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Reading Speed Techniques to Be Applied to English Reading Classes

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I . Introduction

Reading in the foreign language is, in many cases, the ultimate objective of FL learning. Although oral fluency is nowadays in greater demand than it used to be only one or two decades ago, and although most modern methods of teaching foreign language start with oral speech(Larsen-Freeman, 1987 : 6), we still discover that, for various reasons which will be given in the following, it is the reading skill that has to be emphasized and that stays with the learner even when the other skills have been weakened.

Reasons or justifications for emphasis on the development of the reading skill are provided by many scholars(Kharma, 1981 : 398 ; Karlin, 1968 : 237 ; Roe, Stoodt, & Burns, 1978 : 2-10 ; etc). In many countries foreign languages are learned by most of students who will seldom have the opportunity to converse with native speakers, but who will have access to the literature and periodicals or scientific journals written in the language they are learning. Many will need these publications to keep up with the developments in their special field ; others will wish to enjoy reading in another language at their leisure time to keep in touch with the wider world (Rivers, 1981 : 260). Especially in Korea, secondary school students must have good or excellent English reading proficiency in order to

pass the entrance examination of advanced schools and college students also must have a considerable level of this proficiency to pass various tests for getting their jobs.

Although the importance of teaching reading comprehension ability cannot be emphasized too much, in Korea there does not seem to have been much empirical research done on how to teach the reading skill. There are some researches done on reading (Park, 1977 ; Lee, 1977 ; Im, 1982 ; Cho, 1984 ; Lee, 1986 ; Chong 1987 ; and Soh, 1987 ; and Soh, 1987 ; Lee, 1988 ; etc.), and most of these studies have not been aimed at the actual applications in the classrooms. On the other hand, based on the questionnaires (Im, 1988), it was found out that in Korea a great many English teachers in secondary schools do not have taught the reading comprehension skill effectively or systematically. Most of these teachers did not adequately prepare lesson plans to improve the students' reading ability during their class hours. They appear to have been only performing habitual and arbitrary teaching of reading in their own way.

Many scholars (Fitzgerald, 1967 ; Harris, 1962 ; Hill & Eller, 1966 ; Goodman, 1973 ; Lamberg & Lamb, 1980 ; Marksheffel, 1966 ; Jenkinson, 1973 ; Perfetti, 1985) have made their own definitions of reading. Two fundamental reading skills are derived from the definitions of these scholars' : one is how to read fast, and the other is how to read with good comprehension. Only when reading speed and comprehension are competent, the students can be regarded as efficient, independent readers. However, if we consider the past and current situation of teaching/learning reading comprehension ability, most of all EFL students in Korea have been very poor in the aspect of reading speed¹⁾. Even if the reasons why they are very

1) The author's dissertation (Im 1988) shows that Korean high school and college students, selected as subjects of the experimental study, are very slow readers when they read their English textbooks. The average reading speed of each group is like the following : (a) high school students : 24 words/min. ; (b) college students : 45 words/min.

poor readers can be analyzed by a number of different factors, one of the most important factors is that these students have not been taught by a systematic effective teaching method or approach to improve their reading speed effectively.

Therefore, in order to improve students' reading comprehension ability, teachers should pay much attention to the matter of reading speed, which has been neglected until now, in their English classes. For this reason, a number of techniques to facilitate students' reading speed will be discussed in this paper.

II. Reading Speed Techniques

In this section the reading speed techniques which can be utilized for effective reading comprehension instruction, are suggested. Here two parts of reading speed techniques are discussed: one is speed proper and the other is skimming and scanning. These techniques are abstracted from a number of related studies. The related studies of each part of reading speed techniques are like the following: (1) Speed proper — Langan(1983), DeBoer & Dallman(1960), Perfetti(1985), Harris & Smith(1976), Hill(1981), Kharma(1981), Scott et al.(1984), etc.; (2) Skimming(scanning) — Smith(1972), Yorkey(1970), Roe, Stoodt, & Burns(1978), Langan(1982), Hill, Soppelsa, & West(1982), etc.

1. Speed Proper Techniques

A) Make students grasp long sweeping groups of words as they cover each line of print. This is one of the very important secrets of growth in rapid reading. The eye movements of slow and fast readers show that slow readers are word readers, or at least they read in very small units of reading materials. On the other hand, rapid readers grasp several words at each glance as they cover each line of print. In other words, the rapid readers read for ideas while the slow readers read for words. Yorkey(1970 : 91)

exemplifies three kinds of readers' grasping words in a text :

Slow Reader :

Being able to read by phrases instead of by single words results from practice.

Average Reader :

Being able to read by phrases instead of by single words results from practice.

Fast Reader :

Being able to read by phrases instead of by single words results from practice.

Since most students are slow readers reading for individual words, teachers should pay much attention to students' grasping words. Students should be helped to read a text by thought(sense or idea) groups, not by every single word.

B) *Make students quicken their mental tempo while reading.*

One may have fallen into the habit of walking at a certain rate. But one can quicken his step if he wants to. The same thing is true of reading. Students can push their mental tempo into speedy patterns if they consciously strive to read faster and continue to do so. So if we want students to read faster, it is better to train them to quicken their mental tempo while reading.

C) *Make students repress any physical movements which may interfere with mental pace.* Lip-moving(vocalization), head-moving, and finger-pointing are bad habits. If students have any of these habits, teachers had better help students to break

them at once.

D) *Make students have flexibility of reading rate.* Reading efficiently does not mean reading all materials at the same pace. The rate at which a particular piece of material may be read will vary with the nature of the material—its familiarity and its complexity. It will also vary with the nature of reader—his purposes and his basic skills. Powerful readers adjust their rate of reading to these factors. In the beginning, such adjustments will need constant control. In time, as the reader responds to the intellectual cues of the material he reads, flexibility of rate will become smoothly unconscious.

For example, when Korean high school students read a well known subject in their texts—*Korea's Greatest* or *Seoul*, teachers should allow their students read it faster than their usual reading.

E) *Make students maintain the balance of speed and comprehension.* It is of no use to read rapidly without adequate comprehension. It is equally inefficient to read with complete comprehension but at a very slow speed. Students should aim at a comfortable balance between the two. Although one may think at first that reading comprehension suffers from a rapid reading speed, this is not necessarily true. As students push themselves to read faster, they may find that they comprehend less. Continued practice, however, will improve their comprehension as well as their speed. Instead of responding to individual words, they will be responding to meaningful units of ideas.

(1) *Growth ability to read at an appropriate rate is subject to training.* Studies (Hill 1981 : 270-281 ; Kharma 1981 : 398-404 ; Scott et al. 1984 : 114-120) show that remarkable increases in reading rate have been achieved in a brief period of time in many clinical situations, supervised reading courses, and classroom situations where this phase of reading has been

stressed. In fact, there is every reason to believe that almost all readers could make valuable increase in the speed with which they read, without affecting comprehension, if they were given appropriate help.

- (2) *Teachers and students should have clearly defined goals for improving the reading speed.* The teacher should try to find out the needs of the students in order to help them overcome their difficulties. The aims should be specific enough—for example, to learn when to read at the different rate. The student should also have clear-cut objectives. Results are better when the learner is consciously seeking specific goals.
- (3) *Individual difference in the students' ability to read at an appropriate rate should be recognized.* An effective program for helping students to acquire the reading skill at an appropriate rate recognizes variations among individuals. The teacher needs to know what stage of learning to read each student has reached and what kind of factor remains as an obstacle to him. The teacher must work out a program that is adapted to the needs of individual students. He/She should not be satisfied with averages.
- F) *Encourage students to make total efforts towards rate improvement.*

Success in rate improvement can be achieved more quickly and easily when the reader devoted his total effort to this goal. According to Hill & Eller(1966:1799), it is not uncommon to see students improve their rate of comprehension by 25 to 40 percent within one week simply because they are determined to improve and begin to awaken the slumbering rate abilities they already possess. So teachers should encourage students to undertake a total attack on rate improvement :

- (1) Analyze students' present rate of comprehension habits and take steps to correct physical, emotional, and basic skill deficiencies.

- (2) Schedule a regular practice session of reading.
- (3) Whenever students read, be conscious of their reading efficiency.
- (4) Plot students' improvement in rate and comprehension on a progress chart.

In order to diagnose individual student's progress, students were asked to take reading comprehension tests at least once a week. The tests are necessary to measure individual student's reading speed and comprehension. The test forms are different from traditional tests in their construction: On one sheet of test paper reading passages are presented, and on the other sheet of paper test-items are presented. From the outset students are told to aim at a comprehension score of 70 percent minimum and only to increase their speed if they could without sacrificing that minimum.

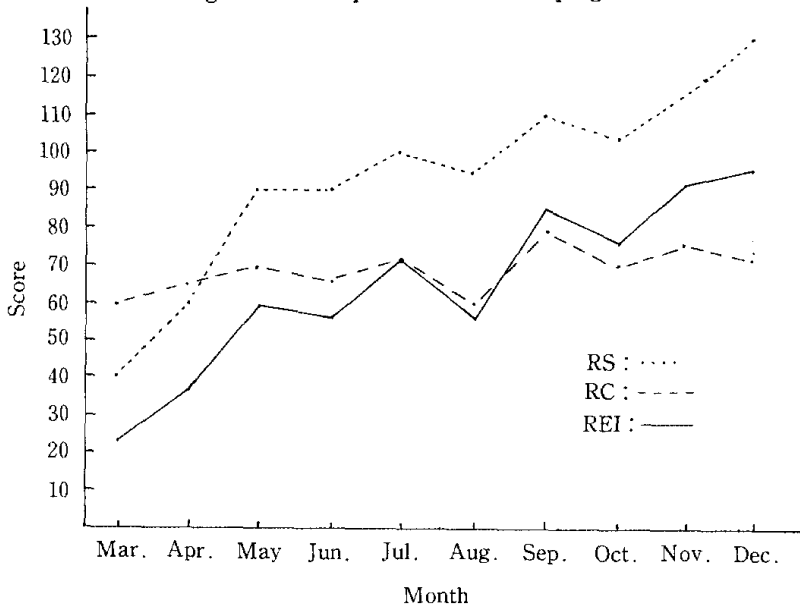
Each student has to read only the passages as rapidly as possible with at least 70 percent comprehension, and then record the amount of time that he spends on reading each passage on the answer sheet. He has to solve the test items of a related passage, and then record the correct answer on the answer sheet. Thus teachers can have data to measure each student's reading speed by means of computing wpm. The tests are presented in multiple-choice items, yes-no questions, true-false tests, or short-answer types depending on the circumstances because well-designed multiple-choice tests seem to be most desirable but they need much time and careful consideration (Rivers 1981 : 387-389).

Each student is instructed to keep a graph which shows his reading rate²⁾, comprehension³⁾, and REI⁴⁾. In drawing a graph the

- 2) Reading rate means reading speed (RS) which is counted as the number of word per minute (wpm).
- 3) Comprehension (RC) means the percentage of correct answers in students' reading comprehension tests.
- 4) Reading efficiency index (REI) reflects the degree of reading comprehension ability. REI can be computed by the following formula :
$$\frac{RS \times RC}{100}$$

average number of wpm, comprehension percent, and REI per month was figured. The progress curve of each line indicates a student's variability of improvement, which gives teachers feedback to further instruction. According to Plaister(1968) and Hill(1981), this kind of graph serves as a powerful motivating factor. We are going to illustrate an example of a student's progress chart below (Figure I).

Figure I Example of a Student's progress Chart



2. Skimming(Scanning) Techniques

A) *Explain in what situations skimming can properly be used.* For example, when students wish to get only a general impression of a passage, or when they wish to glance at it to see if it furnishes a certain item of information.

- B) *Explain how the eyes move across the page when skimming.* It may help some students to know that in skimming, the eyes do not always need to move from the end of one line to the beginning of the next. The eyes often take in only a part of each line as they move rapidly across and down a page.
- C) *Give the students a short period of time to skim an assigned part of a text and then let them write down the main ideas covered.* Teachers may assign a particular passage of a text which students have not read and ask students to summarize its main idea very rapidly. During this activity time is limited depending on the level of the students in the class. We are going to illustrate examples :

Examples of Finding Main Ideas

Science requires definite answers to such questions as "How much force?"—"How much time?"—"How fast?"—"How high?" When you say, "The building is high," your remarks have various meanings to different people. Such a statement is very indefinite. You do not know whether the height of a building is 300 feet or 500 feet or 700 feet. When you say, "The building is 770 feet high,"—then you are being definite. Unless information is specific and definite, it is of little scientific value and significance.

(selected from Lesson 8 of *High School English I* by Tower Press)

Main Idea : Science requires specific and definite Information.

Congratulation on your becoming high school students. You have just begun the most important three years of your lives, and you might as well try to make the most of these years. Studying, of course, is not all that is important. It is, however, the most important part of your school life, and you might at this moment make a new resolution that you

will do better in your high school studies.

Perhaps you were average students when you were in middle school, If you think you will never be a smart, top student in high school because you have been an average or even below average student so far, you are mistaken. Anyone can become a better scholar with good study habits. If you are interested, I would like to give you some advice. The results may surprise you.

(selected from Lesson 1 of *High School English I* by Neung-Ryuk-Ke-Bal-Sa)

Main Idea : Studying hard in high school days is one of the most important things in your life.

D) *Students should pay much more attention to the topic sentence.*

Skimming to find a topic sentence helps students to understand the entire paragraph. So teachers had better explain the importance of a topic sentence to the students during their class hours. Let us look at the following examples. The topic sentences are italicized in the following passages :

Examples of Topic Sentences

Communication is the exchange of information. We communicate with each other in many ways. A baby cries when it is hungry. We wave hello or good-bye to our friends. Animals use sounds and movements to share information. For example, a dog barks and wags its tail to show joy. Machines can also be used to communicate. A dial on the dashboard of a motorcar indicates its speed. The basis of all human communication is language. Important means of communicating include advertisements, books, films, letters, magazines, newspapers, plays, and radio and television broadcasts.

(selected from Lesson 5 of *High School English I* by Neung-Ryuk-

Ke-Bai-Sa)

Golden rule- Never ask questions. For six months during the War I lived in the same tent and shared a bath-tub with an Englishman: he never asked me if I was married what I did in peace-time, or what were the books I was reading under his nose. If you insist on making confidences, they will be listened to with polite indifference. Avoid making confidences about other people. Gossips exist here as elsewhere, but they are at the same time less common and more serious. There is no middle course between silence and scandal. Choose silence.

(selected from Lesson 34 of *College English for Freshman* by KNTC Publishing Co.)

E) Give students brief texts for scanning in search of answers to given questions. For example, the following passage is one of a series about Jesse Owens, one of the Olympic gold medalists.

Question: What did Pierre de Coubertin say?

Even in the excitement of winning four gold medals there, I was more excited because I had set a record in the broad jump, a record that was to last until 1960. What was so exciting about it, though, was that I had done my absolute best, *no, ifs, ands, or buts.*

It was then that I knew fully the meaning of the words of my coach and of Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics, who said: "*The important thing in life is not winning. It is doing your best.*"

(selected from Lesson 10 of *High School English II-1* by Dong-A Publishing Co.)

In the above passage students are easily able to arrive at the answer to the given question: "The important thing in life is not winning. It is doing your best." After a single passage like

this one, a long series can be presented, with only enough time given for the students to scan the passage at top speed. Garton (1979 : 11) suggests the same drill of scanning with the aid of the overhead projector. Here students have to answer the question after reading the passage flashed on the screen within the limited time.

- F) *Students should scan to find specific information.* When practising scanning, students should be made aware of textual cues, and the graphic form the answer is likely to take : for example, written number, numeral, capitalized word, italicized word or phrases, or a short phrase containing key words. Some examples are illustrated :

Question : When was Deogsu Palace built ?

On the grounds of Gyeongbok Palace is the National Museum where priceless antiques can be viewed. Deogsu palace is often visited as a resting place from the busy streets of the city. *It was built in the 15th century* and is now a park and houses a modern art museum.

(selected from Lesson 3 of *High School English I* by Tower Press)

(Answer : in the 15th century)

Question : What is the name of a ceremony to drive the devil out of a dead person ?

The entertainment is highlighted by the 10-person *ssikkingut* and *Kang-gang-suwoollae*. *SSikkingut* is a ceremony which is supposed to drive the devil out of a dead person so that his soul can enter the land of happiness. *Kang-gang-suwoollae* is performed by 30 women in a circle. Its origin goes back to the period of Japan's invasion of Korea (1592-1598).

(selected from Lesson 11 of *High School English II-1* by Kyo-

Moon-Sa)

(Answer : SSikkingut)

Question : What does the name of the village Hodong mean ?

An interesting legend is associated with the parting of the sea. In 1480 a high government official named Son Tong-ki and his family were sent to the remote island of Cheju-do. High winds and rough seas forced them to land their boat near the present site of Hoedong-ri, Son and his family set up a small village and named it Hodong which means a "tiger village". Apparently there were many tigers around the village and they posed a serious problem to the family.

(selected from Lesson 11 of *High School II-1* by Kyo-Moon-Sa

(Answer : "tiger village")

G) *Make students take integrative skimming and scanning drills.*

Up to now we have discussed specific techniques of skimming and scanning(A-F). Here we are going to introduce an integrative(synthetic) drill with three steps. This drill can be applied to students' class work as demonstrated in the following :

Step One

Direction : Step one is to skim the following passage by reading the 'heading', the 'first sentence' and the 'last two sentences'

You should take less than 30 seconds for this¹⁴. Record your time below.

Begin timing

The Newspaper and Its Role

Today, when a war breaks out, a president is murdered, or a football match is won on the other side of the world, you hear about it at once on the radio. You may even see it live on television. In any case you will certainly read about it the next day in your newspaper. News plays a very important

part in our everyday lives. News is almost as necessary to us as food!

Imagine how impatient the British people were in 1815, waiting for news of the Battle of Waterloo. The news of the great victory over Napoleon was carried by the fastest horses and by the fastest sailing boat. And when it finally reached London, Londoners were full of wonder at the speed, for the 250 mile journey took only four days! And it was two months before Londoners learned of the death of Napoleon in 1821 on the distant island of Saint Helena.

Today, radio and television broadcast the news every hour, but in general the news can be better understood when it is read in a newspaper. The newspaper has the same news, but it is able to discuss and report each event more deeply. Radio and television are much faster in giving the news, but still nothing can ever take the place of the newspaper.

(selected from Lesson 7 of *High School English II-1* by Shi-Sa English Book Co.)

Time : _____

Step Two

Direction : Now that you have skimmed the passage, answer the questions below by circling T for True and F for False.

1. T/F The Passage is about the role of newspapers.
2. T/F The role of a radio is more important in our communication than that of a newspaper.
3. T/F Television has more advantage in reporting every event in detail radio and newspaper.

(Answers : 1. True 2. False 3. False)

Step Three

Direction : In order not to lose your scanning ability, scan the same news story looking for answers to the following questions. You should finish in less than 2 minutes.

Begin timing

1. Who were waiting for the news of the Battle of Waterloo? _____
2. How long does it take to carry the news of the victory over Napoleon? _____
3. Where did Napoleon die? _____
4. Why can we understand the news better when it is read in a newspaper? _____

(Answers : 1. the British people

2. Only four days

3. island of Saint Helena

4. Because the newspaper is able to discuss and report each event more deeply.)

III. Conclusion

So far in this paper we have discussed a large number of reading speed techniques, which is one of the two main components of reading comprehension ability (RCA) when RCA is defined like the formula mentioned in the previous section : $RCA = RS + RC$ (Perfetti 1985). Still more, in EFL situations such as English classes in Korea, the factor of reading speed is more essential than that of comprehension to improving students' RCA. Although others may assert that RC is more important than RS according to their own opinions, the author's dissertation (Im 1988) and his other recent empirical research including discussions with many English teachers of secondary schools indicate that to Korean students RS is more needed to develop than RC.

In this paper two kinds of reading speed techniques are suggested : one is the quality of speed proper, and the other is that of skimming and scanning. These techniques may facilitate students' reading speed surprisingly even within a short period without the loss of comprehension if teachers want to apply these techniques effectively in their classes.

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<국문초록>

읽기속도 향상을 위한 효과적인 교수방법

임 병 빈

(공주사범대학)

최근 외국어교육에 있어서 언어의 기본 4기능 중 회화(듣기·말하기) 중심의 교육이 상당히 부각되고, 강조를 받고 있는 것은 주지의 사실이지만, 문어적인 기능에 속하는 읽기기능의 중요성 또한 경시될 수 없다고 본다. 특히 한국과 같은 여건(EFL상황)에서는 읽기의 필요성이 더욱 절실하다고 볼 수 있다.

따라서, 독해력의 중요요소를 '읽기속도'와 '이해도'로 정의해 볼 때 읽기 속도 향상을 위한 교수방법을 계발하여 효과적으로 지도한다는 것은 학생들의 영어독해력 향상에 큰 도움을 줄 수 있다고 생각된다. 뿐만 아니라 실제적인 한국의 중등학교 영어수업 및 대학의 교양영어 강독수업 시간에 '이해'에 치중한 나머지 '읽기속도' 지도를 무시하거나 경시하는 것이 일반적인 사례라는 점에 비추어 보더라도 '읽기속도'에 더 많은 관심과 효과적인 지도방법이 모색되어야 하겠다.

그러므로, 본 연구에서는 '읽기속도' 향상을 위한 효과적인 교수방법으로써 속도 자체에 관한 방법과 훑어읽기에 속하는 방법들을 제안하였다. 여기에서 제시된 방법들을 체계적으로 적용할 수 있다면 학생들의 '읽기 속도'가 상당히 발전되어 결국 독해력 연마에 큰 보탬이 될 것으로 기대 한다.