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PAPER

Reading Strategy for Undergraduates with Manifold Objectives

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Undergraduates pursuing less known or recently introduced disciplines lacking vernacular reading materials are forced to read authentic English publications to find data for their examinations and assignments. The main problems related to these publications are their syntactic complexity and lexical density. Students overcome these obstacles on the basis of guess work in regard to the former and through the use of dictionaries in regard to the latter. These being ineffective strategies new tactics are needed to address the issues.

The present research attempts to do it with the help of a grid containing 5 columns named: verb, subject, WH, explanation and details. Very often writers in English employ cohesive devices (relative clauses and relative pronouns in particular) whereby they can embed the main clause of sentences with numerous extra information, making them become exceedingly long and unwieldy. This impedes comprehension. For instance, as the data that inexperienced second-language readers can retain in their short-term memory is limited, complex constructions tend to confuse them. Often, by the time the readers reach the middle of such sentences they have forgotten the beginning thereby experiencing semantic ambiguities. Research bears this out (Alderson, 1984, 143).

The grid helps to overcome this problem. Other functions of the grid is helping readers with regard to perception. "Recognition" of main clause of a sentence and its "Constituents" is a vital factor necessary to "perceive" meaning according to research (ibid). The grid makes the reader isolate the verb first, using affixes, morphemes etc. as syntactic clues. After the recognition of the verb the reader is encouraged to select the appropriate "WH question form" from column 3. Interaction with first and third columns help the reader to identify the subject. By the time s/he reaches this point s/he has deciphered the main clause of the sentence. Columns 4 and 5 meant for less important information are filled later through logical analysis. Data in the columns are substituted with new information subsequently to construct sentences for writing and speech. This technique was tried out in language classes at Universities of Kelaniya and Moratuwa.