New Horizons in English Studies 3/2018

LANGUAGE & DIDACTICS

Klaudia Gąsior

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (UMCS) in Lublin
klaudia.gasior@onet.eu

One Skill, Many Conceptualizations: Discussion of the Ability to Read, the Purposes for and Types of Reading

Abstract. The main aim of the article is to present the ambiguity of the concept of reading. As an introduction, the author puts into foreground the importance of good reading skills. Then the concept of reading is discussed followed by the classification of the purposes for reading and its types. The concluding remarks are devoted to the author's justification of the selected themes and her stance towards the ideas under discussion.

Keywords: reading, types of reading, purposes for reading, receptive skills

"To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark."
Victor Hugo

"Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body."
Richard Steele

"Reading is important, because if you can read, you can learn anything about everything and everything about anything."
Tomie dePaola

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5796-2951 DOI: 10.17951/nh.2018.3.30

1. Introduction

The citations by Hugo, Steele and dePaola[1] have one theme in common – they all pay tribute to the uniqueness and usefulness of the ability to read. Although the authors were born in different periods in the history of mankind, they all recognize the significance of good reading skills. The value of reading has not only been maintained over the centuries, but the attention paid to the development of good reading skills has increased. According to Cameron (2001, 124), for example, literacy is the basic requirement that every citizen of the modern society should achieve. On account of the fact that one has to make use of his or her literacy skills on a daily basis, it might be stated that "literacy skills are then, not just an additional set of skills learnt in school, but an integral part of peoples' lives" (Cameron 2001, 124). It means that the abilities to read and write can be regarded as indispensable skills without which a full and fruitful participation in the community's life is not possible. That is why the emphasis placed on the development of the ability to read from a very early age is paramount.

There are many reasons why it is worth possessing well-developed reading skills. First, the capability of reading can be regarded as a life-long value. Once mastered, not only does it serve humans on a number of occasions providing the basis for various tasks (Chodkiewicz 2016, 79; Grellet 1981, 3–4; Levin and Villeneuve 2011, 1221), but it is also said to be the key to achieving social and professional success in one's life (Snow et al. 1998, 1). Second, the skills of reading and writing provide learners with innumerable opportunities to develop their general knowledge through working with texts (by reading them and writing their own) (Alfassi 2009, 183). Aside from practical considerations, such as reading a manual or a road sign, the role of the ability to read in one's successful individual learning is also of great importance (Paris 2005, 184). Third, a great deal of positive effects on different areas of one's life can be attributed to reading. Among possible benefits associated with the notion of extensive reading – which will be later discussed in this article – one can enumerate the improvement in dealing with both reading and writing tasks. Fourth, it is also believed that reading, as such, contributes to more effective second language learning (Komorowska 2005, 143) as well as increased knowledge about the world (Black and Barnes 2015, 32). What is more, depending on the genre of a text that readers are exposed to, their holistic knowledge as well as domain-specific one might grow. Finally, combining reading and listening together contributes to the increase in the vocabulary range among L2 learners (Chodkiewicz 2016, 79; Vidal 2011, 219–220). Such information is particularly significant from the point of view of language education as this field of study seeks practices which could enhance the process of foreign language learning.

[1] Victor Hugo (1802–1885) – a French novelist, poet and dramatist, representative of the Romanticism.
Richard Steele (1672–1729) – an Irish poet and politician, founder of "The Spectator".
Thomas "Tomie" dePaola (b. 1934) – an American writer and illustrator.

The list of arguments in favour of mastering decent reading skills proves how profitable it is to read well. As already discussed, the reasons for developing the ability to read range from linguistic considerations (such as a more precise and correct language use) to intercultural awareness (including more extensive knowledge of a surrounding world). On account of the versatile utility of reading in the learning of one's mother tongue or a foreign language, studying, communicating with other people and, simply, surviving in an information-congested world, the use of the adjective "profitable" with reference to well-developed reading skills is perfectly natural.

Having said that, it is justified now to discuss the concept of reading. An important point which needs to be mentioned here is that because of the complexity of the processes underlying reading, one may find a substantial number of publications offering contrasting views on that subject matter. In order to provide a fuller picture of the concept in question, readers' attention will be drawn to three metaphors concerning reading, as discussed by Birch (2009) as well as Grabe and Stoller (2002). The current author will present the key information about those metaphors explaining how the processes of reading take place and what their constituent elements are. That will be followed by the discussion of the purposes for reading and its types (which, as it will be proved later in the article, are closely intertwined) and a presentation of a self-prepared classification of the types of reading based on different publications (Broughton et al. 1978; Dakowska 2005; Thornbury 2006). In order to support the link between the purposes for and types of reading, the classification in question will also be accompanied by some examples of the purposes for reading, matching each type of reading presented. In the final section, the rationale for the inclusion of the ideas described in the article as well as the author's stance towards the concept of reading will be provided.

2. The concept of reading

One of the most common classifications divides language skills into listening, reading, speaking and writing (Chłopek 2016, 4; Harmer 2007, 265). Accordingly, reading is one of the four major types of language skills. As Figure 1 shows, those skills can be categorized into receptive and productive ones. Under the term of reception, one finds reading and listening whereas speaking and writing belong to the category of productive skills. The former two are used to process written or aural messages to get the meaning out of them, while the latter two involve the production of language in order to convey information. An important note should be made that the relation between receptive and productive skills is of intricate character. Not only do the four skills support and complement each other (Harmer 2007: 265), but they also make day-to-day conversations between people possible (Dakowska 2005, 179). Without the ability to receive and process oral and written messages sent from the surrounding world as well as the capability of producing them in a response to various stimuli, humans would not be able to communicate with each other.

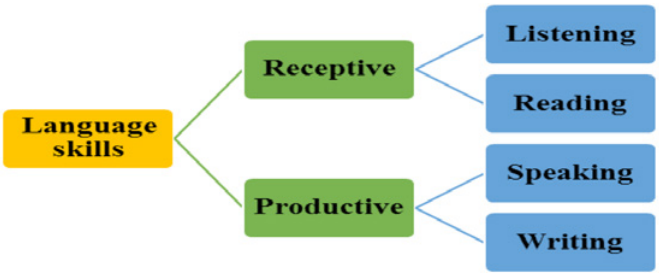

Figure 1. The division of language skills (Chłopek 2016, 4; Harmer 2007, 265)

As discussed in the previous paragraph, many researchers start their explanation of the term of reading by referring to the fact that reading is a receptive skill (Chastain 1976, 308; Thornbury 2006, 190). However, such information does not explain much because both reading and listening are based on reception and belong to the category of receptive skills. Thus, it is fully justified to state that they are to some extent similar. To be more precise, they both entail the process of decoding as well as they require the passive knowledge of vocabulary and grammar (Chastain 1976, 308; Thornbury 2006, 190). They also include the processes involved in receiving messages from the surrounding world – no matter if they take the form of sounds or letters – that proceed in a similar way. Marton (1978, 133–134), while discussing the perception of oral utterances and written texts by learners, referred to three consecutive stages of, first, segmenting, second, identifying and, third, remembering the messages. However, in spite of some similarities between them, reading differs from listening. Chodkiewicz (2016, 12–14) made a distinction between those two receptive skills by considering the social versus solitary aspect of reception. What distinguishes reading from listening is that listening necessitates the presence of other speakers to whom one may listen. It might also, consequently, be believed to be a more social skill as compared with reading which, on the other hand, is regarded by that researcher as a written, visual and less social skill in the sense that it can be performed in silence and on one's own. However, the solitary nature of reading (which takes into account the conditions present during silent reading) might be questioned when one considers reading as an interaction between writers and readers (Dakowska 2005, 191), aspects which will be discussed later as well.

As for more differences between listening and reading, it is Dakowska (2005, 98–99) who drew a distinction between the organization of utterances and written texts. As far as the exchange of oral messages is concerned, it is the intonation, semantic grouping of vocabulary or non-linguistic information which influence the reception of speech. In contrast, while dealing with written texts, spaces between words, punctuation, different kinds of fonts with sizes and colours determine the process of reading. The differences in the ways of processing the written and spoken text result from the fact that those two types of discourse have their own distinctive features (Dakowska

2005, 180). What Dakowska meant is that writing takes place in space, for instance, on a piece of paper or a screen of a computer, hence it is more tangible. Speaking, on the other hand, is just the opposite. It is created by the interlocutors in time and it is not permanent until it is recorded and transcribed. Consequently, the ways in which language is produced – by means of either speaking or writing – leads to the differences in the ways in which it is received – listening and reading. While readers deal with graphemes written down on the page, the listeners' task is to comprehend phonemes which provide the basis for spoken utterances.

The very basic information underlying the concept of reading has already been provided and, at this point, it might be concluded that reading is a visual and receptive skill. However, one may attempt to ask oneself whether it is accurate to say that reading is a passive skill. Such a claim was supported by the early research into reading processes, which viewed reading as passive and decoding-driven (Lalynn 1998, 268). To some extent it is justified as readers are required to read the text and focus on its meaning only. However, even though reading is based on reception, there is a number of publications which point to its (inter)active aspects.

Following the discussion above, it has to be pointed out here that reading cannot be unequivocally classified as a passive skill (Anderson 1999, 1; Nuttal 1996, 5; Thornbury 2006, 190). Writers encode their messages using appropriate lexical and grammatical structures and, then, readers decode those messages in order to extract meaning out of them. The way in which the writer creates his or her written text determines what effect it will have on its audience. Hence, it can be stated that reading is an interactive process involving both writers and readers (Dakowska 2005, 190). The proposition that reading involves some kind of interaction is in stark contrast to the aforementioned solitary view of reading (Chodkiewicz, 2016). Drawing one's attention to the active side of reading and, saying it colloquially, putting oneself into the writer's shoes, Dakowska (2009, 191) claimed that reading involves the relationship not only between readers and writers, but also between what is written and what is spoken. Similarly, Nation (2009) described reading as the ability to "recognize written forms and to connect them with their spoken forms and their meanings" (Nation 2009, 9). It can be stated that reading encompasses the careful meaning-oriented analysis of a written text and a subsequent matching of its elements with their spoken counterparts.

Reading is also connected with the concept of comprehension. It is Cameron (2001, 125) who treated reading and understanding as one concept stating that "(…) three types of information are used by fluent readers in reaching an understanding of the text, together with information about the social uses of the text as discourse." While presenting the understanding of a written text as the essence of the ability to read, she put a considerable amount of attention on the importance of visual, semantic and phonological information that a reader might draw from a piece of writing. It is the symbols written on the page, their meanings and the sounds that they produce respectively which readers need to deal with while working with a text. Some scholars claim that

looking at words and uttering them is not enough for true reading to take place. Smith (2004, 3) described reading as an interpretation of what is written down on paper. He pointed to the construction of meaning, which according to him, was a context-determined process. While discussing the concept of reading, it is also Arroyo (2002, 137–138) who stated that "this person who understands the content is the true reader" (Arroyo 2002, 137). It can be concluded then that there is more to reading than just coping with words and sentences. The following comment by Bouchard, Dourodous and Motta (1979) is closely connected with how Arroyo (2002) conceptualized reading. In their definition of skilled reading, they used the term "anticipatory activity" (Bouchard et al. 1979, 1). By stating so, they pointed to an underlying feature of reading which is that of collecting information by readers.

To cope with so much information simultaneously, readers need to be able to decode the written message and interpret its meaning appropriately. Hence, while discussing the concept of reading, it is common to refer to two cognitive processes underlying it – *bottom-up text* and *top-down text processing*. While the former is responsible for deciphering graphemes and makes use of hints drawn from textual representations on the page, the latter uses readers' schemata in hypothesizing about the content of a reading material (Kusiak 2013, 15). If it is *the bottom-up approach* that is transferred onto reading, its final outcome is the meaning obtained from the text which, as Nunan (1995, 64) suggested, results from the change in the symbolic representation of language from a written (text) to phonological (pronunciation) medium. On the other hand, it is the construction of meaning that is central in the case of *top-down processing*. While *bottom-up text processing* focuses mainly on the text itself, it is readers with their emotional, intellectual and linguistic reservoir who are put in the foreground in the case of *top-down processing* (Anderson 1999, 1). It is impossible to state whether *bottom-up text processing* or *top-down text processing* is of greater significance due to the fact that both of the processes contribute to readers' comprehension success and should be freely used during different reading-based activities (Dakowska 2005, 191–192).

As already stated, one may encounter varying conceptualizations of the ability to read. In order to analyse reading, Grabe and Stoller (2002, 9) suggested providing a definition of the concept. It is worth making a comment here that there are many definitions of reading which can be understood as a skill, process or activity. It is justified to refer to the concept of reading as a skill due to the fact that one has to possess a number of subskills in order to develop one's reading ability. Those subskills include, among others, discrimination between sounds, fluent reading and the comprehension of what is written (Snow, Burns and Griffin 1998, 3–4). Reading can also be conceived by some researchers as a process taking place in one's mind. Because of the fact that reading is a cognitive process, it can also be referred to as "private" (Davies 1995, 1) as no tangible proof that reading occurs is available. Similarly, reading can be conceptualized by some scholars as a "complex cognitive task" (Tindale 2003, 7), "complex activity dependent upon the thinking and language skills of the readers" (Bouchard, Dourodous and Motta 1979, 1) or even as "a problem solving activity" (Kusiak 2013, 104).

Having discussed some selected characteristics and definitions of reading, it is clear that various researchers use different expressions to explain the concept in question. Nevertheless, it is the fact that reading is cognitive and complex that most of them agree upon. As mentioned at the beginning of the article, it is also an eye-opening experience to look at reading from the perspective of metaphorical models discussed by Birch (2009, 2) as well as Grabe and Stoller (2002, 34–35). As widely known, metaphors are frequently used to help people understand complex or abstract issues by comparing them to more concrete ones. Relating the process of reading to the three metaphors is to offer a more schematic view of how reading takes place. The metaphors, which will be discussed in the following part of the article, are as follows: *The Interactive Information Processing Metaphor*, *The Expert Decision Maker Metaphor* (Medsker and Liebowitz, 1994), and *The Psycholinguistic Guessing Game Metaphor* (Goodman 1986, 1990).

2.1 The Interactive Information Processing Metaphor

In *The Interactive Information Processing Metaphor* the process of reading is compared to a machine, to be precise, to an information processor (Birch 2009, 2). In such an information processor, its parts stand for readers' skills. The model consists of two basic elements: knowledge storage and a processing component. The former is responsible for storing general and specific knowledge, whereas the latter encompasses a variety of strategies that a learner is equipped with while reading a text (Birch 2009, 3).

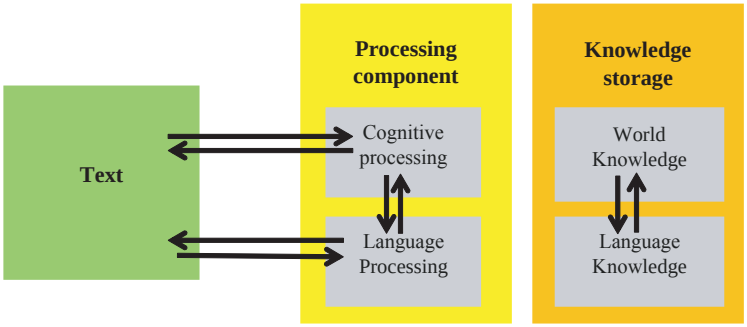

Figure 2: The Interactive Information Processing model of the reading process with processing strategies and the types of knowledge included (taken from Birch 2009, 3)

The model of the processor in Figure 2 illustrates the nature of reading processes. In order to deal with the meaning of some longer stretches of a text, such as sentences or paragraphs, the processor relies on the world knowledge and cognitive processing, that is, high-level strategies. On the other hand, language processing and language knowledge are the low-level strategies used to decipher the symbols written on the page. The arrows presented in Figure 2 are bidirectional which means that the compo-

nents of the processor found at the bottom and the top influence each other. In other words, the elements placed at the top, such as the world knowledge can influence readers' knowledge of a language (found at the bottom of the model). It happens the other way round as well. For instance, it is the meaning of words (constructed after the decoding process of symbols written on the page has taken place) that contributes to the overall meaning of a text (Birch 2009, 3–4).

2.2 The Expert Decision Maker Metaphor

In the case of the second metaphor, *The Expert Decision Maker Metaphor*, it is a computer programme which reading is juxtaposed with. That computer programme is called an expert system and it "uses both symbolic processing strategies and a large number of facts and several hundred rules or heuristics stored in the knowledge base to make quick decisions about something that is perceived" (Birch 2009, 9). Such knowledge of patterns, facts and rules results in a general agreement which is a characteristic feature of the expert system, both at the low- and high-level processing. To put it another way, the meaning construed from the text is the result of the correlation between, for example, the written symbols and their phonemic representations.

The Interactive Information Processing Metaphor and *The Expert Decision Maker Metaphor* provide differing views on the concept of reading. Their adoption implies that certain similarities between reading processes and the operations performed by a machine or a computer programme are found (the models of an information processor and an expert system respectively). However, those two are somewhat related because, as Birch (2009, 9) suggested, once one adopted *The Expert Decision Maker Metaphor*, he or she, at the same time, complied with *The Interactive Information Processing Metaphor*. In other words, there must be some low- and high-level processing (which is characteristic of an information processor and *The Interactive Information Processing Metaphor*) for an agreement between the graphemic and phonemic representations (the features of *The Expert Decision Maker Metaphor*) to be reached.

2.3 The Psycholinguistic Guessing Game Metaphor

The Psycholinguistic Guessing Game Metaphor is thought to be the metaphor of the past (Birch 2009, 8). The fundamental rule underlying that metaphor is readers' dependence on their world knowledge and the hints that they get from the text, and therefore, reading here is contrasted with a guessing game. Readers use this knowledge to make a guess about the meaning of a text. *The Psycholingustic Guessing Game Metaphor* is not without reason discussed as the last one. Although it presents a very simplified model of reading allowing only for a very early stage of reading development (Grabe and Stoller 2002, 35), it used to be applied to consider the processes that take place while reading in a second or foreign language. Because of the fact that a lot has changed in the fields of language studies and language education, the model of

reading is now associated with the past. Despite the fact that some learners of foreign languages do not need any formal instruction in learning grapheme-to-phoneme correspondences, the role of phonological knowledge and the use of strategies proved to be crucial in one's successful reading. That is why *The Psycholinguistic Guessing Game Metaphor* with its guessing-based view of reading has become the thing of the past and no longer fully reflects humans' knowledge about the processes involved in reading (Birch 2009, 8; Grabe and Stoller 2002, 34).

3. Purposes for and the types of reading

The previous sections were devoted, first, to the presentation of the assets of possessing good reading skills and, second, to the discussion of the selected themes concerning the ability to read. Since reading is frequently employed in a variety of tasks, it is worthwhile considering now some of the motives for reading and the types of reading. As will be illustrated later in the article, the purposes for reading are closely connected with the types of reading because each purpose for reading can be fulfilled by means of one (or more than one) type of reading, and vice versa. Wallace (1992, 6–7), distinguished between three basic reasons for reading. The first of them is *reading for survival*. As the name itself suggests, readers intend to obtain information from different kinds of texts in order to survive in a news-congested world. That "survival" might refer to the reading of a timetable, news bulletin or even a receipt. *Reading for learning*, on the other hand, is used by readers who wish to learn something new or to consolidate forgotten pieces of information. The most characteristic example of this type of reading is probably the kind of knowledge-oriented reading that takes place in educational settings. The last reason for reading, as proposed by Wallace, is *reading for pleasure* in the case of which there is no pressure placed on learners to perform their reading. While searching for a number in a phone book or reviewing a biology-related terminology are goal-oriented activities (which are connected with *reading for survival* and *learning* respectively), readers have no sense of duty in the case of *reading for pleasure* (Wallace 1992, 7). A division similar to that mentioned above was proposed by Thornbury (2006, 190–191), who distinguished between reading *for information* and *reading for pleasure*.

Another division of the purposes for reading is based on Grabe and Stoller's classification (2002, 13; 2011, 6). They provided a more extensive, as compared with those suggested by Wallace (1992) and Thornbury (2006), list of reasons for reading. According to Grabe and Stoller, it is *reading for general comprehension* that is said to be the most general term (Grabe and Stoller 2002, 14). Although it is the most rudimental one, it is, at the same time, the most complex purpose for reading on account of the fact that it "requires very rapid and automatic processing of words, strong skills in forming a general meaning representation of main ideas, and efficient coordination of many processes under very limited time constraints" (Grabe and Stoller 2002, 14). The

adjective "general" does not reflect the intricacy of *reading for general comprehension* at all, but it rather conceals a set of conditions (such as automaticity or reading under time limitations) necessary for successful reading to take place. Aside from *reading for general comprehension*, the researchers also described the concepts of *reading to search* and *reading to skim quickly*. It might be inferred that those two purposes bear a close resemblance to *reading for survival* as their aim is to find the desired information in the text. As far as academic settings are concerned, *reading to learn* as well as *reading to integrate information* are the most distinctive. Grabe and Stoller (2002, 13–14) concurred that the characteristic feature of *reading to learn* is the ability to find connections between what readers learn with what they already know. Moreover, while *reading to learn* or *to integrate information*, readers are required to make decisions what, in their opinion, is more or less important to remember from a particular piece of writing. As already stated on a number of occasions, reading is a meaning-driven activity. It can be concluded, then, that no matter what the purpose for reading is, – if it is *reading for survival* or *reading for general comprehension* – readers aspire to extract the meaning from a text. It is Nuttal (1996, 3) who made that comment pointing to *reading for meaning* as the ultimate purpose of humans' reading activity. As she rightly suggested, there is always some kind of a message to be conveyed, hence the purpose for reading any kind of text is to understand it.

It is already evident that the purposes for reading (for information or for pleasure) are closely connected with the types of *extensive* and *intensive reading*. Therefore, the current author would like to commence the discussion of the types of reading with the presentation of the two terms. The criteria which differentiate between *extensive* and *intensive reading* concern, first, the speed with which readers process a text and, second, the size of the reading material to cover. While the pace of *extensive reading* is quite fast and it is readers themselves who are responsible for making up for the deficits in their knowledge, *intensive reading* refers to the thorough and slow study of short texts and aims at the development of reading strategies or the learning of new vocabulary (Dakowska 2005, 206–207; Thornbury 2006, 191). In contrast with *extensive reading*, in the case of which the emphasis is placed on covering the biggest amount of reading material in the shortest period of time, *intensive reading* concerns the quality of the final outcome of the reading, that is comprehension (Broughton et al. 1978, 93). Additionally, what *extensive* and *intensive reading* can be distinguished by, is the place where reading takes place. While it is a language classroom in the case of which *intensive reading* is carried out, *extensive reading* is usually performed by readers outside school (Edge 1993, 106–107). Due to the fact that the above-mentioned types of reading supplement one another and make readers practise different aspects of their overall reading performance – language experience and comprehension – Dakowska (2005, 206) suggested that these two should be practiced interchangeably in foreign language classrooms.

Another classification of the types of reading is based on the criteria of how the text is processed – if it is read aloud or silently. Since *reading aloud* is an orally-motivated issue, its focus is closely connected with the articulation rather than with understand-

ing the text (Broughton et al. 1978, 91). When performed by a teacher, it helps students to link visual graphemes with aural phonemes, whereas when performed by students, it gives the teacher an insight into students' abilities concerning their pronunciation and the use of stress and pausing (Dakowska 2005, 205–206). However, what Broughton et al. (1978) wrote about reading aloud is in a complete opposition to Cameron's (2005, 125) comments on the close link between reading aloud and understanding. She provided an example of readers, who in the face of challenging and difficult texts, "speak the words of the text to themselves" (Cameron 2005, 125). In the light of this citation, stating that reading aloud is "closer to pronunciation than it is to comprehension" does not seem to be fully justified (Broughton et al. 1978, 91). Not only does reading aloud help readers to follow a text more carefully, but it also allows them to understand it more effectively. Having said that, it is worth pointing out now that reading aloud can be used successfully with the purpose of *reading to learn* or *integrate information*. *Silent reading*, on the other hand, is thought to reflect the unobservable nature of the reading process (Broughton et al. 1978, 92). In other words, the idea behind silent reading is that it takes place, as most of reading does, in silence. Because of the fact that it is believed to be a solitary activity, it might be problematic for a teacher to control the tasks based on it (Dakowska 2005, 205).

Given the brief analysis of the types of reading mentioned above, it is worth discussing here the two most famous types of reading as far as reading comprehension is concerned – *skimming* and *scanning* (Dakowska 2005, 207). While *skimming* and *scanning* are frequently discussed in the context of reading comprehension, Grabe and Stoller (2002, 13) commented on them with reference to *reading to search*. It can be concluded then that those two types of reading can be used in different reading situations, no matter if they are connected with search- or meaning-oriented processing of a text. As for the definitions of the concepts, they are as follows. It is *skimming* that takes place when readers read a text quickly in order to grasp the main meaning of it, that is the gist. Broughton et al. (1978, 92) also referred to the concept of *extensive reading* as an umbrella term for *skimming, survey reading* and *superficial reading* as these concepts aim at reading the biggest amount of material in the shortest time possible. *Scanning* of the text, on the other hand, has nothing to do with gist-reading, but rather with searching for a particular piece of information in the text while neglecting the rest (Thornbury 2006, 191). At this point it can be stated that in order to get a general idea of what a text is about or to find a particular piece of information, the types of reading described in the current paragraph, *skimming* and *scanning,* can be employed.

The last type of reading to be discussed is connected with the thorough analysis of the reading material. It is *detailed reading* that takes place when a text is read in order to obtain as much detailed information as possible. While describing that concept, Thornbury (2006, 191) referred to reading a manual of how to install household appliance. According to that scholar, reading instructions, which is an example of *detailed reading*, is a slow information-oriented process performed by readers with the aim of

extracting the biggest amount of details. Importantly, there is no doubt that this type of reading can be employed to serve a number of purposes, such as *reading for survival*, *reading to learn* or *search*.

4. Concluding remarks

The purpose of the current article was to prove the correctness of the statement that reading is an ambiguous and complex term. By providing an overview of the definitions of reading as well as discussing the purposes for and the types of reading, the intricate character of the ability to read was presented. The article was divided into two main complementary sections with the aim of putting into the centre of attention two elements. First, the concept of reading was discussed. To support the claim that reading is an ambiguous term, the current author placed an emphasis on differing conceptualizations of that receptive skill by referring to the points of view of various researchers. Some of them perceived reading as a solely solitary activity, in which the presence of a reader and a text matters. Others, on the other hand, regarded society and culture as crucial elements that have the final effect on readers who are responsible for constructing the meaning of a text. In contrast with an anti-social outlook on the silent reading, it was also suggested that reading is nothing other than an interaction between readers and writers, in which readers try to understand what writers wished to convey. Aside from the relationship between them, the text itself was also thought to be the ultimate element determining the construction of meaning.

Reading is without a doubt a complex skill and it is very well reflected in the multitude of publications devoted to it. However, such an intricacy of reading processes does not only result in the abundance of papers on that topic, but in varied, sometimes conflicting, as it was presented, conceptualizations. Depending on the attitude to reading that has been adopted by theoreticians or practitioners, the concept itself can be examined from contrasting points of view. For instance, if one regards reading as a purely practical and systematic endeavour, the decoding scenario and the idea of a text influencing the meaning seem to be right. When one, however, takes into consideration the influence of readers with their experiences, linguistic competence and knowledge of the world on the construction of the final meaning of a text, the bottom-up processing approach to reading becomes of minor importance. Such examples could be multiplied, each of which questioning the applicability of the former one.

In my opinion, all of the approaches to reading mentioned in this article – in spite of the fact that they seem contradictory at times – do capture the nature of the ability to read. Having combined the selected information that I based my analysis of reading on, I would like to propose a one-sentence definition of reading (Cameron 2001: 125; Ciriaco 2002, 137; Dakowska 2005: 190; Nunan 1995: 64; Thornbury 2006: 190). I would like to suggest that reading can be defined as a receptive skill based on deciphering graphemes and changing their form into that of phonemes thanks to which, by

using readers' knowledge and their interaction with the text and the writer, final meaning of the text is constructed and understanding achieved. Such a perspective on the ability to read contains the information concerning the receptive and interactive nature of reading, as well as the aspect of decoding symbols written on the page.

The article also presented a number of the purposes for and types of reading. As already mentioned, it can be claimed that there is some connection between the two concepts. Thornbury (2016, 191) stated that the purpose for reading usually corresponds with the writer's intention. By providing an example of a novel, which is not read in the same way as a phone book, the researcher claimed that in everyday life one reads a text in accordance with the purpose a particular text ought to serve. Moreover, depending on what one aspires to extract from the text (e.g., detailed piece of information in the case of *scanning*) or what one wishes to achieve after reading written texts (e.g., increased linguistic or cultural knowledge in the case of *extensive reading*), a different type of reading can be selected for a particular purpose. The classification of the types of reading, based on a selected bibliography and their possible purposes provided by the current author, are enumerated in Table 1.

Table 1: The overview of the types of reading based on a selected bibliography with the examples of matching purposes provided by the current author (self-prepared)

	Types of reading	Examples of matching purposes for reading
Broughton et al. (1978)	reading aloud	reading to learn
	silent reading	reading for pleasure
	extensive reading	reading for pleasure
	intensive reading	reading to search
	study reading	reading to learn
	slow reading	reading for information
Dakowska (2005)	reading aloud	reading to learn
	silent reading	reading for pleasure
	extensive reading	reading for pleasure
	intensive reading	reading to search
	skimming	reading for general comprehension
	scanning	reading to search
Thornbury (2006)	reading aloud	reading to learn
	detailed reading	reading to integrate information
	extensive reading	reading for pleasure
	intensive reading	reading to learn
	skimming (skim-reading; reading for gist)	reading to skim quickly
	scanning	reading to search

By presenting the key aspects of reading (its significance, definitions, the purposes for reading and its types), the description of how one of the language skills operates, was provided. To sum up the considerations of the complexity of the reading processes

and the ability to read as such, I would like to refer to the following quote by a British director Ridley Scott: "Life isn't black and white. It's a million grey areas, don't you find?" Even though the citation does not describe the concept of reading as such, but the concept of life in general, I myself have found some correspondences between the concept of life and reading. On the one hand, there is bottom-up processing and the decoding of the text itself. On the other hand, there is top-down processing with psycholinguistic and reader-centred approach to reading. Those two may denote the black and white colours in life. The grey shades, however, may symbolise various views or doubts which accompany the analysis of reading processes, such as the statements on the passive and solitary nature of reading or the role of intuition in arriving at the final meaning of the text. In my opinion, it is these two short sentences that render the intricacy of reading in the best way.

References

Anderson, Neil. 1999. *Exploring Second Language Reading. Issues and Strategies*. Canada: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

Arroyo, Ciriaco. 2002. *The Humanities in the Age of Technology*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press.

Alfassi, Miriam. 2009. "Literacy Learning in Communities of Discourse: Reading to Learn and Writing to Communicate." In *Reading: Learning, Writing and Disorders*, ed. Diane R. Thompson and Lidia E. Bushnell, 181–206. New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc.

Birch, Barbara. 2009. *English L2 Reading: Getting to the Bottom.* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Black, Jessica, and Jennifer Barnes. 2015. "The Effects of Reading Material on Social and Non-social Cognition." *Poetics* 52: 32–43. doi:10.1016/j.poetic.2015.07.001.

Bouchard, Donald, Douroudous, Virginia and Janice Motta. 1979. *Reading English as a Foreign Language. A Reading Skills Perspective for Teachers*. Washington, D.C.: International Communication Agency.

Broughton, Geoffrey, Christopher Brumfit, Roger Flavell, Peter Hill, and Anita Pincas. 1978. *Teaching English as a Foreign Language*. London and New York: Routledge.

Cameron, Lynne. 2001. *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chastain, Kenneth. 1976. *Developing Second Language Skills: From Theory to Practice*. Chicago: Rand McNally College, Co.

Chłopek, Zofia. 2016. "Rozwijanie sprawności receptywnych w języku obcym." *Języki Obce w Szkole* 1: 4–10. Accessed December 12, 2017 from http://jows.pl/sites/default/files/chlopek_0.pdf.

Chodkiewicz, Halina. 2016. "Słuchanie i czytanie w uczeniu się i nauczaniu języków obcych: zarys problemu." *Języki Obce w Szkole* 1: 11–16. Accessed December 12, 2017 from http://jows.pl/sites/default/files/chodkiewicz.pdf.

Chodkiewicz, Halina. 2016. "Szczególne miejsce czytania w nauce języka obcego." *Języki Obce w Szkole* 4: 79–85. Accessed December 12, 2017 from http://jows.pl/sites/default/files/chodkiewicz_0.pdf.

Dakowska, Maria. 2005. *Teaching English as a Foreign Language*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

Davies, Florence. 1995. *Introducing Reading*. London, New York, Victoria, Ontario, Auckland: Penguin English.

Edge, Julian. 1993. *Essentials of English Language Teaching*. Harlow: Longman Group UK Limited.

Grabe, William, and Fredericka Stoller. 2002. *Teaching and Researching Reading*. London: Pearson Education Limited.

Grabe, William, and Fredericka Stoller. 2011. *Teaching and Researching Reading*. Edinburg Gate, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Grellet, Francoise. 1981. *Developing Reading Skills.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Harmer, Jeremy. 2007. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Edinburgh Gate: Pearson Education Limited.

Komorowska, Hanna. 2005. *Metodyka nauczania języków obcych*. Warszawa: Fraszka Edukacyjna.

Kusiak. Monika. 2013. *Reading Comprehension in Polish and English. Evidence from an Introspective Study*. Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press.

Lallyn, Carolyn. 1998. "The Application of First Language Reading Models to Second Language Study: A Recent Historical Perspective." *Reading Horizons* 4: 267–277.

Marton, Waldemar. 1978. *Dydaktyka języka obcego w szkole średniej*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe.

Nation, Paul. 2009. *Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing.* London and New York: Routledge.

Nunan, David. 1995. *Language Teaching Methodology*: *A Textbook for Teachers*. Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall Europe.

Nuttal, Christine. 1996. *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*. Oxford: Macmillan Publishers Limited.

Paris, Scott. 2005. *Reinterpreting the Development of Reading Skills*. *Reading Research Quarterly* 2: 184–202.

Smith, Frank. 2004. *Understanding Reading. A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Snow, Catherine, Burns Susan, and Monica Griffin. (1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Tindale, Jen. 2003. *Teaching Reading*. Sydney: Macquarie University.

Thornbury, Scott. 2006. *An A-Z of ELT Concepts*. Oxford: Macmillan Publishers Limited.

Wallace, Catherine. 1992. *Reading.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vidal, Karina. 2011. "A Comparison of the Effects of Reading and Listening on Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition." *Language Learning* 1: 219–258. doi: 10.1111/j.14679922.2010.00593.x/epdf.