

A Model of Assignment of Importance and its Contribution to Main Idea Instruction and Assessment

Ana Cecília da Gama TORRES
Universidade Estadual de Londrina

Resumo: Este artigo apresenta os problemas envolvidos no ensino e na avaliação da compreensão de idéias principais em leitura em língua estrangeira (inglês): arrolamos os pontos que provocam falta de consenso na definição do termo idéias principais; apontamos a dificuldade de se estabelecer critérios para a identificação e avaliação dessas idéias; apontamos uma lacuna entre o ensino e a pesquisa na área de compreensão em leitura em língua estrangeira. Argumentamos que modelos de atribuição de importância à informação que já se encontram corroboradas por resultados experimentais podem contribuir para o preenchimento dessa lacuna. No entanto, concluímos que, devido à complexidade envolvida na compreensão de idéias principais, há uma necessidade de se conduzir novas pesquisas experimentais e de cunho etnográfico.

Palavras-chave: compreensão em leitura em língua estrangeira (inglês), ensino e avaliação de idéias principais, modelo de atribuição de importância à informação

Abstract: This paper presents the difficulties in assessing and teaching the ability to identify main ideas in EFL: the lack of consensus on what the term main idea means; the difficulty in establishing a criterion for main idea identification; the gap between research and EFL reading instruction. Attempting to bridge this gap, we propose that it is important for teachers and test constructors to become acquainted with models of assignment of importance to information which have already received support from previous experimental research. Finally, we conclude that due to the complexity of the construct (ability to identify main ideas), there is a need for further experimental and ethnographic research.

Key words: EFL reading comprehension, approaches to instruction and assessment of main ideas, a model of assignment of importance to information

Introduction

Ability to identify the main idea of texts has long been considered an important skill in reading comprehension, essential for studying effectively, reading critically and generating inferences (TOMITCH, 2000; WILLIAMS, J., 1988). Despite being important, main idea instruction and assessment are areas in critical need of attention by EFL reading teachers, test constructors, and researchers alike.

In this paper, we initially discuss the difficulties involved in main idea instruction and assessment: (a) the lack of consensus on what the term main idea means; (b) the difficulty in establishing a criterion for main idea identification and in assessing comprehension of main ideas; (c) the gap between research and EFL reading instruction. Attempting to bridge this gap, we propose that it is important for teachers and test constructors to become acquainted with models of assignment of importance to information which have already received support from previous research. Finally, we conclude that due to the complexity of the construct (ability to identify main ideas), there is a need for further experimental and ethnographic research.

1 The Lack of Consensus

Cunningham and Moore (1986), Matos (1999), Tomitch (2000), Williams, J. (1988), Winograd and Bridge (1986) have argued that there is little consensus among theorists as to the definition of the term 'main ideas'. Cunningham and Moore explain that the term main idea is a general label, an umbrella term, and encompasses several terms such as key-word, summary, title, thesis, theme, and central content. According to these authors, all these terms can be taken as the main idea for a text because they identify the important information from a particular perspective. If researchers or teachers want to evaluate whether a given response can be accepted as the main idea for a text, first, it is necessary to specify to which category the response belongs, that is,

whether it is a thesis statement, a summary, etc., then evaluate whether the response is an acceptable member of its category. This evaluation may be quite difficult. For instance, considering a summary: how much of text informational hierarchy should a summary contain?

Categories of main idea responses such as title and thesis are ideas that the author considers important from his perspective. However, the reader may have his own point of view and may be reading with a particular purpose in mind that differs from the author's perspective, that is, the main ideas can be controlled by the reader's intentions and by the task the reader has been assigned (CUNNINGHAM; MOORE, 1986).

A similar point has been raised by van Dijk and Kintsch (1983). The latter makes a distinction between contextually and textually important information. Textually important information takes into account the author's point of view. A well-written text is signalled and organised so as to communicate to the reader what the author considers important. Contextually important information is regarded as important by the reader for several reasons such as personal interest, and background knowledge. It is noteworthy that textual and contextual importance may coincide or differ; in addition, the reader may use textual or contextual criteria flexibly so as to suit his needs. Throughout this paper, main idea refers to those ideas the author of the text signals as important (textual importance).

Since readers may take a different perspective on main ideas, a problem may arise in classroom evaluation: there may be a mismatch between teachers' and learners' perspective. It is unfair and simplistic that learners' perspective will be dismissed simply because it disagrees with teachers'. Given this problem, there is room for ethnographic studies in EFL reading classrooms so as to give us insights into how the classroom context and situational factors impinge upon the development of EFL reading skills (e.g. assignment of importance to information). There may be several situational factors: how teachers evaluate learners' perspective on main idea; teachers' and learners' assumptions about the nature of reading; whether teachers are aware of the need for establishing a criterion for main idea identification before setting a task or evaluating comprehension.

There is another reason for the lack of consensus. Approaches to main idea instruction have failed to consider the differences that exist among genre¹ types (WILLIAMS, J., 1988). In fact, what is important tends to be different in each type of genre. For instance, in narrative genres, the important information is concerned with a sequence of events, how they took place, when, why. In argumentative texts, the important information tends to be the author's thesis and the arguments in support of this thesis. Given that, the definition of term main idea should be specific to each type of genre (WILLIAMS, J.). In addition, although the principles of main idea construction may be quite general, the construction of main idea in a given genre may require knowledge of its textual features as well as particular strategies (KINTSCH, 1998).

2 Difficulties in Establishing a Criterion to Identify Main Ideas

It is well-established that experienced readers are better able to recall the main ideas in a text (WINOGRAD; BRIDGE, 1986). The question that has remained is how these readers identify the main ideas. According to Tomitch (2000), if we take the perspective of cognitive psychology, it will be easy to see why the criteria for main idea identification remain unclear. Tomitch claims that experienced readers might be able to attend to textual cues in order to identify the main ideas in a text; however, it is difficult for them to explain how they identify these ideas. Put another way, experienced readers have procedural knowledge, which tends to be intuitive, not declarative: they know how to identify the main ideas but are not able to verbalise their criteria. In addition, given that main idea identification involves

¹ It is beyond the scope of this study to provide a thorough definition of genre. We follow Swales (1990) and consider that a definition of genre comprises a communicative purpose and a conventional schematic structure. As Swales put it, "a genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognised by experts members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for a genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style" (p. 58).

intuitive knowledge, establishing a criterion for identification is not a matter of describing a logically ordered set of steps that readers conform to.

Trying to describe the process of main idea identification, researchers have often reported one criterion: text structure (TOMITCH, 2000; WILLIAMS, J., 1988). That is, the rhetorical organization of the text signals the important information to the reader.

We conclude that both researchers and teachers need to consider several factors to define the term main idea and to establish some criteria to evaluate its comprehension. Schellings and Van Hout-Wolters (1995) have described three approaches to main idea identification, namely a linguistic approach which assumes that the rhetorical structure of the text will signal what its main ideas are; a cognitive psychological approach which takes into account readers' variables such as personal goals, interests, prior knowledge; and an educational approach which considers that the main ideas in a text are related to instructional variables such as task demands, test questions asked by the teacher, and instructional objectives. According to Schellings and Van Hout-Wolters, the linguistic approach has been mostly employed in research where readers are instructed to identify or infer the main idea from a text.

3 The Gap between Research and Approaches to EFL Main Idea Instruction

It is noteworthy that there seems to be a gap between research and instruction on EFL/ESL reading. On the one hand, the linguistic approach, which has often been employed by researchers, considers the rhetorical structure of the text as the plausible criterion for main identification. On the other hand, after analysing twelve textbooks especially written to teach EFL/ESL reading, Tomitch (2000) found that none of the books explicitly mentioned the rhetorical structure of the text as a criterion for main idea identification. Tomitch concluded that textbook tasks provided learners with practice at main idea identification; however, these tasks (a) failed to define what these main ideas are; (b) failed to provide learners with explicit guidance on how to identify the main ideas. If the reader has already acquired the

skill to identify main ideas, he will put it into practice; however, if a less experienced reader does not have this skill, he is not receiving any guidelines.

Main idea identification is a skill that involves procedural knowledge (TOMITCH, 2000). Given that, explicit guidance may not lead readers to acquire the skill immediately. Still, guidance is important because it may serve as a starting point (AULLS, 1986). The question that remains is how to provide proper guidance in order to help readers develop the specific procedural knowledge. A possible answer comes from the field of educational psychology. As Williams, M. and Burden (1997) put it, teachers should (a) set tasks that are slightly beyond learners' current capacity; (b) teach general principles that will enable learners to take the next step by themselves; as a result, they may gradually take control over the task.

On the one hand, the type of approach suggested by Williams, M. and Burden (1997) could be a possible solution to the problem of main idea instruction. On the other hand, according to Tomitch's (2000) findings, EFL/ESL textbooks failed to offer an approach to promote skill acquisition. We conclude that there is a gap between current EFL main idea instruction and the approach that has been advocated by educational research.

In addition to Tomitch (2000), another Brazilian researcher, Scaramucci (1999), draws attention to a gap between recent advances in reading research and the approach to EFL reading instruction in Brazil. While Tomitch investigated EFL/ESL textbooks, Scaramucci collected her data through observing classrooms and interviewing teachers and students. Her investigation took place in a secondary Brazilian state school. Unlike Tomitch, who focused on the problem of main idea instruction, Scaramucci addressed the backwash effect of university entrance examination on EFL reading instruction. Still, her findings are relevant to the problem being discussed.

Scaramucci (1999) concluded the following: university entrance examination at UNICAMP (Universidade Estadual de Campinas) has incorporated some recent advances in reading research; however, the examination failed to promote changes in EFL reading instruction. According to Scaramucci, the assumption underlying EFL text comprehension was reading as decodification of words, and the

instructional approach was translating texts literally (from English into Portuguese). Scaramucci argued that this approach detached EFL reading from text interpretation.

We note that although decodification of words is an important skill to acquire, it is only one of the skills involved in EFL reading comprehension. Most models assume that reading comprises a set component skills: decodification of words, encoding of syntactic information, derivation of word meanings, generation of inferences, assignment of importance to information, integration of information, monitoring of comprehension (AFFLERBACH, 1990). It seems that the approach above favours one specific skill to the detriment of others. This kind of approach may not help learners develop other skills which are essential to main idea comprehension (e.g. assignment of importance). Indeed, if EFL learners are kept at the level of word decodification, they might not develop skills such as generation of inferences, assignment of importance to information, and integration of information, the latter skills could lead them to reach more sophisticated levels of inferential comprehension. As a consequence of this approach, the learner might take the role of the decoder, not the interpreter of the text.

In the context of her investigation, Scaramucci (1999) also found that the chosen EFL textbook presented texts specially constructed to illustrate specific language points. That is, the text was often seen as means of lexical and syntactic presentation rather than a source of content for learners. There are serious shortcomings in using texts only for teaching the foreign language (WILLIAMS, E., 1984): for instance, neglecting reading as consisting of a set of component skills which readers need to develop. Again, this negligence indicates that specific skills such as assignment of importance to information and generation of inferences are not receiving proper attention.

Another problem arises when EFL learners are exposed to specially constructed or simplified texts: learners are not exposed to the kind of authentic texts they often have to cope with for either informational, or entertainment, or assessment purposes. In fact, specially constructed texts might not be representative of the genres readers need to extract the main ideas in order to be fully operative in a literate society. Nevertheless, we note that even if the texts were

authentic, there would be no point in exposing EFL learners to them if the approach to instruction failed to recognise learners' role as interpreters.

Scaramucci (1999) also described the comprehension tasks learners were assigned, namely multiple choice, true-false, short answer, and gap filling. According to her, such tasks focused on identification of explicit text information. If everything that matters could be explicitly recognised in the text, the tasks did not demand any type of inference from the reader, and may have prevented them from taking hold of the role of interpreter. The latter problem has also been addressed by Grigolito (1999). It is also noteworthy that in real-life reading, the main ideas in a text as well as the communicative purpose of a genre might be implicit. If reading instruction fails to prepare EFL learners to infer what is implicit, they might be put at a disadvantage. A question that remains is whether these traditional textbook tasks represent any kind of real-life reading purpose.

Summing up, both Tomitch's (2000) study on EFL textbooks and Scaramucci's (1999) study on a secondary level classroom indicate a trend: instructional approaches to EFL reading do not help learners develop the ability to identify main ideas. More specifically, the approaches have failed to consider the following points: main idea identification is an ability that involves the acquisition of procedural knowledge; given that, it is acquired gradually, and requires both practice and guidance on highly specialised skills (e.g. assignment of importance to information through recognition of text rhetorical structure, and through recognition of textual features of particular genres). According to Tomitch's findings, textbook tasks only provide learners with practice, but do not offer them any explicit guidance. That is, if the learner has already acquired the ability to identify main ideas, he will put it into practice; however, if a less experienced learner does not have this ability, he is not receiving any help. According to Scaramucci's classroom description, readers do not receive any practice or guidance on specialised skills which are essential to the development of the ability to identify main ideas, in addition, it seems that learners are not recognised as interpreters.

4 Is There a Correct Main Idea Response?

All these issues raised above have serious consequences for evaluation and instruction. On the one hand, reading assessment is a feature of school life. In addition, much reading instruction is assessment-like (ALDERSON, 2000): teachers elicit responses to multiple choice questions, true-false, and gap filling tasks. Such tasks require that learners should provide "the correct" answer, that is, there is only one choice. The requirement for the correct answer seems a pervasive feature of EFL reading tasks, though, we are not currently providing enough evidence to generalise. On the other hand, does it make sense to judge whether a main idea response is correct or incorrect?

One approach that has become popular among post-modernists is that "the notion of correctness is inappropriate and theoretically misguided" (ALDERSON, 2000, p. 6). Although this is an important debate, we shall not take sides. What matters to our discussion is that readers may have legitimately different main ideas for a text. Indeed, what is important for main idea assessment is the plausibility of learners' interpretation rather than the correctness of their response. Recognising that is to a certain extent recognising learners' role as interpreters.

However, we also assume that some main idea interpretations are not legitimate, that is, they are not representative of any plausible interpretation of an author's possible intent. This position is consistent with Alderson's (2000) views. Given that, other questions arise: how to decide which interpretations are plausible main ideas for a text and which are not, what's the criterion? How can we (teachers) expect that learners will reach a critical understanding of the text and evaluate it, if we are not sure whether they have made a plausible interpretation of an author's intent? How far can we go evaluating EFL main idea comprehension if we have not developed an approach to teach it effectively, if we do not even define what these main ideas are? These questions remain for researchers, teachers, and test constructors alike. There are no simple answers, but teachers will need at least to try to consider them, since it is surely not adequate to say that a learner has only grasped the main idea of text when he agrees with the teacher's interpretation.

Alderson (2000) argues that in order to assess a construct (the ability being tested), we need to know what this construct is. In this paper, we propose that in order to assess readers' ability to comprehend main ideas as well as teach this ability, it is important for teachers and test constructors to get to know the models of assignment of importance to information. Knowledge of the models may promote a deeper understanding of what it is they are trying to assess and teach. Next, we will address one aspect of the model proposed by Kintsch and van Dijk (1978), van Dijk and Kintsch (1983), Kintsch (1998): the macrostructure theory. Our assumption is that knowledge of this theory may provide deeper insights into the complexities of main idea assessment and instruction. The acquisition of this knowledge may not simplify any complexity, but might at least raise teachers' awareness of it.

5 A Model of Assignment of Importance

From an instructional perspective, approaches to EFL reading have failed to "teach" main idea identification effectively. On the other hand, from a cognitive perspective, identification of important information is one of the most important skills in reading comprehension (TOMITCH, 2000; WILLIAMS, J., 1988). Why? Because there is a limit to the amount of attentional resources we have available to process information (JUST; CARPENTER, 1992; TOMITCH, 1995). That is, we do not have enough working memory resources to devote the same amount of attention to every piece of information in a text. In addition, if our memory becomes overloaded, pieces of information being stored may be forgotten (JUST; CARPENTER, 1992). Given these limitations, Kintsch and van Dijk (1978), van Dijk and Kintsch (1983), Kintsch (1998) proposed that we tend to read selectively, keeping only the most recent and the most central information in memory. Next, we will describe their assumptions.

As stated above, the expression main ideas can take several forms. One of them is the macrostructure of the text (KINTSCH; VAN DIJK, 1978; VAN DIJK; KINTSCH, 1983; KINTSCH, 1998). This macrostructure is best described as a summary/gist of the contents

of the text constructed through the application of macrorules ² (KINTSCH, 1998; KINTSCH; VAN DIJK, 1978). These rules are applied according to readers' goals and the rhetorical structure of text. They serve to condense the text into its gist (hereafter macrostructure).

The macrorules are the following: (a) readers apply a selection rule to delete redundant, irrelevant information, or pieces of information that are not a necessary condition for interpreting further information; (b) readers apply a generalisation rule to replace a sequence of information by an umbrella term, which encompasses the whole sequence. For instance, a sequence that contains a list of items such as knives, forks, spoons may be replaced by silverware; (c) readers apply a construction rule to replace a sequence of information by a new inference derived from the sequence. Applying these rules, readers select the ideas that are important to text hierarchy and also condense them.

Macrostructure construction is not a process that occurs blindly. That is, macrostructure construction to some extent relies on reader's schematic knowledge about some highly conventionalised types of text structure, the rhetorical superstructures (KINTSCH, 1998). On the other hand, we shall not consider that macrostructure construction results from forcing comprehension into a pre-existing, rigid schema. In fact, in his latest update of the model, Kintsch (1998) conceives comprehension as a process which is "sensitive to context" and adjusts itself to changes in the environment (p.94). In addition, reader's goals also control the application of macrorules, if reader's goals are vague, if the text does not present a conventionalised rhetorical structure, or if the reader fails to recognise text structure, readers might even be able to construct a macrostructure, but it will not be faithful to a particular type of rhetorical organisation.

Besides readers' schematic knowledge of text structure, van Dijk (1979) mentions another aspect of macrostructure formation: the signals by means of which important information is linguistically marked in a text. There are different types of signals for marking importance at a local level: graphical, syntactical, lexical and structural. Graphical signals include type size, italics, etc.; syntactical signals consist of the passive voice, word order and other devices which might

² Or macrostrategies (VAN DIJK; KINTSCH, 1983).

contribute to foreground and topicalise information; lexical signals include words such as 'important', 'relevant', 'to conclude', 'the main...', and repetition of key words; structural signals comprise titles, initial topic sentences, and summary statements. Although such signals are textual features, often used to indicate importance at a local level, they might achieve relevance at a global level through cumulative effect.

If the author of the text does not use signals to cue the main ideas, the reader makes inferences about these main ideas and the relationship between them. It is important to make a distinction between those texts which present the main idea explicitly, and those ones which do not contain enough local signals or an explicit main idea statement (e.g. topic sentences, a thesis statement). If the main idea is not explicit, readers cannot identify or select the main idea from those statements available in the text. As a result, they make greater cognitive effort to infer it (AFFLERBACH, 1990).

In short, according to the macrostructure theory, judgement of importance is dependent on reader's knowledge of how texts are organised, knowledge of how information is signalled, knowledge of how changes of content are cued, as well as dependent on reader's goals.

Final Remarks and Suggestions for Further Research

Although previous research has provided support for the theory of macrostructure, it has its limitations.

On the one hand, the theory of macrostructure has received support from studies on reader's schematic knowledge. That is, there is some experimental evidence for gains in EFL reading comprehension as a consequence of reader's knowledge of the rhetorical organisation of texts (CARRELL, 1985). On the other hand, some problems remain. Swales (1990), a leading researcher on genre analysis, criticised some of these studies. According to him, schema theorists did not draw upon the insights of genre approaches to text analysis. They put exclusive emphasis on reader's cognition and isolated the texts from their communicative purpose and from their environment. As for the latter, the environment of text production and consumption creates powerful expectations, for instance, before

opening a newspaper, readers are already prepared for the type of texts they are likely to find. As for the former, readers try to match the rhetorical organisation and the communicative purpose of the text as they make an effort to identify and situate the genre.

It would be reasonable to expect that recent advances in genre analysis would contribute to enhance the quality of instruction and research on main idea. However, according to Alderson (2000), there has been a lack of empirical research on reader's knowledge of the textual features of particular genres, and how such knowledge relates to reading process or product. Usually, research on genre analysis has focused on textual features themselves rather than on the state of reader's knowledge of such features (ALDERSON, 2000). In short, there is a need for merging the insights from the two traditions (genre analysis and schema theory) so as to shed light on the criteria for main idea identification.

In addition, although the principles of main idea construction may be general, the construction of main idea in a given genre may require knowledge of its typical features (KINTSCH, 1998). Given that, the issue of main idea identification is not settled yet: further experimental research is needed to investigate other models which involve processes that are unique to judgement of importance in narrative, argumentative, procedural and other types of genre. On the one hand, it seems desirable to have one model robust enough to encompass all types of genre; on the other hand, it is unreasonable to assume that when a model is appropriate for one particular genre, it will be equally appropriate for others (MILLS; DIEHL; BIRKMIRE; MOU, 1993).

Despite the limitations of the model above, and despite the fact that it has been developed to explain how readers assign importance to information while reading in their first language, its description may contribute to raise EFL teachers' and EFL test constructors' awareness of the key processes involved in the identification of main ideas. Our argument is that ability to identify main ideas is such a complex construct that instructors need to know what is involved in it in order to (a) assess this construct, (b) attempt to bridge the gap between research and instruction on main idea comprehension. We note that knowledge about macrostructure theory may not simplify

the complexity of the construct, but might at least bring its critical points to discussion, thus creating a need for further research: both experimental research so as to provide us with further insights into the cognitive process of main idea construction in a foreign language, and ethnographic research so as to give us insights into how the classroom context and approaches to EFL reading instruction impinge upon the development of the ability to identify main ideas.

It is not our aim to prescribe a particular approach to main idea instruction, nor is it to argue that all readers should homogeneously construct the same main idea for a text based on a given criterion to identify main ideas. What matters is to bring to discussion the intricate relationship between models of reading, (lack of) approaches to EFL main idea instruction, and main idea assessment.

References

AFFLERBACH, P. P. The influence of prior knowledge on expert readers' main idea construction strategies. *Reading Research Quarterly*, v. 25, n. 1, p. 31-46, 1990.

ALDERSON, J. C. *Assessing Reading*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2000.

AULLS, M. W. Actively teaching main idea skills. In: BAUMANN, J. F. (Org.). *Teaching main idea comprehension*. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1986. p. 96-132.

CARRELL, P. L. Facilitating ESL reading by teaching text structure. *TESOL QUARTELY*, v.19, n. 4, p. 727-752, 1985.

CUNNINGHAM, J. W.; MOORE, D. W. The confused world of main idea. In: BAUMANN, J. F. (Org.). *Teaching main idea comprehension*. Newark, Delaware. International Reading Association, 1986. p. 1-17.

JUST, M. A.; CARPENTER, P. A. A. A capacity theory of comprehension: individual differences in working memory. *Psychological Review*, v. 99, n. 1, p. 122-149, 1992.

GRIGOLETTO, M. Seções de leitura no livro didático de língua estrangeira: lugar de interpretação. In: CORACINI, M. J. (Org). *Interpretação, autoria e legitimação do livro didático*. Campinas: Pontes, 1999.

KINTSCH, W. *Comprehension: A paradigm for cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

_____.; VAN DIJK, T. A. Toward a model of text comprehension and production. *Psychological Review*, v. 85, p. 363- 394, 1978.

MATOS, M. V. The use of metacognitive strategies for main idea identification in expository texts: a perspective on instruction. 1999. Dissertação (Mestrado) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras/ Inglês e Literatura Correspondente, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis.

MILLS, C. B.; DIEHL, V. A.; BIRKMIRE, D. P.; MOU, L. C. Procedural text: predictions of importance ratings and recall by models of reading comprehension. *Discourse Processes*, v. 16, p. 279-315, 1993.

SCARAMUCCI, M. V. R. Vestibular e ensino de língua estrangeira (inglês) em uma escola pública. *Trabalhos de Lingüística Aplicada*, v. 34, p. 7-20, 1999.

SCHELLINGS, G. L. M.; VAN HOUT-WOLTERS, B. H. A. M. Main points in an instructional text, as identified by students and by their teachers. *Reading Research Quarterly*, v. 30, n. 4, p. 742-756, 1995.

SWALES, J. M. *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

TOMITCH, L. M. B. Teaching main ideas: Are we really teaching? *Linguagem & Ensino*, v. 3, p. 145-53, 2000.

_____. Reading: Text organisation perception and working memory capacity. 1995. Tese (Doutorado) – Programa de Pós-graduação em Letras/Inglês e Literatura Correspondente, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis.

VAN DIJK, T. A. Relevance assignment in discourse comprehension. *Discourse Processes*, v. 2, p. 113-126, 1979.

_____; KINTSCH, W. *Strategies of discourse comprehension*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1983.

WILLIAMS, E. *Reading in the language classroom*. London: Macmillan, 1984.

WILLIAMS, J. P. Identifying main ideas: A basic aspect of reading comprehension. *Topics in Language Disorders*, v. 8, n. 3, p. 1-13, 1988.

WILLIAMS, M.; BURDEN, R. L. *Psychology for language teachers: a social constructivist approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

WINOGRAD, P. N.; BRIDGE, C. A. The comprehension of important information in written prose. In: BAUMANN, J. F. (Org.). *Teaching main idea comprehension*. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1986. p. 18-48.