

Are L2 Readers Susceptible to Interesting Details in a Text?

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Although rich and contentious literature has addressed the effect of text-based interest on readers' comprehension, much remains to be determined to understand whether and how interest has similar effects when reading in a first and a second language. This study examined whether L2 readers are susceptible to interesting details in a text in the similar way to L1 readers. Comprehension was assessed by three recall scores, common ideas, main ideas, and non-main ideas. The participants completed a reading proficiency and a prior-knowledge test before reading an informative text about Linus Pauling and Vitamin C. Results of a MANOVA indicated that seductive details interfered with these readers' recall of common and main ideas, confirming past research showing an interference effect of interesting but unimportant details. However, results also indicated that interesting elaborations, designed to be of importance in the text, were not significantly beneficial to EFL reading comprehension when compared to the baseline text. Discussion centers on exploring whether students struggled with the incoherence of the seductive detail version and whether all students seemed to be approaching their reading as one requiring the memorization of ideas.

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a general belief that interesting texts, as compared to non-interesting texts, are more likely to draw readers' attention and to be recalled or comprehended better by readers. That general belief becomes less of a commonplace when I turn to data showing that within a text, interesting text segments may draw readers' attention away from the important points of the text and make it difficult for them to retain main ideas from the text. In other words, interesting segments may interfere with rather than facilitate a reader's overall text comprehension, and in particular, comprehension of the main points of a text. This effect, called the *seductive detail effect* in the literature on reading comprehension, was first described by Garner, Gillingham, and White (1989) and refers to the fact that text segments that are not important relative to the main idea of the text but are very interesting compared to other text segments have a negative impact on memory for the text. In the study by Garner et al., graduate students were less likely to recall the three main points

from a text when it had interesting but unimportant information added than when such interesting details were not present.

However, Goetz and Sadoski (1995) critiqued this literature on the grounds that seductive details had not been definitively shown to cause interference in text comprehension, a critique that itself garnered counterarguments from some of the original authors investigating the seductive detail effect (e.g., Wade, Alexander, Schraw, & Kulikowich, 1995). Thus, there is still a considerable amount of debate about the overall effect of seductive details in L1 reading. And, the effect of interestingness per se, that is, whether interesting segments help readers recall the main points of a text if the interesting segment is associated with the main idea of the text, still remains largely unstudied.

When I turn to the research on L2 (second language) reading comprehension, I find that among a vigorous and productive set of studies, only a few have examined the role of interest in reading performance. LeLoup (1993) investigated the relationship between the level of readers' interest in passage content and their reading comprehension level for American secondary students learning Spanish as a foreign language. Results indicated that L2 readers comprehended significantly more of passages when they had a high interest level in the topics of the passages than when they had a low interest level. Carrell and Wise (1998) investigated the relationship between prior knowledge and topic interest in L2 reading comprehension by asking students in an ESL program at a large university to rate their interest levels in 10 topics and to respond to prior knowledge measures on each of these topics. These responses were used to identify for each student a set of four topics that represented the crossing of high and low interest and high and low prior knowledge. Then, students read texts and responded to comprehension questions for these four topics. Results indicated a significant interaction between prior knowledge and topic interest such that there was no difference between scores on topics for which students had low or high prior knowledge so long as they had high interest in the topic. However, for the low interest topics, prior knowledge made a difference with the high prior knowledge text being comprehended much better than the low prior knowledge text.

However, a distinction needs to be made between *topic interest* and *text-based interest* (that is, the interestingness of a text). Topic interest refers to the level of personal (or individual) interest that a reader has for the topic of a text whereas text-based interest is a kind of situational interest that is invoked by a particular situation. This distinction between individual and situational interest, first made by Hidi and Baird (1988), takes *individual interest* to refer to individual differences in what learners bring to their learning, and *situational interest* to describe the kind of interest that is reliably triggered in most learners by the characteristics of the text or of the learning situation. Thus, the research on interest and L2 reading can be characterized as remaining at the level of individual interest, with little available to guide an understanding of what would happen with text-based interest and L2 comprehension.

Although L2 researchers may not have focused on the effect of textual manipulations aimed at increasing interest, the one kind of related text manipulation that has received attention is input modification. In studies of L2 reading comprehension, researchers have put two types of input modification, simplification and elaboration, against each other to see which would result in better comprehension when compared to an unmodified text (Horiba, 1996; Sun-Young Oh, 2001; Yano, Long, & Ross, 1994). In a comparison of Japanese college students' reading of an unmodified text, a simplified version, and an elaborated version, Yano et al. (1994) found that the baseline text resulted in the lowest comprehension scores but only the comparison between simplified and baseline texts was significant, with no significant difference between the simplified and the elaborated versions. Sun-Young Oh (2001) found that L2 readers who read either an elaborated or simplified text performed significantly better on most measures than those who read an unmodified text, and there was no significant difference between elaborated and simplified conditions. It is important to note that simplification and elaboration were operationalized as changes at the linguistic (vocabulary and syntax) level rather than at the meaning level.

In the study I report here, rather than focusing on textual modifications at the linguistic level, I addressed the effect on L2 reading comprehension of a particular kind of text elaboration, one focused on the interestingness of the text. In a sense, the study was an investigation of whether the interference suffered by L1 readers when reading texts that have had seductive details embedded would be found with L2 readers. Additionally, another kind of interesting details was posited and included, that is, *interesting elaborations*. While seductive details are not important relative to the main idea of the text, these interesting elaborations were designed to be of high importance relative to the main idea of the text and interesting when compared to other segments in the text. In this way, this study had the potential to add to the L1 reading research on text-based interest by testing the effect of two kinds of manipulations, seductive details and interesting elaborations.

In addition to the effect of text types as represented by the baseline, seductive details, and interesting elaborations versions, I also examined whether L2 readers' reading proficiency level would affect the readers' recall of ideas, alone and in interaction with the effect of text types. Gender effects were also examined.

In sum, the main purpose of the present study was to investigate the effect of two kinds of interesting details, seductive details and interesting elaborations, on Korean college EFL readers' recall of the ideas from an English expository text as measured by three different recall scores, common, main, and less important ideas. I was interested in whether *interesting elaborations* would be considered a distinct type of interesting text relative to *seductive details*, helpful rather than harmful to overall and main idea comprehension. Another purpose of this study was to investigate the interaction of L2 proficiency level and gender with text type in explaining the comprehension performance of Korean EFL college students.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study.

1. When compared to a baseline text, will texts with two kinds of interesting details, seductive details and interesting elaborations, have a different effect on Korean college EFL readers' recall of ideas?
2. Will the effect of text type (baseline, seductive detail, or interesting elaboration versions) affect students differently depending on whether they have a higher rather than lower level of proficiency in English and whether they are men or women?

II. METHOD

1. Participants

Korean EFL college students from two large universities in Korea, whose majors were English language and literature or English language education, participated in this study. Their grade levels ranged from sophomore to senior. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions (baseline, seductive detail, and interesting elaborations).

In addition, they were divided into two groups (high and low) based on their scores on an English language reading proficiency test included as part of their experimental materials. According to the 12-point test, 63 students received more than 9 points, 23 students received exactly 9 points, 55 students earned less than 9 points, and 3 students did not provide any answer to the test. The students who received exactly 9 points and those who provided no responses were excluded from data analysis. Therefore, in the end, 118 students, with 63 in the higher group and 55 in the lower group, and 70 women and 48 men, were included as the final group of participants in this study. Groups were not equal because the results of the proficiency measure were not known until all data were gathered. This had the consequence of having unequal n's in the experimental conditions, and there were no men in the low proficiency group in one of the conditions. In Table 1 is listed the number of participants for each condition.

TABLE 1
The Number of Participants in Each Group

Text Conditions	Sex	Proficiency Level		Total N	
		High	Low		
Baseline	M	11	22	42	
	F	11	20		
Seductive Detail	M	6	18	43	
	F	12	23		
Interesting Elaboration	M	8	23	33	
	F	15	10		
Total N			63	55	118

2. Materials

Three sets of materials, the reading proficiency test, a test of students' prior knowledge of the topic, and the target comprehension materials, were packaged together.

Reading proficiency test. To determine the participants' reading proficiency level, a multiple-choice test was designed that consisted of three reading passages, each of which was followed by four questions that asked, for example, for an appropriate title for the text, its main idea, and information that was either stated directly in the passage or implied. Each reading passage was one or two paragraphs long. The total possible score was 12.

Prior knowledge test. The purpose of the prior knowledge test was to measure participants' existing knowledge about the topics of the key material they were about to read in the next section. This test was made up of four short-answer questions regarding main terms that were considered to be critical in understanding the target text. Questions in this test could be answered in English or in the participants' native language (Korean), or in both languages, as the goal of this test was not to test language proficiency but to test prior knowledge. Each answer was graded on a scale from 0 (no answer) to 3. Results of the test indicated that these students knew very little specific information about the material they were about to read, scoring on average 1.7 points out of 12 (range = 0 to 6). Only 6 students received more than 3 points on the test and the mode was 1. More importantly, there were no differences across the conditions in terms of the prior knowledge measure.

Target comprehension materials. The target materials were designed to examine what and how much the readers understood and recalled from a reading passage about the benefits of Vitamin C. Consisting of six paragraphs, each of which had four or five sentences, the reading passage was written from my compilation of information about Linus Pauling, most of which came from Internet sources. The passage was printed on hard copy and presented one paragraph per page, with each paragraph followed by a recall test on the next page and by a reading comprehension test on the next page.

Three different versions of the reading text were constructed: the baseline version, the seductive details version, and the interesting elaborations version. Each version consisted of the same expository information except that the seductive details and interesting elaborations versions had details inserted into the baseline text. For the seductive details version, a sentence containing interesting but unimportant information was added to each of the six paragraphs. For example, to the first paragraph introducing the scientist Linus Pauling who argued for the benefits of Vitamin C, the seductive details version added the sentence, "In his junior year of college, Pauling became an instructor of the quantitative analysis course he had just taken as a sophomore and met his future wife when she was a student in his quantitative analysis class." The same was true for the interesting elaborations version, except that here the additional sentence was deemed to be interesting and important to the point of each paragraph: "At last he was awarded two separate unshared Nobel Prizes, one for Chemistry in 1954 and one for Peace in 1962."

The recall sheet following each paragraph was blank except for instructions at the top asking the readers to write down everything they remembered from the passage they had just read, in whatever language they felt comfortable, Korean or English or both. The reading comprehension test had two parts: a short answer question and a main idea question. The short answer question was about some less important segment of the text and the main idea question was about a more important segment of the text.

3. Data Collection Procedure

Pilot Study I. The goal of the first pilot study was to examine the validity of the reading material that were to be used as a text in the main study in terms of importance and interestingness. In other words, this pilot study was used to validate the fact that the interesting segments that were inserted into the text and were meant to be interesting to the reader were perceived as interesting. A total of 14 ESL graduate students (male: 8, female: 6), who were attending a large university in the U.S., participated in this study. They were asked to rate the relative importance and interestingness of each sentence within each paragraph on a 7-point Likert-type scale.

Pilot Study II. Using the results of Pilot Study I, some sentences were revised to make them more interesting and then presented to different ESL readers again for ratings of the importance and interestingness of all the sentences. A total of 14 ESL graduate students (male: 8, female: 6), who were attending the same university as the above but who had not participated in the first pilot study, took part in the second study. They were also asked to rate the relative importance and interestingness of each sentence within a paragraph on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Results indicated that the materials were now distinguished appropriately in terms of importance and interestingness.

Main study. Four intact classrooms of Korean EFL college students from two large universities in Korea, who were taking core courses for their majors, were invited to participate in this study (two classrooms from each university). Having obtained permission from the instructors to recruit their students for the study, I met the class and described the experiment. Envelopes of testing materials were randomly distributed to the students. There were three different envelopes, each with one of three colored stickers (yellow, red, and green) indicating the three different versions. Each envelope had the following materials inside: the reading proficiency test material, the prior knowledge test material, and six pages of the reading passage (one paragraph on each page), each followed by a recall sheet and a reading comprehension test sheet.

After putting their demographic information (name initials, name of school, major, and sex) on the first page of the packet, the students began each test at the same time at the verbal signal of the researcher. As they began each test, brief instructions were given orally. For example, when the students were reading, recalling, and taking the short reading comprehension test for each paragraph, they were told to read the text two times, then to

recall whatever they remembered from the text on the recall sheet on the next page, and then to take the reading comprehension test on the next page. They were not allowed to turn back to the previous page once they had turned the page over. The researcher announced when students could proceed to the next segment of the task.

Time allotment for each test was as follows: 12 minutes for the reading proficiency test, 6 minutes for the prior knowledge test, and 7 minutes for each of the six segments of the reading—recall—reading comprehension test. The students were finished in about one hour.

4. Data Coding and Analysis

For the reading proficiency test, each correct answer to the 12 questions was credited with 1 point. For the prior knowledge test, 0 to 3 points were given to each answer to 4 questions, and thus, total scores for the prior knowledge test for each student could range from 0 to 12 points. The six recall protocols were scored in terms of the number of idea units correctly recalled by the students against a template that had a list of idea units from the original text. If a segment appearing in a student's protocol captured the gist of the original statement in the text, even though it was not a word-for-word reiteration, it was credited with 1 point. When information presented in the recall protocol, however, was incorrect or too vague to be correctly identified, no credit was given. The main idea question for each segment was scored on a scale of 0 to 3, with 0 given to answers that were entirely missing or clearly incorrect, 1 given to answers of simply one or two words that were clearly coming from a statement of the main idea, 2 for more elaborated but still incomplete statements of the main idea, and 3 awarded to statements that represented fully the main point of the paragraph. Finally, the non-main idea question was scored on a scale from 0 to 2, with 0 awarded to incorrect and missing answers, 1 to partial but correct answers, and 2 to full and correct answers.

Interrater reliability, calculated by asking a trained doctoral student to score 20% of the recall protocols, turned out to be .90 ($p < .01$). Similarly, intrarater reliability, calculated by re-scoring 20% of the protocols, was .97 ($p < .01$).

III. RESULTS

Results are first presented organized according to two hypotheses. Next, I explore two questions that arose as alternative interpretations of the results I obtained.

Hypothesis 1: When compared to a baseline text, texts with two kinds of interesting details, seductive details and interesting elaborations, will have a different effect on Korean college EFL readers' recall of ideas from the text

Hypothesis 1 was first concerned with the treatment effect of text type on recall of common ideas, main ideas, and non-main (unimportant) ideas, respectively. By *common ideas*, I was referring to the 49 idea units that were the same in all three versions of the text, thereby eliminating from the scores of individuals in the seductive detail and interesting elaboration groups those ideas that represented these additional details. The *main idea* score for each participant was derived from his or her answer to the main idea question on the reading comprehension test. The maximum possible for this measure was 18. Similarly, the *non-main idea* measure was obtained by scoring participants' responses to the non-main idea question on the reading comprehension measure. Each person's score could vary between 0 and 12.

Results of a MANOVA, where text type was treated as an independent variable and the three kinds of recall scores as dependent variables, was significant, Wilks's Lambda (6, 210) = 7.98, $p < .001$. Subsequent ANOVA's were then conducted to determine whether a significant difference existed among the three groups' mean scores on each of the dependent measures. A significant main effect was found for recall of common ideas, $F(2, 107) = 23.29, p < .001$. Means and standard deviations for each group appear in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Sample Sizes for the Three Text Conditions
on the Recall of Common Ideas, Main Ideas, and Non-Main Ideas

Dependent Variables	Text Type Condition	M	SD	n
Common Idea Recall Score	Baseline	27.0	9.5	42
	Seductive Detail	16.6	8.0	43
	Interesting Elaboration	21.6	6.4	33
Main Idea Recall Score	Baseline	12.4	2.9	42
	Seductive Detail	9.6	3.3	43
	Interesting Elaboration	12.1	2.4	33
Non-Main Idea Recall Score	Baseline	9.0	2.3	42
	Seductive Detail	8.3	2.3	43
	Interesting Elaboration	9.0	2.2	33

Note: Total possible score for the common idea was 49; for the main idea, 18; for the non-main idea, 12.

Post hoc analyses (Tukey's HSD) indicated that the baseline group recalled significantly more common ideas than both the seductive detail group ($p < .01$) and the interesting elaboration group ($p < .05$). In addition, the seductive detail group recalled significantly fewer ideas than the interesting elaboration group ($p < .05$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was confirmed in that text type made a difference in the recall of common ideas for Korean EFL college students. However, the direction of the differences was not entirely as expected.

For the second dependent measure, the recall of main ideas, the ANOVA also indicated a significant effect of text type, $F(2, 107) = 9.78, p < .001$. Post hoc analyses revealed that

although there was no difference between the baseline and interesting elaboration groups, each of these groups was significantly better in performance than the seductive detail group ($p < .01$ for both comparisons). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was confirmed in terms of the recall of main ideas for Korean EFL college students.

For the third dependent measure, the recall of non-main ideas, the ANOVA was not significant. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was not confirmed, indicating that text type did not influence the recall of non-main ideas.

Returning directly to the question of whether seductive details would interfere with comprehension, results clearly supported the hypothesis. The group reading the baseline text outperformed the seductive detail group on every measure and did so to a statistically significant degree for the common ideas and main ideas measures. However, results did not support the hypothesis that interesting elaborations would facilitate recall when compared to the baseline text. The performance of the groups reading the baseline text was always higher than the performance of the interesting elaboration group, and it was significantly so for the measure of common ideas recalled.

Given that the initial hypothesis was only partially supported and that interesting elaborations did not have the effect I had expected, I was curious whether the effect of text type would be different for students with higher and lower language proficiency and for men versus women, as reflected in Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 2: The effect of text type (baseline, seductive detail, or interesting elaboration versions) will be different for students with a higher rather than lower level of proficiency in English and for men rather than women

To test hypothesis 2, I used a MANOVA with three independent variables (text type, proficiency level, and sex) and the same three dependent measures. Results indicated two significant main effects, text types (replicating the analysis reported for Hypothesis 1) and proficiency level, with individuals with a higher level of proficiency performing better on all three dependent measures than those with a lower level of proficiency, Wilks's Lambda (3, 105) = .674, $p < .001$. Subsequent ANOVA's for each dependent measures were all significant at $p < .001$, with the higher proficiency group outscoring the lower proficiency group on every measure: common ideas, $F(1, 107) = 43.41$: High mean = 26.2 (SD = 8.2), Low mean 16.5 (SD = 7.5); main ideas, $F(1, 107) = 34.79$: High M = 12.8 (SD = 2.3), Low M = 9.6 (SD = 3.2); non-main (unimportant) ideas, $F(1, 107) = 11.42$: High M = 9.5 (SD = 2.0), Low M = 7.9 (SD = 2.3). The performance of men and women did not differ as a main effect. More importantly, there were no significant interactions between text type and either of the learner characteristic variables, proficiency level or gender. Although univariate ANOVA's on each of the dependent measures did yield a significant interaction between the variables of proficiency level and text type for the common idea measure, this was the only effect that reached the .05 criterion of significance and cannot be considered reliable given the non-significant interaction effect in the MANOVA.

Thus, regardless of measure, students in the seductive details condition recalled less of the text than did students reading the baseline text as predicted by previous research on L1 reading processes, but, contrary to what I had predicted, the same was true of the interesting elaboration group. My next focus was to explore the reasons why these three text types had resulted in the patterns of performance I had seen, with the baseline condition outperforming both the seductive detail and interesting elaboration groups on the common idea measure and with the interesting elaboration condition resulting in no better performance than the baseline condition on the main idea measure.

Exploratory Question 1: Was there evidence that students in the two interesting detail conditions had been distracted from the rest of the text (as represented by the common ideas score) by the additional ideas that had been introduced?

My first approach was to see whether students assigned to the two texts that had additional information had actually been “seduced” or “distracted” from paying attention to the rest of the text by the interesting details that had been added to their texts. The argument I was testing here was that the lower performance of students in the non-baseline conditions was perhaps attributable to the greater attention devoted to the additional information. To test this explanation, I calculated two scores for each student in these two conditions, (a) a proportion of the number of idea units coming from the seductive detail or interesting elaboration sentences in the text, and (b) a proportion of idea units coming from the rest of the ideas (the common ideas). I then compared these two scores to see if they were significantly different using paired t-tests. Results were not significant for the interesting elaborations group with mean proportions for the two kinds of idea units nearly identical (.439 and .441). Results were significant for the seductive detail group, $t(42) = 1.82$, $p < .05$ (one-tailed), with the seductive detail mean higher at .377 than the recall mean of the rest of the ideas, .340. These results, that learners in the seductive detail group were significantly more likely to recall ideas that came from the seductive detail manipulation than they were to recall ideas from the rest of the text, suggested that seductive details may have been acting to seduce attention away from other ideas in the text. However, interesting elaborations did not have this deleterious effect, being recalled at levels that did not differ from the recall of the rest of the text.

Exploratory Question 2: Was there evidence that students approached the task as asking them to learn all the information in the text regardless of its importance?

One assumption of text learning studies is that readers will not be able to learn all the information in a text but will differentiate between important and less important information as they attempt to comprehend and learn from the text. However, it is possible that with a short text, a learner may attempt to memorize all the information presented. This approach to learning from a text may be especially likely when reading in a foreign language because one’s understanding may not be as deep as when reading in one’s native language, thereby making it more difficult to identify what is important in the text. For the participants in this study, the task involved reading segment by segment, with each

segment no more than five sentences long. Following each segment, a free recall sheet appeared and then a short-answer task. The time to be spent on each segment including reading, recalling, and answering questions was limited to seven minutes, and was the same for all segments. Thus, as students progressed through the six segments of the text, they became familiar with what was required of them, honing their strategies for remembering the information they had just read. Because students assigned to the seductive detail and interesting elaboration groups had one more sentence to read per segment, their texts were longer by 22% to 29% depending on whether the comparison is based on number of sentences, number of words, or number of idea units. If the learning conditions I had set up were encouraging students to approach the task as one in which they should attempt to remember everything they had read leaving nothing out, students in the baseline condition would have an advantage simply because their text was shorter by six sentences overall, nearly a full quarter of the length.

What evidence can I bring to bear to support the above suggestion? First, I can report on my observation of students diligently reading and re-reading each paragraph, underlining all the sentences in a segment, in seeming preparation for a memory test of what was read. Again, as stated above, students who approached the task as requiring them to learn every bit of the information presented may have found the addition of 22% to 29% of content in the two non-baseline conditions much more challenging. A second source of evidence comes from a different way of analyzing the free recall, this time comparing students on all they had written, no longer excluding the additional information from the seductive detail or interesting elaboration sentences. In this analysis, the mean overall recall scores are as follows: 27 ideas for the baseline group, nearly 22 ideas for the seductive detail group, and nearly 30 ideas for interesting elaboration group. How can we interpret these numbers? When comparing the interesting elaboration group with the baseline group, I find that their overall output on the recall task is slightly better, indicating that the extra information they had to read and study did not overwhelm them to the point of reducing their recall.

However, when I compare the seductive detail group with the baseline group, I see that the extra information presented in the seductive detail sentences not only affected the recall of the rest of the text but also was not as well remembered as the interesting elaboration information. This finding is more puzzling given the explanation provided by L1 researchers of the seductive detail effect. Had these L2 readers been responding to the seductive details in the same way as L1 readers have been reported to respond in previous research, they should have remembered more of the seductive detail information than they did. It is possible that seductive detail information is especially difficult for L2 readers who find it difficult enough to construct meaning from a well-written, coherent text, let alone manage to relate what is being stated in the seductive detail sentence to the rest of the text. For example, the second paragraph of the text in the seductive detail condition describes how Linus Pauling wrote a book about Vitamin C and continued his work in his long life, studying the role of vitamins in health. This paragraph is pivotal in the whole text because

the subsequent paragraphs describe the relationship between nutrition and health. In the middle of the paragraph, however, there is a sentence that states that Linus Pauling was invited to the White House by President Kennedy for a celebration of many Nobel laureates and that he danced with Mrs. Kennedy at the party. Such a sentence may have affected the second language readers in their attempts at constructing meaning from what seems to be a relatively difficult text. The sentence presents information that is perhaps interesting but is not as likely to be readily understood by young people living in the 21st century in Korea to whom the names Kennedy and White House may not have readily made sense. I am proposing that these readers may have felt confused by these seductive detail sentences that were adding new information that interfered with the task of making sense of a rather difficult text. The same would not be true of the interesting elaboration sentences because these were designed to add clarification and explanation to each paragraph, resulting in a more coherent text than would be true for the seductive detail group. For the same paragraph, the interesting elaboration sentence states that Linus Pauling continued to give lectures and to publish several books on the newly emerging science of diet and health. This sentence fits in well with the points that are elaborated in the next paragraphs.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The role of interest in reading comprehension has been surprisingly controversial in the L1 literature. Researchers have debated the seductive detail effect, reporting findings in support (e.g., Garner, et al., 1989; Garner, et al., 1991; Harp & Mayer, 1998; Mayer, et al., 2001; Schraw, 1998; Wade & Adams, 1990; Wade, et al., 1993) or providing a critique of this literature (Goetz & Sadoski, 1995). I set out to investigate what would happen when L2 readers were provided texts that represented different kinds of text-based interest. In addition to a seductive detail version, I asked Korean college students learning English to read texts that had interesting elaborations, and compared both of these elaborated texts with a baseline version. Measures of the students' comprehension of the texts included a score based on their free recall of those ideas that were the same in all three versions of the text, the common idea score, as well as their responses to open-ended, short-answer questions asking them to provide the main idea of a text segment and to answer questions about specific details.

Generally, these learners performed better if they read the unelaborated (baseline) version of the text than if they read either the seductive detail version or the interesting elaboration version. The performance of the students reading the baseline text was always higher than that of the students reading the seductive details text, and it was significantly so for the measure of common ideas and main ideas recalled. Apparently, seductive details had a strong negative effect on L2 readers' recall of ideas from text. Note that my design

included a between group comparison with some learners reading texts with seductive details and others reading texts without such details, a design recommendation made by Goetz and Sadoski (1995) in their critique of previous work on the seductive detail effect.

If I had compared only two types of texts, baseline and seductive details versions, in this study with these L2 readers, I would have concluded that the results confirmed past L1 research and that seductive details were harmful to L2 comprehension in the same ways as they have been hypothesized to work in L1 studies. However, the results were made more complex because of the comparison with the third text condition, the interesting elaboration group. Recall that *interesting elaborations*, a term coined for this study, were ideas that were highly interesting like seductive details but, unlike seductive details, were important relative to the main idea of a text. With the same high level of interestingness but different in their support of the main ideas, interesting elaborations were designed to support the main ideas of the text whereas seductive details were not. Accordingly, I had expected that students who read the interesting elaborations text would recall more (especially main) ideas than those who read the baseline text.

Unexpectedly, however, the results indicated that interesting elaborations did not facilitate L2 readers' recall of text ideas. In fact, the students reading the baseline text recalled significantly more common ideas than the students reading the interesting elaborations text. I can speculate that students reading the interesting elaboration version may have experienced a greater memory load in information processing or more demands on attentional resources because they had 22% to 29% more idea units (or sentences) to be recalled. Because their overall recalls were slightly longer on average when compared to the baseline group, one can assume that the students chose to include some information represented in the interesting elaborations at the expense of some of the information represented in the common ideas.

However, interesting elaborations did not seem to harm L2 readers' performance on the other two recall measures, the short-answer questions for main idea and detail recall. The students in the interesting elaborations group performed equally as well as those in the baseline group, though not better. In this respect, interesting elaborations seemed distinct from seductive details in their role or function in L2 reading comprehension. Although the interesting elaborations did not benefit the college L2 readers' recall of text as compared with a baseline text without interesting elaborations, they were more helpful than seductive details in L2 recall for common ideas and main ideas.

There was evidence that these L2 readers seemed to be approaching the reading task they encountered in this study as a "memorize everything" you can't ask. In such a task, there is no difference between information that would be considered a main idea and information that seems to be an unimportant detail. If one has to memorize all the information presented, relative importance of the text should make no difference and, if anything, would be something a learner would have to resist. Thus, it is possible that these

L2 learners were showing the disadvantage that came from having to memorize a longer text when they were assigned to the two “interesting” versions.

Before accepting this explanation fully, however, I want to re-introduce the many distinctions I found between the interesting elaboration and the seductive detail conditions. The fact that the seductive detail text led to much poorer performance than the interesting elaboration text indicates that these L2 readers were sensitive to text characteristics over and above simply the length of the text. To distinguish between explanations of the results either as based simply on an approach to the task as memorization or as based in whether the information that is added to the text coherently embellishes its main points, future research should include a fourth condition, with the text made the same length as the “interesting” versions by having uninteresting and unimportant information added to it.

As for the individual difference characteristics of proficiency and gender, I was not surprised that men and women responded generally similarly to this task but I was puzzled that proficiency level did not interact with the different kinds of texts. I had expected that the difficulties caused by the seductive detail condition would be particularly evident for the low proficiency group when compared to the high proficiency students, and that the interesting elaborations text would be particularly helpful to the low proficiency students. Although there were clear main effects for proficiency on all dependent measures, there were no interaction effects. One reason I can offer is that it is possible that the students participating in this study did not differ enough on proficiency to show the kind of interaction effect I was expecting. Even though students were assigned to a high and low proficiency group, all of them could be considered as relatively competent English readers as indicated by the fact that they were enrolled in college courses and thus had all met the rigorous entrance requirements. In future research, it would be interesting to focus on how individual difference variables such as proficiency and gender might make a difference, by choosing materials that might polarize the interest effect for men and women and by choosing participants with a greater variety in L2 language or reading proficiency.

V. IMPLICATIONS

I want to consider the pedagogical implications of this study for the teaching of L2 reading and for the development of L2 text material. Teachers may be encouraged to remind their students that L2 reading should not be equated with memorizing the information in a text. Instead, teachers may need to guide students to be judicious about what needs to be learned from what they read, how to decide what is more and less important, and how to look for coherence in what they read. At the same time, teachers may need to be careful about how they test for reading comprehension so as not to reward straight memorization of the text. Second, the findings have implications for the development of EFL text materials. As much as text developers may be wanting to design

materials that are interesting to students, the results point to the need to consider carefully whether the interesting information that is added is coherently tied to the main message of the text. Even though details in a text are very interesting, they may not be of much help to the second language learners' reading comprehension development if the details confuse the readers in their ability to understand the main idea of a text. Interesting details introduced solely because they add spice to the text may actually burden the L2 reader who must then struggle to make holistic sense of the text.

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