READING
FOR MEANING

An Integrated Approach
to Language Learning

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To Sylvia Kagan,
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and
Betty Nance Weber

Preface

One of the current fashions in literary criticism is to question the status of the author. In his essay "What is an Author?" Foucault points out that the proper name of an author "is functional in that it serves as a means of classification. A name can group together a number of texts and thus differentiate them from others. A name also establishes different forms of relationships among texts" (123). In the literal sense of authorship—the writing of this book—I am the author. In the actual sense of authorship—the creation and explication of the ideas presented in this book—Katherine Arens, Heidi Byrnes, and I have written this book together. Article versions of some chapters have appeared elsewhere under various combinations of our names. And, of course, in the larger meaning of Foucault, in the sense of discourse rather than the usual scholarly sense, there are many authors. The shared authorship with names cited in the bibliography and the chapters on testing and a metalanguage for grammar goes without saying. This preface attempts to acknowledge key people whose more personal discourse has also shaped the thinking in this volume and to explain how the book came to be.

My classroom research began with Freda Holley, with whom I investigated reading, vocabulary acquisition, and error correction in the early seventies. In 1974, encouraged by my colleague Betty Weber, I worked as senior author (King with Weber & Holley) on a chapter dealing with reading for the *ACTFL Annual Review*. On the basis of the model developed in that chapter, Betty Weber and I began working with early introduction of unedited texts. Together we developed a program with a listening and reading emphasis for beginning classes in a foreign language. We were aided by a team of excellent graduate and newly graduated students from our institution: Maria Beck, G. Truett Cates, Phyllis Manning, Martha Morgan, Donald Stephens, and Margaret Woodruff.

In 1977 a department proposal for development of a comprehension-based curriculum in high school and college was funded by NEH (Stephens & Swaffar). Results after the pilot year of our study gave us some clear indications about needed revisions (Morgan). First, students were unenthusiastic about many of the texts used in the experimental program. They proved to be too didactic and narrowly Germanic for our audience. Emerging research in schemata suggested that we needed to rethink our selection criteria in light of our students' backgrounds and interests. Second, although the cognitive advantages of comprehension-based learning reduced the need for study time to achieve credible results (Swaffar & Woodruff), that advantage apparently led to lax study habits: students in the experimental group acknowledged spending one fifth the time in outside study that was reported by the four-skills control group. We saw that our program had to ensure a greater amount of time on task, or learning benefits such as automatic processing and maintenance of language abilities in the long term would be vitiated. Third, we discovered that the experimental students' advantages in language creativity and fluency were offset by their deficiencies in mastery of formal features. Students in the four-skills group were more hesitant than the experimental group about expressing themselves, but the experimental group used formal features less accurately. Issues such as monitoring and repair, indeed the entire framing of our enterprise, needed to be reevaluated in view of what we had learned. Initial efforts in that evaluation were made in a monograph by Cates and Swaffar.

When Betty Weber died in an automobile accident in January of 1979, there was a period during which it was extremely difficult to proceed with this effort. Those who knew Betty Weber will appreciate that her death was a devastating personal as well as professional loss.

In the fall of 1980 Katherine Arens joined our faculty. As a graduate student she had worked with Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, Walter F. W. Lohnes, and Orrin Robinson III in Stanford University's German Studies Department. She had also been an instructor in the Humanities Special Programs. With her background in linguistics and philosophy, Katherine brought new perspectives to the dilemmas posed by the study of the University of Texas group. Together, she and I decided to review the data collected during the NEH grant and attempt to address the problems we saw there. Our objective was to revise the reading model so that it would specify a reader focus on textual meaning, text-based approaches to linguistic rules, and a cognitive sequence that linked L2 reading and language acquisition. It was Katherine who realigned our efforts, and, in so doing, created many of the features of this book: the concept of systematic organization for textual topics and comments, the insistence on a cognitive hierarchy in learning, the details of a metalanguage for thinking about ordering ideas prior to expressing them.

Heidi Byrnes' authorship began in her role as a reader of initial drafts of this manuscript in the summer of 1988 during her work with the Summer Language Institute jointly sponsored by the University of Texas and the Texas Education Agency. The ensuing discussions with her co-authors led to revisions in the emphasis and content of the original. A Secretary of the Navy Fellowship enabled me to work in close proximity with Heidi Byrnes in the early months of 1990 so that essential revisions in the volume's content, diction, and style could result from ongoing discussion and teamwork. Heidi Byrnes brought to the book her background in a broad spectrum of linguistic theory, her work in assessing language performance (e.g., proficiency orientation, national test development), and her active involvement in numerous professional organizations (e.g., MLA, AATG, JNCL, Northeast Conference).

All three of us share a heavy involvement in and strong commitment to classroom teaching at all levels—teaching that respects the intelligence of learners and challenges them to involve themselves in their language learning. This teaching is informed by the conviction that pedagogy should reflect theory and research, not only for the sake of appropriate pedagogy but for the sake of valid theory and research as well. This book was written out of the conviction that second-language teaching must be brought out of its traditional isolation and must be connected to general educational issues, including those articulated at the national level.

In the past decade we have been fortunate in finding support both within and outside the University of Texas. As noted above, my Secretary of the Navy Fellowship provided an essential opportunity for talking things out with Heidi Byrnes. At the University of Texas, the authors owe a great debt to Vice-President William Livingston, The University Research Institute, and Dean Robert D. King for their support and patience throughout the long genesis of this book. At an essential juncture in my work with its core ideas Renate Schulz and David Benseler gave vital encouragement. Robert Swaffar contributed his knowledge of computer applications and his gift for identifying essential components. Richard Kern brought his research perspectives in French and reading theory. Claire Gaudiani included me in initial conferences for the development of Academic Alliances and thereby provided an invaluable forum for discussion and reaction to the concepts in the book. Over a period of ten years, a series of Goethe House workshops under the direction of Manfred Heid brought the three authors together with like-minded colleagues both here and abroad.

To our outside readers—Nina Garrett, Gilbert Jarvis, Alice Omaggio, Milton Azevedo, Bill Fletcher, and our in-house readers Neil Anderson for an ESL perspective, Dieter Waeltermann for his "Frisian" eye for detail, Andrea Winkler for her vantage point from outside the immediate field—goes our gratitude. In the sense of Foucault, all these people have contributed to the "author-function" of this book (125).

The debt to the National Endowment for the Humanities, particularly Program Grant Officers Janice Litwin, Gene Moss, and Richard Ekman, who worked with Janet Swaffar and Betty Nance Weber in the late seventies, is simply that, without them, this effort would never have been possible.

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CREDITS

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Introduction

After the first year of second-language instruction, curricular expectations about language learning change. While the current impetus to use the target language in the classroom remains high in courses for beginners, that impetus is often lost as students continue their studies into a second year and beyond. Classes with a strong reading component tend to resort to English when discussing meaning or implications of texts, particularly if students are reading literature. A verbal chasm seems to exist between discussion of facts involving content questions such as "How old is the heroine?" and interpretive or analytic questions such as "Why does she decide to leave home?"

One reason for this chasm is that students have little opportunity to practice answering synthetic or analytic questions in the second language. They may use discourse gambits in expressing personal opinions (e.g., Fanselow; Kramsch 1981), but they rarely practice analyzing a text on its own terms. Indeed, even in their native language, students are often unable to analyze the content of a topic. They may give subjective analyses, but articulate and dispassionate assessments are rare. The need for training in such reasoning is only gradually being recognized in the humanities.

It is a rare course that encourages students to think about the content of what they read, and to assess the implications and significance of that content when they write. Most L2 classes do one of two things: they focus on practice with well-formed sentences, or they replicate the factual content of the reading. In beginning courses the emphasis is, naturally enough, linguistic. We teach formal features of language and information. We teach declension of adjectives. We teach people, places, and events. When we teach content, however, it is largely in terms of explicitly stated details in the text, not the connections between details and reader response to messages.

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True, functional use of language structures such as comparative forms of adjectives is being linked to students' perceptions in newer texts for beginning L2 instruction, e.g., those that offer contextual practice. Perhaps a comparison is made: "The family is closer knit in France. Children live at home longer than they do in the United States." Rarely, however, is functional use linked to the content of a reading text. Consequently, classroom activities or tests which combine names, descriptors, and action verbs for people, places, and events with ways to think about people, places, and events deal with simulations of the real world rather than the fictive realities of a text.

There is a tacit consensus in L2 teaching that if students practice speaking about concrete objects and events they will eventually be able to convey meaningful thoughts about abstract ideas.

Classes begin with replication practice and then move to creation of language about concrete information, and the ability to make requests and inquiries. It is possible for the student to perform these tasks without ever having been exposed to extended discourse or discussions conducted at a level of abstraction that is removed from the listener / reader. At the advanced levels, however, students are expected to be able to negotiate or articulate alternative realities. We believe that this is, in view of dominant practices at the beginning and intermediate levels of L2 instruction, an unfair expectation. Functioning in alternative realities, in visualizations of scenes removed from the immediate environment or speculations about alternative procedures and behaviors, involves high-level, abstract thought processes.

It seems only fair to presume that, in order to conduct these tasks, a student must first have extensive practice. Yet as most curricula are currently designed, we teachers of language apparently expect students to leap magically from the verbally designated worlds of objects, people and physical behaviors (e.g., "Joel fishes. He likes to fish. His father likes to fish, too.") to the verbally created worlds of comparison, instrumentality and causality (e.g., "Joel is a better fisherman than most nine-year-olds. Probably his father's interest in fishing has prompted this enthusiasm.").

It is the thesis of this book that students must have such exposure from the outset of their instruction in a second language. They must hear and read about verbally created worlds. To become articulate speakers of a foreign language they must practice mental and verbal reconstructions of the logical coherences of a reality other than that of their immediate physical environment.

If we fail to teach the connection between language and the ability to manipulate language to analyze or speculate, a discrepancy exists between what we ask students to learn and what we want them ultimately to be able to do. We presume that control of structure constitutes literacy because we presume that control of structure results in comprehension and observations about that comprehension. In this sense we language teachers have had a dual system of expectations for our students. In our curricula, materials, teaching, and testing, we reward formal competence with another language's structure. Ultimately, however, we want our students to demonstrate a literacy which transcends the constraints of skill learning and response. We want them to use the grammar rules and vocabulary lists of a foreign language to be functionally literate in that language. To put it another way, we want our students to be able to use the other language's structure to mediate the comprehension or expression of meanings outside their immediate experience.

This book argues the proposition that this second, covert definition of literacy— the ability to comprehend and express the meaning of alternative realities—must become

the profession's overt goal. Institutions (in curricula, testing, and teaching practices) need to rethink the literacy model they are now using because at worst it excludes and at best it denigrates the ultimate objective of literacy: the use of language to convey new ideas. The issue is not what knowledge to acquire, but rather what knowledge students can create with language. This issue is the subject of widespread concern in our profession. Scholars have observed that the current methodological pluralism in language pedagogy and in literary criticism is an oblique expression of confusion about the role of meaning in language study.

This book presents the procedures for integrating language learning and meaningfulness (see Chapter 5 ff.). The procedures are built on assumptions about the learner rather than on assumptions about the text. A growing body of thought from several disciplines supports learner-based theories. To mention several prominent ones: the genetic epistemologies described by Piaget (psychology), the progression from recognition and recall to synthetic and analytic levels outlined in Bloom's taxonomy (education), research in schema theory and metacognitive strategies, the ideas of literary critics who view protention and retention of text meaning as phenomena realized by the reader.

In other words, learner-centered instruction employs a learner's higher-order cognition, cognition that includes but also goes beyond recall and recognition or concrete operations. To access our students' metacognition, an L2 curriculum must both present opportunities for practice with reasoning processes and reward their successful execution. This book will emphasize and exemplify components of a literacy standard which nurture L2 students' reasoning ability and which integrate that literacy standard with a standard of language learning.

The New Paradigm
in Language Learning

THE HISTORICAL DILEMMA

A comparison between research in foreign-language acquisition from the mid-sixties to late seventies and today tells us much about the current state of our art. A "then and now" perspective suggests why we changed our minds about what we are supposed to teach. The biggest problem which faced foreign-language (FL) teachers in the sixties and seventies did not need statistical analysis to be understood—the raw facts spoke for themselves. Enrollments in foreign-language programs were declining and language requirements had virtually disappeared. In a pragmatic society the elite scholar, the traditional foreign-language learner, was a vanishing species. Higher education in America was in transition. It seemed as though half of our audience wanted to be engineers or business executives, and the other half was seeking gurus in the Far East or the Arizona mesas. For both groups, foreign languages—indeed, humanist studies as the heritage of Western thought—were suspect. Liberal arts colleges looked like an endangered species. In the high schools, always sensitive to influences in higher education, language enrollments also declined.

Foreign languages were in particular jeopardy because they were at odds with themselves. After World War II the advent of audiolingual approaches to language learning seemed to change our mission—but only in appearance. No audiolingual program, whether in high schools or colleges, gave rise to an advanced student who represented an acceptable alternative to the elitist scholar. Schools wanted to produce standard-bearers for the "high culture" goal of language learning. Many academicians viewed an emphasis on speaking skills as contrary to our scholarly aspirations. As a result, an uneasy compromise was made to maintain the *status quo*, yet afford the appearance of change.

While it was well and good to emphasize the spoken language in first-year study, advanced students still got down to the business of learning to read and to display grammar mastery. Since reading generally meant translation, as it had for much of the history of language study, the students' communicative skills suffered (Chastain & Woerdehoff). At the same time, dissenting and often divisive views about what beginners should be learning were found in many departments in colleges and universities. There, the disparity between initial semesters of "language training" (the remedial work) and later "scholarly training" (the academic mission) was evident. The preparation of language majors and graduate students remained a substantively unaltered, "high culture" enterprise.

During this same period, problems of a very different kind were emerging for teachers of English as a second language (ESL). The changing demographics of American society were changing the status of ESL, which had been a peripheral feature of public and post-secondary schools prior to the seventies. For the past two decades, growing numbers of students who speak Spanish and Eastern languages have been entering public schools across the country. As a result, the numbers of ESL classes have increased dramatically.

Concomitantly, pressure is increasing to consider immersion programs for speakers of English as well as speakers of Spanish. The training of teachers to assume this dual task of instruction in language and content has assumed national importance. Moreover, at the post-secondary level the nation has experienced a similarly large increase in the numbers of foreign or foreign-born students who must pass TOEFL tests and function in the university system. In addition to the challenge of a growing immigrant population, post-secondary institutions must cope with the fact that more and more third-world countries are sending students to the United States to study. As graduate students, these non-native speakers often instruct undergraduate classes.

These developments have merged the concerns of FL and ESL instruction in a practical way. Across the country, in major institutions such as Berkeley, Ohio State, and the University of Texas, undergraduate, MA, and PhD programs in language pedagogy are assuming a vital role in preparing qualified instructors. To build these programs, institutions are integrating the resources of educational psychology, ESL and FL instruction and research. At the college and university level, research in learning theory and teaching practice is gradually assuming the status of traditional scholarship in literature and linguistics. This shift can be partially traced to national concern about the international marketplace. Aggressive marketing practices of other nations have raised Americans' awareness that they must become articulate in languages other than English. To some extent, however, the change in attitude toward language studies can be attributed to a rethinking of the language learner's traditional role.

NORMATIVE VERSUS COMMUNICATIVE STANDARDS
FOR SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Among applied linguists, the second-language research emphasis of the fifties and early sixties was on comparing the beginning learner's audiolingual skills with skills resulting from other types of training, often in terms of contrastive analysis. Unfortunately, correct answers on the standardized tests—for example, the Modern Language Association's achievement test battery or the examinations produced by the American Association of

Teachers of Spanish, French, and German—depended largely on knowledge of surface language rules: sentence-level grammar or discrete vocabulary items. The comparison was really between acquisition of discrete skills rather than acquisition of functional language use. Consequently, methodological comparisons focused on replication of form alone: e.g., language out of context. The criteria for accuracy were idealized norms for speech in the abstract rather than real-world situations.

Such purely linguistic criteria reflect the beliefs of a speech community about *how* one should talk. Typically associated with social class distinction, they tend to focus on the correctness of form rather than on the delivery of meaning. They often impose on the spoken language norms developed for a reflective, deliberate written variety of the language. Consequently, normed standards assume that correct sentences equal effective communication. Normed language takes itself seriously. It is sanitized—cleansed of aberrations such as double meanings or colloquial irregularities. In this sense, one illustration of norming is "received" English—the elite linguistic world of educated Britons and the BBC, the world Monty Python satirizes so effectively.

When students do rote work they focus on a language norm, formal and dictionary equivalents that purportedly mean the same thing in another language. Language tests that ask for the "right" word on the basis of a part of speech or a translation presume such a norm. If we fill in the blank in the sentence "Jennifer is a _____ (adjective) girl," we perform a purely linguistic act. A correct answer is whatever adjective is formally correct. "Interesting" will be wrong in English, because following "a" the adjective must begin with a consonant. It might be factually correct, but it would be grammatically incorrect.

What happens when two very different methods—say, for example, audiolingual and grammar translation—share the premise that the language to be learned is normed language? To begin with, different instructional treatments end up with a lot in common: they produce similar results. In research comparisons, statistical measures of language learning with audiolingualism, cognitive code, and grammar translation methods revealed minimal performance differences. Moreover, regardless of method, the average performance at the end of two years of high school or college was not high enough to encourage expectations that students would be able to use that second language in some practical way (Scherer & Wertheimer; P. Smith). This result made our enterprise look like an exercise in futility and explains another significant generalization that can be made about such research. A comparison of the student numbers in all these studies reveals that language programs were losing about half of their students between the first high school year or college semester and the end of the second high school or college year.

Another reason that the upper-division programs in colleges and universities failed to attract and keep students was that, until the mid-seventies, programs consisted of literature and formal linguistic courses. At this level the research findings were no more encouraging, however, than for beginning instruction. John Carroll's 1967 study of language majors, whose findings influenced subsequent assessments of the profession's goals, revealed that most foreign-language majors failed to achieve more than intermediate-level competence. Regardless of the size or prestige of their colleges and universities across the United States, only those who spoke the foreign language in the home or had visited the foreign country for an extended period of time were able to perform on an MLA examination at levels that approached *functional ability* of an adult user of that language. It was time for the profession to rethink both the means and the ends of

language instruction in the United States. And that is, more or less, exactly what happened.

COGNITIVE RESEARCH ABOUT PRAGMATIC LANGUAGE LEARNING

Developments in the foreign language research of the seventies present a classic instance of paradigm shifts in the sense of Kuhn and Foucault. Carroll's findings about the achievement of language majors revealed the unreasonable expectations at American colleges and universities: mastery of surface language was not feasible even in four years. In the course of the 1970s, the profession began to divest itself of a theoretical framework based on normed language. The teaching of *langue*, the notion that teaching comprehensive linguistic rules would result in comprehensive foreign-language skills within two years of college training, quietly disappeared.[1] The *normative input / language replication* paradigm, with foreign language learning defined as the ability to meet an absolute standard of grammatical correctness, was supplanted by multiple interpretations of a less exclusionary goal. Instead of normative use or *langue*, our job was to teach functional use or *parole*. We redefined second-language learning as the ability to perceive and operate within real-world situations, in order to perform real-world tasks.

A new curricular goal, a paradigm of *authentic input / language creation*, emerged. Rather than measuring student performance against an absolute norm for vocabulary and grammar mastery, the new standard acknowledged the value of achieving specific communicative objectives. The profession began modifying curricula to encourage adults, even in their beginning language courses, to express their own feelings and thoughts. Thinking and intentionality became integral to language use at any level. We incorporated linguistic creativity into our agenda.

The curricula that are evolving in the wake of Carroll's findings stress two innovations: (1) expectations that language performance will result from the learner's total knowledge have replaced narrow expectations that performance results only from language ability, and (2) student use of language data for specific purposes has replaced the demand for replication of the total system of normed language. This shift changed the measure of language comprehension. Vocabulary knowledge no longer is the sole predictor of comprehension. Now the profession acknowledges a role for reader schemata. For example, we recognize that although a student knows that the German word for city is *Stadt*, a misreading of this word can occur in a reading assignment about *Karl-Marx-Stadt* if the student fails to realize that a city in East Germany bears this philosopher's name (Bernhardt 1986a: 111). Similarly, in measuring speech production, the old normative standard for accuracy could be expanded. With the new communicative standard, a student's successful circumlocution could be considered as accurate an answer as knowledge of the "right" word or phrase.[2] Changes in the theory of foreign language instruction parallel differences in the way language, cognition, and affective factors were assessed thirty years ago and how they are assessed today.

The definition of language in the old paradigm ignored learner cognition and affect. If the language in the head of the learner was inaccessible to observation, then speaker intent was hidden as well. What remained was surface language and accuracy defined by a language norm. The language to be learned in the paradigm of the fifties and early sixties had a single reality governed by rules for *langue* or standard speech in the abstract,

where learners filled in slots or engaged in pattern drills. The dominant linguistic theory was structuralism. The dominant learning theory was behaviorism.

To the behaviorist, the learner was a *tabula rasa* whose learning resulted from conditioned responses to outside stimuli. In the days before computer technology, observable data were what the student produced in words or writing. Neither models of artificial intelligence nor multivariate statistical measures existed. Because thinking could not be observed, learner comprehension became known as a passive activity. Since learner processes were not evident, there was no way to assess their existence. The learner was a blank slate to be written on by appropriate instruction.

This text does not intend to denigrate the work or research of either behaviorists or structural linguists. Moulton's *The Sounds of English and German*, for example, remains the acme for teaching distinctions in pronunciation. The point is to illustrate what happens when a paradigm shifts and conversely, to demonstrate the things that are virtually impossible before that shift occurs. The case of Bartlett, whose book *Remembering* was published in the 1930s and subsequently forgotten until the 1970s, illustrates what happens to unallowable thought. In Bartlett's volume, the unallowable thought was rationalism—the theory that each human being is born with innate ideas that interact with external stimuli—the converse of the then dominant empirical notion of the human being as a *tabula rasa.* Bartlett's *Remembering* proposed that humans learn by using cognitive strategies to integrate prior knowledge with new information. The subdiscipline he founded, schema theory, was about learning as problem-solving. Fifty years later, thanks to work in computer models for artificial intelligence and extensive neurological research (e.g., R. Anderson), the rationalist model of cognition has become viable.

Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* (1938), the classic case for the reader's right to interact with textual meaning, received a similar reception. Her book, written during the heyday of formalist criticism, went virtually unnoticed until the emergence of phenomenologically-oriented theory some thirty years later.

Today, given a model for language creativity, students' choice of the "right" answer depends as much on their cognition and communicative interaction as it does on language competence. In short, we no longer teach or assess linguistic behaviors in terms of linguistic proficiency alone. That is the new option in our discipline. Thus the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*, for example, encourage teachers to focus on communicatively effective language as a classroom goal. The *Guidelines*, as they are currently described, reward the linguistic creativity of learners rather than rewarding accuracy *per se.*[3] The ways in which scholars are trying to substantiate a functional standard for second-language instruction suggest new directions for that instruction (Byrnes 1988; Magnan 1988).

THE CURRICULAR IMPLICATIONS OF FOCUS ON THE LEARNER

To the degree that Carroll's findings dispelled myths about teaching input for output, subsequent research supported the feasibility of the *authentic input / language creation* paradigm. Work in discourse analysis and artificial intelligence confirmed that demands for knowledge of particular vocabulary and syntax change radically with subject matter or social demands. Cognitive sciences supplied us with data about how creativity—rethinking and reformulating language—promotes depth of processing (e.g., Craik &