

THE ANALYSIS OF ERRORS MADE BY STUDENTS OF GERMAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION

Dr. Abdullah Hameed Musa

Mr. Khalaf Khalid .M. A

Tikrit University / College of Education for women / Department of English

Abstract

This study aims at analyzing the errors made by the college students at certain levels and skills in English reading comprehension. The sample of the study consists of the second year college students, department of German, College of Languages, Baghdad University.

The researchers` hypothesis is that the students of German department made errors in English reading comprehension. A test was constructed on two unseen passages ; each passage was followed by twelve questions, and each question was followed by five multiple choice items

This study falls into five chapters. Chapter one, is an introduction, that contains the significance of the study, its problem, the limits of the current study, the sample, and the definition of some basic terms. Chapter two contains the theoretical literature review. Whereas chapter three is dedicated to the procedures of the study, chapter four checks the analyses of the results, with specific interpretation of the findings in this study. Eventually, in chapter five there are specific conclusions of which have been drawn, and the recommendations and suggestions which have been made in the light of the results.

Chapter ONE

1.1. The problem and its significance

It has been noticed that students of the Department of German, University of Baghdad rarely respond to those implied, inferential and critical meaning in their reading. This could partly be due to their habits of mouthing words in their native language from their early years of primary to secondary schools. Liebert and Marjori, (1979:137) mention that, because there is so much emphasis on learning new words, new idioms and new grammatical structures students can not enjoy reading. Norris (1979:190) considers reading word by word as not being reading at all. So students who cannot traffic with things grow to be no more than parrot readers, who read sentences and even paragraphs without going deep into the ideas expressed behind them. Rivers (1986:215) considers enunciating as one aspect of reading, but that does not mean that foreign language students should be only trained in this skill. They have to get meaning from them. They should familiarize themselves with the code of the foreign language as they know it in their own language. Hill (1965:277) describes a good reader as the only one who enjoys reading and knows how to make use of what he has read. Al-Rufai (1977:49) in an investigation, points out that Iraqi students rarely read thoughts and extract meaning out of what they read and they lack the experience to react, and extract from, literary genres. Jenkinson (1974:11) also suggests that what is mostly retained in the mind is that which has been experienced. The mind as Thorndike (1917:329) puts it " must be selected, repressed softened, emphasized, correlated and organized, all under the influence of the right mental set of purpose or demands ".

Reading comprehension demands understanding the implied and inferential meaning. Burton (1965:133) regards inferences

beyond the literal as very essential to efficient reading. Hillocks (1971:210) writes that if a reader can not comprehend the implied meaning of a work, the significance of that work will be lost to him.

The problem of reading comprehension which can be solved, is the lack of describing and explaining in detail what is meant by reading in general and reading skills in particular. The sorting out of levels and skills are meant to be an end that leads to a fuller understanding (Smith and others, 1970:281).

Due to the foregoing details of the problem, the researchers' attention was drawn to see what levels of English reading comprehension of the second year students, Department of German, College of Languages, University of Baghdad are able to attain.

1.2. Aim of the Study

This study aims at analyzing errors made by students of the German Department in English reading comprehension at certain levels and language skills.

1.3. Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that students of German Department made errors in English reading comprehension.

1.4. Procedures

To fulfill the aim of this study, the following steps are to be followed:

1. Selecting the sample of students from the 2nd year students, German Department, College of Languages, University of Baghdad.
2. Constructing a test and achieving its validity and reliability.

3. Conducting a pilot study.
4. Adopting the statistical means to analyze the results of test.
5. Getting the scoring scheme.

1.5. Limits of the Study

The present study is limited to:

1. The first six reading passages that are taken from the textbook Developing Skills by L.G. Alexander.
2. The sample of the study is restricted to the 2nd year students, German Department, College of Languages, University of Baghdad during the academic year 2006/2007.

1.6. Value of the Study

This study has a theoretical and practical value. From a theoretical point of view, it is believed that this study will be a contribution towards improving both recognition and production parts. It is also believed that

the study has some practical significance in its finding, which will be valuable to both students and teachers of German as a foreign Language and to those who are interested in teaching and learning requirements a part from being valuable to textbook writers and designers.

1.7. Definition of Basic Terms

Analysis: The investigating in order to learn about something (Hornby, 1982:29).

Error: It is a word, a grammatical item, a speech act, etc., in a way which a fluent or native speaker of the language regards as showing

faulty or incomplete learning (Richards and others, 1992:127).Brown, 1992:847) considers error as something done incorrectly because of ignorance.

Reading: The skill of recognizing and understanding written language in the form of sequences of graphic signs and its transformation into meaningful speed either as silent comprehension or by reading aloud (Hartmann and Stork, 1976:192).

Comprehension:

The act or ability of understanding spoken or written text (Davies et al, 1999:28).

Or the act, fact or faculty of understanding of writing or speech by mental grasp (Brown, 199:463).

Chapter Two

2.1. Theoretical Literature Review

Reading is a pivotal skill that provides ideas and information conveyed explicitly or implicitly in a written language. Thorndike (1917:323) regards reading as " thinking". Gray (1963) specifies reading as a form of experience that modifies personality. Strang (1972:67) considers reading as the royal road to knowledge. Strevens (1977:116) regards reading an important skill, since it is a means to approaching limitless experiences of the language. Kohl (1975:17) believes that good readers are often good citizens. Reading broadens the mind and widens the horizon, so it produces citizens who are well-informed and properly trained in all walks of life. A reader who reads efficiently is the one who winnows out the chaff of his responses and retains the kernel that is relevant to the context of a work (Hillocks, 1971:176).

Flesh (1955:110) defines reading as getting the meaning of words formed by letters on a printed page and nothing else. This, of

course, clearly refers to the beginning stage of reading. While Gates (1949:3) states that reading is not a simple mechanical skill ; nor is it a narrow scholastic tool. Researchers have proved that reading for meaning could start with very young people (McConaughy, 1980:157) and (Carr, 1983:518). The definition of Bond and Wanger (1960:4) is similar to Gates`s definition in its comprising of the ability to comprehend, to interpret and to evaluate the printed or written page. Finally Lado (1964:132) defines reading a foreign language as grasping language pattern from their written representation. Yet reading is considered as the foremost of the language process through which an access to the universe of thought is gained (Leferrr, 1964:196).

2.2. Levels of Reading Comprehension

As true reading deals with comprehension, comprehension forms the essence of all reading. Gates (1949:3) adds that reading comprises of highly complex abilities that are not easily detected and observed. Herber (1970:62) who categorizes reading comprehension into three levels. Mangieri et al (1982:65) confirm that their efforts have made the idea of looking at comprehension on three levels quite popular. Russell (1971:456) proposes another variation of levels when he suggests four levels of comprehension:

- 1.word identification
- 2.casual skimming
- 3.reading for exact/literal meaning, and,
- 4.creative reading.

Table (1)

Levels of Reading Deduced from Reading Literature

Author	Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
Barrett	Literal	Inferential	Evaluative	Appreciative
Durkin	Literal	Interpretive	Critical	-----
Herber	Literal	Interpretive	Applied	-----
Ruddell	Literal	Interpretive	Applicative	-----
Smith	Literal	Interpretive	Critical	Creative

Russell (1961:456)

2.3. Reading Comprehension Skills

Reading specialists have attempted to describe the process of reading comprehension as a big umbrella that covers skills that are requisite to make the ability to comprehend what is read. It is further believed that this process can be broken down into teachable components that facilitate the process of comprehension. Davis (1949:186) identifies nine skills:

- 1.knowledge of word meaning.
- 2.Ability to select the appropriate meaning for a word or phrase in the light of a particular contextual setting.
- 3.Ability to follow the organization of passage and to identify antecedents and references in it.
- 4.Ability to identify the main thought of a passage.
- 5.Ability to answer questions that are answered in a passage.
- 6.Ability to answer questions that are specifically answered in a passage.
7. Ability to draw inferences from a passage about its contents.
8. Ability to recognize the literary devices in a passage and to determine its tone and mood.

9.Ability to determine a writer's purpose, intention and point of view ; i.e., to draw inferences about a writer.

Logan and Others (1972:373) identify skills within the literal and interpretation (inferential) levels.The literal level of comprehension involves:

- 1.Getting the main idea.
- 2.Recalling or recognizing details.
- 3.Identifying things mentioned most frequently.
- 4.Checking to understand the appropriate meaning.

The following table indicates the specification of levels.

Table (2)
Table of Specification

Literal Level	Inferential Level	Critical Level
1. Recognizing the detail	1.Reasoning cause & effect	1.Praphrasing or restating what the author as written
2. Getting the main idea	2.Anticipating outcome	2.Recognizing author's purposes
3.Identifying thing mentioned more frequently	3.Making Generalization	3.Forming judgment
-----	4.Discovering new relationship	4.Recognizing literary devices such as humor, irony,etc.
-----	5.Checking to understand the appropriate meaning	

Logan and Logan (1972:372)

2.4. Some of Previous studies

It would be enlightening to mention that some researchers do not confine themselves to test, but they extend the range to what will help, or contribute to the present study.

2.4.1. Al-Rawi (1972)

The study aims at measuring reading comprehension for secondary school for girls. The test consists of three groups of skills: Basic Comprehension Group, Structure and Lexicon Group and Critical Reading Group. It contained (45) items. Each item is followed by three-multiple choice options from which the student can choose the best.

The test yielded one score which indicates the over-all level of comprehension which was operationally defined by the list of accepted objectives.

2.4.2. Al-Kubaisi (1993)

The study aims at identifying:

1. the reading strategies that are used by English foreign language students at the College of Education of Baghdad University,
2. the differences and similarities in reading strategies among the efficient readers of the four college stages,
3. the differences and similarities in reading strategies among the inefficient readers of the four stages, and
4. the differences and similarities in reading strategies among efficient readers in each stage ;

It is hypothesized that, there is significant improvement in reading among senior students as compared to their junior

colleagues of the department of English of the four colleges stage at the College of Education of Baghdad University.

The results of the analysis of data revealed that:

1. There is gradual improvement across the four stages in using efficient strategies and in avoiding inefficient ones by efficient readers except in two cases.
2. Efficient readers are better than inefficient ones in using efficient strategies and in avoiding inefficient one.

2.4.3. Al-Rifai (1994)

The study aims at identifying and cementing the relationship between type and reading English of 4th year college students. The sample of the study consists of 100 4th year students who have been chosen from the Department of English in the College of Education and College of Languages, University of Baghdad.

The results revealed that:

1. There are no statistically significant differences in the 4th year English college students achievement in reading comprehension regarding the type of the text used.
2. Fourth year college students are generally poor in comprehension.

2.4.4. Ahmed (2005)

The study aimed at investigating the impact of using the reading comprehension activity in developing the thinking of Syrian students of English.

The population of the study was all the students of the 3rd year Department of English, College of Education, Damascus University. The sample of the study was two sections out of five sections chosen randomly. There were (35) students in each section.

The results indicate that the experimental group is more able to comprehend of reading comprehension activity.

2.5. Discussion of Some of the Previous studies

After reviewing the previous studies, it is found that they correspond with the present study in some points and do not do so with others, as the following shows:

1. The present study corresponds with Ahmed`s study (2005) in using the reading comprehension technique, and to find out its effect.
2. Ahmed`s (2005) corresponds with the present study in its sample who are college students.
3. Ahmed`s Study (2005) seems to be the nearest to the current study in its sample and its procedures.

Chapter Three

3.1. Introductory Note

This chapter outlines the steps and procedures followed in carrying out the plan of the study. More specifically, the chapter is intended to shed light on the following points:

- 1- The population and the sample of all the students who are studying at the department of German, College of languages, where the total number of the population is 380.
- 2- The steps of ensuring face validity of the questionnaire.
- 3- The steps of ascertaining reliability through using test-re-test and Pearson`s reliability test.
- 4- The final administration of the questionnaire.
- 5- The types of statistical procedures used in fulfilling the objectives of the present study.

3.2. Population and Sample

The population of the current study involves the entire German Language Department's students, who are (350) students, while the sample was restricted to the 2nd year student, College of Languages, University of Baghdad.

3.3. The Material

The selection of the material is considered to be the most essential step for planning the test. Brown (1993:35) points out that the first test task in construction a test is to decide what is to be tested. The material in the test is selected after a close study of the kind of reading material the students covered and their sufficiency of content is achieved by determining the sample, provided that it represents the universe that is supposed to represent (Gronlund 1980:107). The material of this study was the first six reading comprehension passages taken from the textbook *Developing Skills* by L.G.Alexender (1970).

3.4. Test Construction

Two reading comprehension passages are selected on the ground that they contained the levels of reading comprehension. The researchers have been after this goal, and the way is paved for constructing the items in accordance with the levels and skills, literal, inferential and critical skills. Each passage was followed by (12) multiple-choice items and each item measures a skill.

3.5. Statistical Means

The following statistical tools are used:

1. Percentage is used for the sake of generalizing the results.
2. Z-test formula for the sake of comparing results and showing the statistical differences among percentages.

3. Chi-square is used to compare the agreeable and disagreeable responses to the expert on the test. Pearson Correlation Coefficient Formula is used to calculate the reliability coefficient of the test.

Chapter Four

4.1.Introductory Note

This chapter is devoted to the presentation and discussion of the results of the test, which the researchers have attained in the light of the specified objectives.

4.2. Analysis of Data

The aim of this study is to find out what levels 2nd year college students, Department of German, have achieved in comprehending a piece of prose and what sub skills they do as well. Table (3) offers the percentages of the correct answers (item difficulty) which throws light on questions (levels) that the students are or are not able to answer. The test includes twelve items that measure twelve different skills.

Table (3)
The Fluctuation in Percentage of the Correct Answer
and the Mean Value

Levels	No of Items	Skills	Correct Answers	%	Wrong Answers	%	Mean Value %
Literal	1	More frequently Mentioned thing	61	30.54	35	36.46	
	2	Getting the main idea	47	48.95	49	51	53.67
	3	Finding significant details	46	47.91	50	52	
Inferential	4	Reasoning cause and effect	58	60.41	38	39.58	
	5	Anticipating outcome	36	37.5	60	62.5	
	6	Drawing inferences	34	35.41	62	64.58	
	7	Discovering new relationship	27	28.12	69	71.87	36
	8	Picking out the appropriate meaning	19	19.79	77	80	
Critical	9	Summary of what the author has written	31	32.29	62	67	
	10	Recognizing the author's purpose	27	22.12	69	71.87	
	11	Forming judgment	19	19.79	77	80	31
	12	Recognizing literary devices such as humor	12	12.5	84	87.5	

Generally speaking, the sub skills are rather easy at the beginning and tend to be much more difficult gradually. Accordingly, the students' scores are different within the sub skills that make the three levels of comprehension. This indicates that the items test different skills.

To have a close look at the list of sub skills, the researchers find that the easiest (the straightforward) has received the highest number of correct answers, while the lowest correct answers are the hardest (inferential and critical) answers. At the literal level the items within it test different sub skills, since the differences more frequently mentioned receive 63.54 % and rank higher than the two on the literal level. The second item No.3 receives 47.91 %. It has been noticed that there is no appreciable difference between the two sub skills.

The sub skills from four to eight range between fairly difficult and rather difficult according to the shades of meaning they convey. Sub skill No.4, which is reasoning the anticipation of outcome receives 37.5%. Sub skill No.6, which asks about drawing inference, receives 35.41%. Sub skill No 7, which is discovering new relationship, receives 28.12%, and sub skills No.8 registers 19.79%. Sub skills No.9,10, 11, and 12 which formulate the critical level are proved to be more difficult than the literal and the inferential levels because they require higher thinking. Critical reading as Greenwood (1981:83) described it is a manipulative thinking process that demands reconstruction in the mind to build up the meaning the writer led his reader to. Hence, one might easily expect differences in the percentage of correct answers. The sub skills within this level obviously deal with giving summary of what the author has written, recognizing literary devices such as that of humor or irony. They register 32.29%, 28.12%, 19.79% and 12.5% respectively.

The impression by the foregoing analysis is that the 2nd year college students, Department of Germany, taking part in this investigation strikingly illustrated their highest performance on literal level as the percentage of the skills within it ere 63.54%, 48.95% and

45.91% respectively. Clearly, the students achieve best performance on the literal level which registers the highest mean value (53.67). Whereas at the inferential level, the percentage ranged from 60.41% to 19.79% in accordance with the shade of the inferential meaning they are supposed to convey, whether fairly difficult or rather difficulty. This level registers the mean value of (36).

To conclude, best performance is recorded that some students can answer questions which ask about explicitly expressed ideas on papers. At the same time, 36.40% of the same students can not achieve this level of comprehension which gives the impression that a good percentage of students are bad readers, whereas 87.5% of the students failed to answer sub skill no.12 which asks about literary devices such as those of humor and irony. Thus, the problem which reading comprehension poses is the students` complete inability to answer the inferential and critical items. The mean value of the inferential and the critical levels record (36) and (31) respectively which are not much. This lack of comprehension seems due to the following: The students ` lack of training in the area of comprehension in general and inferential and critical levels in particular. It is of necessity then to supplement the practice in getting the inferential and critical meaning that will be most beneficial to the college students to achieve success.

Chapter Five

5.1. Conclusions

In the light of results of the test, the following conclusions are arrived at:

1. Results have indicated that students, regardless of their level, have somewhat been directed towards absorbing the training mostly of the literal information. This is so, since the items directed at literal comprehension are answered fairly better than items directed at inferential and critical ones.
2. Inferential and critical skills are not focused upon in the first year.
3. The study, also indicates that students are incapable of answering questions that demand further advanced thinking like recognizing literary devices, such as that of humor and passing judgment, because 12.5% of the answers were only correct.
4. Teaching the textbook *Developing Skills* appeared to be primarily aimed at the communicating of events, rather than as an active exploration through varied levels and skills of comprehension. For instance, the percentages recorded on discovering new relationship, picking out the appropriate meaning were 28.12, 19.79% respectively. Besides, literal and factual skills asked more frequently than those of inferential and critical ones, as the literal skills recorded 63.54%, 48.95%, and 74.91% respectively.

5.2 Recommendations

In the light of these conclusions,, the study recommends the following:

1. If different kinds of levels and skills of comprehension are emphasized, college students will be able to pass judgment and draw conclusions, and they will be distinguished as open-minded and perhaps more ready for teaching secondary school pupils the level and skills of comprehension.
2. A course in reading comprehension which focuses on the levels and skills of comprehension should be made available.
3. A course in training for the 4th year, the prospective teacher, on teaching reading comprehension should be available. The training should be geared largely to the production of teachers who were effective in teaching reading as well as other subjects.
4. A standardized test should be constructed to test reading comprehension of the college students so as to compare any test against the aforementioned test to be just like a criterion.
5. Reading skill as a whole should receive enough emphasis and attention at college levels.
6. Improvement of student` reading strategies should be focused on.

5.3. Suggestions for Further Studies

The following topics can be suggested for further studies:

1. Studies are required for the 3rd and 4th year college students. German Department to investigate their ability in comprehending written material prescribed for the course.
- 2.A study is needed to find out the effect of the prepared techniques on students` oral reading comprehension and speed.

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة على تحليل الأخطاء التي يقع بها طلبة الجامعات في مهارة القراءة للغة الأنكليزية. تتألف عينة الدراسة من طلاب المرحلة الثانية لقسم اللغة الألمانية في كلية اللغات جامعة بغداد أفترض الباحث بأن طلبة قسم اللغة الألمانية في كلية اللغات يقعون في أخطاء عند قراتهم لمهارة القراءة للغة الأنكليزية.

اعتمد الباحثان على بناء الاختبار الذي يتألف من قطعتان لم يطلع عليهما الطلبة من قبل، وتتبع كل قطعة اثنا عشر سؤالاً، وكل سؤال يتضمن خمسة اختيارات وان اختياراً واحداً منها يحتوي على الأجابة الصحيحة. تقع الدراسة في خمسة فصول. الفصل الأول يشمل المقدمة، التي تتضمن اهمية الدراسة، مشكلتها، حدودها وتعريف المصطلحات الأساسية. الفصل الثاني يتضمن المراجعة الادبية والنظرية. بينما يشمل الفصل الثالث على الإجراءات. وتحليلات النتائج شملها الفصل الرابع، واخيراً يشمل الفصل الخامس على الخاتمة والتوصيات والأقتراحات طبقاً لنتائج الدراسة. وفي نهاية البحث تقع المصادر الأساسية التي أعتمدها الباحثان.