

The strategy of inference in reading comprehension. An exploratory study in the context of teaching Spanish as a foreign language

Lina Hamel Quesadaⁱ 

Universidad de Oriente, Santiago, Cuba

Yessy Villavicencio Simónⁱⁱ 

Universidad Federal de Tocantins, Araguaína, TO, Brasil

Mercedes Causse Cathcartⁱⁱⁱ 

Universidad de Oriente, Santiago, Cuba

Abstract

The article is the final result of the master's thesis in Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language at the Universidad de Oriente, Cuba. It presents the theoretical and methodological foundations of the inference strategy within the process of reading comprehension in this area of knowledge. The methodology used is the literature review with a qualitative and exploratory approach (HERNÁNDEZ; FERNÁNDEZ; BAPTISTA, 2014). The results indicate the importance of the inference strategy as an essential tool for the interpretation of different types of texts in foreign languages, specifically Spanish. In this order, a set of inferential activities is proposed as an example and it is concluded that the design of a didactic sequence with emphasis on the treatment of the inference strategy contributes to the improvement of the reading comprehension process for a B1 language level in Spanish as a Foreign Language.

Keywords

Reading comprehension. Spanish as a Foreign Language. Inference strategy. Didactic sequence.

La estrategia de inferencia en la comprensión lectora. Estudio exploratorio en el contexto de la enseñanza del Español como Lengua Extranjera

Resumen

El artículo es resultado final de la tesis de maestría en Enseñanza del Español como Lengua Extranjera por la Universidad de Oriente, Cuba. En él se exponen los fundamentos teóricos y metodológicos acerca de la estrategia de inferencia dentro del proceso de la comprensión lectora en esta área del conocimiento. La metodología utilizada es la revisión bibliográfica con un enfoque cualitativo y exploratorio (HERNÁNDEZ; FERNÁNDEZ; BAPTISTA, 2014). Los resultados indican la importancia de la estrategia de inferencia como herramienta esencial para la interpretación de distintos tipos de textos en lenguas extranjeras, específicamente, la lengua española. En este orden, se propone un conjunto de actividades inferenciales como ejemplo y se concluye que el diseño de una secuencia didáctica con énfasis en el tratamiento a la estrategia de

inferencia contribuye al perfeccionamiento del proceso de la comprensión lectora para un nivel de lengua B1 en Español como Lengua Extranjera.

Palabras clave

Comprensión lectora. Español como Lengua Extranjera. Estrategia de inferencia. Secuencia didáctica.

A estratégia de inferência na compreensão da leitura. Um estudo exploratório no contexto do ensino do Espanhol como Língua Estrangeira

Resumo

O artigo é o resultado final da dissertação de mestrado em Ensino de Espanhol como Língua Estrangeira na Universidade do Oriente, Cuba. Apresenta os fundamentos teóricos e metodológicos sobre a estratégia de inferência dentro do processo de compreensão da leitura nesta área do conhecimento. A metodologia utilizada é a revisão de literatura com uma abordagem qualitativa e exploratória (HERNÁNDEZ; FERNÁNDEZ; BAPTISTA, 2014). Os resultados indicam a importância da estratégia de inferência como uma ferramenta essencial para a interpretação de diferentes tipos de textos em línguas estrangeiras, especificamente, o espanhol. Nesta ordem, é proposto um conjunto de atividades inferenciais como exemplo e se conclui que o desenho de uma sequência didática com ênfase no tratamento da estratégia de inferência contribui para a melhoria do processo de compreensão da leitura para um nível de língua B1 em Espanhol como Língua Estrangeira.

Palavras-chave

Compreensão da leitura. Espanhol como Língua Estrangeira. Estratégia de Inferência. Sequência didática.

1 Introduction

Various studies in the field of didactics of mother and foreign languages have focused on reading as a communicative process of interaction between the text and the reader, who actively participates using strategies, expectations or motivations to identify and select relevant information, evaluate, establish connections between new information and previous knowledge, make inferences, draw conclusions and reflect on the meanings of a text in order to self-regulate this process (AGUDELO GIRALDO, 2014; CANSIGNO GUTIÉRREZ, 2010; CASSANY; LUNA; SANZ, 2000; DE LA MAYA RETAMAR; LÓPEZ PÉREZ, 2021; ESCUDERO DOMÍNGUEZ, 2010; FONSECA *et al.*, 2019; HAMEL QUESADA; VILLAVICENCIO SIMÓN; CAUSSE CATHCART, 2017; HIDALGO DÍEZ; MANZANO DÍAZ, 2014; INGA ARIAS; ROJAS SILVA; VARAS ARONÉ, 2015; JOUINI, 2005; KLEIMAN, 2013; LERNER, 2002; MORGAN SCOTT *et*

al., 2005; OLIVEIRA; SOUZA, 2019; RODRIGO, 2019; SALES GARRIDO, 2004; SANTOS DÍAZ; JUÁREZ CALVILLO; TRIGO IBÁÑEZ, 2021; SECADES GONZÁLEZ, 2007; SOLÉ, 1998; USÓ-JUAN, 2019; WANNMACHER PEREIRA; BERNARDES BORGES, 2018). The development of the reading comprehension process involves the support of prior knowledge, which must be interrelated with new knowledge. Thus, the practice of reading comprehension allows the language user to construct meaning during interaction with the text, through cognitive, perceptual and linguistic mechanisms. In this sense, Usó-Juan (2019, p. 194) argues that, with the contributions of disciplines such as textual linguistics, psycholinguistics, pedagogy and sociolinguistics, reading comprehension has been reconceptualised, so that "[...] it has come to be understood as an interactive process - between the reader, the text and the context - in which the reader [...] establishes a cognitive dialogue between the information provided by the text and the expectations he or she has of the text".

The teaching-learning process of reading comprehension is participatory, dynamic and flexible, as its different stages facilitate adequate self-direction of the process. It is the teacher's task to teach students to develop it according to their needs, to interact with the text, to determine which learning strategies to follow so that they are able to interpret textual typologies and to form a subjective construction of the meanings of the text (MORGAN SCOTT *et al.*, 2005).

Reading comprehension is an essential communicative skill in foreign language teaching as a fundamental means of knowledge and communication. According to Usó-Juan (2019, p. 218), teaching practice aimed at enhancing this skill should focus on the following key areas:

- i) automaticity in word recognition; ii) the relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension; iii) the effect of prior knowledge on reading comprehension; iv) the strategies used in reading comprehension; and v) the effect of extensive reading on reading comprehension.

Based on the approaches of this author, we assume the conceptualisation of the term strategies to refer to the actions, procedures or techniques that students use consciously or unconsciously to improve comprehension or solve interpretation problems (USÓ-JUAN, 2019). Likewise, in order to train strategic readers, he proposes an

instructional model composed of three stages: explicit instruction to students on the use of strategies in reading a text; practice; and feedback.

The proficient reader automatically employs procedures and strategies from his or her mother tongue in foreign language texts. In this way, lexical, syntactic and semantic information is brought into play to help reconstruct the most viable meaning of the text. In the process of comprehension, cognitive strategies are applied (involving the integration of the new object of learning with previous knowledge), metacognitive strategies (requiring planning, control and evaluation by the learner to direct their own learning) and socio-affective strategies (related to the affective and emotional disposition of the subject towards learning), which make up the system of actions of the skills to be developed in the process to achieve a given task during cognitive activity as a method (HIDALGO DÍEZ; MANZANO DÍAZ, 2014).

Different key elements in the reading process are recognized according to Cansigno Gutiérrez (2010), such as the reader, the text, the reading strategies and the didactic materials, which favor the didactic treatment of reading comprehension in the teaching of Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL). In relation to reading methods, Bisquerra (1983 *apud* CASSANY; LUNA; SANZ, 2000) states that effective reading methods, generally known as fast reading methods, define reading effectiveness on the basis of speed and comprehension. SFL teachers should apply each reading method not only according to the language level of the learner, but also according to the learner's characteristics and learning objectives. In our case, the analytical method of reading is adopted for the subsequent elaboration of inferential didactic activities, which are carried out starting from the general (general questions, anticipations, hypothesis) to the specific (intensive analysis of the text).

The researcher Roméu (1992 *apud* SECADES GONZÁLEZ, 2007) stresses that the text with regard to three meanings: literal or explicit (related to the content); intentional or implicit (refers to that which is found between the lines in the text, without being written); and complementary or cultural (linked to the reader's knowledge which enriches the literal meaning). With regard to the inferential level, in contrast to first-level or literal reading, the reader makes presuppositions and deductions from the expressions. Also, the reader can establish relationships of the meanings in the text (AGUDELO GIRALDO, 2014).

It is assumed that the activity of reading comprehension brings with it the systematisation of the use of different strategies to favor textual decoding skills, such as sampling strategies, prediction, inference, lexical strategies, self-monitoring and self-correction (SALES GARRIDO, 2004). Foreign language learners often have difficulties in understanding unknown words in written texts, which hinders cognitive processes. In this sense, teachers should pay more attention to the didactics of reading comprehension development through the creation of conscious strategies, such as the inference strategy.

2 Conceptual foundation of the inference strategy for the development of reading comprehension

Numerous studies have been carried out that show the need to deepen the improvement of reading comprehension strategies in the learning of mother and foreign languages from different perspectives (AGUDELO GIRALDO, 2014; CASSANY; LUNA; SANZ, 2000; ESCUDERO DOMÍNGUEZ, 2010; FONSECA *et al.*, 2019; HAMEL QUESADA; VILLAVICENCIO SIMÓN; CAUSSE CATHCART, 2017; HIDALGO DÍEZ; MANZANO DÍAZ, 2014; INGA ARIAS; ROJAS SILVA; VARAS ARONÉ, 2015; JOUINI, 2005; KLEIMAN, 2013; LERNER, 2002; OLIVEIRA; SOUZA, 2019; SALES GARRIDO, 2004; SECADES GONZÁLEZ, 2007; SOLÉ, 1998; USÓ-JUAN, 2019). Although they provide significant theoretical and methodological issues for the teaching-learning process of this object of study, they are still insufficient in terms of the treatment of inference as a cognitive strategy to facilitate the performance of this skill in the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language.

Three fundamental strategies for understanding a text have been recognized: a) sampling or the ability to select the essential words and ideas; b) prediction or the reader's ability to anticipate the content of a text: the end of a story, the logic of an explanation, the structure of a complex sentence, among others; c) inference or the ability to deduce and conclude about what is implicit in the text (JOUINI, 2005). The inference strategy is an essential tool in reading comprehension, as it plays an important role in the development of cognitive strategies in students. It is understood as

a natural process that makes it possible to obtain the implicit information of a text. In this respect, Cassany, Luna and Sanz (2000, p. 218) state:

Inference is the ability to understand a particular aspect of the text from the meaning of the rest. It lies in overcoming gaps which, for various reasons, appear in the process of constructing comprehension, and as this is a repeated occurrence in reading, it becomes a substantial skill for the student to acquire autonomy.

It is a matter of taking all the possible elements from the text that facilitate the formation of a possible cause for the questions that are not explained, the reader must rely on the context to answer these unknowns. Inferring is deducing, reasoning, arriving at the conclusion of something without the need to have the answer explicitly, without looking for it in the text through literal words. Thus, the process of inference involves pragmatic interpretation in which the listener tries to find a reasonable explanatory hypothesis for the speaker's linguistic act (DASCAL, 2013).

The interpretation of an utterance involves the formation of hypothesis or the drawing of inference from the following phases: a) rejection of an interpretation inconsistent with the principle of conversational cooperation, b) search for a new interpretation consistent with this principle, c) finding a new interpretation and examining its consistency with the principle of cooperation (SENTIS, 1999). This reveals the need for the reader to create interpretation schemes and to have sufficient information to manoeuvre with inferences. By organising these schemas, the reader can construct a relationship in terms of propositions and conclusion. The propositions are the bases found in the text in the form of statements and the conclusion is the information that is implicit, but vital to make a correct interpretation. Schema theory emerges from interactional theory as one of the contributions of psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology in the late 1970s; it posits that reading comprehension depends on the prior knowledge used by the reader to interact with textual information and construct meaning. In other words, reading consists of the process the reader uses to find the appropriate schema configuration for the purpose of explaining the text (CASSANY; LUNA; SANZ, 2000).

During reading comprehension in SFL, emphasis should be placed on the development of inference as a cognitive skill, which makes it possible to enrich the linguistic meaning of expressions. This facilitates the acquisition of pragmatic

competences from a communicative perspective, which include, in addition to the aforementioned skill, reasoning about mental states, and integrating contextual information from various sources. Although the cognitive inferential mechanisms underlying pragmatic competence are universal, learners still have some difficulties in making adequate inferences, which is due both to cultural differences between the first language and the language they are learning and to the limitations that their linguistic competence places on them (ZUFFEREY, 2015).

One of the shortcomings students show in reading comprehension is the interpretation of a sequence or a fragment of the text. It is advisable to emphasise inferential activity during this process, so that the learner can delve deeper into the implicit information by reflecting on what the text expresses literally (JOUINI, 2005). The effort to endow information with meaning presupposes that comprehension is achieved through various cognitive processes that circumscribe word decoding, lexical access, syntactic processing, levels of mental representation, the execution of multiple inferences and post-reading activities, such as summarising, arguing or answering questions (ESCUADERO DOMÍNGUEZ, 2010).

The elaboration of inferences to interpret the text requires text typologies, which present contextual particularities or clues that enable the student to establish connections at the semantic and pragmatic levels between the words, sentences and ideas that make up the text. A student may present difficulties in inferring when he/she does not have experience related to the type of text: narrative (type of text in which the development of events in time and space is recounted); descriptive (the information expresses characteristics of objects in space); expository (the information explains the interrelation of the elements as a significant whole); argumentative (demonstrates propositions concerning the relationship between concepts or other propositions); and instructive (provides instructions and integrates procedures, rules and conditions that define certain behaviours) (JOUINI, 2005). This is why, in the development of inference, we should not only think about working at the level of the word, but also at the level of the paragraph and the text in general.

Jouini (2005, p. 24-26) proposes different types of inferences for the reading of texts of various types which determine relations at the syntactic, propositional and

pragmatic level between the different textual sequences for the construction and interpretation of the global meaning of the text, which are listed below:

- Inferences about goals: allow the identification of the goal that motivates the intentional action of an agent or character and the explanation of how the plan or action is achieved. - Sequential inferences: allow the specification of how a series of situations and events follow one another in a cumulative chain leading to an outcome. - Causal antecedent inferences: allow the specification of the causes, in the prior context of the text, of the actions, events or states that are explicitly presented. - Inferences of causal consequences: make it possible to make predictions about physical events and new plans of the agents from the explicit clause that is processed. - Emotional inferences: allow the detection of emotions experienced by the agent and the reader in response to an action, event or state. - Predictive inferences: these allow conjectures or assumptions to be made on the basis of certain data which allow others to be presupposed. When a learner predicts what comes next, he/she is also making an inference from the information, explicit or implicit, available in the text and from prior knowledge. - Referential inferences: these enable reference connections to be established between propositions based on grammatical and/or lexical-semantic relations and achieved fundamentally by cohesion procedures: lexical and semantic repetition, pronominal substitution, synonymic substitution, hyperonymy, grammatical pronouns, ellipsis, personal, spatial and temporal deixis, among others.

The analysis of the theoretical sources consulted on the strategy of inference in the process of reading comprehension shows that these studies focus on theoretical and methodological aspects of this type of strategy in the teaching of Spanish as a foreign and mother tongue. However, there is still a lack of studies on the application of didactic activities focused on this pragmatic skill as an essential tool for the development of reading comprehension in Spanish as a foreign language. This demonstrates the need for the elaboration of a didactic sequence whose aim is the methodological treatment of inference in order to favor this process in this area. Therefore, we propose a set of inferential didactic activities for learners of Spanish as a foreign language belonging to level B1 as a result of the article. This is an extract from the Master's thesis in Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language at the University of Oriente, Cuba.

3 Methodology

A literature review study is conducted with a qualitative and exploratory approach to investigate the interpretation of the problem stated in the selected context, based on the collection and analysis of data during the research (HERNÁNDEZ; FERNÁNDEZ;

BAPTISTA, 2014). Data collection instruments such as surveys were applied anonymously to 18 students from multicultural groups at reference level B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (hereafter CEFR, COUNCIL OF EUROPE, 2002), during the period from 2015 to 2017 at the Universidad de Oriente. The students are immersed in the Cuban linguistic and cultural environment due to academic, work or family issues. According to the CEFR, the B1 level learner should be able to understand texts written in everyday or work-related language, as well as the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters. It was decided to sample non-Spanish-speaking B1 learners in this university setting because they are slightly more independent speakers and need to develop strategies to understand the various texts, whose complexity of which increases markedly at this level. The purpose of the surveys was to diagnose the limitations related to the application of the inference strategy which hinder the reading comprehension levels of B1 level SFL learners.

Unstructured interviews were applied to determine the degree of knowledge about the routes for the didactic treatment of the inference strategy to facilitate the process of reading comprehension in ELE classes, to a total of nine teachers of the Integral Practice of Spanish as a Foreign Language in the Department of Languages of the Faculty of Humanities at the Universidad de Oriente, Santiago de Cuba, who have extensive experience and solid scientific-academic training in teaching of SFL. The criteria used made it possible to analyze the characteristics of the object of study in the selected context, based on an understanding of the difficulties expressed by the subjects involved in their teaching practice. The following indicators were taken into account: the methodology used for teaching reading in the class, as well as the use of didactic techniques and procedures; the relevance of the strategy of inference in reading comprehension; and the level of assimilation of the students in correspondence with the application of activities to develop inference in reading comprehension.

Direct observation was also used in B1 classes during nine 40-minute reading sessions in various groups. In this way, the data obtained from this empirical method made it possible to confirm the information that emerged from the student surveys and teacher interviews.

The application of these techniques is operated under the principle of contextualisation of the data, since they describe the relationships as they occur in the contexts in which they are observed, which does not deny the generalisation of the evidence, after comparison with the results of similar studies, taking into account the review of theoretical sources. The principle of triangulation (COHEN; MANION; MORRISON, 2007) was used, with the aim of collecting and analyzing data from three perspectives in order to contrast them with each other.

4 Results and discussion

The qualitative analysis of the data obtained in the student surveys showed the recognition of the value of reading comprehension (100%) for learning Spanish. The qualitative analysis of the data obtained from the student surveys showed that they recognised the value of reading comprehension (100%) for learning Spanish. 92% showed that, although they consider reading to be an essential factor for the communicative practice, it is very difficult for them to understand a text on any subject, although in the case of informative texts they present a lesser degree of difficulty. The learners have an independent level of the Spanish language; however, they understand the smallest part of the words present in the texts according to the context (89%). Most students report that there is little motivation for reading due to insufficient presentation of activities in class, which hinders their ability to inference when facing a text (80%). In general, they prefer the speaking sections because it is more motivating for them.

These shortcomings are confirmed by the data obtained in the interviews with the SFL teachers, who indicated the recognition of the value of reading comprehension for the interpretation of textual typologies in language learning (100%). However, despite knowing the techniques for developing inference in their students, they do not consciously plan their didactic treatment in order to improve reading comprehension in class (94%), so the inclusion of activities for this purpose is still deficient. In addition, they explain that students with a greater knowledge of Spanish, native speakers of Romance languages, present fewer obstacles for understanding a text, but show problems of global and specific comprehension. This is because they often translate literally, that is word for

word, and do not do so by inference, grasping the meaning according to the context. Each student carries out the process of inference differently depending on their culture, cultural level and language level.

From the observation of the classes of the reference level B1 of SFL, specifically the reading sessions, it could be noted that although the students have a greater command of the Spanish language according to the level reached, which allows them to overcome the deficiencies in understanding different types of texts, they still have limitations, such as poor interpretation of the essential ideas of the different types of texts, insufficiencies in deducing the meaning of a word according to the context, and excessive use of the dictionary to understand the meaning of words, which shows that learning takes place at the word level, and not at the paragraph or paragraph level; insufficiencies in deducing the meaning of a word according to the context; and excessive use of the dictionary to understand the meaning of words, which shows that learning takes place at the word level, and not at the paragraph or text level.

In the reading sessions of the lessons, reading comprehension activities are carried out in which many of the questions are very close to the text: the student writes the appropriate fragment without thinking about what he/she has read, or answers the questions taking into account only his/her prior knowledge without referring to the text. More complex texts are applied, are not the most appropriate to carry out an intensive work on the text which leads to the development of the students' capacity for inference, deduction and reasoning, which points to a superficial and incomplete approach to the inferential strategy which hinders the development of reading comprehension in non-Spanish-speaking students.

Based on the identification of the deficiencies diagnosed, a didactic alternative is proposed to improve the work with the inference strategy so that it makes it possible to guide the SFL teacher for the practice of reading in the classes of a B1 level. The design of didactic sequences is a fundamental task for organizing learning situations. On the matter, Ferreira, Muniz and Oliveira Júnior (2018) consider that listening, reading, writing and rewriting activities are present in the planning of teaching sequences. For his part, Barroso (2005) states that the learning sequence of the class includes all the activities to be developed, the order in which they would appear and the way they are related to each

other. Thus, the didactic sequence can be made up of a task, a complete lesson or a part of it. The main intention of the teacher is to retrieve the students' previous knowledge about a fact, relate it to real contexts so that the new information is meaning full.

The following are examples of some activities from the didactic sequence to be carried out before, during and after the reading of a text, as part of a reading class or more than one, depending on the characteristics and needs of the students. The didactic objective is to work on the strategy of inference to improve reading comprehension, hence most of the exercises focus on developing deductive thinking and, at the same time, practicing other language skills, as this is a proposal with an integrative character.

We have adopted the principles of Usó-Juan (2019) regarding the sequencing of didactic activities to guide reading comprehension within the communicative approach, organized in the pre-reading, reading and post-reading phases. The first phase should foster interest in reading, so the teacher should encourage students to determine the purpose of the reading; activate prior knowledge about the subject of the text, as well as its rhetorical-discursive structure; predict the content of the text from aspects such as the title, subtitles, images; raise questions regarding the content of the reading; or work on specific or key vocabulary of the text. The second phase corresponds to the reading of the text in order to achieve the interpretation by the student, hence the teacher must instruct students to distinguish the essential ideas from the secondary ones; monitor their comprehension; adjust the use of strategies to the purposes of reading; among other actions. Finally, the third phase is linked to the process of interpreting the text, taking into account the development of skills such as: corroborating the fulfillment of the purpose of reading; summarising the information; writing reports about the text; evaluating the information provided by the text; or enhancing the critical evaluation of the text (USÓ-JUAN, 2019).

Thus, the pre-reading stage will be carried out as part of the appropriation activities to open up the learning climate through the development of a motivational exercise, a prediction/anticipation activity through the observation of a series of images related to the text and lexical activities to facilitate the comprehension of the text. The reading stage will be developed within the extension and systematization activities through general pre-reading questions, exercises to check the comprehension of the text

(indirect or inference questions/specific pre-reading questions), intensive work (comprehension exercises, on questions of form, relations between sentences and paragraphs, lexis and development of inference skills in order to achieve the comprehension of new words and to deduce implicit ideas). Finally, the post-reading stage will be carried out as part of the consolidation and transmission activities, based on the development of a set of productive exercises that facilitate a synthesis of the teaching-learning process and enable an evaluation perspective for the teacher and the learner.

4.1 Opening activities (Pre-reading stage)

1. Explain the meaning of the following words and write down their meaning. At the end exchange the information with your partner (keep these meanings in mind during the reading of the text you will read later):
 - a. Jacket.
 - a. Bar.
 - b. Unbelieving.
 - d. Earring.
2. Look at the following pictures and say:
 - a. What do you observe?
 - b. Where are the people?
 - c. Do you think the order of the pictures makes sense? If not, suggest an order for the pictures and create a short story about what you observe.
3. Have you read many stories, which authors of stories do you know, and what characteristics do the stories have? Today's story is called "The Mobile". What does this title suggest to you?
 - a. Before reading the text, read the following excerpt from "The Mobile" and give a continuation. Extract from the text "The Mobile": "The guy who was having breakfast next to me in the bar forgot a mobile phone under the bar. I ran after him, but when I reached the street he had disappeared [...]".

4.2 Developmental activities (Reading stage)

4. Read the following text and answer the following questions:

- a. What is the story about?
- b. How many characters are involved in the story?
- c. Where do the events take place?

"The mobile"

The guy eating breakfast next to me in the bar forgot a mobile phone under the bar. I ran after him, but by the time I reached the street he had disappeared. I walked around a couple of times with the device in my hand and finally put it in my pocket and got on the bus. At the height of Cartagena Street it started to ring. As people looked at me, I took it out of my pocket and answered the call. A woman's voice on the other end asked: "Where are you? "On the bus," I said, "On the bus? What are you doing on the bus? "I'm going to work. The woman burst into tears, because it sounded like I had said something horrible to her, and hung up.

I put the device in my jacket pocket and lost my gaze in the void. At the corner of María Molina and Velázquez it rang again. It was the woman again. She was still crying. "You're still on the bus, aren't you?" she said in an incredulous voice. "Yes," I replied. A woman coughed next to me. "Who are you with?" she asked in anguish. "No one," I said. "What's with that cough?" "It's from a passenger on the bus." After a few seconds she added in a firm voice: "I'm going to kill myself; if you don't give me some hope I'll kill myself right now." I looked around me: everyone was watching me, so I didn't know what to do. "I love you," I said and hung up.

Two streets away it rang again: "Are you the one playing with my mobile phone? "Yes," I said, swallowing my breath. "Are you going to give it back to me? "No," I replied. After a while they left it without a line, but I always carry it in my pocket in case she calls again. (Text adapted from *Cuentos a la intemperie*, 1997 *apud* PINILLA; SAN MATEO, 2016, p. 106).

5. Do a second reading of the text. Pay more attention to details and mark true (T) or false (F). If the answer is (F), explain if necessary.

- a. (___) The robbery occurred in a park.
- b. (___) The man took the mobile phone because he wanted to steal it.
- c. (___) The woman wanted to commit suicide because the person who took the mobile phone was betraying her.
- d. (___) He said, "I love you" because he was in love with her.
- e. (___) The male voice that called at the end was the owner of the mobile phone.

6. Read the text again very carefully and then answer:

- a. Why do you think the woman felt that she had been told something horrible?
- b. Why did she want to commit suicide?
- c. What kind of relationship do you think the woman had with the man who lost the mobile phone?
- d. Did he say "I love you" because he was sorry? If not, explain.
- e. For what reasons do you think the man who found the mobile phone never told the woman that he had found the phone in a bar?
- f. Who do you think was the male voice that called out at the end?
- g. Why the person does not want to return the mobile phone at the end ?
- h. Why is the man waiting for another call from that woman?
- i. What conclusion have you drawn from this story?

4.3 Closing activities (Post-reading stage)

7. Write a text in which you give continuity to the final story of the text.

8. Summarize the text in writing in 70 words.

The deficiencies that may arise in the inference work during the teaching-learning process of reading comprehension will allow the teacher to make the appropriate modifications to some of the methodological steps in order to achieve an optimal orientation of the content selected for the development of the class and, therefore, to corroborate the methodological feasibility and validity of the sequence.

5 Final considerations

In the light of the above considerations, it is acknowledged that numerous publications coincide in highlighting the need to analyse reading comprehension skills in the teaching of mother tongues and foreign languages from different perspectives. However, a review of the specialized scientific literature shows that research on this subject has been limited to the study of reading strategies in a very general way in both mother tongues and foreign languages, in such a way they conclude on the need for an explicit teaching of reading strategies in order to improve this skill (CASSANY; LUNA;

SANZ, 2000; DE LA MAYA RETAMAR; LÓPEZ PÉREZ, 2021; FONSECA *et al.*, 2019; HIDALGO DÍEZ; MANZANO DÍAZ, 2014; KLEIMAN, 2013; LERNER, 2002; MORGAN SCOTT *et al.*, 2005; RODRIGO, 2019; SALES GARRIDO, 2004; SANTOS DÍAZ; JUÁREZ CALVILLO; TRIGO IBÁÑEZ, 2021; SOLÉ, 1998; WANNMACHER PEREIRA; BERNARDES BORGES, 2018). The theoretical and practical contributions of these studies make it possible to highlight the importance of training strategic readers, given the limitations that students present in the construction of inferences in the interpretation of different types of texts in mother and foreign languages in general, and Spanish in particular, and the methodological implications.

In the literature consulted, there is a broad consensus among researchers regarding these shortcomings, so it is urgent to emphasise the relevance of the treatment of inference as a cognitive strategy to facilitate the performance of this skill, specifically in the field of teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language. The teaching of inferential comprehension strategies favors the reading of any type of text with autonomy and efficiency (AGUDELO GIRALDO, 2014; ESCUDERO DOMÍNGUEZ, 2010; HAMEL QUESADA; VILLAVICENCIO SIMÓN; CAUSSE CATHCART, 2017; INGA ARIAS; ROJAS SILVA; VARAS ARONÉ, 2015; JOUINI, 2005; OLIVEIRA; SOUZA, 2019; USÓ-JUAN, 2019). Therefore, it is considered essential to be aware of students' needs and limitations in order to infer non-explicit information typical of the reading activity in a foreign language, also taking into account the level to which they belong, their motivations for reading and previous knowledge of the subject, as well as the selection of texts appropriate to their current circumstances.

Thus, little research has been found regarding the development of a didactic sequence to optimise the work with this cognitive strategy for non-Spanish-speaking students at the B1 reference level. In this sense, the aim of this article is to offer some theoretical and methodological assumptions about this object of study within the process of reading comprehension in SFL. The analysis of the results of the instruments applied confirms that the main causes of the shortcomings diagnosed are to be found in the existence of a limited treatment of the strategy of inference in the teaching practice.

Accordingly, it is concluded that the design of a didactic sequence with emphasis on the development of the inference strategy can contribute to the improvement of the reading comprehension process for a B1 language level in the

framework of SFL teaching at the University of Oriente, Cuba, which allows us to provide a sequencing of inferential activities. We agree with Usó-Juan (2019) that the teacher should present the sequencing organised in the phases of pre-reading, reading and post-reading, taking into account the principles that promote the transition from passive reading (decoding the text, without integration between the contents and the reader's previous knowledge), to active reading (construction of the meaning of the text by activating knowledge schemas and promoting comprehension strategies). These principles should guide reading comprehension within the communicative approach in order to train strategic readers from a didactic vision that emphasises the active role of the reader in this process, in correspondence with an instructional model composed of three phases: explicit instruction to students on the use of strategies in reading a text; practice; and feedback, through the sequencing of activities.

6 References

AGUDELO GIRALDO, C. H. *Secuencia didáctica para la comprensión lectora desde la perspectiva de Teun Van Dijk aplicada a estudiantes de 6-2do de la institución educativa Byron Gaviria de la ciudad de Pereira*. Tesis (Pregrado) – Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, Colombia, 2014.

BARROSO, C. La preparación de una clase de ele: pautas para una secuencia didáctica. *In: CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL: EL ESPAÑOL, LENGUA DEL FUTURO*, 1., 2005, Toledo. *Anales* [...]. Toledo: Fiape, 2005.

CANSIGNO GUTIÉRREZ, Y. La experiencia de la lectura en lengua extranjera. *Revista Lingüística Aplicada*, México, DF, v. 7, s.p.2010. Available at: http://relinguistica.azc.uam.mx/no007/no07_art06.htm. Access on: Mar., 16th, 2021.

CASSANY, D.; LUNA, M.; SANZ, G. *Enseñar lengua*. Barcelona: Graó, 2000.

COHEN, L.; MANION, L.; MORRISON, K. *Research Methods in Education*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

CONSEJO DE EUROPA. *Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las lenguas: aprendizaje, enseñanza, evaluación*. Madrid: Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, Madrid, 2002. Available at: https://cvc.cervantes.es/ensenanza/biblioteca_ele/marco/cvc_mer.pdf. Access on: Mar., 16th, 2021.

DASCAL, M. *Filosofía del lenguaje II: Pragmática*. Madrid: Trotta, 2013.

DE LA MAYA RETAMAR, G.; LÓPEZ PÉREZ, M. Hábitos de leitura e competência lexical de futuros professores de inglês na Educação Primária. *Educação & Formação*, Fortaleza, v. 6, n. 1, 2021. Available at:
<https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/redufor/article/view/3504/3568>. Mar., 16th, 2021.

ESCUADERO DOMÍNGUEZ, I. Las inferencias en la comprensión lectora. Una ventana hacia los procesos cognitivos en segundas lenguas. *Revista Nebrija de Lingüística Aplicada a la Enseñanza de Segundas Lenguas*, Madrid, 2010. Available at:
https://www.nebrija.com/revista-linguistica/files/articulospdf/articulo_530dae4bbe5f3.pdf. Access on: Mar., 16th, 2021.

FERREIRA, E. M. O.; MUNIZ, D. M. S.; OLIVEIRA JÚNIOR, O. B. Sequências didáticas, tecnologias e aprendizagem de língua portuguesa na escola de ensino médio. *Educação & Formação*, Fortaleza, v. 3, n. 9, p. 71-87, 2018. Available at:
<https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/redufor/article/view/857/759>. Access on: Mar., 16th, 2021.

FONSECA, L. *et al.* Estrategias para mejorar la comprensión lectora: impacto de un programa de intervención en Español. *Psicología Educativa*, Madrid, v. 25, p. 91-99, 2019. Available at:
https://journals.copmadrid.org/psed/archivos/1135_755X_psed_25_2_0091.pdf1. Access on: Mar., 16th, 2021.

HAMEL QUESADA, L.; VILLAVICENCIO SIMÓN, Y.; CAUSSE CATHCART, M. Apuntes teóricos y metodológicos sobre la estrategia de inferencia para el desarrollo de la comprensión lectora en la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera. *In: NUEVOS ESTUDIOS SOBRE COMUNICACIÓN SOCIAL*. Santiago de Cuba: Centro de Lingüística Aplicada, 2017. p. 489-492.

HERNÁNDEZ, R.; FERNÁNDEZ, C.; BAPTISTA, M. *Metodología de la investigación*. 6. ed. México: McGraw-Hill: Interamericana, 2014.

HIDALGO DÍEZ, E.; MANZANO DÍAZ, M. El proceso de comprensión en una lengua extranjera: una propuesta para evaluar estrategias de lectura. *Educación XX1*, Madrid, v. 17, n. 1, p. 289-326, 2014. Available at:
<http://revistas.uned.es/index.php/educacionxx1/article/view/10716/11311>. Access on: Mar., 16th, 2021.

INGA ARIAS, M. G.; ROJAS SILVA, P. R.; VARAS ARONÉ, F. Estrategias inferenciales en el desarrollo de la comprensión lectora. *Revista Alma Máter*, Lima, v. 2, n. 2, p. 131-141, 2015. Available at:
<https://revistasinvestigacion.unmsm.edu.pe/index.php/alma/article/view/11891/10612>. Access on: Mar., 16th, 2021.

JOUINI, K. Estrategias inferenciales en la comprensión lectora. *Glosas Didácticas*, n. 13, 2005. Available at: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=2255343>. Access on: Mar., 16th, 2021.

KLEIMAN, A. *Oficina de leitura: teoria e prática*. 15. ed. Campinas: Pontes, 2013.

LERNER, D. *Ler e escrever na escola: o real, o possível e o necessário*. Porto Alegre: Artmed, 2002.

MORGAN SCOTT, S. M. *et al.* Recomendaciones didácticas para el desarrollo de la competencia lectora con fines profesionales. In: SIMPOSIO INTERNACIONAL DE COMUNICACIÓN SOCIAL, 2005, Santiago de Cuba. *Actas-II* [...]. Santiago de Cuba: 2005. p. 792-796.

OLIVEIRA, M. A.; SOUZA, R. M. O ensino de estratégias de leitura mediado por sequências didáticas. *Entretextos*, Londrina, v. 19, n. 2, p. 165-195, 2019. Available at: <http://www.uel.br/revistas/uel/index.php/entretextos/article/view/36133/26916>. Access on: Mar., 16th, 2021.

PINILLA, R.; SAN MATEO, A. *ELEExpress: Curso intensivo de español A1-A2-B1*. Madrid: Sociedad Española, 2016.

RODRIGO, V. *La comprensión lectora en la enseñanza del español LE/L2: de la teoría a la práctica*. New York: Routledge, 2019.

SALES GARRIDO, L. M. *Comprensión, análisis y construcción de textos*. La Habana: Pueblo y Educación, 2004.

SANTOS DÍAZ, I. C.; JUÁREZ CALVILLO, M.; TRIGO IBÁÑEZ, E. Motivação para a leitura acadêmica de futuros professores. *Educação & Formação*, Fortaleza, v. 6, n. 1, 2021. Available at: <https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/redufor/article/view/3535/3542>. Access on: Mar., 16th, 2021.

SECADES GONZÁLEZ, J. Fundamentos teóricos en los que se sustenta la comprensión lectora con enfoque cognitivo, comunicativo y sociocultural en la enseñanza de la lengua y la literatura. In: ROMÉU ESCOBAR, A. (org.). *El enfoque cognitivo, comunicativo y sociocultural en la enseñanza de la lengua y la literatura*. La Habana: Pueblo y Educación, 2007. p. 111-139.

SENTIS, F. Dimensiones pragmáticas. *Onomazein*, Santiago, n. 4, p. 33-51, 1999.

SOLÉ, I. *Estratégias de leitura*. 6. ed. Porto Alegre: Artmed, 1998.

USÓ-JUAN, E. Comprensión lectora en una segunda lengua: de la teoría e investigación a la práctica docente. In: RUIZ DE ZAROBÉ, Y.; RUIZ DE ZAROBÉ, L. (ed.). *La lectura en lengua extranjera*. Barcelona: Octaedro, 2019. p. 192-218.

WANNMACHER PEREIRA, V.; BERNARDES BORGES, C. Compreensão leitora e consciência linguística em diferentes objetivos de leitura. *Linguarum Arena*, Porto, v. 9, p. 69-84, 2018. Disponível em: <https://ojs.letras.up.pt/index.php/linguarumarena/article/view/5157/4812>. Access on: Mar., 16th, 2021.

ZUFFEREY, S. *Acquiring pragmatics: social and cognitive perspectives*. London: New York: Routledge, 2015.

Lina Hamel Quesada, Universidad de Oriente

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1483-2786>

MA in Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language (2017) and BA in English as a Second Foreign Language (2011) from Universidad de Oriente, Cuba.

Authored contributions: Formal analysis, conceptualisation, research, methodology, data curation, writing - first draft, translation.

E-mail: linahamel1987@gmail.com

Yessy Villavicencio Simón, Universidad Federal de Tocantins

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9006-7775>

D. student of the Graduate Program in Teaching of Literature (PPGL) at the Federal University of Tocantins (UFT), campus Araguaína, Tocantins, Brazil (2020). Master in Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language (2009) and BA in Literature (2006) from the University of Oriente, Cuba. Assistant Professor of Spanish as a Foreign Language at the University of Oriente (2006-2020).

Authored contributions: Writing: proofreading and editing, methodology, supervision.

E-mail: villavicencioys69@gmail.com

Mercedes Cause Cathcart, Universidad de Oriente, Departamento de Letras, Facultad de Letras

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7524-0242>

PhD in Linguistic Sciences (2006) from the University of Oriente. Post-doctorate in Linguistics from the Federal University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil (2011). BA in Literature (1983), MA in Community Cultural Development (1998). Coordinator of the Master's Degree in Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language at the Universidad de Oriente (2007-2018). Associate Professor, Department of Literature, Faculty of Literature, Universidad de Oriente.

Authored contribution: Project management and supervision.

E-mail: mechyc@uo.edu.cu

Responsible editor: Lia Machado Fiuza Fialho

Ad hoc experts: Guadalupe Retamar and María Castillo

How to cite this article (ABNT):

HAMEL QUESADA, Lina; VILLAVICENCIO SIMÓN, Yessy; CAUSSE CATHCART, Mercedes. The strategy of inference in reading comprehension. An exploratory study in the context of teaching Spanish as a foreign language. *Educ. Form.*, Fortaleza, v. 6, n. 3, e4804, 2021. Available at: <https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/redufor/article/view/4804>



Received on February, 10th, 2021.

Accepted on April, 5th, 2021.

Published on June, 28th, 2021.

