

## Can't I Read Without Thinking?<sup>1</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION

"Can't I read without thinking?" ask some of my students on a critical reading course which has been running since 1996 at the Advanced English Unit of the School of Foreign Languages, Bogazici University, and at the English Language Department of Yildiz Technical University only recently. I usually tell the following Charlie Brown joke in reply;

"Lucy writes: 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles by Laurel N. Hardy'. Charlie Brown explains: 'That's Thomas Hardy'. She replies 'Really?' He responds with: 'I can't believe you read this whole book'. Lucy: 'I read the first word 'on'. Charlie then questions: 'How can you write a book report if you've only read the first word?' 'No problem' says Lucy, and writes 'Right from the first word I knew this was going to be a good book'... [Finally] Charlie says: 'I can see you're going to be a lover of great literature' to which Lucy responds: 'Those who can't do, fake it!'"

(taken from Bernhardt 1991:185)

Later I comment that if they want to read properly, and not "fake it", then reading without thinking is not possible. I discuss this claim as my first task in this paper. I then present Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which I see as a pedagogically useful instrument enabling the practice of the sorts of thinking skills so necessary for reading efficiently, before I consider the issue of the teachability of reading and thinking skills. Finally I describe the critical reading course that I run by outlining the procedures that I adopt with my students, the concepts I teach, the list of questions which I have put together with my students and which we have found beneficial in getting us thinking about a reading text.

### WHAT IS READING?

*Schema Theory* (Anderson 1977, Spiro 1978, 1979, *Script Theory* (Schank & Abelson 1977), or *Frame Analysis* (Tannen 1979, Minsky 1982), have provided an influential alternative to the "traditional" notion of reading, which observed meaning

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