FOREIGN LANGUAGE READING RESEARCH AND TERTIARY EFL IN JAPAN

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ABSTRACT

This is an exploratory paper into some of the issues surrounding English reading instruction at Japanese universities, and the current state of foreign language reading research. The first section deals with the Japanese university context—students and graduates themselves and their English language needs. From what little evidence is available it is argued that if we were to single out any one skill as most likely to be both wanted and needed by Japanese university students, it would probably be the ability to read in English. On the basis of this claim, the second section, the main body of this paper, traces the innovative course of research in foreign language reading over the latter part of this century. Although the results are far from conclusive, the progress and development that this field has undergone over the last two decades is substantial, resulting in corresponding advances in classroom instruction. In the third and final section a brief summary of the generally accepted components of effective reading instruction that this body of research and theory supports, is presented. A comprehensive application of this research to the reading classroom is implied and encouraged, but goes beyond the scope of this paper.

INTRODUCTION

The buzz word in Japanese society and the educational establishment in particular these days is "internationalization." Companies and institutions are actively discussing and planning ways of becoming more international. In concert with this movement there are voices in the field of EFL in Japan calling for an end to so-called outmoded classroom practices such as grammar

translation and for the introduction of modern approaches which emphasize oral communication.[1] The movement toward improving oral communication skills instruction is certainly overdue, and I am basically sympathetic with this general trend. However, the EFL/ESL field has experienced several pendulum swings this century, and thus, there is some reason to be concerned that the "bandwagon effect" may lead to a swing so far toward oral approaches that English reading instruction will suffer. It should be noted that foreign language reading research has received far more attention world-wide recently simply because the need for improved reading ability has grown so rapidly amongst ESL/EFL students. It would be ironic indeed if the place of reading instruction in Japanese universities were to suffer because of the drive for internationalism, while the international arena is experiencing great advances in this field. This paper seeks to justify the prominent standing of reading instruction in English at Japanese usiversities and offers an overview of the history and current state of research and theory in foreign laguage reading. Perhaps it is possible to avoid the bandwagon and yet still offer an English program that has benefited from internationalization.

PART I . THE NEEDS OF JAPANESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

This section addresses two inter-related issues. First of all, it is necessary to acknowledge that compulsory English education in Japan plays a significant role in preparing university graduates for their future contact with the language. Secondly, it is neccessary to discuss the specific English language needs of Japanese university students and graduates. Here, this will be discussed in terms of student surveys and a projection of students' future uses of the language.

A. WHY STUDY ENGLISH

The vast majority of Japanese have little proficiency in English and are none the worse for it. Most Japanese are as monolingual as native speakers of English, though they may have had more instruction in a foreign language. It is possible that some Japanese even have the kind of love-hate relationship wish English that Abbott (1992) has experienced in developing countries. The great importance of the language in acknowledged, yet it is resented for this very reason. In any event, "the situation in Japan is contradictory in the sense that while learning English has been strongly supported at an official level, community expectations are extremely low, as are those of the majority of students and professors. This can hardly be surprising when one

considers the proportion of the 450,000 annual graduates from universities and junior colleges who will have the need or even the opportunity to utilize their English language skills" (Hansen 1985, 147). However, from another perspective, JACET found that among college graduates, "78. 8% said they had some connection with English, and among those people, 54.2% said that this connection was 'at work'" (JACET 1990, 72).

On the surface, this JACET study appears to refute Hansen's perceived lack of need or opportunity for college graduates to use English. However, the JACET survey does not indicate the *degree* of contact that graduates have with English. Thus both observations are most likely true. The vast majority of graduates have some contact with Engqish, while probably, relatively few are in situations that demand a high degree of proficiency in the language. Somewhere in the middle there are presumably many grduates who would be able to function better in their given capacity with a better grasp of the language.

It appears then, while not everyone in Japan will ever need to be fluent in English, those who are most likely to have this need will be college graduates. For college graduates to gain sufficient proficiency, they would certainly need to begin studying long before arriving at college. This surely argues for the continuation of compulsory English education in schools—or at least for college-bound students.[2]

B. STUDENT SURVEYS AND FUTURE USE OF THE LANGUAGE

The JACET survey discussed above also states that, "a fairly large number of people said that the English they use in their job or in daily life comes in the form of writing and reading (33.8%), a comparatively small number (14.7%) said that they use listening or speaking skills" (JACET 1990, 72). This suggests that written language is used more than twice as much as oral language. Thus, it is noteworthy that these same graduates, "when asked about what kind of classes they wished they had had, 75.1% answered 'classes stressing speaking' and 67.8% responded 'classes stressing listening'" (JACET 1990, 73).

In a more recent survey, Widdows and Voller found that the language skills that students most wanted to master at university were "'light' speaking and listening skills, and pronunciation practice" (Widdows and Voller 1991, 130).[3] The skills least preferred were "academic or technical reading skills, followed by grammar and least important of all, writing skills" (Widdows and Voller 1991, 130). Paradoxically, they also found that among non-English majors, when asked why they wanted to study English, "the two highest ranked items were reading English

books and magazines, and going on holidays abroad" (Widdows and Voller 1991, 132). Another puzzling finding was that although most students saw English as important to their future careers, they showed very little interest in being able to read and write business documents, leading Widdows and Voller to conclude that "students feel that English is important for their careers, but mastering business English while at university is less so" (Widdows and Voller 1991, 132).

Perhaps the picture becomes a little clearer when we acknowledge the role of university in the overall life of the student. Compared to the rigors of high school in preparation for the destiny-determining university entrance exams, and the tedium of lifetime employment at a company, university life is relatively less intense. In a study on the motivation of college freshmen, the researchers concluded that once the university entrance examinations are over, "the student appears in freshmen classes as a kind of timid, exam-worn survivor with no apparent academic purpose at university" (Berwick and Ross 1989, 206). Few students are able to matriculate to their first-choice university, a factor which further undermines their motivation. Even fear of failing is not apparent as the graduation rate is usually extremely high compared to some other parts of the world. The choice of company has been severely narrowed by the choice of university—a decision already made based upon efforts at high school. In addition, it is not unusual for a graduate from one field to end up working in an entirely different area, once joining a company. Students know then, that their real job training will occur at their company, and that for the most part their university studies will have limited bearing on their future—indeed, far less than their high school studies.[4]

Thus, it is not so strange that students may want to study "lighter" uses of English as opposed to more academic or "heavier" uses. Though they are somewhat aware of how they will be expected to use English in the future, they appear to be content to postpone preparing for that until after university. It seems that interest among students is not confined to oral communication—reading books and magazines ranked high as well—but clearly, there seems to be almost an aversion for anything that reminds them of their high school experience, or of where they will be in a few short years.

In discussing the needs of university students, then, it is clear that the students' outlook on themselves and their time at university in the context of their whole life cannot be ignored. However, this is not to suggest that this one viewpoint alone should be considered in planning curricula and classes. The situation of Japanese university students is not unique in the realm

of human services when we consider needs to be made up of not only *wants,* but also *necessities* and *lacks* (Hutchinson and Waters 1987, 55). The problem with only considering *wants,* surrounds the question of whether a wanted service actually solves a problem or not. In addition, "the ability of consumers to make judgements in their own best interests is often questioned" (McKillip 1987, 16).

It has been suggested that, "in order to design and teach effective courses, the teacher and planner must investigate the uses to which the language will be put" (Mackay 1978, 21). In addition to considering what students *want* to study at university, then, the likely future use of English must be carefully considered as well. Obviously, "it is quite possible that the learner's views will conflict with the perceptions of other interested parties: course designers, sponsors, teachers" (Hutchinson and Waters 1987, 65). This is, of course, nothing new and informed changes in course designs are unlikely to make the situation worse; on the contrary, this is perhaps the best hope of reducing such differences.

So what do students need? Most graduates will reside inside Japan and communication in English will probably be predominantly through letters and facsimiles. There is no hard evidence to support this conclusion, but the JACET survey mentioned earlier certainly points in this direction, and Widdows and Voller's survey does nothing to refute this claim. Thus, in terms of future use of the language, it appears likely that students will need their written language skills more than their oral skills. In terms of what students want, it appears that they mostly want to use their English for day to day, lighter subjects that are obviously given to the kind of conversations they are probably having with their friends in Japanese. As noted earlier, Widdows and Voller also found that they seem to be keen on light reading too. Thus the point of overlap here between *future use,* and *student wants* appears to be reading. Though they will probably need to read business documents more than magazines and will also need to be able to write such documents as well, in the broadest terms, reading in English is probably the single area most likely to satisfy the requirements of a needs analysis which covers the *wants, necessities* and *lacks* of students at Japanese universities.Of course, this does not reduce the hope that students are able to satisfy their desire to become more fluent in oral communication in English while at university. However, at tertiary level institutions, surely preparing students better for what they will be required to do as graduates should not be subordinated to such a desire.

PART II . OVERVIEW OF SECOND LANGUAGE READING RESEARCH

"The starting point for all language teaching should be an understanding of how people learn" (Hutchinson and Waters 1987, 39). While this proposition itself is likely to receive almost universal acceptance, there is no such agreement over how exactly people learn languages. From the Natural Approach which begins with vocal teachers and silent students to The Silent Way which begins with vocal students and silent teachers, there are a dazzling array of ideas on how people learn languages, and therefore how they should be taught. The putative successes of many of these various approaches testifies to the enigmatic situation surrounding the various learning methods.[5] Approaches to reading in a second or foreign language are not riddle-free either. As Barnett so succinctly states, "No fully defined model of second language reading yet exists" (Barnett 1989, 36). Mercifully, however, she does go on to point out that "certain generally accepted theoretical principles have emerged" (Barnett 1989, 36).

A. HISTORY

In the sixties, second language reading was seen mostly as reinforcement for the more highly regarded oral skills while audiolingualism was in its heyday. However, as the numbers of ESL students who needed the ability to read English for their academic needs expanded, interest in reading instruction increased. Teachers naturally turned to first language reading researchers for help. Coincidentally, at the same time, such researchers were developing radically new ideas about the nature of the reading process. Goodman, for example, challenged the prevailing view that reading was the passive act of obtaining information (that had been previously recorded on a page) in a letter by letter, word by word, sentence by sentence fashion. He argued that meaning does not exist in print; it exists in the mind of the writer, and is encoded on the page. Given the speed by which fluent readers were able to read, he argued that good readers "*reconstruct* this meaning" as they read (Goodman 1970, 5).

This view was further developed by Smith who argued that the basic process of reading was to ask questions and know how to find the answers in print. He points out that "the questions we ask in reading are invariably implicit; we are not generally aware of the questions that we ask or even that we are asking them. But the fact that we are unaware of the questions does not mean that they are not being asked. They are like the questions that we ask in making sense of spoken language and of the world in general" (Smith 1985, 114).

These views taken together gave rise to the *psycholinguistic model* of the reading process. In the seventies, second language theorists developed new classroom procedures based on these views where "the goal of reading instruction was to provide students with a range of effective approaches to texts—including helping students define goals and strategies for reading, to use prereading activities to enhance conceptual readiness, and to provide students strategies to deal with difficult syntax, vocabulary and organizational structure" (Grabe 1991. 377). It is interesting to note that many of these ideas are still considered central to the second language reading classroom today, though not necessarily because of the psycholinguistic model.

B. SCHEMA THEORY

In second language reading research, the eighties and early nineties have been dominated by schema theory. "According to schema theory, comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text. Efficient comprehension requires the ability to relate the textual material to one's own knowledge. Comprehending words, sentences, and entire texts involves more than just relying on one's linguistic knowledge" (Carrell and Eisterhold 1983, 557). In discussing schema theory, it is useful to look closely at the two elements of the interactive process—the reader and the text—before looking at this process itself.

1. The Reader

According to this theory, readers possess two kinds of background knowledge, known as content schemata and formal schemata. **Content schemata** refers to the background knowledge the reader possesses about the topic being read. For instance, it has been shown that it is possible to "improve ESL students' reading comprehension by helping them to build background knowledge on the topic prior to reading" (Carrell 1990, 60). Roller and Motambo (1992) found that their very proficient readers of English as a foreign language were able to use context (a picture related to the text) to aid them in their comprehension of reading texts.

Formal schemata refers to "the reader's background knowledge of, and experience with textual organization" (Carrell 1990, 60). An example of this can be seen in a study which compared Japanese and English speakers reading texts with a typical Japanese rhetorical structure, in their own respective native languages (Carrell 1990, 60). It was shown that not only was the Japanese structure generally more difficult for the English readers, but that particular aspects of the rhetorical organzation were extraordinarily problematic for them, especially in

delayed recall. The conclusion is that the traditional *kisho-ten ketsu* pattern of contemporary Japanese expository prose is more difficult for English readers because of its absence in English expository prose. That is, native English readers lack the appropriate formal schema against which to process the Japanese rhetorical pattern (Carrell 1990, 61).[6]

In comparing the relative significance of both content and formal schemata, it was found that content schemata seem to play a greater role in reading comprehension. "Texts with familiar content, even if in unfamiliar rhetorical form, are relatively easier than texts in familiar rhetorical form but with unfamiliar content" (Carrell 1990, 63).

Schema theory itself is intuitively satisfying, because it has given greater relevance to the ways in which readers store information in their memories, gain access to that store of knowledge and then use it in the process of comprehending. Yet it is not without its detractors. It has come under attack from psycholinguistic and cognitive psychological perspectives because it fails to present a clear outline of the mental representation of knowledge. Thus, its theoretical structure is empirically unverifiable (Grabe 1991, 389). In other words, it is not possible to scientifically prove that the processes which schema theory claims to go on in the minds of readers actually happen as described. However, it is clear that readers do store knowledge and are able to recall and use it in the reading process. Also, researchers have observed improved comprehension by readers who have been guided through the kinds of activities that schema theory suggests are important for foreign language readers. Thus, schema theory has received a great deal of attention in foreign language reading research over the last decade.

2. The Text

It can be seen from the concept of formal schemata that schema theory does not ignore the role of text in the reading comprehension process. Among theorists, there is general agreement that some texts are more difficult to read than others because of the nature of the text. Yet there is less agreement over precisely what it is in the text that makes it more or less difficult to read. Silberstein points out that schema theory "suggests that no text can be considered generically difficult or easy to read simply on the basis of linguistic features such as syntactic complexity or word frequencies" (Silberstein 1987, 31). Given the role of each individual reader's schemata, it is doubtful that any one text will cause precisely the same problems for every reader. In fact, work with reading protocols has shown that among readers, "*conceptual and linguistic problems*

are highly individualized" (Bernhardt 1986, 111 emphasis in the original).

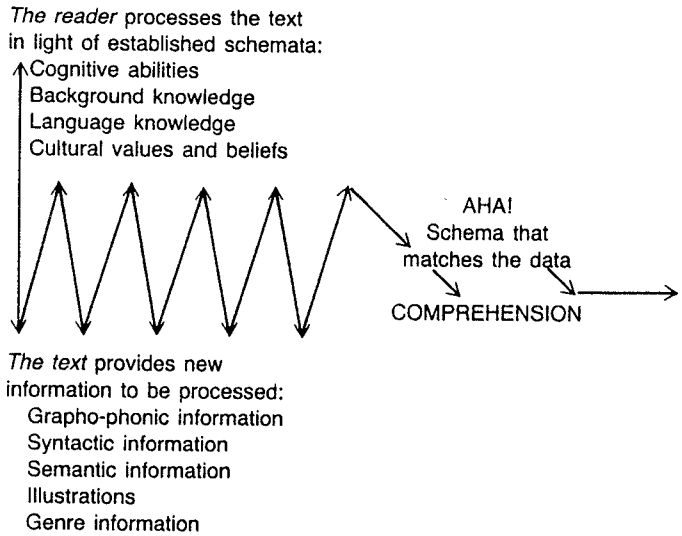
Yet, neither does this deny that certain texts are likely to cause similar problems for readers of somewhat compatible proficiency. In defending readability formulas, Fry does not deny the reader's contribution to the readability of texts, yet adamantly claims that "readability formulas will predict comprehension, oral reading errors, and inclination to continue reading" (Fry 1989, 294). He goes on to state that extensive research shows that "in general, on the average, the two inputs of sentence length and word difficulty accurately predict how easily a given passage will be understood by the average reader" (Fry 1989, 295). Researchers have attempted to identify the causes of text difficulty, and the three areas they have focused on most are vocabulary, syntax and semantics, and cohesion.

Although there is some argument over the relative importance of lexical knowledge and the ability to guess the meaning of words from their context, common sense tells us that readers must have a reasonable recognition vocabulary. What is reasonable? It has been estimated that by the last year of high school, native speakers of English have a recognition vocabulary of between 40,000 and 150,000 words.[7] It has been argued that for foreign students, a vocabulary of 5,000-7,000 words is sufficient for academic coursework (Grabe 1991, 392). To pursue an academic career in English obviously provides a formidable task for foreign students when it comes to vocabulary. Not surprisingly, "foreign and second language students repeatedly claim that lack of vocabulary knowledge is a major problem when reading" (Barnett 1989, 60). Thus it is likely that the range of vocabulary items in any given text will generally affect its readability.

Research on syntax and semantics has been far from conclusive, and the only useful conclusion to be drawn is that, "we cannot disregard any aspect of language proficiency in our efforts to develop better readers" (Barnett 1989, 62). Likewise, cohesion—a subjectively satisfying way of describing how ideas and meanings in a text tie together—has successfully evaded empirical scrutiny. From experience, most readers have noticed that some texts "hang together" better than others, and this makes them easier to read, but precisely how they do this is not yet clear.

3. The Interactive Process

Put simply, the interactive view of reading points to the interaction between the reader and the text, as in the diagram below.



The reader constructs the meaning of the text by interpreting textual information in the light of prior knowledge and experience.

Figure 1 *Model of the Reading Comprehesion Process* (Mikulecky 1990, 3).

A superficial glance at this diagram may be misleading however. Strictly speaking the interaction is not between the reader and the text itself. Rather, the upper and lower sections of the diagram refer to two different *processes* which occur separately and simultaneously *within the mind of the reader*. Thus, "when a person reads, two aspects of the 'human processing information system' continuously interact" (Mikulecky 1990, 2). One aspect of this system is driven by one's previous knowledge (formal and content schemata), and the other aspect is driven by the data encoded in the text. The former is known as "top-down processing" and the latter as "bottom-up processing". "Top-down processing is making predictions about the text based on prior experience or background knowledge, and then checking the text for confirmation or refutation of those predictions. Bottom-up processing is decoding individual linguistic units (e. g. phonemes, graphemes, words, on up to phrases and clauses) and then referring these analyzed units to one's background knowledge for confirmation of fit." (Carrell 1990, 56).[8]

Readers, then, are capable of two very important processes. On the one hand they are able to

glean information from text. This process is extremely complex and depends upon the readers' knowledge of the given language's vocabulary, syntax and semantics, and cohesion. However, the text cannot be said to have been successfully "read" until the reader knows what the text actually means. In order to do this, the reader must make use of the second process—placing this information alongside what the reader already knows, and confirming what the writer intended to convey. The two processes operate quite differently, of course, but not independently. The two processes occur simultaneously until comprehension is complete. Usually, for the fluent reader, these two processes work so smoothly that the reader has no awareness of the interaction at all. However, in some circumstances, even in our first language, comprehension can be so slowed down that the process becomes apparent. One example is the reading of instructions for a new and unfamiliar appliance—such as a video cassette recorder. The reader will first of all go over the instructions and then try to apply these to the appliance. When this doesn't work, the reader goes back to the instructions and reads them again, and so on until finally successful. Even though the reader may know the meaning of every word in the instructions, the meaning of the instructions remains unclear until the reader has verified this by successfully applying this meaning to the appliance. Therefore, it isn't possible to say that the reader "comprehends" the instructions until he or she is successful with the appliance.

For first language readers it takes an unusual situation like this to see the interactive process. For second language readers, however, this kind of delayed interaction is much more common —especially for beginners. However, the reason for the delay in comprehension for the beginning second language reader is quite different from that of the first language reader in the example above. In this example, the reader of the instructions was having difficulty with top-down processing—matching the information to the known world. The second language beginning reader usually has more difficulty with bottom-up processing—decoding the text and getting at the information itself. This distinction is important because the application of schema theory has often led to an emphasis on top-down processing skills instruction. Bottom-up processing skills have been overshadowed as a result. In order to read fluently, the interaction between these two processes requires that both processes operate at an optimum. Many text books for second language readers overlook the need for this balance; especially in the EFL setting, it is important to ensure that students are given the opportunity to develop bottom-up processing skills as well.[9]

C. FIRST AND SECOND LANGUAGE READING

In comparing first and second language readers, researchers have focused on two areas: process and skills. Focus on process has centered on the question of whether or not the reading process is universal. Focus on skills has centered on the question of whether or not first language reading skills transfer to the second language.

Not surprisingly, researchers who claim that first and second language reading processes resemble each other tend to concentrate on advanced readers in the second or foreign language. Those who believe that first and second language reading processes differ usually claim that subjects' language proficiency level is the determining factor (Barnett 1989, 51). Generally speaking, there are more similarities between advanced first and second language readers than between beginners and advanced readers in the same language.

In all languages there are some readers who are always better than others. Yet, are good first language readers going to be good second language readers? In other words, do first language reading skills transfer to the second laguage? The research is divided on this issue. For example, there is research to suggest that reading skill is more dependent on language proficiency than on one's first language reading ability. "An imperfect knowledge of a language hinders guessing or predicting ability; readers with a poor grasp of language perceive words as the basic elements of reading comprehension and fail to take into account adequately the context and written discourse as a whole" (Barnett 1989, 54). Another study gave rise to the view that a reader's poor grasp of a second language will 'short circuit' his or her ability to enact good first language reading strategies and substitute less effective ones (Barnett 1989, 54). Barnett (1989) also cites additional evidence to suggest that there is a certain minimum language ability level, sometimes referred to as a 'language competence ceiling,' that must be reached before readers are able to transfer first language reading skills to the second language. Hughes (1992) supports this view by arguing that readers with limited language competence overload their short-term working memories (about seven chunks of information for about 30 seconds) and are thus unable to extract meaning from the limited amount of language they are working on before it decays or is replaced by new information. Alderson (1984), finds more evidence to support the view that reading is more of a language problem than a reading problem, but tempers this by admitting that this appears to be the case only for low levels of foreign language competence.

Thus, it is significant to reiterate that experienced readers in different languages have more in common in terms of reading processes used than beginning and experienced readers in the

same language. Thus we can anticipate that skills have probably transferred for the experienced second language reader at some point in his or her reading development in that language. However, there is also some evidence to suggest that even for less experienced readers, some reading skills are likely to transfer. "Individuals with stronger cognitive strategies and logical reasoning skills understand more than do readers tied to the graphic representation of the text" (Barnett 1989, 55). This view is supported by studies which have shown that it is possible to effectively compensate for readers' poor language ability by inducing schemata in readers with vocabulary or pictures relating to the text topic. Block (1986) found evidence to support the notion that reading strategies appear to be universal and are not related to any particular language-specific features. However, among individual readers she found considerable variation in the application of these strategies.[10]

This suggests that reading development in a second language is not only related to increased language proficiency; it is also closely related to effectively managing the skills and strategies that advanced readers in all languages use. Every classroom then, presents the teacher with a decision to be made based upon this question of whether or not first language skills transfer. How much should the teacher focus on teaching language, and how much on reading strategies? The research tends to suggest that for beginners, language should be stressed. and for more advanced readers, reading strategies should be introduced. However, this should never be stressed to the point of completely excluding language. For intermediate readers, if they possess a basic competence in English, the research suggests treating them more like their advanced counterparts.

PART III. IMPLICATIONS FOR READING INSTRUCTION

As noted above, a broad sketch of specific applications of these findings with any one reading class is beyond the scope of this paper. What follows is a brief representative outline of some of the approaches taken in designing curricula and techniques which reflect the findings of the research discussed above.

Mikulecky (1984) suggests a four fold approach: training in specific reading skills[11], practice on graded reading materials (intensive reading), practice in speeded reading, and extensive reading of self-selected materials for pleasure. Grabe comcurs with these points and adds three more. He suggests that reading be taught in a content-centered context; that "reading lessons

should be planned in a pre-, during, and postreading framework in order to build background knowledge, practice reading skills within the reading texts themselves, and engage in comprehension instruction" (Grabe 1991, 396); and that group work and cooperative learning should be used regularly. Greenwood (1988) has developed the idea of pre-, during and postreading into an impressive variety of techniques for use with class readers. Likewise, Grellet (1981) offers an abundance of reading comprehension exercises based on a four-fold format; reading techniques, how the aim of the text is conveyed, understanding the meaning of the text both linguistically and non-linguistically and finally, assessing the text itself. Fader (1976), in discussing efforts to encourage young first language readers to become independent has experimented successfully with groups and cooperative learning activities. For Barnett, comprehension is most dependent on the reader—the reader's expectations to be exact. And, the reader's expectations are "defined by his or her content and formal schemata, linguistic proficiency, first language reading skill, reading strategies, and purpose in reading the text" (Barnett 1989, 111). Thus, these are the areas which need to be dealt with in any reading class in order to help students interact with texts.

One more study deserves mention, not only because of its focus on Japanese universities, but also because of its challenge to the generally agreed upon views mentioned above. Susser and Robb argue very effectively for the benefits of EFL extensive reading instruction, even going so far as stating that "experiments have shown (if not conclusively) that reading ability can improve as much with extensive reading as with skills training" (Susser and Robb 1990, 175). They support this view by denying the very existence of reading skills, stating that "these so-called reading comprehension skills do not exist" (Susser and Robb 1990, 162). Perhaps extensive reading has been overlooked—just as we noted the neglect of bottom-up processing skills instruction. However, if we were to draw any one conclusion from this review, it is the need for balance. Susser and Robb would seem to agree. In their conclusion reading comprehension skills miraculously reappear when they assert that extensive reading alone is probably insufficient, and that some form of skills training is also needed (Susser and Robb 1990, 175). Thus, even though this study initially appears out-of-step with current thinking, it eventually argues convincingly for a balanced approach to reading instruction.

NOTES

1. This call is not restricted to native speakers of English. Recently, a newly appointed senior curriculum specialist, Masao Niisato, at the Education Ministry echoed this view (Nozawa 1992).
2. This is not to suggest, however, that junior and senior high school English should continue to be taught in its current form of providing yet another subject to be arduously tested on for university entrance exams. However, beyond being compulsory and serving as a foundation for university English courses, the situation in high school English programs is beyond the scope of this paper.
3. For a fuller discussion of Widdows and Voller's survey see Sargent (1992).
4. In adition, it should be noted that the "linguistic distance" between Japanese and English makes English more difficult for Japanese learners than for learners from most European countries. This is compounded by the contrast in attitudes toward communication in general in Japanese society and in English speaking societies (Thompson 1987).
5. Stevick has posed a riddle which clearly illustrates the curious paradox which still pertains today. "In the field of language teaching, Method A is the logical contradiction of Method B: if the assumptions from which A claims to be derived are correct, then B cannot work and vice versa. Yet one colleague is getting excellent results with A and another is getting comparable results with B. How is this possible?" (Stevick 1976, 104).
6. Kaplan has suggested that different cultural thought patterns contribute to different rhetorical patterns in discourse. For example, he characterizes the English speaking world's predominant pattern as a direct straight line, while the predominant pattern in oriental cultures can be represented by circling the subject to view it from tangential perspectives, while never actually looking at it directly (Kaplan 1966). If this is true, then the formal schemata of oriental readers when approaching an English text could be entirely inappropriate, leading to major difficulties in comprehension. In reality, university students who have been exposed to English for six years at high school, would not be in quite such a "virgin" state at universities, but would have already developed some degree of formal schemata appropriate to English discourse. Other studies have shown that readers who have an ideographic (e. g. Japanese and Chinese) first language, "apparently process according to the configuration of characters, whereas English readers apply a rule system" (Barnett 1989, 65). What is not known, however, is the relative importance of this knowledge for such readers learning to read in English.
7. This estimation is based on two separate sources; (Brown and Perry 1991, 655) and (Mikulecky 1990, 72).
8. It is interesting to note that this interactive process highlights the importance of the reader over the text in the reading process. This further explains why the lack of progress made in research on identifying the causes of textual difficulty has done little to impede progress in research on the reading process.
9. It is worth noting that grammar translation classes could very easily contribute to this need. However, ever since Goodman (1970) claimed that a major cause of reading deficiency lies in the failure to grasp meaning (as opposed to bottom-up decoding), the research which shows the value of top-down processing implicitly supports the view that proficiency only in the bottom-up skills that grammar translation tends to reinforce is insufficient to lead students to become independent readers. Onoda (1992), while reluctantly admitting the benefits of

grammar translation, notes that at the very least, students also need to read extensively once they have reached an intermediate level of reading. It should also be noted that although grammar translation is likely to be helpful with some bottom-up processing skills, particularly in relation to linguistic proficiency, it will do little to assist students in their need for others—automaticity, for example.

10. This variation among readers—a point made by Bernhardt also and noted earlier— is an important factor to be taken into consideration in any reading class and with large classes this can be especially challenging.
11. The teaching of reading skills is certainly one of the major implications of recent reading research. This is an enormous subject in itself worthy of separate discussion. Different practitioners supply almost the same, yet slightly different lists of the reading skills they see as essential for effective reading comprehension. Some resources are (Grellet 1981), (Barnett 1989), (Stoller 1986), and (Mikulecky 1990).

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