

# Reading Stamina in EFL

YAMAMOTO, Akio

When you want to master English as a foreign language, you might be told to learn a lot of English words and rules of grammar. It is true, but is it enough? Knowing those words and rules is different from using them. The former is knowing *that* and the latter is knowing *how*. What we learn by heart is easily forgettable, but what we practice repeatedly and use in real settings is not, just like riding a bike and skiing. When you use English, a skill called stamina would be important other than the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, just as we need one when we play sports and other activities. This paper introduces a new skill of reading English called reading stamina. It will be a skill indispensable for reading English extensively.

Keywords: EFL, Extensive reading, Reading stamina

## **1. Learning words and grammar first or reading books extensively from the beginning**

A lot of successful learners of English have said that reading English extensively is one of the most effective ways to master English (Yamamoto, 2007a). However it is not so easy that many people have struggled mastering English. A lot of learners of English as a foreign language (or EFL) may believe that they have to learn many words and rules of grammar before they can read English well. Learning many words and rules of grammar is another difficult issue, which makes the learners feel more difficult to read English extensively.

Is it true that those who know a lot of English words and grammar can read English well? There are quite a few EFL learners who have a lot of knowledge of English words and grammar but cannot read English well. Yamamoto (2003) shows that 12<sup>th</sup> graders who want to go to university have difficulty in reading English stories of a junior high school textbook. They are supposed to know more than 3,000 English words or more, but they feel it hard to read 1,000-words-or-fewer-level English passages. Why do such intermediate learners have difficulty in reading elementary level stories?

## **2. Knowing *that* and knowing *how***

Ryle<sup>1</sup> (1949) distinguishes two different types of knowledge: knowing *that* and knowing *how*. The former is just knowing what is knife in German ('Messer') or knowing the states of England.

Knowing *how* is to know the way of doing. For example, knowing *how* is playing one of the musical instruments or fishing. You are to master these types of activities. Skillfulness is required.

Ryle reminds us of the importance of knowing *how*. Theorists have done with knowing *that*, but have paid little attention to what is knowing *how*. However, people in ordinary life believe that knowing *how* is more important than knowing *that*.

Theorists have been preoccupied with the task of investigating the nature, the source and the credentials of the theories that we adopt that they have for the most part ignored the question what it is for someone to know how to perform tasks. In ordinary life, on the contrary, as well as in the special business of teaching, we are much more concerned with people's competencies than with their cognitive repertoires, with the operations than with the truths that they learn. (Ryle, 1949: 28)

Of course knowing *that* is based on knowing *that*. What is important is not how much the size of knowledge is but how useful the knowledge we possess is in the real world.

A man knowing little or nothing of medical science could not be a good surgeon, but excellent at surgery is not the same thing as knowledge of medical science; nor is it a simple product of it. The surgeon must indeed have learned from instruction, or by his own inductions and observations, a great number of truths; but must also have learned by practice a great number of aptitudes. (Ryle, 1949: 49)

The dichotomy of knowing *that* and knowing *how* has been succeeded in various fields such as computer science and psychology. In the following chapters we will have a glance of those successes.

### **3. Declarative Knowledge and Procedural Knowledge**

In the field of psychology, there is the same dichotomy between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge. The former is the knowledge that a bicycle has two wheels. Declarative knowledge is easy to explain with words. On the contrary, a skill to ride a bicycle is categorized into procedural knowledge. It is much more difficult to explain with words than declarative knowledge.

The study of memory also has the dichotomy between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge. Declarative knowledge had been studied mostly in the research of short-term memory

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<sup>1</sup>Ryle, Gilbert (1900–1976) was the Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy at Oxford University from 1947 to 1971.

and long-term memory. Procedural knowledge has been studied in the research of working memory. Working memory is considered to help people do two or more tasks at the same time such as reading.

In the research of artificial intelligence, the dichotomy between the two types of knowledge has been discussed as declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge. The former is to give someone a problem such as "Tokyo is the capital of Japan." The latter is to program a proper computer to do a certain task in a limited situation. One in declarative knowledge has general versatility and procedural knowledge lacks versatility. However, the latter is suitable for practical use in a proper situation.

*Deep Blue*<sup>2</sup>, which beat the world champion of chess, was one of the most successful computers in the type of declarative knowledge. *Deep Blue* had a vast amount of data of moves in chess and found the best move in almost every situation in chess. All the information had to be prepared in advance. The knowledge *Deep Blue* possessed was also categorized into procedural knowledge because they were the data of strategic patterns of moving chess to win.

*Genghis*<sup>3</sup>, the concept of which was applied in the exploration on Mars, is beyond declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge. *Genghis* had little data in it and a move is determined after the interaction with the environment around it (Brooks, 1999).

In reading, people perceive the words and structures of the sentences in the paragraphs of a story, recall the information of the words and structures in their mind, match the sounds and meanings of the words, and follow the story almost at the same time. There is a problem here. The knowledge of the words and structures in their minds and one in the story are not exactly the same, but just similar. The meanings of words are different in different contexts and if we use input-output idea in order to explain the process of reading, the readers have to deal with many sub-tasks of reading task at the same time. Moreover, they have to adjust the knowledge in their minds to match the meanings of words appearing in the story just like *Genghis* moving on a rough ground.

#### 4. Knowing *how* in EFL

In EFL situation, knowing *that* is collecting the meanings of words and structures. Reading and other skill activities will be categorized into knowing *how*. The latter is quite important, but it has seemed quite difficult to master such skills in a lecture-type class and it has been avoided in EFL classes of Japanese high schools. It is unfortunate that many learners and teachers believe that

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<sup>2</sup>*Deep Blue* was a computer that was made to play chess, developed by IBM. The IBM computer beat the world chess champion Garry Kasparov by two wins to one with three draws in a six-game match on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1997.

<sup>3</sup>Created by Brooks, Rodney A., who is a professor of Robotics at MIT.

English is a subject of learning by heart.

Japanese high school students are supposed to learn 3,000 words or more if they take part in the courses of English I, English II, Reading, and Writing, but in most cases they only know the meanings of those words or less. Knowing those words is different from using them. The former is knowing *that* and the latter is knowing *how*.

What we learn by heart is easily forgettable, but what we practice until we can do it automatically in various kinds of real settings is not. Those who have learned English at school may not remember the words and rules of English later, but if you use English in their daily lives in an English speaking country, the knowledge will be stored properly and will be useful later in life, just like riding a bike and skiing.

Reading English extensively may enable EFL learners to use English in real settings even for a classroom of non-English speaking country. The world in those books of graded readers is full of wonders. They will attract the EFL readers and let them read for a long period of time, which will enable the readers to enter the world of English without going to stay in an English speaking country.

## **5. Reading extensively and knowledge of information in English**

### **5.1 Learning words is not always first**

Reading English extensively is one thing and learning many words and rules of grammar is another. You do not have to have the knowledge of English when you read English. See pre-school children read a lot of picture books even though they do not know words. Even non-native pre-school children of English can enjoy reading English picture books. Some titles of the first stage of *Oxford Reading Tree (or ORT)*<sup>4</sup> do not have words but pictures. The next stage titles have one word on each page, then two, and then one sentence and then more. They read a lot of books and learn words gradually. Learning words is not always first.

Lack of concentration may be thought as another factor of discouraging people to read. It is true that some learners do not have a habit of reading and tend to lose concentration more easily than others, but there are some cures.

The thinner the books are, the more learners who have poor concentration can complete reading them easily in a short time. If you have twenty minutes, you can read more than ten ORT books. The repetition of achievement to read books will encourage EFL learners to read more.

Learners will start reading a book if the story is interesting. A variety of genre will help learners find their favorite choice. You can easily access thousands of titles in graded readers in English if

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<sup>4</sup>Graded Readers widely used to learn English at About 80% of elementary schools in Britain.

you have a well stocked library of graded readers at school.

### **5.2 Will extensive reading help us increase vocabulary?**

The number of research on extensive reading (or ER) show that ER may and may not help vocabulary development (Day & Bamford, 1998; Krashen, 2004). If you read English frequently, some words will appear repeatedly. Those words are not content words like nouns and verbs but function words like articles and prepositions. You may be able to learn a lot about the use of those function words, but the content words may appear only one or two times in the book. Day & Bamford (1998) indicate possible increase of sight vocabulary.

### **5.3 What will be developed through ER?**

Evaluating the effect of ER has three problems. The first is the length of practice of ER. Generally speaking, it takes a long term to know the effect of ER. The longer the term is, the more vague about the cause and effect relationship. The second is the problem of measuring. There has been no established measurement of ER. The third is the problem of effect itself. It seems ER will help EFL learners develop their English abilities, but what is developed in those abilities is unclear.

## **6. ER and reading stamina**

ER requires EFL learners to read English for a long time, which is not so difficult for them. ER may give them a kind of stamina to read English. It is called 'reading stamina (Yamamoto, 2007).'

'Reading stamina' is a skill of reading English at a constant speed of 100 words per minute (or WPM) or more for a long time. It is ideal that the reading time will be thirty minutes or more.

Reading stamina will be developed through ER. ER is thought to be one of the most effective way of developing reading stamina because EFL learners can keep doing it with less effort but with a lot of interest.

If the English passage consists of difficult words and structure, it will be more difficult to keep reading it. If the subject is difficult, it will be much more difficult to do so. If the sentences in the English passage are long, it will be more difficult to keep reading the passage. If the structures of sentences in the passage are difficult, it will be more difficult to keep reading it. When the amount of processing increases, you have to deal with a lot of information you face. If you ignore some of information that is not so important, you can reduce the burden and energy you have to use.

Graded readers will make a suitable environment for EFL learners. They will be able to enjoy reading English books and develop their reading stamina gradually like swimming in the beach (Yamamoto, 2007).

## 7. ER in Gakushuin Boys' Senior High School in 2008

Thanks to the rich environment at the library, Gakushuin Boys' Senior High School enables us to have ER classes in a regular curriculum. In 2008, about two hundred 11<sup>th</sup> graders have one class of ER and about 20 of them have two more hours a week for ER. They are expected to read more than 100 titles of ORT in April and to read 10,000 pages or more of English books a year. The experience of reading English extensively will develop the readers' stamina of reading, which will definitely help them read English faster and longer.

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