
The Effect of Gender Base Materials on Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

As it is true for other three language skills, reading is a process involving the activation of relevant knowledge and related language skills to accomplish an exchange of information from one person to another. Reading requires that the reader focus attention on the reading materials and integrate previously acquired knowledge and skills to comprehend what someone else has written. There have been a lot of researches on reading and reading comprehension. One of the most interesting areas in reading comprehension is related to schemata theory. This interesting line of research in the second language area concerns the effect on reading performance of readers' own internalized models or emotions and beliefs, consequently different internalized models or schemata, males will have greater comprehension achievement if they read the text which sound masculine and females will have greater comprehension achievement provided that they read text which are about feminine topics.

Having a look at the revised pre-university English course book, we can truly recognize that nearly all of the text in this book with the topics such as sports and exercise (with a picture of man in running), global warming and man and space (with a picture of man in the space) are male oriented. Based on the result of previous researches on reading comprehension, this paper suggests:

- Including balance of reading material, one half male oriented and one half female oriented;

- including topics such as space ,war ,competition ,sports for males ;
- including topics such as house chores ,humanities and baby sittings for females in high school levels of English course book;

That both male and female have the equal chance to activate their pre-existent knowledge to comprehend the text.

Key terms: schema, Gender, Reading Comprehension.

Introduction

Receptive skills are the way in which people extract meaning from the discourse they see or hear. When we read a story or a newspaper, listen to the news ,or take part in conversation we employ our previous knowledge as we approach the process of comprehension , and we deploy a range of receptive skills; which ones we use will be determined by our reading or listening purpose. Sometimes erroneously called a passive skill because the reader does not produce message in the same sense as a speaker or writer, reading nevertheless requires active mental processing for communication to accrue. It means that understanding a piece of discourse involves much more than just knowing the language. In order to make sense of any text we need to have " pre-existent knowledge of the world' (Cook 1989:69) .such knowledge is often referred to as schema (plural schemata) .Current learning theory holds that the brain organize its information into related schemata.

Anderson (1980, p.120) defines a schema as "large, complex units of objects, classes of events and types of people," The brain not only receives and /or generate information; it assembles it into organized and interrelated units. It is not only stores information, it is also arranges it so that it will be available for retrieval. Schemata that reflect typical sequence of action are often referred to as script. Each of us carries in our heads mental representation of typical situation that we come across. When we are stimulated by particular words, discourse patterns, or context, such schematic knowledge is activated and we are able to recognize what we see or hear because it fits into pattern that we already know. When we see a written text our schematic knowledge may first tell us what kind of text we are dealing with. Thus if we recognize as extract as coming from a novel we will have expectation about kind of text we are going to read. These will be different from expectation aroused if we recognize a piece of text as coming from an instruction manual. Knowing what kind of a text we are dealing with allows us to predict the form it may take at the text, paragraph, and sentence level, as we read, to predict what is coming next, Shared schemata make both spoken and written communication efficient. Without the right kind of pre-existing knowledge, comprehension becomes much more difficult.

And that is the problem for some foreign language learner who, because they have a different shared knowledge of cultural reference and discourse patterning in their own language and culture from that in the English variety they are dealing with, have to work doubly hard to understand what they see. As it mentioned, when we read a text we bring the information and

pre-existent knowledge into the printed word. It goes without saying that since male and female have different emotion, needs, desire and knowledge they have different schemata. Therefore, a text which is masculine in nature, that is it is about a topic which is a favorite of male, will activate the schemata of male more than a female and vice-versa. A content schema is knowledge relative to the content domain of the reading passage that the reader brings to text.

In the examining the effect of content schemata in the second language reading process, researcher often manipulate the passage content and have subject process each different passages. The subjects might answer basic comprehension question or inferential questions, write recalls or summaries, perform oral think- aloud recall and more. Any differences in these measures of comprehension are connected to the direct manipulation of content and reader existing of knowledge of that content.

Most of the research on content schemata has focused on the acquisition of English as a second language (ESL), and researchers often utilize two groups of participants: native English speaker and international students. With two passages about an Indian wedding and American wedding Steffensen, Joag-dev and Anderson (1979) reported that participants read the native culture content oriented passage faster and recalled a large amount of information from the native passage. They calculated that difference in existing knowledge about content of text material may be an important source of individual differences in reading comprehension.

With Iranian students studying ESL in the United State and a group of American students ,Johnson (1981),manipulated passage content (authentic folktales) while maintaining constant passage form ,or organization structure of the texts , to determine whether the level of language complexity of the text had greater influence on reading comprehension than the cultural origin of the text. The result showed that members of each cultural group comprehend more of the content from culturally familiar text than did non-members of the cultural group. With students of Muslims background and Roman Catholic background, Carrel (1987) utilized historical biographies of little –known personages from both religious denominations to explore the interaction of form and content knowledge at the influence comprehension. She concluded that when both content and rhetorical forms are variable in ESL reading comprehension, content is generally important than form. Each studies reviewed, manipulated the content of the passage in order to illustrate that reading is a content specific activity. These students provided empirical support for hypothesis that content schemata, as seen as culturally familiar and unfamiliar content influence first and second language reading comprehension. Some researches on the effects of topic knowledge in listening have revealed similar result of the L2 reading studies. With Australian English native listener and nonnative listener, Tyler (2001) suggest that nonnative rely more than native on topic knowledge in listening comprehension. In another study on L2 listening, Bacon (1992) examined the relationship among gender, comprehension, processing strategies and cognitive effective response with students studying Spanish. She found that men and women reported using different listening strategies, yet she found no major differences in listening comprehension levels of males and females with different topics.

Utilizing different content passage with reader from different gender adds intriguing dimension to the research on content schema. Hyde and Linn (1988) contended that the lower scores of women in the United States on the language part of the American Scholastic Aptitudes test (SAT) were mainly attributed to changes in the content of the reading of the test. This claim was in line with research that supported the assertion that in college-level achievement test successful reading is related to the passage topic from which exam questions are developed. In a study on gender differences in achievement test performance at the college level, Doolite and Welch (1989) found notable gender differences for items associated with specific passages, reporting that female scored higher than male with humanities-oriented reading passage. In a study of gender difference in L2 reading comprehension in the Netherlands, Bugel and Buul (1996) found that the topic of text is an important factor explaining gender-based differences among scores obtained on the reading part of the national foreign language examination.

Males scored significant better on the multiple choice comprehension items for essay about laser thermometers, volcanoes, cars, and football player. Female achieved significantly higher scores on the comprehension tests for essay on text topics such as midwives, a sad story, and a housewife's dilemma.

Discussion

Instructors know that students have been uncultured in society through a particular set of circumstances and experiences that form part of their existing cognitive domain, the result of some researches clearly demonstrate that male or female learners at high level of instruction are not familiar with the subject matter at the text. It is obvious that these direct relationship between the activation of schemata and reading comprehension. The more schemata are activated, the higher the reading comprehension achievement will be. When a female student reads a text which is masculine or neutral, her schemata will be activated little if any, so she will have comprehension about the topic, and on the other hand, if a male student read a text which is feminine, his schemata will be activated poorly; therefore he will grasp the text poorly.

Conclusion

Reading is an active process that involves complex, interactive variables. This article serves to provide the foundation for further discussion of the corresponding implication for instruction and program evaluation of the intermediate level.

Given the role of reader's gender and gender-oriented passage content in second language reading, the following suggestion for reading instruction is offered.

Selection of reading material is important. Selecting authentic texts for the intermediate levels of instruction should not simply be a matter of examining text difficulty aspects that are based on linguistic features.

Familiarity or unfamiliarity of subject matter should also be considered: that is, having a glance at the revised pre-university English course book, we can recognize that most of

materials in this book are male oriented , so the comprehension of these topics will be more difficult for female than male because of little activation of their schemata about these topics. The present article suggests including a balance of reading materials, both male-oriented and female-oriented, in the high school levels Iranian classes.

Overall ,this article believes that at the high school levels of instruction ,it may not only be the Persian language that hinder successful 2 reading comprehension of authentic text but rather it may be the topic of the text.

Passage content clearly influence how well male and female readers process meaning of real text at high school levels; therefore , the curriculum designer should include materials in English course books which activate she students' schemata to connect the already acquired information with information in the new text.

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