

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study investigated the reading strategies in English reading comprehension of first-year Business English students at Hatyai University. Thus, the related research and literature were reviewed under the following headings:

- 2.1 Definition and nature of reading comprehension
- 2.2 Information processing models of reading comprehension
- 2.3 Strategies for reading comprehension
- 2.4 Schema theory
- 2.5 Research studies related to reading strategies

2.1 DEFINITION AND NATURE OF READING COMPREHENSION

Reading is a complex process many researchers have attempted to define. Roe, Stoodt, and Burns (1983, p. 15) interestingly state that reading comprehension and reading are frequently considered synonymous because reading usually means comprehending written language. When understanding breaks down, reading actually has not occurred.

In Brown and Smiley's study (as cited in Roe, Stoodt, & Burns, 1983, p. 15), reading comprehension is the reconstruction, interpretation, and evaluation of what the author of written content means by using knowledge gained from life experience.

To clarify this point, Goodman and Niles (1970) cite that reading comprehension is a receptive language process which involves an essential interaction between language and thought in that the writer encodes thought as language and the reader decodes language to thought.

Similarly, O'Malley and Chamot (1993, p. 65) state that reading comprehension was previously thought of as a process of representing with reasonable accuracy the information contained in the text. However, more recent opinions of reading concentrate on the constructive elements of the process and acknowledge that what is retained is the result of a dynamic interactive between the reader, the tasks and the text.

According to Sheng (2000), a different but interesting definition of reading comprehension is offered in these terms:

Reading is a process of recognition, interpretation, and the perception of written and printed material while comprehension is the understanding of the meaning of the written material and covers the conscious strategies that lead to understanding. The process of reading deals with language form . while comprehension deals with language content . (p. 1)

2.2 INFORMATION PROCESSING MODELS OF READING COMPREHENSION

Different explanations have been presented to account for the approach of the process of reading. Nunan (1999, p. 252) notes that the bottom –up approach views reading as a process of decoding. The information presented by the text is processed from letter features to letters to words to meaning.

However, research into human memory provides counterfactual evidence. It shows that to process every letter in a text will slow reading in a way and it will be very difficult for meaning to be retained (Nunan, 2000). Furthermore, Smith (as cited in Nunan, 2000) points out that it is often impossible to know how upcoming letters and words should be sounded out until the context is understood.

With such an idea, Goodman and Smith (as cited in Wallace, 2001) cite that reading is viewed as a process heavily focused on the readers' ability to make informed predictions as he or she progresses through the text. The approach underlined in this process is known as the top- down approach.

However, Eskey (2002) raises questions about the top- down model for the ESL readers. This approach seems to be for skillful readers, not for developing readers- like most second language readers. Moreover, the attention should be directed to the threshold level of ESL/FL students as well.

This leads to a compromise between bottom – up and top – down theories, the interactive approach. In this view, good readers are both good decoders and good interpreters of texts, their decoding skills becoming more automatic but no less important as their reading skill develops (Eskey, 2002, p. 94).

Similarly, Rumelhart (as cited in Carrell & Eisterhold, 2002) cites that top – down and bottom – up processing occur simultaneously. When the accumulated evidence strongly supports a particular hypothesis, comprehension takes place. Because comprehension depends on both graphic information and the information in the readers' mind, it may be obstructed when a critical skill or a piece of information is missing. When comprehension is hampered, skilled readers compensate by decoding key words, relying on context or both.

2.3 STRATEGIES FOR READING COMPREHENSION

Goodman and Niles (1970, p. 25) note that the only objective in reading is comprehension. Comprehension depends on the successful processing of three kinds of information: grapho-phonetic, syntactic, and semantic. A series of abilities necessary for this process includes:

1. scanning
2. fixing (the ability to focus the eye on the line of print)
3. selecting
4. predicting
5. forming (the ability to form perceptual images on the basis of selection and prediction)
6. searching (the ability to search memory for phonological cues and related syntactic and semantic information associated with perceptual images)
7. tentative choosing (the ability to guess on the basis of minimal cues and related syntactic and semantic input)
8. testify semantic and syntactic (the ability to test choices against the screens of meaning and grammar)

Apart from the strategies previously stated, Brown (1994) suggests additional strategies as follows:

1. identify the purpose in reading
2. use graphic rules and patterns to aid in bottom – up decoding (for beginning level learners)

3. use efficient silent reading techniques for relatively rapid comprehension (for intermediate to advanced levels)
4. distinguish between literal and implied meanings
5. capitalize on discourse markers to process relationships

According to Bennett's study (as cited in Brantmeier, 2002), reading strategies are divided into effective and less effective as follows:

Effective strategies

1. Reader pays most attention to what the reading passage means.
2. Reader pays most attention to what the forms or grammatical functions of the words are.
3. Reader reads the whole passage once and then rereads it.
4. Reader finds the topic interesting.
5. Reader thinks about what s/he knows about the topic of the passage.
6. Reader often hypothesizes about what might come next.
7. Reader reads the title first and imagines what the passage might be about.
8. Reader guesses what some words mean.

Less effective strategies

1. Reader pays most attention to what individual words mean.
2. Reader pays most attention to what the structure of the passage is.
3. Reader rereads only the difficulties sections.
4. Reader reads only because it has been assigned.
5. Reader never hypothesizes about what comes next.
6. Reader read each paragraph by itself.
7. Reader reads the title but does not think much about it.
8. Reader thinks that it is a mistake to skip any words.

In the study of Gebhard (1996), similar strategies employed by successful readers in order to comprehend reading materials are presented. Additional strategies, too, are suggested as follows:

1. skip words they do not know
2. do not consistently translate
3. look for cognates
4. ask someone what a word means

5. draw inferences from the title
6. make use of all information in the paragraph to comprehend unfamiliar words
7. try to figure out the meaning of a word by the syntax of the sentence
8. study pictures and illustrations
9. purposefully reread to check comprehension

2.4 SCHEMA THEORY

The role of background knowledge in language comprehension is formalized as the schema theory (Roe, Stodt, & Burns, 1983). The schema theory is described as the process in which readers combine their background knowledge with the information in the text for comprehension (Stott, 2001, p. 1). Nunan (2000) states that such schemata enable the readers to make predictions about what they might expect to experience in a text.

Singhal (1998, p. 2) classifies schemata into three types: content, formal, linguistic or language. Firstly, content schemata refers to a reader's background knowledge or world knowledge. Secondly, formal schemata, often called textual schema, refers to the organizational forms and rhetorical structures of written texts. This can include knowledge of different text types and genres and understanding that different texts use different organization, language structures, vocabulary, grammar, level of formality or register. Thirdly, linguistic or language schemata includes the decoding features needed to recognize words and how they fit together in a sentence.

Some research shows general effects of content schemata on EFL/ESL reading comprehension. Research by Johnson (as cited in Stott, 2001) shows that a text on a familiar topic is better recalled by ESL readers than a similar text on an unfamiliar topic. Moreover, Alderson and Urquhart (as cited in Carrell & Eisterhold, 2002, p. 80) find a discipline – specific effect of content background knowledge in measuring reading comprehension in ESP/EST.

Apart from the research concerning content schemata on EFL/SL as earlier stated, several recent studies shows the effects of formal, linguistic schemata in EFL/ESL. The result of Carrell's study (as cited in Carrell & Eisterhold, 2002, p. 81)

reveals that when the content is kept constant but the rhetorical structure is varied, second language reading comprehension is affected.

From the discussion above, it is evident that schemata play a very crucial role in reading comprehension for L1 and L2 readers.

2.5 RESEARCH STUDIES RELATED TO READING STRATEGIES

Upton (1997) conducted research so as to explore how L2 readers use their knowledge of both their L1 and L2 in the reading comprehension process. The subjects were 11 native Japanese students in the U.S. Five, ESL subjects, were taking intermediate ESL classes at the university of Minnesota while the others, 'academic subjects', were no longer taking such classes, but enrolled in different academic programs at the university. The research results could be summarized into three generalizations.

1. It appeared that the ESL subjects frequently switched to their L1 when reading L2 text when they came to across unknown vocabulary. On the other hand, the academic subjects did not seem to wrestle with confusing vocabulary in their L1 but generally attempted to work out vocabulary difficulty in the L2.

2. There was a tendency for the ESL subjects to work out text and sentence meaning by translating concepts they understood into L1 whereas the other did not.

3. The ESL subjects seemed to find it more comfortable to paraphrase or restate sentences and phrases they understood in the L1 merely to confirm their comprehension while the academic subjects did not frequently resort to L1 translation.

He (2001) investigated the influence of goal orientations on strategic use patterns and reading comprehension of Taiwanese EFL college freshmen. Results indicated that participants chose a variety of strategies in order to make sense of what they read. Moreover, the EFL readers' strategy use is not arbitrary; rather, it is driven by their decision based on personal judgments.

Carrell (as cited in Singhal, 1998) investigated metacognitive awareness of L2 reader strategies in both their native language and second language, and the relationship between this awareness and their comprehension. The subjects consisted of native Spanish speakers studying English as a Second Language and native English

speakers studying Spanish as a foreign language. The result demonstrated that the ESL reader perceived global or top- down strategies as more effective. With the Spanish as a L2 group, she found that they used more bottom- up or local strategies.

Siwalee Ampai (ศิวลี อัมไพ, 2540) investigated learning strategies of Engineering students at Rajamangala Institute of Technology in Thailand. They were randomly selected from four areas: Civil, Electrical, Mechanical, and Industrial. The instrument was a questionnaire with a rating scale and open- ended questions. The results demonstrated that the students made some guesses or predictions from the context for reading comprehension.

Zainee Waemusa (1993, pp. 108-109) conducted a study to investigate strategies for learning English vocabulary employed by Mathayom 6 students in an Islamic school in Thailand. The results of this study indicated that Thai students learning English should be encouraged to use dictionaries, both English- Thai and English- English, for meanings and usage of unknown words.