselves that stars move in a westerly direction, as the last two lines of the first stanza indicate. They could also be asked to refer to an encyclopaedia to get information about the "North Star/Polaris". The aim here is that by the time they have to read the poem they will have some background knowledge about the movement of the stars and about why the stars that Hodge saw appeared strange to him.

The students could also be asked to read newspapers or listen to the news to follow what is happening to the "End Conscription" campaign. This has been topical news in South Africa for some time now (see appendix 1 ). Knowing about the End Conscription campaign would help them to grasp Hardy's intention in poems like *DRUMMER* *HODGE* and *THE MAN HE KILLED*, plus Owen's *DULCE ET DECORUM EST PRO PARTIA MORI*. The three poems were prescribed for the year 1987. Another aspect that the teacher could use is the fact that the poem under discussion contrasts certain physical aspects of

Britain with those of South Africa. Again I refrain from giving a step by step guide of how the poem should be taught, all I wanted to do was show that the teacher does not have to provide the relevant schemata to students verbally. The students themselves can play a part in trying to get some background information after the teacher has given them the right direction.

#### 4 . 3 . 2 Short story

##### 4 . 3 . 2 . 1 The Waste Land (Alan Paton)

This is one of the short stories that are prescribed for the year 1990. The teacher can use what Langer calls a Pre-reading Plan (PReP). This involves:

1. Determining the amount of prior information a student possesses about a certain topic, as well as the manner in which this information is organized.
2. Becoming aware of the language the students use to express knowledge about a given subject.
3. Using concepts to anticipate the directions the text will take. (1981)

With the PReP the teacher then proceeds to select a key concept and says to the students:

1. Tell anything that comes to mind....
2. What made you think of.....
3. Based on our discussion, have you any new ideas about...

In the case of *THE WASTE LAND*, the teacher could first ask the learners to think of an incident in which they did something expecting a certain outcome only to have the opposite happen. An example I could give is that remember playing "hide and seek" as a

child and then falling asleep in the nook I had chosen. By the time I was found, my aunt was thinking of calling the Police Department. The students, only a few could tell their anecdotes, and then after that the key concept of the text could be discussed. In the case of the story under discussion it would be "Mugging/Killing for money". The topic would be discussed from two points of view; the muggers' and the victim's. The discussions referred to here, would provide the relevant schemata for the students.

#### 4 . 3 . 3 Comprehension passage

##### 4 . 3 . 3 . 1 A place To Live - Africa (Appendix 2)

Tonjes (1981) sees the "Advance Organizer" as one of the ways in which reading texts can be made easier to interpret. He says the purpose of the AO is to "assist the reader in the mastery of forthcoming concepts by providing a framework or scaffolding prior to the reading assignment. (P:13). He identifies three types of AO's which are, expository (when dealing with unfamiliar material); comprehensive (when dealing with familiar material); and schematic ( a graphic representation )..

In *A PLACE TO LIVE - AFRICA*, there are several "forthcoming concepts" that the learner will probably not know. Some of *them* are

1. The idea of one person having a lake or a salmon river to himself.
2. The kind of property that would put England to shame. The learners would probably not have a frame of reference for this

comparison.

3. Khubla Khan. Who was this person and why is he referred to?
4. Driving bushbuck and and pig in the forest. What does the author actually mean by this?
- 5.Imported Highland cattle. Why import cattle when there are plenty in South Africa.

This kind of passage might seem unsuitable to some, but as I have already mentioned some passages come from books that were clearly meant for White South African learners. This passage comes from one of these books. It will be up to the teacher to try and deal with the questions listed above in order to provide relevant schemata to the learners.

I have not said anything about linguistic schemata because I indicated from the onset that I would be looking at formal and content schemata.

Within the precincts of this chapter, I have tried to show how schemata can be utilized to facilitate second language reading comprehension. I have also tried to show that although there are many problems a negative attitude to the teaching of reading will not get us anywhere. It is my wish that where possible teachers in my part of the country come together now and again to share ideas on how they conduct their reading lessons, with special emphasis on the utilization of schemata.

## CONCLUSION

A complete solution to the problems that we have with understanding the reading process might still be forthcoming. As recently as the 7th of September, an article appeared in the British Press, alleging that the teaching of reading is not what it should be. See appendix 3. This is a clear indication that the search for solutions is far from over.

Within the confines of this dissertation, I have looked at the interactive nature of reading. What has emerged is that reading is an interactive process because bottom-up and top-down processing interact. This interaction also includes the dialogue between writers and their texts and the one between readers and writers, via the text. It was shown that background knowledge plays an important role in both spoken and written discourse. This fact caused me to try and trace the developmental stages of the notion of a schema. After tracing this development from Kant to present-day researchers, I looked at how schemata, or the absence thereof, can cause problems of interpretation. I discussed the problems of text-biased and knowledge-biased processing to show that if we are aware of them we can try to correct them. In the final chapter I looked at two poems, a short story and a "comprehension passage" to try and see how schemata can be utilized in the interpretation of texts. I avoided a discussion which would include the teaching of whole texts because my aim was to show the relevance of schemata in the teaching of those texts.

My belief is that if teachers try to help students by providing the relevant schemata, there will come a time when the background knowledge of students is so vast that they can deal with texts on their own. The important factor is that students should never be regarded as *a tabula rasa*, they should be allowed to show how much background they have before the teacher starts with a lesson.

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## The Waste Land

*Alan Paton*

The moment that the bus moved on he knew he was in danger, for by the lights of it he saw the figures of the young men waiting under the tree. That was the thing feared by all, to be waited for by the young men. It was a thing he had talked about, now he was to see it for himself.

It was too late to run after the bus; it went down the dark street like an island of safety in a sea of perils. Though he had known of his danger only for a second, his mouth was already dry, his heart was pounding in his breast, something within him was crying out in protest against the coming event.

His wages were in his purse, he could feel them weighing heavily against his thigh. That was what they wanted from him. Nothing counted against that. His wife could be made a widow, his children made fatherless, nothing counted against that. Mercy was the unknown word.

While he stood there irresolute he heard the young men walking towards him, not only from the side where he had seen them, but from the other also. They did not speak, their intention was unspeakable. The sound of their feet came on the wind to him. The place was well chosen, for behind him was the high wall of the convent, and the barred door that would not open before a man was dead. On the other side of the road was the waste land, full of wire and iron and the bodies of old cars. It was his only hope, and he moved towards it; as he did so he knew from the whistle that the young men were there too.

His fear was great and instant, and the smell of it went from his body to his nostrils. At that very moment one of them spoke, giving directions. So trapped was he that he was filled suddenly with strength and anger, and he ran towards the waste land swinging his heavy stick. In the darkness a form loomed up at him, and he swung the stick at it, and heard it

give a cry of pain. Then he plunged blindly into the wilderness of wire and iron and the bodies of old cars.

Something caught him by the leg, and he brought his stick crashing down on it, but it was no man, only some knife-edged piece of iron. He was sobbing and out of breath, but he pushed on into the waste, while behind him they pushed on also, knocking against the old iron bodies and kicking against tins and buckets. He fell into some grotesque shape of wire; it was barbed and tore at his clothes and flesh. Then it held him, so that it seemed to him that death must be near, and having no other hope, he cried out, 'Help me, help me!' in what should have been a great voice but was voiceless and gasping. He tore at the wire, and it tore at him too, ripping his face and his hands.

Then suddenly he was free. He saw the bus returning, and he cried out again in the great voiceless voice, 'Help me, help me!' Against the lights of it he could plainly see the form of one of the young men. Death was near him, and for a moment he was filled with the injustice of life, that could end thus for one who had always been hard-working and law-abiding. He lifted the heavy stick and brought it down on the head of his pursuer, so that the man crumpled to the ground, moaning and groaning as though life had been unjust to him also.

Then he turned and began to run again, but ran first into the side of an old lorry which sent him reeling. He lay there for a moment expecting the blow that would end him, but even then his wits came back to him, and he turned over twice and was under the lorry. His very entrails seemed to be coming into his mouth, and his lips could taste sweat and blood. His heart was like a wild thing in his breast, and seemed to lift his whole body each time that it beat. He tried to calm it down, thinking it might be heard, and tried to control the noise of his gasping breath, but he could not do either of these things.

Then suddenly against the dark sky he saw two of the young men. He thought they must hear him; but they themselves were gasping like drowned men, and their speech came by fits and starts.

Then one of them said, 'Do you hear?'

They were silent except for their gasping, listening. And he

listened also, but could hear nothing but his own exhausted heart.

'I heard a man . . . running . . . on the road,' said one. 'He's got away . . . let's go.'

Then some more of the young men came up, gasping and cursing the man who had got away.

'Freddy,' said one, 'your father's got away.'

But there was no reply.

'Where's Freddy?' one asked.

One said, 'Quiet!' Then he called in a loud voice, 'Freddy.'

But still there was no reply.

'Let's go,' he said.

They moved off slowly and carefully, then one of them stopped.

'We are saved,' he said. 'Here is the man.'

He knelt down on the ground, and then fell to cursing.

'There's no money here,' he said.

One of them lit a match, and in the small light of it the man under the lorry saw him fall back.

'It's Freddy,' one said. 'He's dead.'

Then the one who had said 'Quiet' spoke again.

'Lift him up,' he said. 'Put him under the lorry.'

The man under the lorry heard them struggling with the body of the dead young man, and he turned, once, twice, deeper into his hiding-place. The young men lifted the body and swung it under the lorry so that it touched him. Then he heard them moving away, not speaking, slowly and quietly, making an occasional sound against some obstruction in the waste.

He turned on his side, so that he would not need to touch the body of the young man. He buried his face in his arms, and said to himself in the idiom of his own language, 'People, arise! The world is dead.' Then he arose himself, and went heavily out of the waste land.

### 3. A PLACE TO LIVE – AFRICA

*Read the following carefully:*

Hereabouts, when my ship comes home, I shall have my country house. There is a piece of flat land, perhaps six acres square, from which a long glen runs down to the Letaba. There I shall have my dwelling. In front there will be a park to put England to shame, miles of rolling green dotted with shapely woods, and in the centre a broad glade in which a salmon-river flows in shallows and falls among tree-ferns, arums and brackens. There may be a lake, but I am undecided. In front I shall have a flower-garden, where every temperate and tropical blossom will appear, and in a sheltered hollow an orchard of deciduous trees, and an orange plantation. Highland cattle, imported at incredible expense, will roam on the hillsides. My back windows will look down 4 000 feet on the tropics, my front on the long meadow vista with the Iron Crown mountain for the sun to set behind.

My house will be long and low, with broad wings, built of good stone and white-washed, with a thatched roof and green shutters. Within it will be cool and fresh, with stone floors and big fireplaces, for the mists are chill and the winds can blow sharply on the mountains. There will be good pictures and books, and quantities of horns and skins. I shall grow my own supplies, and make my own wine and tobacco. Rides will be cut in the woods, and when my friends come to stay we shall drive bushbuck and pig, and stalk tiger-cats in the forest. There will be wildfowl on my lake, and Lochleven trout in my waters. And whoever cares to sail 5 000 miles, and travel 1 500 by train, and drive 50 over a rough road, will find at the end of his journey such a palace as Kubla Khan never dreamed of. The accomplishment is difficult, but not, I trust, impossible.

JOHN BUCHAN: THE AFRICAN COLONY.

THE TIMES FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 7 1990

# MacGregor orders study of reading in primaries

By JOHN O'LEARY, HIGHER EDUCATION CORRESPONDENT

JOHN MacGregor, the education secretary, has ordered an enquiry into the teaching of reading in primary schools yesterday after a report gave evidence of a serious decline in reading standards.

At the launch of the report yesterday, its author blamed the decline on modern teaching methods. Martin Turner, a local authority educational psychologist, said that the proportion of non-readers or poor readers among pupils aged seven had risen from 10 to 15 per cent in the past five years.

Mr Turner added that, since completing his survey of eight local education authorities, he had been sent evidence of a decline in four more. The downturn was, he said, unprecedented in peacetime in modern educational history.

Although the report contains no information on teaching methods, Mr Turner has linked the findings with the introduction of the "real books" theory, which holds that reading cannot be taught and children acquire the skill through exposure to good books and the adoption of role models. He said yesterday that research had discredited the method but that its proponents had captured the national curriculum.

Mr MacGregor is to see Mr Turner and Stuart Sexton, a former Conservative education adviser and director of the Independent Primary and Secondary Education Trust, which published the report. Mr MacGregor said yesterday that he had made it his business to read the report as soon as he had returned from

holiday. The issue was about teaching methods and not resources, he said. The schools inspectorate has been asked to report on the teaching of reading in primary schools, and the School Examinations and Assessment Council is to survey evidence on recent trends in reading standards among pupils aged seven.

Mr Turner's findings were criticised for drawing conclusions from too small a sample of schools when they were first published in preliminary form in *The Times Educational Supplement*. He emphasised yesterday, however, that his survey did not present a national picture.

The report says, however, that there is now clear evidence that hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren south of a line from the Mersey to the Wash are subject to a sharply downward trend in reading attainment at seven or eight. Mr Turner added that children who fell behind at the age of seven seldom regained the ground by the age of 11.

Mr Sexton, in his introduction to the report, said: "This 'reading failure' is a sponsored reading failure, attributed not to poor home conditions, or family breakdown, or too much television, or any other of the popular and totally unproven excuses; attributed rather to what goes on in our state schools, or rather what does not go on, namely teaching to read."

*Sponsored Reading Failure* (Education Unit, Warlingham Park School, Chelsham Common, Warlingham, Surrey: £5.50)

