# APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES IN READING UNFAMILIAR ENGLISH TEXTS

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**Abstract:** Reading is a skill mastered and gained through mindful effort. It is a complex skill, made up of different processes happening simultaneously through implementing various strategies used interchangeably. This article briefly discusses the approaches, models, and strategies in reading, especially reading unfamiliar texts..
**Keywords:** *Reading Approaches, Reading Strategies, Reading Instruction, Unfamiliar Text*

Dealing with English reading text successfully is important for language learner. However, reading is a skill that is mastered through efforts, not automatically possessed by EFL readers although they learn English for years. All readers, including EFL readers, no matter how good or how poor they are, will eventually deal with unfamiliar and difficult academic reading text, even in no time such as in several standard reading comprehension tests. This article briefly discusses approaches, models, and strategies that EFL readers can implement when encountering unfamiliar texts.

## Paradigmatic Approaches of Reading Processes

Reading processes, both in first language and second language, are approached by four paradigmatic approaches: bottom-up, top-down, interactive approach, and new literacy approaches (Hudson, 2011). Bottom-up approach explains how readers build meaning from letters, words, phrases, clauses and sentences to reconstruct the writer's original idea and to understand the text. It focuses on readers' ability to rapidly processing the text and identifying words. Theories to support this approach are from Gough who states that reader passes through a reading process by scanning the serial of letters one by one (comprehension by recognition), and LaBerge and Samuels who state that reader, at the certain level, automatically decodes and comprehends the text at the same time (Gough, 1972; Hudson, 2011; LaBerge& Samuels, 1974).

Top-down approach explains how readers apply their background knowledge to understand and to create meaning which is personally and contextually sensible. Theories developed under this approach are Goodman's psycholinguistic guessing game to explain how readers bring their past experiences and general conceptual background to understand the reading text, and Smith's theory of a person's background knowledge to construct meaning when reading (Goodman, 1976; Hudson, 2011; Tracey & Morrow, 2006; Smith, 2012).

Interactive approach focuses on how readers interact with the information in the text, and how their background knowledge is involved during comprehension. Tracey and Morrow, alsoHudson, discuss two models of reading process which have been developed under this approach, the Rumelhart Model and the Stanovich Model.

The Rumelhart's Interactive Model, as re-explained by Tracey and Morrow and Hudson, claims that reading actually consists of simultaneous processes of syntactic, semantic, orthographic, and lexical information. All these processes allows for higher level and lower level processes to interact on the visual input simultaneously (Hudson, 2011; Rumelhart, 1977, 1994; Tracey & Morrow, 2006).

Stanovich who states that those processes are not only interactive and nonlinear, but also compensatory later expands this model (Stanovich, 1980). For Stanovich, if one of the processors fail to make meaning from the text, then the other processors will compensate for it. For example, our syntactic processor can still work effectively to understand the meaning of words although some of the alphabets in the words are blurred, missing, or scrambled (insufficient data) (Hudson, 2011, Stanovich, 1980, Tracey & Morrow, 2006).

The last approach in reading process is new literacy approach, which focuses on how multiple literacies embedded in social construction and societal contexts rather than reading skills in isolation. Bloome, for example, theorizes that reading is a social process, requires and examines author-reader interaction as well as social relationships among people during a reading event (Bloome, 1993). Parry believes that reading process is affected by the role of the text in daily life and by the status relationships implicit in the reading text itself (Parry, 1993). Furthermore, Street focuses on the concept of literary

practices to specify cultural practices associated with reading in given contexts (Street, 1993).

All these approaches capture important aspects of reading process. Bottom-up approach focuses on cognitive processing needed in changing images on text into meaning; top-down approach focuses on reading activity as an applied ability in society and the world; interactive approach focuses on how bottom-up and top-down interact each other in comprehending the text, and new literacy approaches focus on how social context influences reader in comprehending the text. By understanding these approaches, we can understand the important aspects covered in the process of reading and comprehending the text.

## Strategies in Reading Familiar and Unfamiliar Texts

Practically, there are two ways of approaching reading text: knowledge-based processing strategies and text-based processing strategies. Knowledge-based processing strategies are a way to approach reading text using a set of metacognitive strategies in reading such as making predictions, sequencing strategies to find out main idea and supporting details, using various skills to complete tasks related to reading text, monitoring their comprehension, and evaluating whether the reading text fits their reading needs (Dori, Avargil, Kohen, & Saar, 2018; Rahmati &Widowati, 2017; Batang, 2015; Ahmadi, Ismail & Abdullah, 2013).

Meanwhile, text-based processing strategies used by readers to make sense of a text. These strategies include making meaning from linguistic knowledge such as grammatical, semantic, or phonic knowledge to recognize unknown words, guessing the context from making connections between paragraphs, and re-reading (Hudson, 2011; Taylor, 1979).

Then, how do good readers read difficult and unfamiliar reading text? The differences between good reader and poor reader in using metacognition strategies to understand reading text have become the center of investigation for researchers. The results shows that, compared to poor readers, good readers have more various strategies when reading; deliberately choose strategies to fit reading purposes; use more strategies in reading; and rely on their prior knowledge when understanding reading text (Alsheikh&Mokhtari, 2011; Hudson, 2011; Iwai, 2011; Lee, 2011; Brown, 1980; Taylor, 1979).

However, Taylor explains that good reader, somehow, also uses text-based strategies when reading unfamiliar text instead of using knowledge-based strategies (Taylor, 1979). Both good and poor readers will use text-based processing strategies to try to understand unfamiliar text since the use of prior knowledge is very restricted. Hence, to make us an advanced language learner, readers are supposed to use these two ways of reading approach purposefully. Likewise, Hudson claims that low-knowledge high-ability readers do not score better than low-knowledge low-ability readers are in immediate recalling process (Hudson, 2011), thus readers must strengthen our text-based processing strategies.

Readers can implement two strategies to read unfamiliar reading text: input enhancement (Stringer, 2018; Cho & Ma, 2016) and graphic organizers (Kurniaman, Zufriady, Mulyani, &Simulyasih, 2016; Praveen &Rajan, 2013; Montanero& Lucero, 2012; Lee, 2011). Enhancement is a strategy that is effective to help readers remembering the details in the reading text for short-time period. Techniques under this strategy are *highlighting the main ideas*, *underlining topic sentences*, *circling content words* such as proper nouns or verbs, and *writing important words in the margin of the text*.

The other strategy, graphic organizers, is effective to help readers remembering the detail in the text for long-time period. By transferring information into flowchart, table, map, or diagram, readers can train their mind and memory to remember the information from the reading text (Kurniaman, Zufriady, Mulyani, &Simulyasih, 2016; Praveen &Rajan, 2013; Montanero& Lucero, 2012; Lee, 2011).

## Schema: Making Unfamiliar Reading Text Familiar

The previous section already explains that both good readers and poor readers face difficulties when reading unfamiliar texts, and knowledge-based strategiesare used interchangeably with text-based strategies. Besides these knowledge-based and text-based strategies, readers need to learn how to keep information from unfamiliar text in the memory. This process is very important since it is the foundation of building readers' blocks of knowledge.

Blocks of knowledge, which is popular as schema, is important to facilitate readers, especially EFL readers, in understanding a text, getting the message conveyed by the text, and dealing with the underlying message which is implied within the

text itself (Alsheikh & Mokhtari, 2011; Jufri, 2014; Liu, 2015).

Schema, which is believed to be divided into two broad categories: content schema and formal schema (Hudson, 2007) or plus one, linguistic schema (Yang, 2010), should be activated to get the whole meaning of the text. Schema comes not only from previous reading texts, but also enriched by all of readers' experiences in life. What people perceive, experience, feel, or even witness others' experiences, all are built in different blocks. These blocks are ready to be used in understanding a new knowledge.

When readers comprehend something, it is the moment where the schema interacts with the new knowledge. However, what will happen if readers do not have schema at all about the new knowledge that they have to comprehend, such as unfamiliar reading text? There will be no process of interaction between previous and new knowledge, but what will happen is the process of building new blocks of knowledge, building new schema. The length and result of this process depends on how a person tries his or her best to build the blocks, and will be shown by his or her performance or responses on the new knowledge itself (Rumelhart, 1980; Smith, 2012). The more complex the knowledge that we possess; the better our comprehension will be.

## Reading Strategies in Pre, During, and Post Reading

In classroom, reading activities are generally subdivided into three phases: pre reading, during reading and post reading. Before emerging into these three phases, EFL readers must know the reading condition they are into, are they reading for getting general knowledge or for pleasure (extensive reading), or to understand literal meaning or rhetorical relationships (intensive reading)? Recognizing reading condition is significant to determine which strategies are appropriate to apply (Brown, 2007).

In *pre-reading phase*, EFL readers can activate their background knowledge or schemata by finding several familiar words in the reading text, trying to understand the text from the title and sub-headings, and looking for pictures/tables/charts/diagrams. At the same time, EFL readers can determine the purpose of our reading by considering the time available, whether it is to answer reading text/assessment or it is to get general knowledge.

In *during-reading phase*, especially in extensive reading, EFL readers can use top-down approach with the skills applied such as skimming and scanning. Readers can check and recheck their understanding by asking WH questions to themselves and trying to find the answers within the text (i.e. understanding figurative language). Meanwhile, if readers have to answer questions under limited time such as in reading test, they can reading the text and directly jump to the questions section, and then scan the text to find the answers.

On the other hand, if the readers are in intensive reading activity, they can apply bottom-up approach in during-reading phase. Since they should construct meaning from grammatical units in reading text, it means that they should rely on their L1 and L2 knowledge and proficiency (bottom-up approach) and smartly guess what is meant by the text (Hudson, 2011).

In *post reading phase*, EFL readers have to make sure that the new knowledge from the reading text gives effect on them. Firstly, to save the new knowledge in their short-term memory, they can summarize the text and list difficulties they encounter when reading based their reading notes. Secondly, they would like to discuss the text with their peer or share it to make sure that the new knowledge is saved in their long-term memory.

## Implications for Reading Instruction

EFL teachers must pay attention to the instruction in reading classroom activities. The instruction must be carefully crafted by taking into accounts the reading approaches, models, and strategies to implement in the phases of reading activities, especially when introducing unfamiliar text or reading topic to students.

The body of research on paradigmatic approaches of reading processes present at least four paradigms: bottom-up, top-down, interactive, and new literacy. The instruction designed must be based on the paradigm that is suitable with the condition of reading nowadays and the needs of EFL readers. All paradigms can be intertwined as a theoretical framework in designing reading instruction, especially for reading unfamiliar text.

Before reading, when introducing unfamiliar reading text or topic, it is crucial for EFL teachers to create context for students first. Teachers can explain the background or setting of the text, the author's biography, where this text is often found and in what situation, and many more.

As students read, when they encounter difficult or unknown words or terms, teachers can help them to build meaning from letters, words, phrases, clauses, and sentences they are already familiar. Another assistance including

asking readers to identify ideas and highlights repeating nouns or verbs in the text, pay attention to the graphics, tables, images, author's illustrative style such as examples or other writing styles, and imagine their experiences when reading texts with similar topics or if they themselves ever have similar experience with what they read in the text.

After reading, EFL teachers must monitor students' comprehension to check whether their schema are successfully built during reading activities. Ask them to define the new words they get from the text, re-explain the text, or re-read the text to see whether this time the text is felt more familiar to them or not.

Reading instruction in the classroom must be able to facilitate students' process of building their schema as they read and encounter new information. Furthermore, EFL teachers must teach students reading strategies explicitly. One option to teach reading strategies explicitly is by modeling the implementation of reading strategies when reading to the students.

**Conclusion**

Reading is a skill mastered and gained through mindful effort. It is a complex skill, made up of different processes happening simultaneously through implementing various strategies used interchangeably.In order to successfully teaching reading to EFL learners, reading instruction must be designed by taking into account the paradigms of reading processes, the models of reading process, the phases of reading activities, and the reading strategies.

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