

Kwan Kit Man, Kitty

READING DIFFICULTIES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE LEARNER¹

ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author reports briefly on her study investigating the reading problems of ten Secondary One pupils in reading text materials in history and integrated science. On the basis of the pupils' mid-term examination results in English, six pupils were chosen from among the top ten pupils and four others from the bottom ten in a secondary school in Hong Kong. They were grouped under the labels of the High Group and the Low Group in terms of their general proficiency in English. In both the history and science parts of the study, the pupils were interviewed and asked to read two reading selections taken from the textbooks used at that time in the two subjects. In the early sessions, practice tasks were given to pupils to prepare them for giving self-reports or thinking aloud while reading. Misinterpretations of the text were examined by asking the pupils the way in which they arrived at their interpretations. In the first part, communication breakdown in processing, wrong predictions of unknown vocabulary and serious distortion were evident among pupils in the Low Group. These were mainly due to the pupils' paucity in vocabulary. The syntactic problems were partly the result of first language interference and heavy concept load. These problems were commonly found in both groups. In the second part, insufficient knowledge of sub-technical vocabulary and the modal passive significantly affected students' reading comprehension in both groups. At the syntactic level, the insufficient knowledge of passive voice did not affect interpretations as normally expected. Rather it was the lack of the pupils' understanding about the use of modal passive and the concept of coherence that influenced their comprehension most.