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# I read like a traffic light: Teaching reading comprehension strategies with metaphors

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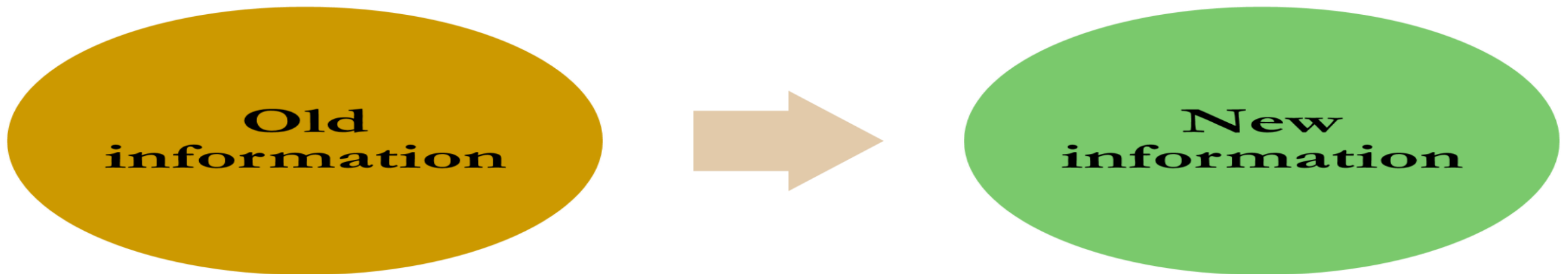
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ETAI International Conference  
David Yellin Academic College, Jerusalem  
July 11 , 2023

# Abstract

Metaphors can help students at any age to learn by bridging from something they already know to something new (Cartwright & Duke, 2019).



After defining “metaphor” in terms of Lakoff and Johnson’s Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Sadoski and Paivo’s Dual Coding Theory, and briefly reviewing the research on EFL learning metaphors, I will illustrate the teaching of two reading strategies with the help of metaphors.

# Introduction

## 1. The etymology of “metaphor”

English  
“Metaphor”  
(16<sup>th</sup> century)

Old French  
“métaphore”

Latin  
“metaphora”,

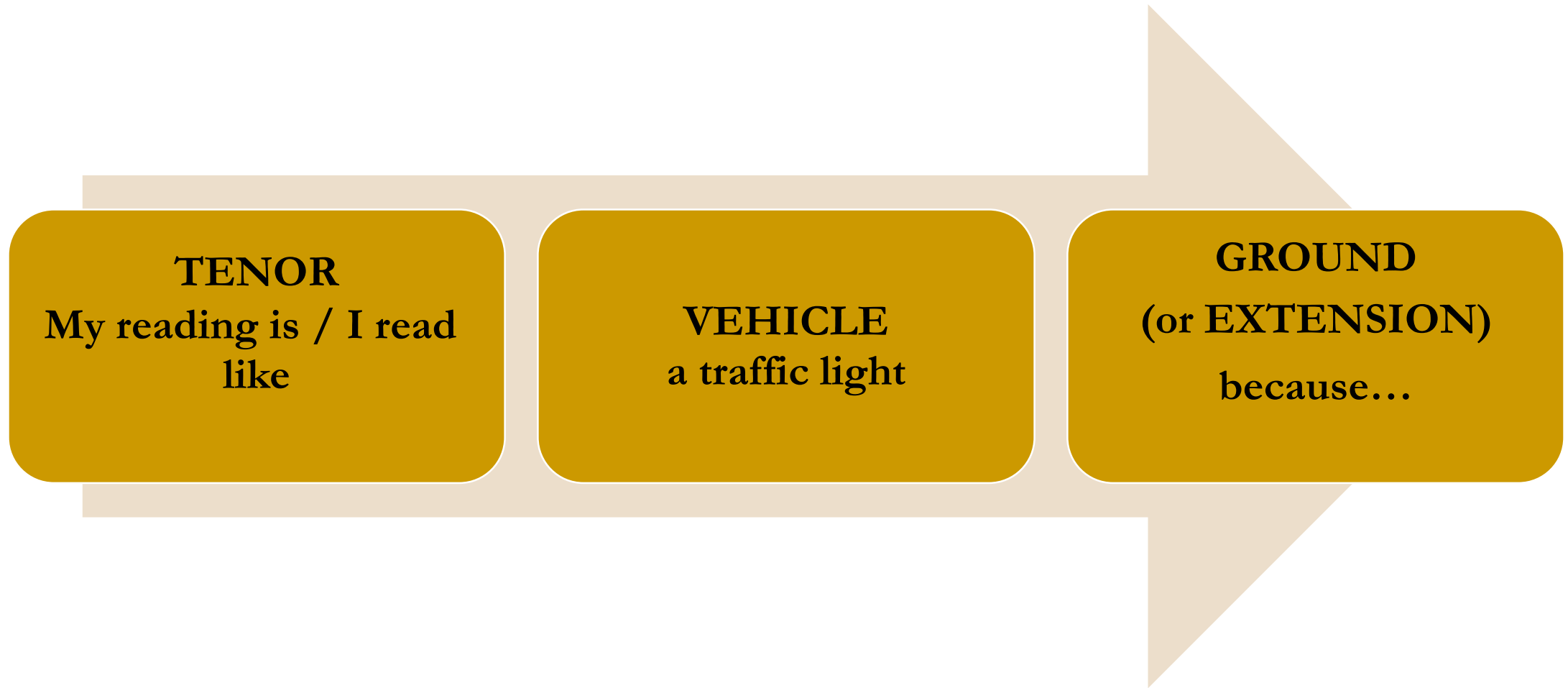
the Greek  
μεταφορά (lit.  
carrying over,  
transferring,  
transporting)

<https://learningspy.co.uk/english-gcse/using-tenor-vehicle-and-ground-to-analyse-metaphors/>

“There’s something rather exquisite about the fact that lorries in modern Greece are still called metaphores”.



## 2. Parts of the metaphor (Richards, 1965)



## Danny, a 5<sup>th</sup> grader, explains his traffic light metaphor



I read like a traffic light because...

**RED** is when I stop because I understand I have a problem;

**YELLOW** is when I think about how I'm going to solve it;

**GREEN** is when I carry out my plan.

## Danny, a 5<sup>th</sup> grader, explains his traffic light metaphor



I read like a traffic light because...

**RED** is when I stop because I understand I have a problem **[evaluating]**;

**YELLOW** is when I think about how I'm going to solve it **[planning]**;

**GREEN** is when I carry out my plan [executing = using an appropriate strategy].

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**My study of learning metaphors in general and of reading and writing metaphors in particular (Segev Miller, 1997, 2007, 2016, 2020) draws on two major theories:**

- **Conceptual Metaphor Theory** (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980)
- **Dual Coding Theory** (Sadoski & Paivo, 2004, 2013)



# 1. Lakoff and Johnson (1980:3) Conceptual Metaphor Theory

“Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish – a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action (...).

We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conception system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature”.

# Exercise with 6<sup>th</sup> graders:

Think of metaphors related to different parts of the head



# One implication

Of this is that the learning of vocabulary cannot be limited to words, as in Bands 1-3. It should include metaphors as well, especially since

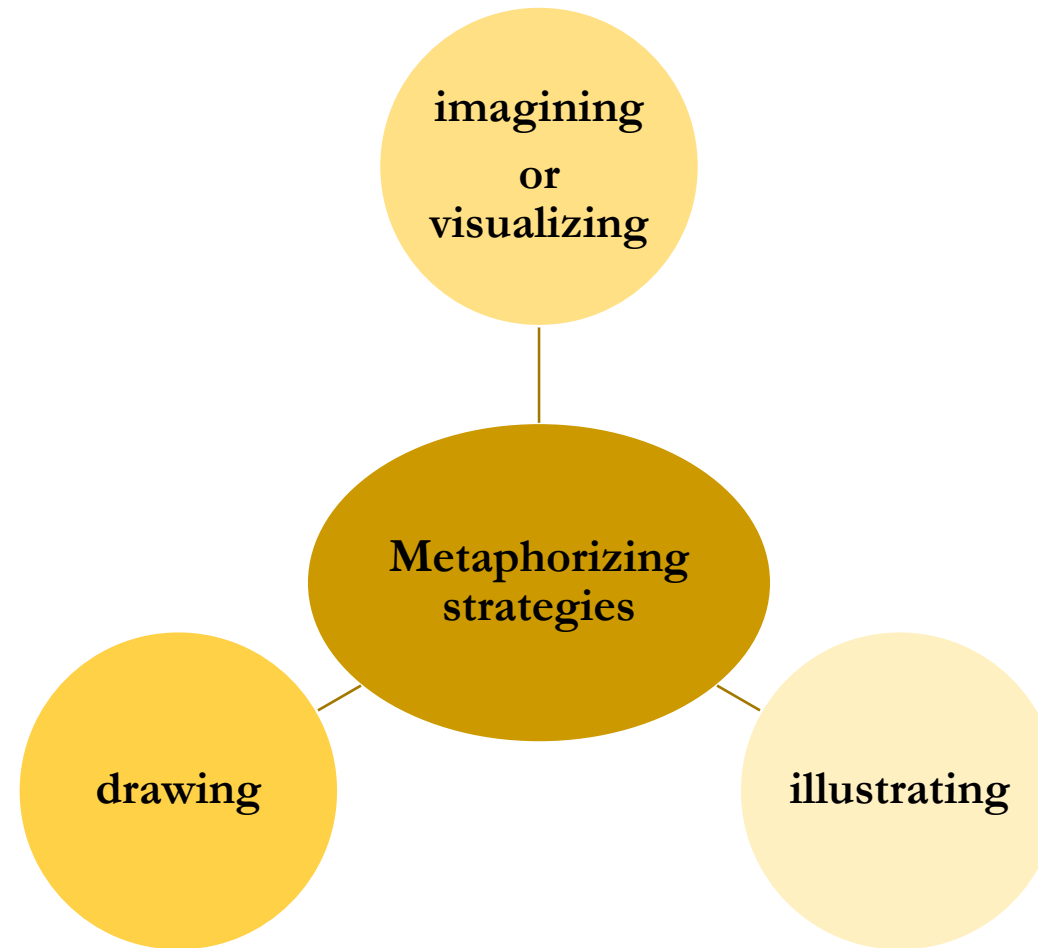
- they are mostly cultural
- they cannot be merely translated word for word

## 2. Sadoski & Paivo's (2004, 2013) Dual Coding Theory

“Verbal information, consisting of words for objects and events, and nonverbal information, consisting of visual and other sensory images, is processed in separate but interconnected mental subsystems in working memory. By processing information through both, a richer mental representation of the text is likely to be constructed, which is supposed to result in better comprehension (...).

Creating nonverbal representations of the text and connecting them to the reader's private sensory experiences and images is also likely to make the comprehension process more personal” ” (Sadoski & Paivo, 2004:1329).

**The direct implications** of this are that (1) we should explicitly teach “metaphorizing” strategies, and (2) we should encourage our students to conjure up “pictures”, or images, of what they are reading.



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## Here are some ideas from my book:

1. The teacher may want to start explicit instruction with an episode from **בסוד העניינים**, first broadcast on Israeli Educational Television in 1991, but still accessible on the web.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Jkq3sN98wE>

Today there are many animated strategy videos on the web.

2. The teacher can hang a poster or large bulletin board in class and add to it one strategy at a time after it is presented and practiced. Students can be asked to think of metaphors for the strategies and add them to the board.

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**Metaphor analysis is now an accepted instrument in educational and applied linguistic research (e.g., Cameron and Low, 1999; Wan & Low, 2015).**

**Metaphors of learning have been studied for a long time now (for a review see: Rose, 2021), and are especially illuminating with regard to understanding both teachers' (e.g., Shaw et al., 2021) and students' (e.g., Wegner et al., 2020) conceptions of learning.**

**Over the last two decades, there has been a plethora of research on metaphors of second language learning, especially the learning of vocabulary (e.g., Hall, 2012; O'Reilly & Marsden, 2023).**

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**In my 2016 study, when asked to describe their learning process over one semester, 60% of my undergraduate EFL majors used the journey metaphor.**

**Previous research (e.g., Caballero, 2006; Cortazzi & Jin, 2011, 2023) indicated that the journey metaphor is indeed quite common.**

**My students described their journey**

- as "difficult", but also
- as "mysterious",
- "a long and interesting journey into understanding", etc.

**The task, then, encouraged them to relate to their learning experiences both cognitively and affectively.**



In another study (Segev Miller, 2020:101), O., my EFL graduate student,  
is reading and recording herself thinking aloud the text:

Abbot, J (1997). To be intelligent. *Educational Leadership*, 54 (6), 6-10.

[7] זאת הייתה הקדמה די ארוכה, אך אני מקווה שהבהרתי לעצמי מספר נקודות חשובות לפני היציאה למסע:  
כותרת, מחבר (...) [evaluating] // [8] נכין את הצידה [planning] // [9] כל הצידה לצידי ולידי: מילון, טוש  
הברקה, עפרונות מחודדים, סרגל וכמובן אנוכי [evaluating] // [10] הבה נצא לדרך [planning] //

## Oxford et al. (2014)

Six international experts – Rebecca L. Oxford, Carol Griffith, Ana Longhini, **Andrew D. Cohen**, Ernesto Macaro, & Vee Harris, were asked to describe language learning strategies and their involvement with such strategies over the years. One of the metaphors which emerged from an analysis of their narratives was the journey / travel / movement metaphor.

E.g.,

Harris: “My own personal journey through learning strategies research”, “the impetus to set off on the journey”, and “a real journey of discovery for me”.

Oxford: “journeying through the landscape of language learning, (...). Good language learners are those who manage this difficult journey successfully”.

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## Shaw et al. (2021)

Likewise, a recent study of 46 college reading teachers (so-called reading educational professionals), elicited similar metaphors of their conceptions of reading and teaching reading:

“traveling the world”,

“a trip to an unknown place”,

“a never-ending journey”, etc.

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1. At the face-to-face ETAI Winter Conference in November 2021, I demonstrated how 7<sup>th</sup> graders were required to collaboratively synthesize information from multimodal online sources (e.g., Simple Wikipedia, clips) on a topic of their choice.

2. At the online ETAI Spring Conference in April 2022, I demonstrated how EFL undergraduates, again collaboratively, compared and contrasted original and cover versions of a song.

**Both groups were using metaphors in the process of performing their respective tasks. Some referred to themselves as "builders" of meaning-making – a metaphor in line with current constructivist models of the reading process (Pearson & Cervetti, 2017).**



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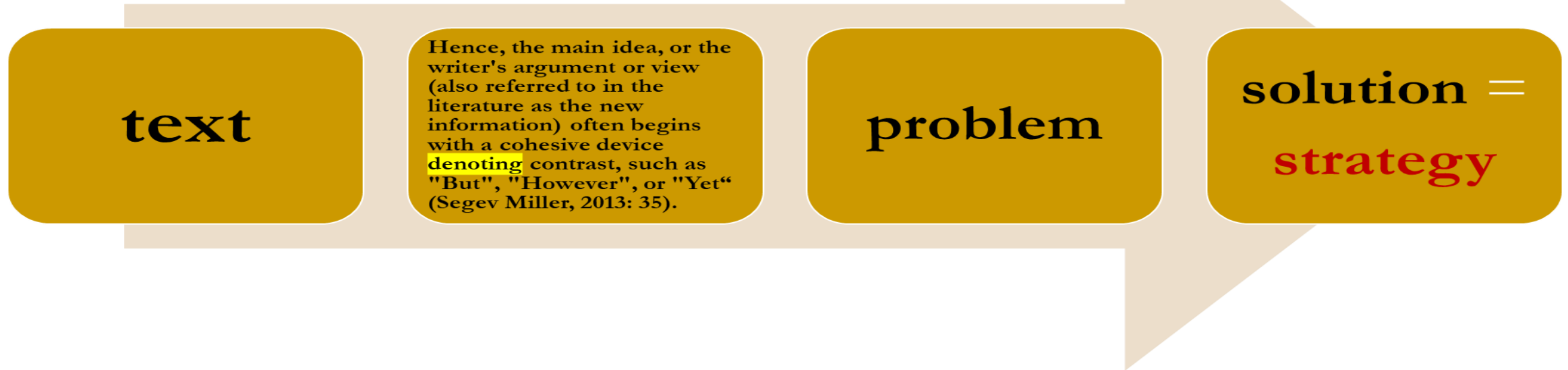
# Teaching reading strategies with metaphors

The strategies I always suggest to my students they start their reading with are

1. Previewing
2. Scanning

# The shortest definition of reading strategies

"plans for solving problems encountered in constructing meaning" (Duffy, 1993: 232).



A more recent definition of L2 reading strategies (Oxford, 2017) emphasizes the purpose of using these strategies to improve readers' self-regulation and effective task performance.

# Strategy vs. Skill

The terms *strategy* and *skill* (and other terms) are often used interchangeably, or together – “skills and strategies” (e.g., Revised English curriculum, July, 2018; English Curriculum, 2020).

However, theory and research (e.g., Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008; Cohen, 2011) make a clear distinction between the two cognitive operations:

- **Strategies** are deliberately and consciously selected and used
- **Skills** are used automatically





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# 1. Previewing

**PRE** – prior to reading the text

**VIEWING** – looking at what they can easily see in the text (e.g., the title, subtitles, tables and graphs, inserts, etc.) and "around" it (illustrations), for the purpose of learning about the text as much as possible.

After previewing a text, we can evaluate, for example, whether it meets our purpose, or how long it may take to read, and we can also plan our next moves.

Previewing may become an even more important strategy as more and more reading is done online, and readers must be more selective.

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L., my native EFL graduate (Segev Miller, 2020:141)

[To Be Intelligent]

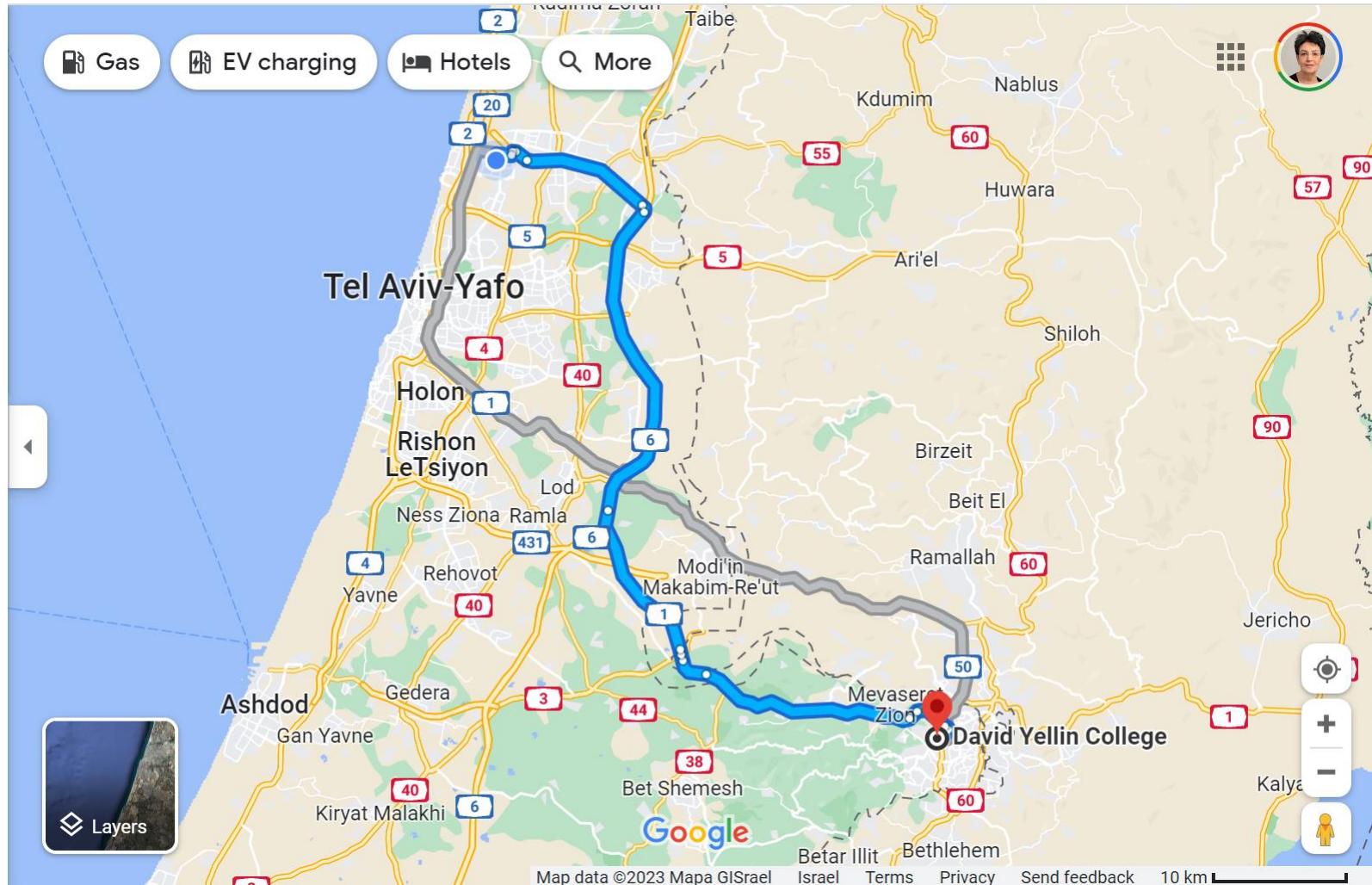
[1] We've learnt about MI theory, so I wonder if there's anything new  
... [PAUSE] [evaluating] // [2] The author [PAUSE] [previewing] // [3]  
Never heard of John Abbott [evaluating] // [4] I may look him up later  
on Wiki [planning (to put off)] // [5] This box is probably some kind of  
abstract [previewing] // [6] and as such probably presents "dear John"'s  
argument // [7] There's also an illustration on this page. It looks like a  
cave painting [previewing] // [8] but I can't see the connection to the title  
[evaluating] // [9] Maybe later ... [planning (to put off)] //

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# Mikulecky & Jeffries (1986:21)

**"Before you start on a trip, you usually look at a map. It helps you plan your way. Then you know what to expect as you travel. This is a good idea for reading, too. Look before you read. Then it is much easier to understand".**

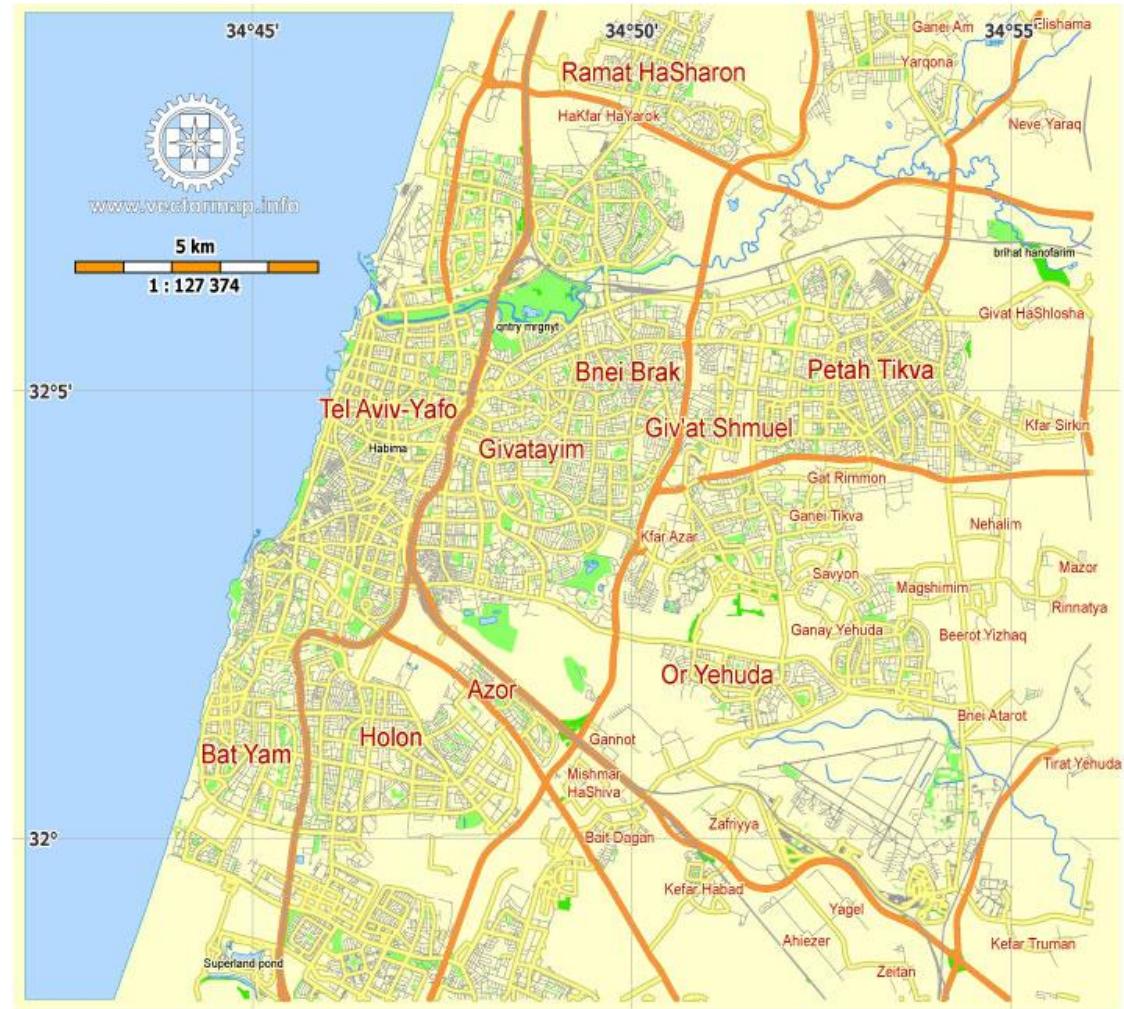
**Later, I expanded the metaphor to include Google Maps and Waze, which provide the driver with more information, such as alternative routes and the arrival time of each.**





“Reading a text is like reading a map because it sometimes tells you how to get where you want to go, but you've got to figure it out, and everyone is using the same map to go to different places” (Shaw et al., 2021:7).

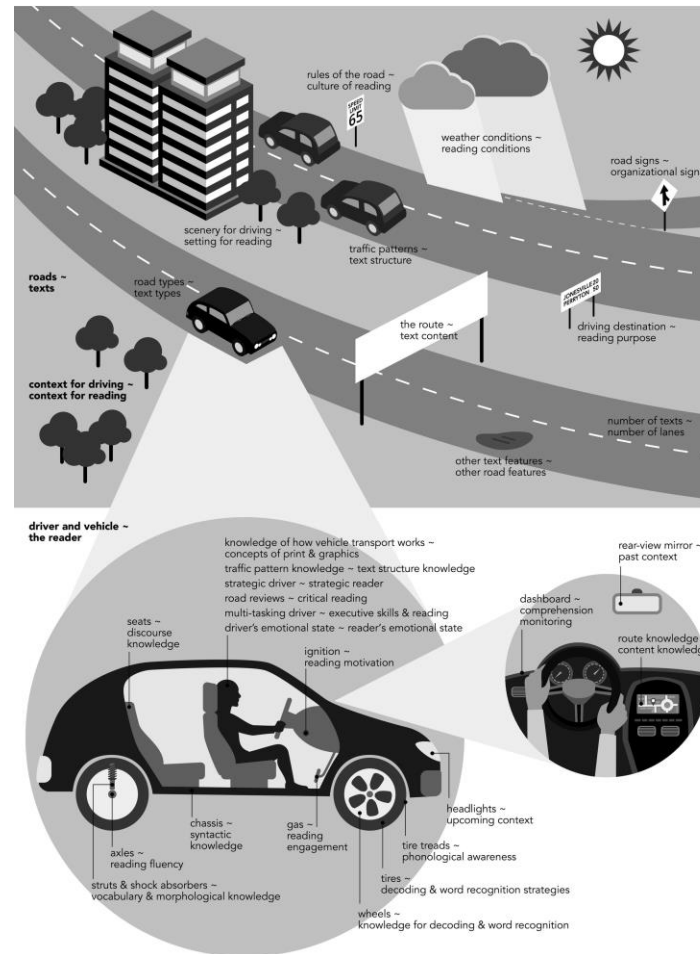
“Reading is like driving through a map (...)”.



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY

# The DRIVE Model of the reading process

(Cartwright & Duke, 2019)



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## 2. Scanning

Like previewing, scanning is also a strategy we often use in everyday life. However, instead of practicing the strategy in authentic contexts with authentic materials, students at school are required to use scanning for contrived purposes.

Scanning could be put to better use in order to locate the main idea in the text, provided the text is coherent. That is, provided the text meets the requirements of textual coherence.

# Advance organizer (Ausubel, 1960)

Widdowson (1984)

Old information



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graph TD; A[Old information] --> B["Means of transition<br/>BUT, HOWEVER but.."]; B --> C["New information or Main idea"]
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The diagram illustrates the Advance Organizer model. It consists of three main horizontal sections, each with a dark gold header and a light beige body. The first section is labeled 'Old information'. A large gold arrow points down from this section to the second section. The second section is labeled 'Means of transition' and 'BUT, HOWEVER but..'. Another large gold arrow points down from this section to the third section. The third section is labeled 'New information or Main idea'.

Means of transition

**BUT, HOWEVER but..**

New information or Main idea



## IMPROVING CREATIVE ABILITIES

Suppose you want to invent a recipe for dinner or decorate your room. This might require you to use your creative abilities. People might also need to be creative in their workplace – for example, if the company they work for asks them to develop a certain product. But it is not always easy to think of creative ideas at home or at work. The good news is that studies have shown there are ways to improve creativity.

### 1. Scan for the means of transition



## IMPROVING CREATIVE ABILITIES

Suppose you want to invent a recipe for dinner or decorate your room. These things require you to use your creative abilities. People might also need to be creative at their workplace – for example, if the company they work for asks them to improve a certain product. **But** it is not always easy to think of creative ideas, either at home or at work. The good news is that studies have shown there are ways to increase creativity.

2. Read the sentence following it (i.e., the new information, or the main idea)
3. Go back to read the text from the beginning and compare it (i.e., the old information) with the new information

## QUESTIONS (70 points)

Answer questions 1-9 in English according to the article. In questions 1, 5, 7 and 8, circle the number of the correct answer. In the other questions, follow the instructions.

**1. What do we learn from paragraph I?**

- (i) Businesses don't have enough creative people.**
- (ii) It is easier to be creative at work than at home.**
- (iii) It is possible to become more creative.**
- (iv) Studying can improve creativity.**

**3. What do we learn about the AUT from paragraph II? Give ONE answer.**

**COMPLETE THE SENTENCE.**

**We learn how it .....**

# Reading comprehension questions

Instead of these multiple choice and completion items, with reference to the paragraph(s) where the answer is to be found, ask fewer, open-ended questions, such as

1. What is the main idea of the text?
2. “there are ways to increase creativity”. List the ~~two~~ ways.

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Students do not read the text when they have to answer questions on an exam. In fact, they do not have to.

But when they do have to read, they usually read "like an ant":

Word by word, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph without a plan.

You often hear them use metaphors such as

"get lost on the way" or

"drown in a sea of information“.



Scanning the text for the means of transition to locate the main idea is “smart reading”.

It saves time and energy and frustration.

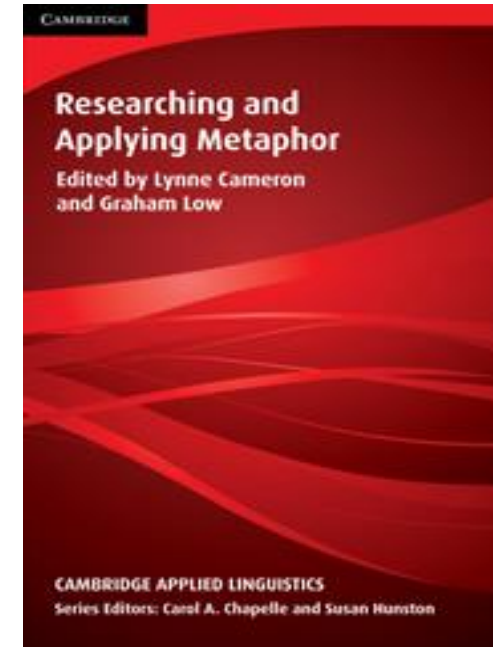
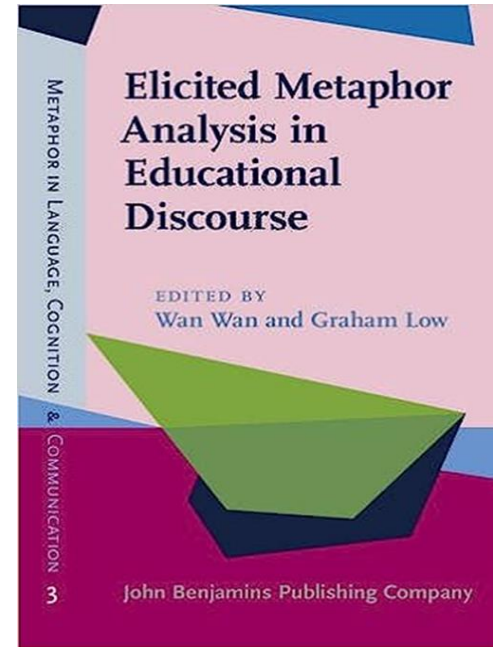
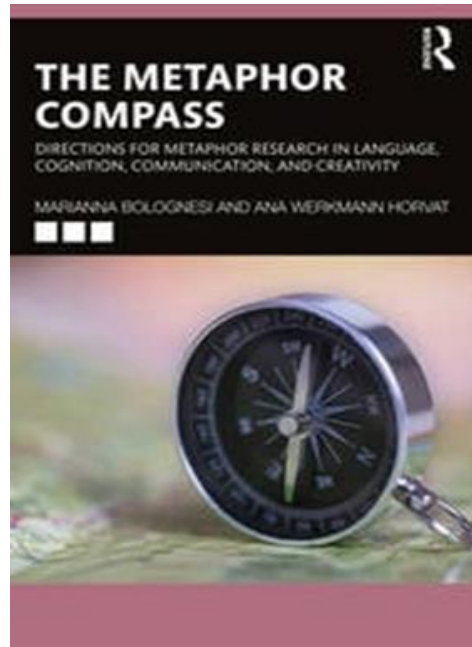
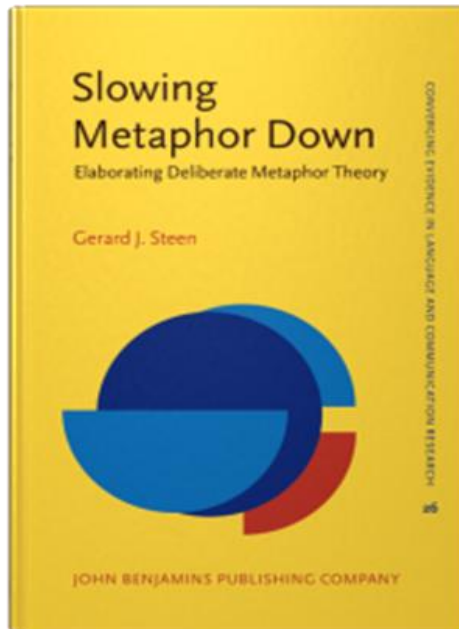




# Books on metaphors

<https://www.jbe-platform.com/content/series/22104836>

<https://benjamins.com/catalog/ftl.16>







# References