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**'Reading Competencies':
Central Concepts and Reference Systems in Hungarian
Educational Discourses**

Structure of the Position Paper

1. History and current situation of reading research: change of paradigm
2. Methods and practices of reading instruction in Hungary
3. Modelling of reading competence
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1. History and current situation of reading research: change of paradigm

According to the semiotic perspective, reading means decoding signs, in a narrow sense decoding written texts. However, defining the term of reading is not so simple. At the end of the 20th century it was rethought by cognitive and later by sociocognitive psychology. In this sense reading means decoding, understanding, thinking or reasoning, transaction or creating new meanings. Nowadays there is a shift from cognitive perspective (how knowledge is organised in our mind: scheme theory) towards metacognition (studies of learning process) and sociocognitive tendencies that take sociocultural aspects into consideration. The change of paradigm in reading research is the following:

Behaviorist → Cognitive → Sociocultural

(A. Jászó 2006)

Empirist-Behaviorist → Linguistic → Psycho- and Sociolinguistic → Cognitive

Psychological → Constructivist → Motivated learning

(Cs. Czachesz 2005)

Learning about reading has gone under a change from the simple reproductive skills to a more complex, functional interpretation (social context, previous knowledge, personal representation, reader's motivation). The change of paradigm can be traced in reading concepts of international researches (Hungary also participated):

1. First IEA: Behaviorist perspective, reproduction of texts. The stages of development concerning decoding skills are pointed out.
2. Second IEA: Evaluation shifted from reproductive-like measurement to a higher level of components. Eg. being able to understand and use such language forms that are required by the society and/or regarded useful by the individual. (The main problem: it is rather subjective speaking about requirements of society, since the 32 countries participating had diverse cultural characteristics.)
3. PISA 2000: Measurement of 15-year-old teenagers. Using written texts in a common sense, and *reflection* is the keyword (supposing metacognitive elements). Reading

definition of PISA refers to a cultural, instrumental knowledge nature of reading.
(Csíkos 2006)

Hungarian researches have learned a lot from international studies and now they are based on strictly empirical research methods of the natural sciences.

2. Methods and practices of reading instruction In Hungary

At the moment reading instruction is organized around three crucial questions:

- Teaching methods
- Understanding texts (development of reading comprehension)
- Motivation

Teaching Methods: There are three main groups of teaching methods in the first grade (analytical, synthetical and analytical-synthetical or combined). The pure analytical or synthetical methods are very rare, because endeavour for balanced programmes can be seen (principle of integration). In Hungary there is a strained debate over teaching methods although reading researches do not show significant differences concerning effectiveness. The major problem in this field is inadequate time for preparing reading and writing and in some cases the unjustifiable rapid speed of teaching decoding.

Understanding text (development of reading comprehension): This field applies results of cognitive psychology:

- knowledge of grammar
- comprehension of words, sentences, paragraphs and the whole text
- reader's scheme or his/her structure of knowledge
- understanding implications and presuppositions in text

Motivation: Inevitably important factor that has been elaborated in reading models thoroughly and is connected to differentiation. According to sociological studies, besides decoding skills, social background, literacy events at home, family income, freetime activities and mainly mother's qualifications all have great impact on becoming readers.
(A. Jászó 2006)

The socialization paradigm in reading research have a lot to do with these factors.

Reading and writing in our National Curriculum (A. Jászó 2001:59)

	Reading	Writing
1st grade	Preparatory of reading and writing	
	Learning signs of reading	Learnig signs of writing
2nd grade	Reading skills Developing fluent reading	Writing skills Learning letters and their connecting
3rd grade	Reading skills Proper stressing. Interpretative and process reading. Reading literary texts. Comprehension	Writing skills Economical ways of writing Arranging written text on sheet
4th grade	Reading skills Preparing expressive reading. Reading literary texts. Comprehension	Writing skills Developing individual writing (writing defined on an instrumental level)

One of the most cardinal problems in our Curriculum is the insufficient number of Hungarian mother tongue lessons. Since 1978 it has been decreasing dramatically. On the other hand, our curriculum emphasises the importance of becoming readers on each school level. It used to be a practice to ensure reading practice from grade 5 as well. Nowadays the idea seems to have been shelved. (A. Jászó 2006)

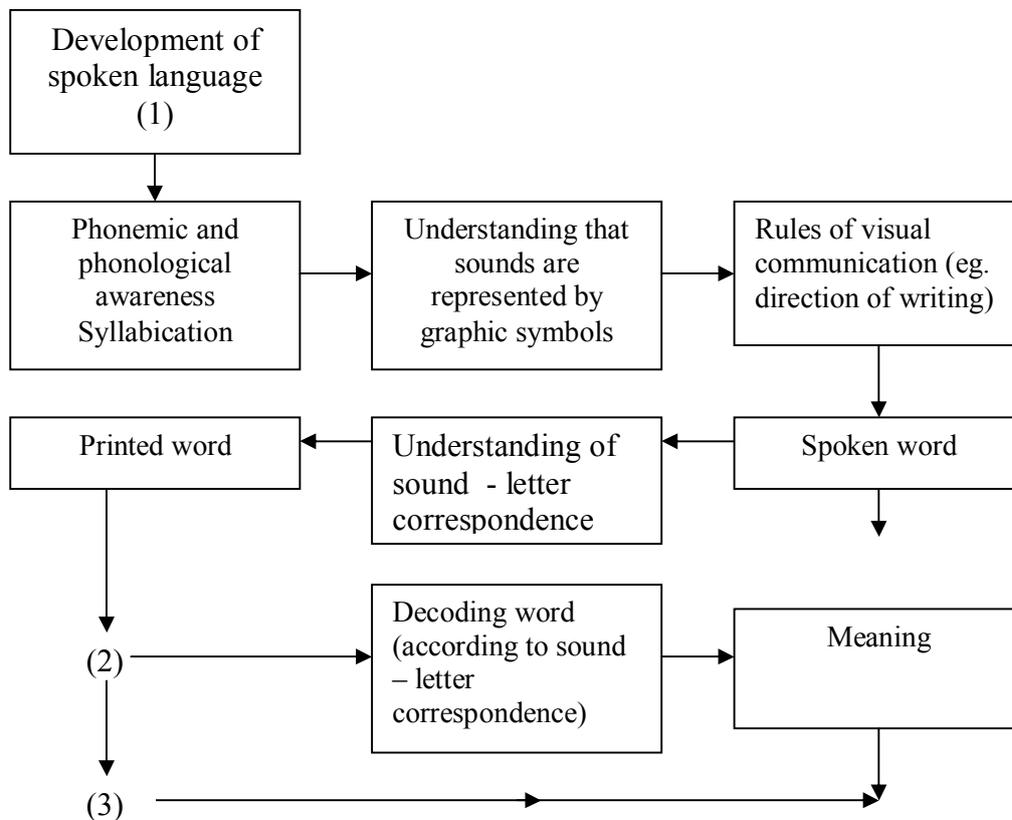
The other problem is that Curriculum does not detail reading instruction above grade 4, because it is considered revision and not a new content or activity. From grade 5 pupils are expected to study curricula from their textbook, although for many children and teenagers understanding of both verbal and visual information is quite difficult. Until the age of 10 or 11 only few pupils reach the required level of comprehension necessary for individual learning from textbooks. (Molnár 2006)

3. Modelling of reading competence

According to reading psychology, reading is a skill so learning of it has three stages:

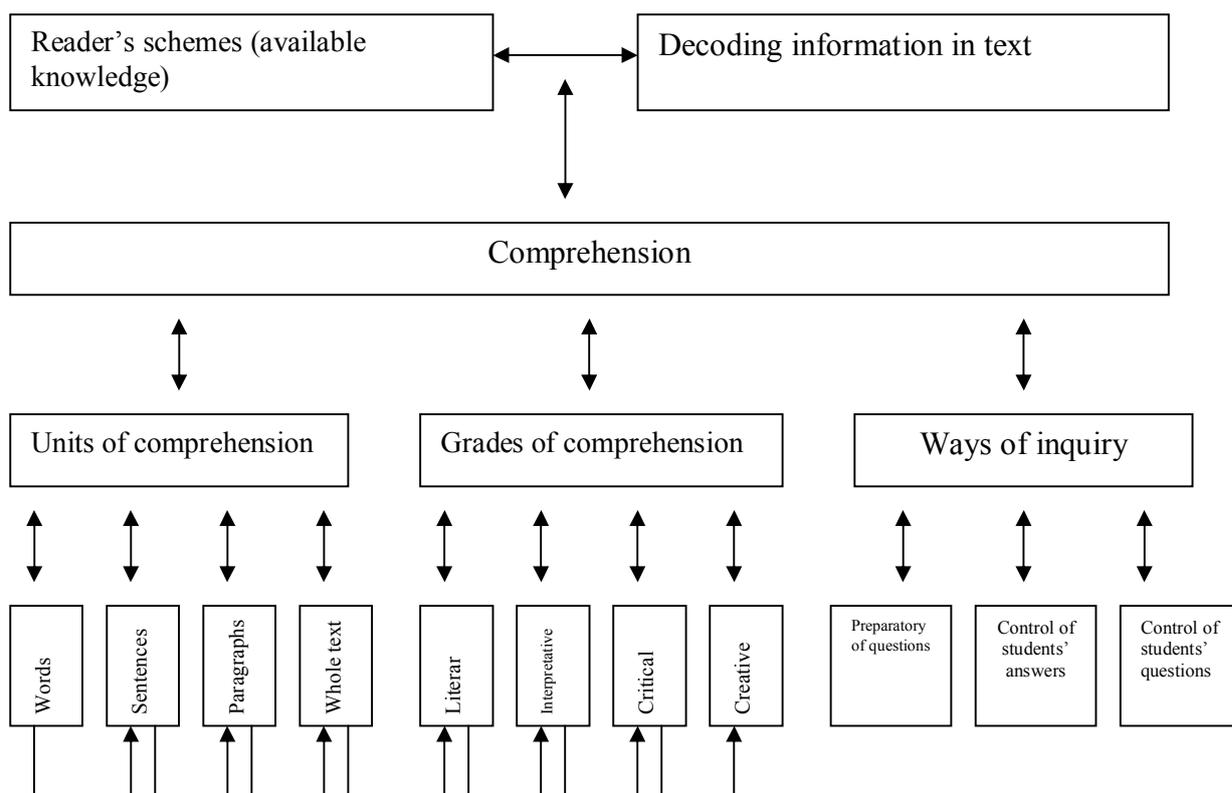
- understanding the task
- developing of skills necessary for reading

- automatization of skills



Model of reading competence (A. Jászó 2006: 250)

Understanding information in texts has verbal and non-verbal conditions. Verbal condition is technics of reading, so the way of decoding. One has to be aware of language system, its pragmatic, rhetorical, poetic and stylistic rules. For reading comprehension such non-verbal factors are also needed as speech situation and context (who is sending the message to whom, what is the sender's intention, historical and social background of text). Non-verbal signs also belong to written text which help or hinder understanding.



Model of comprehension (A. Jászó 2006: 268)

It would be an illusion to believe pupils acquire reading and writing perfectly by the age of 10. Moreover, between grades of 4 and 9 differences between schools get bigger and bigger. The reason of PISA-shock is that according to results, one student out of four does not learn to read.

4. Reactions to study results

International and Hungarian reading researches (IEA, Monitor, PIRLS, PISA) and their results have affected Hungarian reading research and education. What are the basic problems and what changes do we need (and what opportunities do we have) in order to satisfy new demands?

1. The most important results are the followings concerning adolescents:

- In first IEA study (1970) Hungarian reading results were disappointing in all age groups (10, 14, 18) and in all research fields (comprehension, reading speed, word knowledge). Second IEA study (1990-1991) showed better results

especially among 14-15-year-old pupils (girls were better than boys). PISA (2000), measuring 15-year-old teenagers' achievement, caused disappointment again (pupils performed below the average).

- The first IEA called researchers' attention to social-economic background factors, because just a part of the differences could be traced back to various methodological culture. (Csikos 2006)
- By the age of 10 or 11 (when systematic reading instruction ends) only few pupils reach the required level of comprehension necessary for individual learning from textbooks. It is an interesting result from PISA 2000 that during learning process, Hungarian pupils prefer memorizing units to applying other strategies (eg. looking for connections or analyzing), while the latter points show correlation with achievement in reading tests. (Molnár 2006)
- According to a Hungarian research (Józsa & Pap-Szigeti 2006) between the age of 14 and 18 language and reading skills do not develop considerably, but individual differences are great. Many of these differences can be explained by motivation. In 8-10th grades marks of Literature and Grammar are getting worse. Parallel to this, pupils' attitudes of subjects change. Popularity of Literature and Grammar decreases (evidently, this fact does not help efficiency).
- Hungarian adolescents are dissatisfied with their reading abilities on average.
- Reading literary texts is important, but its hegemony should be discontinued and reading should be interpreted in a broader sense.

2. Changes in reading research since then:

- The basic strategy of traditional education is that curriculum must be fulfilled within a limited time. This length of time is the same for everybody, ignoring different needs. Developing skills happen in the same way, resulting different levels of acquisition. *Criteria-oriented teaching of reading and writing* (Nagy 2000, 2006) is an alternative way instead of norm-oriented attitude:
 - If we know the components of reading skills, we can decide which of them must be aimed as a goal of acquisition (for optimal use).
 - In criterium-oriented measurement we know the actual level of each pupil.

- With the help of a diagnosis we know what pupils have to acquire and what we have to do in order to reach acquisition criterions.
 - Comprehensive and interpretative reading also must be considered as aims in the case of every student. (For this, reading education should be a task for the whole period of compulsory education, and not only Hungarian Literature and Language teachers' responsibility.)
 - Interpretative teaching lasts until all pupils have reached the level of defined criterion independently of their age or class.
- There are more studies also about:
 - Developing effect of reading education in logical thinking.
 - Experiments with cooperative teaching methods.
 - The effect of metacognition on reading. (Csíkos & Steklács 2006)
 - Using ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in reading instruction (teaching/learning environment has been brought into focus, the keyword is motivation). (Molnár & Józsa 2006)

These new demands and ambitions hardly make their way in practice.

3. Changes in education recently:

- In text-books more care has been taken of developing comprehension (including such textbooks and workbooks which deal with comprehension exclusively). However, question system of the books are quite mechanical, inquire mainly about trivial information (a matter of literal reading) like characters, the spot, dates, events which do not require logical thinking. Also, texts in books in many cases are not motivating, just the very opposite: they develop aversive attitudes towards reading. Pedagogical, psychological and linguistic aspects have not predominated consequently yet.
- In 2007 the Hungarian Ministry of Education introduced a new aspect in the National Curriculum. According to it in the 5th grade in the primary schools (which is the first year in the upper primary section) students have to be taught with lower primary methods. Minimum 20 per cent of their numbers of lessons weekly should be devoted to develop their competencies using lower primary methods. Hungarian Literature and Grammar, Foreign Language, Mathematics are the subjects that are to be taught like this compulsorily in every school; schools can choose two more subjects in which they use these methods.

Altogether 4.5 lessons weekly should be on developing competencies; the subject material cannot be taught in these lessons. Students are assessed only orally in these lessons. New curricula are to be written on these subjects. The aim is partly to ease the transition between lower and upper primary sections, partly to improve competences including competencies one of which is reading competence.

- It is also important to educate pre- and in-service teachers to qualify them to teach with new methods and be able to meet new requirements of education. **Keckskemét College Teacher Training Faculty** is having effective adult education and further education for teachers. The main interests of the Further Education and Examination Centre are the followings: In-service teachers' postgraduate trainings, specializations and trainings result in specialist examination. Language developing training course, Training course on teaching mixed ability, Hungarian Language and Literature special course. In 2006 a further education course on Teaching Reading Strategies in order to Improve Comprehension Skills. Since then every year there are 10-15 participants from all over the country who acquire the new methods

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