高中生對於英文生字所使用的閱讀策略

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摘要

　　本研究擬探討優秀高中讀者, 在閱讀英文文本時, 遇有不熟識的英文生字時, 使用何種閱讀策略來幫助自己理解。本研究以八位成績優秀的高中學生為研究個案, 以放聲思考法作為資料蒐集法, 研究者分別請個案用語言清楚地說明, 當他們在做英文閱讀時, 若遇不熟識的英文生字時, 如何解決問題?
　　研究結果顯示, 優秀高中讀者遇有不熟識的英文單字時, 所運用的閱讀策略有六, 分別是:搜尋課文脈落、查字典、推論、使用先備知識、比較前後文之關係、改寫文句。其中, 搜尋課文脈落和查字典是最常用的閱讀策略。

關鍵字: 優秀高中讀者、 放聲思考法、英文生字閱讀策略

1. Introduction

　　With respect to the importance of vocabulary knowledge, Alderson (2000) argued that vocabulary knowledge has long been considered to be significant in first language (L1) reading; estimates of the words of fluent first language readers varied from 10,000 to 100,000 words. Measurements of readers' vocabulary knowledge correlate highly with measurements of reading comprehension. More often than not, readers' vocabulary knowledge is the single best predictor of reading comprehension. Based on the above findings, we see readers' vocabulary knowledge plays a vital role in the L1 reading comprehension and their correlation is highly positive. Compared to research on vocabulary knowledge in L1, the L2 research on the relationship between vocabulary and reading was just beginning to be the focus. In other words, there might be a causal connection between vocabulary knowledge and L2 reading comprehension. In terms of L2 research, Grabe (1991) argued that, "Virtually all second language reading researchers agree that vocabulary development is a critical component of reading comprehension" (p.392). Besides this, Birch (2002) suggested that English L2 reading should focus on bottom-up processing, including vocabulary knowledge. Birch (2002) further insisted that vocabulary knowledge is a significant factor to L2 readers, especially for young readers. Fan (2003) also states that inadequacy in lexical knowledge may hinder students' proficiency development and affect their performances on exams. It is high time for teachers to look into ways to enhance vocabulary knowledge in high school. The purpose of the study was to investigate the unknown English vocabulary processing strategies used by senior high school students. The research questions underlying the study were

1.How do senior high school students learning to read in English deal with the challenges of unknown English vocabulary?

2.What kind of reading strategies are most commonly used by senior high school students for coping with the challenges of unknown English vocabulary?

2. Increasing the Importance of L2 Vocabulary in Reading Comprehension

Qian (1999) explored the relationships between depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension in English as a second language (ESL). A total of 80 volunteers were recruited for this study, including Korean and Chinese speakers. However, the test required that only learners with a threshold vocabulary of 3,000 words family level (referred to vocabulary size with only high-frequency words in English) or better could be included in this sample. Research instruments included paper-and pencil testing and a questionnaire. In the study, the breadth of vocabulary knowledge was defined as the number of words for which a reader had at least some minimum knowledge of meaning. The definition of depth of vocabulary knowledge was defined as how well the reader knew a specific word. According to the multivariate analysis, the main results showed that 1) test scores on vocabulary size, depth of vocabulary knowledge, and reading comprehension were highly and positively correlated; and 2) test scores on depth of vocabulary knowledge could make a significant contribution to the prediction of reading comprehension level. This study also reported that if ESL readers had a minimum vocabulary size of 3,000 word families, their breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge were strongly correlated, and their depth of vocabulary knowledge was a significant factor in the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and academic reading comprehension (Qian, 1999). Regarding the strength of this study, we gain solid evidence for the roles of depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge in L2 reading comprehension, in particular with Asian participants (Chinese and Korean).

There was one further problem that we must not ignore: unknown vocabulary. Roskams (1998) examined Chinese students' inference strategies for unknown words while reading. The seventeen participants were freshman university students in Hong-Kong who had good command of English. Readers were asked to read the target text and think aloud in L1 or L2 when they came to each of the 12 underlined words. They shared their thinking processes while they attempted to decipher the meaning of the underlined words. Results showed that these Chinese readers most commonly used sentence level context clues while they inferred unknown vocabulary in a text. The main conclusions have been made in this study are the following: First, Chinese readers used varied and flexible decoding strategies to infer the meanings of unknown English words. Individual readers appeared to use a different number of context sources to make a guess as to the meanings of unknown words. Second, the amount of relevant content knowledge affected text comprehension and inference ability (Roskams, 1998). In terms of the strength of this study, it provided powerful research findings about Chinese students' inference strategies for unknown words while reading.

Copper (1999) investigated the on-line (the computer term *on-line* referred to the thought processes activated in the minds of L2 learners when they comprehended the idiomatic expression immediately, without time for reflection) processing strategies of idioms by L2 learners of English. There were 18 participants in this study, including eight native speakers of Spanish, three of Japanese, five of Korean, one of Russian, and one of Portuguese. They ranged in age from 17-44 years; the average age was 29.3. With respect to procedures, participants were asked to give the meanings of selected idioms presented in a written context. Data was collected by the think-aloud procedure; participants were asked to verbalize their thinking processes as they understood the meanings of the idioms. Copper (1999) found that 28% of the readers used inferring from context as a strategy to identify the meaning of idioms. On the whole, this percentage was higher than that of all other strategies, including analyzing the idiom (24%), using literal meaning (19%), requesting information (8%), paraphrasing and repeating (7%), using background knowledge (7%), and using L1 or other strategies (7%). By virtue of the strength of this study, it provided strong research findings about reading strategies for idioms.

De Bot , Paribakht, and Wesche (1997) conducted a study of L2 vocabulary acquisition as a lexical processing model. There were 10 students in an intermediate university ESL class, including speakers of French, Chinese, Persian, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Arabic. Data collection and analysis were composed from the interviews and think-aloud procedures in this study. Knowledge sources used in inference were as follows: sentence-level grammatical knowledge (34.6%), word morphology (15%), punctuation (11.2%), world knowledge (9.3%), discourse and text (3.7%), homonymy (3.7%), word associations (2.8%), cognates (1.9%), and unknown sources (17.8%). Owing to these types of knowledge about lexical inference, we gain a clear answer that sentence-level grammatical knowledge plays a vital part in terms of lexical inference. Due to the strength of this study, it provided important research findings about Asian participants' (Chinese and Vietnamese) lexical processing strategies while reading.

Recently, Nassaji (2003) probed into the use of reading strategies and knowledge sources in L2 lexical inference and their relationship with success in L2 lexical inference. A total of 21 adult ESL learners (10 males, 11 females) participated in this study. They spoke a variety of languages, including 2 Arabic, 8 Chinese, 6 Persian, 2 Portuguese, and 3 Spanish. Think-aloud protocol was the main source of data collection. Regarding procedures, 21 intermediate ESL learners tried to infer new word meanings from context. The criteria of success of lexical inference were categorized into 3-point scale levels: 2=successful, 1=partially successful, and 0=unsuccessful. Of the total 199 lexical inferential responses, 51 (25.6%) were successful, 37 (18.6%) were partially successful, and 111 (55.8%) were unsuccessful. According to this data, results have indicated that the intermediate-level ESL learners were not very successful at inferring lexical meanings from context while reading the text. Of all the knowledge sources to infer lexical meaning, students used world knowledge most frequently (46.2%), morphological knowledge (26.9%), grammatical knowledge (11.5%), discourse knowledge (8.7%), and L1 knowledge (6.7%). Of all the strategies to infer lexical meaning, students used word repeating (39.7%), section repeating (24%), analogy (8.5%), verifying (7.9%), monitoring (7.2%), self-inquiry (7.2%), and analyzing (5.5%). The main conclusions were the following: 1) on the whole, the rate of success was low in terms of lexical inference; 2) a variety of strategies contributed differently to lexical inference success; and 3) success was relevant more in terms of the quality instead of the quantity of the strategies adopted.

Regarding the relationship between variables such as level of proficiency, gender, and major which is the main concern of the EFL vocabulary study, a number of recent studies have been conducted. Nemati (2008) explored the effects of the two variables of proficiency and gender in terms of the use of vocabulary learning strategies by a sample group of Indian pre-university learners (N=60). The results of this study showed that higher proficiency learners used more vocabulary strategies than lower proficiency learners did, and there is no significant difference between gender and strategy use. Liao (2004) investigated university freshmen students' vocabulary learning strategies in Taiwan to see if differences existed between English-major and non-English-major university freshmen's use of vocabulary learning strategies. The results showed that female freshmen used more vocabulary learning strategies than males. Also, students majoring in English used vocabulary learning strategies more frequently than students with non-English majors.

3. Methods
3.1 Research Setting and Participants

The setting the researcher has chosen is an 11th grade classroom in a Comprehensive High School which is located in the central cluster of Taiwan. Eight successful readers

participated in this study, and their ages ranged from 17-18 years old. The selection of student participants focused on two criteria: (a) students scored in the top 10% in English based on their mean scores on the English mid-term and final exams, and (b) students could work on the think aloud assessments independently and express their opinions and ideas freely with very little difficulty as based on their teachers' recommendation.

The codes of the participants were A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H. A total of eight successful readers participated in this study. A basic profile of the eight participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Basic Profiles of the Eight Participants

Participants	A	B	C	D
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Female
Age	17	18	17	17
English Learning History (years)	8	7	8	7
English scores	94	89	91	90
Participants	E	F	G	H
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Female
Age	18	18	17	17
English Learning History (years)	8	8	8	7
English scores	90	95	88	92

3.2 Reading Material

The English text considered for selection was the commonly adopted 11th grade level textbooks in Taiwan: *the Senior High English Textbook*. The researcher used this English textbook as the main source for the reading passages; three were expository passages. The main criterion for passage selection is text readability as based on the Fry Readability Graph (Fry, 1968, 1977). Rasinski (2003) stated that the formula of the Fry Readability Graph is determined by adding the total number of syllables of the first ten sentences and then dividing by ten. The researcher also points out that the reason why the researcher used expository passages was that the students were most familiar with these text structures and thus reduced unfamiliarity with text type as a confounding variable. In terms of the three expository passages, the topic of the first expository is "*The Global Telephone*," and the level of readability is at the eighth grade level. It is 556 words in length, and there are 278 syllables in the first ten sentences of this passage. The topic of the second expository is "*Who's Out There*," and the level of readability is at the sixth grade level. It is 567 words in length, and there are 201 syllables in the first ten sentences of this passage. The topic of the third expository is "*Losing Our Languages*," and the level of readability is at the sixth grade level. It is 556 words in length, and there are 212 syllables in the first ten sentences of this passage.

3.3 Procedures for Data Collection

The think-aloud procedure was chosen because it could provide a glimpse at what are invisible cognitive processes. Participants needed exposure and experience to perform the think-aloud procedure because some researchers argued that it could be difficult for intermediate readers to verbalize their thoughts and ideas when reading silently. In order to make up for this problem, some researchers suggested that the students should practice with

the think-aloud procedure prior to using it for data collection. To encourage participants to verbalize their comprehension processes as much as they could, training in the think-aloud method is important (Ericsson & Simon, 1984).

Due to these recommendations, the researcher acted as a model to show the participants about the procedures of think-aloud assessment. Before working on data collection, participants were given enough time to practice. In essence, the training was a warm-up practice for the formal data selection session (Yang, 2002). After the training and practice period, when the researcher thought that the readers knew how to think aloud, the researcher presented the reading passage and instructed them to read it out loud. Think-aloud assessments were recorded on an audiotape. Students were also encouraged to use whatever language they felt most comfortable with. As they encountered each italicized target word in the text, the researcher asked them to express their thinking from the context, verbalizing and reporting whatever came to their mind. Approximately 15 different locations in each of the unknown English vocabulary words were marked with an asterisk. These asterisk marks were made on the basis of a qualitative analysis regarding where the readers were most likely to use strategic thinking processes while reading. Students were also prompted several times to think about what they did during reading and to reflect on their reading strategies concerning unknown English vocabulary words.

3.4 Procedures for Data Analysis

Analysis of the think-aloud assessment data began with the writing of think-aloud assessment transcripts immediately after leaving the fieldwork site. The researcher transcribed the interview protocol sentence by sentence and then coded the interview content. An initial framework, which emerged from the data for analyzing the complete think-aloud data, was developed by the researcher who read and reread the transcript using the constant-comparative method to identify the strategies and coded the data. In this study, the researcher used the reading strategy code references as follows: 1) Pressley and Afflerbach's (1995) list of reading strategies in *Verbal Protocols of Reading* which listed what readers should do when they read and was a summary of the results from on-line self-report studies of reading, and Duffy's (2003) list of reading strategies in *Explain Reading* which contained examples for explaining comprehension strategies. Analysis of the students' think-aloud data resulted in the identification of reading vocabulary strategies.

4. Results and Analyses

In the following section, the researcher will provide the main results and findings of the readers' English vocabulary strategies when they encounter unknown English vocabulary to answer research question one: How do Taiwanese students learning to read in English deal with the challenges of unknown English vocabulary?

With respect to vocabulary strategies, six kinds of strategies were found in this study in terms of dealing with unknown English vocabulary: Using context clues, looking up words in the dictionary, inferring, activating prior knowledge, comparing and contrasting the text, and paraphrasing. Text-based strategies refers to the way readers operated to construct meaning of the text by concentrating on selected components of the original text; words, phrases, or sentences. Two strategies are included: using context clues and inferring.

The following section will provide some solid examples to demonstrate these English vocabulary strategies.

1. Using context clues: This strategy involves using clues in the text in order to make predictions or increase understanding about vocabulary. Participants E, B, and H used the contextual clues to infer the vocabulary word.

(Participant E, Response to the fourth paragraph in the English text *Losing Our   Language*): The word "essential" meant important. I guessed the meaning from the following sentence:

'knowing a major world language is often essential.' I thought knowing a major world language was often important, so I guessed the word "essential" meant important.

(Participant B, Response to the fourth paragraph in the English text *The Global Phone*): I guessed the word "potential" meant the possibility to make something come true. I guessed the meaning of this vocabulary word based on the following sentence: 'global telephones are a marvelous invention, because they have the potential to bring even the most remote villages into touch with the rest of the world.' So, I thought the global phone would make it possible for the most remote villages to be in touch with the rest of the world.

(Participant H, Response to the first paragraph in the English text (*Losing Our Language*): I thought the word "disappear" meant cannot be found or gone. At the beginning of this paragraph, it said 'the time may soon come when we say goodbye to most of the world's languages.' It gave me a hint that most of the world's languages would be gone soon because I knew the meaning of goodbye.

2. Inferring: This strategy involves giving a logical and reasonable guess on the basis of the facts or evidence presented using knowledge to help comprehension for unknown words. Participants F and C used knowledge of semantic rules to deal with the unknown vocabulary, such as looking for connections between the former sentence and the latter sentence. Participant E used word formation to infer the meanings of the vocabulary, such as prefix and suffix. Participant H used contrary or contrasting ideas to comprehend the vocabulary.

(Participant E, Response to the third paragraph in the English text *Who's Out There*): I guessed the word "flying disk" meant meaning something which could fly, because I know the verb "fly." If a verb has the suffix (-ing), it would be an adjective. I knew that the word "disk" referred to bowl. According to these inferences, I knew its meaning had something to do with a flying bowl.

(Participant H, Response to the second paragraph in the English text *Losing Our Language*): Compared to dominant cultures, I thought the word "regional" meant smaller cultures, because dominant meant big. Based on this reasoning, I thought "regional" referred to a particular region or district.

(Participant F, Response to the fifth paragraph in the English text *Who's Out There*): It said: '…where the temperature can reach 110 degrees.' In my opinion, if one place could reach 110 degrees, it was a terrible hot place. That is the reason why I thought the word "desert" might mean an extremely hot and dry place.

(Participant C, Response to the fifth paragraph in the English text *The Global Phone*): I thought the word "devastating" might mean damaged. I knew that a storm might damage the crops badly; farmers could ask for help in harvesting their crops before a devastating storm. If someone needs help in harvesting their crops, that storm will do harm to the crops.

Text and prior knowledge combined strategies indicated that the readers used both information from the text and from their prior knowledge about the content, language, and their world experience. A strategy is included: activating prior knowledge.

3. Activating prior knowledge: This strategy is employed to help readers make related connections between new knowledge and what they already know about unknown vocabulary words. For example, Participants E and G used their previous experiences and background knowledge to infer the meanings of the vocabulary.

(Participant E, Response to the second paragraph in the English text *The Global Phone*): The word "satellite" meant a heavenly body or man-made object which moved around a larger one. I already knew the meaning of this word.

(Participant G, Response to the first paragraph in the English text *Who's out There*): The word "alien" means creature from another world. It was discussed on a TV program, so I

already knew its meaning.

Text-structure-based strategies reflected attempts by the readers to use their knowledge of text organization to facilitate their comprehension. A strategy is included: comparing and contrasting the text.

4. Comparing and contrasting the text: This strategy involves using contrary or contrasting ideas to aid comprehension. For example, participant B used the compared information to make a logical guess about the meaning of the vocabulary.

(Participant B, Response to the first paragraph in the English text *Who's out There*): I thought the word "alien" meant different creatures in another world, because this paragraph used a recent poll example to compare them with people in terms of their intelligence.

Self-corrective strategies reflected more declarative, procedural, or conditional knowledge and indicated that the readers had knowledge for planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own comprehension. This category included two strategies: Looking up words in the dictionary and paraphrasing.

5. Looking up words in the dictionary: This strategy is employed when a reader consults the dictionary. For example, Participants C and F used the dictionary to deal with unknown vocabulary words. It was obvious that some readers used the dictionary to solve their reading problems when they encountered unknown vocabulary words.

(Participant C, Response to the fifth paragraph in the English text *The Global Phone*): I looked it up in the dictionary, and I found that the word "devastating" meant harmful.

(Participant F, Response to the fourth paragraph in the English text *Losing Our Language*): I looked it up in the dictionary, and I found that the word "essential" means important.

6. Paraphrasing: This strategy involves rephrasing content using different words but retaining the same meaning. For example, Participant E used the phrase to paraphrase the meaning of the vocabulary.

(Participant E, Response to the first paragraph in the English text *Who's out There*): I thought the word "hostile" meant unfriendly because this following sentence stated 'eight-five percent also said they thought aliens were friendly rather than hostile.' I have learned the key phrase of rather than which referred to not. Judging from this, I could understand that the meaning of hostile was totally contrary to friendly.

In the following section, the researcher will provide the main results and findings of the readers' English vocabulary comprehension strategies when they encounter unknown English vocabulary to answer research question two: What kind of reading strategies are most commonly used by senior high school students for coping with the challenges of unknown English vocabulary?

The researcher presented English vocabulary strategy types and usage frequency in Table 2 as follows.

Table 2. Group Frequency of English Vocabulary Strategy Categories

Strategy Category	Usage Frequency
1. Using context clues	9
2. Looking up words in the dictionary	8
3. Inferring	4
4. Activating prior knowledge	3
5. Comparing and contrasting the text	1
6. Paraphrasing	1

As we can see, the results have shown that the strategies of "using context clues" and

"looking up words in the dictionary" were ranked as the first and second in terms of the most frequently used strategies when readers dealt with unknown English vocabulary words. During the reading process, the students usually used a dictionary or an electronic dictionary to deal with unknown vocabulary in the texts. On the other hand, they made use of textual clues to infer unknown vocabulary most of time. Indeed, most of the readers were very apt to use these two strategies to cope with unknown English vocabulary words. Interestingly, the strategies of "using context clues" and "looking up words in the dictionary" were very different methods to handle English vocabulary problems. The former is more characteristic of an active reading process; the latter is more characteristic of a passive reading process. In conclusion, the readers used high-order thinking to apply, infer, and compare the meanings of unknown vocabulary based on Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) in this study. These strategies include "using context clues," "inferring," "activating prior knowledge," "comparing and contrasting the text," and "paraphrasing."

The other thing that this study investigated was strategies for dealing with unknown English vocabulary. Jimenez, Garcia, and Pearson (1996) stated that reading knowledge and explicit L1-L2 vocabulary knowledge influenced readers' comprehension. Importantly, the bilingual participants were more focused on strategies that helped them deal with unknown vocabulary. A total of six strategies were found in coping with unknown English vocabulary in this present study: using context clues, looking up words in the dictionary, inferring, activating prior knowledge, comparing and contrasting the text, and paraphrasing. As mentioned above, the results of this study echoed Roskam's (1998) findings that Chinese readers most commonly used sentence level context clues while they inferred unknown vocabulary in a text. The result of this study has shown that readers' most frequently used strategy was using context clues to tackle unknown English vocabulary. The results of this study also resembled Roskam's (1998) findings that Chinese readers used varied and flexible decoding strategies to infer unknown English words. Individual readers appeared to use a different number of context sources to make a guess as to the meanings of unknown words. The strategy of looking up words in the dictionary also plays an important part in dealing with unknown English vocabulary. From the researcher's observations, these eight readers seemed very dependent on dictionaries or reference books when they did not really understand the meaning of English vocabulary.

In terms of instruction applications, think-aloud protocols, when used correctly reveal readers' cognitive and metacognitive strategies and processes during text comprehension--successful and unsuccessful strategies employed by readers at various proficiency levels. Specifically, they can explore the lexical inferencing procedures based on proficiency levels of high and low level readers and investigate what knowledge sources and cues they appeal to when confronted with unfamiliar words in a written text.

Based on the findings of thinking aloud assessment, it is worthwhile to use the think-aloud protocol to explore readers in terms of their cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies and lexical inferencing procedures. On the other hand, the designer would use a variety of reading strategies to design the reading strategies lesson plan for their students, and then the students will become independent, skillful readers.

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A Study of Senior High Students' Unknown

English Vocabulary Reading Strategies

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Abstract

This study investigated reading strategies used by a sample of eight successful senior high school readers who were asked to express the meanings of selected unknown English vocabulary from the textbook. The data was collected by means of the think-aloud procedure: Participants were asked to verbalize the manner in which they deduced the meanings of unknown English vocabulary. Analysis revealed that a total of six kinds reading strategies were identified in this study: Using context clues, looking up words in the dictionary, inferring, activating prior knowledge, comparing and contrasting the text, and paraphrasing. The strategies of "using context clues" and "looking up words in the dictionary" were the most commonly used strategies when reading unknown English vocabulary among these successful readers.

Key Words: successful senior high school readers, the think-aloud procedure, unknown English vocabulary decoding strategies