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DIPLOMA PAPER

**TASKS TO IMPROVE READING COMPREHENSION FOR FOURTH YEAR STUDENTS
OF THE BACHELOR IN EDUCATION ENGLISH MAJOR**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENT	Pages
Introduction	1
CHAPTER I: EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION ABOUT READING COMPREHENSION FROM AN INTERLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE IN FOURTH YEAR STUDENTS OF THE BACHELOR IN EDUCATION ENGLISH MAJOR	7
1.1 Characterization of the current situation of the comprehension process of English literary texts in fourth year students of the Bachelor in Education English Major	7
1.2 Theoretical foundation related to the formation of the communicative competence in a foreign language that supports the development of the reading comprehension skills that best suit the processing of information from literary texts in English	10
CHAPTER II: ELABORATION OF A SET OF TASKS TO FAVOR THE READING COMPREHENSION PROCESS OF ENGLISH LITERARY TEXTS FOR FOURTH YEAR STUDENTS OF THE BACHELOR IN EDUCATION ENGLISH MAJOR	23
2.1. Basic foundation for the elaboration and implementation of the tasks to favor the comprehension process of English literary texts	23
CHAPTER III: CORROBORATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COMMUNICATIVE TASKS TO FAVOR THE COMPREHENSION OF ENGLISH LITERARY TEXTS	38
3.1 Analysis of the results of the specialists' criteria	38
3.2 Analysis of the results of the pedagogical experience	39
Conclusions	43
Recommendations	
Bibliography	
Apendix	

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my family for their unconditional support and kindness in the dreariest moments of my studies, to my students, to all the professors of the Foreign Language department of my University, and to all the persons who made it possible in spite of the obstacles ahead.

But I would especially like to dedicate this Diploma Paper to the best teacher I have ever had, who is the source of my strength: my son Kevin Miguel Zaldivar Alcina, my giant little man.

“Espantado de todo me refugio en ti”

Josè Martí

ABSTRACT

This research work aims at developing the reading micro skills of students in fourth year Bachelor in education English Major, as well as enhancing their motivation for reading, especially literary texts which are studied in the subject History of the English Speaking Cultures. It is intended to solve the problem they have in reading and processing information from texts which are complex to read.

The application of some empirical methods proved the difficulties the students have in reading comprehension and the lack of motivation to read. The revision of different bibliographical sources on this area of knowledge, and the application of the theoretical methods allowed the author to synthesize relevant conceptions about the significance of the conceptualization of the communicative competence and its dimensions, and the linguistic and psychological theories that may support the elaboration of the tasks to promote the development of the reading skills.

The research work contributes to create a set of communicative learning tasks to foster the reading comprehension process of literary texts which may be implemented through remedial work in class, in office hours with selected students or through interdisciplinary work through Integrated English Practice

The novelty of the tasks is supported by considerations based on the theory of interlanguage, and particularly on the processing approaches, i.e. the bottom-up and top-down processing, and the specific reading skills that help comprehend the intricacy of English literary texts, focusing specific syntactic constructions, lexical units, text construction resources and author's style.

The assessment of the tasks by collecting the specialists' considerations and the implementation results allowed the author to observe and prove their effectiveness. Despite the need for some adjustment in some of the tasks for the slow and average learners, an increase in all indicators was noticed: motivation, participation, enthusiasm, involvement in task resolution, and better comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

At the present time, full development of the 21st Century, humanity lives an era of paradigmatic advances in areas such as science and technology. Mankind has gone forward overcoming adversities from the past, opening their minds to knowledge, investigation, wisdom and imagination. But, all this has been reached thanks to several factors and phenomena, one of them, and of a social nature 'communication'.

Nowadays, English, as an international language, has a great significance from the political, historical, economic, academic and socio-cultural points of view. The Cuban Educational System has established the teaching of English as a core subject in almost all schools. It contributes to the formation of the students' scientific conception of the world, based on language as a social phenomenon and the relation of language and culture.

In foreign language teacher education, at the pedagogical universities, the general curriculum sets important goals intended to form the communicative and the intercultural competence. This implies the training of the different dimensions of the communicative competence for the processing and negotiation of meaning in interaction with other people or with oral and written texts. Learning the language should contribute to the linguistic and functional efficiency through the formation of linguistic habits and the development of communication skills.

Through Integrated English Practice and other disciplines they have in English, the students are trained in the four verbal skills: listening-comprehension, speaking, reading and writing. This research focuses fourth year students of the Foreign Language Major at the pedagogical university. Among the subjects that make up the curriculum, History of the English Speaking Cultures is one of the most complex ones. This subject aims at the formation of a professional culture substantiated by the analysis and interpretation of different texts of the English speaking countries.

In fact, this is a subject that may greatly contribute to the widening of the learners' vocabulary, syntactic repertoire and discourse abilities, in permanent unity of cognitive and affective factors. However, the satisfaction of teachers and students does not always reach the expected level. The students find some of the literary

texts beyond their level of communicative competence because of their complexity in terms of linguistic, stylistic, pragmatic and cultural authenticity.

Through direct contact with these students and the application of some empirical methods, the author has observed certain potentialities, such as sensibility and curiosity for language phenomena, and interests for improving their communicative competence; however some difficulties have been determined:

- Insufficiencies in the levels of linguistic and communicative competence to express their ideas explicitly and accurately
- Difficulties to process some specific lexical items, syntactic patterns and discourse aspects which affect the overall comprehension of the text
- Limitations in the reading comprehension process of literary texts of certain level of complexity

It is important to consider that these students, as adult learners, have consolidated basic habits and skills in their mother tongue. Therefore, it will be an important source of interference for the learning of the target language, even though this also allows the positive transfer of some skills.

In the process for the development of the communicative competence in a foreign language, many authors have referred to the formation and development of an **interlanguage**, among them, Corder (1967); Neiser (1971); Adjemian (1976); Bergen (1993), cited by Gass and Selinker (2008); Cortés (1993); and Richards (2010). It is referred to as a system that evolves throughout different stages while approaching that of the target language. The learner strives to overcome the effects of mother tongue interferences and the confusions within the system of the target language.

The complexity of foreign language learning make teachers puzzle over what activities to implement for an adequate processing of linguistic material by the students; especially to focus the difficulties the students face in learning the new language items. What is the role of the students in learning to process information and comprehend texts?

Regarding the previous stated practical and methodological adversities, the author of this investigation declares the following **Research problem**: *How to favor the reading comprehension process of authentic written texts in fourth year students of*

the Bachelor in Education English Major at José de la Luz y Caballero Pedagogical University

The **Research object** of study is: *The reading comprehension process in fourth year students of the Bachelor in Education English Major at “Jose de la luz y Caballero” Pedagogical University.*

The **Research objective**: *Elaboration of a set of reading tasks to favor comprehension of literary texts centered on inter-linguistic aspects in fourth year students of the Bachelor in Education English Major at José de la Luz y Caballero Pedagogical University.*

Consequently the **Scope of action** consists in: *The reading comprehension process of English authentic written texts, centered on interlinguistic aspects, in fourth year students of the Bachelor in Education English Major at José de la Luz y Caballero Pedagogical University.*

With the purpose of following a logical sequence in this investigation, some important questions have been formulated in order to achieve the objective and solve the scientific problem.

1. What is the current situation in the reading comprehension process of English literary texts in fourth year students of the Bachelor in Education English Major at José de la Luz y Caballero Pedagogical University?
2. What are some of the principal theoretical conceptions related to the formation and development of the communicative competence in a foreign language that support the development of reading comprehension skills?
3. How to elaborate a set of tasks to favor the comprehension process of English literary texts in fourth year students of the Bachelor in Education English Major at José de la Luz y Caballero Pedagogical University?
4. What is the effectiveness of the tasks to favor the comprehension of English literary texts in fourth year students of the Bachelor in Education English Major at José de la Luz y Caballero Pedagogical University?

In order to accomplish the process of research, the following investigation tasks were established:

1. To characterize the current situation of the comprehension process of English Literary texts in fourth year students of the Bachelor in Education English Major at José de la Luz y Caballero Pedagogical University.
2. To determine the principal theoretical conceptions related to the formation of the communicative competence in a foreign language that support the development of the reading comprehension skills that best suit the processing of information from literary texts.
3. To devise a set of reading tasks to favor the comprehension process of English literary texts in fourth year students of the Bachelor in Education English Major at José de la Luz y Caballero Pedagogical University.
4. To corroborate the effectiveness of the tasks to favor the comprehension of English literary texts in fourth year students of the Bachelor in Education English Major at José de la Luz y Caballero Pedagogical University.

To accomplish the previous tasks the researcher puts into practice some *research methods* with the objective of approaching and studying the theoretical and empirical information, to process the scientific data of the research and the conceptual interpretation of the theoretical foundations, these methods are:

Empirical methods:

- **Observation:** It is used to observe the students' performance and obtain information about the nature of the students' inter-language development and the special difficulties during the comprehension of authentic literary texts, both in the first exploratory stage and in the implementation process for the corroboration of results.
- **Interview:** It is applied to teachers of Integrated English Practice in order to gather more information and opinions about the significance of inter-linguistic analysis and the methodological treatment they need in terms of practice time considering the difficulties the students face. Also teachers of the discipline History of the English Speaking Cultures were interviewed in order to determine their opinions about the problems the students face processing the literary texts.
- **Diagnostic test:** It is used to diagnose the initial state of the problem in the learners; and to determine the students' current state in the comprehension of English literary texts during the learning process.

- **Revision of documents:** It is used to collect data from the ruling documents of the curriculum (objectives, professional qualities, values and skills), and the pedagogical characterization of the group which includes cognitive and affective aspects.
- **Survey:** It is enforced to assess teachers' opinions about the linguistic preparation of the students and its impact in the reading process.
- **Specialists' criteria:** To assess the efficiency of the practical contribution of the paper, in this case the devised and implemented reading tasks
- **Pedagogical experience:** For the corroboration of the feasibility and effectiveness of the elaborated tasks.

Theoretical methods:

- **Analysis-synthesis:** to analyze the different dimensions of the communicative competence in a foreign language, as well as the different aspects and specific characteristics of English, in order to have a full understanding of the reading process and the integration of different skills in communication from a semantic-pragmatic point of view.
- **Induction-deduction:** To reach generalizations about what essential aspects may be focused and analyzed from the linguistic, semantic and communicative viewpoints to determine the appropriate methodological procedures to put into practice through the design of the tasks. Also, the method was useful in processing the empirical data and reaching generalizations and regularities.
- **Historical-logical:** This method is partially applied in order to analyze the object of study from the historical point of view, i.e., what premises have contributed to the most recent interlanguage analysis theory, and its connection to the reading comprehension abilities.

Population: Students from the fourth year Bachelor in education English Major at José de la Luz y Caballero University

Sample: Ten students from the fourth year group.

Expected results: A set of communicative learning tasks to foster the reading comprehension process of literary texts which may be implemented through

remedial work in class, in office hours with selected students or through interdisciplinary work through Integrated English Practice

Novelty: The reading tasks are supported by considerations based on the theory of interlanguage, and particularly on the processing approaches, i.e. the bottom-up and top-down processing, and the specific reading skills that help comprehend the intricacy of English literary texts, focusing specific syntactic constructions, lexical units, text construction resources and author's style.

The paper consists of three chapters. In the first one, the characterization of the current state of the students' communicative abilities to comprehend literary texts in English is analyzed. Also, the author makes a systematization of the fundamental theoretical aspects about the communicative competence, the theory of interlanguage and the reading comprehension process.

The second chapter contains the basic methodological and theoretical support, as well as the methodological considerations for the implementation of the tasks. The third one includes the corroboration of the effectiveness through the implementation process and the specialists' criteria.

DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER I: EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION ABOUT READING COMPREHENSION FROM AN INTERLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE IN FOURTH YEAR STUDENTS OF THE BACHELOR IN EDUCATION ENGLISH MAJOR

In this chapter the reader can find a characterization of the present state of the English comprehension skills of literary texts in fourth year students from the Bachelor in Education English Major. It also presents a brief historical analysis on the conceptions about the communicative competence and its dimensions, the theory of interlanguage, and particularly on the reading comprehension processing models.

1.2 Characterization of the current situation of the comprehension process of English literary texts in fourth year students of the Bachelor in Education English Major

This epigraph includes the results of different empirical methods that were applied in order to determine the current situation of the students' reading comprehension skills.

Pedagogical characterization of the students

By means of the revision and analysis of documents (The pedagogical characterization of the group, and the record files in the registration office), and the interview of teacher trainers, a psychological and pedagogical characterization of the students was undertaken. In this order, it is suitable to highlight the positive affection that prevails in the relations among the members of the group regarding the existing friendly atmosphere, what permits a cooperative interaction and harmony in the execution of the lesson-tasks. In the same sense, in the examination of their record files, no risk-agents were found, like family conflicts or any other of this kind. No student is facing problems in their behavior or incompetence in the mental processes like memory, imagination and logical thinking.

The group consists of 13 students, 7 males and 6 females. Three of the males are repeating the year. From the cognitive and academic points of view the group portrays evenness, that is, equilibrium between advanced, average and slow learners. Nevertheless, there are some cases of students with serious problems in certain subjects and some others, on the contrary, with more remarkable scores.

In general the group reflects insufficiencies in reading habits in both languages, Spanish and English; irregularities in devoting time for studying the different subjects, that is, they do not plan their spare time and conditions in order to study; deficiencies in the formation of meta-cognitive strategies; in spite of this, the majority show positive interest for their object of study and for their future profession.

Results of the diagnostic test applied to the students

After the administration of the diagnostic test applied to the students (Appendix 1) all the information was analyzed and synthetized so as to scout their performance in the process of reading comprehension, especially in the information processing of some specific authentic language forms of English. The results revealed insufficiencies in the decoding process of the written data due to a contradiction that arises between their language level and the complexity of the text. This contradiction is pictured in the following chart:

Limitations on the students language level	Complexity of the English literary texts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited level of vocabulary • Lack of reading habits • Interferences from the mother tongue and from the target language itself • Inappropriate development of reading-micro skills (especially the inference process) • Insufficiencies in their cultural background (schemata) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of highly literary lexicon • Use of archaisms • Use of foreignisms, barbarisms and loan words • Use of stylistic devices • Use of uncommon syntactic structures with stylistic intentions • Personal writing style of the author

Results of the survey applied to the teachers

With the aim of gathering information on the linguistic and didactic preparation the students receive, several teachers of Integrated English Practice and Methodology of Foreign Languages were surveyed (Appendix 2). The data collected was generally positive regarding this object in concern. Nevertheless, this indicates, by no means, that all the goals are not achieved, that is, the results are not always the expected ones.

Most of the teachers agreed assessing as acceptable the linguistic capacity of the students in formation, as well as the recently graduated ones. They all coincided in the opinion that they cannot qualify as insufficient such preparation, but it is a real fact that the pursued linguistic level in the students, as established in the curriculum, does not correspond to the current one. Anyway, there are students who achieve high levels of proficiency, but they represent a low percentage.

In the didactic order, the teachers' general considerations show coincidence with the previous matter. The students face methodological difficulties when dealing with linguistic aspects that hamper the reading comprehension process. This reveals a lack of mastery of didactic tools when teaching reading comprehension in their learners.

In an overall sense, the majority of the teachers opined that there is a close relation between the linguistic level and the efficiency of the didactic work. This means that the better a language is mastered the easier and better the didactic performance will be.

Results of the interviews applied to teachers

With the implementation of interviews to teachers (Appendix 3) a metacognitive characterization of the students of the Major was carried out. According to the professors who were interviewed, the attitudes, behaviors and performance of advanced students differ from the slow ones in the following points: frequent questions, use of dictionaries, efficient fulfillment of the tasks, planning of the studying time, recurrent participation, use of the foreign language inside and outside the classroom, steady auto-monitoring and self-correction of their performance.

In order to confront this situation (the unevenness in the students) teachers suggest to profit from work in groups and make emphasis on the importance this brings about, to make the students aware of what material and media to use and how, to reflect on the importance of self-recording (if possible) for a later self-monitoring, to carry out interlanguage analyses between the mother tongue and the target language in order to warn the students about the barrier they have to surpass.

In coincidence with the diagnostic test applied to the students and the interview to teachers of History of the English Speaking Cultures, professors agreed that authentic literary texts are of a significant difficulty for the students due to the complexity of the language level employed by the authors. In fact, the language competence demanded by the subject materials (literary texts and texts on historical facts) does not match the students' current linguistic and communicative competence.

Regularities of the triangulation of the different instruments

The problem the students face in comprehending English literary authentic texts may be considered multi-dimensional. Therefore, this investigation cannot concentrate on all the different facets. As a result of the triangulation of the different instruments the following regularities were evidenced:

- Difficulties in the comprehension of the literary style of authentic texts
- Limitations to process the intended meaning of parts of the text which contain idioms, and other syntactic constructions which are distant from the Spanish equivalents
- Unawareness of the meaning of certain phrasal verbs
- Lack of understanding of foreign words and phrases which are used as stylistic resources in literature, as well as certain borrowings
- Problems to comprehend a text at a critical level (deciphering socio-cultural aspects at a semantic-pragmatic level)
- Avoidance in the processing of syntactic constructions and collocations which are English-like forms they need to understand in order to discuss about what they have read
- Limitations in treating reading comprehension from a more analytical approach (with emphasis on bottom-up processing), and lack of motivation to read.
- Poor reading habits and skills in the learners

1.2 Theoretical foundation related to the formation of the communicative competence in a foreign language that supports the development of the reading comprehension skills that best suit the processing of information from literary texts in English

In this epigraph the basic categories of this research are systematized. Departing from the general to the particular, the analysis encompasses the communicative

competence, the linguistic dimension, some of the basic conceptions about the theory of inter-language analysis and theoretical data about the reading comprehension skills and the reading processing models.

The communicative competence

The present conception of the communicative competence is the result of a historical process of evolution of the concept, as studied by many authors such as Hymes (1972), Van Ek (1976 and 1980), Pulido (2004), Medina (2006, 2013), and Rodríguez (2014).

Hymes analyzes the **communicative competence** in terms of proficiency. This author makes his analysis based on the native speaker proficiency. The intuitive mastery that the native speaker possesses to use and interpret language appropriately in the process of interaction and relation to social context has been called proficiency. In Hymes' words a competence is "when to speak, when not, and what to talk about, with whom, where, and in what manner". The communicative competence involves grammatical (or linguistic) competence, sociolinguistic competence strategic competence, discourse competence and socio-cultural competence.

These dimensions have been summarized by Van Ek (1976):

Linguistic competence, i.e., "knowledge of vocabulary items and mastery of certain structural rules and forms which the listener and the speaker can process into meaningful utterances". That is, this dimension guarantees the accuracy of the input and output processing.

Socio—linguistic competence, i.e. "the ability to use and interpret language forms with situational appropriateness".

Discourse competence, i.e., the ability to perceive and to achieve coherence of separate utterances in meaningful communication patterns.

Strategic competence i.e., "the ability to use verbal and non-verbal strategies to compensate for gaps in the users' knowledge of the code

Socio-cultural competence, i.e., certain degree of familiarity with the socio-cultural context in which the language is used

The communicative competence is manifested through listening, speaking, reading and writing. Each of these aspects of verbal activity is formed by a set of subskills, that is, to understand the message globally (listening), to put the words together to form sentences (speaking), to infer meanings of words, phrases and discourse in written texts (reading). This last aspect is the focus of attention in this paper.

More recently, the concept of **communicative competence** has been analyzed by other authors. The tendency has been the consideration of the traditional dimensions and the addition of new ones, in trying to reach a more comprehensive conception. According to Pulido (2004), it is the ability of that person who learns the language in order to express, interpret and negotiate socio-cultural meanings in the interaction between two or more persons, or between a person and an oral or written text, so that an efficient process of communication is achieved.

In his definition of communicative competence, Medina (2006), makes reference to a configuration of linguistic and paralinguistic capacities, knowledge, habits and skills which are manifested during the realization of the communicative act in the foreign language. But most authors coincide in the inclusion of the five basic dimensions analyzed before, without the development of each of them, the accuracy and fluency of the communicative act would be impossible. In this regard, the reading process is a communicative act.

In trying to communicate in a English, the learner confronts not only the irregularities of the new language, but also the differences between his mother tongue and the target language systems. This area of study is called **inter-linguistics**.

The premises of inter-linguistic theory

This field is not new but has achieved relevance in the last decades. The first attempts to analyze the learners' difficulties in learning a new language were carried out through **contrastive analysis** (CA), Lado (1957). According to Gass and Selinker (2008); it consists of making detailed comparisons between two languages in order to determine similarities and differences. It is a way of comparing languages in order to determine potential errors for the ultimate purpose of isolating what needs to be learned and what does not need to be

learned in a second-language-learning situation . According to Lado, the ultimate goal was to predict areas that would be either easy or difficult for learners.

The pedagogical implication of this theory for the reading comprehension process in particular is the following:

- The learner will try to use the mother tongue linguistic habits to comprehend the foreign language, so new habits must be established.
- The problems of comprehension of texts can be explained by considering differences between the L1 and the L2, (the greater the differences, the more misunderstanding will occur).
- In reading comprehension, use different techniques and procedures to learn the differences. Similarities can be safely ignored as no new learning is involved. In other words, what is dissimilar between two languages is what must be learned.

The theory of contrastive analysis has been considered and systematized by many language practitioners, so that the **consideration of the learners' mother tongue** has become a principle in language teaching. In the Cuban context, it is considered as such by Antich (1986), González (2009), Acosta (2011), and Medina (2013).

Many linguistic phenomena are easily appropriated, for example, cognate words, sounds that have similar articulation characteristics in both languages and similar or parallel grammatical structures and patterns. Differences, instead, are object of special attention because they interfere in the learning process. To reduce this phenomenon it is advisable to give more pedagogical emphasis to its analysis (cognitive aspect) and exercitation (practice) as well. Such is the case of the false friend words, specific syntactic forms with particular English-like structures, among others.

The teacher should keep in mind and resort to the learners' mother tongue when it is required during the management of the learning process. Sometimes a comparison or a contrastive analysis is necessary for the learners to understand the meaning and use of a given form. The consideration of the learner's mother tongue will help determine what is easy or difficult, simple or complex for the learners, and to organize adequately the learning process on this basis.

Bermello (1987) points out that one of the most important aspects in the *individualization of learning* is the consideration of the learner's mother tongue. She adds that this fact, together with the principle of communication, outlines the conscious-practical approach in language teaching and it allows the teachers to know the interferences and positive transfers which are basic to orient the teaching-learning process.

Acosta (2011) points out that the consideration of the learner's mother tongue will help determine what is easy or difficult, simple or complex for the learners, and organize adequately the learning process on this basis. In Foreign Language Teaching one needs to consider the students' native language in deciding on priorities: degree of similarities, degree of governance of the mother tongue in the process of foreign language appropriation, and overgeneralizations of both languages.

In spite of the usefulness of CA, some of these facts are not absolute as these authors have stated. For instance, language learning is not only habit formation—a behaviorist view point--; as many teachers have experienced errors are not only caused by transfer from the mother tongue, as there are many which emerge from confusions and overgeneralization within the system of the target language. Besides, many teachers claim—including the author of this paper—that learners produce errors even when the patterns between the two languages are similar.

Because of dissatisfactions with the use of CA to explain the causes of the learner's errors, another area of analysis emerged: **error analysis** (EA), to which this analysis turns next.

Error Analysis through the study of interlanguage

Error Analysis is a procedure for analyzing second language data that begins with the errors learners have and then attempts to explain or classify them. One of the early promoters of this theory was Corder (1967), cited by Gass and Selinker (2008). These authors argue that as the name suggests, "it is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners actually make". Unlike contrastive analysis, the comparison made is between the errors a learner makes in producing the target language (TL) and the TL form itself. It is similar to CA in that both start

from learner production data; however, in CA the comparison is made with the native language, whereas in error analysis it is made with the TL”.

They also state that errors can be taken as samples which provide a view onto a system; that is, evidence of the state of a learner’s knowledge of the L2. They are not to be considered only as a product of imperfect learning; hence, they are not something for teachers to give up. In these authors’ words, errors are rather indications of a learner’s attempt to figure out some system, that is, to impose regularity on the language the learner is exposed to.

The pedagogical implication of this theory for the teaching of the reading comprehension process can be related to devising exercises and tasks that focus intra-linguistic phenomena, for example the overgeneralization of rules in the target language. Teachers can do that on the basis of their experience and collected data of students’ typical errors while processing English material. This should be accompanied by an explanation for the conscious appropriation of rules.

A criticism of error analysis was directed at its total reliance on errors to the exclusion of other information. That is, critics argued, one needs to consider non-errors as well as errors to get the entire picture of a learner’s linguistic behavior. The study of learner’s inter-language has led to recent findings in the role of individual learners while learning a foreign language. There are other phenomena which are causes of errors, such as simplification, avoidance, and confusions.

The latest studies focus the nature of the students’ inter-language (inter-language analysis), Gass and Selinker (2008), among others. They give relevance to the idea that inter-language has an individual nature, so every individual student gradually constructs their inter-language and there are not identical ones. Errors are normal in this process and the causes can be attributed to multiple factors.

In the latest studies on learners’ interlanguage, relevance has been given to the information processing approaches, Gass and Selinker (2008). The studies center on the nature of interlanguage (interlanguage analysis). The learners process input for comprehension and they also process language during output. The student faces input either through listening or through reading.

The term *input* has been used to refer to the language (specific language forms) to which the learners are exposed. In Krashen’s theory (1985), the author refers to

comprehensible input as that bit of language that is heard or read, and is slightly ahead of a learner's current state of grammatical knowledge. This author states that there must be sufficient quantity of appropriate *input*. The author of this paper emphasizes that *input* must be systematic, that is, learners should have several opportunities to encounter and deal with specific language forms to be able to apprehend them through listening and reading.

The theory of interlanguage

In the process of learning a foreign language, pupils develop certain strategies so as to self-create a linguistic system which differs, in many respects, from that of their first language system. This temporary system is called *Interlanguage*, to emphasize the structurally intermediate status of the learner's language system between his mother tongue and the target language.

According to specialists, the study of inter-language could help teachers understand the learners' problems better and try to provide them timely help, so that they attain competence in the language they are trying to learn. Gass and Selinker (2008) point out that in a given situation the utterances produced by the learners are different from those the native speakers would produce. This comparison reveals a separate linguistic system. This system can be observed when studying the utterances of the learners who attempt to produce a target language norm. In fact, it is a linguistic system that results from the foreign language learners' attempt to produce the target language.

Richards (2010) expresses that inter-language is the type of language produced by second or foreign language learners who are in the process of learning a language. Apart from the influence of the mother tongue and the intra-lingual errors, learners tend to express meanings using the words and grammar that are already known in the target language (communication strategy).

Since the language which the learner produces using these processes differs from both the mother tongue and the target language, it is sometimes called an **interlanguage**, or is said to result from the learner's interlanguage system or approximate system.

In the analyses and definitions produced by the authors there are certain recurrent phrases and key words, such as: process, linguistic system, process of

approximation, stages, strategies, target language, and a system that evolves. Taking into consideration these aspects the author of this research proposes a simplified definition of inter-language: **It is an individual self-created linguistic system that transits through a process of approximation towards the target language system, and that evolves through different stages of development during the learning period.** To illustrate this process the following figure is presented:

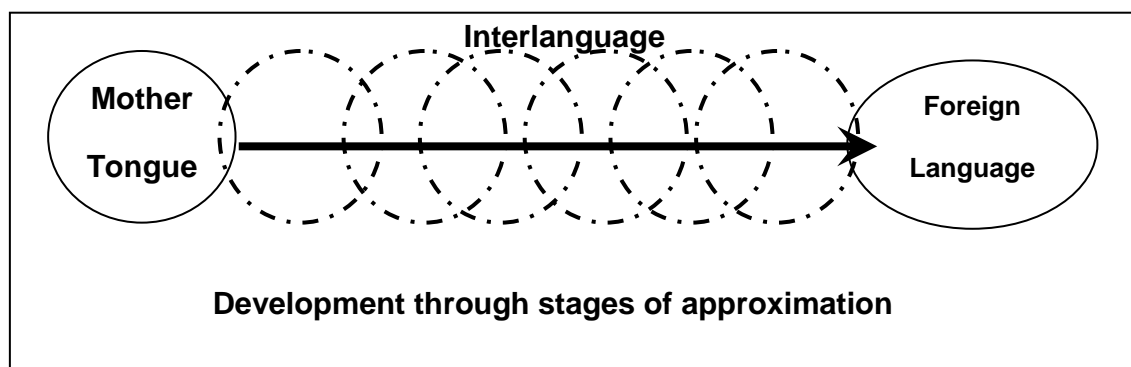


Figure 1: The process of inter-language development

Source: Representation produced by the author

It is well known that language is the expression of a culture, and in spite of the claims of the existence of a Universal Grammar (UG), there are many differences between the patterns and uses of English and Spanish. Sometimes, a pattern may linguistically correspond to an authentic pattern, yet it may be wrong from the communicative point of view. For example, a very novice student, to show love to somebody might say “You are my *middle orange*” trying to express “tu eres mi media naranja” which is a very common phrase in Spanish, whereas the conventional phrase for a native speaker of English would be “You are my *better half*”. Another example could be when the foreign language student says “*I was always by your side when you needed me*”, which grammatically is right and the meaning is clearly conveyed, whereas a native speaker would say “*I was always at hand when you needed me*”

These examples obviously explain that language structure should be processed in context, i.e. how forms are actually used in order to get the real message conveyed by the speaker or writer. Reading is a good source of input for interlanguage development. Reading gives far more opportunities because the learner can pause to think and over-read in order to analyze and process

linguistic, semantic and pragmatic information from contextual clues. Therefore, it is important to turn to this process.

The reading comprehension process

According to Richards (2010), it is the process by which the meaning of a written text is understood. When this is done silently it is known as silent reading. The understanding that results is called *reading comprehension*. Reading employs many different cognitive skills, including letter and word recognition, knowledge of syntax, and recognition of text types and text structure. Comprehension that is based on clues in the text is referred to as *bottom-up-processing*, and comprehension that makes use of information outside of the text is known as *top-down processing*.

Goodman (1968), (cited by Romeu 2007), defines reading as an interaction between a reader and written language, through which the reader attempts to reconstruct a message from the writer.

Antich (1986), states that reading is not only an aim in itself; it is also a means of learning a foreign language. When reading a text; the students review sounds and letters, vocabulary and grammar, memorize the spelling of words, meaning of words and word combinations. If the teacher instructs their students in good reading and they can read with sufficient fluency and complete comprehension, they help them to acquire speaking and writing skills as well.

Medina (2002) states that reading comprehension is the process through which the student-reader, in interaction with the written text and in an active position, decodes its meaning from general understanding to the level of making a critical analysis, based on their own cultural background. As a skill in process of formation, it goes through different stages and requires the apprehension of strategies which might be used in different kinds of reading. The effectiveness of this process requires the integration with the rest of the verbal skills in the foreign language and of a strong entailment between affective-motivational and cognitive elements.

Richards (2010) distinguishes different types of reading comprehension according to the reader's purposes and the type of strategy used. The following are commonly referred to as:

A) **Literal comprehension:** reading in order to understand, remember, or recall the information explicitly contained in a passage.

B) **Inferential comprehension:** reading in order to find information which is not explicitly stated in a passage, using the reader's experience and intuition, and by inferring.

C) **Critical or evaluative comprehension:** reading in order to compare information in a passage with the reader's own knowledge and values.

D) **Appreciative comprehension:** reading in order to gain an emotional or other kind of valued response from a passage

Romeu (1992) states that all texts convey three different kinds of meaning: literal or explicit, intentional or implied, and cultural or complementary meaning. These meanings correspond to different levels of comprehension: translation level, critical level and creative level or extrapolation.

Reading micro-skills

These are text processing abilities employed in reading and that are relatively automatic in their use. For example:

1. recognizing words
2. recognizing grammatical functions of words
3. noticing specific details
4. making inferences
5. making comparisons
6. making predictions.

Reading strategies

They are ways of accessing the meanings of texts, which are employed flexibly and selectively in the course of reading and which are often under the conscious control of the reader. Strategies serve to make the reading process more effective. Such strategies include:

1. identifying a purpose for reading
2. planning what steps to take

3. previewing the text
4. predicting the contents of the text or text section.

However due to the nature of reading, specialists suggest that there is not a clear distinction between skills and strategies. The teaching of reading strategies and helping learners understand and manage the use of strategies is thought to be an important aspect of the teaching of foreign language reading skills.

Types of reading models

Bottom-up processing

Reading is viewed as a **psycholinguistic guessing game**. In bottom-up processing, readers must first recognize a multiplicity of linguistic signals (letters, morphemes, syllables, words, phrases, grammatical cues, discourse markers) and use their linguistic data processing mechanisms to impose some sort of order on these signals. This **data-driven** processing obviously requires a **sophisticated** knowledge of the language itself. Then, the reader selects from among all this information those data that make some sense, that cohere, that "mean." Virtually all reading involves a risk - a guessing game, in Goodman's words -because readers must, through this puzzle- solving process, infer meanings, decide what to retain and not to retain, and move.

Top-down processing

Schema theory and background knowledge

How do readers construct these meanings? How do they decide what to hold on to? and having made that decision, how do they infer a writer's message? These are the sorts of questions addressed by what has come to be known as **schema** theory, the hallmark of which is that a text does not by itself carry meaning. The reader brings information, knowledge, emotion, experience, and culture to the printed word. Research has shown that reading is only incidentally visual. More information is contributed by the reader than by the print on the page. That is, 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. Schema theory emphasizes this other side of the reading process, **top- down** processing that brings a whole host of background information into the arena of making decisions about what something means.

The interactive model

All the previous definitions and conceptions are valuable for understanding the nature of the interactive reading process. Some of the most recurrent aspects in them are: the active role of the reader in processing information and in interaction with the text, the identification of micro-skills which should be trained and the fact that it is a process that goes from general comprehension to more complex levels of interpretation. In fact, it is a process of constructing meanings based on specific data in the text, as well as the information the reader brings to the text. In fact, the interactive model combines the two reading processing models.

Partial conclusions of the chapter

The empirical study carried out through the application of different methods, revealed the limitations the students have in reading and understanding literary texts in English. Apart from the insufficient development of the communicative competence, including its five basic dimensions, they have poor reading habits; they lack meta-cognitive strategies and reflect limited cultural background for processing text information and build up interpretations. The characteristics of literary texts with very particular syntax and the use of stylistic resources, add more difficulties to the process of comprehension. This was determined through the triangulation of the results reflected by the different instruments employed.

The use of the theoretical methods helped the author determine the essential aspects about the object of study and synthesize important implications for the reading comprehension process.

The five basic dimensions of the communicative competence are relevant aspects to be considered by the language teacher in devising reading comprehension tasks. The development the student has in each of these dimensions is also crucial for understanding and interpreting texts. But to be able to have an overall view of how the individual processes the language information, the language teacher needs an insight into the interlanguage the students are constructing and

how they struggle to understand the target language text on the basis of this system.

An integrated view of the roles of contrastive analysis, error analysis and interlanguage analysis will provide teachers not only with knowledge, but also with a better preparation for guiding the students and devising tasks, techniques and procedures to read and understand authentic texts. It is important to remark the role of the mother tongue as a source of positive transfer and as the cause of interferences, but not as the only source that affects the comprehension process.

In the analysis of the reading process, the author of this paper considers Medina's definition the most appropriate as it explicitly considers all the positive aspects from previous definitions. For designing the reading tasks and favoring the solution of the problem, the author takes into account the different levels of comprehension, the reading micro-skills and the processing models with an emphasis on the bottom-up model.

CHAPTER II: ELABORATION OF A SET OF TASKS TO FAVOR THE READING COMPREHENSION PROCESS OF ENGLISH LITERARY TEXTS FOR FOURTH YEAR STUDENTS OF THE BACHELOR IN EDUCATION ENGLISH MAJOR

This chapter contains the basic ideas about the psycholinguistic and didactic foundation of reading tasks and procedures based on the communicative methodology of foreign language teaching which helped select and devise the typology of tasks suggested in this research work to emphasize on bottom-up processing.

2.1. Basic foundation for the elaboration and implementation of the tasks to favor the comprehension process of English literary texts

Throughout the historic development of foreign language teaching, different terms have been used to designate the means of interaction between the learners and the target language: drills, exercises, activities, and techniques. Following different language educators, with the purpose to emphasize learning, as contrasted to other terms that emphasize teaching, the term communicative learning task is preferred. Learning tasks are means of interaction subject-object, that is, between the learner and the language content, under the guidance of the language teacher, so that learning can take place. They are structural units which organize language material, but also the learners' actions and operations.

Breens (1987), (cited by Medina), provides a definition which expresses the essence of a task in the following terms: "any structured language endeavor which has a particular objective, appropriate content, specific working procedures and a range of outcomes for those who undertake the task. Richards (2010), refers several dimensions of a task: **objective**, **language** (particular function, vocabulary, grammar, sounds), **procedures** (operations), **pacing** (time), **product** (outcome or result), and **assessment** (the evaluation of success).

The author of this paper assumes the Communicative Methodology to language teaching and learning as the general conception, Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983); Savignon (1983); Richards (1986); and many others. In this attempt, certain didactic and psycholinguistic **premises** derived from the communicative methodology must be taken into account when devising and implementing the comprehension tasks:

- The conception of the **communicative competence** as a configuration of knowledge, habits and abilities with emphasis on the linguistic, the sociolinguistic, the sociocultural and discourse dimensions.
- The theory of **interlanguage** which incorporates the beliefs about the role of the mother tongue and its influence in new language learning (Contrastive Analysis); the role of the foreign language system which is a source of intralingual problems, as revealed by Error Analysis; and Interlanguage Analysis which includes the previous conceptions but identifies other causes, sources and contradictions affecting language learning, such as simplification of forms, confusions, the individual beliefs of the learners about the new language they are constructing and their particular strategies for learning it.
- The information processing approaches (Bottom-up, Top-down and Interactive processing) and the conception of reading comprehension as interpreted by several authors who consider it **an active process of building up meanings and interpretations on the basis of several conditions and factors of the student and the contextual features of the text**; in fact, the cognitive structure of the learner, the cultural background and their individual strategies play an important role.
- The processing of information for comprehension at a semantic-pragmatic level, which requires a focus on the specific English forms of the language, the author's style, intentions, particular syntax, and socio-cultural aspects.

General methodological considerations for the elaboration and implementation of the communicative reading tasks:

The tasks are based on reading extracts of the story *Feathertop* which is studied in History of the English Speaking Cultures in 4th year. The tasks can be implemented in class time, in extra-class time (office hours) or in Integrated English Practice as interdisciplinary work; besides, they can be used to offer students opportunities for remedial work. The conception and implementation of the tasks take into account some relevant methodological considerations:

- In the first tasks there is more emphasis on bottom-up processing in order to train the students in those strategies for understanding the parts to build up the interpretation of the whole.
- There is a transition as they advance through the different text extracts to the top-down and interactive processing, i.e., in the last text portions the students are expected to apply the strategies they have experimented before, showing more automaticity and independence.
- The organization and implementation of the tasks should allow students interaction, posing questions, using the dictionary, cooperating and learning from each other. In fact, they have the opportunities to develop the meta-cognitive strategies.
- Though the main concern is reading comprehension, in every text extract there are items that integrate listening, speaking and writing to give a more communicative character to the tasks.
- The tasks contribute to the development of the students' interlanguage as they interact with authentic texts; therefore, the general objective is to integrate different **skills** and reading strategies so as to:
 - infer meanings of new words and phrases
 - identify specific English syntactic forms used by the author to express particular meanings
 - understand information between the lines
 - identify the meaning of collocations and different word combinations which are not transparent with the Spanish equivalents
 - Distinguish new language idioms and incorporate them to their repertoire
 - identify false cognates and be aware of possible misunderstandings
 - Recognize synonyms, antonyms and appropriate equivalent expressions to Spanish translations
 - Reflect on differences and similarities
 - Comprehend the general message or intention of the author

-Use some of these forms creatively through personalization

General objectives of the set of tasks:

- Use different types of reading such as skimming, scanning, and analytic reading according to the reading purpose.
- Comprehend literal and implied information to determine the author's intention
- Assess the text from a critical position
- Use the information from the text creatively to state points of view and opinions

READING EXTRACTS AND TASK ITEMS (Extracted from *Feathertop*, a moralizing legend, by Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1804-1864)

TEXT EXTRACT # 1: Mother Rigby and Feathertop

Read the following extract using different types of reading (skimming, scanning, and analytic reading) as convenient in order to solve the question items below:

The good woman had risen thus early (for as yet it was scarcely sunrise) in order to set about making a scarecrow, which she intended to put in the middle of her corn-patch. It was now the latter week of May, and the crows and blackbirds had already discovered the little, green, rolled-up leaf of the Indian corn just peeping out of the soil. She was determined, therefore, to contrive as lifelike a scarecrow as ever was seen, and to finish it immediately, from top to toe, so that it should begin its sentinel's duty that very morning. Now Mother Rigby (as everybody must have heard) was one of the most cunning and potent witches in New England, and might, with very little trouble, have made a scarecrow ugly enough to frighten the minister himself. But on this occasion, as she had awakened in an uncommonly pleasant humor, and was further dulcified by her pipe of tobacco, she resolved to produce something fine, beautiful, and splendid, rather than hideous and horrible.

1. From the following ideas there is one the text does not include, which one is it? If you are not ready, then wait until you have done the ones that follow.

_What Mother Rigby was like

- _Why she wanted to make a scarecrow
- _A description of Mother Rigby's corn plants
- _The steps she followed to make the scarecrow
- _Mother Rigby's mood today

2. As you read do the following:

- Pick out the specific form used by the author to express because it was still early (First three lines):
- In the second line, the two-word verb set about is used, look it up in the dictionary, which meaning best suits this context?
- Extract the author's full description of the growing corn plants. Try a translation of the phrase into Spanish
- After reflecting on the author's peculiar syntax and intended meaning, try your own version in Spanish of the following sentence: She was determined, therefore, to contrive as lifelike a scarecrow as ever was seen
- Find out the English equivalent expression to terminar de punta a cabo / o de arriba a abajo... Is the English phrase close or distant from the Spanish equivalent?
- Copy from the text six words with close spelling, pronunciation and meaning to their Spanish equivalents. Reflect on the distinguishing features in the three aspects
- Copy from the last sentence in the extract three adjectives which share similar shades of meaning. Why does the author use them?
- The word *further* in this content is equivalent to: a) más lejos, b) además, c) más profundo
- What is the meaning of the word resolved as used in the last sentence? Use the dictionary.

3. Answer these questions about the extract:

- What facts in the text indicate that Mother Rigby was a popular woman?
- What words/phrases indicate that she was a woman who regularly had a bad temper?

- What specific idea does the author express in the last lines to exaggerate the **ugliness** of the scarecrow Mother Rigby might have made? Explain
- What does the author mean by saying that Mother Rigby was dulcified by her pipe of tobacco?
- What idea is predominant in this extract, a characterization of Mother Rigby or a description of the scarecrow?

EXTRACT #2: The composition of Feathertop

Read the extract of the story analytically and do the exercises below

It was settled, therefore, in her own mind, that the scarecrow should represent a fine gentleman of the period, so far as the materials at hand would allow. Perhaps it may be as well to enumerate the chief of the articles that went to the composition of this figure.

The most important item of all, probably, although it made so little show, was a certain broomstick, on which Mother Rigby had taken many an airy gallop at midnight, and which now served the scarecrow by way of a spinal column, or, as the unlearned phrase it, a backbone. One of its arms was a disabled flail which used to be wielded by Goodman Rigby, before his spouse worried him out of this troublesome world; the other, if I mistake not, was composed of the pudding stick and a broken rung of a chair, tied loosely together at the elbow. As for its legs, the right was a hoe-handle, and the left, an undistinguished and miscellaneous stick from the wood-pile. Its lungs, stomach, and other affairs of that kind were nothing better than a meal-bag stuffed with straw. Thus, we have made out the skeleton and entire corporeity of the scarecrow, with the exception of its head; and this was admirably supplied by a somewhat withered and shriveled pumpkin, in which Mother Rigby cut two holes for the eyes, and a slit for the mouth, leaving a bluish-colored knob, in the middle, to pass for a nose. It was really quite a respectable face.

1. Read the text quickly and make an inventory of all the articles Feathertop is made of and the parts of the body they represent

ARTICLES	FEATHERTOP´ S BODY PARTS
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2. Which of the expressions below is closer to the following: *It was settled, therefore, in her own mind, that the scarecrow should represent a fine gentleman of the period*

- Mother Rigby had no idea of what a gentleman looked like
- She had made a similar scarecrow before who was a gentleman
- She had decided that the scarecrow would look like a gentleman

3. At the beginning of the second paragraph, the author says: *...although it made so little show...* Which is the actual meaning of this phrase? a) *... it could hardly be seen* b) *...it could be seen for a short time*

4. Analyze the following sentence: *...a broomstick, on which Mother Rigby had taken many an airy gallop at midnight.* What does this remind you from your childhood memories, particularly of what you used to hear about witches? What peculiar syntactic feature do you notice in the phrase *many an airy gallop?* How do you translate this into Spanish? a) *muchos galopes/viajes ventilados* b) *muchos galopes ligeros.* What is the distinguishing syntactic feature between the two phrases in English and Spanish?

5. In line number 8, find out another way to say *uncultivated.* In the same line, the word *phrase* is used as: a) a noun, b) a verb, c) an adjective.

6. In that very same line pick out: a) an adjective formed by a root + prefix + suffix, b) a word that means *an agricultural instrument consisting of a wooden handle at the end of which a stout shorter stick is so hung as to swing freely*_____

7. In line number 9, which verb in past best substitutes the meaning of *wielded?* a) governed b) handled c) directed

8. Who was Goodman Rigby in relation to Mother Rigby?

9. In lines 9 and 10 the expression *“his spouse worried him out of this troublesome world”* encloses information between the lines. Look up the two-word verb *worry out* and express what you interpret out of this phrase.

10. In line 10, the determiner the other refers to _____
11. The narrator at certain moment says "if I mistake not", what is another way to say this?
12. Find out the expression equivalent to: "y como piernas" _____
13. If you look up the word hoe, it will be easy to figure out hoe-handle, what is the Spanish word for it? _____
14. Look up the adjectives withered and shriveled which qualify pumpkin, and respectable that qualifies face. Which of the entries best suit their meanings?
15. What contradictions do you find between the woman's intention to produce something fine, beautiful, and splendid, and the material and articles she used?

EXTRACT # 3

Feathertop's clothes

But the clothes, in this case, were to be the making of the man. So the good old woman took down from a peg an ancient plum-colored coat of London make, and with relics of embroidery on its seams, cuffs, pocket-flaps, and button-holes, but lamentably worn and faded, patched at the elbows, tattered at the skirts, and threadbare all over. On the left breast was a round hole, whence either a star of nobility had been rent away, or else the hot heart of some former wearer had scorched it through and through. The neighbors said that this rich garment belonged to the Black Man's¹ wardrobe, and that he kept it at Mother Rigby's cottage for the convenience of slipping it on whenever he wished to make a grand appearance at the governor's table. To match the coat there was a velvet waistcoat of very ample size, and formerly embroidered with foliage that had been as brightly golden as the maple-leaves in October, but which had now quite vanished out of the substance of the velvet. Next came a pair of scarlet breeches, once worn by the French governor of Louisbourg², and the knees of which had touched the lower step of the throne of Louis le Grand³. The Frenchman had given these small-clothes to an Indian powwow⁴, who parted with them to the old witch

¹ *Black Man*: A folk name for the devil.

² *Louisburgh*: A seaport town of Nova Scotia, formerly strongly fortified by France.

³ *Louis Le Grand*: Louis the Great (Louis XIV), King of France from 1643 to 1715.

⁴ *Powwow*: Here Native American priest, or medicine man. Often it means a conference with other Native Americans.

for a gill of strong-waters⁵, at one of their dances in the forest. Furthermore, Mother Rigby produced a pair of silk stockings and put them on the figure's legs, where they showed as unsubstantial as a dream, with the wooden reality of the two sticks making itself miserably apparent through the holes. Lastly, she put her dead husband's wig on the bare scalp of the pumpkin, and surmounted the whole with a dusty three-cornered hat, in which was stuck the longest tail-feather of a rooster.

1. Try your own translation of the following expression; check it against your classmates' versions: *But the clothes, in this case, were to be the making of the man.* What peculiar syntactic construction requires reflection?
2. In the first line, the word *good* is not used as a synonym of *nice*. Look it up in the dictionary and explain the author's intention in this context

3. Translate the expression: *an ancient plum-colored coat of London make.*
4. The word *relic* in this context means: a) restos b) reliquias
5. In the sentence "*On the left breast was a round hole, whence either a star of nobility had been rent away, or else the hot heart of some former wearer had scorched it through and through*" a) Look up in a dictionary the meaning of the word *whence*, b) Identify the expression which means: *something that was done repeatedly.*
6. After you have clarified the meaning of all the words you need to, how would you transform it using your own words? You may probably write: *On the left breast was a round hole, _____ either a star of nobility had been _____, or the hot heart of some _____ had _____ it through and through.* Now check it against your classmates' versions, how close are they to the author's words? Which one is not Spanish like? Why?
7. Find out among lines 7, 8 and 9 a word that stands in general terms for a clothing item _____
8. Write a summary of the characteristics of the following clothing items
Mother Rigby used to dress up Feathertop

⁵ *Strong-Waters*: An archaic term for whisky or brandy.

CLOTHING ITEMS	CHARACTERISTICS

9. How did the Frenchman's clothes get in the hands of Mother Rigby?

10. Write in the following chart a summary of facts or ideas you find in the text, related to:

Historical facts	Geographical facts	Mystic ideas

11. How does the ending of this extract explain the name given to the scarecrow *Feathertop*?

EXTRACT # 4

Read the extract quickly and stop whenever you consider necessary to analyze and work out meanings

Mother Rigby's Greatest Invention

"And you are well worth looking at—that's a fact!" quoth Mother Rigby, in admiration at her own handiwork. "I've made many a puppet, since I've been a witch, but me thinks this is the finest of them all. It is almost too good for a scarecrow. And, by the by, I'll just fill a fresh pipe of tobacco and then take him out to the corn-patch."

While filling her pipe, the old woman continued to gaze with almost motherly affection at the figure in the corner. To say the truth—whether it were chance, or skill, or downright witchcraft—there was something wonderfully human in this ridiculous shape, bedizened⁶ with its tattered finery; and as for the countenance, it appeared to shrivel its yellow surface into a grin—a funny kind of expression betwixt scorn and merriment, as if it understood itself to be a jest at mankind. The more Mother Rigby looked, the better she was pleased.

1. What did Mother Rigby feel for the handiwork? If you cannot do it now, go on to the next exercise and go over it later

⁶ *Bedizened*: dressed or adorned with vulgarity.

--- Love

--- Admiration

--- Tenderness

--- Fulfillment

--- Joy

a) How do you account for your choice (s)? Choose expressions from the text to support your answer

b) Besides your point of view, might there be another choice? Why?

2. Resort to your knowledge of Stylistics to answer the following questions:

a) When are we in presence of a written and oral text? Explain through sample fragments from the text.

b) Evidently, this is not current or modern English. Spot in the text the words that indicate a flavor of archaism and antiquity.

c) Analyze the speeches of Mother Rigby. How is it like? Why do you think the author shifts to this kind of language to illustrate the personality of the witch?

d) In the expression with its tattered finery, we are in presence of a stylistic device, *oxymoron*, what is the author's intention with this?

3. Read the last paragraph slowly; look up the words that you need to know. Do you agree that the last sentence reformulate or emphasize the ideas in the first paragraph? Support your answer.

EXTRACT # 5

Feathertop Comes to Life

1. Read the first sentence, what do you think Mother Rigby is going to do?

I'll make a man of my scarecrow, were it only for the joke's sake!"

While muttering these words, Mother Rigby took the pipe from her own mouth and thrust it into the crevice which represented the same feature in the pumpkin-visage of the scarecrow.

“Puff, darling, puff!” said she. “Puff away, my fine fellow! your life depends on it!”

(...) “Puff away, my pet! puff away, my pretty one!” Mother Rigby kept repeating, with her pleasantest smile. “It is the breath of life to ye; and that you may take my word for!” Beyond all question the pipe was bewitched. There must have been a spell either in the tobacco or in the fiercely glowing coal that so mysteriously burned on top of it, or in the pungently aromatic smoke which exhaled from the kindled weed. (...) The old witch clapped her skinny hands together, and smiled encouragingly upon her handiwork. She saw that the charm worked well. The shriveled, yellow face, which heretofore had been no face at all, had already a thin, fantastic haze, as it were of human likeness, shifting to and fro across it; sometimes vanishing entirely, but growing more perceptible than ever, with the next whiff from the pipe. The whole figure, in like manner, assumed a show of life, such as we impart to ill-defined shapes among the clouds, and half-deceive ourselves with the pastime of our own fancy.

2. After your quick reading determine what words you need to look up in order to better understand the text extract, underlining them as you read.
3. What does Mother Rigby mean by *“were it only for the joke’s sake”*? Translate it.
4. The word spell has a peculiar meaning in this context, which is it?
5. What gave life to the unmoving scarecrow?
6. What expressions does the witch use to address Feathertop? What do they express?
7. Describe with your own words the process of enliven of Feathertop.

EXTRACT # 5

1. **Read the following extract. Apply the comprehension strategies you have practiced through the previous text portions, and then write the sequence of actions or reactions of the scarecrow to the commands of Mother Rigby in the chart below.**

“Why lurks thou in the corner, lazy one?” said she. “Step forth! Thou hast the world before thee!” (...) In obedience to Mother Rigby’s word, and extending its arm as if to reach her outstretched hand, the figure made a step forward—a kind of hitch

and jerk, however, rather than a step—then tottered and almost lost its balance. (...) So it stepped into the bar of sunshine. There it stood—poor devil of a contrivance that it was!—with only the thinnest vesture of human similitude about it, through which was evident the stiff, rickety, incongruous, faded, tattered, good-for-nothing patchwork of its substance, ready to sink in a heap upon the floor, as conscious of its own unworthiness to be erect. “Thou hast a man’s aspect,” said she, sternly. “Have also the echo and mockery of a voice! I bid thee speak!” The scarecrow gasped, struggled, and at length emitted a murmur, which was so incorporated with its smoky breath that you could scarcely tell whether it were indeed a voice, or only a whiff of tobacco.

Mother Rigby’s commands and comments	Feathertop’s actions or reactions

2. Use the notes in the chart to retell the events in this extract.

EXTRACT # 6

The Task of Feathertop

1. Read this extract carefully. Use Webster’s Dictionary and a bilingual one if necessary to look up the words you do not know, especially the archaic forms of pronouns and other words.

... in high good-humor with this fantastic contrivance of hers, Mother Rigby told the scarecrow that it must go and play its part in the great world, where not one man in a hundred, she affirmed, was gifted with more real substance than itself. (...) this excellent old dame gave him a token, by which he was to introduce himself to a certain magistrate, member of the council, merchant, and elder of the church (the four capacities constituting but one man,) who stood at the head of society in the neighboring metropolis. The token was neither more nor less than a single word, which Mother Rigby whispered to the scarecrow, and which the scarecrow was to whisper to the merchant. “Gouty as the old fellow is, he’ll run thy errands for thee, when once thou hast given him that word in his ear,” said the old witch. “Mother Rigby knows the worshipful Justice Gookin, and the worshipful justice knows Mother Rigby!” “The worshipful Master Gookin,” whispered she, “hath a comely

maiden to his daughter. And hark ye, my pet! Thou hast a fair outside, and a pretty wit enough of thine own. Yea, a pretty wit enough! Thou wilt think better of it when thou hast seen more of other people's wits. Now, with thy outside and thy inside, thou are the very man to win a young girl's heart. Never doubt it! I tell thee it shall be so. Put but a bold face on the matter, sigh, smile, flourish thy hat, thrust forth thy leg like a dancing-master, put thy right hand to the left side of thy waistcoat—and pretty Polly Gookin is thine own!"

2. Fill the following chart with your own version of Mother Rigby's phrases according to your comprehension and the help of the dictionary. Use synonyms whenever necessary to convey a clear message. Then compare them to other classmates' versions

Mother Rigby's words	Your version of her message
<i>"...he'll run thy errands for thee, when once thou hast given him that word in his ear".</i>	
<i>"Master Gookin hath a comely maiden to his daughter".</i>	
<i>"And hark ye, my pet! Thou hast a fair outside, and a pretty wit enough of thine own"</i>	
<i>"Thou wilt think better of it when thou hast seen more of other people's wits".</i>	
<i>"Now, with thy outside and thy inside, thou are the very man to win a young girl's heart."</i>	
<i>"Never doubt it! I tell thee it shall be so"</i>	

<p><i>“Put but a bold face on the matter, sigh, smile, flourish thy hat, thrust forth thy leg like a dancing-master, put thy right hand to the left side of thy waistcoat—and pretty Polly Gookin is thine own!”</i></p>	
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Partial conclusions of the chapter

Through this phase of the investigation, the author has devised a set of reading tasks to be implemented in the fourth year group of the Bachelor in Education English Major, as a type of remedial work to help students read and comprehend literary texts of high complexity. In order to elaborate the tasks, some important methodological conceptions were taken into account, such as: the treatment to the different dimensions of the communicative competence in the reading process, the teacher’s awareness of the characteristics of the students’ interlanguage, as a system in process of evolution and construction.

This kind of information is valuable in order to know what aspects, linguistic phenomena and meanings should be focused through the reading tasks. Likewise, the conceptualization of the nature of the reading comprehension process, as viewed by different authors, emphasize on the active role of the student (as a reader) to build up interpretations. Furthermore, the reading processing models (Top-down, bottom-up and interactive) and the consideration of the reading micro-skills completed the necessary foundation to substantiate the practical contribution. So as to corroborate their effectiveness, the tasks were submitted to the specialists’ criteria for assessment, and they were implemented through a pedagogical experience.

CHAPTER III: CORROBORATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COMMUNICATIVE TASKS TO FAVOR THE COMPREHENSION OF ENGLISH LITERARY TEXTS

In order to corroborate the effectiveness of the set of tasks to favor the comprehension of English literary texts, the following empirical methods were applied: the **specialists' criteria**, with the purpose to gather the opinions and suggestions of some experienced professors who work with the Major. They were surveyed on the usefulness and pertinence of the tasks; and a **pedagogical experience**, in order to implement the tasks, and through this, the direct observation in order to assess the students' reactions and transformations during the execution process. This allowed the assessment of the students' results during this period and the qualitative results in reading comprehension, and the contribution to the interlanguage building process.

3.1 Analysis of the results of the specialists' criteria

Before the reading tasks were implemented, they were submitted to the specialists' criteria. The selected specialists are teacher trainers with 25 years of experience on average; 50% have an academic degree in Education and the other 50%, a scientific degree. The tasks and an evaluation sheet were given to the ten selected specialists (Appendix 4).

The specialists were requested to evaluate the reading tasks considering the following statements as indicators of the transformations they may cause in the students. The reading task items in each text extract may:

- a) help students process the meanings and comprehend specific information
- b) help them increase their meta-linguistic capacities
- c) favor the development of inference from context
- d) increase linguistic sensibility and analytic reading processing
- e) enhance motivation and reading habits
- f) guide the students to overcome the complexities of authentic literary texts
- g) require them to compare the target language and the mother tongue systems

- h) demand reflection on differences and similarities between the two language systems

The evaluation categories to rate the tasks encompassed five options on a scale from lower to upper degree of approval by the specialists in the survey: **disagree**, **partially agree**, **agree**, **very much agree**, and **totally agree**). The professors' assessment criteria about the reading tasks were satisfactory. The specialists **agree** on the pertinence of 62, 5 % of the indicators, while they **very much agree** on 25% of them, specifically items a) and c). Indicator e) had the most irregular assessment, it scored **partially agree** by 30% of the specialists, while 70% **agree** or **very much agree**.

Main suggestions of the specialists

The specialists made also some important recommendations to improve the evaluation tool, and the reading tasks, for instance:

They considered that some of the task items are appropriate for advanced learners, and that this should be taken into account as they were a little complex, especially for slow students; for example, the translation of some utterances used by the story author in Middle English, as well as the inference of some complex expressions.

They also recommended that the number of items to make the students critically evaluate and extrapolate the textual information may be increased. It was recommended to classify the reading micro-skills into their corresponding level of comprehension and to reflect this transition through the reading task items. All these suggestions were appreciated and taken into account by the author of this paper for the improvement of the results and future development of the research work.

3.2 Analysis of the results of the pedagogical experience

Organization and implementation

As stated in epigraph 1.1, intended for the empirical characterization of the investigation, the population is composed by the total amount of 13 students. Out of them, the author selected a sample of 10 students; this represents 96 % of the total quantity. The empirical characterization of the research had been applied to

this sample group. The group was selected including a balanced quantity of slow, average and advanced learners.

The pedagogical experience started on late February 2015 and extended to May 2015. During these three months the author implemented and corroborated the effectiveness of the tasks through direct observation of the students and a group interview (Appendix 5). They were allowed to work in small groups so as to promote mediation and cooperation.

In each session, a) the students were given the text extracts to read and assess the level of complexity of the text, b) then, to self-evaluate their capacities to process the information and understand them, c) later, they were assigned the tasks one after the other in order to read and try to solve it, d) finally, when they had completed all items, they were asked to read again the extract and self assess their comprehension.

In order to guide the description record, the following indicators were determined and are synthetically exposed as follows.

Students' opinion about the complexity of the extracts and the stories they have to read in History of the English Speaking Cultures

The majority of the students under study agreed in qualifying the extracts as complex or partially complex. They expressed that the presence of unknown words and expressions in certain parts of the text, as well as unusual grammatical constructions hindered their comprehension process. They considered they generally read quickly to get a global understanding, but they noticed they lacked full understanding so as to be able to elaborate on the communicative, social and cultural values of the text. Besides, they were usually short of time to read so much information and go over the text as many times as necessary and consult dictionaries.

Students' results in the application of reading strategies and skills

At the beginning (during the implementation of two first excerpt tasks) there was an acceptable level of efficiency in the fulfillment of the tasks by the students, at least in the case of the advanced and average ones. In the first excerpt they accomplished the tasks acceptably, though with slowness, difficulties and certain lack of accuracy in the responses. In general, they showed acceptable

development of reading skills such as scanning; that is, spotting specific information in the text, inferring word meaning, synthesizing and gathering information, and skimming for figuring out the central idea. In the case of the slow ones, they showed more difficulties while undergoing the comprehension process.

Nevertheless, in the reading excerpts that followed the first ones, there was a tangible positive evolution in their performance. With the experience of the first excerpts the students accomplished more efficiently each time in the coming tasks. This result led the author to conclude that these tasks gradually prepared the students to read intricate literary texts more proficiently; especially, they demonstrated a higher level of independence to figure out meanings by consulting the dictionary, drawing inferences and in the general management of reading strategies.

Motivation towards reading

One of the facts that impede reading comprehension in the students is the lack of motivation towards such process. At the beginning of the implementation process, they looked a little reluctant to read and be successful in understanding because of the high complexity of the texts. With the lack of reading habits and skills they felt unable to do the tasks, and consequently, to comprehend the text. After the accomplishment of the first tasks their motivation started to raise considerably, that is to say, they were better trained in the reading skills; therefore, they felt more capable to face an English authentic text with more willingness.

Students' considerations of the effectiveness of the reading tasks

Through a group interview, they were requested to offer their opinions about how useful they considered the reading activities, and how much they helped them to understand the text. In most of the cases, the students displayed agreement that the tasks are profitable and very beneficial to favor their reading comprehension skills, and for their linguistic growth as well. Many of them expressed their satisfaction with these tasks, and that they can help reach the essential content of the text, that is, they lead them to comprehend the text from its parts and as a whole.

In the same way, they believe that it might be also suitable to implement them in other subjects establishing interdisciplinary connections like in Integrated English

Practice and in English Grammar lessons. Moreover, some others think that it is fruitful for them to have more tasks like these ones, and to have them more frequently in the literary studies of History of the English Speaking Cultures. They also felt that the curiosity to discover linguistic and semantic phenomena through the different task items motivated them to read and do the activities.

Metalinguistic development of the Students

Through the realization of the tasks a metalinguistic evolution in the students' performance was observed. With the interlinguistic analysis carried out in some of the tasks the students learned words and phrases of special difficulties and understanding, so they experienced: a widening of their lexical repertoire, the development of the inference strategies to discover the meaning of uncommon syntactic constructions, an awareness of the type of language used by the author in terms of ancient or modern English, adaptation to the style of the author, recognition of cognate words, identification of the pragmatic use of words in specific contexts, and reflect on spelling differences, and the appropriation of idioms.

Partial conclusion of the chapter

The validation of the reading tasks was carried out through the specialists' criteria and a pedagogical experience. The assessment by experienced teachers of the English Major corroborated the acceptance of the tasks and their effectiveness for the solution of the research problem. Likewise, the pedagogical experience allowed assessing the reading tasks and the observation of the effects on the students. Their implementation process revealed the following transformations in the students:

- A positive evolution in performing the reading tasks
- A growing level of independence to read and process the information
- An observable enhancement of motivation to read
- A more effective comprehension process
- A growth of their lexical repertoire
- More curiosity for language phenomena
- Metalinguistic development

CONCLUSIONS

Through the accomplishment of the stated research tasks, the following conclusions were drawn:

The empirical study carried out through the application of different methods, revealed the limitations the students have in reading and understanding literary texts in English. Apart from the insufficient development of the communicative competence, including its five basic dimensions, they have poor reading habits; they lack meta-cognitive strategies and reflect limited cultural background for processing text information and build up interpretations.

The use of the theoretical methods helped the author determine the essential aspects about the object of study and synthesize important implications for the reading comprehension process. The five basic dimensions of the communicative competence are relevant aspects to be considered by the language teacher in devising reading comprehension tasks.

The consideration of the roles of contrastive analysis, error analysis and interlanguage analysis provided the author not only with knowledge, but also with a better preparation for guiding the students and devising tasks, techniques and procedures to read and understand literary texts. It is important to remark the role of the mother tongue as a source of positive transfer and as the cause of interferences, but not as the only source that affects the comprehension process.

For designing the reading tasks and favoring the solution of the problem, the author took into account the different levels of comprehension, the reading micro-skills and the processing models, with an emphasis on the bottom-up model.

The corroboration of the reading tasks was carried out through the specialists' criteria and a pedagogical experience. The assessment by experienced teachers of the English Major corroborated the acceptance of the tasks and their effectiveness for the solution of the research problem. Likewise, the pedagogical experience allowed assessing the reading tasks and the observation of the effects on the students. Their implementation process revealed positive transformations in the students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The author recommends the implementation of the reading tasks as interdisciplinary work through the subject Integrated English Practice in fourth year.

Also it is the author's interest to continue researching in this area and to make use of self-reflection and sharing experiences of the the reading strategies they have used and developed.

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APPENDIX 1

DIAGNÓSTIC TEST

Objective: to test the students' abilities to comprehend a literary text fragment

Read the following extract using different types of reading (skimming, scanning, and analytic reading) as convenient to solve the first task below.

The good woman had risen thus early (for as yet it was scarcely sunrise) in order to set about making a scarecrow, which she intended to put in the middle of her corn-patch. It was now the latter week of May, and the crows and blackbirds had already discovered the little, green, rolled-up leaf of the Indian corn just peeping out of the soil. She was determined, therefore, to contrive as lifelike a scarecrow as ever was seen, and to finish it immediately, from top to toe, so that it should begin its sentinel's duty that very morning. Now Mother Rigby (as everybody must have heard) was one of the most cunning and potent witches in New England, and might, with very little trouble, have made a scarecrow ugly enough to frighten the minister himself. But on this occasion, as she had awakened in an uncommonly pleasant humor, and was further dulcified by her pipe of tobacco, she resolved to produce something fine, beautiful, and splendid, rather than hideous and horrible.

1. From the following ideas there is one the text does not include, which one is it? If you are not ready, then wait until you have done the ones that follow.

- _Who Mother Rigby was like
- _Why she wanted to make a scarecrow
- _A description of Mother Rigby's corn plants
- _The steps she followed to make the scarecrow
- _Mother Rigby's mood today

2. Read again and slow down in your reading when necessary: As you read do the following:

- Pick out the specific form used by the author to express because it was still early (First three lines):
- In the second line, the two-word verb set about is used, look it up in the dictionary, which meaning best suits this context?
- Extract the author's full description of the growing corn plants. Try a translation of the phrase into Spanish

- After reflecting on the author's peculiar syntax and intended meaning, try your own version in Spanish of the following sentence: She was determined, therefore, to contrive as lifelike a scarecrow as ever was seen
- The word *further* in this content is equivalent to: más lejos, además, más profundo
- What is the meaning of the word resolved as used in the last sentence? Use the dictionary.

3. Answer these questions about the extract:

- What facts in the text indicate that Mother Rigby was a popular woman?
- What words/phrases indicate that she was a woman who regularly had a bad temper
- What specific idea does the author express in the last lines to exaggerate the **ugliness** of the scarecrow Mother Rigby might have made? Explain
- What does the author mean by saying that Mother Rigby was dulcified by her pipe of tobacco?
- What idea is predominant in this extract, a characterization of Mother Rigby or a description of the scarecrow?

APPENDIX 2

Survey to be applied to English teachers from the department

Objective: to determine the teachers' opinions about the linguistic competence of the English Major students

Distinguished professors, your opinions will be evaluable in order to carry out this diploma paper which is associated to the department research. Please, your useful collaboration is requested.

1. How do you consider the metalinguistic capacities of your students (knowledge of grammatical, pronunciation, word formation, orthographical rules, and the differences in relation to their mother tongue?

Excellent ____ Satisfactory ____ Acceptable ____ Insufficient ____

2. What about the students who recently graduated?

Excellent ____ Satisfactory ____ Acceptable ____ Insufficient ____

3. What about the abilities of the students to focus linguistic aspects from the didactic point of view which are special difficulties for reading comprehension?

Excellent ____ Satisfactory ____ Acceptable ____ Insufficient ____

4. ¿How do you assess their interest and curiosity for grammatical and lexical rules?

Very much motivated ____% motivated ____% little motivated ____% no motivated ____%

5. What is the importance of such preparation for their future professional performance?

APPENDIX 3

Entrevista a profesores del departamento

Objetivo: Valorar el desarrollo meta-cognitivo y en particular las estrategias de aprendizaje en los estudiantes de la Carrera de Lengua Extranjera

1. ¿Qué actitudes y comportamientos observas en los estudiantes aventajados con respecto al estudio del idioma que no observas en los menos aventajados?
2. ¿Qué actitudes y comportamientos aconsejarías a los estudiantes que demuestran poca eficiencia en el aprendizaje?
3. ¿Qué acciones has desarrollado con ellos para que estos aprendan a aprender?
4. ¿Qué tratamiento le da a los contenidos lingüísticos del inglés que son singulares o diferentes a los de la lengua materna?
5. ¿Cuáles son las dificultades que más afectan la comprensión de textos, sobre todo los literarios?
6. ¿Cómo valora la motivación, interés y curiosidad de los estudiantes por los aspectos lingüísticos, y en particular las diferencias con respecto a la lengua extranjera?
7. ¿Cuál considera debe ser la preparación de un profesor al respecto?

Entrevista a profesores de Historia de la Cultura de los Pueblos

1. Por qué considera que su asignatura es compleja para estudiantes de la carrera?
2. ¿Cuáles son las principales dificultades que presentan los estudiantes en la comprensión de textos literarios?
3. ¿Qué trabajo remedial pudiera realizarse para facilitar la comprensión de esos textos?
4. ¿Cuáles son sus experiencias al respecto?

APPENDIX # 4

Specialists' criteria

Objective: to evaluate the effectiveness of the reading tasks

After analyzing each task, with the items and procedures corresponding to every text extract, score them with the appropriate category to express their pertinence as indicated in the chart. Make any suggestion you consider useful for their improvement.

	The task items may...	Disagree	Partially agree	Agree	Agree a lot	Totally agree
A	help students process the meanings and comprehend specific information					
B	help them increase their meta-linguistic capacities					
C	favor the development of inference from context					
D	increase linguistic sensibility and analytic reading processing					
E	enhance motivation and reading habits					
F	guide the students to overcome the complexities of authentic literary texts					
G	require them to compare the target language and the mother tongue systems					

Suggestions for the improvement of the task items:

APPENDIX 5

Group interview

Objetivo: Determinar el nivel de satisfacción de los estudiantes con respecto a la efectividad de las tareas de comprensión lectora implementadas

1. ¿Consideras que las tareas fueron de utilidad y te ayudaron en la comprensión de los textos?
2. ¿Cuáles te ayudaron más?
3. ¿Qué habilidades de comprensión lectora consideras has desarrollado?
4. ¿Cómo han incidido las tareas en tu motivación hacia la lectura?
5. ¿A través de qué asignaturas sugieres se trabajen estas tareas?