*영어어문교육, 15*권 **4**호 **2009**년 겨울

Case Studies in EFL Reading: Perceptions, Experiences, and Strategies

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Chin, Cheongsook. (2009). Case studies in EFL reading: Perceptions, experiences, and strategies. *English Language & Literature Teaching, 15*(4), 1-22.

This case study aimed to explore proficient EFL readers' perceptions and experiences about reading tasks and how those perceptions and experiences influence their reading processing behaviors, and to examine how the cultural background of a text affects their reading strategies and comprehension. Three college students who were non-English majors participated in this study. Three data sources were employed: questionnaires, interviews, and think-alouds. The results showed that: (1) the participants emphasized comprehension as the goal of reading and considered themselves good EFL readers; (2) their reading purposes were closely associated with personal pursuits; (3) they preferred to read materials that deal with areas of interest but did not try to take a risk in terms of level of difficulty and/or length; (4) they implemented a multistrategic approach to reading in that the majority of their strategy use was in conjunction with their concern about meaning construction; (5) they were able to develop useful understandings of unknown vocabulary; and (6) their clear awareness of the cultural background presupposed in the text helped them invoke prior knowledge and reduce unknown vocabulary hindrances which contributed to comprehension. Pedagogical implications for EFL reading instruction are provided.

[EFL readers/perceptions/reading behaviors/cultural background]

I. INTRODUCTION

In academic contexts, reading is claimed to be the most important skill that is necessary to learn new information and have access to alternative explanations and interpretations. Moreover, reading is a pivotal means of independent learning, whether the purpose is to fulfill academic tasks better or to promote language abilities. With regard to research implications for L2 reading instruction, it is obligatory to illuminate the target L2 readers'

nature. "L2 readers" are defined as cognitively mature populations who are already literate in their L1s learning to read in L2. Compared to L1 readers, L2 readers in general have weak linguistic skills and a limited vocabulary store. They may also have difficulty understanding text organization and culture-specific information which could be an impediment to reading comprehension. While L1 reading presupposes that information processing takes place in a single language, L2 reading postulates dual-language involvement. Therefore, L2 readers are expected to rely on their L1 knowledge and L1 reading abilities if such abilities are beneficial. In addition, they are able to make use of L2-specific resources such as bilingual dictionaries, word glosses, and mental translation skills (Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Koda, 2005).

Most of the research in L2 reading has focused on L2 learners' comprehension, motivation, cognitive strategies, recall, and the influence of a text's cultural background on reading comprehension. However, there seems to be little research that traces the reasons L2 readers employ or favor certain types of strategies during reading. Furthermore, L2 readers' perceptions about reading tasks appear to be neglected areas in L2 research (Chesser, 1993; Chin, 2008; Kim, 2008). L2 readers' perceptions may be influential factors from which their cognitive strategies are derived. Differences in perceptions may result in differences in the strategies that readers employ and in the comprehension that they achieve, and may distinguish proficient L2 readers from the less-proficient. Also, the cultural background of a text could be another factor that may influence L2 readers' cognitive strategies and reading comprehension. When designing a curriculum and selecting text materials for L2 readers, classroom teachers should have a clear understanding of how L2 readers' perceptions affect their reading strategies, and of how a text's cultural background affects L2 readers' reading strategies and comprehension.

Hence, the primary goal of the present case study is to explore proficient EFL readers' perceptions and experiences that they have with regard to reading in English, and to examine how those perceptions and experiences influence their reading strategies. The secondary goal is to investigate how the cultural background of a text affects their reading strategies and comprehension.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Goodman (1971) characterized reading as a psycholinguistic guessing game, in which the "reader, a language user, reconstructs, as best he can a message which has been encoded by a writer as a graphic display" (p. 135). Goodman regarded this act of reconstruction as a cycle of sampling, predicting, testing, and confirming. Efficient reading does not require readers to identify all of the elements in the text, but rather to choose the

minimum number of most useful cues essential to generate appropriate guesses at the first reading. Clarke and Silberstein (1977) summarized implications for L2 reading instruction which could be derived from Goodman's psycholinguistic perspective of reading. The accurate adjustment of a variety of skills is conducive to success in reading. Thus, the primary concern of a reading program should be to prepare students for exercising reading skills (e.g., skimming, scanning, reading for thorough comprehension, and critical reading), and to teach them to improve fix-up strategies (e.g., guessing meaning from context). Teachers' objectives in reading instruction are to help students decide their goals, to train them to employ reading strategies useful to the given task, to urge them to take risks, to relax their concern with correctness, and to encourage them to utilize the minimum number of syntactic/semantic clues in searching for the maximum amount of information while reading.

Based on Goodman's psycholinguistic model, Coady (1979) developed a model in which L2 readers' background knowledge interacts with conceptual abilities and process strategies effectively to achieve comprehension. Schema theory has shown the significance of background knowledge in reading comprehension. According to schema theory, a text does not convey meaning by itself. Rather, a text simply gives readers directions to creating meaning from their own previously acquired knowledge which is called the reader's background knowledge (i.e., schemata). L2 readers' ability to activate appropriate background knowledge of text content and text rhetorical organization paves the way for efficient comprehension (Carrell, 1984; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1988). Previous empirical studies on the effects of culture-specific schemata (Carrell, 1983, 1987; Johnson, 1981, 1982) reported that L2 readers better comprehended and demonstrated more appropriate elaborations of the culturally familiar text, whereas they comprehended less of, and produced distortions of the culturally unfamiliar text.

Metacongition refers to the knowledge that directs the reader in selecting and processing reading strategies. Metacognition controls the reader's thinking and behavior. Metacognitive awareness is related to efficient learning. Thus, it may give a crucial interconnection in accounting for the transition from a novice to an advanced reader (Gambrell & Heathington, 1981). Carrell (1989) explored the metacognitive awareness of L2 readers about reading strategies in their L1 and L2, and the relationship between their metaconitive awareness and their comprehension in their L1 and L2 reading. The results disclosed that regarding L1 reading, the readers who believed that global reading strategies (i.e., those related to background knowledge, text gist, and textual organization) were more effective performed better in reading English as their L1 than did those who believed that local reading strategies (i.e., those related to sound-letter, word meaning, and text details) were effective. Regarding L2 reading, the readers who believed that global reading

strategies posed less difficulty performed better in reading English as their L2 than those who believed the local strategies posed less difficulty.

Based on data collection from the prior knowledge assessment, interviews, and think-alouds, Jiménez, García, and Pearson (1995) conducted case studies on bilingual and monolingual readers' cognitive and metacognitive knowledge. Regarding the manner of interaction with text, the proficient bilingual and monolingual readers manifested a multistrategic approach to reading. The less proficient bilingual reader, however, manifested fragmentation in using reading strategies. In other words, she used strategies in isolation; use of one strategy did not lead to use of other strategies to make an overall meaning of the text. With regard to their views of reading, the proficient bilingual reader demonstrated a word-driven view of reading but also articulated concern with meaning construction. Likewise, the proficient monolingual reader stressed comprehension as the purpose of reading and claimed that a basic vocabulary knowledge was required to become a good reader. The less-proficient reader, however, disclosed a faulty conception of reading which appeared to be detrimental to her comprehension ability. Her goal was to simply finish the reading task. Although she exhibited some awareness to activate her knowledge to monitor comprehension, she rarely tried to fix comprehension problems. She just moved on to the next sentence.

In a subsequent study, Jiménez et al. (1996) investigated the reading strategies of bilingual Latina/o readers and reported that when the successful Latina/o readers confronted unknown vocabulary, they could implement a set of strategies to unlock the meanings of these words. Being cognizant of the relationship between Spanish and English enabled them to utilize the bilingual strategies of searching for cognates, transferring, and translating. The less successful readers, however, employed fewer strategies and were often less able to repair comprehension difficulties. Moreover, they frequently recognized unknown vocabulary, but they were unsure of how to provide plausible interpretations of text, which distinguished them from the successful Latina/o readers. Unknown vocabulary was a barrier to reading comprehension for both groups. It is of importance to note, however, that this research examined Spanish-English bilingual readers' reading behaviors. Since Spanish and English are connected languages, the results of this research may not be transferable to other bilingual populations which are non-Roman.

Based on interviews, Padron, Knight, and Waxman (1986) also analyzed bilingual and monolingual students' perceptions of their reading strategies and observed that bilingual readers did not employ as many cognitive strategies as monolingual readers which may result from their limited L2 language proficiency. As the most cited strategy, "student's perceptions of teacher's expectations" (i.e., reading to answer questions that the teacher might ask) was chosen among bilingual students, while concentrating (i.e., thinking about the story, keeping it in mind, remembering it) was chosen among monolingual students.

Padron and Waxman (1988) further examined the effect of ESL students' perceptions of their cognitive strategies on reading achievement. Hispanic ESL students responded to a reading strategy questionnaire. The findings showed that low level readers implemented inappropriate cognitive strategies which could explain why Hispanic ESL students were less successful on reading achievement tests than English monolingual students. Padron and Waxman concluded that the use of negative strategies (e.g., writing down every word) by Hispanic ESL students could be another factor that could impede their reading comprehension and thus bring about a counterproductive effect on reading achievement.

On the other hand, Chesser (1993) ran a case study to probe two Asian ESL readers' perceptions of reading and their reading processes both in their L1s and in English and found that both of the participants did not believe themselves to be fluent in any language and that gave rise to a lack of confidence. While reading, both readers appeared to tolerate ambiguity, but at different spots. When it came to reading literature, the Japanese ESL reader focused on every single word; when he encountered an unknown word, he couldn't move on. He, however, favored ambiguity in the storyline. By contrast, the Chinese ESL reader usually skipped unknown words; word ambiguity did not impede her reading. She, however, favored an unambiguous ending to a story. In short, both participants revealed their own personal preferences with regard to the structures of the stories they read. As one thing in common, both of them claimed to prefer to read materials related to their interests. Chesser suggested that figuring out ESL readers' interests and giving them choices in their reading selections should contribute to encouraging extensive reading.

In a similar vein, Chin (2009) took a survey to explore EFL learners' beliefs and preferences about reading tasks and to inspect the reading behaviors that they used for making sense of text. The results showed that a majority rated themselves as just fair readers, which might be indicative of the insecurity they felt toward L2 reading and that unknown vocabulary was a major obstacle to their L2 reading comprehension. Authentic texts and popular media appeared to be their favorite reading materials. Their fundamental reading purpose was to develop reading skills, while pleasure was secondary. As a requirement for fluent EFL reading, the proficient readers demonstrated a meaning centered view of reading, whereas the less-proficient readers accentuated vocabulary. While both groups implemented a variety of strategies as they interacted with English text, the less-proficient readers were less successful in determining the meaning of unknown vocabulary than their counterparts.

III. METHOD

1. Case Selection

In order to choose participants for this case study, the researcher implemented a standardized test to an English reading class at a university in Gyeongsang province during the first week of the spring semester of 2009. The test was an adapted version of a TOEIC practice test from *Longman Preparation Series for the New TOEIC: More Practice Tests* (Lougheed, 2007), which consisted of 13 reading passages and 60 comprehension question items. The data pool showed that all the 18 students gained total scores ranging from 32 to 57 correct items. Since the present study aimed to do a case study with proficient EFL readers, the researcher interviewed only the 7 students who scored over 50 correct items and finalized three students as the participants: Sim, Kim, and Han (all are pseudonyms). Three criteria were employed for the case selection: their English reading proficiency, motivation to improve English reading skills, and their ability to think aloud in interacting with English texts. As shown in Table 1, all of the three participants were non-English majors but had experiences living in an English speaking country and attained TOEIC scores over 800. Specifically, Sim and Kim went to an English language school (U.S. and Australia, respectively), while Han finished his high school in Canada.

TABLE 1
Participants' Background Information

Participant	Age	Gender	Year & Major	Overseas Period	TOEIC Score
Sim	22	female	Sophomore in Early Childhood Education	2 months in the U.S.	905
Kim	27	male	Senior in Interior Design	1 year in Australia	805
Han	27	male	Senior in Nano Engineering	4 years in Canada	870

2. Data Collection

1) Questionnaires

As the preparation for the upcoming interviews, the participants were asked to fill out open-ended questionnaires during the last week of March in 2009. The purpose of the

questionnaires was to gather information about the participants' perceptions and experiences of English reading tasks and about their reading processing behaviors in English. The researcher allowed them to respond to the questionnaires in Korean to help them express their ideas and thoughts clearly. The items on the questionnaires (see the Appendix) were basically derived from the findings of previous studies (Barnett, 1988; Carrell, 1989; Chin, 2009; Jiménez et al., 1995; Schmitt, 2000).

2) Interviews

During the second week of April in 2009, semistructured, in-depth interviews were administered with the participants individually in Korean. Adapted from the findings of previous studies (Barnett, 1988; Jiménez, García, & Pearson, 1996), a list of questions to be explored were set up beforehand (see the Appendix), but the researcher followed neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions strictly. Rather, she tried to be flexible enough to respond to the situation at hand and to allow the participants to elaborate on their emerging views which were conducive to this study. The researcher paid attention to the verbal and nonverbal messages being conveyed and often summarized the participants' remarks to confirm her understanding (Merriam, 1988). The interviews aimed to investigate the participants' perceptions and experiences about reading in English and about themselves as EFL readers and to probe their preferences of English reading materials (e.g., topics and genres). Each interview took place at the researcher’s office. They averaged over an hour each and were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

3) Think-Alouds

Think-alouds were conducted to examine the participants' reading processing behaviors toward English texts. Think-alouds offer a means for disclosing otherwise unobservable cognitive processes. In other words, think-alouds ask individuals to verbalize the thought processes that came across while interacting with a text. Accordingly, information regarding their interpretation of text and reading comprehension strategies can be discovered (Jiménez et al., 1996). The participants were, however, never exposed to a think-aloud protocol before. To offset this problem, each individual was provided with an explanation of the think-aloud procedure and involved in a practice session prior to actual data collection (Olson, Duffy, & Mack, 1984). The first think-aloud on *In Praise of New York City* was performed during the first week of May, 2009, and the second think-aloud on *Call Kim Ssang Su a Man of the People* two weeks later. In order to examine how the participants dealt with unknown vocabulary, the researcher did not allow them to consult

dictionaries. Each participant's think-aloud session ran from one to two hours and was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

The participants were directed to think aloud while reading silently; they were supposed to stop reading when they got to the assigned stop signs in each text and provide verbal reports in Korean. In short, they verbalized whatever came to their minds referring to the passage associated with each stop sign. In order to help the participants identify each stop sign, the researcher highlighted it in red and marked its number. There were 4 stop signs in *In Praise of New York City* and 6 stop signs in *Call Kim Ssang Su a Man of the People.*

4) Materials

Texts for the think-alouds consisted of two expository passages which had different cultural origins (America and Korea). One was *In Praise of New York City* by Andy Rooney, a popular American journalist and TV commentator. The other was *Call Kim Ssang Su a Man of the People* by Michael Schuman from *Time Magazine*. Both were 'authentic' articles taken from *Mosaic I Reading* by Wegmann and Knezevic (2007). They were selected because the lengths were reasonable (430 to 627 words), the designated level was appropriate (intermediate to high-intermediate), and the topics were interesting. Based on pilot testing, the texts also led to opportunities for implementing cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

3. Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis procedure is recursive and dynamic; when all the data are collected, analysis gets more intensive and ongoing (Merriam, 1988). As analytic techniques, the researcher combined analytic induction and constant comparison throughout this case study. Regarding analytic induction, she sought categories of phenomena and relationships among them within the data, generated working hypotheses from that initial search, and refined those hypotheses in subsequent work. Regarding comparison, patterns within the data were coded by category and simultaneously compared with all other incidents under study (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Thus, based on the collected data sources (questionnaires, interviews, and think-alouds), recurring patterns and regularities were developed into coding categories into which subsequent items were sifted. In devising coding categories, Holsti's (1969) guidelines were applied to check the efficacy of categories: (1) the categories corresponded to the purposes of the study; (2) the categories were thoroughgoing. That is, all the pertinent items in the collected data under study were able to be sorted into a category; and

(3) the categories were exclusive to each other, so that no single item could fit into more than one category.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Proficient EFL Readers' Perceptions and Experiences

Regarding the participants' beliefs about their English reading ability, Sim, Kim, and Han assessed themselves as good EFL readers. The interviews disclosed that in general, they did not feel anxiety about reading in English. Han mentioned that since he went to a high school in Vancouver, he was exposed to an immersed English speaking environment and is still in contact with his Canadian friends. Thus, he feels confident of his English reading proficiency. Likewise, Sim and Kim recently had experiences in taking advanced ESL courses abroad which might have led to high self-esteem. Nevertheless, none of them are satisfied with their reading proficiency yet because they still have difficulty interacting with English texts. Thus they are all highly motivated to improve their reading skills further mostly for "instrumental goals" (e.g., reading technical materials, pursuing a career, increasing TOEIC scores, etc.) (Brown, 1994).

The participants attributed their reading difficulties to multiple factors. They all indicated that their lack of background knowledge and unknown vocabulary, including slang and technical terminologies, are major obstacles to comprehension. Han added that complicated text structures (e.g., transition phrases and pronoun references) could impede reading process.

> The passages of TOEFL deal with many different fields which I am not knowledgeable about like medicine or biology...the content is too long and the terminologies drive me crazy....overwhelmed. I might have to memorize all the names of human bones first. Otherwise, I have no idea what they are talking about. (Sim, Interview, Apr. 6, 2009)

In order to become better EFL readers, Sim believed that, first of all, she has to increase her vocabulary, especially terminologies of academic fields, and practice reading passages in workbooks such as TOEIC/TOEFL practice textbooks, along with authentic materials (e.g., magazines and novels). Kim indicated that, regardless of genres, extensive reading is absolutely the best strategy since it helps him develop a general understanding of text and enlarge his vocabulary and background knowledge of a variety of fields. Through extensive reading, he claimed that his anxiety level gets lower and his reading speed gets faster. Interestingly, Han commented that he tries to read out loud, in addition to extensive

reading. According to his beliefs, extensive reading teaches him to get the main points rapidly, while oral reading helps him get used to a variety of sentence structures and monitor comprehension.

When choosing what to read in English, all the participants claimed that they take interest and length into account (See Table 2). That is, they first make sure that the material interests them but it should not be too long. Kim said, "when it's too long, I easily get tired and end up stopping reading in the middle." With regard to the participants' areas of interest, Sim prefers to read materials that deal with fashion and cosmetics such as *Vogue*, and *Elle* or celebrities' biographies such as *Living History* and *My Life*. She also enjoys reading materials that are related to early childhood education (e.g., *Cases in Early Childhood Education: Stories of Programs and Practices*) and novels that convey morals (e.g., *Tuesdays with Morrie*). Likewise, Kim is interested in romance novels (e.g., *Becoming Jane* and *The Love Letter*) and materials that deal with daily life or economics (e.g., *Reader's Digest* and *The Green Economy*). It is notable that since his major is interior design, he is more likely to choose materials that include fancy illustrations. Han is interested in materials that are related to science and sports such as *Newton's*, *Health & Fitness*, and *Men's Health*. He is also keen on reading popular novels (e.g., *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Abduction*). Moreover, the participants like to read materials that they can easily have access to on a daily basis such as newspapers (e.g., *The Korea Times*), instruction manuals, flyers, brochures, and websites. The participants emphasized that when reading materials of their own interests, they get less interrupted by unknown vocabulary so that they are better able to comprehend. Sim perceived reading in English as enjoyable, but Kim and Han did not believe so. Apparently, Kim and Han feel obligated to spend time reading English materials for the purpose of improving their reading skills. All three of them are, however, reluctant to risk reading difficult English materials.

TABLE 2
Participants' Criteria of Choosing English Reading Materials

Sim	Interest, Length, Genre
Kim	Interest, Length, Illustrations
Han	Interest, Length, Popularity

Regarding the participants' criteria for judging the level of difficulty of English reading materials, vocabulary and subject were chosen to be the common factors among them (See Table 3). They mentioned that their lack of background knowledge about the subject of a text gives rise to comprehension failure. Furthermore, Sim and Han considered length. Individually, Sim took sentence structure into account and Kim pointed out interest and

font type (e.g., italics). Again, it is interesting to note that Kim, the interior design major, focuses upon visual elements of the text. As the most difficult materials, *Newsweek* and *Time* were selected because they employ technical vocabulary and complicated sentence structures and require a clear understanding of culture-specific knowledge and/or international current issues of a variety of subjects (e.g., economics, politics, show business, etc.). Han added that content area textbooks (e.g., *Electrochemistry*), which are not related to his major, are quite challenging. In contrast, the participants named *Reader's Digest, Chicken Soup for the Soul*, *Teentimes*, and *San Francisco* (i.e., travel guide) as easy materials because they consist of familiar words and simple sentence structures and deal with daily life or their interest, while specific background knowledge is not presupposed and the length is not too long.

TABLE 3
Participants' Criteria of Judging the Level of Difficulty of English Reading Materials

Sim	Vocabulary, Subject, Sentence Structure, Length
Kim	Vocabulary, Subject, Interest, Font Type
Han	Vocabulary, Subject, Length,

With respect to the participants' views of the requirements for fluent EFL reading. Sim believed that fluent EFL readers draw on a large vocabulary store, have the ability to analyze sentence structures, integrate text information with their own prior knowledge, and infer the meanings of unknown words. Also they have positive attitudes toward reading in English rather than perceive it as drudgery. Kim mentioned that fluent EFL readers have a great deal of common sense and strong vocabulary, read rapidly for comprehension, and are good at figuring out meanings of unknown words based on context and understanding the main ideas of a whole text. Han reported that fluent EFL readers spend plenty of time exposing themselves to English materials and are able to get the gist of what they read rapidly and clearly. None of them, however, commented on using useful strategies that fluent EFL readers could typically do to repair miscomprehension or facilitate comprehension.

> I always see my brother accessing English websites like yahoo. He never studies vocabulary separately... he just picks it up in real context. He also enjoys watching English channels like BBC World or CNN and reading English newspapers. He gets e-mails from abroad. English is part of his daily life. That's what makes him a fluent EFL reader. (Han, Interview, Apr. 7, 2009)

With regard to reading processing behaviors, the participants all claimed to usually tolerate ambiguity and move on rather than stumble or stop when they are aware of a problem. In order to read effectively, Sim reported that she pays attention to getting the big picture and often ignores what she perceives as unimportant portions such as supporting details. When she encounters unknown vocabulary, she tries to infer the meanings based on context only if it seems to be important enough to influence the storyline or the gist. Otherwise, she moves on to the next sentence. Dealing with a complicated sentence structure, she tries to divide it into a subject and a predicate and often parenthesizes modifying clauses. Kim indicated that his primary concern is to get the gist of a text. Therefore, he carefully examines headings and subheadings in a text and then predicts what the whole content would be about. Regarding each paragraph, he makes sure to identify a sentence that expresses the main idea. Kim did not, however, indicate a concern for determining the meaning of unknown vocabulary; he often disregards it. He believed that focusing on vocabulary could be detrimental to making sense of what he reads. Han mentioned that he keeps the title in mind throughout reading because it gives clues about the main ideas of a whole passage. He usually makes use of context to unlock the meanings of unknown vocabulary. In case he cannot work it out, he places the problem on hold and reads on. He also confided that reading sentences out loud with accurate pronunciation makes more sense than when he reads them to himself. Especially, when he recognizes miscomprehension, he reads aloud to repair it.

Differences surfaced among the three participants with respect to their wants and needs in an EFL reading class. Sim said that along with a textbook, she wants the instructor to provide a variety of supporting resources to diversify reading experiences. For instance, she suggested that newspaper articles, which deal with state of the art fields (e.g., information technology) or current hot issues (e.g, well-being), or translated versions of Korean literature would be appealing. She also recommended an open discussion either in a whole class or in groups as a comprehension check-up. Kim demonstrated a concern for his pronunciation so that he wanted the instructor to give him an opportunity to read orally and correct his pronunciation rather than just to focus on silent reading. As an assignment, he preferred to write a summary in his own words because he believes that it helps him figure out main points and exclude less important details. On the other hand, Han mentioned that in order to find interesting materials at appropriate levels of difficulty, the instructor should allow students to bring authentic materials either individually or in groups and share with the whole class. That way, students feel like an authority and could be more actively involved in the reading task. Han said, "Reading materials of our own choices would facilitate comprehension."

> I don't feel secure with my pronunciation. It seems to be fossilized. I have to practice reading a passage orally so that it can get better. I expected my instructor to let us do it, but it's all silent reading. Outside of class, I hardly get a chance to take care of it. Clear pronunciation is important because it determines my conversation skills somehow. (Kim, Interview, Apr. 9, 2009)

2. Proficient EFL Readers' Strategies

As shown in Table 4, the think-aloud data demonstrated that the participants employed a variety of strategies as they interacted with English texts. Paying attention to vocabulary, monitoring, using context, summarizing, restating, paying attention to text structure, rereading, predicting, confirming/disconfirming, paying attention to the title, and interpreting the text were commonly used by all of them. In addition, questioning was found in Sim and Kim; conducting an etymological analysis in Sim and Han; and invoking prior knowledge and visualizing in Kim and Han. Individually, Sim employed conducting a grammatical analysis. All in all, when reading, the participants primarily focused on comprehension but also indicated a concern for unknown vocabulary, a result consistent with the findings of Jiménez, García, and Pearson (1995).

TABLE 4
Participants' EFL Reading Strategies

Sim	Paying attention to vocabulary, Monitoring, Using context, Summarizing, Restating, Paying attention to text structure, Rereading, Predicting, Confirming/Disconfirming, Paying attention to the title, Interpreting the text, Questioning, Conducting an etymological analysis, Conducting a grammatical analysis
Kim	Paying attention to vocabulary, Monitoring, Using context, Summarizing, Restating, Paying attention to text structure, Rereading, Predicting, Confirming/Disconfirming, Paying attention to the title, Interpreting the text, Questioning, Invoking prior knowledge, Visualizing
Han	Paying attention to vocabulary, Monitoring, Using context, Summarizing, Restating, Paying attention to text structure, Rereading, Predicting, Confirming/Disconfirming, Paying attention to the title, Interpreting the text, Conducting an etymological analysis, Invoking prior knowledge, Visualizing

Although they paid attention to unknown vocabulary, it did not substantially interfere with their general comprehension process. Everytime they came across unknown vocabulary, they identified it by saying such and such was a word that they did not understand and often made a distinction between important and unimportant vocabulary.

As an example, Han said, "I didn't know *wigs*, *jiggling*, and *ear-numbing*, but I just passed on. I didn't want to bother....they didn't seem to be important." It should be noted that they were more likely to skip unknown vocabulary, especially ones they perceived to be unimportant, while reading the Korean background text than while reading the U.S. background text. A possible explanation for this may be that their Korean background knowledge made them feel secure enough to tolerate ambiguity.

Using context, rereading, and conducting an etymological analysis were in the service of determining the meaning of unknown vocabulary. With regard to conducting an etymological analysis, unknown vocabulary was broken into pieces etymologically. For instance, when Sim encountered *loudmouthed*, she analyzed it into loud +mouth +ed and assumed that it could mean "talk loudly or noisily." Using context and rereading almost always occurred together and were employed more often than conducting an etymological analysis. Overall, the participants were able to provide provisional word meanings appropriate for comprehension. The following example demonstrates how Han figured out the meaning of the unknown word, *cramming*, by using context and rereading:

> "LG has outpaced Nokia and Motorola in cramming the hottest new features into its mobile phones." mm....*cramming* might mean "stuffing a lot of things together" because in the next sentence, it says, "Its latest model, the SC 8000, combines a PDA, an MP3 player, a digital camera, and a camcorder." The hottest new features may refer to PDA, MP3, digital camera, and camcorder, and all these things are put into one mobile phone....which could be called "cramming." (Han, think-aloud 2, stop sign 4)

Once the participants started reading, they constantly used the strategy of predicting. The strategy of paying attention to the title strongly helped them predict the content which paved the way toward their comprehension of text. To be more specific, when reading the American background text, "In Praise of New York City," the participants predicted that the whole passage would talk about positive things about New York city. Likewise, when reading the Korean background text, "Call Kim Ssang Su a Man of the People," they expected that the text would talk about great achievements of Kim Ssang Su who seemed to be a leader of people. They, however, did not pay much attention to the pictures in each text. Before moving on to the next stop sign portion, the participants again tried to predict what it would be about and confirmed or disconfirmed it afterwards. The strategy of invoking prior knowledge was also involved into the service of comprehending the text at hand. That is, the participants integrated prior knowledge with textual information. The

following example discloses how Han used the strategies of invoking prior knowledge, paying attention to the title, and predicting:

> I know that the CEOs in big companies tend not to socialize with ordinary employees....they are expensive, but "Kim is a man of the people," then he might like to do it. So what they are saying is unlike other boss, Kim is down to earth. In the next stop sign, I would assume that it will explain Kim's contributions to LG in detail. (Han, think-aloud 2, stop sign 2)

While reading, the participants constantly monitored their comprehension by specifying comprehension problems. Sim, for example, indicated that she was monitoring her comprehension after she read the following sentence, "It clothes, feeds, and houses 15 percent of its own." She commented, "This sentence is confusing." Then she read the sentence out loud again and added the following comment which demonstrated use of the strategies of rereading, questioning, and conducting a grammatical analysis to repair miscomprehension:

> "It clothes, feeds, and houses 15 percent of its own." Well, what is that supposed to mean? Let me see.....*it* is the subject referring to New York, *clothes*, *feeds*, and *houses* are the verbs and *15 percent of its own* is the object. Now I can make sense out of it. (Sim, think-aloud 1, stop sign 1)

In order to aid comprehension or to consolidate ideas, the participants frequently used the strategies of summarizing and/or restating while reading. In doing so, they exploited different words or phrases that carried the same sense. They often ended up confirming or disconfirming their summary or restatement:

> In short, this paragraph tells that the past doesn't mean anything to New Yorkers. The immigrants moved searching for something new. And the first sentence in the following paragraph says that strangers are afraid that New York is changing too rapidly. I think what I said so far is right. (Kim, think-aloud 1, stop sign 4)

While summarizing or restating, the participants occasionally used the strategy of interpreting the text as a follow-up. That is, they tried to make an inference, draw a conclusion, or figure out the author's intention. For example, regarding the following sentence, "I don't want LG to be perceived as nice," Kim said, "I can infer that what the author intends to say is that LG should not be satisfied with the present status. LG has to

work harder because it still has a long way to go." By and large, the participants' inferences appeared to be appropriate to the given context. In fact, they verbalized their inferences when they believed they were correct. Moreover, the strategy of restating often led Kim and Han to initiate visualizing which included vivid graphic elements. For example, after Kim read the following sentence, "Kim Ssang Su spent his childhood knee-deep in the family's rice paddies," he commented, "I can picture that Kim is busy transplanting rice in the green paddy field to help his parents. He's sweating and soon gets exhausted." Finally, paying attention to text structure which involved an attempt to distinguish between main points and supporting details was another strategy that the participants employed to make reading easy:

> The third sentence in the first paragraph, "What New York used to be means nothing to them," is the central idea. I would think so. And the following paragraph seems to be mostly supporting details. (Han, think-aloud 1, stop sign 3)

V. CONCLUSION

The primary goal of this case study was to understand proficient EFL readers' beliefs. The three participants, Sim, Kim, and Han, displayed similarities with respect to their views about reading task. They emphasized comprehension as the goal of reading and considered themselves good readers in English. It is conjectured that their experiences studying abroad could have substantially got rid of their anxiety about reading in English and promoted their self-confidence as EFL readers. They did not, however, feel secure about their English reading proficiency as yet. As requirements to become better EFL readers, the participants pointed out reading large amounts of materials and practicing oral reading, in addition to strengthening vocabulary. Their reading purposes were closely associated with personal pursuits. They preferred to read materials that deal with areas of interest but did not intend to take a risk in terms of level of difficulty and/or length. They all claimed that they are drawn to easy and short materials.

Another question to be explored was how the proficient EFL readers' beliefs would affect their reading processing behaviors. The result showed that the participants' meaning centered view of reading enabled them to implement a wide range of strategies to enhance comprehension. They were successful in coordinating these strategies; use of one strategy triggered use of other strategies. According to the participants' perspectives, unknown vocabulary was a major impediment to comprehension. Their think-alouds, however, demonstrated that they were not obsessed with unknown vocabulary while reading. When

they evidenced a need to determine the meaning of unknown vocabulary, they employed multiple strategies and often developed useful understandings of it. Drawing on contextual cues was the predominant activity in which they engaged. The analysis of the participants' reading strategies revealed that EFL reading, like first language reading, is an active process which involves an ongoing cycle of sampling, predicting, testing, and confirming (Goodman, 1971). Finally, regarding the influence of the cultural background of a text on the participants' reading strategies and comprehension, the participants were more likely to skip unknown vocabulary and better able to predict the content, invoke prior knowledge, and enhance comprehension when reading a culturally familiar text than a culturally unfamiliar one. In short, their clear awareness of the cultural background presupposed in the text appeared to significantly reduce unknown vocabulary hindrances.

All in all, the value of this study may be acknowledged as providing classroom teachers with a brief view of proficient EFL readers' metacognitive awareness and strategies. Nevertheless, limitations should be recognized for future explorations. First, this study was comprised of only three proficient EFL readers and two expository texts. Therefore, the findings might not be applicable to other EFL populations or other textual content. This study should be replicated with a large mixed level EFL populations and reading materials of a variety of genres. Such populations and materials might well exhibit different patterns of reading strategies. Second, in examining the influence of the cultural background of a text on the participants' comprehension, this study simply relied on think-alouds. Future research might ask participants to recall what they have understood or to take comprehension tests as a follow-up. That way, whether the cultural background of a text significantly influences EFL readers' comprehension or not could be objectively determined. To investigate EFL readers' approach to reading more thoroughly, it would be also crucial to observe their behaviors in reading classes over a period of time. While observing, the researcher might find additional reading strategies which are not disclosed from think-aloud protocols. The results of such studies might provide more in-depth insights on EFL reading processes.

VI. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of this case study suggest the following pedagogical implications for EFL reading teachers. First, in order to help students become proficient EFL readers, it is crucial that reading instruction should concentrate on comprehension, not the language in which the text is conveyed. Students should be aware that meaning does not exist in the text or in the reader; meaning is constructed through the transaction between reader and text (Rosenblatt, 1994). In short, they need to learn to transact with a text to create their own

understanding. Thus, while interacting with text, students should be encouraged to make use of all the resources available to them. Not only specific words or phrases within the text but also personal experiences and background knowledge can contribute to reading comprehension. Hence, teachers should introduce useful strategies such as using context, paying attention to the title, invoking relevant prior knowledge, making inferences, and predicting in class.

Second, students should understand that successful reading does not require them to know the meaning of every single word in a text. When encountering unknown vocabulary while reading, however, they will need to decide the relative importance of it. If the meanings of unknown vocabulary appears to be essential for comprehension, they should be able to utilize appropriate strategies to make sense of it, rather than simply rely on dictionaries. As a viable vocabulary lesson, teachers might modify texts by removing key words or phrases, and then invite students to infer the missing words through drawing on the different cue systems available to them. Furthermore, when students are exposed to reading a variety of genres such as articles or stories which include content-specific knowledge or unfamiliar cultural references, they would get a chance to experiment with different text types and reading strategy use, featuring a view of reading as an active process of meaning construction (Jiménez et al., 1996; Wurr, 1998).

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: Major& Year: TOEIC Score:

Directions: Please read each question carefully and answer it in Korean. Detailed answers would be appreciated.

1. How do you rate yourself as an English reader? Explain why.
   excellent_____ good_____ fair_____ poor_____

2. What do you do to improve your English reading skills?
   a. What do you want to do better as an English reader?

3. Do you feel that you read English and Korean materials differently? If so, how? Please describe.

4. What are your favorite types of English reading materials?

5. What is your primary concern while interacting with English materials?

6. When you find something you don't understand while reading in English, what do you do to clarify it?

7. What are your favorite classroom activities and assignments in English reading class?

INTERVIEW

1. Tell me about your reading experiences in English.
    a. Have you ever learned how to do something to better understand your English reading?
    b. What experiences do you recall in learning to read in English?
    c. What did you read?
2. What are the criteria that you consider when choosing English reading materials?
3. What are the criteria that you consider when judging the level of difficulty of English reading materials?
4. What kinds of problems do you have as an English reader?
5. What do you think you should do to become an excellent English reader?
6. Is there anybody who really helped you improve your English reading ability?
7. What types of English materials are difficult for you to read?
8. What types of English materials are easy for you to read?
9. What is required for fluent EFL reading?
10. What are your beliefs about your English reading ability?
    a. Do you feel secure when it comes to reading in English?
    b. Do you enjoy reading in English?
11. Why do you read English materials?
12. What are your preferences in English reading materials?
13. What are the most useful English reading strategies to you?
    a. When you get to an unfamiliar word while reading, what do you do to figure it out?
14. What do you expect your teacher to provide you with in English reading class?
15. What makes English reading difficult?

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

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Received in October, 2009
Reviewed in November, 2009
Revised version received in December, 2009