CHAPTER III

READING AND THE EFL LEARNER

As pointed out in the last chapter, reading was once considered to be an act of identifying, deciphering and decoding written language and translating it into the spoken language. In the 1950s and the 1960s the pre-eminence of the structuralist view of language led to a preoccupation with vocabulary and structures. It was believed that text has meaning and that we can identify the meaning within the text itself, the words on the page. All that is needed is linguistic knowledge. Attention was therefore focused on the text to determine those elements of language which caused difficulties for EFL readers.

Whatever the reading process, the reader must engage with the text. A considerable body of research exists which has examined the text in detail and related its nature to the reading process. The study of text readability has a considerable history. Even in the last decade when attention moved to reading skills rather than language practice, concern with the linguistic accessibility of text continued as is evident from the studies made by Berman (1984) and Williams and Dallas (1984). This concern has obvious affinities with text 'readability'. Klare (1974) gives a review of the various readability formulae, the input to
which consists of linguistic features of the text. Although readability formulae as such are only occasionally involved in the EFL context, the concept of readability in a general sense is implicit in all discussions of comprehension in EFL.

The variables studied in most readability research have been linguistic, that is, the studies have tried to find the contribution of both vocabulary and structure to text difficulty. The typical readability study takes a range of passages and determines their 'difficulty' for a range of readers. The difficulty is determined by means either of multiple choice questions or, more recently, cloze tests, and then attempts are made to find the best predictor or group of predictors of text difficulty by statistical means. As far as linguistic difficulties are concerned, the passages are usually analysed in terms of their linguistic units: words, structures, clauses, sentence relationships and rhetorical organisation.

The variables that have emerged as the best predictors of difficulty have proved to be related to word difficulty, and to complexity of sentence structure. Word difficulty may relate to infrequency of occurrence, and has been indexed either by reference to frequency lists, or by reference to word length, usually measured in number of syllables, since it is believed that longer words tend to be
less frequent and therefore might be expected to cause processing problems.

The second predictor of reading difficulty that readability research has established is sentence complexity. It is said that a complex sentence is more difficult to comprehend than a simple sentence. A variety of devices has been suggested to measure sentence complexity ranging from a simple count of the number of words in a sentence to the number of transformations required to produce the surface string from a posited deep structure (See Chomsky, 1965).

One typical readability formula is the Fog Index whose formula is

\[
\frac{\text{No. of words}}{\text{No. of sentences}} + \frac{\text{No. of 3-syllable words}}{\text{No. of words} \times 100} \times .4
\]

The result is interpreted as follows:

12 - = easy
13-16 = undergraduate
16+ = postgraduate

Similarly, we have McLaughlin SMOG index (1969) and Fry readability estimate (Fry, 1963, 1964, 1977). There are other formulae as well. Their rationale, construction and
validity are practically the same. The rationale, of course, corresponds to the layman's view of difficulty of text that simple English is written in short easy sentences with not too many unfamiliar and long words.

More illuminating research into the causes of difficulty with text has been carried out recently with a view to making the task of the foreign language learner easy. These studies have been influenced by our new awareness of the nature of language which has shifted focus from form to meaning, decoding to meaning-making processes, and sentence to utterance. Texts have been studied to find those features which make the processing of texts for meaning a difficult task for foreign language learners. Yet most of these, too, are concerned with decoding.

It has been said that too many unfamiliar words pose the biggest problem to EFL learners in comprehending texts. However, as Nuttall (1982:65) observes, it is more useful to think of new lexical items, rather than new words, as the things that make reading comprehension difficult. Lexical items of all kinds pose reading comprehension problems. A lexical item is not always a word—and not always a content word. It can be new words or phrases, new uses of familiar words, or new idiomatic combinations (such as phrasal verbs), linking devices, and discourse markers. Thus a lexical item can be termed as any word or group of
words with a meaning that needs to be learnt as a whole. Words with several meanings, sub-technical vocabulary, super-ordinates, hyponyms, idioms, metaphors, metonymy, and irony are some of the features of language that have been found to pose problems for our learners.

Any word that has more than one meaning (homonym) is bound to cause trouble to the inexperienced and there are several such words in all languages. In English, for example, such a common word as 'bank' may become a problem in reading comprehension. Similarly, idioms are another stumbling block. We use the term 'idiom' to mean a lexical item consisting of several words with a meaning that cannot be deduced from the meanings of the individual words, e.g. 'beside oneself' 'see through' etc. Much problem arises with the idioms composed of simple words, each of which the student believes he understands. Williams and Dallas (1984:199) find that idiomatic expressions cause immense difficulty. The probable reason is that unless the learner already knows the meaning of the expression as a whole, he attacks it word-by-word. But piecing together these individual jigsaw parts does not produce intelligible meaning.

Metaphor, metonymy and similar kinds of transferred meaning are also potential problems. Like idioms, they do
not mean what they at first glance seem to mean, e.g. 'galloping inflation' and 'bear hammering' at a stock exchange.

Attempts to study the possible linguistic difficulties of foreign language learners beyond the sentence level have led to an examination of rhetorical organization of written texts. Studies by Kintsch and Van Dijk (1978), Meyer (1975), Rumelhart (1977) and Thorndyke (1977) have shown that the global organization of a narrative text can influence recalls of the text.

This approach has been viewed as a part of readability studies and also as an attempt to validate the advice given by pedagogical rhetoricians (McCrimmon, 1963 and Hodges and Whitten, 1962) for narratives and description of processes respectively, with regard to organization. That is, just as readability studies have investigated the role of word length or syntactic complexity, this approach examines another language variable, viz. the organization of the statements or propositions making up a text. From another point of view, the approach has been seen as an attempt to validate the advice given by traditional rhetoricians with regard to organization. This approach brings together readability studies and pedagogical rhetoric, and has been used both for simplifying reading text and for the teaching of writing and material production.
It has been found that certain types of text organizations are difficult to recall while some others are easy. Meyer (1975) embedded the same paragraph in two different texts: in one it was the solution of a problem-solution type of organization and in the other text as one of a number of items in a listing organization. She found that when appearing as a solution, the text was recalled significantly better.

In recent years further studies in this area have been made by Marenghi and Frydenberg (1980), Urquhart (1984), Carrell (1984), and Richgels, et.al. (1987). Urquhart investigated two organizational principles: time order and space order. He concluded that there was every reason to believe that a non-organized text would be more difficult to read and recall than the non-linear text.

Bever (1970) suggests that the frequent sequence of animate noun-verb-noun is heuristically assigned the case roles of agent-action-object and this frequently results in misinterpretations of text. What is suggested is that readers develop strategies for handling particular types of linguistic organization which cause problems when the expectancy is not confirmed by the ongoing text.
Just and Carpenter (1980) suggest that readers are constantly attempting to integrate new information with the ongoing text, and that such integration is facilitated where a linking relation can be made. It is thus suggested that explicit connections across text might aid the reader in his processing and, conversely, their lack will pose problems.

Cooper (1984: 122) has also examined the reading comprehension problems of non-native readers of English who enter tertiary education. He compares what he calls 'practised' and 'unpractised' readers and examines the linguistic features of texts that might be thought to pose problems. He found that lexis is a greater source of difficulty in reading than structure. The features of lexis and structures examined by him were not the traditional ones examined in readability studies. He chose the following five areas for his study as these make a progression from morpheme to sequences of sentences:-

1. common affixes in academic texts
2. word meaning in context
3. syntactic features (viz. tense, aspect, modality, non-finite clauses and conditional clauses)
4. grammatical and lexical cohesion viz. reference, substitution, ellipsis, repetition, synonymy, hyponymy)
5. inter-sentential connections (matching, contrast and logical sequence).
Cooper found that the features that discriminated most clearly between practised and unpractised groups were

a. hypothetical condition;
b. lexical cohesion (in particular hyponymy) and cataphoric reference; and
c. inter-sentential relationships (all items).

He found both the groups insecure and inconsistent with

a. syntactic features (tense, aspect, modality and non-finite clauses, and
b. grammatical and lexical cohesion (anaphoric reference).

The unpractised readers were found to be weak in all the other items.

These features have been found to pose problems to foreign language readers in their understanding of the meaning carried by syntactical components (Berman, 1984:139). Ruth A. Berman has investigated the nature of the problems posed to foreign language readers by the syntax. According to her, efficient foreign language readers must rely—in part, though not exclusively—on syntactic devices to get at text meaning. She also claims that unsuccessful reading, like all linguistic decoding, requires the reader to extract the semantic gist of the language material confronting him. In order to get at the basic propositional content of a sentence, readers must be
able to process the following interrelated components of sentence structure:-

1. constituent structure—what the parts of a sentence are, and how they interrelate hierarchically;

2. structural items—function words and affixes which serve as markers of grammatical relations and of constituent and rhetorical structures; and

3. dependencies—relations expressed between discontinuous elements such as *so* and *that* in the sentence, "So widespread had the habit of reading the Bible in English become that official steps were taken to combat it."

If the reader fails to manipulate these interrelated components, he will fail to understand the meaning.

Moreover, Berman claims that processing of these interrelated components may be complicated by perceptual factors such as 'heaviness' and 'opacity'. By 'heaviness' she means constructions which extend the basic NV(N) structure so that one or more of the sentence constituents is 'heavy', containing many sub-parts of embedding or modification. Thus 'heaviness' is not due to linear length but is due to the amount and depth of information which the reader must store in memory in moving from one constituent to the next, and how hard the transition becomes as a result. Heaviness may also occur where the basic NVN or 'kernel' structure is violated. By 'opacity' she means the problems created by certain kinds of cohesive devices such as
deletion -- by means of gapping, lack of relative pronouns in English relative clauses, etc.

substitution -- use of one or verbal do as grammatical substitutes for repeated lexical material, as well as of lexical substitution.

Berman also refers to another source of difficulty. In English, as in other languages, a single grammatical formative may perform various functions as, for example, that as a relative marker and as a noun clause subordinator; one as pronominal substitute and as quantifier, etc.

Berman thus emphasizes the importance of 'transparency' --the opposite of her term 'opacity'-- of the kernel sentence. Her conclusion is that text becomes difficult to process when its language displays structural properties unknown to the students, or which contrast with their native language.

As Alderson and Urquhart (1984:157) rightly state Berman's approach differs from the traditional readability studies in that it is aimed at the difficulties of syntax of utterances rather than sentences. A sentence-based approach often seems to entail a belief that a particular syntactic structure will always cause difficulty. For example, the passive has been held to be simply more
difficult than the active. Berman's approach seems to argue that syntax only becomes a problem when it interacts with other factors in the utterances.

Various suggestions have been made to help the foreign language reader. These can be put broadly under two categories: (1) improving the text so as to bring it within the reach of the reader; and (2) equipping the reader with skills necessary to cope with the text. The two approaches are not, of course, mutually exclusive.

IMPROVING THE TEXT

Various techniques have been suggested from time to time to improve the reading materials so that these can be brought within the reach of the reader. Almost all of these techniques derive their origin from our understanding of the reading comprehension problems of foreign language learners described above. One of these techniques is called 'simplification' of texts.

Ever since 1926, when Longman published a simplified edition of Robinson Crusoe, reduced texts in various forms have appeared in the foreign language situation. The term 'simplification' has been used differently by different people. Alan Davies (1984) makes distinction between simple language, simplified language and simplification. 'Simple
language' is a paradox as linguistics accords equal status to all languages. 'Simple language' does not mean it has a less complicated structure than other languages; it only means that it is used for a very narrow range of functions; that its use is restricted to a few activities. One example of a simple language is a pidgin. Ferguson (1971) extends the pidgin analogy to 'simplified language' in which speakers deliberately simplify their normal language in order to make communication possible with certain interlocutors. According to him there are two kinds of simplified language: one in which the functions are restricted (as for example, mother's talk to children or teacher's language to second language learners); the other in which the language forms are reduced (as in baby talk and foreigner talk). 'Simplification', like simple language and simplified language, is also concerned with ease of communication. The former two may or may not be deliberate products but simplification certainly is deliberate. It belongs to the special class of deliberate production which is labelled 'pedagogic'. In fact, what particularly distinguishes simplification is its unique pedagogic purpose. Simplification of reading material, as Tommola (1979) puts it, refers to the selection of a restricted set of features from the full range of language resources for the sake of pedagogic efficiency: "The code is not
affected, the learners are not presented with a simpler language system, but with a restricted sample of the full system."

A more general view of simplification, as Davies points out, is that it is used to make information available to an audience other than the one originally intended. What is meant by simple, therefore, according to this view, is determined by the needs of the audience even though this may require a longer text or even, on occasion, one with more complex grammatical structure and fewer common words.

For our purpose here we use the term 'simplification' to mean texts derived from original texts by means of various deliberate simplification procedures.

Simplified materials often find acceptance because it is said that they prepare the reader for eventual control of "authentic texts". Lautamatti (1978:98), for example, argues that "simplified texts are used in the teaching of foreign language reading comprehension as a ladder towards less simplified and finally authentic texts".

* Authentic, like simplified has many definitions. The phrase 'Authentic texts' was first used in the late '70s and early '80s and over the years there have emerged three different interpretations of the phrase. The most widespread refers to a text not specially produced for language learners and it is in this sense that we have used the term here. 
Within the concept of simplification, we can distinguish two approaches, again capable of being combined. First, one can concentrate on simplifying the text itself. This has been done either in terms of some criterion such as readability formula or in terms of eliminating features thought to give rise to particular difficulty for one's target learners. Alternatively, attempts have been made to make the text more accessible to the learners by providing what Williams and Dallas (1984:199) refer to as 'back-up devices'. One can also use a combination of all these processes of simplification. In the pages below we will examine in some detail some of these techniques of simplification.

Till the '70s simplification was broadly done on the principles discussed by Michael West (1950, 1953, 1964) and A second interpretation of the term comes from Widdowson (1976). He suggests that authenticity resides not in the text but in the interaction of reader and text. A reader's response is authentic if this response corresponds to the intentions of the writer as expressed through linguistic and rhetorical conventions. An example of inauthentic response would be to read a literary text for practising vocabulary and structures.

Another definition of 'authentic' comes from Alan Davies (1984). His view is that authenticity is defined not by interaction of reader and writer, but solely by reference to the reader's response. In this view any text that the reader finds appropriate to his/her purpose is 'authentic' for that reader (Williams and Moran, 1989:219).
Bright and McGregor (1970), viz. lexical counts. Texts were graded lexically and syntactically for different levels of learners on the basis of these principles of simplification.

Simplification of texts based on readability formulae was limited to simplification at sentence level and it considered word length and sentence length as causes of text difficulty. Material writers were advised to substitute 'simpler' words for difficult ones and to remove syntactic complexity to simplify texts.

There is another technique of simplification and it focuses attention on text organisation beyond sentence level. In order to examine text organization beyond sentence level, it takes into consideration rhetorical ordering of texts (Urquhart, 1984:160). It is based on two considerations: one, that organizational structures can be varied so that readers focus on and remember particular parts of the text (Meyer, 1975); and two, that certain organizational structures are easier to read and recall and that it is possible to produce one 'textualization' or version of a text which is easier to learn than another textualization of the 'same' message (Clark 1975; Urquhart, ibid.). This approach thus takes up another language variable, viz., the organization of the statements, or propositions making up a text, instead of word length or...
syntactic complexity. Some of the rhetorical patterns examined for ease of reading and recall are time-order for narration and description of processes, space-ordering for physical description (Trimble, 1972) and problem-solution type (Meyer, 1975). According to this technique of simplification, existing texts are altered to conform to time or space ordering or problem-solution pattern depending upon the given text. Some other principles of organization facilitating quantitative recall are cause-and-effect, principles and examples, generalizations and justifications, focal and support, and classifications from left-to-right, outside to inside, bigger parts to smaller parts, main body to attachments, largest to smallest, and more general to less general.

BACK-UP DEVICES

Some researchers have suggested another technique of making difficult texts more accessible to readers. Williams and Dallas (1984:199) term it 'back-up devices'. Some of these back-up devices suggested at word level are printing in-text L1 translations of unfamiliar words and expressions, providing glossary of words in the margin or at the bottom of the page or at the end of the text, using familiar examples and illustrations to write definitions in context, and instead of giving definitions solely in
words, enabling learners to form a mental picture of what is being read. Williams and Dallas argue that

one reason for adding in-text translations was simply that a study of pupils' books in use showed that this was what the pupils themselves did anyway, and therefore printing the translations of unfamiliar words will reduce their dependence on the dictionary, and so make their reading faster and more pleasurable.

(Williams & Dallas, 1984:204)

According to Alderson and Urquhart (1984:211) the reason given for incorporating in-text L1 translations, namely that this represented a formalization of what the students did themselves, is of particular interest in their discussion of back-up devices. They argue that

'much of the advice offered to students on handling unfamiliar vocabulary, e.g. identifying roots and affixes, guessing using rhetorical clues, etc. seems to depend heavily on input from applied linguistics: there is seldom any sign of input from observation of student's own behaviour. The danger is that if the gap between the advice offered and his own practice is too great, the student will decide to ignore the advice as being unrealistic. Hence the value of approaches based on observation of student's own practice.

(Alderson and Urquhart 1984:211)

Another form of 'back-up devices' can be found in James M.Royer, et.al. (1984:65) in their attempt to control a reader's intent while reading a text. These devices are
(1) presenting readers with learning objectives that specify what is to be acquired from the text,

(2) inserting questions into the text, and

(3) asking readers questions that require more than the recall of specific information what they term, 'higher-order questions'.

Reviewing the learning objectives research Royer et.al. conclude that learning objectives have been found significantly to enhance at least intentional learning, if not incidental learning, from a text, provided that (1) the objectives are clearly stated and are each related to only a few specific text-sentences, (2) the students are convinced that studying the objectives is of academic value, (3) the students are not already highly motivated to master course material, and (4) the objectives direct student attention to information that may not be immediately seen as being important.

Similarly, inserted questions, that is, questions inserted throughout the body of a text, have been found to affect text learning. Research on inserted questions has demonstrated that pre-questions may enhance intentional learning and that post-questions may facilitate both intentional and incidental learning. Such inserted questions have already appeared in EFL teaching materials, notably in the Focus series and in Reading and Thinking in English.
Alderson and Urquhart (1984:211) remark that the incorporation of such devices in a text would seem to have advantages over an exclusive reliance on text simplification:

Firstly, it seems to give more acknowledgement to the learning aspects of the reading situation, e.g. that students need to increase their vocabulary and must be exposed to unfamiliar items. A second advantage is that since the text used can be less 'simplified' and more 'authentic', the transition from adapted to non-adapted texts may be made easier.

However, one danger of giving learning objectives or inserting questions may be that it may lead to learner's dependence on these devices so much so that if he does not receive these devices he may learn very little on his own. In any case, one does not get these back-up devices in real life situations and hence it would be desirable to find ways to encourage readers to develop their own purposes in reading. Back-up devices can be a first step in that direction and may be withdrawn slowly and steadily so that the learner learns to form his own questions.

These studies have led us to question the so-called 'simplification' process. It is pointed out that simple and difficult are not always polar opposites: sometimes they are and sometimes they are not.
In the words of Alan Davies (1984:181) "it is not at all obvious what is simple language and what is difficult language." It is also asked how valid it is to rely on word and sentence length only as estimates of text difficulty. It is argued that shorter and more frequent words are not necessarily simpler to understand as, for example, more frequent words like 'get' can become loaded with so many denotations that they cease to have any meaning other than a contextual one. Moreover, as both Mountford (1975) and Davies (op.cit.: 181) point out, such simplification is not without its hazards. Making a text syntactically less complex may actually have the effect of distorting the 'message' or, indeed, increasing difficulties in other aspects of the text. Grellet (1981:7) also makes this point when she says that simplifying a text often results in increased difficulty if there is a reduction in the number of linguistic and extralinguistic cues. Again, it is said that there is no absolute index of simplicity. Simplification of texts must be related to audience comprehension. Bransford et.al. (1984:28) point out that what renders a text simple is not necessarily the language but whether the information can be related to the background knowledge of the reader. And since each reader's background knowledge is likely to be to some extent unique, any general form of simplification would seem to be impossible.
The intellectual level of most simplified material was also attacked (Frechette, 1975). Saunders (1973) demanded original material and less rigid grading. Alderson and Urquhart (1984: 198) rightly observe that we must sympathize to some extent with those who insist that only 'authentic' texts should be used, given the stilted unnaturalness of many made-up 'teacher-texts'. Widdowson (1978) also argues that a 'simplified' version "is not genuine discourse; it is a contrivance for teaching language."

Some of the criticism made above in respect of 'simplified' texts applies to other simplification processes as well. In the words of Alderson and Urquhart (1984:177) "there are at least two problems: the first is methodological. How are we to determine the causes of difficulty? What do we take as evidence of understanding, and what textual features do we seek to isolate?" Urquhart's definition of reading success or text understanding is reading speed and quantitative free recall. He uses reading speed, as defined by the number of intruded words subjects could identify in a given period, and also the number of textual units recalled in a free recall task. Others have used multiple choice tests of understanding, or cloze, or gap-filling tests, or completing tasks, activities, and so on, as a means of getting a measure of reading success.
The second problem is that the product of reading will vary according to the reader's purpose and background knowledge. If comprehension varies from reader to reader, it is not clear how the 'causes of difficulty' in the text can be satisfactorily identified or predicted. Readability studies inevitably ignore the reader, and the important variables he brings to the reading event. They treat the readers as in some sense homogeneous in background knowledge, purpose, motivation, etc. in order to examine text variables.

Another charge particularly against this technique of simplification is that this paradigm seems to believe that it is possible to produce different versions of the same 'message' and not change the text's meaning. As Alderson & Urquhart (op.cit.:179) argue "whilst there must be some sense, at present highly illusive, in which that is true, it must also be the case that different textualizations may well mean different things."

It is also argued that one problem with this process of producing doctored texts is that it is difficult to change a text on one level without affecting difficulty on other levels.

Another drawback of simplification is brought out by Widdowson (1978). He makes distinction between what he
calls 'simplified versions' and 'simple accounts'. Simplified versions, he suggests, are "passages which are derived from genuine instances of discourse by a process of lexical and syntactic substitution." It is a simplification of the language code, simplifying usage. Altering a text according to fixed language-directed rules such as 'replace polysyllable words with monosyllable ones' or 'decompose complex sentences into separate simple sentences' constitutes simplification of usage. A simple account, on the other hand, "represents not an alternative textualization of a given discourse but different discourse altogether."

A writer who simplifies by using all the linguistic means at his disposal to clarify the referential and propositional meanings of a particular text will be, in Widdowson's terms, simplifying use. Widdowson makes it clear that simplifying 'use' is to be preferred to simplifying 'usage'.

EQUIPPING THE READER

The alternative to simplification is to equip the reader with skills necessary to cope with reading tasks in real life situations. Efforts have been made to identify what these skills are and to categorize them systematically. For this purpose research has focused attention on the process of reading. Studies have been made
to isolate text processing strategies employed by successful and unsuccessful readers through various techniques, such as questionnaires, observations, interviews, learners' diaries, self-introspection, thinking aloud, talk-back, and so on. The aim has been to see if poor readers can be induced to abandon their faulty reading strategies and to learn the strategies used by successful readers.

Carol Hosenfeld (1977) has tried to uncover the kind of strategies students use to solve problems of understanding foreign language texts. She found that high-scorers (called successful readers) tended to: keep the meaning of the passage in mind, read in broad phrases, skip inessential words, guess from context the meaning of unknown words and have a good self-concept as a reader. By contrast, low scorers (called unsuccessful readers) tended to: lose the meaning of sentences as soon as they decoded them, read word-by-word or in short phrases; they rarely skip words, never try to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words but always turn to the glossary for meaning and, if they ever guess, they guess the meaning without regard to context, that is, as though they existed in isolation, and have poor self-concept as a reader.
Hosenfeld (1979) also found that successful readers tended to: (1) identify the grammatical category of words; (2) demonstrate sensitivity to a different word order in the foreign language; (3) examine illustrations; (4) read the title and make inferences from it; (5) use orthographic information (e.g. capitalization); (6) refer to the side gloss; (7) use the glossary as a last resort; (8) look up words correctly; (9) continue if unsuccessful at decoding a word or phrase; (10) recognize cognates; (11) use their knowledge of the world; (12) follow through with a proposed solution to a problem; and (13) evaluate their guesses. Alderson and Urquhart (1984:245) classify these into several types:

- narrowly linguistic, as in identifying the form class of words, recognizing cognates, or chunking strings into phrases. Others are broadly semantic, in that they relate to a reader's attempt to make sense of a text, to keep the meaning of the text in mind whilst solving a particular lexical problem, checking to see if his guess fits into the context, evaluating the sense of his hypotheses. Other strategies might be termed paralinguistic, in that they involve relating the variable information to accompanying visuals, tables, etc. using punctuation and orthographic clues as cues for meaning, and typographic devices like titling and sub-headings.

Hosenfeld (1979,1984) also took up two case studies to see if unsuccessful readers can acquire the strategies of successful readers. The results of the two case studies
prove that, irrespective of economic, social and linguistic background, unsuccessful readers can learn the strategies used by successful readers.

There are many important aspects of Hosenfeld's work:

(1) This work is part of a growing emphasis on *process* rather than *product*. Traditional teaching and research practices emphasized product—the right answer, the desired terminal behaviour. Students' reasons for arriving at an answer could at best only be inferred. This approach, on the other hand, is more interested in ways in which readers approach the problem.

(2) The studies reveal that students clearly need help in learning to read in a foreign language. Unassisted, many students learn strategies that impede their obtaining meaning efficiently from printed texts.

(3) It is found that in some cases a reader's foreign language reading behaviour could be induced by the sort of instruction he has received: either he began reading too early in his language course, or at least he began by reading texts that were far too difficult for him linguistically, because they contained too many unknown words. Alternatively, he may have simply followed his teacher's advice to look up unknown words.
Or the nature of what passes for reading exercises has itself led to his behaviour: the exercises, through comprehension questioning, emphasize the importance of understanding texts in detail, and they are linguistically biased, in the sense that they focus on the language—vocabulary and grammar—of the texts.

(4) The research proves that unsuccessful readers can be made aware of faulty strategies of reading and encouraged to replace them with effective strategies.

A study which gives us an insight into the processing strategies of readers above the sentence level is by Malcolm Cooper (1984:122). He found that practised readers have a large vocabulary and have learnt to understand the meanings of affixes, structural words and 'sub-technical' vocabulary (words which are common across subject areas). Practised readers were also found to attend to grammatical and lexical cohesion (e.g. reference, substitution, ellipsis, repetition, synonymy, hyponymy), intersentential connectors and discourse markers. Cooper concludes:

practised readers have a far greater ability to understand meaning relationships above the sentence level, and that this ability includes an understanding of subordinators, sentence connectors, lexis and other cohesive relationships (described above).

(Cooper, 1984:132)
These findings are corroborated by Ruth A. Berman (1984:139). She has investigated the strategies used by efficient foreign language readers at advanced level in processing meaning carried by syntax. She claims that efficient readers manipulate the interrelated components of sentence structure in order to get at the basic propositional content of a sentence.

It is further claimed that the efficient reader is able to manipulate these interrelated components even though they may be complicated by perceptual factors such as 'heaviness' and 'opacity'. It is said that efficient readers try to recognize the basic parts of a sentence—what constitutes its main and subordinate clauses, what their predicate and arguments are in propositional terms, the SVO of surface syntax, the NVN actor-action-patient semantic relations which, as Bever (1970) argues, are crucial in language perception and decoding. In other words, what Berman suggests is that successful readers somehow manage to get at the core or 'kernel' of more complicated sentences. This in a way is in line with the findings made earlier that "parsing sentences into their natural surface structure constituents clearly facilitates the speed at which sentences can be processed regardless of the grade level or the skill of the reader" (Wood, 1974:21).
In recent years some more techniques have been suggested to overcome the problems caused by text difficulty. Rigg (1981) suggests Language Experience Approach (LEA) to minimize cultural conflicts and interference and to maximize comprehension. LEA is an excellent way to control vocabulary, structure and content. This technique uses the students' ideas and the students' own words in the preparation of beginning reading materials. The students decide what they want to say and how to say it, and then dictate to the teacher, who acts as a scribe. This material is then used in the classroom.

Krashen (1981) suggests what he calls 'narrow reading' to minimize interference from the text. Narrow reading refers to reading that is confined to a single topic or to texts of a single author. Krashen suggests that 'narrow reading', and perhaps narrow input in general, is more efficient for second language acquisition" (Krashen 1981:23).

Carrell and Eisterhold (1988:86) suggest that another possibility of text facilitation is to develop materials along the lines of those proposed by Paulston and Bruder (1976). Paulston and Bruder suggest using texts with local settings and specialized low-frequency vocabulary as, for example, student or local newspapers, pamphlets, brochures, or booklets about local places of interest.
However, nothing can match Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) programme which can prove an excellent activity for EFL readers provided the SSR programme is based on student-selected texts so that they are interested in what they are reading.

Whatever be the merits of these text readability studies and the various measures suggested by them for improving reader's reading comprehension, one thing is evident from them and that is that text readability studies have concentrated only on the formal features of the language and reading problems posed by them. The teaching of reading based on these studies naturally has emphasized what is popularly known as the bottom-up approach for teaching reading comprehension. Thus, these studies could not give any new direction to the teaching of reading; they only helped in perpetuating the traditional classroom practice of teaching decoding.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have presented a survey of research in reading with particular reference to some of the problems encountered by second/foreign language learners of English and the steps suggested to overcome those problems. It will be noticed that the studies have focused by and large on
three elements in reading: the text, the reader and the interaction between the two. Researchers have looked at various features of the printed text, for example linguistic features, discoursal features, text organization, and text content, and how these features of the text pose reading comprehension problems. Research on interaction of reader and text has concentrated on reading style, reading process, and the product of reading. Reading problems and suggestions for improvement have been worked out naturally keeping these elements in mind.

As Alderson and Urquhart (1984:xvi) put it, reading undeniably and incontrovertibly involves two necessary elements: a reader and a text, but a third element is often important and influential, namely the writer. Reading research has studied only the former two and the interaction between them. It has almost ignored the third element and very little has been said about how and why messages in writer's head are turned into text and what their effect is on the printed text and the meaning-making process of the reader. It is to this element in reading that we will turn in our next chapter and try to examine its implications for teaching reading skills and strategies.