

Can the Cheetah Catch the Warthog? Reading stamina in EFL

YAMAMOTO, Akio

Abstract

This paper emphasizes the importance of stamina in the EFL context and makes an attempt to seek a way of doing research on 'reading stamina' in the future. First, we will give an overview of the present situation of reading class in Japan and learn that we might have underestimated stamina in EFL. Second, 'reading stamina' will be introduced. Third, the way to develop reading stamina will be proposed by clarifying the type of knowledge we need to have in EFL, claiming the efficacy of extensive reading, and presenting a modified model of Cummin's dual iceberg analogy. Finally, we will discuss what we have to examine in the research on reading stamina.

1. Introduction

The cheetah is faster over short distances than any other animal, running over 100 km/h. It seems quite difficult for other animals to outrun the wild hunter. In actuality, however, the warthog, a relative of pigs, can leave behind the hunter though the top speed of the warthog is only 60 km/h on the savannah, as fast as the horse. The hunter consumes a large amount of energy at one time using every muscle in the body and can only keep the high speed for 20 seconds at most. By contrast, the warthog can keep the top speed much longer like the horse because it has running stamina. It runs effectively and saves the energy. Therefore the warthog can have a clean escape from the cheetah if it notices the hunter approaching it.

Reading a difficult passage in English is just like a cheetah running. It consumes a lot of energy in the brain at that time and it will be difficult to keep reading for a long time. EFL learners wish they could read longer, but they also know that it is hard to read English for a longer period. They hesitate, give up reading during the process, or avoid reading all together. They need stamina in order to keep reading English for a long time as the warthog needs running stamina in order to leave behind the cheetah. The purpose of the present study is to emphasize the importance of stamina in the EFL context and to discuss what kinds of research we need to do in the future.

First, we will give an overview of the present situation of reading class in Japan and understand that we might have been underestimating stamina in EFL. Second, a concept called 'reading stamina' will be introduced. Third, the way to develop reading stamina will be proposed by clari-

fying the type of knowledge we need to have in EFL, showing the effect of extensive reading (ER), and presenting a modified model of Cummin's dual iceberg analogy. Finally, we will discuss what we have to examine in the research on reading stamina.

2. Present Situation of Reading Class in Japan

2.1. Grammar translation

In a class that uses a traditional grammar translation method, the students take hours to read some short passages of English and translate it into Japanese and the teacher takes another long time to give the explanation of it. The vocabulary that appears in the passages is very difficult, the sentence structures are intricate, and the content is quite abstruse, sometimes hard to understand even in Japanese. The more esoteric the passage is, the more likely the teacher wants to use it in class. It is largely believed that those who want to enter prestigious universities in Japan have to pass the exams that have translation tasks of difficult passages. The students read short passages by using all their intelligence as if the cheetah consumes its energy by running at a top speed at a time when it chases the prey.

It is true that we need to acquire intensive reading skills to translate difficult English passages into Japanese and interpret and understand it. However, a large number of EFL students also feel it is quite necessary to read English for a long period of time. Those Japanese students in high school and university who plan to go to English speaking countries to study will have to read a lot of English books for a limited period of time and feel discouraged to know how little reading ability they have in the beginning.

2.2. Scanning and skimming

There are some reading skills that assist the readers to read materials faster and correctly. Scanning is a skill to find what the reader wants to know in the passage quickly. The reader does not read every word but find some keywords to tell him or her the information. Scanning is often used when we consult a reference book, a dictionary or an encyclopedia. Skimming is a skill to grasp the gist or catch the drift in the passage. Running your eyes through the newspaper in the morning to know what happened yesterday is an example of skimming. Compared to scanning by which the reader has a purpose to find some information in the reading material, the reader does not have a clear purpose of reading the material but just want to know what is written there.

2.3. Rapid reading

Reading a passage in a limited time is called Speed Reading Practice or Rapid Reading. It is popular among EFL classes in order to raise the reading speed. The learners read a passage and

answer the comprehension questions about the story while the teacher keeps time. They extract the number of words per minute (WPM) by calculating the time they use for reading the passage and the number of words in it. The larger the WPM is, the better readers they are considered to be. However, Yamada (1984) says that the WPM of those who are not good at reading English as EFL is fewer than 100 WPM. They become faster readers with this speed reading practice. However, reading passages are usually about 100–400 words in the speed reading practice, which will not guarantee that you can keep the pace when you read passages that are ten times longer. Takanashi, Takahashi (1987, pp. 92–95) points out that those learners who may be able to read a passage of 300 words for two or three minutes may not be able to keep reading a story of 3,000 words for twenty or thirty minutes. How can these learners achieve at this level? One possibility would be “reading stamina.”

3. Reading Stamina

Reading stamina is a new concept of reading skill that has not been perceived and discussed well in the second language acquisition field as well as in the first language acquisition field. Yamamoto (2008) tentatively defines a reading skill as a skill that enables us to read a whole book or a number of passages continuously in one block of time, not a few paragraphs or a few passages. The target length of reading time would be half an hour or more. Quite a few EFL learners tend to lose concentration easily somewhere along the way when they try to read English for such a ‘long’ time because they have not experienced reading for that time in their regular English reading class.

How do we acquire reading stamina? The good amount of vocabulary and grammar knowledge for the reading materials would be consistent without doubt. However, there are many people who have a large amount of knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but cannot use them well while reading and hence cannot read well. They are considered to have less reading stamina. Quantity of knowledge is necessary, but it is not enough. The quality of knowledge should be taken into consideration.

There are two types of knowledge: knowing *that* and knowing *how* (Ryle, 1949). If you know what ‘cherry blossom’ is in Japanese, it is knowing *that*; the answer is ‘Sakura.’ If you can ride a bicycle, you know how the bicycle is manipulated and you master how to do it: It is knowing *how*. In psychology, there is a similar dichotomy; declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge. If EFL learners just have the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar and cannot use it properly, they seem only to have declarative knowledge, or knowing *that* of vocabulary and grammar. If they can use the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar while listening, reading, speaking, or writing, it means that they are supposed to have procedural knowledge, or knowing *how* of vocabulary and grammar. Therefore, to have reading stamina means that the learners possess enough

amount of procedural knowledge of vocabulary and grammar.

Knowing *how* is quite important in EFL as long as one of the goals is to use English properly, but it has seemed quite difficult to master knowing *how* in a lecture-type class and it has been avoided in EFL classes of Japanese high schools. Unfortunately many learners and teachers consider English as a school subject of learning by heart. It is knowing *that* that they can get by learning by heart. It is knowing *how* that we need to have in order to read long.

4. How Do We Develop Reading Stamina?

Stamina is required in any human action. What does it mean we have stamina? We need a type of strength, but the strength is not a strong power. Stamina needs persistence and efficiency. Simply stated, having stamina means using the energy that we possess economically and efficiently.

We may find some hints of developing reading stamina through the observation of physical exercises. Takahashi (2007, p. 18) says that low-impact, moderate, and daily aerobic exercise will enable us to build up our physical strength. One of the best ways to build up your strength for running a marathon is walking or light jogging. Too much burden is just painful and will lead to poor continuity. We do not seem to consume a lot of energy while reading, but brain activities consume more energy than we imagine. Ikuta says (2002, pp. 117–118) that the brain uses about 20% of bodily energy consumption in static conditions, and the amount of energy is as large as that of all the muscles in the body. Stamina must be essential in the workings of the brain as well as in those of the muscles. Light reading will equate to low-impact, moderate, and daily aerobic exercise for swimming or running.

Light reading utilizes attractive and interesting materials and has few unfamiliar words and structures. Therefore it does not require us to use a lot of energy consumption on the brain of the reader. Pictures may also help the readers grasp the content of the book and lure them into the story of the book. Accordingly they can keep reading it.

What will light reading provide the reader? Light reading may not guarantee the chance to learn a lot of new words or grammar. However, some skills will be developed so that the learners will improve their proficiency of the target language. Yamamoto (2008) hypothesizes that it is reading stamina that will be developed through extensive reading like light reading. If it is true, what part of proficiency of the target language will extensive reading develop?

One possibility would be the development of a bridge between Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) and the surface features in English as a foreign language (EFL). CUP is proficiency hypothesized by Jim Cummins in 1980, which underlies the first and second languages and is developed by experience with either language (Cummins, 1980 as cited in Baker, Colin and Hornberger, 2001). CUP, which was created against a model of bilingualism called the Separate

Underlying Proficiency (SUP) where L1 proficiency and L2 proficiency are separated and differentiate each other, is almost the same as Cognitive/academic language proficiency, which is considered to manipulate language in decontextualized academic situations.

Yamada (2006) believes that there should be a certain device that will turn CUP into the surface features of EFL and vice versa. He devises a new dual iceberg analogy (Figure 1 and Figure 2) and assumes that the input-output channel would play a role in connecting CUP to the surface features of each language. The input-output channel between the surface features and CUP is considered to be a bridge between the forms of language and the manipulation of language in decontextualized academic situations.

EFL learners may be able to learn the knowledge of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar without the channel. However, this kind of knowledge is a floating island that is described as the part 'a' in Figure 1. It will go away easily, slipping from the learner because this part is not connected to CUP. It will be categorized into knowing *that* that is acquired instantly. Experience shows that knowledge by cramming the night before the examination will not last long like a floating island. On the other hand, the part 'b' is connected to CUP because the Japanese language is used at every moment in their life and the Japanese input-output channel.

The connection between 'a' and 'b' will be developed by reading through the translation of English into Japanese. The translation work of English into Japanese tends to become cheetah running if the passage is difficult: you cannot read long just as a cheetah cannot run long. This connection is weak because the part 'a' is not connected to CUP.

In Figure 2, it has the English input-output channel as well as the Japanese input-output channel.

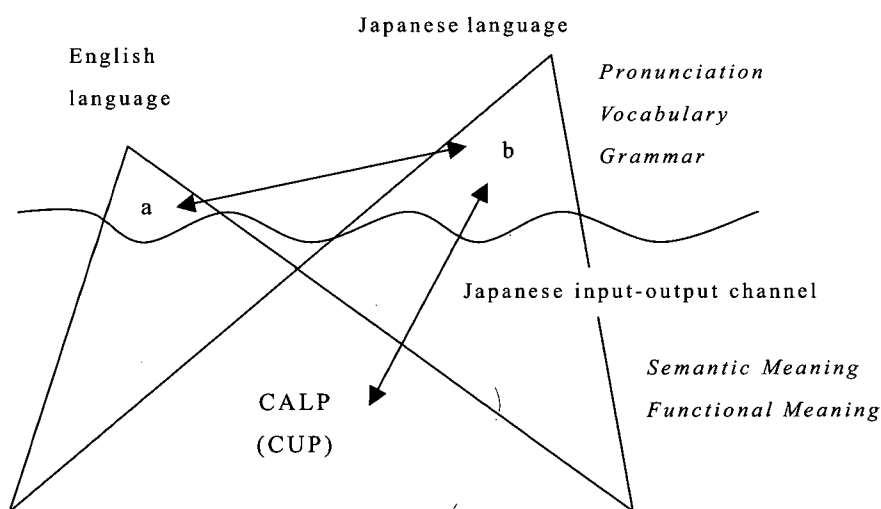


Figure 1 An iceberg analogy of bilingual of Japanese and English languages 1
(Modified and translated model of Yamada's (2006))

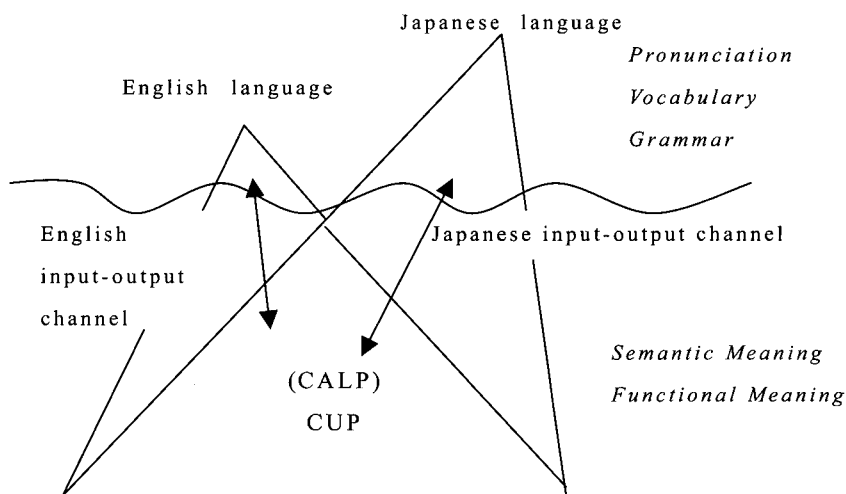


Figure 2 An iceberg analogy of bilingual of Japanese and English languages 2
(Modified and translated model of Yamada's (2006))

The English input-output channel would be considered the products of numerous repetition of the transformation of the forms and their meanings as we have done to build the Japanese input-output channel since we were born.

5. Repetition in ER may develop the channel

It is not an overstatement to say that repetition in learning a foreign language is indispensable. In EFL learning, drills of writing the spells of words and sentences are typical ways of practicing through repetition. Reading a story aloud hundreds of times is more effective on learning the words and expressions in the story as well as reading skills than reading it just a few times.

Yamamoto (2007) claims that those acts that seem different from each other could be considered the same and the action of these acts could be considered "repetition." However, exactly speaking, every act cannot be repeated in the same way. There are a lot of variables surrounding us that will give us different contexts every moment. He claims that learners should consider every act that seems the same as different in repetition and should recognize that every act is done in a context. You can find those above aspects of repetition in ER. Walking and running seem like a numerous repetition of stepping the ground, but in actuality, every step is different from each other. It is almost impossible to step in the same way as before while walking and running. ER has the element of repetition though it doesn't look as if it has this portion. That element of 'repetition' is to transfer the forms of English to their meanings on every line in ER in EFL, which will enhance English abilities and may enable us to develop the English input-output channel. You may be able to

develop the channel by reading the same passages hundreds of times. However, such a way of learning requires the learners to stick out the monotonous repetition. By contrast, ER will attract the readers and lead them to the world of the books.

6. How can we keep reading English?

There are quite a few learners who cannot keep reading English for thirty minutes or more. It is not always a matter of English knowledge. The following three factors will enable us to keep reading English for a long time in addition to English knowledge. The first one is a skill to transfer textual information into semantic information automatically. The automatic transformation between form and meaning will be built by a great number of repetition practices. This transformation is repeated numerous while reading. This practice will develop the input-output channel between CUP and the surface feature of English. CUP is almost the same as CALP in the context of this paper and CALP will be developed through extensive reading as Cummins mentions (Cummins, 2000).

The amount of background knowledge will be the second important factor. Those who are skillful at English may not be able to read English well in a certain field if they are not familiar in that field. It will be difficult to read a scientific article such as immune systems or an article on economics in English if they are not familiar to science or economics.

The third factor is concentration, which will enable you to keep working on one thing for a long time. Reading has just one route of receiving information, which is different from daily conversation, in which people receive various kinds of non-verbal information, such as gestures and environmental settings. We have to concentrate on the single way of receiving information from a book while reading. Reading is a series of actions, keeping your eyes on the book, repeat on transforming the form of language into the meaning of it, and following the story. However, human beings are curious about everything happening around them and tend to pay meaningless attention to every change in the atmosphere. It is very important to avoid such stimulus from the environment around the reader or to ignore those noises; some undesired sound outside, people talking, even some clatter noise of desks and chairs will prevent the reader from sustaining reading.

A skilled person makes the tools part of his or her body or mind and assimilates it as if it was part of the body. Ichikawa (1975, as cited in Nomura, 1989 pp. 157–179.) calls it ‘kumikomi,’ or assimilation. An expert tennis player may make his or her racket a part of his or her hand and use it like his or her hand naturally. We may apply this idea to knowing *how*. An expert reader may enter himself or herself into the story of the book while reading it and become part of the book. It is as if the reader is always becoming the last piece of the jigsaw puzzle in each scene of the story while he or she reads the book. Comprehension is completed when the last piece is put

successfully.

7. For Further Study

It may be an empirically-deduced fact that reading stamina can be a crucial skill of reading. Lack of reading stamina will be observed while the learners keep reading a book. Those who do not have enough reading stamina cannot keep reading the book.

We need to define reading stamina clearly, and verify that it plays an important role in reading. There will be three sub-skills that construct reading stamina. One is to transfer textual information into semantic information. The second one is background knowledge. The third one is concentration which is the ability for a person to work on just one thing. We also have to examine the relationships between reading stamina, concentration, motivation, and English proficiency. The means of measurement also need to be refined.

There are two more challenging themes: One is to seek what prevents the learner from reading a book: the variables may be considered the difficulty of the topic, the difficulty of the sentences, and the familiarity of the book for the readers. The other is to show some factual evidence of the input-output channel that may connects CUP and the surface features of English. We may be able to find those learners who have the knowledge of surface features of English and rich in CUP but do not have the input-output channel may not be able to use English well.

References

- Baker, Colin and Hornberger, Nancy H. (Eds.) (2001). *An Introductory Reader to the Writings of Jim Cummins*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, Jim. (1980 April). 'The Entry and Exit Fallacy in Bilingual Education.' A keynote address at the Workshop on 'Comparative Review of Identified District Continua.' At the 9th Annual Bilingual Education Conference, Anaheim, California.
- Cummins, Jim. (2000). *Language, Power and Pedagogy - Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*. Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Furukawa, Akio, Kawade, Mariko, Sakai, Kunihide ed. (2003). *Reading English over one million words! [Kyokara Yomimasu Eigo 100man-go!]* Tokyo:Nihonjitsugyo-shuppansha.
- Ichikawa, Hiroshi. (1975). *Seishin Toshiteno Shintai. [A Body as a Mind.]* Tokyo: Keisoshobo.
- Ikuta, S. (2002). *No no kenko. [Brain Health]* Tokyo: Kodansha.
- Nomura, Yukimasa. (2002). *Jukutatsuka To Jiko. [Master of Skills and Self.] Kouino Shinrigaku. [Psychology of Behavior.]* Osaka: Kansai University Press.
- Ryle, Gilbert. (1949). *The Concept of Mind*. London: Hutchinson.
- Takahashi, Y. (2007). *Crawl Ga Hayaku Kireini Oyogeruyouninar! [You can swim freestyle fast and beautifully!]* Tokyo: Takahashi-shoten.
- Takanashi, Yasuo & Takahashi, Masao. (1987). *Eigo Reading No Kiso. [Basic Instruction of English Reading.]* Tokyo: Kenkyushashuppan.
- Yadama, Jun. (1984). 'Speed Reading and the Instruction of Speed Reading.' Chapter 3.2. Kakita, Naomi. Matsumura,

- Mikio, Ed. *Eigo No Reading. [English Reading]* Tokyo: Taishukan Shoten.
- Yamada, Yuichiro. (2006). *What Is English Proficiency? [Eigo Ryokutoha Nanika.]* Tokyo: Taishukan Shoten.
- Yamamoto, Akio. (2007). 'Repetition Practice in Learning English as a Foreign Language – From the view point of the Affordance theory and the expert theory –.' *The bulletin of the Research Institute for Humanities*. Vol. 5, 2006: 81–100.
- Yamamoto, Akio. (2008). 'Reading Stamina – A new reading skill for extensive reading –' *Kanatani Ken Kyoju Kanreki Kinen Ronbunshu Kanko linkai Ed. [Committee of Anniversary Issue for Prof. Kanatani Ken's 60th Birthday.]* Tokyo: Kiriharashoten. 50–59.