

EDITOR'S FOREWORD

THE TOPIC

Ambiguity, multiple reference, polysemy and metaphor are most characteristic of human language. 'One form, one function' may be a convenient teaching standpoint, but in real life no conclusion is more evident than that each form has several functions and each function is carried out by a variety of forms. This is true of the key term in the present collection, 'reading'. Let us briefly consider some plausible contexts:

- (a) Will you do the map-reading, please?
- (b) I can see the sign but I can't read it.
- (c) He's reading Physics at USP.
- (d) I'm sorry, I'll read that again for you.
- (e) He can speak Japanese but can't read it.
- (f) Ferreira Martins is a most expressive reader.
- (g) What do you read into Jorge Amado's early novels?
- (h) She read anxiety and worry in his grey hair and lined face.
- (i) The gypsy read all sorts of things in the palm of his hand.
- (j) I can read the words but I've no idea what the text really means.
- (k) Her latest novel is an excellent read.
- (l) In Indonesia many people don't know the alphabetical order so they have trouble reading the phone book.
- (m) The tape head reads the magnetic tape at $1 \frac{7}{8}$ inches per second.
- (n) He read the paper while waiting.
- (o) 'NO ENTRY' read the sign, so he turned and went back.
- (p) Although he read her note, he didn't realize that she was implicitly taking her leave.
- (q) You have to know how to read between the lines.

Thus far, it seems that reading can be silent (k) or audible (d, f); it can involve lines on a page (e), in a map (a) or on the body (h, i). Reading may involve music, computer data, video signals (m). The subject of the verb may be the location of the text, as opposed to a human agent, too (o). Comprehension may be implied (n) and this may be non-existent (j), for details, main points or for a general overview (n). Problems may be of legibility (b) or of lack of reader's knowledge or skill (e). Comprehension may in some way 'go beyond' the text (g, h, i, p, q); it may involve a critical reaction of acceptability or applicability (f, k). Reading may be comprehensive (k, m) or selective (l, n).

If these multiple meanings of 'reading' are accepted, we may now perhaps consider the 'image' of 'reading' in the usage of the typical literate non-specialist. This, I think, is clearly visible in

(r) She didn't read it properly, but just skimmed it through.

The adverb 'properly' suggests that there may be 'better' and 'worse' types of reading: value judgements have crept into the reading process as well as the text! Reading 'should' in some sense be 'thorough'.

Where does this come from?

In much the same way as lexical items may be classified as 'core' or 'typical' (a well-known example being robins or eagles being typical **birds** and penguins and chickens being considered by most users of language as peripheral birds, perhaps because they don't fly), it may be that language users view **reading** as having the following core meaning:

examining a text and proceeding once only through it, line by line, comprehending 'everything' and remembering most of the content.

Perhaps it is such a core view of reading that allows (r) to be attestable without the linguist's ? or *.

The point of the discussion up to here is to suggest that reading is a much more complex activity than its normally

accepted core usage may imply. I think this fact is shown quite clearly in the various positions taken by the authors of the six texts provided here.

Taken together, they provide a number of indications, from quite different standpoints and therefore at different angles, all of which help to answer the question implied above — What is reading? — and to show that the core meaning in (r), while prevalent, is a misleading red herring, a wild goose chase, a chimera.

Reading is a much more complex, active, interactive, skill-, schema- and strategy-based affair than the casual or the traditional view would imply: one justification for the collection of articles in this issue of *Ilha do Desterro*.

A second reason is the need for work in this important area in a Brazilian context. If reading is interactive, involving the reader's schemata, skills and strategies, it is important to find out how it works, not only in relation to North American college students or schoolchildren (on whom most of the contemporary work has been carried out), but also for Brazilian readers, who can be expected to have different schemata, skills and strategies.

STRUCTURE OF THE COLLECTION

While diverse in emphasis and aims, the six contributions fall into two broad categories.

The articles by Kato, Figueiredo, and Meurer are essentially theoretical: they each take an aspect of reading theory and consider the literature available on the subject, while providing some degree of critical commentary and argumentation. We therefore begin with readability, text organization, and schemata.

The second section, of three papers, contains reports of experimental or descriptive research in reading-related areas. The articles by Carioni, Kleiman, and Célia provide experimental data in the context of English as a foreign language, at

University level.

PRESENTATION

Notes and Appendices are provided by the author(s) of each article at the end of each text. I have taken the liberty of commenting or making other references: this is indicated in each text by an asterisk which refers to a footnote. I hereby apologize to authors and readers for any disruption this may cause in processing the original texts: the excuse is that in so doing I hope to stimulate critical reading and a wider debate of the issues.

A full bibliography is to be found at the end of the volume.

This issue of *Ilha do Desterro* examines reading, but of course only a sub-set of topics of this vast question. A third purpose of the collection is to provide some further ideas for the production of further research into this most important area of daily life and education in Brazil and elsewhere.

Michael R. Scott, October, 1985.