

영어교육 33호
1987년 2월

Teaching Reading as Communication

Yoon-Hee Soh
(Sogang University)

1. Introduction

Recent years have seen many exciting and innovative developments and approach in English language teaching, with emphasis on the oral or spoken aspect of the language. The dissatisfaction felt by many a student and teachers alike after having studied English for a number of years at the secondary school level and yet finding themselves inept at carrying out simple everyday conversation in English has given an impetus to the shift from the grammar-translation method to improving the spoken aspect of the language in Korea. The fever for learning spoken English is felt by merely observing a plethora of the latest teaching materials for English conversation abounding in downtown book stores, a variety of daily English lesson programs being broadcast on TV and radio, and new audio cassettes claiming to teach English conversation cropping up ever so often. Under the shadow of spoken English, then, teaching of reading skills has been downgraded somewhat, perhaps because there is less demand for it by the public at large. If you fall under those who do need the skill, you were supposed to have learned the basic English structure and vocabulary necessary to read in English in secondary school.

But for many of the college students in Korea, reading is an important skill to master. Not only do they have to read English

textbooks for their studies, but in this day and age of information they will also be inundated with different types of reading text in the future, whether they pursue further professional degrees or find work after finishing college. The need for efficient reading is not to be overlooked in the academia.

The purpose of this paper is to inquire into principles of reading and explore their applications for teaching of reading with a communicative approach for college students. First, the paper will look into the theories of the reading process in order to understand it better. Then, the design and the procedures for a reading course will be presented as a guideline in developing a communicatively oriented reading course in English.

2.0. Statement of the problem

Reading courses in a foreign language are often taught by having the text translated into the native language for comprehension, and reading in English is no exception. For this purpose, students resort to word-for-word translation by consulting the bilingual dictionary and they are forced to focus on word-by-word identification of the text and look for detailed information before an overall comprehension of the text sets in. As a consequence, the text is studied as though it is a succession of separate sentences thematically related by structure and vocabulary. But unless reading a text is the sum of sentences and paragraphs, translation may not necessarily lead to most efficient comprehension of the text (Rivers, 1981).

As has been mentioned in various articles dealing with the process of reading (Kolers, 1969; Goodman, 1970), reading is not just decoding of graphic forms and encoding them into meaning. It involves a complex activity whereby the reader brings meaning to a text through thoughtful interaction with the meaning intended by the writer.

Too often, students become dependent on understanding every single sentence in the text, even when it is not necessary to fulfill their reading purpose, with the result that they read all texts at the same

speed and they become very insecure about predicting and inferring meaning of sentences of paragraphs from what comes before or after them. This makes the students very frustrated and leaves them with a sense of inadequacy for not being able to understand what they have read although the words are familiar to them.

It is essential for the students to try to read without translating into the native language for a number of reasons. First, translation focuses on the form of the language rather than on the meaning to be conveyed. When we read there is a purpose for reading. The reasons for reading are essentially practical, that is to say, reading is carried out for a purpose other than reading the language itself. We read for enjoyment, to obtain information, to study for a test, to learn a new skill, and for many other reasons. In other words, we read to understand an idea, get a message or other thoughts in the new language. As Goodman (1970 : 20) states, "Successful reading yields meaning which becomes the means to further ends. The reader may follow directions, respond to questions, read further." Depending on the purpose, it is not necessary to know everything word-for-word and because translation can become tedious and time-consuming, soon the readers will not be very efficient in extracting meaning from the text.

Second, it is difficult to find a one-to-one equivalence in meaning between any two languages. Cultural background, connotation and special effects would be lost, even resulting in gross misinterpretation in some cases if we try to adhere too strictly to translation.

As mentioned earlier, translation may hinder overall understanding of the text by focusing on the words and sentences rather than on the text as a whole. A reading task should start with global understanding and move toward detailed understanding as the reader becomes more proficient and confident in his reading ability. The emphasis on global understanding would build students' confidence so that they will be willing to guess and anticipate what will come next in the text.

Fourth, students become too dependent on the word and are reluctant to make guesses, predict meaning and anticipate what will

come next. This is going against the natural process of anticipation in the reading process and there is no chance for playing the "psycholinguistic guessing game." Since "reading is an active process in which the reader selects the fewest cues possible from those available to him and makes the best choice possible," (Goodman 1970 : 19), the reader will miss many of the cues necessary for efficient reading by concentrating on the translated meaning of each sentence.

Then what goes on during the process of reading? Let us examine some of the theories behind effective and efficient reading.

2.2. The process of reading

Reading can take a variety of meaning depending on the context in which it occurs from decoding of written symbols on the page into real or imagined sound of speech, as when a student stands and enunciates in the conventional way the sounds symbolized by the printed or written marks on the script, to a more complex process of extracting meaning from the written representation of code in a particular language to bring comprehension to one's mind (Smith, 1978 : 2). The former is of minor goal for our purposes since we presuppose that our target audience, i.e., college students in Korea, have learned the English phonic system before coming to our class. We are more concerned with the latter, i.e., how to bring comprehension to the reader's mind through decoding of prints to encoding of meaning.

Smith (1978) states that in order for reading comprehension to take place, there are two essential facets which contribute to reading. One is visual information and the other is nonvisual information. By visual information, physical possibility for the reader to actually decode the written symbols is referred to. One needs light, the print and the physical mechanism, the eyes. Visual information is the physical necessity for the actual possibility of reading. On the other hand, nonvisual information is something the reader possesses in himself/herself, such as the knowledge of the relevant language, subject matter, and how to read. There is a reciprocal relationship between the two areas of

information, so that the less nonvisual the information, the more visual the information required in order to understand the text.

The notion that the process of reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game has been introduced by Goodman(1967) and has been used widely in the understanding of reading processes and application of the principles for pedagogical purposes. Contrary to the notion that a reader proceeds by decoding a series of verbal units in sequence, Goodman maintains that it is too simple a model. In his research on oral reading miscues, Goodman (1970 : 20) found that a reader is not simply responding to the print with accurate word identifications but is processing information in order to reconstruct the message the writer has sought to convey. It is a form of information processing in which the reader uses his/her knowledge of how language works. Goodman(1970 : 260) states:

Reading is a selective process. It involves partial use of available minimal language cues selected from perceptual input on the basis of the reader's expectation. As this partial information is processed, tentative decisions are made to be confirmed, rejected or refined as reading progresses.

Furthermore, reading at its proficient best is a smooth, rapid guessing game in which the reader samples from available language cues, using the least amount of available information to achieve his/her essential task of reconstructing and comprehending the writer's meaning.

For these reasons, it is important for us as teachers of reading to let the students develop awareness of the hypothesis formulation and testing in reading and actually engage in the process as they read.

2.3. Goals for teaching the reading skills

Reading is sometimes referred to as a passive or receptive skill but when the readers engage in fluent, direct reading with comprehension of meaning in mind, it is clear that readers utilize a variety of skills. They must be able to recognize structural clues, i.e., word classes, verb

tenses, adverbial phrases of time, manner or place, and logical connectors which help in bringing the readers to follow the rhetorics of the writing, to name a few. They must be able to quickly distinguish word grouping and the relationship with other groupings. These abilities must be developed to such a degree that they operate almost automatically. So we propose to start the students by providing them with some useful skills in confronting the reading directly.

For this purpose, we have to identify basic techniques or skills which are involved in reading. Grellet(1981) describes four main ways of reading depending on the purpose and type of reading. They are: skimming, quickly running one's eyes over a text to get the gist of it; scanning, quickly going through a text to find a particular piece of information; extensive reading, reading longer texts, mainly involving global understanding for enjoyment; and intensive reading, reading shorter texts to extract specific information.

In addition to those four basic reading skills, a set of micro skills can be identified (Munby,1978). To name some of them, they are as follows: students need to be able to understand the main idea of a text, both stated and implied; recognize the overall organizational relationship, locate specifically required information (scanning); get the gist of the text(skimming); and be able to read critically. In order to develop these micro-skills, several types of exercise will be suggested in the latter part of this paper.

2.4. Reading as communication

Another aspect of reading which should be emphasized is that reading does not stop and end as a receptive skill. Reading, like talking, is a process of communication in which information travels between a transmitter(writer) and a receiver(reader). As readers have a purpose for reading, so does the writer. The reader must make use of all available information from either the print(visual) in the forms of syntactic and semantic cues, or prior knowledge of the subject matter (nonvisual) in order to understand the writer's purpose. Just as in

talking, in reading we must understand how to read by being involved in its use*, in situations when it makes sense to us, and generate and test hypotheses.

Readers are constantly guessing, predicting, and checking the hypotheses and their comprehension. In real life, we use information we obtained from reading in re-telling the information to others, making judgment, expressing our opinion, solving problems, following directions, discussing and evaluating what we have read, etc.. That is why reading has to be communicative. Integrating the reading skill with other language skills is also our goal. Some of the communicative activities can spring from the subject matter of the reading, in the form of exchanging information, giving our opinion, following directions, arguing, reacting to what we have read, either orally or in written form. A variety of communication activities can be prepared and designed to meet the student interest and needs. It is hoped that by creating a language environment where the language through reading is used naturally for communication, we can create a beneficial and useful source of input for our students.

3.0. Design

Having identified the goal of the reading course as training the students to read directly in English without translating into Korean and using the content of the reading as a springboard for communication, how to foster the type of learning environment to create the atmosphere which would stimulate and parallel the real language environment as closely as possible is our next task.

3.1. Syllabus

The organization of the syllabus will be the task left to each individual teacher to suit the particular needs of the students. The

* For the discussion of differences between "use" and "usage", readers are asked to consult Widdowson (1978).

syllabus should follow closely with the objective of the course identified and hold student interest. It should expand progressively from simple to complex based on the previous repertoire. It would be neither desirable nor possible to arrange the syllabus lineally so that students acquire each part separately and synthesize the whole material at the end, but we can focus on one skill at a time and build on it as we proceed from simple to more complex tasks.

In order to ensure that students read directly in English, during the first few lessons, it is recommended that reading be done as part of an in-class activity for we do not want our students to fall back on their habit of translating and reading word-for-word.

Since our objectives also include integrating reading skills with other language skills, either speaking, writing or listening, from the very start we can have our students engage in pair activities and group discussions of guided to less structured discussions. Group discussions can provide a setting for the students to share their predictions, guesses, and formulation of hypotheses about the reading, be them on finding the main idea or meaning of vocabulary in context to the more difficult task of finding the writer's attitude and implications. It would encourage the students to predict and make guesses, thus activating the interaction between the intended meaning of the writer and the reader.

3.2. Arrangement of the class

Needless to say, a conducive and affective class atmosphere where the students develop a sense of rapport among themselves as well as with the teacher is of paramount importance. It should be non-threatening so that the students can get the maximum benefit out of active participation in the groups, cooperating in working on the solution of problems presented and having the opportunity for peer feedback sessions.

The class will be divided into groups of five to six people and the students will take turns in being the discussion leader within the group. Most of the class work will be done in the group, in exchanging ideas,

discussing the difficulties encountered during the reading, giving feedback on each other's opinion and giving encouragement and support.

3.3. Student role

What happens in the classroom must involve the students. While the teacher can help and advise, it is the student's responsibility to learn by doing and performing the kind of activities required. Students contribute meaning to a text by utilizing the information they gained and relating it with their attitude, experience, prior knowledge and actively seeking the challenge. The interaction will be not only between the text and students as they read, but they will interact with other students in class and a significant part of learning takes place through communication of this type in classroom activities where students often work in small groups or in pairs. The activities students are asked to do may develop more and more into open-ended communication type where the student initiative will play a major role.

3.4. Teacher role

As in most of the communicatively oriented courses, the teacher's role is flexible and variable. The role in this course is threefold in different stages. Initially, there should be more guidance from the teacher who assumes the role that is required in traditional classroom, bringing the students closer to the course goal. In the initial stage, the teacher can present different subskills to be studied and make the students use the skills and apply them in their reading. There should be more monitoring and systematic presentation of the material in conducting the class. Gradually, as the students feel more confident about what they are doing and what is expected of them to do in using the language, the teacher's role should diminish.

In the next stage, the teacher can have less input and act as a participant, circulating from group to group helping to generate more lively discussions and giving initiative when there seems to be lack of it in some groups. The activities would include discussions arising from

reading material and activities, forming ideas and evaluating the ideas presented in the readings.

Finally, the teacher will act as a facilitator to supply the kind of information necessary, i.e., cultural background and linguistic knowledge, to prevent communication breakdown. The teacher can provide access to meaningful and interesting reading materials and encourage students to predict and make guesses. The students should be aware that the responsibility for learning rests on their shoulders and the teacher is there to see to it that they are carrying out the learning tasks. The ultimate goal is to foster independence in students and we should allow for greater student participation. As the class progresses, it is hoped that the class will gradually develop into a group of people working together to increase their reading skills.

3.5. Materials

The problem of materials is one faced by all teachers. We generally find ourselves either trying to find a textbook and adapt it to suit our need, or finding the reading material and writing our own exercises.

In the selection of the materials, first, we have to ask ourselves if they meet certain criteria we have set out ourselves. The materials should try to cover different topics and different varieties(types) of text for the benefit of our students. The topics can be left to be decided by asking the students to write their areas of interest in reading in the beginning of the course and while it will not satisfy all the students all the time, it can ensure that the course will be tailored to our student needs.

Second, we should also choose among different types of reading, from newspaper articles to essays and advertisements, so that our students are exposed to different genre of text which they are likely to find themselves reading in the future.

Thirdly, presentation of the materials should match what we are trying to cover in each lesson. If we want to teach the skill of looking for the main ideas in the reading passage, we should prepare a text which can

enable the students to carry out their task by selecting a piece with well-organized topic sentences. It should match with what we want to teach. If we are utilizing the exercise which goes along with the text, we should evaluate it and see if it is relevant to our teaching goal and whether it is fair for the students. If we are trying to teach how to look for the global meaning of the text and the exercise has questions concentrating on the nitty-gritty of the text, it is not measuring the type of learning we want to cover.

The length and difficulty of the text should gradually be moved up so that it will be challenging to the students and leave them feeling fulfilled for having mastered a difficult task.

4.0. Procedure

If language learners are made aware of what they are doing when they undertake language tasks, they should be led to recognize that these tasks relate to the way they use their own language for the achievement of genuine communicative purposes (Widdowson, 1978). Following are various procedures which were employed in the reading class in the past couple of semesters. The procedures were carried out with the aim of making the students realize that the reading activities do not have to end in themselves as receptive activities, but rather that the activities can provide genuine use of the language. The procedures will be described in terms of what language skills are utilized and what purpose the procedures serve in relation to the goal of the course mentioned in Section 2.3.

4.1. Recognizing main ideas and discourse organization of paragraphs

Since we want our students to read directly in English, we will have to provide them with some tools and purposes to get started. A good place to start is with the paragraphs and paragraph organizations. Students should be made to realize that paragraphs are important organizational units in English and that each paragraph contains a

unifying idea. For this type of exercise, teachers should select paragraphs with clear topic sentences and central ideas.

Students will be asked to read directly in class without the aid of the dictionary even if they come across unfamiliar words. Then they will be asked to identify key words which seem to contribute to the main idea of the paragraph and discuss their choices in groups. Initially, paragraphs in isolation can be practised but as students get more confident, related paragraphs and longer texts can be utilized.

Similarly, finding paragraphs which seem to employ different types of discourse organization, i.e., description, comparison and contrast, narrative, examples, etc., and presenting them to students, first as class lecture and later as recognition exercise, can help the students follow the line of the writer's thought and ideas. Both paragraph level and longer pieces of discourse can be presented for student exercise. Students will discuss their answers in groups, justifying their choices.

Both of these procedures would demand of the students to predict and guess at the right choices, and they would utilize both the reading and speaking skills, as well as a little bit of listening skill. The focus would be concerned with the global understanding rather than concentrating on parts as meaningful units of comprehension. These procedures can be built up to developing skimming strategies.

4.2. Skimming, making summaries

Having worked on finding the main ideas in paragraphs, students can now move on to the longer text and be asked to look for the gist of the text, in other words, to skim and make summaries. The activity can be done either as written assignment or orally as information-gap game where half of the class is given one article and the other half, another one and students work in pairs exchanging information by summarizing each other's articles. At the end, students read their partners' articles. This procedure ensures that each student talks and tries to carry out a genuine act of communication. Although only the reading and writing skills are demanded of the students in the former activity, in the latter,

all four skills of reading writing, listening and speaking are involved. While students are listening to their partner's summary, they formulate a hypothesis about what the reading is all about, thus trying to guess at the content of the article which is in the process being summarized.

4.3. Vocabulary in context

During any type of reading, students are encouraged to guess at the meaning of the vocabulary from context. It should be pointed out that there are a lot of redundancies, either semantically (use of synonyms) or syntactically (use of anaphora, apposition, etc. or logical connectors which denote certain relationship of contrast, restatement, additional explanation and so on) and that they should take advantage of these clues. This exercise can be particularly useful and helpful in making the students guess, formulate and check their hypotheses about the content of the text, and to check whether they are on the right track, so to speak. In extensive reading when we are reading mainly for enjoyment, this can be very helpful. The procedure can be carried out either individually or in groups, which would require both reading and speaking skill

4.4. Question and answer

Perhaps the most commonly and widely used form of conducting the reading class is through question and answer technique, from the standard multiple choice questions appearing at the end of the reading textbooks designed to measure comprehension, to asking for specific piece of information and open-ended questions which may lend its way to group discussions. This technique can utilize reading, speaking and writing skills. This technique can be applicable in scanning, skimming, intensive and extensive reading skills. For scanning exercises, specific questions on sports page, menus, classified ads, telephone directories, dictionaries and advertisements provide good sources of exercise.

4. 5. Pre-reading discussions

Having the students engage in discussions based on what they see from the accompanying picture, titles, subheadings, etc., will activate their mind in formulating certain ideas about the reading to be done, anticipating and predicting about the content and the writer's message. Relating similar personal experiences about the subject of the reading can generate helpful discussions.

4. 6. After-reading discussions/critical reading

This type of activity can be initiated at the latter stage of the course when students feel most comfortable at speaking out their ideas and opinion. The task can range from agreeing and disagreeing with the writer to detecting the writer's purpose and attitude, challenging the presupposition of the writer and formulating an opinion of their own. This is useful in both the intensive and extensive reading. A good source of practice for this skill is from the "Letters to the Editors" section of magazines dealing with controversial issues and this can generate a lot of discussion and bring information sharing opportunities as in real life situations. Both skills of reading critically and speaking are presupposed.

4. 7. Composition

As a follow-up activity of reading, composition on how to follow directions or how to write a resume, can be used as an example to be devised as an application of the reading assignment. The composition may range from guided to open-ended to include writing letters to the editors of magazines about the articles they have read to express their opinion and feelings. Another form of developing the writing skill is making an outline of the reading, which will be helpful in intensive reading and as the academic study skills.

4. 8. Use of procedures

All of the above techniques presented can be combined and integrated with different language skills or done only as a reading skill depending on the content and interest level of the students. These techniques or procedures are not prescriptions but suggestions of how theories can be applied into actual practices.

As mentioned in Section 2.2. under Syllabus, the techniques are not to be lineally presented but used analytically and progressively to offer interest and variety to the students. Class dynamics is different in each class and it is up to the teachers' discretion and responsibility to ensure that maximum learning is taking place by using and combining techniques thought to be appropriate. The job of the teacher is not to present lectures or translate the text, but to activate the learner to take charge of the situation and be the center of learning.

5. Concluding remarks

The process of reading has been examined in order for us to establish a reading program to make the students efficient readers without having to translate into the native language for comprehension. The design has been presented under the communicatively oriented approach to teaching of reading as communication, utilizing and integrating other language skills in addition to the reading skill alone. The procedures in the paper were presented under the assumption that language exists in the process of its use and that using language and learning language by doing the task created by the reading program can set a stage for oral language and reading development.

Integration of the reading skill with another language skill, in particular with the speaking skill, can raise some objections to the purpose of this course. The key motivational factor was communicative need and we wanted to give the students a purpose for reading the text, from finding specific pieces of information to relating the students' experiences to the reading content. By engaging in group discussions

and peer feedback, we let the students be active and independent learners, searching and reconstructing the meaning of the text.

It should be emphasized again that instruction should be flexible to meet the criteria of maintaining high interest, keeping the lessons comprehension centered, developing opportunities for expressing and defending one's opinion about some information given in the reading. To consolidate the language skills using reading as a springboard for oral exercises and discussions at the later stage of the course can be valued and appreciated by many of the students who have genuine desire to communicate, no matter what the medium of communication should be.

References

- Clarke, Mark A. and Sandra Silberstein. Toward a realization of psycho-linguistic principles in the ESL reading class. *Language Learning* 27(1). 135-154.
- Dowhower-Vuyk, Sarah and Gisela E. Spiegel. 1982. The process of learning and reading instruction. Paper presented at the 16th Annual International Convention of Teachers of English to the Speakers of Other Languages, Honolulu, Hawaii.
- Gaskill, William H. 1979. The teaching of intermediate reading in the ESL classroom. In Marianne Celce-Murcia and Lois McIntosh, eds., *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*. Rowley, Mass: Newbury House Publishers. 144-154.
- Goodman, K.S. 1970. The reading process: theory and practice. In R.E. Hodges and E.H. Rudolf, eds., *Language and learning to read: what teachers should know about language*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Grellet, Françoise. 1981. *Developing reading skills*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Munby, John. 1978. *Communicative syllabus design*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Pierce, Mary Eleanor. Teaching the use of formal redundancy in reading for ideas. *TESOL Quarterly*. 9(9). 253-270.
- Rivers, Wilga M. 1981. *Teaching foreign language skills*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, Frank. 1978. *Understanding reading*. New York: Holt Rhinehart and

Winston.

White, Ronald V. 1981. Reading. In John, K. and K. Morrow, eds., *Communication in the classroom*. Essex: Longman House.

Widdowson, H.G. 1978. *Teaching language as communication*. London: Oxford University Press.

<국문 요약>

Communication 을 위한 읽기 학습 지도방법

스 윤 희
(서강대학교)

한국 대학생들에게 있어서 영어로 읽기는 학생들의 학구적인 성과 및 그 밖에 자신들의 흥미와 관심분야를 추구하는데에도 큰 역할을 하고 있다. 읽기가 단순히 번역에 의존된 독해가 아니고 직접적인 읽기와 **communication** 을 위한 학습이 되도록 본고는 읽기과정에 대한 연구와 이론을 고찰하고 이를 토대로 하여 보다 효율적인 읽기 전략을 개발하고 향상시키기 위한 읽기 학습의 **communicative design** 과 읽기과정 이론을 응용할 수 있는 실제적인 읽기 교수법 과정 몇가지를 열거 하였다.