



THE IMPORTANCE OF INFERENCES IN THE READING PROCESS, SOME OF THEIR CLASSIFICATORY ASPECTS, AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article aims at discussing the importance of inferences in the reading process, some of their classificatory aspects, and some pedagogical implications the knowledge of inference can rouse. Firstly, definitions for reading are presented and also important factors that can influence the reading process are discussed. Secondly, the definition of inference and its importance in the process of reading is approached. Thirdly, it is presented and discussed, based on theoretical perspectives, why readers made inferences. After this, the points discussed are the main kinds of inferences and their classification concerning their location in the text, their moment of occurrence, and also concerning their validity or non-validity. Finally, the article presents some pedagogical implications the knowledge of inference and their usage can cause, stressing the fact that students can produce much more in their educational process if they are aware of the advantages they can take of inferences when reading for study, in that inferences develop their memory recall ability making the task of learning an easier one.

KEYWORDS: reading process; inferences; classification, pedagogical implications.

A IMPORTÂNCIA DAS INFERÊNCIAS NO PROCESSO DE LEITURA, ALGUNS DE SEUS ASPECTOS CLASSIFICATÓRIOS, E IMPLICAÇÕES PEDAGÓGICAS

RESUMO

Este artigo tem por objetivo discutir a importância das inferências no processo de leitura, alguns aspectos classificatórios das inferências e implicações pedagógicas quanto à importância delas. Primeiramente, apresentam-se definições do que seja leitura, e também discutem-se importantes fatores, que podem influenciar o processo de leitura. Em segundo lugar, trata-se da definição de inferência e da importância da inferência na leitura. Em terceiro lugar, apresenta-se e discute-se, com base em perspectivas teóricas, por que os leitores fazem inferências. Após isso, os principais tipos de inferências são apresentados e classificados quanto à localização no texto, o momento de ocorrência e, também, quanto à sua validade ou não-validade. Por

fim, são apontadas implicações pedagógicas que o conhecimento sobre inferências e sua aplicação podem suscitar, destacando-se o fato de que estudantes podem produzir muito mais educacionalmente se estiverem conscientes das vantagens que podem tirar das inferências em leitura de estudo, visto que inferências melhoram a habilidade de lembrança do que foi estudado, tornando mais fácil a tarefa de aprender.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: processo de leitura; inferências; classificação; implicações pedagógicas

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a kind of activity a lot of people, including children, teenagers, adults and old ones, who had the opportunity to develop it, have been performing now and then, some more frequently than others, some with more competence than others, some more accurately than others. And this intricate ability is not something that human beings bring naturally with them when they are born, but it was a man's invention, which "expanded the ways we were able to think, which altered the intellectual evolution of our species" (WOLF, 2008, p.03).

GOODMAN (1995, p.11), in an article called *The Reading Process*, presents the following definition for this complex man's invention:

[r]eading is a receptive language process. It is a psycholinguistic process in that it starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning which the reader constructs. There is thus an essential interaction between language and thought in reading. The writer encodes thought as language and the reader decodes language to thought.

And for DANEMAM (1991, p. 512), reading is

a complex cognitive skill, consisting of the coordinated execution of a collection of oculomotor, perceptual, and comprehension process. These include processes that direct the eye from location to location, word-level processes that encode the visual pattern of a word and access its meaning from memory, and text-level processes that compute the semantic, syntactic, and referential relationships among successive words, phrases, and sentences in a text.

According to ALVERMANN et al., (2013, p. 61), reading is

a transaction between reader and text. Meaning is the result of the reader's meaning construction that engages his or her background knowledge and cognitive processing. When readers transact with a text, they create an evocation or mental representation of the text that can be observed, analyzed, reflected on, pondered, explained, and savored. While exploring and clarifying the evocation, readers assemble meanings for or interpretations of the text.

For MITCHELL (1982) cited by CLAPHAM, (1996, p. 11), the process of reading can be defined simply "as the ability to make sense of written or printed

symbols. The reader uses the symbols to guide the recovery of information from his or her memory and subsequently uses information to construct a plausible interpretation of the writer's message".

Many things were said about the reading process and another great deal is being said and written today, and there is no doubt that much more will still be said in the future. But one thing is strongly accepted nowadays, which is that reading is a process where meaning is constructed by the reader, and that it is not a easy process, because it is not a physiological necessity.

GOODMAN (1995) starts his definition saying that reading is a receptive process; he gives life to it when he mixes receptiveness in with interaction, and in with production, which is in accordance to ALVERMANN et al., (2013, p. 61). In the interaction between the reader and the text, the reader approaches the text provided with his or her background knowledge (a concept explained ahead).

Reading goes beyond the mere detection of relationships among successive words, phrases, and sentences; it is the perception of all these relationships and their implied ideas, and consequently the perception of the implicature the implied ideas have.

In this not-only-receptive-process-but-also-a-constructive-one, the reader influenced by his or her background knowledge, and information on his or her working memory (see ahead) will also construct his or her meaning producing inferences when necessary, without which, text understanding will not be adequate.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to present aspects related to the importance of inferences in the reading process, encompassing reasons by which they are generated, their kinds of classification, and implications the knowledge of their role in the process of reading may rouse.

This work has a qualitative characteristic, once theories of how the process of making inferences is discussed. The paper is divided into five parts. Part one, ***Some Important Notions***, deals with terms and notions as background knowledge, working memory, short-term memory and long-term memory, concepts important for understanding the article's content. Part two, ***What Is An Inference?***, presents some definitions for inference; part three, ***Why Are Inferences Generated?***, presents reasons why readers generate inferences – the importance of inferences for readers; in part four, ***Classificatory Aspects – Some Kinds of Inferences***, inferences are discussed and classified concerning their location in the text, their moment of occurrence, and concerning their validity; in part five, ***Implications of This Knowledge***, some pedagogical implications the knowledge of inference raises concerning students and their process of learning are discussed.

SOME IMPORTANT NOTIONS

Before dealing with the theme inferences, it is necessary to define some important terms present along the article, which are narrowly connected with inference drawing. These terms are *background knowledge*, *working memory*, *short-term memory*, and *long term memory*.

Background knowledge (also prior knowledge, previous knowledge), for some the same as world knowledge and schema, is what someone already knows about a subject which will help him or her to develop, understand or learn something new, "facts or events that are not described in the text" (BROEK et al., 1995, p. 357).

There is also a more specific prior knowledge called domain knowledge,

that is, when the text is specifically of the area of domain, of expertise of the reader.

Regarding the notion of schema, SOUSA (2005, p. 52) says that “[a] reader’s ability to comprehend gists is largely dependent on that individual’s past experiences and the mental models that have evolved as a result of those experiences”. These mental models are called schemata, the plural of schema.

He still explains the theory, affirming that schemata “develop over time and represent framework or scripts that use general concepts stored in long-term memory to help us make meaning out of situations”, and they can change as individuals gain new experiences. These modifications can be *accretion*, when new information is incorporated to the existing schema; *tuning*, when the existing schema is not appropriate for receiving the new information and then occurs a change in the existing schema to be more consistent with the experience; *restructuring*, when it is necessary to develop a new schema in that the new information cannot fit in with the existing schema (SOUSA, 2005, p. 53). Human beings develop schemata for every activity and experiences lived, physical or mental.

For GATHERCOLE & ALLOWAY (2008, p. 2), working memory refers to the “ability we have to hold and manipulate information in the mind over short periods of time. It provides a mental workspace or jotting pad that is used to store important information in the course of everyday lives”.

And according to ALLOWAY (2011, p. 1), working memory is our

ability to remember and manage information. The best way to think working memory is as the brain’s ‘Post-it note’. We make mental scribbles of bits of information we need to remember. In addition to using it to remember information, we also need working memory to process or manage that information as well.

Thus, it is memory and action at the same time. For instance, if one gets a direction how to go to a certain place and begins going to that place, he or she simultaneously is remembering the steps to follow and is proceeding in a manner the steps come true. ALLOWAY (2011, p. 1) explains it better in the following manner:

One question I often get asked is whether working memory is the same thing as short-term memory. No, it is not. Here is an example of the difference. Imagine that you are driving to a new school for a meeting. You lose your way and stop at a store to ask for directions. You may repeat the information to yourself over and over again as you walk back to your car so you don't forget. At this point, you are using your **short-term memory** to remember the directions. Now you get back inside your car and start driving. As you recite the directions to yourself, you look around and match them to the road names. Is this where you make that right turn? Where do you make that second left? Now you are using your **working memory** as you are applying or using the information that you were given. (Original emphasis).

GATHERCOLE & ALLOWAY (2008, p. 6) also explains short-term memory making difference between it and working memory:

Psychologists use the term 'short-term memory' to refer to those situations in which the individual simply has to store some material without either manipulating it mentally in some

way, or doing something else at the same time. Remembering a telephone number is a good example of an activity that depends on short-term memory – in this case, verbal short-term memory. Working memory is an umbrella term for the larger system of which short-term memory is a part, and activities that tax the central executive (possibly in combination with the short-term memory stores) are often described as working memory tasks.

In its turn, long-term memory is the system that is capable of storing information during long periods of time (BADDELEY et al., 2009). And for GATHERCOLE & ALLOWAY (2008, p. 10), it refers to the “memory of experiences that occurred at a point in time prior to the immediate past or near present, and also for knowledge that has been acquired over long periods of time”.

Long-term memory is divided into episodic memory, autobiographical memory, semantic memory, and procedural memory. The episodic memory retains information of events occurred in recent past; examples of episodic memory is what someone recall eating and drinking in the last breakfast, clothes that he or she wore for going to a party last week. Autobiographical memory stores information about ones identity like name, age, information about the family, friends, phases of life and so on. Semantic memory refers to the capacity people have to store information about language, that is, word, vocabulary, meaning and pronunciation for instance. Procedural memory is the memory of doing, of performance of certain kinds of actions – cognitive and motor abilities are combined. Examples are the abilities people have to brush their teeth, tie their shoes, driving, among others (GATHERCOLE & ALLOWAY, 2008).

WHAT IS AN INFERENCE?

Inferences are defined by YULE (2010, p. 288), “as additional information used by a listener/reader to create a connection between what is said and what must be meant”, and as “likely or possible interpretations, which readers will easily abandon if they [the interpretations] do not fit in with some subsequent information” (YULE, 2010, p. 149). Some may argue that this is a definition for forward inferences only, but depending on the subsequent information even backward inferences can be abandoned.

For ASHCRAFT (1993, p. 429), “[i]nference is the process by which the listener or reader draws the connections and conclusions not specifically mentioned in the passage” or “a process of drawing connections between concepts, determining the referents of words and ideas in the passage, and deriving conclusions from a message” (ASHCRAFT, 1993, p. 432).

According to VONK & NOORDMAN (1990, p. 447), an inference is some information “the writer supposes the reader will compute from the text and that the writer therefore leaves implicit”.

And ZWIERS (2010 p. 99), in a more simple way, explains inference as the “process of combining the current text information with one’s own experience in order to create meaning that is not directly stated in the text [...] it means creating connections and making educated guesses that go beyond the author’s exact words or images”.

What follows is a real situation the author of this article experienced, which, despite not being a written text, can properly exemplify what an inference is.

The narrative and the discussion of the episode are in first person for the purpose of clarity of the participants.

Once, on a Sunday morning, I was talking to my brother and a friend of mine, Vanderley, who was sitting in his car. My brother and I were standing near the window of the driver. Then there came my niece, my brother's daughter, and said: "my daddy is gonna buy a fish to him too. Vanderley has already bought his too. It's here", and pointed her finger to the trunk of the car. Then I asked Vanderley if he had bought any fish. He responded affirmatively. Then my brother apologized and said that he was going to buy his fish, and walked into a gospel bookshop very near the place we were.

What connections did I make in order to build meaning during this situation?

Firstly, from the sentences *My daddy is gonna buy a fish to him too* and *Vanderley has already bought his*, I draw a possible (or unauthorized – as will be seen later) inference that many people had already bought some kind of fish.

Secondly, after my niece pointed her finger to the trunk of the car, I drew an inference, predicting that Vanderley would have fish for lunch, and my background knowledge brought an image of a fish wrapped up in a newspaper or in a Styrofoam box in the trunk of the car. Most people do this when taking fish home. This prediction became apparently consistent when Vanderley answered affirmatively at my asking whether he had bought any fish. But when my brother went to buy his fish in a gospel bookshop, all the information I had activated previously and my predictions had to be checked and or replaced on account of the subsequent information (my brother's action) has not matched the previous one.

Thus, all the interpretations between Vanderley's answer and my brother's going to the gospel bookshop made way to the inference that that fish was not a real one. My background knowledge brought to my mind the knowledge that one of Christianity's symbols was a fish. This information and interpretation was linked to a possible sticker stuck on the rear end of the car. Then I walked some steps back, and there really was a cool black fish sticker stuck on the rear end of the car with a biblical verse written on it.

This little event shows how important inferences are. They are resources listeners and readers use in order to construct meaning in an oral or written text. They are attempts listeners and readers do in order to fill the information gaps speakers or writers leave in their discursive productions. These attempts will be confirmed or not by the text. For instance, my interpretation that that fish was a real one was not confirmed, because the sequence of the event brought some other information, not matching the schema I activated, and I had to reconstruct my mental representation.

Inferences are important because "They are a necessary part of the interpretation process: for an utterance to be understood, as intended, referring expressions must be linked to entities in the world [...]" (IRMER, 2011. p. 09).

WHY ARE INFERENCE GENERATED?

According to the definitions of inference seen previously, the reader generates inferences in order to build comprehension. The reader makes inferences in an attempt to understand, to interpret, and to create a logical representation of what he or she is reading.

The above can be confirmed by GRASSER & KREUZ (1993, p. 154), for whom the reader generates inferences because “the reader wants to know (a) the goals, motives, or reasons that explain an agent’s actions; and (b) the events, actions, and states that cause or enable involuntary events”.

The reader will try to achieve the objectives above by taking advantage of his or her background knowledge, the information in working memory, short-term memory and of the information in the long-term memory. The reader provided with these powerful resources will try to build a bridge across the gaps of information (i.e., writer’s implicitly intended information), existing in the text, in order to give sense to what he or she is reading. Inferences are part of the process of interaction between the reader and the text.

Since the reader’s aim is comprehension, it is making sense of what is read, one may sum up the previous words of GRASSER & KREUZ (1993) as a reader’s search for coherence. Hence, the reader will make inferences to establish coherence. Coherence is one of the reasons inferences are generated. But coherence “is not something which exists in the language, but something which exists in people. It is people who ‘make sense’ of what they read and hear” (YULE, 2010, p.144). That means that text is not enough and good texts and bad readers do not fit in with properly.

Coherence is established through a causal relationship between the current statement and the antecedent, or between the current statement and the subsequent text. According to BROEK et al., (1995), inferences are causal in nature. Inferences are generated to search for causes.

For BROEK et al., (1995, p. 364), inferences may be “generated in order to attain standards [criteria] for coherence”. Local and global coherence are vital to help the reader carry over the text indispensable information for his or her to construct understanding.

TRABASSO et al., (1995, p. 160) - also see ZWAAN & BROWN (1996, p. 289) - presents local coherence as a process that “involves connecting the currently processed information with the immediately preceding context (i.e., information in short term memory, generally the previous one to three sentences)”, and global coherence as a process performing “connections between currently processed information, but is no longer available in active memory (based on local coherence strategies) because it occurred much earlier in the text”.

Whether the attempts by the reader to construct coherence are successful, understanding is generated and the reader can go on reading. Thus, coherence, and consequently comprehension, depends on the inferences made (when necessary) by the reader (GUAN, 2007).

Making sense is the reason why inferences are made, but the level and quality of them varies from reader to reader, because “inferential processes during reading are strongly determined by the extent to which they satisfy readers’ needs for coherence” (BROEK et al., 1995, p. 368).

For TRABASSO et al., (1995, p. 27), inferences will help the reader’s retrieval:

what a person does during reading and comprehension affects both the amount and what is recalled. The basic theoretical idea is that when subjects integrate sentences through causal relations, they construct a memory representation during comprehension that will be used in later retrieval. The more relations that a clause has to other

clauses, the more accessible its information is in retrieval.

Thus, if the reader is aware of the importance of inferences for retrieval, he or she can take advantage of them especially when reading for study.

CLASSIFICATORY ASPECTS - SOME KINDS OF INFERENCE

Now, some inferences readers tend to produce when trying to build comprehension will be presented.

We can say from a broad perspective that inferences have been recorded and analyzed: (a) in relation to their location in the text as local, global - also called backward inferences (BROEK et al., 1995), and forward inferences; (b) concerning to their moment of recurrence as on-line or off-line inferences; (c) regarding their validity as necessary or not necessary inferences for comprehension (VONK & NOORDMAN, 1990). Necessary or not necessary inferences are also called by ASHCRAFT (1993) authorized and unauthorized ones; and (d) in relation to their contextual knowledge.

a- Location in the text - inferences can be basically classified as to the part of the text they are being generated about as:

Local inferences – these are generated in order to link the current statement, that is, the information presently being read, to information still activated in the working memory, immediately preceding the current event.

An example of local inference is given by BROEK et al., (1995, p. 354) in the sentences *He freed the princess / The princess was very thankful to the knight*, where the reader has to connect the word knight to its antecedent in the immediately preceding sentence.

Global inferences - these are made in order to fulfill an information gap by connecting the current statement to some information that is no more active in the reader's working memory, information that is in the prior text, hence in the reader's long term memory, or which is part of his or her background knowledge.

For SILVER (2012, p. 131), an example of global inference "would be the ability of infer the theme of a story".

Another example of global inference, with a different perspective, is given by BROEK et al., (1995), in the following situation, when the reader in order to understand sentence number eight (which is the current statement) needs to reactivate the information in his or her long term memory concerning sentence number one: 1- *The knight wanted to marry her* / 2- *The Knight hurried after the dragon* / 3- *They fought for life and death* / 4- *Soon, the knight's armor was completely scorched* / 5- *At last, the knight killed the dragon* / 6- *He freed the princess* / 7- *The princess was very thankful to the knight* / 8- *She married the knight*.

Forward inferences - these "occur when the reader anticipates aspects of events that are likely to be described in subsequent text" (BROEK et al., 1995, p. 355). Forward inferences are generated based on the current statement, which is supported by the prior text. But the current statement not always contains sufficient information that allows the reader to generate a correct forward inference. The fact is

that forward inferences are predictions that will match or not the current statement. In case they do not, the inferences will have to be corrected to the extent new information is added to the current event.

On account of reader's uncertainty of having correctly guessed or not the subsequent event, some researchers argue that forward inferences are difficult to be generated.

I would not say that good readers avoid forward inferences, because as BROEK et al., (1995, p. 355) say, "they [forward inferences] are part of what makes reading enjoyable". Good readers make forward inferences consciously that their inferences may not match what the subsequent information will reveal, that is, they predict future events in the text but their expectation concerning their fulfillment is left open-ended. Forward inferences are conditional; they are bound to the subsequent event confirmation.

Good writers of fiction explore forward inferences. They lead their readers to predict, and these writers create situations in the text that support the predictions they want their readers to make, and in the end they surprise the readers with a non-predicted event. It is "what makes reading enjoyable" (BROEK et al., 1995 p. 355), in this case, reading for pleasure.

UR (2012, p.145) suggests that an efficient reading is also characterized by forward inferences.

b- Inferences in relation to their moment of occurrence – concerning this aspect, inferences can be:

On-line inferences - they are inferences generated at the very moment the reader is reading, without pause, "during the course of comprehension" (GRAESSER & KREUZ, 1993, p. 145).

Examples of on-line inferences, according to GRAESSER & KREUZ (1993), are the causal antecedent inferences. A causal antecedent inference is generated when the reader, in order to understand the current event, searches for information in a previous reading cycle, which will explain the current event.

Other examples of on-line inferences, according to VONK & NOORDMAN (1990), are "inferences that identify the antecedent of an anaphoric expression", called by GRASSER & KREUZ (1993) referential inferences.

The two kinds of inferences above are on-line inferences to the extent the antecedent is not too far from the current event. When the antecedent is too distant from the current event, the reader will have difficulty to establish the connections between the two parts, and the reading process may slow down or even stop. This could make what would be an on-line inference become an off-line inference (off-line inferences will be seen ahead).

The generation of on-line inferences is constrained by the characteristics of the text, as its level of cohesion, for instance. But that is not all, the reader's motivation, the reader's reading purpose, the text genre, the reader's background knowledge and the world knowledge are other factors to which on-line inference generation is bound. An interesting question to be asked is what inferences will a reader make if he or she is exposed to a text he or she is not interested in, or to a where referents and antecedents do not match?

Off-line inferences - they are "generated after comprehension during a retrieval task, but not during text comprehension" (GRASSER & KREUZ, 1993, p. 155). These

inferences may be also generated when the reader stops reading in order to reflect about the current reading cycle, trying to establish connections with the prior text and or with his or her background knowledge. Such reader's reading pause may be a result of his or her goal, and or a result of text characteristics.

c- Inference validity – it has to do with the purpose of the writer that an inference be generated by the reader, and has to do with the reader's generation of an inference intended or not intended by the writer. Regarding validity inferences can be:

Necessary / authorized inferences - they are (local, global, forward, on-line or off-line) inferences that serve a function in the text, which is to avoid inconsistencies, and are constrained by the text in order to help the reader to construct his or her text representation.

They “are necessarily true implications of sentences in the text. Negation of the inference leads to inconsistency” (VONK & NOORDMAN, 1990, p. 449). They are necessary inferences for the interpretation and explanation of an oral or written text. For ASCRAFT (1993, p. 432), “an authorized inference is an inference drawn by the listener [or reader] that indeed was intended by the speaker [or writer]”.

It is important to remember that an inconsistency when detected by the reader makes reading slow down and represents time consuming in the reading process, since the reader will have to “restructure the mental representation to re-establish coherence” (BROEK et al., 1999, p. 87). There may be an unnecessary effortful operation if the reader generates an unauthorized inference.

On the other hand, the detection of inconsistencies depends on the reader's reading purpose and the location of the inconsistency (ies) in the text. For instance, BROEK et al., (1995, p. 370) say that “inconsistencies are noticed when the two inconsistent pieces of information are active at the same moment”, but they are likely not to be noticed when they involve the current event and an information from the prior text or background knowledge “if local relations provide adequate coherence for the current event” (BROEK et al., 1995, p. 370).

Kinds of necessary inferences - According to VONK & NOORDMAN (1990), necessary inferences can be classified as presuppositions, entailments, conventional implications and transitive inferences.

They exemplify presuppositions as in *John forgot to let the dog out* which presupposes that the dog should be out; thus the reader necessarily should infer this or he or she probably would have comprehension problems. Entailments are exemplified as in *Dick is a father*, what leads the reader to understand that Dick inevitably has one or more children.

Conventional implications are exemplified as in *John is a linguist, but he knows much about statistics*, which implicitly says that linguists do not have to know about statistics because it is not their domain area. Transitive inferences are exemplified as in *Alan is taller than Bill; Bill is taller than Chris*, which leads the reader to infer that Alan is taller than Chris.

Unauthorized inferences - according to ASCRAFT (1993, p. 433), these “are mistaken inferences on the listener's [reader's] part”, in the sense that he or she did not convey the intended meaning, that is, the meaning constrained by the text. But on the other hand, ASCRAFT (loc. cit.) says that “unauthorized inferences may have

been unintentionally suggested”; thus, they are possible once they do not lead to inconsistencies.

For VONK & NOORDMAN (1990), “[p]ossible inferences are probably true implications of the sentences in the text. They are more or less likely to be true given the state of affairs in the world. Negation does not lead to an inconsistency” (p. 450).

Still, according to VONK & NOORDMAN (1990), possible inferences may be called invited or pragmatic inferences, and can be exemplified as in *The little old lady stepped into the chauffer driven Cadillac*, from which one may or may not infer that the old lady is rich. This kind of inference is based on the reader’s world-knowledge, when he or she uses previous experiences, perceived in parallel contexts, that are in the long-term memory of the reader, to build coherence and consequently understanding (IRMER, 2011).

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS KNOWLEDGE

It was seen that inferences are part of the reading process, and that they are the result of the reader’s attempts to build comprehension, and that they occupy an important place in reading process studies. Thus, there are pedagogical implications in it, and the first one is that teachers and all those involved in teaching, especially in teaching reading, should promote activities to their students that improve students’ ability of making inferences, and consequently they will be more autonomous in their reading, because “when readers take control of their reading, they become self-regulated, independent learners who can recognize and resolve decoding and comprehension problems when they encounter them” (ALMASI & FULLERTON, 2012, p. 7).

The second one is that inferences also depend on the reader’s schemata, background knowledge, and linguistic knowledge, features prior to the generation of inferences, and, therefore, teachers should aware students of this, as well as to think of improving conditions for students to implement and better use those resources (BROWN, 2007; BADDELEY et al., 2009). Concerning this CLARKE & SILBERSTEIN (1997, pp. 136-137) say:

Readers understand what they read because they are able to take the stimulus beyond its graphic representation and assign it membership to an appropriate group of concepts already stored in their memories [...]. Skill in reading depends on the efficient interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world.

The importance of background knowledge and its development by the reader and its importance of being worked in the classroom are stated in the words of FISHER & FREY (2009, p. 2) that “[w]hen readers engage with a text for which they have limited background knowledge, the text is much more difficult to understand than one for which they have ample background knowledge”, and also in the words of SOUSA (2005, p. 52), “[s]chemata are important in helping to comprehend text. Readers use their schemata to interpret cause and effect, to compare and contrast, and to make inferences about the author’s meaning”. Therefore, the more readers improve their background knowledge the more they are prepared to draw proper inferences, especially the ones depending from extra-text knowledge.

And the third one refers to the fact that students can produce much more

in their educational process if they are aware of the advantages they can take of inferences when reading for study, in that inferences develop their retrieval ability (TRABASSO et al., 1995), making the task of learning an easier one.

Thus, didactical activities with inferences like local, global and necessary ones - presuppositions, entailments, conventional implications and transitive inferences (VONK & NOORDMAN, 1990; SILVER et al., 2012), as seen before, can contribute to the betterment of such an indispensable cognitive operation for proper text understanding.

FINAL REMARKS

Inferences have the crucial role of building comprehension, that is, they help readers to understand, to interpret, and to create logical representations of what they read.

Thus, if readers and students or anyone else improves this important cognitive feature, they will be better prepared to interpret what they read and what is happening around them.

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