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ABSTRACT. Strategies for Developing Listening and Reading Skills in **Romanian as a Second Language for Primary School.** The present study aims to provide an insight into how, with the help of specific strategies, reading and listening skills in Romanian as a non-native language can be improved for primary school pupils belonging to Romanian minorities. The use of strategies for comprehending written/oral texts and acquiring or improving the skills necessary to handle such a communication context represents a directly proportional relationship, starting from the early levels of education. As pupils' strategic awareness increases, their ability to listen/read in the target language improves. Applying and practising these strategies on a voluntary basis can also help teachers to design strategy-based lessons, thereby encouraging learner autonomy and increasing the likelihood of success. This paper first defines listening/reading strategies, discusses different types of strategies, and clarifies why they are important and what role they play in L2 listening/reading. Secondly, it presents relevant research studies on L2 listening that support the above and identifies areas that require further research. Thirdly, it presents ideas on how listening strategies can be implemented in the classroom.

Keywords: listening, reading, strategies, acquisition, comprehension, metacognitive, primary school

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REZUMAT. Strateaii de dezvoltare a competentelor de ascultare si citire în limba română ca a doua limbă pentru elevii din ciclul primar. Studiul de fată îsi propune să ofere o perspectivă asupra modului în care, cu ajutorul unor strategii specifice, le pot fi îmbunătătite abilitătile de citire si ascultare în româna ca limbă nematernă elevilor de ciclu primar aparținând minorităților din România. Utilizarea strategiilor de receptare a textului scris/oral și dobândirea sau îmbunătățirea abilităților necesare pentru a face față unui astfel de context de comunicare reprezintă un raport direct proportional, încă de la ciclul primar. Cu cât creste gradul de constientizare strategică a elevilor, cu atât se perfectionează abilitatea de a asculta/de a citi în limba-tintă. Aplicarea si exersarea acestor strategii în mod voluntar îi poate ajuta și pe profesori să conceapă lectii bazate pe strategie, încurajând, astfel, autonomia elevilor și sporind șansa de reușită. Lucrarea de față definește, mai întâi, strategiile de ascultare/citire, discută diferite tipuri de strategii si clarifică de ce sunt importante si ce rol joacă în ascultarea/citirea în L2. În al doilea rând, prezintă studii relevante de cercetare privind ascultarea L2 care sustin cele de mai sus si identifică domeniile care necesită cercetări suplimentare. În al treilea rând, prezintă idei cu privire la modul în care strategiile de ascultare pot fi implementate în sala de clasă.

Cuvinte-cheie: ascultare, citire, strategii, achiziție, înțelegere, metacognitiv, ciclul primar

1. Preamble

The European project entitled "Competence and efficiency in teaching Romanian to pupils belonging to national minorities in Romania" (2014 - 2020) was a welcome opportunity for me (as expert trainer) to get acquainted with the mysteries of teaching Romanian as a non-native language to Romanian minorities. The central objective of this national project was to provide teachers with a practical teaching model. In addition to many other aspects, we realized the major need to provide specific strategies to improve the reception of written or oral texts among primary school children².

In order to justify the importance of using reading and listening strategies, we should start from the fact that there is a strong link between the use of strategies and the improvement of listening/reading skills (Dimassi 2016), as they help learners to become more self-directed in their problem-solving efforts and more autonomous in their choice of learning methods.

To examine a model of a teaching scenario centred on strategies in the pre-reading stage, please consult the appendix at the end of this study. This model is not comprehensive but rather a segment of a more complex scenario, which was provided as a resource for the educators who participated in the training throughout the entire project.

Listening strategies in a foreign (or non-native) language can be defined as the ways in which listeners manage real-time interactions with a spoken text in order to achieve comprehension (Dat and Bao 2016, 1). That is why explicitly teaching and practising these strategies will visibly improve the learner's journey and, of course, provide a high motivational factor to cope with possible obstacles they may face when challenged with a text.

Furthermore, the teacher (as mediator of the learning act) must consider the strategies with which his or her learners are already familiar. This involves the use of questionnaires for the learner to self-monitor when solving a listening/reading task or, more simply, asking questions focusing on how to comprehend efficiently an oral or a written text.

2. Reading strategies

2.1. The usefulness of reading strategies

Our whole plea can start with the question that we must have all asked ourselves: *Is the guidance provided by the teacher necessary for acquiring these reading strategies, or do they develop unconsciously and independently of it?*

The fact that some pupils fail to make progress in their reading comprehension skills, regardless of the time available and despite continuous practice, has been attributed to the lack of appropriate teaching methods and strategies (Pintrich 2002) designed to gradually yet visibly enhance this ability. Research over the last two or three decades, both in psychology and educational sciences, has emphasized the importance of making learners aware that the purpose of reading is comprehension – not merely completing a reading task as quickly as possible, especially when they have no interest in the text. In other words, having a "reading project" and intrinsic motivation for reading are fundamental conditions for developing the ability to comprehend written messages. Therefore, it is recommended that, from primary school onward, pupils be made aware that learning to read and write is not solely about mastering formal skills but, more importantly, about acquiring effective reading strategies that facilitate comprehension as efficiently as possible (Platon, Sonea, & Tărău 2015, p. 59).

2.2. Single strategy or multiple strategies?

Another question to ask next is: Which approach do you think is the most effective to text comprehension: applying a single strategy or applying several strategies simultaneously?

Reutzel, Smith, and Fawson (2005) conducted a study to find the answer to this question, applying the two approaches to different groups of learners, based on the same *input*. In the end, by analysing the results, it turned out that the level of knowledge acquired with the multiple-strategy approach surpassed that of a single approach, indicating that it might be more useful to combine the reading strategies in order to obtain satisfactory results.

Comprehension is an integrative process which activates, at the same time, prior knowledge, decoding the text at the literal level, understanding the text at the semantic level and the inferences we make mentally (consciously or unconsciously). Modelling text comprehension must consider comprehension during, before and after reading. Thus, according to Walpole and McKenna, to ensure the adequate comprehension of a text, the teacher: must have a clear understanding of the cognitive processes involved in the strategy to be implemented, must adopt the appropriate strategies to ensure comprehension of a given text and must explain the text comprehension strategy to students in the most accessible way possible. (Walpole and McKenna 2007, 106-108).

2.3. Types of reading strategies Activating prior knowledge

The human brain, faced with a new communication situation, acts and reacts by accessing the scenarios and the mental schemes available to it. Prior knowledge plays an important role by associating what is already stored in the long-term memory with the new knowledge. Previous experience and the knowledge we bring to a new text contribute to our understanding and interpretation of the text. With each new set of stored knowledge, the mental scaffolding is reconfigured and reset (Moreillon 2007, 19-20). Thus, with each reading experience, the system of operations and mental scheme is trained, as well.

| What do I know? | What do I want to know? | What have I learnt? | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------------|--|
| | | | |

Figure 1. KWL Chart (simple version)

(Re)actualizing and enriching the mental schema necessary for understanding a text is best done in the pre-reading stage, and the handiest way is the KWL Table (*I know, I want to know, I have learnt*), in its simple version (Figure 1) or in its developed version (Figure 2).

| What do | What do I want | What have | What questions do I have? | |
|---------|----------------|-----------|---------------------------|--|
| I know? | to know? | I learnt? | | |
| | | | | |

Figure 2. KWL Chart (developed version)

Therefore, the activity of learning and, implicitly, that of comprehension after reading is based on what we already know, and pupils need to be aware of this "secret" of the cognitive processes involved. Moreover, in all three stages of reading, the reader can establish any of three types of connection: *text-individual*, *text-text*, and *text-surrounding world* (Keene and Zimmerman 1997).

Using sensory imaging

Inherently related to the previous strategy, appealing to sensory images stored in our long-term memory facilitates the understanding and interpretation of a text. To optimize this strategy, it is useful to use graphical schemes such as the one below (Figure 3):

| Sensory images in the text | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------|---------|-------|--------|--|
| Hearing | Olfactory | Tactile | Taste | Visual | |

Figure 3. Graphical schemes for sensory imaging

Using questions

The questions cover all three stages of the reading activity (pre-reading, actual reading, post-reading). They make the pupil realize that the meaning of a text is constructed in his or her own mind and that it is not to be found in the text itself. Perceived from the point of view of the targeted content, questions can be approached from two perspectives (Figure 4):

| Maria went to visit her friend Alina. When she got there, it was 7:00 PM. They played, they had fun It was not until 9:00 PM that Maria left for home. Mum was waiting for her, terrified. | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| Approach | Define | Example | |
| ✓ base-top (bottom-up or spoon-fed) | It starts with simple, strictly text-based questions and eventually moves to questions that require inferences. | Teacher: When did Maria reach Alina? Pupil: At 7:00 PM. Teacher: When did Maria go back to her house? Pupil: At 9:00 PM. Teacher: So, how long did Maria stay at Alina's? Pupil: Two hours. | |

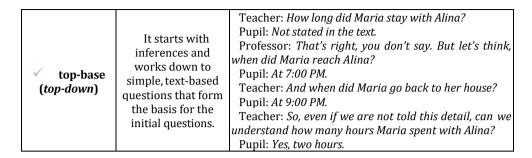


Figure 4. Base-top and top-based approaches for using question (Walpole and McKenna 2007, 112)

Using predictions and inferences

Closely related to the previous strategy and more than necessary in stimulating interest in a particular text to be read is reading aloud an interesting passage or discussing keywords. A simple way to explain the terms *prediction* and *inference* is to use cards which the pupils must place in such a way that they follow the logical thread of a possible action in the text.

Therefore, we present inferences in each of the three moments of the reading (Figure 5), because, starting from them, we will be able to: place the information in a different context from that mentioned in the text; realize different interpretations; discover links between the text and personal experiences or other texts we have read; use new information to modify our own initial predictions; analyse and compare characters in the text and their relationships; summarize the text; infer the author's theme and message (Willis 2008, 135).

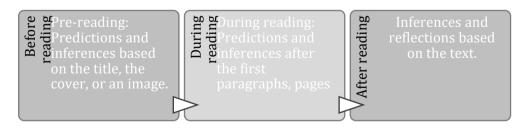


Figure 5. Inferences and predictions in each of the three moments of the reading (Platon, Sonea, Tărău 2015, 61)

Inferences, depending on the elements that serve as raw material, can be of different types:

- syntactic (textual): re-establishing the semantic content of pronouns, adverbs of space/time/mode, through the relationship among terms at the syntactic level;
- semantic (textual): establishing the meaning of a particular term according to the context in which it appears;
- *complex (extratextual):* starting from the information explicitly provided by the text, these inferences are enriched (consciously or not) by activating prior knowledge about the world/other texts.

Exercise:

Based on the text below, draw inferences at the syntactic level.

Maria was invited to Alina's birthday party. She wondered if she would like a kite. She went to her room and shook her piggy bank. Not a sound was heard.

Possible answer: At the syntactic level, the structure and use of pronouns (*She wondered if she would like a kite.*, *She went to her room and shook her piggy bank.*) indicate that Maria was considering buying a kite as a gift for Alina but realized she had no money after shaking her piggy bank.

Figure 6. Practical activity for practicing syntactic inference

Extracting main ideas

Determining the main ideas of a text may be the most valuable strategy a 21st-century reader can develop. Especially in this age of technologization, when access to information is extremely easy in all areas, it is necessary for teachers to guide pupils in developing their ability to identify the main ideas of a text.

The main ideas of a text are always dependent on the purpose of reading. Therefore, Judi Moreillon (2007, 97) considers that although the extraction of the main idea of a text is standardized in the classical educational system, there is rarely a single main idea. For example, for a fictional text, the characters, plot and theme of the text will be important. However, if we look at the same text from the perspective of an architect, the main ideas will be made up of elements related to the setting. Educators need to demonstrate to pupils that, depending on the purpose of the reading, the reader's attention shifts significantly.

Moreillon (2007, 98-99) offers a set of questions that can help pupils establish the main ideas: Why am I reading? (purpose of reading), What new things have we learnt?, What do I want to remember from this text?, What will I do with the information I have learnt from this text?, What was the author or illustrator's purpose in writing/illustrating this text?

Synthesizing information

Whilst we cannot know for sure what the world will look like and what the values of the society will be in the years to come, we do know that our learners' daily lives will involve accessing, evaluating and utilizing information. Unlike summarizing, which is simply a presentation of the facts in the text without making judgements about them, synthesizing goes one step further. It is true that it starts from the main ideas selected by the reader, but through the process of selection, the reader analyses the information acquired and filters it through his or her own interpretation (Figure 8).

While it is possible to synthesize information from a single text, the most common application of this strategy involves juxtaposing and synthesizing information from multiple sources, on which the reader makes value judgements.

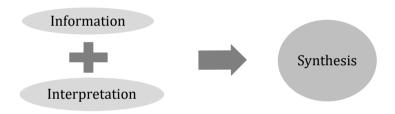


Figure 8. The components that form the basis of synthesis (Moreillon 2007, 136)

Mapping the story

Many written texts have a typical structure. Once the outline of a particular text has been learnt, comprehension will be improved. Depending on the type of the targeted text, in this reading strategy pupils are taught to focus their attention on:

- temporal/spatial framework, characters, problem-resolutionoutcome relationship, reactions and theme, in order to help them understand, memorize and respond to the story (Boulineau *et alii* 2004); the usefulness of this strategy is mainly limited to fictional texts, on which the following "x-ray" can be made (Figure 9):

| | Title: Author: Reader: | | |
|------------|------------------------------|--|--|
| Context | | | |
| Characters | | | |
| Problems | | | |
| Solutions | | | |
| Results | | | |
| Theme | | | |

Figure 9. Map of a story (Walpole and McKenna 2007, 117)

- recognition of comparative-contrastive structures, descriptions, chronological sequences, explanations, definitions, examples and problem-solution relationships; this type of strategy is very useful for pupils with high decoding and fluency skills but who have problems with comprehension of expository texts; suggested graphic organizers include Venn diagram, a simple two-column table, a table of statements or key words that signal comparisons: both, compared to, as compared with, same as, unlike, etc. This type of strategy focuses not so much on the initial learning of each individual concept, but rather on how we understand a text that compares two concepts.

3. Specific strategies for oral reception

3.1. Different approaches to listening

Listening, i.e. receiving an oral message in another language, can often be a difficult task, but we can make it easier by applying several strategies that optimize the comprehension process and the L2-language competence development. While the traditional model of listening has viewed the listening activity strictly from the perspective of understanding the spoken text (listening as comprehension), relatively recent views (Richards 2008, 3) give it a primary

status as a key dynamic factor in the further development of L2-language competence (listening as acquisition), yet not overlooking the importance of the first component.

By comparing the two approaches, both the differences in vision and in its actual application can easily be seen in the diagram below (Figure 10). In the transfer from comprehension to acquisition, the text is given the status not only as a "carrier of meaning", but more importantly as a model of communication that the L2 speakers can make their own.

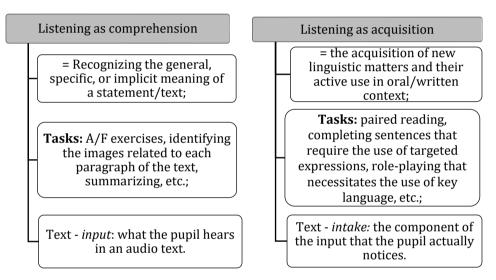


Figure 10. Differences between listening as comprehension and listening as acquisition (Richards 2008, 16-17; Van Patten 1993, 436)

3.2. Types of listening strategies

Over the years, a few different listening strategies have been used, each with its own vision. Below there is a list (which is not intended to be exhaustive) of the main strategies that have proved their worth over time.

Activating prior knowledge

The main purpose of pre-listening exercises is to activate prior knowledge and awaken pupils' interests and use them, as a foothold, in acquiring new knowledge, which, in fact, describes the *top-down* approach (see Sonea, Sacalîş 2020). The role of the teacher in this strategy is to help/guide pupils in applying this knowledge and their interests in order to become effective listeners.

This type of strategy can only be implemented orally (through general questions such as: *What means of transport do you use?*, *Do you live a healthy life or not? Why?*, etc.), through images to generate a *brainstorming* session, through a short quotation anticipating the topic and generating a debate among the learners, etc.

Naturally, the effectiveness of this strategy does not negate the obvious usefulness of some *basic-top* work tasks, which focus on unravelling, in advance, the meaning of new words or lexical/syntactic structures that pupils might need in understanding the *text* to be rendered.

Predictions

Most of the time, prediction formulation is applied in the pre-listening stage, but it also proves to be effective during listening. Thus, depending on the stage at which this strategy is adopted and the targeted content, predictions can be of two types:

- global: anticipating the gist of a text or general content before hearing it, by predicting the title, images accompanying the text, etc.: "I can understand this statement because I already know a bit about camels and, even if the teacher won't say anything more than the title, I can already guess what he/she will talk about!":

- *local:* anticipating details throughout the text: "Because in the first part of the text we heard the word *wing*, they will probably go on to talk about its role for a bird. This will also help me to better understand what it's about!".

For example, a customer-waiter dialogue might be preceded by a set of images, accompanied by general questions such as: Where are the people and what are they doing?, How do they feel?, What are they discussing?, etc. Once those possible answers are outlined, the general idea of the text can be very easily perceived. At the same time, these questions should be selected in such a way as to focus attention on what we are interested in during the lesson.

Inferences

The problem for any beginner of a foreign language is that speakers do not always say exactly what they mean. In other words, important aspects of meaning are sometimes implied rather than stated. Pupils need to learn to listen "between the lines" in order to realize what is really being said behind the text (Figure 11).

Example:

We use the following dialogue:

Maria: We're going out after school. Do you want to come?

Alin: Maybe. Where are you going?

Maria: To Pizza King. Alin: Pizza? I love pizza.

Based on this dialogue, we can ask: "Is Alin planning to go with Maria and her friends for a pizza?". Once the answer is in the affirmative, make it clear that their intuition was based solely on a logical relationship, not actually expressed in

writing: "If Alin loves pizza, he will most likely go too."

Figure 11. How we make pupils aware of the importance of setting the purpose of reading (Brown 2006, 6)

To this strategy is added, inherently, paraverbal language (volume and intonation of voice, rhythm of speech, etc.) and non-verbal language (body language – in the case of texts read by the teacher –, or those with visual support), which also facilitate comprehension and influence the "guessing" of meaning.

Setting the purpose of the reading

In the past, for the after-listening stage, audio materials frequently relied on a series of (often local) comprehension questions – *What time does the train leave? How much does the ticket cost? How many members are in the family?*, etc. –, which simply listed a series of sterile answers, whereas the core of the text was reduced to understanding certain details, more or less relevant in real life.

This approach to listening has proved to be ineffective, as learners, not knowing in advance the purpose for which they are listening and the points on which they need to focus their attention, cannot successfully complete the tasks. In other words, if they know why they are listening, learners will find it easier to concentrate on the text. Much the same is true in real life, where the purpose, the context and the aim of receiving certain content information guide the listener, unconsciously (most of the time), towards the most faithful message comprehension. Once these points have been made, we can move on to another strategy, which follows from the previous one.

Contextualization

The most succinct definition of this strategy is precisely the frequent retort of our learners: "I don't know exactly what *X* means, but I have guessed the meaning of the word!". Whether they are aware of it or not, the fact that already known terms build the understanding of other terms is a first strategy that learners can apply regardless of the type of text (oral or written).

On this strategy, Larry Vandergrift and Christine Goh (2012, 282) mention the following types of contextualization:

- *linguistic*: when we can relate a word that we have heard to another situation in which the same word has been used: "I don't know the exact meaning, but I have seen the same word on some doors: *No Entry.*";
- *schematic*: when we relate a textual cue to a fact that we have in the long-term memory: "I don't understand exactly what it means *he got scared*, but in general, if a child hears a strange sound at night, he gets scared. Maybe that's the meaning!".

Co-operation

Working in teams/pairs can often make it easier to understand an audio text. In addition, with this strategy, both comprehension and use of the targeted vocabulary is ensured, as well as more effective learning/memorizing through negotiation of meaning.

The role of the learner/teacher, when a learner asks for clarification on a text can, not infrequently, be taken over by another learner. Pooling knowledge, clarifying the task they have to fulfil, or checking a certain contextual meaning that a term may acquire are just some of the activities where pair-/team- work proves to be extremely useful.

Example:

Listen to a dialogue in the shop and write on the shopping list at least 5 items that the customer needs. At the end, *compare your list with your colleague's list*. How many different items do you and your colleague have in total?

Figure 12. Example of a collaborative task

In analysing different transcripts of such dialogues between pupils to carry out a common task in class, J. Cross observed that their metacognitive knowledge increased significantly as a result of the interaction, which resulted in a better individual engagement (Cross 2010, 285).

Reorganization

Vandergrift & Goh (2012, 292-283) provide a detailed perspective on content reorganization as a strategy by which the learner is taught to reorganize the information heard in order to understand and store it in the long-/short-term memory, but also to retrieve it at any time, if the communicative situation

requires it: *summarizing* (making a written or just mental summary of what is presented in the text), *repetition* (simply repeating the word itself or, even more effectively, using it in a listening exercise), *clustering* (selecting groups of words/statements that have common features), *note-taking* (writing down key words/words to memorize a particular sequence of ideas).

Metacognitive strategies

This set of strategies is directly related to the following question: "Does the learner focus mainly on the content of a listened text, or does he or she also think about how to listen to it?".

Metacognitive strategies (Vandergrift and Goh 2012, 278-279) are those mental processes (at first unconscious, then gradually becoming conscious) through which a learner is taught to approach and manage listening activities, thus actively involving him/her in their own learning process: planning (determining the goals of an exercise and how they can be achieved), focusing attention and, by implication, hearing on specific aspects that the task is aimed at: "I pay special attention to temporal elements!", self-monitoring (checking one's own learning progress as one goes along: "I didn't hear very clearly... Bird's wi... (bird's wing), so I'll have to pay more attention when I listen to the text again!"), self-assessment (identifying problems, checking the effectiveness of the chosen strategy and substituting it if it did not serve the task effectively: "Did I guess the meaning of the word correctly? I need to pay more attention to idea X"), etc.

Analysing the effectiveness of the awareness and application of strategies among a group of pupils (11–12-year-olds), Goh and Yusnita (2006) found, at the end of the metacognitive instruction period, that pupils gained a deeper understanding of listening and its demands, increased confidence in completing the listening task, and received higher scores on listening tests, especially among the poorest pupils. The immediate conclusion was that metacognitive instruction has a direct impact on the listening performance.

4. Conclusions

Based on recent research by D. Bao and C. Guan (2019), in order to streamline reading/listening to a text, the teacher should consider the following recommendations: *evaluating learners' existing strategies* (before introducing new strategies, teachers should identify which strategies learners already use and how they apply them; this analysis can be undertaken through questionnaires, interviews or observations during listening activities), *continuous and explicit*

practice of the strategies (to be effective, listening strategies need to be presented, explained and practised over a long period of time, not just occasionally), use of an integrated approach (strategies should be taught together, so that learners can combine different techniques to improve comprehension/acquisition), diversification of audio materials (exposure to different accents, speaking speeds and text types – conversations, interviews, news, podcasts – help learners to develop their malleability in the process of listening to a text).

The strategies are clearly a way to ease the "burden" of listening, and they should be consciously taught in the classroom. Although their number is continuously increasing, an effective approach would be to select a limited number of strategies and teach them repeatedly. Therefore, teachers can help students develop the skill of working with strategies by making them aware of these methods each time they encounter an audio or written text.

Appendix – A Learning Sequence Based on Reading Strategies³

Before introducing the lesson topic, by utilizing predictions based on a series of images, and with the support of a brainstorming session, students can effortlessly deduce the subject matter they are about to explore.

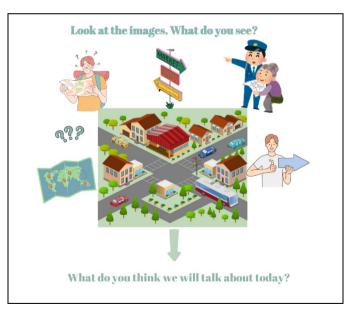


Figure 13. Pre-reading stage – using prediction and brainstorming

The images and graphics featured in the accompanying figures have been designed using the Canva platform.

Once the necessary vocabulary for comprehending the forthcoming text has been practiced in advance, a series of guiding questions are provided. Furthermore, with the help of an additional set of images, students' attention is carefully directed toward the key aspects we intend to focus on in the process of understanding the target text.



Figure 14. Pre-reading stage – applying prediction and brainstorming within the context of the target text.

Once the context in which the target text will be situated is established, the actual reading phase begins. During this stage, students are provided with orientation instructions to navigate the city, using a map as a tool. They are tasked with organizing these instructions in the correct order to guide Tom in reaching Merry. This process not only helps to reinforce the understanding of spatial directions but also encourages students to apply their reading comprehension skills in a practical, real-world scenario.

The use of strategies enhances comprehension, stimulates active engagement, and helps students develop critical thinking skills. By applying these strategies, students can better retain information, make connections, and improve their ability to process and understand complex texts or audio materials in real-life situations. Ultimately, these strategies contribute to more effective communication and long-term learning.

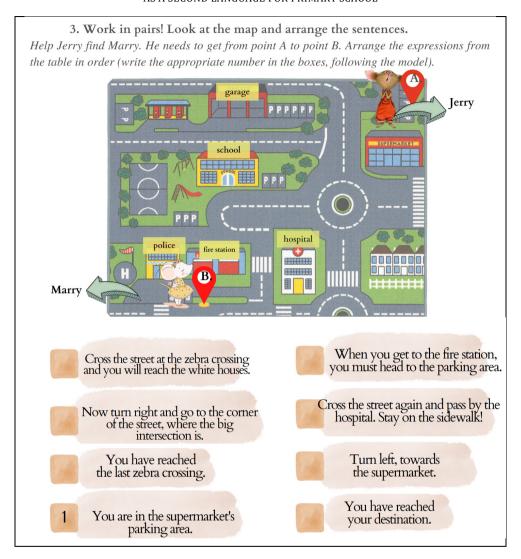


Figure 15. Reading stage

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