

The Role of Reading Comprehension In Developing Other Language Skills

Diagnosis and Remedy

- Fouad Yousif Jassim

1. Introduction

An important principle of structural linguistics is that the primary medium of language is oral: speech is language. That's why speech has a priority in language teaching. Richards and Rodgers (1986:49) believe that "language is speech, not writing....A language is a set of habits...teach the language, not about the language.

Recently, there is a trend in the teaching of foreign languages which advocates the prime importance of teaching reading as a receptive skill before the other productive skills. Gray and Gray (1982:62) tell us that:

"The most effective way to teach a foreign language is by providing a substantial base of receptive competence (listening and reading) before attempting to teach productive skills".

Hence, the presentation of language through reading passages (with appended comprehension questions) is a well-established and familiar pedagogic practice. But, learning to read does not precede comprehension. They are both part of the same process. From the beginning, the teacher's aim should go beyond the words calling and to get an answer from the learner that indicates his understanding.

The Importance of Comprehension Through the reading process

Jafari (2008) states:

For many years, listening skills did not receive priority in language teaching since it was widely assumed that listening skill is a passive skill, one that should not be thought a part from the other language skills.

But, researchers began to understand that listening comprehension is the objective of reading. The developing of comprehension should be the primary concern in the teaching of reading from the first stage, with emphasis on reading-to-learn.. In this sense Smith(1978:5 8)says, "Children must learn in order to understand, and learning to read is a literally a matter of understanding reading"

Goodman (1970:125) observes that:

"like all language activities, reading has as its central purpose the effective receiving of the meaning of communications, the reader getting out the meaning the writer put in"

since getting the meaning depends so much on the reader's background knowledge and experience, it is important that teachers of reading comprehension understand learners background knowledge and through wise questions thinking to help them in making connections with what they already know.

Zintz(1980:230) states:

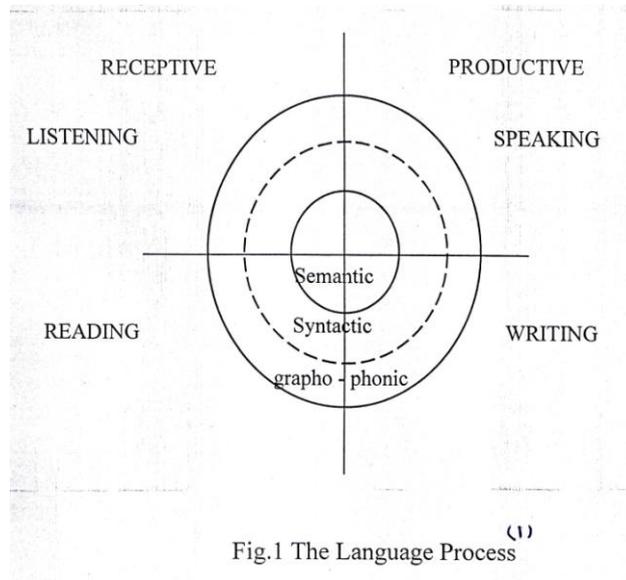
"Most teachers agree that pronouncing words correctly without getting meaning from the context is not reading. Boys and girls must learn to synthesize meanings as they read through the passages in their textbooks". Thus, reading comprehension is the activity that enables the students to go deeper and deeper to get the meaning which is intended by writer. It is the activity that depends on understanding.

Although reading is a process by which a learner reconstructs a message encoded graphically by a writer, it is not a matter of decoding surface structure, but of seeking meaning below the surface. (Davies 1980:12 1)

To achieve full meaning through reading, Roberts (1979:31) observes that "The actual teaching of reading should not be segmented into exclusive sub-skill training. Where sub-skills are to be taught, they should be practiced within the context of the complete skill".

Unless the reader gets meaning from the passage, he will get merely sound that may suggest idiosyncratic pieces of information. And unless he is getting a message that makes immediate sense to him, he will be confused and this can be demonstrated when he uses any or all of the three categories

of cues used in the interpretation of texts: semantic, syntactic and phonographic. Fig. 1.



2 ,Background Knowledge

Acknowledging the importance of background knowledge in comprehension has two main sets of implications for the development of L2 reading programmers. The first is that a careful assessment needs to be made of learners' conceptual preparedness for their target reading materials. The second is that the learners should be actively encouraged to establish meaningful links between their current knowledge and the content of the target reading materials. (Floyd and Carrell, 1987:103)

Researches on second language reading over the past ten years have placed considerable emphasis on the role and influence of background knowledge schemata in the text comprehension of L2 learners. Tudor (1989:323) argues that "One of the main lines of investigation in this area has concerned the role of cultural background knowledge in L2 text processing."

Students must be alerted to the fact that what they already know contributes to their understanding of what they read. Thus, the development

of comprehension skills does not depend on an innate ability to answer questions.

The Relationship Between Reading

Comprehension and Other Language Skills

1. Listening,

Durrell (1969, pp.455-460) reports that competence in the two methods of reception may be estimated by comparing reading comprehension with listening comprehension.

There are, however, some important differences between the listening and the reading modes of reception. The reader is presented with the whole word, which he assimilates at his own pace. The listener, on the other hand, receives the words in parts. Thus, the initial acquisition of the stimulus or input is received differently through the two input channels.

2. Speaking

The speaker usually organizes the rational into meaningful thoughts and units. In reading this process must be done by the reader based upon his former experience of the ways in which it is possible to combine words for specific meanings to emerge. (Swaim, 1971:11)

3. Reading

Lunzer and Donald(1979:63) believe that there is an evidence that rate training in reading can produce improved comprehension as well as improvement in speed. However, Lunzer (*ibid(i)*) found that students when they were encouraged to read quickly were able to recall less well what they had read than students who were instructed to slow down.

4. Writing

Research on the relationship between reading comprehension and writing indicates that reading skills are related to writing skills. Reading instruction may influence writing instruction and vice versa. Taylor and Beach (1984:136) mention some studies\ that show how writing can be reinforced by reading comprehension instruction. Wright (1982:43) state that "few would disagree with the principle that upper- level composition instruction can be reinforced by reading comprehension instruction."

Experiment and Test

In order to show the relationship between reading comprehension and other language skills the researcher uses a technique of the experiment-control group design, in which two equivalent groups were chosen. In addition, pre-test-post-test design was adopted to fulfill this technique.

4. Administration of the Test

The test was administered twice: (a) At the beginning of the first semester (2006) (before the experiment (b) and at the end of the first semester, after the experiment. This means that the experiment lasted or three months.

Subjects were chosen randomly from the fourth year secondary school.

4-1 Selection of the Samples

Two sections out of four sections were selected randomly from the fourth year secondary school. One section represents the experimental group; the other represents the control group (which doesn't receive experimental Treatment). Students' mother tongue is Arabic. Students' age was taken into consideration, too. Students who exceeded the limits of the normal age (16-17) were excluded, The average age of both groups was approximately the same. See table 1.

Table 1: Mean of age of Experimental and Control group

| | Group no. | Mean |
|--|--------------|---------|
| | Experimental | 30 16.6 |
| | Control | 30 16.4 |

4-2 The Pre-Test Scores

The pre-test was given before beginning of the experiment. The mean of the experimental group was 61.2 and that of the control group was 61.566. The 't' test score was 0.154 which indicates no significant difference between the two groups as far as their achievement in English is concerned. Table 2.

Table 2: The Mean, Sd and 't' value of the

Pre-Test

| | Group | no. | Mean | sd | df't' |
|--|--------------|-----|--------|-------|-------|
| | Experimental | 30 | 61.2 | 12.78 | 58 |
| | Control | 30 | 61.566 | 12.72 | |

 t_{cv} 0.01 2.748

0.05 2.002

4.3. Instruction

The researcher exposes the experimental group into a wide range of **reading** comprehension materials. The passage which were chosen for this purpose were suitable for the subjects. The subjects' background knowledge was taken into consideration also. (page5). The first teacher taught the experimental group. The control group was taught by a second teacher, who didn't supply the group with any extra reading comprehension material except what was found in their textbook.

4.4. Description of the Test

The test is designed in a way to test and investigate subjects' ability in listening, reading, speaking and writing. These four skills represent the objectives of both the test and the course of the subjects. The test was based on the objectives and units of the course. The samples were subjected to the test as one unit in order to facilitate the statistical analysis of results.

4.5. Reliability of the Test

The researcher adopted the test-retest method to ensure reliability of the test. After applying Pearson Formula, the results indicated that the correlation coefficient of reliability was 0.79 which means the test is reliable.

Table 3: The Mean and Correlation Coefficient
of the Test-Retest Scores

| | No. | Mean | r |
|----------|-----|-------|------|
| Test | 30 | 67.53 | 0.79 |
| Retest30 | | 63.73 | |

The Post-Test

The same test which was designed and administered as a pre-test was applied as a post-test at the end of the experiment. See table 4.

Table 4: The Mean, sd, df and 't' Value of the Post-Test

| Group | no. | Mean | sd | df | 't' value |
|--------------|-----|--------|-------|----|-----------|
| Experimental | 30 | 74.166 | 11.42 | | |
| Control | 58 | 5.249 | | | |

The results of the post-test indicate that there is a significant difference between the two groups, since 't' value is 5.249.

Discussion

1. Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores in the Control Group
In order to find out whether there is a significant difference in the scores of the pre-test and post-test, the t test is used. The 't' value is 0.449 which indicates that there is no significant difference in achievement as compared with 't' critical value at .01 and .05 levels which is 2.042 and 2.756 successively. Table 5.

Table 5: The Mean, sd, df, and 't' value

| Of the Control Group | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----|-------|--------|----|-----------|
| Test | No. | Mean | Sd | df | 't' value |
| Pre-test | 30 | 61.56 | 12.724 | | |
| Post test | 30 | 62.6 | 12.707 | 29 | 0.495 |
| Difference | | 1.034 | 0.017 | | |

2. Comparison of the Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores in the Experimental Group

The 't' test is used again. Its value is 5.858 which indicates a significant difference between the two tests scores in the experimental group as compared with 't' critical value which is 2.042 and 2.756 at .01 and .05 levels.

See table 6.

Table 6: The Mean, sd, df, and 't' value

Of the Experimental Group

| Test | No. | Mean | Sd | df | 't' value |
|------------|-----|--------|--------|----|-----------|
| Pre-test | 30 | 61.2 | 12.78 | | |
| Post test | 30 | 74.166 | 11.429 | 29 | 5.858 |
| Difference | | 12.966 | 1.351 | | |

6. Remedy:

The statistical analysis of the experimental group indicates that the achievement of the experimental group is higher in average than the achievement of the control group in the final scores of the post-test. The experiment demonstrates the fact that reading comprehension has an important role in developing language skills. It is clear, out of the experiment that longer exposure to reading comprehension material achieves good results as far as students receptive and productive skills are concerned.

Further Readings :

- Davies, Alan (1980). "Second Language Lessons for the Teaching of Reading". In .1
Cashdan, Asdher (ed.), Language, Reading and Learning. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Durrel, D.D. (1969), "Listening Comprehension Versus Reading Comprehension", .2
Journal of Reading, 12, 6, pp.455-460.
- Floyd, P. and P.L. Carrel (1987), " Effects on ESL Reading of Teaching Cultural .3
Content Schemata", Language Learning. 37, pp.89-108.
- Goodman, K.S. (1970), " Comprehension Centered Reading", Claremont Reading .4
Conference 34 Yearbook . California; Claremont Reading Conference.
- Gray, N. and J. Gray (1982), "Packing Comprehension Materials: Towards Effective .5
Language Instruction in Difficult Circumstances". Systems. 10, 1, pp.61-69.
- Jafari, S.M. (2008), " Listening Comprehension and Foreign language Classroom .6
Anxiety among Iranian EFL Learners ". Unpublished Master's Thesis. Shiras University.
- Lomb ad Arnold (1976), " Foundations and Instructional Strategies" (eds). .7
- Lunzer, Eric and Terry Dolan (1979) , " Reading for learning in the Secondary .8
School", in Cashdan, Asher.
- Richards, Jack and Theodore S. Rodger (1986) . " Approaches and Methods .9
Language Teaching . Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
- Roberts, Geoffery (1979), " Reading – An Integrated Methodology", in .10
Cashdan, Asher.
- Smith, F. (1978) " Understanding Reading: A Psycho-linguistic Analysis of .11
Reading and Learning to Read". New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.