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# An Exploratory Study of Korean College Students' Reading Strategy Use in Test Preparing Text Reading*

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This paper endeavored to explore the ways in which Korean college students used reading strategies when reading test preparing text in English. Four college students at a university participated in this study. The students read a different reading passage from the textbook that they were using in their TOEIC class at the time of the study. They were asked to report what he or she was thinking while reading and were interviewed to clarify any confusion. The think-aloud protocols and interview data were analyzed regarding reading strategy use and reading process. There are several common characteristics of each student's reading strategy use in TOEIC passage reading such as setting reading goals, previewing, guessing, re-reading, underlining, paraphrasing, and going back and forth in text. The most interesting strategies they used were reading aloud or analyzing parts of unfamiliar words, skipping and translating. This study demonstrated that not only their individual learning experience in learning to read in English but also the level of awareness of linguistic differences between Korean and English seemed to contribute to their reading strategy use in reading English text.

**[reading strategy use/think-aloud protocols/TOEIC reading]**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the growing population of English readers as a second or foreign language, and despite a growing body of literature on first-language or second-language reading strategy use, there is little research on foreign language reading strategy use. More specifically, in the last 20 years, a number of studies have been conducted on L1 reading

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strategy use for comprehension (Duffy, 2002; Flippo & Caverly, 2009; Palincsar & Perry, 1995; Pressley, 2000), and studies on L2 reading strategies have been increased (Allen, 2003; Anderson, 2005; Bang & Zhao, 2007; Chamot 2005a; Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Jimenez, Garcia & Pearson, 1996; Pang, 2008; Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001; Singhal, 2001). However, there have been relatively few studies on L2 reading strategy studies in an EFL context including Korea (He, 2008; Lee, 2011; Maeng, 2006; Maghsudi & Talebi, 2009; Saricoban, 2002; Song, 1999). Especially, the previous studies of reading strategy in Korea are mostly about reading strategy instruction and reading strategy use in pattern as well as awareness of reading strategy use, which were mostly conducted in quantitative methods. Quantitative information is eminently important, but the methods are insufficient in that they reveal little about the readers' internalized strategy or developed strategy use. To reveal the nature of students' thoughts while reading, it is necessary to conduct an exploratory research on how Korean college students approach reading in English.

On the other hand, Korean students are usually expected to read different types of texts including major-related texts, mandatory EFL course text, and test preparing text for their college years. However, there has been little effort to document how Korean college students understand each type of texts applying their own reading strategies. This study, therefore, is an attempt to explore how Korean college students understand test preparing text in English. This study pays special attention to the reading strategies that the Korean college students use while reading Test of English for International Communication (hereafter, TOEIC) passages followed by multiple-choice questions. Participants for this study included four Korean undergraduate students at a university in Korea. The reason to select TOEIC passage for this study is that it is one of the most familiar authentic text types to Korean college students. Most Korean undergraduate students try to achieve higher TOEIC score before graduation, and there are very few qualitative studies on how they understand the text type in terms of reading strategy use. Based on this knowledge gap, the research question is "How do the four college English learners in Korea use reading strategies to understand test preparation text such as TOEIC reading passage?"

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many scholars consider reading a constructive process. Wade (1990) viewed reading as the active construction of meaning, and McGeown and Getilucci (2007) described reading as "a covert process actively controlled by readers to create meaning from text" (p.136). On the other hand, according to Anderson (1991), strategies are deliberate,

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cognitive steps that learners take in acquiring, storing, and retrieving new information. In this sense, strategies are a reader's resource for understanding (Block, 1986).

Regarding definitions of reading strategies in the L2 literature, Cohen (1986) defined reading strategies as "those mental processes that readers consciously choose to use in accomplishing reading tasks" (p.7). Brantmeier (2002) defined reading strategies as the comprehension processes that readers use in order to make sense of what they read. Carrell, Gajdusek, and Wise (1998) defined reading strategies as "actions that readers select and control to achieve goals or objectives" (p.97).

Researchers in reading strategy studies have utilized different strategy types when categorizing reading strategies (Anderson, 1991; Block, 1986; Carrell, 1989; Jimenez et al., 1996; Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). The classification scheme that was used in this study is based on Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001). Using a cognitive framework, they grouped what they found into metacognitive, cognitive, and/or support strategies, which many other researchers follow. According to them, metacognitive strategies are defined as "those intentional, carefully planned techniques by which learners monitor or manage their reading" (p.436). Such strategies include setting purpose for reading, previewing before reading, or determining what to read. Cognitive strategies are defined as "the actions and procedures readers use while working directly with the text" (p.436). These include adjusting reading rate, pausing and thinking about reading, re-reading, or guessing meaning of unknown words. Support strategies are "basically supportive actions learners take that are intended to aid the reader in comprehending the text" (p.436). Such strategies as using a dictionary, taking notes, or underlining or highlighting the text belong to support strategies.

In previous studies, many scholars have used successful and less-successful dichotomies in studying reading strategy use in an ESL context (Carrell, 1989; Grabe, 1991; Saumell, Hughes, & Lopate, 1999; Shih, 1992; Singhal, 2001). In other words, the studies on ESL reading strategy have used generally dichotomized learners as successful or unsuccessful learners, and asked them about their most frequently used strategies and their least frequently used strategies. In comparing commonly used strategies of native English learners and ESL learners, ESL learners tended to use more support reading strategies than native English learners. In terms of the proficiency level of ESL learners and strategy use, advanced ESL learners tended to use global strategies and metacognitive strategies more often, whereas ESL learners with a lower proficiency level tended to use more local strategies. In addition, researchers who were interested in the relationship between strategy use and comprehension found that the more the ESL learner used reading strategies, the higher the score he or she tended to have on comprehension tests.

More specifically, in previous studies, successful readers consider reading as an active

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meaning construction process (Shih, 1992) and as an interactive process (Saumell et al., 1999). Better readers tend to show better strategy use and more effective metacognitive skill use (Grabe, 1991). They have a tendency to have a positive self-concept as a reader. They know and use many different strategies, including employing top-down processes based on prior knowledge and schemata (Carrell, 1989; Shih, 1992). Contrary to successful readers, less successful readers tend to pay attention to decoding processes in reading, and consider reading as a passive activity. Singhal (2001) describes the characteristics of less successful readers in terms of reading strategy use as "they fail to monitor their comprehension, underutilize effective reading strategies, and employ fewer reading strategies when reading" (p.7). They tended to depend more on bottom-up, text-based strategies.

The studies on reading strategy use in Korea can, in a broad sense, be grouped into two areas. One group comprises the studies that investigated the effectiveness of reading strategy instruction on the reading ability of Korean college students. Several studies investigated the effectiveness of explicit English reading strategy instruction on the positive improvement of Korean college students' reading ability of English text (Chang, 2012; Kim, 2006; Song, 1998; Song, 1999). The other group comprises the studies that examined the strategy use patterns of Korean college students in reading an English text (Chun, 2006; Lee, 2008; Maeng, 2006; Rha & Lee, 2005). They often use statistical methods and usually neglected to capture learners' real thought processes through learner-focused perspectives. Most of them focused on teacher-oriented strategy training and strategy use pattern analysis in numbers, and there were too few case studies exploring the various ways Korean English learners use reading strategies to understand reading texts in English.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### 1. Participants

Selected by a purposeful sampling technique (Martella, Nelson, & Marchand-Martella, 1999), four college students at a university in Seoul, taking a TOEIC class, participated in this study. The criteria for selection were that they were taking a TOEIC class and non-English majors at the time of this study. They were 2 male students (Jongsoo and Kibum) and 2 female students (Yoori and Miso) between the ages of 20 and 27. Their names are pseudonyms. They had been studying English for more than 10 years and were non-English majors. The TOEIC class that they were taking was worth 2 credits and the students received 3 hours of instruction per week at

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an intermediate level class of the university.

## 2. Data Collection Instruments

Think-aloud protocols have been used by researchers to document strategy use in each specific task (Anderson, 1991; Block, 1986; He, 2008; Jimenez et al., 1996). Think-aloud protocols are particularly useful in obtaining in-depth information from participants while they are engaged in a reading task (Anderson, 1991; Feyton, Flaitz, & LaRocca, 1999). Based on the literature, I utilized think-aloud protocols as a primary instrument for getting information about the participants' strategy use while reading in English. While participants are often asked to do think-alouds with prompts, in this study, participants were not given prompts since they had learned how to do the think-aloud protocols during their initial think-aloud practice session. The students were allowed to complete the think-aloud task in either English or Korean. All participants chose to complete the think-aloud in Korean.

Regarding the texts that were used in the study, the students were asked to bring the English textbook which they were using in the TOEIC class. I interviewed the students about their feelings regarding the reading material. I asked whether they thought the texts hard or easy, boring or interesting. Using the information I gathered through these interviews, I chose the authentic texts for the think-aloud tasks. More specifically, the criteria of the text selection were: (1) the texts may vary in length although students read the whole length of the text, (2) students were interested in the topic, (3) students read texts challenging enough to allow them to apply reading strategies, and (4) students read texts which they did not read in the real class.

## 3. Data Collection Procedures

### 1) Phase I: Preliminary Think-aloud Practice

I explained the task involved in this study to each participant. I explained that readers always think while reading and students would be asked to report exactly what they were thinking while reading. I informed them that the think-aloud protocol would require them to report how they interacted with the text in order to comprehend it. I also informed them that they would have to become familiar with the task by practicing it. Then, I modeled the task while reading a short article on education in order to show each participant how to think-aloud. After the demonstration, the participants practiced think-aloud with a sample text. The text was taken from *Interactions 2: Reading* (Kirn & Hartman, 1997). It was a general expository passage about campus life in the United

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States, comprising approximately 530 words. The text was chosen because it talked about college life, which was related to the students' current lifestyle.

In the practice section, students produced verbal protocols while reading the sample text with the aid of visual prompts (red dots). The dots were not used in the real reading tasks, but in the initial practice session, the dots were used to get the students familiar with think-aloud. I did not prompt the participants verbally so as not to distract them. Instead, they were allowed to use a dictionary, a pen, and a sheet of paper. Each student had 30 minutes to practice the task.

After the think-aloud practice, I informed them, after reading a text, that they also would be expected to be interviewed. I also told them that the actual think-aloud task would begin when they felt comfortable with the task. I asked the students whether they had any questions, and they reported that they understood what they were expected to do. Therefore, I decided to move on to the next research stage which was the task-based investigation.

2) Phase II: Test Preparing Text Reading

In the second stage, each participant met the researcher for the think-aloud session. I met each participant at a scheduled time, and he or she was interviewed and did a reading task in a quiet classroom on campus. At each meeting, I prepared the day's text, a pen, a blank paper, pencils, and highlighters for the participants. I informed them that they could use a dictionary and they could mark or write anything in the passage or on the blank paper.

Before each think-aloud task, following Jimenez et al. (1996), I asked questions about the topics and key vocabulary terms from the text to figure out whether the students had prior knowledge of the topics in the text. During each think-aloud task, each participant was asked to report what he or she was thinking while reading. They were reminded to read as they usually did while saying everything that they were thinking when they read. They were not told to think aloud after each sentence. They could read at their own pace. While they were reading and doing think-aloud tasks, their individual reading behaviors were observed.

Immediately after the participants finished their think-alouds, follow-up interviews were conducted to clarify any confusion. During these follow-up interviews, if necessary, they listened to the audio-tapes of their think-alouds, and I prompted them to further comment and analyze the reading strategies they had used during their think-alouds. For example, I asked such nondirective questions as "Can you tell me more about what you just said?" or "Is there anything else you would like to say?" In addition, if necessary, the participants were asked to look at the text, identify the elements of the text which

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made the reading difficult, and talk to me about how they managed to comprehend them. I also asked the participants to talk about the notes they made in the margins or on the scrap paper and the different markings they used in the text. Their remarks were recorded, and later transcribed, coded, and analyzed.

### 4. Data Analysis

Data from the think-aloud protocols was transcribed and coded in order to elucidate recurring issues regarding reading strategy use. More specifically, I read and looked through the transcripts several times to identify think-aloud utterances based on Hartman (1995). According to Hartman (1995), think-aloud utterances are defined as "those words spoken aloud by a student that were preceded and followed by some period of silence" (p.529). While coding the information from the think-alouds, I identified and classified participants' strategies using classifications of reading strategies by Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001). There are 28 reading strategies organized into 3 categories: metacognitive, cognitive, and support strategies (see Appendix). The interview data was also transcribed, coded, and categorized in terms of reading strategy use, reading process, and reading experience.

## IV. FINDINGS

### 1. Jongsoo's Reading Strategy Use

The passage Jongsoo read was a letter with about 250 words and was presented in a standard letter format: greeting, body, closing, and signature. Four reading comprehension questions followed.

In terms of metacognitive strategy use, as soon as Jongsoo recognized that the passage had letter format, he looked to see who wrote it and to whom it was written (MET4). The purpose he established for reading the letter was to find the answers to the questions (MET1). He previewed the text by scanning it (MET2). He read the first paragraph and then read the first question, which asked why the letter had been written. He read the first paragraph over again to search for the answer to the first question, since he knew that the first question was almost always about the purpose of the reading (MET4). After reading the first line of the first paragraph, he thought that it was a letter of appreciation (MET9).

Text: We'd like very much to be the headquarters for your annual sales

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management conference October 22 to 27.

Jongsoo: (He read while translating into Korean.) We. From October 22 to 27. Every year. For sales management. To become a headquarter. Like it very much. *Headquarter. Headquarter. Headquarter. What is headquarter? I will read the questions first.* (After reading the questions silently) *OK. I will read the first sentence again.* (He read the first sentence again silently.) *They are appreciating that he was selected. About he is selected as sales manager every year. They are appreciating.*

His supposition regarding the purpose of the letter was wrong, and it was caused by his misunderstanding of the sentence "*We'd like very much to be the headquarters for your annual sales management conference.*" as "*We liked you very much to be the headquarters for your annual sales management conference.*"

As he read through to the last paragraph and looked at the final question, he kept trying to glean what the text was about (MET9) by using context clues (MET7), and he checked to see if his guess was correct (MET10). He came to realize that his guess was wrong after reading the context clue "*please telephone me*" at the very end of the letter. It was not a letter of appreciation, but rather a letter of asking to use the conference center for an annual sales management conference. Jongsoo changed his guess about the purpose of the letter to "*request to use Seattle Conference Center.*" He checked the information in the letter to see if it corresponded with his guess (MET3). Jongsoo's process of changing his mind about the purpose of the letter is illustrated below.

Text: Please let me know before September 5 whether I should reserve accommodations for you. While the October date is open now, the situation could quickly change. In the meantime, if there's anything you would like to know that isn't covered in the booklets, please telephone me at (919) 453-9562.

Jongsoo: (He silently read the text.) *They ask them to make a reservation as soon as possible because (the situation) could quickly change. Call them. Call them if they have something to ask for. Wait. This is not about appreciating. Then what is this letter about? Um. It is confusing. I will read the question.*

Text: Question 4: By when must Mr. Watson make a reservation if he wants to host a conference in Seattle Conference Center?

Jongsoo: (He read while translating into Korean.) By when. Have to make a

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reservation? If he wants to become a conference host, make it until. *OK. It is not about appreciating. They are asking about reservation. Right. It is about a request. When I read the first paragraph, I thought it is a thank you letter because they prepared for things every year. But it is about requesting for reservation.*

On the other hand, when Jongsoo read the passage and the questions, he sometimes re-read the corresponding paragraph to look for the answers to the comprehension questions (COG11). In terms of word recognition, he sometimes skipped vocabulary he did not understand, such as "*headquarter*" and "*catering service*." On the other hand, he guessed the meaning of the unfamiliar word "*rate*" in context (COG12), as shown below.

Text: Another advantage of the date you selected is that summer rates are still in effect. This means that all rooms are just a little less than half the winter rates that take effect from December 1.

Question 2: How much does conference accommodation in Seattle Conference Center cost in October?

Jongsoo: (He read while translating into Korean.) Another advantage. summer rate. Still. Have effect. This means. Less than half the winter rate. *What are the winter rates? I will read the second question.* In October. How much. conference accommodation. Seattle Conference Center. Cost? *Ah. Here rate means cost because cost is related to price. I did not know that. Here it is.* (He went back to the text again and read aloud.) rate. Summer… rate. *Um. OK. It means that summer rate is cheaper than winter rate. The rates is about half. OK. Less than that of December. Um. I got it.*

Jongsoo usually read slowly and carefully (COG3) and tried to stay focused on the reading (COG4). He sometimes read the passage aloud (COG2) when he re-read it to look for answers to the questions. He adjusted his reading rate when he encountered difficult parts (COG5). He paid closer attention to what he read even though the text became difficult (COG6), and he sometimes paused and thought about the reading (COG7).

Regarding support strategy use, Jongsoo did not look up words in the dictionary while reading the letter, even though he came across unfamiliar words. Nor did he leave any special notes, except to indicate the letter's sender and recipient. However, he did use some other support strategies while reading the text. He underlined or circled information in the text (SUP2), paraphrased what he read for better understanding

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(SUP4), went back and forth in the text (SUP5), and often asked himself questions (SUP6). For example, when he read the following text, he re-read it aloud and he went back and forth in the text when answering the comprehension questions. He kept asking himself questions or restating what he read in his own words.

> Text: Some of these are listed on page 2 of "*So You're Having a Meeting.*" I'd like to share with you some of the letters I've received praising our excellent accommodations and our know-how in looking after our guests.
>
> Question 3: What specific information is not included in the enclosed materials? (A) Accommodation rates for the summer season (B) Names of organizations which have held a meeting in Seattle Conference Center (C) Details on recreational facilities and catering services (D) Letters that praise Seattle Conference Center's accommodation services
>
> Jongsoo: (He read while translating into Korean.) Some of these are on page 2. *Page 2? Then is it something like a book? Page 2? I will keep reading.* Letters? Received praising? Guest. know-how. (After silently reading the third question and answer choices) *OK. I think I understand. It is talking about summer rate. Are there names of organizations? Names of organizations? Skip it. It does not mention about (C). Letter? I read the word. Where?* (He went back in text and read the paragraph again in English.) *Um. I'll read it again.* (He read aloud.) I've received praising…our excellent accom…modations and our know-how…(He went back to the question and read the choice (C) again.) *what is catering service? I'm confused. I can't find names of organizations, either. It seemed that there is little explanation of recreational facilities. I'm still confused. Let's choose (B) as an answer. There is no definite mention of names of organizations, I think.*

The answer was (C), and he had incorrectly chosen (B). He picked the wrong answer because he failed to make a connection between "*names of organizations*" in answer (B) to "*some of these are listed on page 2*" in the text. In addition, he did not try to figure out what "*catering services*" meant and skipped it even though it was a critical hint for choosing the right answer.

## 2. Kibum's Reading Strategy Use

The passage for Kibum was a report about a person named Katherine Weller. It was 180 words and consisted of two paragraphs. Four multiple-choice comprehension

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questions followed the passage.

Kibum had a purpose for reading (MET1) the TOEIC passage. It was to understand the article and answer the questions correctly. With this purpose in mind, he read the questions before reading the passage. While reading the text, whenever he read something he thought might be a clue to answer a question, he went back to the questions and chose his answer. He tended to decide what parts to read more closely as he read, depending on the questions he had to answer (MET5).

> I started reading the text after looking at the questions. I keep on reading the text until I find a sentence that is similar to the one in the questions. I go back to the questions and tried to match the text to find the answers. When I feel that 'I have read something before like this in the question' while reading the whole passage, I read that part over and over and try to look at the questions again to find the answers. That's what I did.

While reading the second paragraph, he tried to guess what the paragraph was about (MET9). It was easier for him to understand the second paragraph, since he was able to surmise it was about Katherine Weller's working experience. Such expressions as "*worked for*" and "*played a key role*" suggested the topic of the paragraph to him. Compared to other participants, Kibum used fewer metacognitive strategies.

In terms of cognitive strategy use, Kibum utilized reading-aloud when the text became hard (COG2), adjusting his reading rate (COG5), re-reading for better understanding (COG11), and guessing the meaning of unknown words (COG12). More specifically, he tended to read the text aloud in English and translate it into Korean. If a part was difficult to understand, he looked up the unfamiliar words in the dictionary. Then, he re-read the part and translated it into Korean. If he was unable to translate the part or unable to understand it, even after re-reading, he just skipped it. His reading speed slowed down when he had too difficult parts. He had the most difficulty understanding the following part from the middle of the first paragraph:

> Text: As a highly motivated executive, Weller has more than 15 years of experience and successful records in establishing new networks for product promotion and coming up with innovative sales strategies.
>
> Kibum: (He read aloud while translating into Korean.) as a highly motivated. High motivations. Executive. executive…executive… *What does this word mean?* (He looked it up in the dictionary.) *administrative, administrator. Ah. It means administrator. Then let's read again.* (He read aloud while translating into Korean.)

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Motivated. Weller has more than 15 years of experience. Establishing. *I see.* (He re-read the text aloud.) executive…establishing new network for product. *Um.* (He re-read the text while translating into Korean.) more than. Experienced for more than 15 years. Successful records. Establishing. New networks. (He read the text aloud.) for product promotion and coming up with innovative sales strategies. *Increasing products?* innovative sale. *There are many things I do not know. Let's move on for now.*

In terms of trying to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words, Kibum tended to read unfamiliar words aloud several times. As illustrated above, he repeated "*executive*" three times before looking it up in the dictionary. In the debriefing interview, I asked why he read the word aloud in English. He said reading unfamiliar words aloud in English helped him get a sense of the meaning in English. For example, he also read "*innovative*" aloud several times before using a dictionary. While repeating it, he recalled that he had heard the word "*innovative*" in a commercial on TV, and it helped him to guess the meaning. Sounding out words in English seemed to help him guess the meaning of unknown words (COG12).

In short, translating and skipping were the strategies Kibum used most often whenever he encountered difficult parts while reading. As mentioned above, I noticed that he usually translated what he read into Korean. If the translation was unsuccessful, he skipped the part.

The support strategies Kibum used included using reference materials (SUP3), paraphrasing for better understanding (SUP4), and going back and forth in the text (SUP5). As he read each sentence, he followed along the words on each line with his pencil, without leaving any marks. Interestingly, he was not aware he followed the line of text with his pencil. After trying to guess the meaning of unknown words, he looked them up in the dictionary. In this reading task, he just paraphrased the content of the first paragraph, after having read the entire passage.

Kibum went back and forth in the text to answer questions related to the reading passage. As mentioned above, he read the multiple-choice questions before reading the passage, and he used what he read in the text to answer the questions. He went back and forth in the text to look for relationships among the ideas in it, as shown below.

Text: Sutton Inc. expects her to reinforce its stance in the home electronics market.

Kibum: *It says the company expects.* (He read the text aloud.) She reinforce…reinforce… *What is this?* (He looked it up in the dictionary.) *It means strengthen.* (He read the text aloud.) stance in the home electronics market. She

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reinforce its. *I do not know.* (He read the text aloud.) home electronic market. *Ah, I think I read this in the question.* (He went back to the question and read it again.) *Ah, right. This company.* (A) is home electronic company. *This is the answer.*

## 3. Yoori's Reading Strategy Use

The reading passage of the reading task for Yoori was an advertisement for a portable fridge. It consisted of four short paragraphs with about 200 words. The passage was followed by two comprehension questions about the purpose of the advertisement and advantage of purchasing the company's product.

The most distinctive characteristic of her performance on the reading task was that she read title and the comprehension questions and their choices before reading the passage. She reasoned that she read the questions first since she was able to preview what the passage was about (MET2). By doing this, she was also able to determine where in the passage she should focus her attention in order to find answers to the questions (MET5). In short, she started her reading with her reading purpose (MET1) as finding answers to the questions. She got in the habit of reading titles and questions prior to approaching the body of a given text in high school and continued employing this strategy in her university courses.

> The reason for reading the question first is because of the previous education that I received. Many teachers told me that you had to read the questions first. I think it became a habit for me, reading the question first and trying to find the answer in the text. Also, in order to understand what the passage is referring to, I look at the title first. I think this has also become a habit for me since it helped in the past, to look at the titles first.

Yoori also considered noting text characteristics (MET4) of each question type before reading the passage. She was already aware of the organizational characteristics of question types of in TOEIC readings. More specifically, she knew that question one was about the purpose of the reading, and question two was a comprehension question about the content. She was also aware that the passage consisted of four paragraphs, and each paragraph would talk about a different topic. Previewing text characteristic helped her predict that she was going to read an advertisement of an inexpensive product called Lektron Kool.

Finally, she used context clues (MET7) to understand the difficult part while reading. For instance, she seldom translated what she read while reading the second paragraph since she did not understand it. She, instead, used context clues including "*module*",

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"*coil*", and "*motors*", in the text, to figure out the meaning of the paragraph as shown below.

> Text: It's a lightweight but roomy electronic refrigerator that you can plug into your car or a 110-volt adaptor. The secret is in Lektron Kool's thermo-electronic solid-state module which replaces all bulky piping coils, compressors, and motors you find in conventional portable refrigerators. Lektron Kool is the most indispensable item of equipment you carry for your summer vacation.
>
> Yoori: (She read aloud the text.) lightweight but roomy electronic refrigerator you can plug into your car. *Maybe it's one of those electronic something. The secret is the module. How does this work?* (She read aloud the text.) which replaces…*Since the phrase after 'which' describes what is before it…* (She read aloud the text.) Replace. *Replaces something? Large piping coils? Coil? Talking about the parts? Motors. Maybe an electrical motor? So, maybe it means that without using such big parts, this 'module' is replacing.* (She read aloud the text.) conventional… indispensable item. *Well, maybe it means that it is a comfortable refrigerator. Seems like this is convenient. Move on.*

Yoori employed cognitive strategies including using prior knowledge (COG1), reading aloud when text becomes hard (COG2), reading slowly and carefully (COG3), adjusting reading rate (COG5), and guessing the meaning of unknown words (COG12). The most difficult paragraph for her to understand was the second paragraph, and she utilized her prior knowledge of cars to understand the paragraph.

> While I was reading this paragraph (the second paragraph), I remembered something that I had read about cars. It was about how a car operated. I just suddenly remembered that and tried to understand (this passage) by applying the principles that I learned back then.

On the whole, she read the text slowly and carefully, translating each sentence in Korean. Her reading speed slowed down when she read the second paragraph. She read the first part of the second paragraph aloud in English and tried to figure out the content, using context clues as illustrated above.

As for understanding unfamiliar words, she used the guessing strategy or she just skipped the word. For instance, she did not know the word "*fridge*" was an abbreviated form of "*refrigerator*." She guessed the meaning of the word by reading the first paragraph of the passage. She also had a sense of the word by comparing the similar

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structure of "*fridge*" and "*refrigerator*." On the other hand, she just skipped the word "*fingertips*" without guessing the meaning or looking it up in the dictionary.

> Text: The Lektron Kool, our newest product, is the greatest little portable fridge you've ever seen. Pack it with sandwiches, drinks, fruit, whatever, and you'll have at your fingertips really cold food and drink day and night. The Lektron Kool is not an ice box. It's a lightweight but roomy electronic refrigerator…
>
> Yoori: (She read while translating into Korean.) the Lektron Kool. New model. This is the greatest little. (She read aloud the text.) portable fridge. *What is fridge?* (She read aloud the text.) sandwiches, drinks, fruit, whatever… fingertips? *Skip it.* (She read while translating into Korean.) day and night. Cold food and drink. Not an ice box. (She read aloud the text.) re…fri..ge..rator… *Here, spelling looks similar. Putting what I read together, it is a product, and well, foods can be stored. Maybe it means Naingjanggo in Korean.*

Yoori underlined the words, "*fridge*" and "*fingertips*", with which she was not familiar (SUP2). As mentioned above, she read the title and comprehension questions before reading the passage. After first checking the question she would need to answer, she proceeded with reading the passage. After reading the passage, she went back into the text to find answers to the questions (SUP5).

## 4. Miso's Reading Strategy Use

The passage for Miso was a memo addressed to the employees of a company informing them of imminent company takeover by another company. It consisted of three short paragraphs of about 245 words and was followed by two multiple choice comprehension questions. The questions asked the reader to identify the purpose of the announcement and to sort true and false information about the company.

Miso's reading purpose at the outset of the task was to be able to answer the comprehension questions after reading the text (MET1). She assumed that answering the questions was the purpose of the TOEIC reading task. After having established her reading purpose, she read the comprehension questions to get a sense of the type of information she would need to pay attention to in order to complete the task successfully (MET2). She was already accustomed to the format of TOEIC comprehension questions. She was aware of the fact that the first question usually dealt with the author's purpose and that this was usually followed by questions that asked the reader to identify pronouns, interpret figures, and select true and false information in the text. While

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reading, she kept searching for the key parts of text where she would be able to find the answers to the comprehension questions (MET3). In addition to actively searching for the answers in the text, she was constantly evaluating the material deciding what to read closely and what to ignore (MET5).

> When answering TOEIC questions, reading the questions first and roughly understanding the message helps reading the text more easily. I also read the questions first to pinpoint the required answers. In other words, you carefully read the questions first and focus on the parts relevant to the questions when reading the text.

There were very few parts that hindered her from understanding the passage, but she seemed to lose her concentration when she encountered several new words and expressions such as "*acquisition*", "*into family*", and "*take over*." Her strategies for getting over this hurdle were to stay focused on the reading (COG4), to decrease her reading speed (COG5), to re-read the unknown words (COG11), and guessing their meanings in context (COG12). In addition, once she read the passage and the questions, she re-read key parts of the passage to find answers to the questions.

As mentioned above, it was revealed that Miso successfully understood the passage. She translated each sentence into Korean with the exception of the expressions mentioned above. Beyond translating, she underlined information in the text (SUP2) and sometimes went back and forth in the text (SUP5). She used the latter strategy in order to find information related to the comprehension questions. Marking where key information was located in the text was one of her main strategies in understanding the text.

> For TOEIC reading where you are put under time pressure, I roll my eyes rapidly and use my hand swiftly. Well, for me at least. I use my hand when memorizing and leave many visual signs. Some friends memorize by saying it out loud, but I once heard that using your hand allows you to better memorize. So I usually leave many markings like this and during the actual tests, I mark even more to make sure I don't miss any critical information. I mean, for tests like TOEIC.

## V. DISCUSSION

In general, synthesizing the findings of each participant's patterns of reading strategy use across the reading tasks revealed several common characteristics. In terms of

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metacognitive reading strategy use, the most commonly used strategies were "*setting purpose for reading*", "*previewing text before reading*", "*determining what to read*", "*using context clues*", and "*predicting or guessing text meaning.*" Regarding cognitive reading strategy use, the participants most often used "*reading aloud when text becomes hard*" and "*adjusting reading rate.*" They also used often such cognitive strategies as "*reading slowly and carefully*", "*re-reading for better understanding*", and "*guessing meaning of unknown words.*" Interestingly, however, they almost never used "*evaluating what is read*" and "*resolving conflicting information.*" Finally, the most commonly used types of support reading strategies were "*underlining information in text*", "*paraphrasing for better understanding*", "*using reference materials*", and "*going back and forth in text.*"

An interesting tendency that emerged from the study is that most students in this study—that is, Jongsoo, Kibum, and Yoori—often read English text aloud. They especially tended to read-aloud unfamiliar words in order to get a sense of their meaning of the words. This helped them to better understand difficult parts of the text. Yoori described her reasons for reading aloud unknown words as follows:

> Yoori: When there are words that I don't know, I try to pronounce all of them. I think that I might recall the words by pronouncing them. It might be a word that I heard before. So I try to pronounce each of them. Frankly, just by looking at them, I don't recall them easily. How should I put it? When I hear them, they sound familiar, but just by looking at them, I can't really tell. There are so many that look like this (the word 'distinction'). If you look at them like this, it only looks like a combination of characters or look similar to 'district', but when you pronounce them, the feeling is clearly different. I can't explain how, but that's just the way it is.

Similar to Yoori, the other students also seemed to think that pronouncing words or sentences that they found difficult to understand helped them guess the meaning of those words or sentences from the context. The habit of using reading aloud as a strategy for understanding was recognized by Bang and Zhao (2007) as one that distinguished Korean learners from those of Chinese learners. The authors stated:

> Korean readers tended to use phonological processing strategies, while Chinese readers tended to use visual-orthographic processing strategies to overcome the comprehension gaps caused by inadequate knowledge of vocabulary. (p.39)

They also stated that Korean students tended to break down unknown words into smaller components in order to better grasp their meaning. Yoori was observed dividing

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new words into their respective parts: prefix, root, and suffix. The other participants attempted to do the same as they were observed placing slashes through unknown words. This study supports Bang and Zhao's findings that Korean students seemed to prefer reading aloud or analyzing parts of unfamiliar words when they had to guess meanings of unknown words. The strategy of breaking down new words also seemed to be related to the Korean writing system as shown in Bang and Zhao (2007). In addition to the strategies described above, students also used dictionaries to check the accuracy of their guesses regarding the meaning of new words.

Another emerging theme from the analysis revealed that the students relied on different support strategies in general. Interestingly, the male students seemed to rely more on support strategies and used a greater variety of them than the female students throughout the reading tasks. The finding seemed to contradict Lee (2008)'s finding that females seem to use more support strategies. Considering that the male students' English proficiency level was relatively lower than that of the female students, it could be that English proficiency, rather than gender difference, might be responsible for the male students' frequent use of support strategies. On the other hand, the students' purpose in underlining information in the text was to distinguish the key portions of the text. The use of paraphrasing appeared to not only help them to better comprehend the text but also to retain what they read.

An unexpected finding emerged in the analysis. There were two strategies which were not listed in the classification of reading strategies but were nonetheless the most commonly used strategies across the reading tasks. All of the participants translated or skipped some portion of each text. It seemed that skipping was related the metacognitive strategy, determining what to read. The students skipped parts if they evaluated them as unimportant or too challenging. Some students tried to understand the skipped parts by re-reading them.

It was observed that the students naturally translated English text into Korean while they read. The analysis of the think-aloud protocols also revealed that the students had a strong tendency to translate texts from English into their native language. The automatic translation seemed to be a natural habit of the students, developed through their academic careers, and they seemed to believe that translating what they read in English helped them comprehend and remember the content.

There were several critical differences between Korean and English sentence structures which often made it difficult for Korean students to comprehend English text. Synthesizing the findings of this study seemed to support this insight. In other words, word order differences between subject-object-verb in Korean and subject-verb-object in English in addition to flexible deletion of subject or object nouns in Korean sentences seemed to contribute to the difficulties that Korean students faced while trying to

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comprehend English texts. They were sometimes confused about what the pronouns referred to in the context of a given sentence and often mistranslated what they read despite knowing all the words in the sentence. It was evident that greater knowledge of grammatical and syntactic differences between the two languages led to greater ease in comprehending English text in general.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This present study has two main limitations: One is that each student did only one reading task, which is not enough to generalize the reading process of the students. The other is that it is necessary to enhance validity of the analysis through triangulation of different sources of data. With the limitations, however, this study contributed to reveal the real thought process and reading strategy use of college learners in reading test preparing text in English. By taking stance of students in reading, teachers are able to better understand what and how they are doing in their reading practices, which may help them design their reading class better.

A possible future research topic is to explore how Korean students understand different types of reading texts and how the ways are different from those of test preparing text reading. Furthermore, the insight from observation and analysis of the reading tasks implies that we need to know more about how L2 readers selectively use their L1 linguistic and schematic resources to enhance their understanding of L2 text. L1 to L2 selective strategy transfer such as sounding out words to help predict their meaning, which was shown in this study, is related to transfer of L1 reading skills and strategies. Transferred L1 structures and L2 syntactic structures can also be the possible ongoing topic of research in the field of L1 and L2 strategy transfer.

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## APPENDIX

Classifications of Reading Strategies
(From Sheorey and Mokhtari, 2001)

| Name | Strategy |
|---|---|
| MET1 | Setting purpose for reading |
| MET2 | Previewing text before reading |
| MET3 | Checking how text content fits purpose |
| MET4 | Noting text characteristics |
| MET5 | Determining what to read |
| MET6 | Using text features (e.g. tables) |
| MET7 | Using context clues |
| MET8 | Using typographical aids (e.g. italics) |
| MET9 | Predicting or guessing text meaning |
| MET10 | Confirming predictions |
| COG1 | Using prior knowledge |
| COG2 | Reading aloud when text becomes hard |
| COG3 | Reading slowly and carefully |
| COG4 | Trying to stay focused on reading |
| COG5 | Adjusting reading rate |
| COG6 | Paying close attention to reading |
| COG7 | Pausing and thinking about reading |
| COG8 | Visualizing information read |

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| | |
|---|---|
| COG9 | Evaluating what is read |
| COG10 | Resolving conflicting information |
| COG11 | Re-reading for better understanding |
| COG12 | Guessing meaning of unknown words |
| SUP1 | Taking notes while reading |
| SUP2 | Underlining information in text |
| SUP3 | Using reference materials |
| SUP4 | Paraphrasing for better understanding |
| SUP5 | Going back and forth in text |
| SUP6 | Asking oneself questions |

**Examples in: English**
**Applicable Languages: English**
**Applicable Levels: College**

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