



Developing the general skill of reading in English as a Foreign Language in Cuban Language School

El desarrollo de la habilidad generalizada leer en inglés como lengua extranjera en las escuelas de idiomas cubanas

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Abstract

This article defines and describes the concepts of generalized ability, generalized operations, and operations, as well as the models of how the reading process occurs. It provides the internal structure of the generalized ability to read in English as a foreign language for students of Cuban language schools and the synthetic analytical scale for its evaluation.

Key words: skill, generalized skill, operations, read.

Resumen

En el presente artículo se definen y describen los conceptos habilidad generalizada, operaciones generalizada y operaciones; así como los modelos de como ocurre el proceso lector. En el artículo se aporta la estructura interna de la habilidad generalizada leer en inglés como lengua extranjera para estudiantes de las escuelas de idioma cubanas y la escala sintético analítica para su evaluación.

Palabras clave: habilidad, habilidad generalizada, operaciones, leer.

Introduction

The study of a foreign language is of vital importance from personal and strategic points of view, from the social point of view, it favors the insertion of the individual into society with better professional conditions, whether in the area of tourism, research, international relations, foreign collaboration and the establishment of new friendly relations.

The Ministry of Education in Cuba created in 1961 the School of Languages belonging to the subsystem of Adult Education, with a still present objective, the learning of a foreign language to respond to the individual and collective needs of improvement in this aspect of the workers and to the interests of our country, immersed at that time in plans of social development on a large scale from its opening to the world.

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Currently, due to the transformations that have taken place in our country as a result of scientific-technological and social development, this Education has been immersed in different social programs related to the study of languages, especially for foreign collaboration, so nowadays we talk about Youth and Adult Education. People who present an autonomous nature since they have work experience, family, defined interests, and social life. The public is conditioned by personal and situational factors so they make their own choices considering the experience and the environment in which they live. They do not have much time to learn, so they set their objectives, an aspect that makes them increasingly demanding with the quality of their learning, they know what they want and what they need to learn.

It is for the above reasons that this research project is conceived: "Improvement of communication and its styles from the Saxon formative process".

So, this article is intended to define the inner structure of reading as a general skill in Cuban Language Schools.

Materials and methods

To carry out this investigation, it is necessary to use different kinds of texts and different types of reading, also called methods of reading.

Before delving into the skills involved in the reading process, it is necessary to specify that reading can be valued from two perspectives: as a means and as an end. As the former, it is the use of this verbal activity as a method or technique in language teaching or for other purposes; while as the latter, it is nothing more than the generalized ability to read, which will be the object of study in this section.

There is a regularity in the scientific community of the linguistic area of assuming one of the models of how the reading process occurs. These models, called by some specialists approaches to the study of reading, classify this verbal activity (independently of the divergent taxonomies) into three fundamental groups:

Those who explain the reading process as the execution of steps that begin with the perception of the visual stimuli that appear on the page and culminate with the reconstruction in the reader's mind of the meaning that the author of the text intends to convey. (Ascending models).

Those who explain it as the execution of a series of steps that begin with the formulation of the hypothesis made by the reader about the meaning of the text and then, confirming or rejecting the information as a result of the successive inspections made to the information provided in the text. (Top-down models).

Those who assume an eclectic position, state that the reading process is accomplished through the analytical and dynamic interaction of the information that the reader has about the language and the content of the text, with the information provided by the text itself. (Interactive models).



In this regard, Solé (2017a), p. 26) considers that reading cannot be considered as a process from "top to bottom" nor absolutely from "bottom to top". If it were only from "top to bottom", it would be almost impossible for two people to reach the same conclusion about a reading text; likewise, if reading were exclusively from "bottom to top", there would be no disagreement about the meaning of a text. Nor would personal interpretations based on differences in age or experience be possible.

On the other hand, this same author (2017b), p.22) considers that it is demonstrable that an active reader processes information in various ways, contributing his knowledge and experience, his hypotheses, and his capacity for inference, a reader who remains alert throughout the process, constructing an interpretation and who, if he is objective, will be capable of compiling, summarizing, expanding the information obtained and transferring it to new learning situations.

Hence, reading is a dynamic-participative process in which the subject/reader understands, comprehends, and interprets a written text in correspondence with the dynamics of the text itself in its context.

Results and discussion

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It is then explained how those "models" are present in the reading process and do not constitute, as it is thought, different positions on the same object, but all these "models" are present depending on the type of text and above all, within the action performed by the decoder of the text, which is determined as a generalized ability. Therefore, depending on the objective of the decoding subject or reader, the attitude he assumes, and the type of text, this reader will adopt the different reading operations that will allow him to achieve his objective, which will be reflected in the understanding, comprehension or interpretation of the text read.

To achieve the generalized skill of reading, one must work on the development of general or generalized operations: understanding, comprehension, and interpretation, which in turn are developed by operations. Perhaps, due to the diversity of text definitions and their divergent classifications, there are no unanimous criteria regarding two skills that are present in the decoding process: understanding and comprehending, which constitute generalized operations of the generalized ability to read. These operations constitute, in the scientific community of the linguistic area, an object of controversy because many specialists consider them to be synonyms. In the present text, the aim is to delimit the conceptual frameworks and dimensions of each one.

On the one hand, understanding is considered to mean recognizing or identifying the literal meanings of the lexical units of the text. It also implies the fusion of the meaning of the words into senses and ideas, that is, the associations that the reading arouses and that are based on which to reconstruct the ideas that the sender encoded in the message.

This requires the ability to read with reasonable speed and to group words into semantic groups. Next, the reader must not only attribute literal meanings to words and phrases, the literal sense to sentences, supra-oral units, and paragraphs but must also grasp the literal content of the text.

In the process of understanding, there is the execution of a set of procedures that begin with the perception of the visual stimuli that appear on the page and culminate with the reconstruction, in the reader's mind, of the meaning that the author of the text intends to convey; which from the didactic perspective implies that the student/reader, among other things, can answer the question: What did the sender encode? (Bottom-up models).



On the other hand, the concept of comprehension is considered to be a complex psychological process that includes not only linguistic factors, such as phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic factors but also motivational and cognitive factors. This includes the use of conscious strategies that lead first to decoding the text; then, it presupposes that the reader grasps not only the literal meaning of the words and phrases, or the literal sense of the sentences, of the supra-oratorical units or the paragraph, or of the literal content of the text; but must grasp the meaning, sense and complementary content, which means, among other things, dynamic processing by the receiver/reader, who develops it by establishing coherent connections between his knowledge and the new information provided by the text.

Morles (2022) elucidates that how this processing is carried out during reading is explained by technicians, researchers, and teachers in many different ways. These elucidations have resulted in a wide range of approaches.

The reading process is given in this case as a series of steps that begin with the formulation of the reader's conjecture about the meaning of the text, which is then confirmed or rejected as a result of successive inspections of the information provided in the text; which from the didactic perspective is achieved when, among other things, the student/reader answers, essentially Why would this text be encoded? (top-down models).

Once the generalized reading operations have been defined: understanding and comprehension, it is necessary to specify the generalized operation interpreting according to the logic of the present didactics.

It is considered then that interpreting means locating oneself between parts of a text, it is a more complex activity than understanding or comprehending. It requires the reader to modify his or her location in a sociocultural space, since he or she will have to enter, imaginatively, into the scope of the text and move culturally within it, in addition to choosing the parts or components of the text and hierarchizing what he or she considers, depending on his or her interests, motives or objectives defined by him or her. It also implies being able to form an opinion, extract central ideas, deduce conclusions, predict results, and extrapolate to other contexts where it can be applied, which from a didactic point of view means that the student/reader can answer the question: Why was the text codified?

In this case, the reading process is accomplished through the analytical and dynamic interaction of the information that the reader has about the language and the content of the text, with the information provided by the text itself, where the reader must communicate the decoded and decoded information; which enables him to transform his characteristics, express his subjective world and as a consequence of this interaction move his socializing dimension. (Interactive models).

Once the generalized operations of understanding, comprehending, and interpreting have been defined and specified, it is necessary to go deeper into the methodology established by González (2023, p. 41) for the determination of a generalized ability. It is significant to note that this

methodology not only allows the identification of one generalized skill per subject, as the author states but that the determination of the number of generalized skills depends on the dynamics of the subject and the characteristics of the content. Thus, for example, in the subject of Integrated English Practice, four generalized skills are considered: speaking, writing, listening, and reading. In this work, the generalized skill of reading, its generalized operations, and operations for Language Schools education, which are shown in Figure 1, are specified.

This theory is based on the conception of skill invariant, the referred conception is taken because:

- it allows structuring the skills in the form of a system;
- it is a didactic model for the improvement of skill formation and development;
- it makes possible the determination of generalized skills and therefore it is possible to apply them in a context other than the university context.
- In the theory proposed by González (2023, p. 41) he alludes, among others, to the following procedures for determining generalized skills:
 - the logic of the science to which the subject is related is analyzed;
 - the objectives of the level and grades are analyzed;
 - The logic of science is analyzed in the teaching-learning process of the subject;
 - based on the logic of the subject, the generalized ability is specified.

When analyzing the logic of the science to which the discipline is related, in Cuban Language Schools and how, according to the conception with the invariant of ability, the relation problem - object - the objective of teaching is reiterated at the level of discipline and subject, the general objectives and those of each grade are analyzed. From the analysis of the objectives of the level and each level and of the methodological guidance, the logic of the discipline is specified (in this case, both the objectives of the level and of each level are functions of the development of reading skills). With the foundation of the logic of the process, an assessment is made of which of the skills has the greatest correspondence with it, which constitutes the skill with the highest level of generalization and must also have the characteristic of integrating within itself the system of skills that the discipline contributes to developing in the students.

Logic leads to:

- determining the literal meaning of the text;
- determine the meaning expressed in meanings and ideas;
- locate the micro-context;
- determine the complementary meaning;
- determine the sender's purpose;
- to locate the meso-context;
- determine the inferential meaning;
- infer the socio-cultural space of the text;
- determine the meaning expressed in ideas or images;
- locate the macro-context.

As the logic is taken to the teaching-learning process, the objectives of the subject at the level are analyzed, establishing an analogy between the Integrated English Practice of the entire Language School levels. Integrated English Practice is assumed as a discipline and, as they constitute a subject in each level, the parallelism is established according to the curricular conception assumed.

The logic of the teaching-learning process of Integrated English Practice in Language School education allows assuring that one of the generalized skills of the disciplines is reading, which has the characteristic of integrating the system of skills that Integrated English Practice contributes to develop in the students of this education.

The appropriation of general skills leads to the formation of theoretical thinking (Santiesteban, 2021), that is, to operate with theoretical generalizations, concepts, laws, and general principles, with the essence of knowledge. If only specific skills are developed, the type of thinking that is formed is empirical, on the contrary, the mastery of general skills, oriented to the essence, establishing links and relationships, and applying knowledge to new situations.

According to the definition of the concept of generalized skill, the generalized skill to read is constituted by systematized knowledge; as well as the abilities that allow the subject/reader to understand, comprehend, and interpret any moderately complex teaching and non-teaching text - codified in a common linguistic system between the sender and the receiver, the structure of the ability to read is shown below.

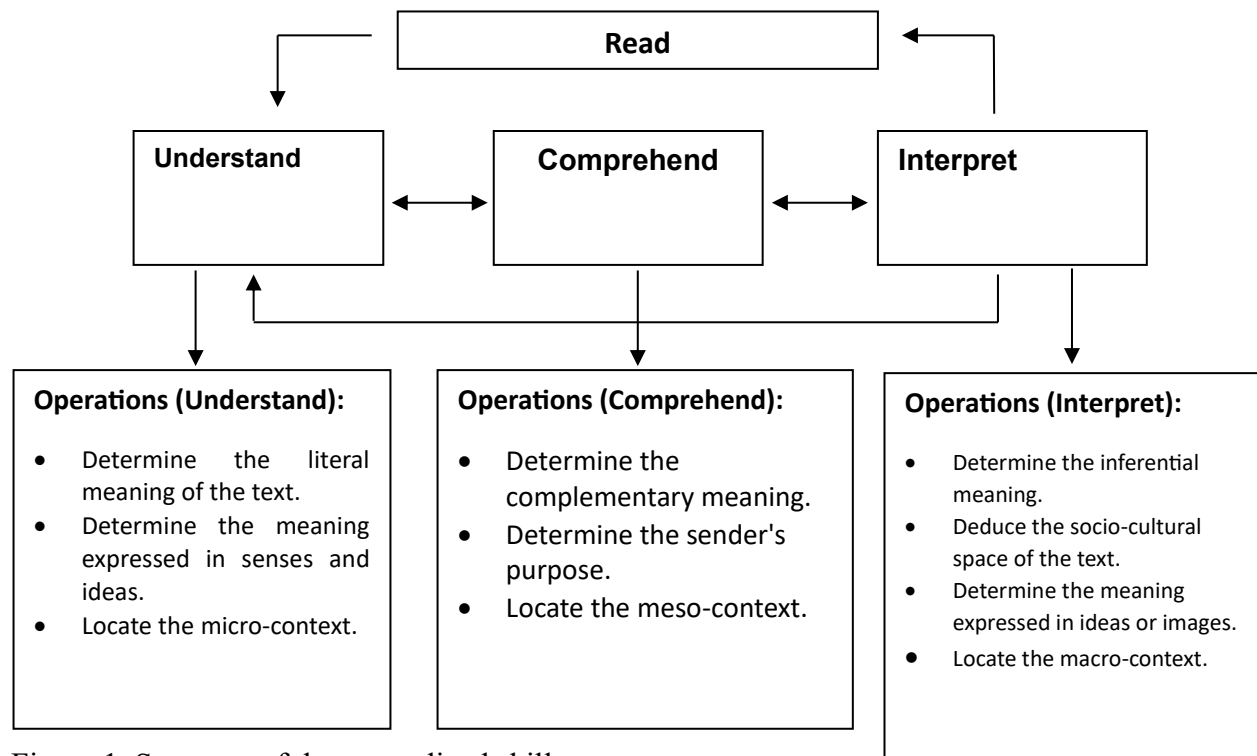


Figure 1. Structure of the generalized skill.



To be able to carry out an objective evaluation of the aforementioned ability, the following is a definition of the operations that make up the aforementioned ability.

1. Determination of the literal meaning of a text

Very high (5): the determination of the literal meaning of the text is very high when the reader, among other things, masters the literal meanings of the lexical units; being able to merge the meaning of the words into senses. In addition, he/she determines the main ideas of the text and externalizes them with fluency and competence.

High (4): the determination of the literal meaning of the text is high when the reader, among other things, knows the literal meanings of the lexical units. He/she can merge the meaning of words into senses and determine the main ideas of the text.

Medium (3): the determination of the literal meaning of the text is medium when the reader, among other things, knows the literal meanings of the main lexical units, which enable him/her to fuse the meaning of words into senses. It determines some of the ideas of the text.

Low (2): the determination of the literal meaning of the text is low when the reader, among other things, knows the literal meaning of some lexical units; however, he/she is not able to fuse the meaning of the words into senses. Hence, he/she does not determine the ideas of the text and does not achieve the meaning of the text; he/she only expresses isolated and incoherent words.

Very Low (1): the determination of the literal meaning of the text is very low when the reader does not respond.

2. Determining the meaning expressed in senses and ideas.

Very high (5): the determination of the meaning expressed in senses and ideas is very high when the reader, among other things, merges the meaning of words into senses and ideas, determines the senses of the text, and shows its significance. Demonstrates competence in performing the activities.

High (4): the determination of meaning expressed in senses and ideas is high when the reader, among other things, determines the senses of the text, merges the meaning of words into senses and ideas, and shows their significance.

Medium (3): the determination of meaning expressed in senses and ideas is medium when the reader, among other things, determines some of the main senses, emphasizes secondary senses, merges the meaning of words into senses and ideas, and shows their significance.

Low (2): the determination of meaning expressed in senses and ideas is average when the reader does not determine any meaning of the text. It expresses textual and incoherent words.

Very Low (1): the determination of the meaning expressed in senses and ideas is very low when the reader does not respond.



3. *Determining the micro-context*

Very high (5): the determination of the micro-context is very high when the reader, among other things, determines the essence of the text, locates the semantic key, and answers the what of the text. Shows competence in the externalization of the decoding of the text. Demonstrates logical sequential correspondence of the cotext with the context.

High (4): the determination of the micro-context is high when the reader, among other things, determines the essence of the text, locates the semantic key, and answers the what of the text. However, it adds secondary elements.

Medium (3): the determination of the micro-context is medium when the reader, among other things, offers the partialized essence and details secondary elements. It tends to answer the what of the text by reproducing textual elements.

Low (2): the determination of the micro-context is low when the reader, among other things, only provides some secondary elements and none of the main ones, is not able to locate the semantic key or answer the what of the text and does it reproductively from the text.

Very Low (1): the determination of the micro-context is very low when the reader does not respond.

4. *Determining complementary meaning*

Very high (5): the determination of complementary meaning is very high when the reader, among other things, can grasp the implicit meaning, sense, and significance that complements what is explicitly expressed; that is when the reader can decode the full range of information implicit in the text, demonstrating competence and fluency.

High (4): the determination of complementary meaning is high when the reader, among other things, determines the implicit meaning and significance that complements what is explicitly expressed. Decodes the range of information implicit in the text.

Medium (3): the determination of complementary meaning is medium when the reader decodes some of the main senses that complement what is explicitly expressed, with greater emphasis on secondary elements.

Low (2): the determination of complementary meaning is low when the reader, among other things, expresses only some implicit secondary elements and places greater emphasis on explicit elements; it manifests itself reproductively.

Very Low (1): the determination of complementary meaning is very low when the reader does not respond.

5. *Determining the sender's purpose*

Very high (5): the determination of the sender's purpose is very high when the reader, among other things, can determine not only what the sender encoded; but also why the text externalizes it competently and fluently; where he/she links it with the knowledge he/she has of the topic.

High (4) The determination of the sender's purpose is high when the reader, among other things, can determine not only what the sender encoded; but also why the sender encoded it. To do so, he/she considers the elements that emerge from the text and the knowledge he/she has of the subject.

Medium (3): the determination of the sender's purpose is medium when the reader, among other things, can determine not only what the sender encoded, but also why he encoded it. The second aspect is performed without sufficient elements to prove it. It tends to reproduce from the text.

Low (2): the determination of the sender's purpose is low when the reader, among other things, can determine what the sender encoded; however, he/she cannot determine why he/she encoded it. Provides explicit elements in the text.

Very Low (1): The determination of the sender's purpose is low when the reader does not respond.

6. *Determining the meso-context*

Very high (5): the determination of the meso-context is very high when the reader, among other things, can determine the most significant senses, defines the meaning of the text, of the supra-oratorical units, the paragraph, the sentences, the lexical units, achieves the meaning of the text, and externalizes it with fluency and competence.

High (4): the determination of the meso-context is high when the reader, among other things, can determine the most significant senses of the text, defines the meaning of the text, of the supra-oratorical units, of the paragraph, of the sentences, of the lexical units, and achieves the meaning of the text.

Medium (3): the determination of the meso-context is medium when the reader, among other things, can determine some of the senses of the text, and answers with substantial elements of the reason of the text. It tends to reproduce textually some of these senses. Partially achieves the meaning of the text.

Low (2): the determination of the meso-context is low when the reader, among other things, can express some meaning of the text, but cannot explain the reason for it. He/she uses textual phrases and words.

Very Low (1): the context-setting is low when the reader does not respond.



7. *Determining inferential significance*

Very high (5): the determination of inferential meaning is very high when the reader, among other things, can deduce from the senses of the text the range of suggestions implicit in it; externalizing it with fluency and competence. He/she shows a high affective and creative link with the text.

High (4): the determination of inferential meaning is high when the reader, among other things, is able from the senses of the text to deduce the range of suggestions implicit in the text. It shows a high affective and creative attachment to the text.

Medium (3): determining inferential meaning is medium when the reader, among other things, partially infers the range of implicit suggestions. He/she emphasizes explicit meanings and is effectively manifested in the text.

Low (2): inferential meaning determination is low when the reader, referring only to explicit issues in the text, does not address implicit elements.

Very Low (1): inferential meaning determination is very low when the reader does not respond.

8. *Inferring the socio-cultural space of the text.*

Very high (5): the determination of the sociocultural space of the text is very high when the reader, among other things, can determine the scope of the text. He/she places him/herself in the historical, social, and cultural framework, which allows him/her to situate him/herself in time and space; and consequently, act accordingly; demonstrating competence and a high level of creativity.

High (4): the determination of the sociocultural space of the text is high when the reader, among other things, can determine the scope of the text. He/she places him/herself in the historical, social, cultural, etc. framework that allows him/her to situate him/herself in time and space; and consequently, he/she acts accordingly. Expresses his/her performance with a high level of creativity.

Medium (3): the determination of the socio-cultural space of the text is medium when the reader, among other things, partially determines the scope of the text. Hence, more emphasis is placed on the form than on the content.

Low (2): the determination of the socio-cultural space of the text is low when the reader, among other things, is not able to locate him/herself in the scope of the text. Their responses are reproductive.

Very Low (1): the determination of the socio-cultural space of the text is very low when the reader does not respond.



9. *Determining the meaning expressed in ideas or images.*

Very high (5): the determination of the significance expressed in ideas or images is very high when the reader, among other things, can visualize what he reads by making mental pictures. In the imagination, he sees the actors and the scenery, hears the sounds and voices, smells the smells, tastes the food and drinks, and participates in the happiness or pain of the situation. Places him/herself within the scene being described. Expresses a high level of creativity and imagination in the externalization of ideas and expresses him/herself fluently.

High (4): the determination of significance expressed in ideas or images is high when the reader, among other things, can visualize what he reads by making mental pictures. In the imagination, he sees the actors and the setting, hears the sounds and voices, smells the smells, tastes the food and drinks, and participates in the happiness or pain of the situation. He places himself within the scene being described.

Medium (3): the determination of significance expressed in ideas or images is medium when the reader, among other things, can visualize what he/she reads. It expresses a medium level of creativity and imagination in the externalization of ideas. It places more emphasis on the secondary issues than on the main issues of the text.

Low (2): the determination of the significance expressed in ideas or images is low when the reader manifests a low level of imagination and expresses some secondary ideas.

Very Low (1): the determination of the meaning expressed in ideas or images is very low when the reader does not respond.

10. *Determining the macro-context*

Very high (5): the determination of the macro-context is very high when the reader, among other things, can make a complete decoding of the text and expresses his/her points of view enriching the work. He performs this activity with competence. In his externalization, he emphasizes the purpose of the text. Can extrapolate to other contexts, i.e. extrapolate.

High (4): the determination of the macro-context is high when the reader, among other things, can carry out a complete decoding of the text. It refers to the purpose of the text. He/she can extrapolate.

Medium (3): the determination of the macro-context is medium when the reader, among other things, focuses on the secondary meanings of the text. However, it provides some general criteria. It refers to the purpose of the text.

Low (2): the determination of the macro-context is low when the reader reproduces textually some secondary meaning. It is not able to refer to the purpose of the text.

Very Low (1): the determination of the macro-context is very low when the reader does not respond.



The generalized operations (understanding, comprehending, and interpreting), unlike the generalized ability to read, are more mutable, since depending on the reader's knowledge and experience concerning the content or form of the text, so will be the degree of understanding, comprehension or interpretation of the text. This skill tends to be stable over a relatively long period. It should be structured in each subsystem or educational level.

In the scientific community of the linguistic area, there has been a regularity in assuming the process of decoding texts as levels of comprehension. Thus, for example, Grass and Fonseca (2023, p. 28) consider three levels: literal, interpretative, and applicative. On the other hand, Paradiso (1998, p. 57) considers six levels: word recognition, word meaning, reconstruction of ideas, thematic progression, identification of the macrostructure, and representation of the superstructure. On the other hand, Romeu (2001, p. 19) in the text "Taller de la Palabra" considers three levels: translation, interpretation, and extrapolation.

These skills are not levels, even though at the beginning they may manifest themselves as such, their development is achieved with differentiated systems of exercises that presuppose the procedures suggested in this article.

Conclusions

The structuring of the generalized skill of reading makes it possible to organize the skills involved in the reading process into a system.

The synthetic analytical scale allows an objective evaluation of the level of development of the generalized skill of reading.

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