

A Pilot Study on Strategies for Reading: From the Viewpoint of Remedial Teaching

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Abstract

It is widely recognized that a lack of vocabulary knowledge is one of the most serious problems for foreign language readers, especially poor readers, and a number of theorists claim that vocabulary learning requires attention to both form and meaning. Vocabulary learning mostly occurs incidentally and some degree of conscious attention is necessary for incidental learning to take place. Although a variety of processing strategies are required for incidental vocabulary learning, they are not fully understood and many important questions remain unanswered. They include the efficacy of different word-guessing strategies. The present study aims to explore these issues. The research questions for the study are 1) What strategies do poor foreign language readers use when they encounter unknown vocabulary in context? 2) What condition makes them guess word meaning successfully? 3) How can the readers be helped to make better guesses when their vocabulary knowledge is not sufficient?

A Japanese well-known narrative that participants all knew was chosen. They were asked to write down all unknown words and how they guessed the meaning of these words. Afterwards, they were interviewed about the strategies that they used for each unknown word. The same tasks and interviews were conducted three times with an interval of two or three weeks between them. It was found that different strategies were used for guessing words.

Keywords

Reading, Vocabulary, Top-down, Strategies

1 Introduction

In EFL classrooms, many learners are struggling with learning English, and also many teachers are struggling with teaching English. Moreover, under EFL setting, it is unusual for learners, especially Japanese learners living in an island nation to read English in their daily life except for signs or ads of a few words. For the learners,

classrooms should be appropriate places where they can learn and feel close to English reading materials by way of learning foreign languages that have different structures and cultures.

In order to detect some clues to and make suggestions for better teaching English to learners in EFL settings, this paper, in the perspective of remedial teaching, attempts to analyze the result of the cloze tests and the interviews for the learners, focusing on the strategies for unknown words. In this study, it is expected that significant awareness would be suggested for better teaching.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

The participants were 8 college students in Japan. They were all women and belonged to the department of cultural expression of a women's college in Tokyo. Their level of the proficiency in English was poor. As for TOEIC, most students were not able to reach 365. Also most of them were not interested in learning language elements and language-use activity in English, although they hoped to be good, fluent speakers of English. However, 6 of 8 preferred reading books or comics written in Japanese.

2.2 Materials

A Japanese well-known narrative that participants all knew was chosen. The title of the narrative is *The Adventures of Little Peachling* or *Momotaro* in Japanese. It is a traditional children's story told in homes or nurseries. The participants were asked to read one third of the whole story, which consists of 254 words. All the participants noticed that the story is *Momotaro* while they were reading it, although they were not given the information on the story in advance.

2.3 Procedure

This survey was conducted in a basic English class three times from May to July in 2011. The participants were asked to write down all unknown words and how they guessed the meaning of these

words while reading the story. Afterwards, they were interviewed about the strategies that they used for each unknown word. The same tasks and interviews were conducted three times with an interval of two or three weeks between them.

3 Results

Table 1 indicates the list of the unknown words that all the participants picked up in the first task. Also, it shows the result that they guessed the unknown words (C: Correct, Cl: Close, I: Incorrect).

Table 1 Unknown Words List (1)

Student	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8
honest	C							I
woodcutter		C		C		C	C	C
billhook	Cl	I			C	C	I	C
faggot	I			I	I		I	I
floating	C	C	I					C
stream	C							C
husband	I							C
inviting	I							I
split	Cl	C			C	C		C
puling	I	C			I			I
babe								C
peachling								C
termination	I	I			I			I
eldest	I					C	I	I
degrees	I				Cl			I
brave								C
foster-parents	Cl	Cl	I	C	I	C	I	C
ogres	Cl	I	C	C	I	C		C
stored	C	I	I		I	C		I
pray	C		I			C		I
millet	C					I		C
dumplings	C		I			Cl		C
journey	Cl							C
folk	I							I
ground	I							I
affectionate	C							I
cheerfully								I

Table 2 Total of Task 1

Student	Unknown	Correct	Close	Incorrect
# 1	22	8	5	9
# 2	9	4	1	4
# 3	6	2		4
# 4	4	3	0	1
# 5	9	2	1	6
# 6	10	7	1	2
# 7	5	1	0	4
# 8	28	11	3	14

Table 2 indicates the total of the number Table 1 shows.

4 Conclusion

The research questions for the study are 1) What

strategies do poor foreign language readers use when they encounter unknown vocabulary in context? 2) What condition makes them guess word meaning successfully? 3) How can the readers be helped to make better guesses when their vocabulary knowledge is not sufficient?

This research has not been completed yet, however, at least, the answer for the third research question seems to be clear. The students who preferred reading novels or comics written in Japanese tended to make better guesses when their vocabulary knowledge is not sufficient. Their imagination seemed to help them guess word meaning successfully. It might be said that they can read some English reading materials if they have some knowledge on them in advance.

On the other hand, it was clear that it was difficult for them to maintain their concentration on reading the whole story to the end. They seemed to be bored in the middle of reading it.

At present, further discussion and analysis on this study would be necessary in order to discover the factors that can contribute to poor learners of English, especially in reading. The discovered factors in the further research could be beneficial in changing remedial teaching of English.

5 References

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