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**The Immediate Recall of Propositions via
Listening and Reading
by Some EFL Learners.**

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Abstract

Eighteen EFL subjects from a group of 180 second, third and fourth-year college students were selected by means of a simple random sampling method. The subjects were requested to individually read and listen to twelve, short English texts ranging from thirty to forty words, one text at a time. The subjects were also asked to give the written rendition of what they could immediately recall in their native language

In terms of the number of meaning units, i.e., propositions, the study revealed that there was a significant difference, in favor of reading, when the overall performance of the subjects was taken into consideration. A similar difference, in favor of reading, for propositions within Levels 2 and 3 of the text structure, was also maintained. However, no significant difference in the number of propositions recalled within Level 1, neither in favor of reading nor in favor of listening was discerned.

The claim that the reading and listening abilities were essentially the same (Kintsch, 1974) was not confirmed in our EFL situation, except for Level 1 propositions. According to the study, the levels of text structure were perceived by our EFL learners as being either super-ordinate, belonging to Level 1, or subordinate, belonging to the other lower levels, with no intervening levels. The validity of the perception of texts as having multi-tier levels, as proposed by Mandler and Goodman (1982) was not confirmed in our EFL situation either.

The study calls for an increase in the number of hours allotted to listening in EFL language programs. It also recommends that EFL learners be encouraged to listen to connected discourse depicting real situations. Moreover, it proposes that quizzes and exercises, which may help in the perception of different degrees of saliency in texts, be prepared.

It should be borne in mind that the methodology, used in this study, was different from those used by other researchers, and that the study was not intended to be an attack on other researchers' findings, but merely to characterize some aspects of foreign language learning.

تذكر معاني النصوص المقروءة والمسموعة لدى بعض متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

الملخص

طلبنا من ثمانية عشر طالباً من طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، تم اختيارهم عشوائياً أن يقرأوا ويستمعوا إلى اثني عشر نصاً يتراوح عدد الكلمات في كل نص من ثلاثين إلى أربعين كلمة كما طلبنا من الطلاب أن يكتبوا ترجمة النصوص مباشرة بعد قراءة كل نص أو الاستماع إليه وأن يكتبوا جميع ما يتذكرونه.

لقد أثبتت الدراسة أن عدد وحدات المعاني المترجمة عن طريق القراءة كان أكبر من عدد الوحدات المترجمة عن طريق الاستماع ولقد كان الفرق ذا دلالة إحصائية كما أظهرت الدراسة أن القدرة على تذكر وحدات المعاني المقروءة أكبر من القدرة على تذكر وحدات المعاني المسموعة وذلك بالنسبة لوحدات المعاني الموجودة في المستويين الثاني والثالث من مستويات تكوين النصوص إلا أنه لم يظهر أي فرق ذو دلالة إحصائية بالنسبة لتذكر وحدات المعاني التي ظهرت في المستوى الأول من مستويات تكوين النصوص.

ومقارنة الدراسة مع دراسات سابقة فإنها لم تؤيد تساوي القدرة على التذكر المباشر للمواد المسموعة والمقروءة بصفة عامة لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وهذا مخالف لما توصل إليه كوتش 1974م، كما أن الدراسة لم تثبت إدراك تعدد المستويات في النصوص من قبل متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية مما يخالف ما توصل إليه مادندلر وجودمان عام 1982م. توصي الدراسة بزيادة الوقت المخصص لمواد الاستماع في برامج اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية كما توصي بتشجيع المتعلمين على الاستماع لنصوص تصور مواقف من الحياة، كما توصي بإعداد اختبارات تساعد على إدراك وحدات المعاني التي تكون ضمن المستويات المختلفة للنصوص.

Introduction

We know that, shortly after we receive a message whether orally or in written form, we tend to forget the specifics of the surface structures of such a message. The word order may be completely lost. However, information related to the meaning of the message may not be lost. Different factors affecting the recall of the word order or the meaning of a message come into play. These may include the length of the message, in terms of the number of words, the number of meaning units, i.e., propositions, the amount of time that elapses after the message is delivered, the types of activities performed by a person after the receipt of the message, the structure of the text, the syntactic complexity of the message, and many other factors.

Relevant studies.

Many researchers have been interested in the effect of one factor or another on the immediate recall of propositions and word order for some time.

Examining the effect of word order patterns on the retention of surface patterns, Glisan (1980) discovered that the retention of English-speaking learners of Spanish fell significantly below that of native speakers of Spanish. The difference in performance was attributed to the fact that the word order in Spanish was, in some aspects, different from that of English.

Dixon (1978), investigating the immediate recall of a narrative and an expository passage by first and second grade children, discovered

that his subjects immediately recalled more superordinate propositions than subordinate ones. In addition, Dixon found out that the narrative text was recalled more easily than the expository text and that second grade children recalled more from both types of text than did first grade children.

Having studied immediate and delayed text recall characteristics of good and poor readers at grades five, eight, eleven and college, Drum (1981) concluded that good readers recalled more text propositions and better maintained text input order than did poor readers. Moreover, Drum discovered that there was an increase, by grade, for good readers in retention and order of recall, that both ability groups recalled more of high-level propositions than low-level ones, and that subjects who studied the text did better in retention than those who did not.

Slater (1980), who varied text features such as length, number of propositions, use of heading and signals, concluded that high ability subjects immediately recalled more propositions than low ability ones and that subjects receiving directions and signaling recalled more propositions than those receiving direction without signaling.

In a study, in which fifth and sixth grade children studied a map of a fictitious island and listened to a 1100-word prose passage describing the island, Stader et al (1990) discovered that responses to cued recall tests varied depending on the type of map which the children had access to during the testing session. The children had access to one of four

maps. The authors concluded that their results conformed to the conjoint retention hypothesis and that multiple presentations provided additional boost in the performance of their subjects.

Similar studies (Kintsch et al: 1970, Anderson:1977, Belmore: 1982, Clark & Clark: 1977, Fletcher:1981, Mandler et al: 1977, 1980, 1982 Lund: 1991 and Mecarty:2001) have been conducted either on native speakers of English or on speakers of English as a second language. Moreover, the eliciting of data has sometimes been carried out through verbatim or near-verbatim repetitions of delivered messages. Since such repetitions may not always mean the actual processing of the meaning units in a message, as experience has shown, especially in a foreign language situation, it seems to us, that another corroborating tool of elicitation may really be needed. Furthermore, research on foreign language learners of English, in this area, still lags behind.

The problem:

One aspect of our problem centers around the question of whether Arab learners of English as a foreign language can immediately recall meaning units, delivered in English through the media of listening and reading and recalled in Arabic, with the same degree of accuracy for both media. In other words, this aspect of the problem is related to the query of whether there is a significant difference between the amount of the immediate recall of meaning units, propositions, delivered to our learners through listening , in English,

and recalled by the learners in Arabic, on the one hand, and the amount of the same units delivered to the learners through reading, in English, and recalled in Arabic , on the other.

The other aspect of the problem deals with the question of whether the structure of the text, which will be discussed later, has any effect on the amount of meaning units immediately recalled ,in Arabic, by Arab learners, especially when such meaning units are delivered to the learners through the media of listening and reading .

Objectives of the study:

In this study we will try:

1. To find out whether there is an overall significant difference between the amount of the immediate recall of meaning units delivered to Arab learners of English as a foreign language through the receptive medium of reading, on the one hand, and the amount of the immediate recall of the same units delivered to the learners through the medium of listening, on the other.

To determine whether the structure of the text of messages , which will be discussed later, has any effect on the amount of the immediate recall of meaning units , i.e., propositions. In other words, we will be concerned with differences, if there are any, in the amount of correctly translated propositions delivered through the medium of listening and those delivered through the medium of reading on different levels of text structure. Only three levels of text structure i.e., first,

second, and third-level propositions, will be dealt with in this study.

٣. To relate our findings to those arrived at by other researchers and make some recommendations.

Propositions:

The concept of proposition was developed by case grammar advocates such as Filmore (١٩٦٨) and later refined by Chafe and Filmore (١٩٧١), and summarized by Cook (١٩٨٩). It is based on the analysis of the meaning of sentences in terms of their combination properties. This type of analysis of meaning is sometimes referred to as 'predicate calculus analysis'. Sentences in English may be thought of, semantically, as consisting of one or more predicates. **The lion killed the white gazelle**, for example, consists of two predicates. The first one involves the action of killing represented by **kill**, an agent, that did the killing i.e., **the lion**, and an object which is **the gazelle**. The second predicate has to do with the state of the gazelle, i.e., being **white**. These predicates can be represented in terms of their meaning units as:

[eat, lion, gazelle]

[white, gazelle]

The entities with which the predicate, **kill**, is associated i.e., **lion** and **gazelle**, are called arguments. In Case Grammar terminology, these arguments represent fillers for cases. The number of arguments may vary, depending on the type of predicate. **Sleep**, as a verb, for example, requires only one argument. **Transfer** (v), in terms of its meaning, requires four arguments that stand for an **agent**, an **object**, a **source**, and a **target**. Some of the arguments may come to the surface and others may

be suppressed. (For more information on overt and covert roles, see Cook: ١٩٨٩). A predicate along with its arguments is called a proposition. A proposition is viewed as the natural unit of meaning. (For more information, see Clark & Clark: ١٩٧٧. See also Cook: ١٩٨٩, for a detailed account of case grammar models)

The structure of a text:

The structure of a text is defined in terms of the hierarchical order of propositions contained in a certain text. A certain proposition is ranked as belonging to the first level in a hierarchy, if it introduces a theme for the first time. Other propositions are subordinated to it and ranked as belonging to second level ones only if they contain arguments that also appear in first-level propositions. Any remaining propositions sharing arguments with second-level propositions are classified as third-level propositions, and so on and so forth. A text may contain as many first-level propositions as the number of themes or information topics introduced in it. Concepts representing locatives, time expressions, concession, result, etc., that lie beyond the combinatorial properties of a proposition, are considered to be modifiers of that proposition. They are ranked one level lower than such a proposition. (For more details, see Kintsch & Keenan: ١٩٧٣, Anderson: ١٩٧٤, Kintsch: ١٩٧٤, Kintsch et al.: ١٩٧٥, Mandler & Johnson: ١٩٧٧, and Mandler & Goodman: ١٩٨٢).

Figure ١. shows the representation of the structure of one of our texts in terms of levels. The indentation reveals that the propositions, numbered ١ and ٣, belong to Level ١

because they express new themes or information topics. Propositions ۲, ۳, ۴, and ۵ belong to level ۲ because some of them either qualify level ۱ propositions or share some arguments with level ۱ propositions. In a similar fashion, Propositions ۶, ۷, ۸, ۹, and ۱۰ belong to level ۳ because some of them either qualify level ۲ propositions or share some arguments with level ۲ propositions. Propositions ۱۱ and ۱۲ belong to level ۴ for the same reason.

Figure ۱.
The representation of the structure of a text.

- ۱- [leave, train]
- ۲- [time: ۸ o'clock]
- ۳- [have, we, lunch]
- ۴- [loc: restaurant]
- ۵- [little, restaurant]
- ۶- [on hill, restaurant]
- ۷- [has, hill, top]
- ۸- [visit, we, caves]
- ۹- [loc: town]
- ۱۰- [old, town]
- ۱۱- [time, then]
- ۱۲- [be in, we, rooms]
- ۱۳- [has, hotel, rooms]
- ۱۴- [time: ۳,۰۰ p.m.]

The train will leave at ۸,۰۰ o'clock. We will have lunch in a little restaurant on the top of a hill. Then, we will visit the caves in the old town. At ۳,۰۰ p.m., we will be in the hotel rooms. (۴۰ words)

The rationale for such a representation of the structure of a text is based on the theory that level ۱ propositions are more salient and can more easily be processed and recalled than others belonging to levels ۲ and ۳ and that those belonging to level ۲ can be more easily processed

and recalled than others belonging to levels ۳ and ۴ and so on.

The validity of such a rationale was confirmed by Kintsch and his collaborators (Kintsch et al, ۱۹۷۵), but was never tested in a foreign language environment.

Methodology:

Design: The design of the study is a ۳ by ۲ design. On the vertical level, we have three levels of text structure, and on the horizontal level, we have two types of media, i.e., reading and listening. We will be interested in the overall differences between reading and listening on all levels of text structure combined and within each level of text structure. We will also be interested in differences in listening and reading combined, among the three levels of text structure.

Subjects: Eighteen subjects, from a group of ۱۸۰ second, third and fourth-year students enrolled in English courses, in the English Department at Umm Al Qura University, were selected. A simple random sampling method was used in the selection of the subjects. All the subjects, in the sample, were native speakers of Arabic. Their average age was roughly twenty one.

Materials: Twelve passages, each ranging in length from thirty to forty words, were constructed. The topics of the passages consisted of a mixture of old news items, short narratives, facts about modern technology, and some future events. The content of the passages was familiar to the average subject, but was never heard or read before. The average number of propositions in each passage was thirteen.

The twelve passages were divided into two halves. Each half, i.e., six passages, was recorded on a separate audiotape. Each passage was timed. The first half of passages was called Part A., and the second Part B. The passages were also typed on "by" cards. The recording times, measured in seconds, were also typed on each card. They were divided into two groups corresponding to the ones recorded on audiotapes. They were called Part C., and Part D. Then, two forms were compiled -- Form A., and Form B. Form A. consisted of the recorded passages in Part A and the typed Passages in Part D. Form B consisted of the typed passages in Part C. and the recorded ones in Part B. In other words, no passage, on each form, was repeated.

Procedure:

All of the subjects were individually requested to listen to the recorded, whole passages in Form A, one by one, and give the written literal translation of what they could recall, in their native language. They were also requested to individually read the typed, whole passages in Form A, within the amount of time shown on each card, one by one, and give the written rendition of what they could recall, in their native language. In other words, the translation was elicited, immediately after each passage was listened to or read within the amount of time shown on each card. Following the same procedure, we asked the subjects to do the same in regard to Form B. We followed this procedure in order to offset the effect of learning that may result either from reading or listening to the passages.

Scoring:

We prepared a text structure for each passage. The scoring was done in terms of the number of propositions in the text structure of each passage. Each proposition, translated literally or through the use of other synonyms, was assigned one mark. Propositions with mistakes in the predicates were given zeros. Those, with replacements of one argument for another were also allotted zeros, only if replaced by a subject for the first time. Other referents of the same replaced arguments were considered to be correct.

Reliability. We fed the scores into a computer. The following acceptable reliability coefficients were obtained.

EQUAL LENGTH SPEARMAN-BROWN = .80
 GUTTMAN SPLIT-HALF= .80
 UNEQUAL-LENGTH SPEARMAN-BROWN = .80
 100 ITEMS IN PART 1 100 ITEMS IN PART 2
 ALPHA FOR PART 1 = .8062 ALPHA FOR PART 2 = .8881
 CRONBACH'S ALPHA FOR ALL VARIABLES = .9236

Results: Even though the amount of time, the type of propositions, their level and number i.e., 28 in level 1, 62 in level 2 and 42 in level 3, were kept constant for the recorded and typed passages, the results revealed that there was a significant difference in the overall performance of the subjects in favor of the medium of reading (mean difference = 6.00, $p = .033$). A similar difference was also maintained for propositions within level 2 delivered through reading and the ones delivered through listening (mean difference = 3.8, $p = .017$).

Similar results, favoring reading, were obtained for propositions within level 3 (mean difference = 2.3, $p = .009$). However, no significant difference was obtained when propositions within level 1, delivered through reading were compared with the same ones delivered through listening (mean difference = 0.006, $p = .9420$).

The above results were arrived at in terms of the raw scores because the number and identity of propositions were the same for both reading and listening on each level of text structure. When we examined our data in terms of differences among levels of structure, between level 1 and level 2 or level 1 and level 3, for example, we realized that the number of propositions was not the same on the different levels of structure. We had to convert the scores of each subject into absolute scores so that we could highlight any differences in terms of proportions.

A comparison of the results among the three levels of text structure, with scores on listening and reading taken together on each level, showed a significant dichotomy between Level 1 propositions and those belonging to other levels and insignificant differences between Level 2 and Level 3 propositions. Tables 2 and 3 summarize these results.

Table 2. ANOVA for the proportional performance of the subjects on three levels of text structure, with scores on listening and reading taken together.

Source	SS	DF	MS	F
	*			

Between Groups	2736	2	1368
	19,2		
Within Groups	3637	51	71,3

*
 $P < .01$

Table 2. Scheffe test for the comparison of differences in the performance of the subjects on three levels of text structure, with scores on listening and reading taken together.

Level 1 vs. Level 2.	3,0
Level 1 vs. Level 3.	4,00
Level 2 vs. Level 3.	.04

*
 $P < .01$

It should be noted, here, that no significant differences, between reading on level 2.. and its counterpart on level 3., were obtained (mean difference = 1.9444, $p = .289$). The same was true for listening on level 2. and its counterpart on level 3 (mean difference = 1.3889, $p = .397$). However, significant differences, in favor of reading on level 1. over its counterparts on levels 2 and 3, were discerned (mean difference = 13.667, $p = .000$ for the first comparison; and mean difference = 11.7222, $p = .000$ for the second). The same was true for listening on Level 1. and its counterparts on Levels 2 and 3 (mean difference = 18.2222, $p = .000$ for the first comparison; and mean difference = 16.8333, $p = .000$ for the second). These results supported the dichotomy mentioned above and that

such a dichotomy was not influenced by the overweight, in terms of statistics, of one skill or another on any level of text structure.

Conclusion:

It may be concluded that, everything being equal, reading and listening are not equivalent for foreign language learners. It is possible that reading permits the subjects to visualize reading material, delivered within the same amount of time as that allotted to listening, in a better way than they do listening material. The study supports Labbert's (1986) claim that the visual stimulus is much more powerful than the auditory in enhancing message comprehension and meaning. The claim that the reading and listening abilities are essentially the same (Kintsch, 1970; Stich, 1972), has not been confirmed in our EFL situation. It may also be concluded that EFL subjects can immediately recall main themes in a much better way than they do minor details of messages delivered through reading or listening. The levels of text structure may be perceived by foreign language learners as being either superordinate (Level 1) or subordinate (other levels), i.e., with no intervening levels. The validity of a multitier structure of a text proposed Mandler & Goodman (1982) has not been confirmed, in our EFL situation, either.

It should be borne in mind that there are differences in methodology between this study and the other related studies and the study is not intended to be an attack on findings by other researchers, but merely to

characterize some aspects of foreign language learning.

Recommendations :

EFL learners are always at a disadvantage when their performance is compared with that of native speakers of English in all the skills. Since the skills of reading and listening are essentially the same for native speakers of English (Kintsch, 1970), our subjects will be at a more disadvantage as far as their listening ability is concerned.

EFL programs usually offer equal or more hours to the teaching of reading than to listening. In the light of the results, this practice needs to be changed. Learners should be encouraged to listen to programs depicting real life situations, whether recorded at normal pace, or transmitted on the radio and TV. Quizzes and exercises, in which all levels of text structure are tested, can be prepared and administered to such learners for enhancing their listening ability. The amount of time allotted to such tests and exercises can be used for the improvement of such ability, in general, and the improvement of the learners' processing of minor details of messages, according to their saliency, in particular.

Moreover, every effort should be made to make such learners perceive the different degrees of saliency associated with each level of text structure in both skills, i.e., reading and listening.

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APPENDIX

Sample reading and listening passages.

1. When the telephone was invented, we assumed that it would replace the mail service. Similarly, when television was introduced, many of us thought it was the death of the radio. (30 words.)

2. Last week, two ships collided in the Atlantic Ocean. One was carrying fruits and the other some building materials. In spite of the severe damage, the two ships managed to reach a nearby port. (34 words.)

3. Pains in the neck are a common complaint. Some people get them from long hours of driving. Others get them from sitting, for a long time, staring at a computer monitor. (31 words.)

4. We will always remember the day when our car broke down. The children were sleeping. We were in the middle of the night and we were miles from home. We tried to get the car started, but it wouldn't. (40 words.)

5. Newspapers are classified into groups. Some are national; others are local. National ones can be bought everywhere in a country. Local ones can be bought only in a particular part of a country. (32 words.)

6. The police have issued a description of three men. The men were thought to have placed a bomb that exploded near the office of the prime minister. Fortunately, nobody was hurt by the explosion. (34 words.)

7. The train will leave at 8.00 o'clock. We will have lunch in a little restaurant on the top of a hill. Then, we will visit the caves in the old town. At 4.00 p.m., we will be in the hotel rooms. (40 words.)