Intervention in teaching reading in a foreign language: development of divergent thinking and ambiguity tolerance

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Abstract

Aim. The paper presents partial results of research aimed at the development of foreign language reading comprehension using the specially developed intervention programme.

Concept. The *English Reading Comprehension Intervention Program* has been developed within the research project *Support for reading literacy in the mother tongue and foreign language*. It consists of 10 intervention units and is based on 10 identified predictors, the conscious development of which contributes to students' success in reading comprehension.

Methodology. Assumptions presented in the paper are based on the cognitive theory of learning, identifying which cognitive processes precede the predictors with the greatest share of influence, and which higher cognitive processes follow them. Based on these scientific hypotheses and research results, we have determined the predictors

positively influencing reading comprehension and worth intervening in the process of development of reading comprehension.

Results and conclusions. In the paper, the *English Reading Comprehension Intervention Program* for B1 level of language proficiency is introduced, with both the content and methodology of its class application described. The predictors of divergent thinking and ambiguity tolerance are discussed in detail as the presented example of the intervention unit is focused on their development.

Originality. While intervention programmes are not a new phenomenon, the recently developed reading comprehension intervention programmes for foreign languages are a valuable contribution to teaching foreign language reading comprehension in primary and secondary schools. They provide foreign language teachers with ready-made materials, which can be immediately used in their classes and will contribute to better learning results of their students.

Key words: reading comprehension, English text, intervention programme, divergent thinking, ambiguity tolerance

Introduction

Reading is considered to be a multifaceted complex skill that is affected by many psychological, physical and social phenomena. It is an active and, in a sense, also interactive process, in the implementation of which a number of different sub-processes take place very quickly and often simultaneously. This process of receiving and interpreting information that is encoded mainly through print or electronic media involves phonological, lexical, grammatical and discursive knowledge. The success of learning and the quality of knowledge also depend on the level of development of reading skills. They serve as an educational tool: the better the student learns and develops them, the more they contribute to the quality of their education, including the acquisition of a foreign language.

The aim of reading is to understand the content of the text, to analyse and interpret the facts, concepts and information contained in it. There are several reasons why reading is important and should be pursued: it is a well-known fact that the more one reads, the more one learns. By reading a lot, students enrich their vocabulary, improve their spelling, grammar and stylistics, and develop their ability to express themselves in both speaking and writing. They develop thinking, creativity and imagination, as well as build a personal and cultural identity. In foreign language teaching, reading significantly affects the overall acquisition of the language, as reading a foreign language text provides examples of relevant language use. For instance, students can focus on grammar, punctuation or specific use of different words and phrases. It also provides convenient examples of how coherent text is formed, how sentences are formed and combined into paragraphs. Last but not least, reading a text offers a number of interesting topics that encourage discussion and make the learning process more interesting and stimulating, expanding the knowledge and understanding of students from different fields.

Reading comprehension in a foreign language is a personal challenge for each student. Unlike reading in their mother tongue, reading in a foreign language is more demanding in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure, or intercultural aspects embedded in the text, which naturally affects both comprehension of the text and the speed and fluency of reading.

In our paper, we approach reading comprehension in a foreign language from several perspectives. We connect reading comprehension with psychological aspects of this process, such as attention, concentration, divergent or critical thinking, which are implemented either directly or through the use of various reading strategies, such as predicting the content of the text based on its title, fast searching for keywords in the text, realising the main idea of the text or its purpose on the basis of a quick text skimming. We consider these to be key aspects in improving and developing reading comprehension skills. The third and no less important aspect is the activity of reading through experience, by which we understand an event that emotionally affects students and their personality, motivates them and develops their creativity and social skills.

That is why the team of researchers from Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra has developed a special intervention programme developing a number of predictors which positively influence the development of reading comprehension in general and, in this case, reading comprehension of English text at the B1 level of language proficiency. The intervention programme is just a partial result of the research projects VEGA 1/0062/19 and APVV-17-0071 *Support for reading literacy in the mother tongue and foreign language*. The paper introduces the programme, presents the procedure of its possible application, and shows an example of an intervention unit focused on the development of two predictors – divergent thinking and ambiguity tolerance. The programme is currently being piloted in upper-secondary schools all over Slovakia.

The study sheds some light on the development of reading comprehension from the perspective of information processing, abandoning in this way a one-dimensional look at reading comprehension in favour of a multi-faceted understanding of texts.

Text comprehension

As Nader Haghani and Fereshteh Bahmannejad (2018) state, reading comprehension is the grasping of text's core meanings from the context and through prior knowledge of the subject, worldviews and assumptions. The cognitive interaction between the reader and the text takes place through the interpretation, design and understanding of the stimulation situation or the text on the basis of available hypotheses (Finkbeiner, 2005). Readers participate in the process of meaning-extraction by means of the texts or the contextual clues. They understand not only the meaning in the given text, but also the relevant

grammatical patterns, common lexical phrases, and typical word collocations in the context since learners see chunks of words rather than individual lexical units (Ying, 2001).

Observations suggest and researches as well as international testing exercise (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA] and International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement [IEA] Progress in International Reading Literacy Study [PIRLS) prove that a large number of students are not able to read and understand materials in their mother tongue (Miklovičová, Galádová, Valovič, & Gondžúrová, 2017) or in the English language effectively (Azizi, Pavlikova, & Masalimova, 2020; Valencia & Buly, 2004; Vlack, 2009), which may later affect their academic performance. It is indisputable that effective teaching of reading has long been recognised as vital in both mother tongue and foreign language teaching and learning. Readers read texts in order to get some sense — whether it be facts or feelings — out of texts (Graesser, Singer, & Trabasso, 1994; Nuttall, 2005), and they do so by cognitively interacting with the text (Nuttall, 2005) and by using not only linguistic and background knowledge but also cognitive capabilities such as inferencing during reading (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). In this sense, it can be concluded that the students' success in reading comprehension depends on their language (conceptual) knowledge and cognitive qualities.

Divergent thinking and ambiguity tolerance

When struggling to solve a problem, an example of which can also be exploring the meaning structures of the text, some students simply need to think out-of-the-box to arrive at a number of solutions. To solve a comprehension task that is based on cognitive information processing, readers usually collaborate using two cognitive modes – either convergent or divergent thinking style. It should be noted, however, that the first style is conditioned by the very essence of the task since for different tasks it is necessary for a reader to focus on the different characteristics of the text because the requirements of the task are not the same (Joe, 1998). In convergent tasks, students have to have the same goal and they have to come into agreement with each other as to the regarded outcome, i.e. they are expected to converge on a single correct answer. In divergent tasks, the goals are expected to be different and a range of possible responses are encouraged. Many researchers (Guido, 2018; Haji Pour Nezhad & Shokrpour, 2013; Khonamri, Králik, Vítečková & Petrikovičová, 2021; Khonamri, Pavlikova, Ansari, Sokolova, Korzhuev & Rudakova, 2020; O'Byrne, 2017; Runco, 2008; Vincent, Decker, & Mumford, 2002) find divergent thinking (and divergent tasks) to be more appropriate for the development of reading comprehension and, in general, more useful for the professional life of students as in the future, students will need to be flexible, have multiple ideas and original solutions to problems, be ready to take creative risks and become innovators.

Though divergent thinking is strongly linked to creativity (Runco & Acar, 2012), it is not synonymous with creativity (Runco, 2008). Divergent thinking can lead to creativity as students come up with more unique solutions. Similarly, encouraging students' creativity can lead them to present divergent answers to the problems.

Divergent thinking builds curiosity in learners, encourages experimentation, risk-taking, perseverance, and self-expression. It involves brainstorming as well as collecting spontaneous and random associations with a given topic. An effective way to help students think divergently is to ask open-ended questions. Divergent thinking also supports students in becoming more open-minded (Cobo, Kralik, & Bianco, 2020; Goodman, 2014) as students learn to think about a topic from new angles, which can help them broaden their horizons and understand better people with different views (Khukhlaev, 2020). The phase of divergent thinking is, however, mostly followed by the phase of convergent thinking, in which learners critically go through the collection of suggested solutions by considering their limitations and feasibility, comparing their positives and negatives, and evaluating their applicability or usefulness. Convergent thinking narrows down and filters the set of creative options.

Reading comprehension in a foreign language is often connected with tackling many confusing elements as well as processing unknown linguistic and cultural input inherent in a written text, which causes uncertainty and confusion on the part of readers and requires taking risks and anticipating the meaning of unfamiliar words, grammatical structures and cultural phenomena, dealing with multiple meanings, vagueness and others. Success in such a complex and full of uncertainty process involves lots of styles and strategies, one of which is undoubtedly ambiguity tolerance. It can either facilitate or make the reading process difficult. Some students perceive ambiguity as an exciting phenomenon in reading foreign language texts, but others find it frustrating and stressful. If ambiguity is not tolerated in a reasonable way, it may negatively affect language teaching and learning (White, 1999).

Ambiguity tolerance and its impact on language learning have been studied by a number of researchers who have focused on its various aspects, including its relationship to reading comprehension (El-Koumy, 2000; Erten & Topkaya, 2009; Kamran & Maftoon, 2012; Keshavarz & Assar, 2009;). All these studies have confirmed a direct correlation between ambiguity tolerance and reading success.

If students are intolerant of ambiguities, they tend to perceive ambiguous stimuli as sources of threat and discomfort. They cannot tolerate ambiguous language structures and feel more anxious in reading tasks. They are not willing to accept or analyse new or complex data or deal with unsolvable situations. On the other hand, students with higher ambiguity tolerance have less anxiety in their foreign language reading classes as they are open to innovative and creative solutions and can cope with uncertainties without being cognitively or affectively disturbed by them. Hanieh Varasteh, Afsaneh Ghanizadeh and Omid Akbari (2016) claim that students with more tolerance of ambiguities

are more inclined to use deep language strategies to deal with uncertainties.

Developing reading styles and strategies including the development of divergent thinking and ambiguity tolerance depend on teaching students well by integrating a variety of tasks, such as asking open-ended questions, brainstorming, contextual guessing, eliciting spontaneous associations with a given topic, skipping unfamiliar or ambiguous words and others so that students can overcome the anxiety of reading and they can become aware of their tolerance.

Intervention in teaching foreign language reading

Intervention programmes are generally aimed at achieving a change in the behaviour of individuals through various techniques and procedures. They fixate on optimising one selected area of human activity through intervention, i.e. the focus is always on only one process, one activity that is consolidated or developed through the chosen technique.

Intervention programmes belong to group forms of education. They are based on the basic principles of interpersonal learning, group cohesion and dynamics. Their effectiveness is also based on experiencing authentic emotions in processing personal experiences and their reflection. The intervention programme can therefore be considered to be a type of experiential form of learning. In addition to interpersonal learning, it also develops individual work, which is very important in processing information and emotions.

The intervention in foreign language reading has the character of two simultaneously working procedures – work with text and development of a predictor (cognitive or metacognitive process). Working with the text is usually carried out in three stages of reading – before, during and after reading the text. But working with text is often confused with working with test tasks, which does not teach the student to work with the text. Test tasks do not develop comprehension of the text but verify or test its comprehension, i.e. whether the student has understood the text. This type of work is not intervention work with a text.

In the designed intervention programme for foreign language reading comprehension, the focus is on developing comprehension, developing motivation to work with text and to read in a foreign language, developing an affective level while working with activities before, during and after reading the text, as well as on supporting student's experience with working with text using various techniques, activities and assignments.

The development of predictors is focused on stimulating and supporting individual cognitive and metacognitive processes of students. In each intervention unit (designed for one class lesson), one or two interconnected predictors are developed so that activities and procedures are intentionally focused on the development of a given cognitive process. We progress from lower to higher processes, their sequence being as follows: attention, concentration,

memory, perception, cognitive structuring, inferential thinking, imagination, fantasy, divergent thinking, tolerance of ambiguity, critical thinking, and self-reflection.

The above-mentioned predictors influencing the success of reading comprehension were identified on the basis of research, which showed that the perception of language means (vocabulary and structures), cognitive structuring and partly tolerance of ambiguity have the greatest influence on reading comprehension. Our assumptions are also based on the cognitive theory of learning, identifying which cognitive processes precede the predictors with the greatest share of influence, and which higher cognitive processes follow them. Based on these scientific hypotheses and research results, we determined the predictors necessary to be developed in the intervention programme, i.e. predictors worth intervening while developing foreign language text reading comprehension.

Intervention programme for teaching English reading

The *English Reading Comprehension Intervention Program* (Gadušová, 2020a, 2020b) is a specific incentive support programme that develops reading comprehension of English texts. It was designed to help teachers prepare the students to understand a text and work with a text in English, to develop such reading skills of the student as, for example, understanding the main idea of a text, finding specific information in a text, deducing implicit information in a text, critical evaluation of a text, and others. Considerable attention has also been paid to metacognitive processes: knowledge of our limits in the process of understanding an English text, awareness of our strategies while working with a text, identification of problems that need to be solved, formulation of plans and strategies, evaluation, self-evaluation and self-reflection.

In the process of the *Intervention Program* application, a combination of several types of foreign language learning is used. It is an eclectic interconnection of various strategies and procedures in learning and teaching, i.e. project teaching, student-oriented teaching, activity teaching, interactive teaching, cooperative teaching, autonomous learning, and others.

The *Program* also offers work with various types of texts - linear and nonlinear. Linear texts—texts with a complete continuous structure—are mostly factual texts (general, professional, administrative, journalistic, public or personal) and narrative texts (narration, samples from literature for young people). Nonlinear texts are texts with a discontinuous structure, with graphical nonlinguistic means (diagrams, graphs, tables, overviews, timetables, menus and others).

The *Intervention Program* is of a general nature, for language proficiency level B1. When choosing texts, the performance standards of the language level have been taken into account, gender (so that the texts are not intended only

for boys or only for girls but address both sexes), developmental specifics of the group of older teenagers (16-19-year olds), field of study (an effort was made to select texts for the widest possible sample of secondary school students) and pragmatic level (use of vocabulary and grammatical structures in texts, students' interests and hobbies).

APPLICATION OF THE *INTERVENTION PROGRAM*

Each unit of the *Intervention Program* consists of three main parts:

- introductory part – warming up the group (warm-up and motivational activities),
- main part - characterised by the most diverse work of the group (students work intensively with the text, solve assignments before, during and after reading the text), which combines information and experiential part,
- final part – ending the teaching unit (students finish the topics, evaluate the previous course of activities, close emotional topics in the texts and relax).

At the beginning of a unit, there may not always be both warm-up and motivational activities. A teaching unit can contain only one activity, either warm-up or motivational. However, it is recommended to work with warm-up activities, which are not always directly related to the topic of the text (often give the impression that they are detached from the context), but subconsciously support the development of a specific predictor (cognitive and metacognitive process); they connect the interaction of language and cognitive processes, activate the affective level of students, reduce students' fears of a foreign language and naturally direct them to work with a text or topic.

The main part of a unit consists of pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities, focused on developing the identified predictor. The purpose of this part is to link the work with a text with the development of understanding at the language proficiency level; the level is developed in a spiral towards more complex processes. Each intervention unit takes into account the interaction of linguistic and cognitive processes. The ratio of activities and assignments is not identical in every intervention unit. In some units, more work is devoted to assignments during reading, in others to activities after reading the text. This depends on the nature of the intervention, i.e. what is the focus of the particular unit. For each activity, the teacher will find its exact description as well as bilingual instruction (Slovak and English) for students.

The final part contains mainly techniques inducing relaxation (relaxation techniques), activities aimed at closing the topic or emotional experience (music and reading a foreign language text such as a poem or short story, or a free description of nature, images, storytelling, and others). The intention of the closing is to make students reflect and relax in cognitive, emotional and social areas, with which students have worked intensively throughout the intervention unit.

All the units of the *Intervention Program* are designed so that, at first, methodology guidelines for a teacher are given, where he or she can find a description and expected timing of all activities and instructions for students in the order in which the different activities should follow. The guidelines are structured in a table form for clarity. The timing of activities does not have to be the same in every group of students. The teacher can adapt the duration of activities to the group.

The methodology guidelines for the teacher, if necessary, can be followed by appendices with copyable materials. Then the unit text and worksheet for students follow. They are copyable and the teacher should distribute texts together with worksheets to the students at the same time.

The *English Reading Comprehension Intervention Program* for the B1 level of language proficiency consists of ten units, in which the following predictors, topics and texts are covered:

1. Attention and concentration; topic: website history, *Million dollar homepage* (user text).
2. Attention, concentration and memory processes; topic: English speaking countries, *The Loch Ness Monster - behind the myth* (Internet article).
3. Perception and language means; topic: occupation, *I want to be an actor* (e-mail communication).
4. Perception, cognitive structuring and language means; topic: history of time zones, *A brief history of time* (factual text).
5. Perception, cognitive structuring and language means; topic: home, *Living above the shop* (interview).
6. Inference thinking; topic: culture and art, *The history of rap* (factual text).
7. Inference thinking; topic: science and technology in the service of humanity, Samsung Galaxy A51 Manual (User guide - professional text).
8. Divergent thinking and tolerance of ambiguity; topic: social relations, *The girl I followed* (literary text).
9. Divergent thinking and tolerance of ambiguity; topic: environment, *There was once a whole world in the scarecrow* (poem - literary text).
10. Critical thinking, reflection and self-reflection; topic: otherness, *Curious incident of a dog in the night-time* (literary text).

Table 1
Methodology guidelines for teacher (example)

Unit	8
Focus	*Divergent thinking and ambiguity tolerance*
Duration	45 minutes
Topic	Social relations
Title of the text	The Girl I Followed
Text type	Literary text
Material	Copies of two situational photos/pictures, worksheet, cut strips of paper

Procedure	A. Introduction
Warm-up activity	THE BEST TITLE
Aim:	to develop divergent thinking
	to develop ambiguity tolerance
Social form:	group work
Teaching aids:	copies of two situational photos/pictures (Appendix 1)
Duration:	10 minutes

Instruction: A teacher brings 3-5 copies of two different situational photographs/pictures; samples of photographs are attached to the plan sheet of this lesson. The number of copies depends on the number of students in the class and the number of groups (there should be 4 students in one group). Each group of students receives copies of two photos/pictures. Each member of the group looks at the photo and writes down in their exercise book/on a piece of paper what title they would give to each of the two photos. Subsequently, the members of each group discuss the photo titles and justify why they decided to give each of the titles to the photo. The aim of the discussion is for its members to agree on the most appropriate/best/most original title for each of the two photographs. In the meantime, the teacher also attaches copies of the photographs to the board, monitors students and then asks them to state their decisions. Each group suggests a title for each of the photograph and writes them under the photos on the board. Students then decide which title they think is best.

Teacher says:
O.K., today we are going to be a bit creative. I have brought for you some copies of photographs but without a title. This will be your task. So form groups of four and as soon as you get the photographs in your group, look at them. Each member of the group has to write down a suggestion for the title of each of the photographs. Then, share, discuss and defend your ideas/opinions with the group, but you must end up just with one conclusion - the agreed title for each photograph. You have 4 minutes to do so. ... Now, let's listen to your suggestions. Group no. 1, who will tell us what you have agreed on? ...O.K., write your titles on the black-/white-board under the photographs. ....So we have 4/5/6 different titles for each photograph. But which one do you like most? We are going to vote for each title. Who thinks the first title is the best? Hands up. ... O.K., seven votes. Next one, title two, who likes this one? Hands up. ... Oh, just three votes. etc. ... So, the winning titles are: ... Who has suggested this one? ... Congratulations.

B. Main part

Pre-reading activity	WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF ...
Aim:	to develop divergent thinking
	to develop ambiguity tolerance
Social form:	group work

Teaching aids:	worksheet, cut narrow strips of paper (for each group 15-20 pieces)
Duration:	15 minutes

Instruction:	Teacher says: *Form groups of four. Each group will be given a number of strips of paper to write on. Take your worksheets and read the sentence which you will find in the task WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF: ...* *I'd never* forgive myself *if anything* happened *to her because I didn't go to* meet *her.* *And divide these four questions between each other:* a) *Where should they meet?* b) *Why should they meet?* c) *What kept the person from going to meet her?* d) *What could happen to her?* *Each person in the group chooses just one question to answer and writes down (on the pieces of paper) as many answers to the question as s/he can think about. You have 3 minutes to do that. Now share your ideas in the group, discuss the suggested answers and choose the best matching possibilities (answers to question a-d) to create a story. You have 3 minutes to do that. Finished? So, let's listen to your stories. The other group listens carefully as their task will be to finish the story with a "happy end" or a "sad end".*

While-reading activity	READING THE TEXT AND IDENTIFICATION OF THE NARRATOR
Aim:	to develop divergent thinking to develop ambiguity tolerance to understand the text
Social form:	individual work of students
Teaching aids:	text
Duration:	5 minutes

Instruction:	Teacher says: *Read the text* The Girl I Followed. *While reading, try to think about the person in the title of the text addressed as "I." You have 3 minutes to read the text and identify the person. ... Has everybody finished reading? So, what do you think about the mystery "I" person? Who is s/he? What is his/her attitude to "the girl"? Why does s/he want to talk to her? … Why do you think so?* Pupils express their different views/opinions on the question. The teacher should not guide them, but only from time to time, he or she can ask them why they think so. The teacher can also ask students the following questions: *What were the thoughts/memories of the "I" character when s/he:* - *noticed "the girl,"* - *followed "the girl"?*

After-reading activity	DISCUSSION ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND LITERARY GENRE
Aim:	to arouse students' interest in the author and her work, or the literary genre
Social form:	frontal work with the whole class / group of students
Teaching aids:	none
Duration:	5 minutes
Instruction:	Teacher says/asks: *The text you have just read is from the book The House of Stairs written by Ruth Rendell under the pen name of Barbara Vine. The story takes place in London in the 1960s.* The House of Stairs *is her third psychological thriller, a modern masterpiece of the crime genre.* *Do you know this author? Have you read any book written by Barbara Vine? Which one? Did you like it? And how about the crime genre and thrillers, do you like reading books written in this genre? Have you read any book written in this genre? ... Who likes it? Hands up. ... What book(s) have you read? Who is its/their author? Do you have a favourite author writing thrillers?*

C. Final part

Final activity	THRILLING THOUGHTS
Aim:	to develop divergent thinking to develop ambiguity tolerance to understand the text
Social form:	individual students' work followed by a frontal oral presentation(s) and discussion
Teaching aids:	worksheet, text, pencil
Duration:	10 minutes
Instruction:	Teacher says: *Take the worksheets again and read the text in the task THRILLING THOUGHTS advertising the book The House of Stairs. ...*

Trailer:
Lizzie hasn't seen her old friend, Bell, for some fourteen years, but when she spots her from a taxi in a London street, she jumps out and pursues her despite "all the terrible things" that passed between them. As Lizzie reveals those events, little by little, the women rekindle their friendship, with terrifying results...

Teacher asks/says:
Who is Lizzie? Do you think the advertising trailer is well-written? Would you buy or borrow the book from the library to read it after reading this text?

Now, think about the expression "terrifying results" in the text. What is hidden behind these words in the text of the book? Can you imagine some situations, events?

Let's go back to the expression "terrifying results". What are your feelings, thoughts, emotions, images when you read such words? Do you experience any fears, stress, tensions? ... Now, go back again to the text you have read and underline thrilling words/expressions/sentences in it. What makes the text thrilling? How does the author achieve the thrilling effect of the text on the reader? You have 3 minutes to do that. Then you will present what you have underlined and tell us why.

Examples of possible findings of students:
- the use of the word 'have to', over and over again, for example, *I have to talk to her. … I had to follow her,*
- accumulation and gradation of expressions: *I saw a woman I know, a woman I used to know, I have to talk to her,*
- dark colours, scary natural phenomena/scenery: *the sky was red, with heavy, dark clouds,*
- words with a frightening meaning: *after all the terrible things.*

Resources	Text: Barbara Vine: *The House of Stairs*, Penguin 1988.

Source: own research

Appendices to warm-up activity THE BEST TITLE
(No titles for the pictures are given, as students must suggest their own best title)

Fig. 1. Tokashiki Island, August 2013
Source: own research

Fig. 2. Japanese monkeys, January 2012
Source: own research

Unit 8: Text

The Girl I Followed

The traffic-lights were changing from red to green when I saw her. She was crossing the street in front of us. I almost shouted to the taxi-driver to stop.

'I saw a woman I know, a woman I used to know. I have to talk to her,' I explained.

Bell was already disappearing among the crowds on their way home from work. But I was sure it was her. I had to follow her even after all these years and after all the terrible things.

I waited impatiently while the London traffic streamed past. A red wall of buses hid her from me, and then I saw her again, tall and thin, dressed all in black. I noticed something different, though: her hair had changed colour. With a shock I realized that Bell's hair was grey.

The traffic-lights changed again and I went after her. It was sunset and the sky was red, with heavy, dark clouds. I looked along the Bayswater Road in both directions, but I couldn't see Bell. Perhaps she had walked up Queensway. Then I saw her again in the distance. Her grey hair was arranged on top of her head in the same way Cosette used to have her hair when she first came to the House of Stairs. I hadn't realized that Bell would be free already; another year at least, I had thought. I wondered, for the first time, would Bell want to see me? I couldn't imagine that she blamed me the way Cosette had blamed me. But did she think I blamed *her?* I hurried on, up St Petersburgh Place, along Moscow Road and into Pembridge Square, until finally I knew I had lost her. The sky wasn't red any longer, but a wild, stormy grey.

Of course I was in Notting Hill now, near the Portobello Road. There weren't many people in the streets. It had been different when I first came here nearly twenty years ago. The streets had been alive with young people then, wearing long hair and strange clothes, listening to loud music, enjoying a new freedom.

I started to walk back, but not the way I had come. I can't pretend I didn't know that those streets would lead me to Archangel Place. As I walked I thought of Bell. How could I find her? Had she seen me and wanted to hide? I had walked a lot and my legs began to hurt.

It is always the same, the feeling that this may be it, that this is not an ordinary tiredness but the early warning itself. The usual fear rushed through me. I am not old enough yet to be out of danger. I have never told anybody except Bell and Cosette. Well, naturally, Cosette knew already. Does Bell remember? I told myself, as usual, your legs hurt because you don't take any exercise.

Then I came to Archangel Place. I looked down the narrow, short street. At that distance the House of Stairs appeared unchanged. It was getting dark now. Slowly I walked down on the opposite side. On summer evenings when Cosette lived there, people used to sit outside talking and laughing. But Archangel Place has changed. The houses have become modern flats now, and the same thing has happened to the House of Stairs. Someone has changed the front door, but the front garden is the same. Although I couldn't see it, I knew that the back garden would be different. The new owners had obviously been told. I felt sure they had changed things to chase away the awful memory.

Source: Barbara Vine: *The House of Stairs,* Penguin 1988. p. 8-9.

Conclusion

The realisation of the strong impact of a variety of predictors—including divergent thinking and ambiguity tolerance—on the success of foreign language reading comprehension is of great importance and should lead material developers, course designers and teachers to more conscious and intentional planning and implementation of tasks for the development of reading so as to more efficiently help the foreign language students to overcome their psychological barriers. Paying special attention to classroom procedures and informing students well about them can contribute to a better class atmosphere where students feel relaxed and motivated to reading. This paper points at two of the predictors connected with the perceived success in foreign language reading comprehension. The use of strategies and tasks developing students' divergent thinking and ambiguity tolerance by teachers is of crucial importance. Teachers, as leading personalities in the educational context, are supposed to play an important role in assisting students with their struggle for success in foreign language reading comprehension. They should be aware of the ways and procedures how to raise students' consciousness of methods and techniques allowing them to overcome potential threats and successfully manage reading content. The example of such an approach has been presented in the paper and is currently being verified in the school context.

Acknowledgements

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