

Business English Majors' Employment of Reading Strategies in Terms of Reading Anxiety

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Abstract—This study was to investigate the reading strategies employed by the Business English majors in relation to their levels of reading anxiety. The participants were 926 Business English majors from 6 universities in southwest China. The Business English reading strategy questionnaire, the reading anxiety questionnaire and the Business English reading comprehension test were used to collect the data. The results showed that the Business English majors' reading anxiety had significant negative influence on their use of reading strategies. The less anxious students reported significantly greater use of reading strategies than the more anxious students. In addition, the students with different anxiety levels had significant variations in the choices of individual reading strategies.

Keywords—reading strategies, reading anxiety, reading proficiency, Business English majors

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print [1]. It is a helpful language skill needed for obtaining information, fostering and reacting to ideas, developing interests, and finally deriving pleasure by reading through understanding or comprehension [2]. Reading plays a crucial role in language learning. It is through reading that the language learners acquire the knowledge of the target language and culture. For many students, reading is by far the most important skill in second language or foreign language learning [3]. Effective and efficient reading is the prerequisite for successful language learning. To achieve desirable reading result, reading strategies play a critical role. One of the main characteristics of effective readers is that they know how to effectively use strategies in order to facilitate the functioning of different cognitive processes [4].

Reading strategies are “mental processes that readers consciously choose to use in accomplishing reading tasks” [5]. They are “deliberate, cognitive steps that readers can take to assist in acquiring, storing and retrieving new information” [6]. Reading strategies are critically important in English reading comprehension. As Song (1998) points out, reading strategies are important because they help learners to improve their reading comprehension, and to enhance efficiency in reading [7]. Studies have revealed that students' reading strategy use is strongly correlated with their reading proficiency, as in [8] [9] [10]. Many variables may affect students' use of reading strategies, such as gender, as in [11], field of study [12],

reading tasks[13], reading motivation[14], reading attitude[15], type of the reading material[16], and reading anxiety [17], etc.

As one of the most important affective factors that may affect students' foreign language learning, learning anxiety has been paid much attention by many researchers. Horwitz et al (1986: 128) define foreign language (FL) anxiety as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” [18]. The essence of FL anxiety is the threat to an individual's self-concept caused by the inherent limitations of communicating in an imperfectly mastered second language. Anxiety is an important factor of affective states that may influence the choice of language learning strategies [19]. Some studies have revealed the relationships between students' reading strategy use and reading anxiety. However, the studies in this field are still few. Miyanaga (2002) conducted a research to investigate the relationships among the EFL learners' reading anxiety levels, reading proficiency levels, and use of reading strategies. The results showed that anxiety exerted a significant negative influence on the students' reading performance in English. The students' metacognitive awareness was a significant predictor of their reading ability. Persistence, going back and rereading, turned out to be factors which distinguished better readers from poor readers, and more anxious from less anxious students [17]. Lien's study (2011) showed a negative correlation between students' reading anxiety and their use of reading strategies. EFL learners with low anxiety levels tended to use general reading strategies, while EFL learners with high anxiety levels employed basic support mechanisms. Low-anxiety level readers used reading strategies significantly more frequent than high-anxiety level readers [20].

The Business English major in China is a kind of content-based instruction (CBI) program, in which most of the specialized courses concerning business and economics are taught in English. Reading plays a crucial role in this program as the students must learn the specialized courses through reading the academic texts written in English. Cheng (2010) points out that academic reading strategies are very important for the students in English-medium programs because of the role of reading comprehension in their academic success [21]. However, many of them do not know how to develop their reading skills in content-based English reading. Reading Business English is still a big challenge for many students of the Business English major.

In 2007, Business English was officially ratified as a major in the universities by the Education Ministry of China. The history of teaching business English is very short and the experience of teaching and learning Business English is still very deficient, especially in the underdeveloped southwest China. After years of Business English learning, many students still cannot read Business English materials efficiently and effectively. Therefore, it is worthy and necessary to conduct research to investigate the reading strategies use by the university Business English majors in terms of some variables so as to improve their academic reading proficiency.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants of the present study were 926 Business English major students selected from 6 universities in Southwest China through the cluster sampling and the purposive sampling methods. 312 students were selected from 2 universities in Guizhou Province; 310 students were from 2 universities in Yunnan Province; and 304 students were from 2 universities in Chongqing City. They were the third and the fourth year students, among whom 252 were males and 674 were females.

B. Data Collection

Three instruments were used to collect the data for the present investigation: the Strategy Questionnaire for Business English Reading (SQBER), the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS), and the Business English Reading Comprehension Test ((BERCT).

The Strategy Questionnaire for Business English Reading (SQBER) was designed by the researcher mainly based on the studies of Anderson (1991), Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) and Cheng (2010). The initial questionnaire consisted of 37 question items. Through pilot study and semi-structured interview, the researcher modified and added some question items and then constructed a more comprehensive questionnaire, which consisted of 45 question items. The question items were classified into 3 categories, i.e. the Pre-reading Strategies (PRS), the While-reading Strategies (WHS), and the Post-reading Strategies (POS). The While-reading Strategies (WHS) were further divided into two sub-categories: the Strategies for Comprehending the Text (SCT) and the Strategies for Coping with Difficulties (SCD). A 4-point rating scale, ranging from 'never' to 'always', was used to value the frequency of the students' reading strategy use. The estimated reliability (α) of the questionnaire in the main study was .91.

The Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) designed by Saito, Horwitz and Garza (1999) was adopted in the present study. The FLRAS contains 20 items scored on a

5-point rating scale, ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. The theoretical ranges of the FLRAS scales are from 20 to 100. In the present study, the reading anxiety of the participants were divided into three levels: 'high', 'moderate' and 'low' based on the total scores of each student obtained from their answers. The estimated reliability (α) of the questionnaire in the main study was .89.

The Business English Reading Comprehension Test (BERCT) was constructed by the researcher through selecting the reading texts from the authentic BEC (Business English Certificate) tests, including the three levels of Preliminary, Vantage and Higher. The initial BERCT comprised seven parts, consisting of 61 question items. After the pilot study, five question items were removed because their facility values were either too high or too low and the power of discrimination was extremely low through item analysis. The split-half procedure was used to test the reliability of the reading test in the main study. The reliability of the test was .89, which was considered acceptable as it was higher than the acceptable criterion of .70 proposed by Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) [22]. Based on the students' scores obtained in the reading test, the reading proficiency of the participants was classified as three levels of "good", "fair" and "poor".

C. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaires was inputted into the computer, and then the SPSS program (16.0) was conducted to analyze the data. The statistical methods used in the present study included the ANOVA (Analysis of Variance), the Post-hoc Scheffe Test, and the Chi-square test. The ANOVA was employed to examine the variations of the students' strategy use at the overall and category levels. The Post-hoc Scheffe Test was used to determine the variations of the strategy use between the students with different reading anxiety levels if significant differences were found in the ANOVA. The Chi-square test was employed to examine the variations of the students' use of reading strategies at the individual strategy level.

III. RESULTS

A. Variations of Students' Strategy Use at the Overall Level

As shown in TABLE I, The results of the ANOVA and the Post hoc Scheffé tests showed that significant differences in the overall reading strategy use existed between the students with high and low reading anxiety levels, with the mean scores of 2.34 and 2.45 respectively ($p < .01$). This means that the students with high reading anxiety reported employing reading strategies significantly less frequently than those with low reading anxiety. Significant variations did not exist between the students with high and moderate reading anxiety, and also did not exist between the students with moderate and low reading anxiety.

TABLE I. VARIATIONS OF STUDENTS' STRATEGY USE AT THE OVERALL LEVEL

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Sig. Level	Variation Pattern	
Level of Reading Anxiety	High	2.34	.36	P<.01	Low>High
	Moderate	2.40	.33		
	Low	2.45	.31		

B. Variations of Students' Strategy Use at the Categorical Level

As demonstrated in TABLE II, the reading strategy use of the students with different anxiety levels was significantly different in the PRS and WHS categories, but not significantly different in the POS category. In the PRS and the WHS

categories, the students with low and moderate reading anxiety levels reported employing reading strategies significantly more frequently than those with high reading anxiety level. It indicates that the students with lower anxiety employed reading strategies significantly more frequently than the students with higher anxiety in the before and while reading stages.

TABLE II. VARIATIONS OF STUDENTS' STRATEGY USE AT THE CATEGORICAL LEVEL

Strategy Category	High (n=277)		Moderate(n=361)		Low (n=288)		Sig. Level	Variation Pattern
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
PRS Category	2.39	.414	2.50	.40	2.55	.35	P<.001	Low>High Mod>High
WHS Category	2.44	.35	2.47	.34	2.53	.31	P<.01	Low>High
POS Category	2.22	.47	2.23	.43	2.21	.45	P>.05	----

TABLE III shows the students' use of reading strategies in the SCT and SCD sub-categories in relation to their levels of reading anxiety. The results showed that significant differences existed in the SCT sub-category of the WHS category. The variation pattern was negative. The students with a lower reading anxiety level reported employing reading strategies

significantly more frequently than those with a higher reading anxiety level. It indicates that the students with lower reading anxiety used reading strategies significantly more frequently to comprehend the texts while reading. Students did not vary significantly in the use of strategies for coping with difficulties as significant differences were not found in the SCD category.

TABLE III. VARIATIONS OF STUDENTS' STRATEGY USE IN SCT AND SCD SUB-CATEGORIES

Strategy Category	High (n=277)		Moderate(n=361)		Low (n=288)		Sig. Level	Variation Pattern
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.		
SCT Category	2.46	.38	2.53	.39	2.62	.36	P<.001	Low>Moderate >High
SCD Category	2.42	.37	2.42	.35	2.43	.35	P>.05	----

C. Variations of Students' Strategy Use at the Individual Level

At the individual strategy level, according to the results of the Chi-square tests, 21 strategies varied significantly in terms of this variable as shown in TABLE IV. Three variation patterns were discovered, but two are dominant, which are: 'H>M>L' and 'L>M>H'. The 'H>M>L' pattern indicates that a significantly greater percentage of the students with a higher anxiety level than those with a lower anxiety level reported high use of those strategies. The 'L>M>H' pattern indicates that a significantly greater percentage of the students with a lower anxiety level than those with a higher anxiety level reported high use of those strategies. The results indicate that

the students with higher and lower reading anxiety had different preferences in the choices of reading strategies while reading business English texts. The students with higher anxiety tended to use some mechanical, bottom-up or cognitive strategies such as 'rereading', 'translation', and 'reading words and sentences carefully', while the students with lower anxiety preferred to employ general, top-down or metacognitive strategies such as 'skipping', 'skimming' and 'considering the logic, coherence and consistency'. On the other hand, the 'L>M>H' pattern contains 13 strategy items while the 'H>M>L' pattern only have 6 items, which indicates that the less anxious students are good at employing more different strategies to comprehend the reading texts or cope with reading difficulties than the more anxious students.

TABLE IV. VARIATIONS OF STUDENTS' STRATEGY USE AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Individual Learning Strategy	% of high use (3 and 4)			χ^2 P < .05
	High	Moderate	Low	
Variation pattern: H>M>L				
1. Reread the part I cannot fully understand	58.1	56.8	45.8	$\chi^2=12.73$
2. Read every word and sentence carefully	53.7	46.5	32.6	$\chi^2=9.26$
3. Translate the text into Chinese while reading	52.7	41.8	31.3	$\chi^2=26.73$
4. Pause and think about what is being read from time to time	51.3	49.2	40.6	$\chi^2=7.31$
5. Stop to look up the new words in the dictionary while reading	58.1	57.6	49.0	$\chi^2=6.34$
6. Ask friends for help when encounter difficulties while reading	36.1	25.8	20.8	$\chi^2=17.30$
Variation pattern: L>M>H				
1. Pay attention to the key words in the text	77.8	60.9	48.7	$\chi^2=51.46$
2. Read the title of the text carefully	74.0	72.6	59.9	$\chi^2=16.17$
3. Make use of features of the text	71.2	54.3	43.3	$\chi^2=45.47$
4. Take notes or mark the important information in the text	69.4	61.5	58.5	$\chi^2=7.91$
5. Use specialized terms as clues or indications	61.8	57.9	49.5	$\chi^2=9.17$
6. Skip/neglect unneeded or unimportant content	57.6	45.2	52.0	$\chi^2=10.13$
7. Do fast reading first and peruse later	57.3	50.4	45.8	$\chi^2=7.54$
8. Set goals/purposes	56.9	50.1	37.9	$\chi^2=21.05$

Cont. to TABLE IV.				
9. Glance over the foot/end notes, tables and graphics	56.9	52.1	40.4	$\chi^2=20.62$
10. Draw on my prior knowledge of the topic	56.9	51.2	46.6	$\chi^2=6.12$
11. Analyze the structures of difficult sentences	39.9	38.5	27.1	$\chi^2=12.47$
12. Consider the logic, coherence and consistency	44.4	40.4	34.1	$\chi^2=7.48$
13. Skim the text	58.7	53.8	48.0	$\chi^2=7.24$
Variation pattern: H>L>M	High	Low	Moderate	χ^2
1. Read the first and the last paragraphs first	35.4	25.7	22.7	$\chi^2=13.26$
2. Discuss the problems / difficulties with teachers/friends	33.6	26.5	21.3	$\chi^2=9.21$

IV. DISCUSSION

Reading anxiety was hypothesized as an independent variable affecting the students' choices of reading strategies in the present study. The results of the ANOVA showed that the students' use of reading strategies varied significantly at the overall and categorical levels according to their levels of reading anxiety. The frequencies of the students' reading strategy use were negatively correlated with the students' levels of reading anxiety. The Chi-square tests showed that, at the individual level, 21 strategies varied significantly according to this variable. The main variation pattern was 'L>M>H', indicating that a significantly greater percentage of the students with a lower anxiety level than the students with a higher anxiety level reported high use of those reading strategies. It was also found that the students with different anxiety levels had different tendencies to use different strategies. From the results above, we may infer that there are possible correlations between the students' levels of reading anxiety and their use of reading strategies.

The results of present study were consistent with the study of Lien (2011) [21], which revealed that students' foreign language reading anxiety was negatively correlated with their reading strategy use. The students with higher anxiety employed reading strategies less frequently. In addition, high and low anxiety students differed in the choices of reading strategies. Students with low anxiety tended to use general reading strategies, while students with higher anxiety tended to employ basic support mechanisms to help them understand the texts. Miyanaga (2002) also found that more anxious students tended to rely on word-level local reading strategies [17]. Similarly, the results of the present study revealed that the students with higher reading anxiety tended to focus more on discrete words and employ some mechanical or cognitive strategies when they read business English texts.

Two factors may be hypothesized to help explain the differences of the students' reading strategy use in relation to their levels of reading anxiety for the present study. The first factor may be the students' reading proficiency. In the present study, the mean reading proficiency test scores of the students with a higher anxiety level were significantly lower than those of the students with a lower anxiety level. This indicates that the students' reading proficiency and reading anxiety negatively correlated. As reported and discussed in the previous studies, the students with a higher proficiency level reported employing reading strategies significantly more frequently than the students with a lower proficiency level, as in [21]. Therefore, it is not difficult to explain why the students with lower reading anxiety reported more frequent use of reading strategies. From another perspective, the reading

proficiency level was the reflection of the students' English language ability. The students with different levels of language ability would tend to use different reading strategies, as in [17]. This can help explain why the students with different anxiety levels tended to employ different reading strategies.

The other factor may be the students' familiarity of the specialized words and the content knowledge of Business English. In their study, Rajab, Zakaria, Rahman, Hosni, and Hassani (2012) identified several factors eliciting reading anxiety among L2 learners. These factors include unfamiliar linguistic components, culture materials and curricular content. Low proficient ESL learners at tertiary level might find problems in comprehending the academic texts as they did not have enough vocabulary and were also unfamiliar with the content of the topics. When they were not familiar with the vocabulary and the content, they might feel anxious and stressed to continue reading the texts, which would impede their reading process [23]. Saito, Horwitz and Garza (1999) also found that students' reading anxiety increased with their perceptions of the difficulty of the reading content in their foreign language learning, and their grades decreased in conjunction with their levels of reading anxiety [24]. In the present study, the participants were the Business English majors under the content-based instruction (CBI). Their vocabulary and content knowledge about Business English would play an important role for them to comprehend the texts. The students who were not familiar with the specialized vocabulary and the business content would perceive reading Business English difficult. This would increase their reading anxiety, and thus would affect their use of reading strategies and reading proficiency.

V. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the correlations between university Business English majors' use of reading strategies and their levels of reading proficiency. The results showed that the frequency of the students' reading strategy use had significant negative correlations with their levels of reading anxiety and reading proficiency. The students with higher reading anxiety reported employing reading strategies significantly less frequently, and they also got lower reading proficiency scores than the students with lower reading anxiety. Students with different anxiety levels had different preferences in the choice of reading strategies. The students with higher reading anxiety tended to focus on discrete words or sentences. They preferred to use the bottom-up or cognitive strategies. On the contrary, the students with lower reading anxiety focused more on the textual meaning and tended to employ more metacognitive or top-down strategies to monitor or manage their reading process.

The results of the present study revealed that the students with lower anxiety had better strategic awareness and they also tended to obtain higher reading proficiency scores than the students with higher anxiety. Therefore, teachers of Business English should put more effort to help the students reduce their reading anxiety by training them how to effectively employ different reading strategies to enhance their reading comprehension and solve their reading difficulties. On the other hand, the students with high anxiety should try to reduce their reading anxiety through reading more Business English texts to get familiar with the specialized vocabulary and content. They also needed to practice more different reading strategies to improve their reading comprehension while reading Business English texts.

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