A Study on the Effects of Socioaffective Strategies on Reading Comprehension

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The purpose of this paper is to investigate how socioaffective strategies used by language learners affect reading comprehension. The research method employed was designed to facilitate more effective reading comprehension by encouraging learners to ask for help whenever they were faced with difficult English sentences. The experiment was conducted on 50 Korean EFL college students. In the experimental group, the subjects had to work in small groups. They were encouraged to recognize problems in reading English passages, to formulate the problems by expressing them concretely, and to ask the teacher and peers for help. For the control group, the classes were led mainly by the teacher using a traditional grammar translation method. For both the pre-test and post-test, the subjects translated the same paragraph without the use of a dictionary. The improvement was evaluated in two areas: the increased number of sentences translated correctly and the increased number of words translated correctly. The results obtained indicated that the experimental group improved in translating sentences rather than words. The learning of socioaffective strategies for one semester did not seem to affect the progress in the TOEFL test. It is not easy to conclude which level of learners benefited more from the socioaffective strategies. However, the results seem to imply that the strategies helped the lower-level learners when they were faced with difficult problems.

1. Introduction

English reading classes in Korean universities often end up with teacher-led translations, resulting in a lack of interaction between the teacher and students and among students themselves. The lack of interaction in turn leads to a more serious problem, that is depriving students of the opportunity to gain useful feedback to check and correct their understanding of the reading materials. Due to the lack of feedback, they are often unaware of how well they are understanding the material, what mistakes they are making and what problems they are having. Even if they do, most of them are unwilling to ask questions in front of many classmates. One may ask why teachers choose to use traditional methods in teaching language classes and

why students use the learning strategies they do. There may be several reasons for this. Some teachers simply choose this traditional pedagogy for instruction since they are accustomed to it. Or sometimes they believe they have no other choice due to the large size of their classes and students' passive attitude.

Some major universities have recently replaced such teacher-led translation classes with an integrated course emphasizing the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, such English courses still have their own problems. One of the major problems can be attributed to the relatively easy reading materials. The reading materials are easy since, in such an integrated course, students are asked not only to read but also to talk and write about the materials. The productive skills of speaking and writing have not yet satisfactorily been emphasized and taught in middle and high schools. Limited by the low proficiency of such productive skills, students cannot use difficult texts. Therefore the reading materials do not tend to have enough words and sufficiently difficult structures for college students to improve their receptive skills, particularly reading. While offering integrated English courses, it is essential to provide students with classes which solely focus on reading comprehension in order to enhance their ability in reading more difficult texts.

What is crucial in this line is how to encourage students to use their initiative and participate more actively in learning to read English texts. Socioaffective strategies have been described as the tactics employed by non-native speakers and native speakers to achieve communicative goals in the target language. In the experimental study, the subjects have employed socioaffective strategies in English reading classes conducted in their first language, Korean. It suggests that using socioaffective strategies is a way of helping students to take a more active role in English reading classes.

2. Theoretical background of the study

O'Malley et al. (1985) classify the socioaffective strategy as one of the three learning strategies which include the metacognitive strategy and the cognitive strategy. They further divide socioaffective strategies into two sub-strategies: the cooperative strategy and the questioning for clarification strategy. They define cooperation as "working with one or more peers to obtain feedback, pool information, or model a language activity," and question for clarification as "asking a teacher or other native speaker for repetition, paraphrasing, explanation, and/or examples" (Brown, 2000, p. 126).

Long (1981, 1983, 1996) and many other researchers (Gass & Varonis, 1986; Ellis, 1985; Doughty & Pica, 1986; Williams, Inscoe & Tasker, 1997) identified the devices employed in the negotiation process including confirmation checks, clarification requests, comprehension checks, repetitions and reformulations. Based on their analyses of discourses undertaken between NS and NNS, and also between NNS-NNS, these researchers view socioaffective strategies as communicative strategies which are considered to facilitate the achievement of communicative purposes. Mitchell and Myles (1998) warn that "learning strategies must not be confused with communication strategies" even though they admit "there is some overlap" (p. 90).

It is taken for granted that learning strategies and communication strategies are two separate strategies. It may be partially correct that they have their own distinctive features and characteristics. However, the view that regards learning strategies as being separate from communication strategies is due to the idea that learning is a "solitary process hidden in the heads of individuals" (Donato, 1994, p. 35). This paper supports the idea that learning takes place when those participants involved in learning activities can efficiently interact when communicating. Learning as part of human communicative activities can therefore be facilitated by those strategies that make communication easier.

What seems to be crucial when considering learning as a negotiation process is that it must not be regarded as a conduit metaphor of communication, in other words as a channel of message transmission and reception. According to Vygotsky's developmental theory (1986), all human activities including teaching and learning activities are available in the social relationships among participants. For Vygotsky, human development processes involve two levels: first, the interpsychological level, and then the intrapsychological level. Development first takes place socially between people and later individually and internally. For successful achievement of classroom learning objectives, the teacher should provide an environment in which all the participants can actively interact with others and effectively communicate through negotiation for meaning.

3. Method

50 Hanshin University students participated in this research project while undertaking an English reading course. The course was an elective subject and students came from a number of different departments. There were 34 first year students, 12 second year students, 3 juniors and 1 senior. There were 32 subjects in

the experimental group and 18 subjects in the control group. Both groups read a collection of articles in *Cellege English* compiled by Hanshin University English Faculty and published by Hanshin University Press, and some supplements.

All the 50 subjects took the pre-test at the beginning of the semester and the post-test at the end. For both the pre-test and post-test, the students translated the same paragraph taken from one of the articles in *College English* without being allowed to use a dictionary (see Appendix 1). In addition, the students were required to complete 30 reading comprehension questions from a TOEFL test, both at the beginning and at the end of the semester.

For the control group, traditional teacher-led translation and grammar lectures were given. The teacher/researcher translated most of the articles, explained the meaning of words, sentences, grammar, and context, and answered students' questions when they were raised. The subjects were asked to give an individual presentation, in which they translated and explained an article assigned from *College English.* Between the pre-test and the post-test, the subjects in the control group had to do the translation assignment twice individually with the use of a dictionary. For the assignment, they translated the same paragraph they did for the pre-test and the post-test.

For the experimental group, the teacher/researcher gave a short introduction to socioaffective strategies a week after the pre-test. The three major steps of socioaffective strategies are: first to realize problems they face in reading comprehension, second to formulate questions, and third to ask the teacher and/or peers the questions for clarification. The students often did not realize their problems and were reluctant to express them even in their first language. Therefore, the second step, formulating and expressing their questions appropriately was greatly emphasized. The types of questions can include confirmation checks, clarification requests and comprehension checks. While comprehension checks can be used by the teacher and those who help with their interlocutors' understanding, confirmation checks and clarification requests can be useful in assisting students with difficulties.

The subjects in the experimental group were encouraged to ask questions that related to three areas: semantic questions, grammatical questions and pragmatic questions. A problem may involve all three areas at the same time. However, the subjects were encouraged to employ at least one of the three kinds of questions when they were faced with a difficult sentence, and then move on to another kind of question. The students were asked to check whether they had any problems with the meaning of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs or the text as a whole.

For grammatical questions, they were encouraged to analyze what part of speech a word is, whether a phrase is nominal, verbal, adjectival, adverbial or prepositional. When they were analyzing a sentence, they were told to find out the main clause and the subordinate clause of the sentence. Related to grammar, they were also told to deconstruct a sentence into a subject, a verb, a complement and an adjunct. If they could not find out the subject of a sentence or the verb or the complement, they had to learn to ask what each component of a sentence was. For pragmatic questions, the subjects were encouraged to relate their schemata: that is their background knowledge and experience related to the specific topic to the reading materials.

In the experimental group, each group of three or four subjects had to give a presentation of an article assigned to them and to submit the translation assignment. On the other hand, in the control group, each individual had to prepare a presentation and to do the translation assignment alone. The subjects in the experimental group, therefore, had to meet other members of their group outside the classroom several times. For the translation assignment, the experimental group also used a dictionary to translate the same paragraph they translated for the pre-test. The same translation assignment was given twice: one was given two weeks after the pre-test and the other two weeks before the post-test. The reason for giving the same assignment twice was that it was considered likely that the students would improve in analyzing their problems and clarifying questions as the course progressed. It was assumed that they would find more problems they did not realize existed when they were doing their first assignment. In order to make sure all the students, not just a few advanced students, did actually participate in the assignment, the experimental group was asked to audiotape while they were working. Those recorded conversations can later be analyzed for further research.

The post-tests were given to both the experimental group and the control group at the end of the semester. For the post-tests, they translated the same paragraph they did for the pre-test and twice for the assignment, and also completed the same 30 questions in a TOEFL reading comprehension section. Improvements made in the translation test were evaluated in two areas: the increased number of clauses correctly translated and the increased number of words correctly translated. In the paragraph there were 9 sentences (see Appendix 1) with 102 types and 184 tokens of words (see Appendix 2). Since there were several complex sentences and long simple sentences, the 9 sentences were divided into 15 units, each of which carried clear ideas (see Appendix 3). The total number of correctly translated units was 15, including 14 clauses and 1 phrase. To check the words correctly translated,

66 word units were counted. The word units included 64 content words, and 1 preposition and 1 prepositional phrase, the meanings of which were considered to be critical in understanding the text (see Appendix 4).

As mentioned previously, both the experimental group and the control group did the translation assignment twice with a dictionary. Through this assignment, they had opportunities to find out the meanings of the words they had not known in the pre-test and to translate the sentences with enough time to think. Therefore, it can be assumed that they all showed some improvement both in the numbers of clauses and words correctly translated, compared with those in the pre-test.   The differences between the two are that the experimental group worked in collaboration with other subjects and they used socioaffective strategies, while the control group worked individually. Therefore it is expected that the two factors, the collaborative work and the use of socioaffective strategies, affected the results of the post-test.   It seems to be reasonable to expect that the experimental group would do better in both areas since the interactive work could have helped them solve the problems in the clauses and words. It is also plausible to assume that they could have paid enough attention while negotiating for meaning, and therefore could have better memorized the meanings of the clauses and words. In addition, the experiment sought to find out whether the two factors also affected the TOEFL test and which level of learners they affected most; the lower-level or the upper-level learner.   This research pursued to answer the four key questions:

*Q*1: Which group, the experimental or the control, improved in their ability to translate clauses?

*Q*2: Which group increased the number of words translated correctly?

*Q*3: Which group showed a greater improvement in the TOEFL test?

*Q*4: Which level of learners, the lower-level or the upper-level, benefited more from the socioaffective strategies?

4. Results and Discussion

Q1:   Which group, the experimental or the control, improved in their ability to translate clauses?

Table 1 shows that the control group had an average of 2 clauses translated correctly in the pre-test and 5.22 in the post-test, that is an increase of 3.22. On the
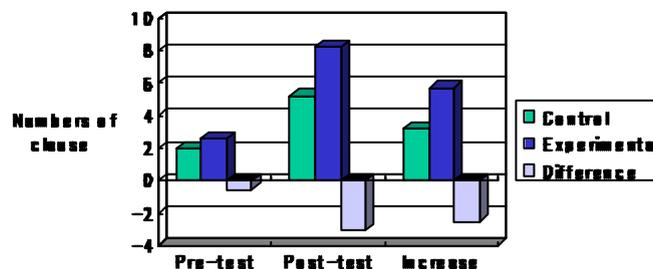
other hand, the experimental group shows an increase of 5.72 clauses with an average of 2.56 clauses in the pre-test and 8.28 in the post-test. The difference between the control group and the experimental group in the mean score of the improved clauses shows 2.497 as Figure 1 indicates. The result of the t-test points to a highly significant difference at the 0.01 level (p<.01), showing a p value of 0.0076. This answers Question 1 by showing that the experimental group did better in translating clauses correctly. As expected, the two factors, the collaborative work and the use of socioaffective strategies, resulted in significant improvements in the subjects' ability to
translate clauses.

Table 1 *Mean numbers of clauses*
translated correctly

	Pre-test		Post-test		Increase	
Group	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Control	18	2	18	5.22	18	3.22
Experimental	32	2.56	32	8.28	32	5.72
Difference	-14	-0.56	14	-3.06	14	-2.5

P = 0.0076

Figure 1 *Mean numbers of clauses*
*translated correctly*

Q2: Which group increased the number of words translated correctly?

Contrary to what was expected, the control group showed an increase in the mean scores of words translated compared to that of the experimental group. As Table 2 shows, the control group has an average number of 18.83 correctly translated words in the pre-test and 44.17 in the post-test. The total number of improvement was 25.33. On the other hand, the experimental group had an average number of 26.75 correctly translated words in the pre-test, which is much higher than that of the control group. The experimental group showed 47.91 in the post-test, still slightly higher than that of the control group. However, the number of improvement was only 21.16. Therefore, the control group did better in translating words correctly. Figure 2 indicates that the difference between the control group and the experimental group in the mean score of the improved words is 4.17. This difference, however, is not significant as the t-test showed a p value of only 0.2349 (p<.05). Even though the difference is not meaningful, it is possible to assume that one can learn the basic meaning of words through a dictionary even if he/she works alone. Overall, the socioaffective strategies did not produce any improvements in translating words.

Table 2 *Mean numbers of words translated correctly*

|	Pre-test		Post-test		Increase	
Group	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Control	18	18.83	18	44.17	18	25.33
Experimental	32	26.75	32	47.91	32	21.16
Difference	-14	-7.92	14	-3.74	14	4.17

Figure 2 *Mean numbers of words translated correctly*
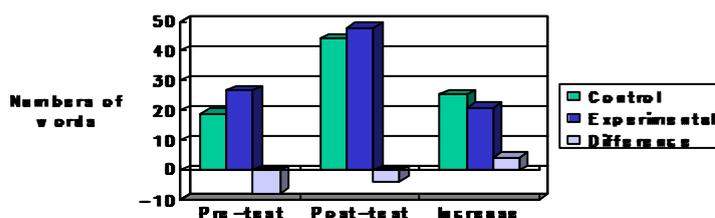
The experimental group did slightly better on the TOEFL test, but the t-test does not prove its performance to be significant. The p-value is 0.3034, much higher than a significance level of 0.05. The control group and the experimental group performed more or less the same in the TOEFL pre-test. The control group had an average score of 15.67 and the experimental group had an average score of 15.09 in the pre-test (see Table 3). The experimental group performed slightly better on the post-test than the control group by an average number of 1.472. This result indicates that the translation assignment and classroom activities performed throughout the semester were not directly related to the performance of TOEFL.

Table 3 *Mean numbers of TOEFL scores*

Group	Pre-test		Post-test		Increase	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
Control	18	15.67	18	16.94	18	1.28
Experimental	32	15.09	32	17.84	32	2.75
Difference	-14	0.58	14	-0.9	14	-1.47

P = 0.3034

Figure 3 *Mean numbers of TOEFL scores*
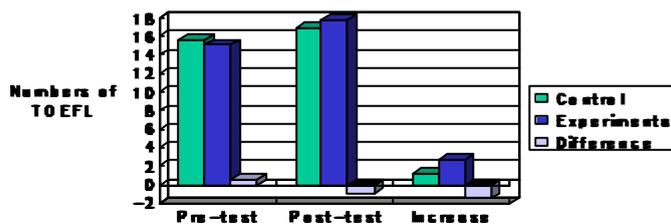
Q4:   Which level of learners, the lower-level or the upper-level, benefited more from the socioaffective strategies?

Both the control and experimental groups were divided into two levels: the upper and the lower by a score of 15 on the TOEFL pre-test, which had a total score of 30. Table 4 compares the upper and the lower levels of the experimental group in their improvement in the translation of the clauses. The lower level showed an

average increase of 5.8, the upper level 5.64. The t-test indicates no significance, with a p value of 0.8954. However, the lower level performed far better in translating words correctly as Table 5 shows. The mean score in the increased number of words translated was 26.133 in the lower-level-group and 16.765 in the upper-level-group. The difference between the two groups is significant with a p value of 0.0232.

Table 4 *The difference between the upper level and the lower level of the experimental group in the average number of clauses improved*

	N	Mean
Upper	17	5.647
Lower	15	5.8
Difference	2	-0.153

P = 0.8954

Table 5 *The difference between the upper level and the lower level of the experimental group in the average number of words improved*

	N	Mean
Upper	17	16.765
Lower	15	26.133
Difference	2	-9.369

P = 0.0232

In the control group, the upper level performed better in translating both the clauses and the words. When the subjects did not receive any lessons on socioaffective strategies and therefore did not resort to them in translating difficult clauses and words, those in the upper level group showed more progress. In such a condition, the lower level group did not show much progress. The comparison between the upper levels of the two groups does not show any significant difference in the increased number of correctly translated clauses. However, the upper level of the control group progressed in the number of correctly translated words.

What seems to have most interesting and meaningful implications in comparing the two groups is that the lower level of the experimental group showed a significant improvement in translating the clauses. Table 6 indicates that the lower level in the experimental group showed an average increase of 5.8 clauses, which is 4.1 clauses more than that of the lower level in the control group. The difference between the two groups is proven to be highly significant with a p value of 0.0006. The lower level of the experimental group also showed a higher average score in improved words, but its significance is not validated with a p value of 0.2412.

Table 6 *The difference between the lower levels of the control group and the experimental group in the average number of clauses improved*

	N	Mean
Control	10	1.7
Experimental	15	5.8
Difference	-5	-4.1

P = 0.0006

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to investigate the effects of socioaffective strategies on reading comprehension. Based on the idea that learning can be facilitated and successfully achieved through efficient communication, the research

was designed to implement socioaffective strategies in classroom activities. The students were taught what the strategies were and how these strategies might help them when they had problems understanding difficult English texts. Throughout the semester the students learned how and when to use the strategies.

For the first research question, the experimental group showed a significant progress in translating the clauses. This indicates that the socioaffective strategies can be useful in dealing with complex idea units. The experimental group, on the other hand, did not show any improvement in translating the words. The results of the first and second questions show that the socioaffective strategies effectively helped students solve more complicated problems such as clause level translation, while basic word meaning could be found by an individual student with the use of a dictionary. The teaching and learning of socioaffective strategies for one semester did not seem to affect the progress in the TOEFL test.

It is not easy to conclude which level of learners, the lower-level or the upper-level, benefited more from the socioaffective strategies. The results show no significant difference between the upper-level-students and the lower-level-students of the experimental group in the number of correctly translated clauses. However, in the number of correctly translated words, the lower-level-students showed a greater increase. Therefore one is tempted to draw a conclusion that the socioaffective strategies facilitate a greater understanding of words especially for the lower-level-students. What is interesting in the results of the analysis for the control group is that the upper-level-students showed significant differences both in the increase number of clauses and words understood. In other words, in the group that was not exposed to socioaffective strategies, there were significant differences between the different levels of proficiency. Also, the comparison between the lower level in the control group and the lower level in the experimental group seems to embrace an even more significant implication. The lower-level-students in the experimental group performed far better in translating the clauses with a p value of 0.0006. This may imply that the socioaffective strategies help the students with lower levels of proficiency especially when they are faced with complicated problems. Further research is highly recommended for this last question.

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Appendix 1

Despite, however, the fact that individual apes learn easily and, as individuals, show
remarkable progress in the acquisition of knowledge, apes as a species have never
developed a culture (1). There are two reasons for this (2). Lacking language, the
apes have no way of continuing in word and thought their separate experiences in
the use of tools and techniques (3). When an ape has disposed of a problem the
knowledge he has derived from that experience remains static (4).   He may
remember it when and if another problem of the same sort arises, but he does not, in
between times, ponder over his knowledge and devise means of applying it to further
problems (5). Man does (6). His overt experiences with practical problems are,
like those of the ape, separate and distinct (7).   But because man possesses
language, he can continue his problem-solving activities beyond the actual physical
experience and so develop, in thought and discussion, new applications of his
knowledge and improved means of solving problems (8). In short, by reason of
language, man's experiences are continuous, not discontinuous as among apes, and
so show far more rapid development (9).

Appendix 2

a	acquisition	activity	actual	among
an	and	another	apes	application
apply	are	arise	as	because
between	beyond	but	by	can
continue	continuous	culture	derive	despite
develop	development	devise	discontinuous	discussion
disposed	distinct	does	easily	experience
fact	far	for	from	further
have	he	his	however	if
improve	in	individual	it	knowledge
lack	language	learn	like	man
may	means	more	never	new

no	not	of	over	overt
physical	ponder	possess	practical	problem
progress	rapid	reason	remain	remarkable
remember	same	separate	short	show
so	solve	sort	species	static
technique	that	the	their	there
this	those	thought	time	to
tool	two	use	way	when
with	word			

(102 types, 184 tokens)

Appendix 3

Despite, however, the fact that individual apes learn easily and, as individuals, show remarkable progress in the acquisition of knowledge (1), apes as a species have never developed a culture (2). There are two reasons for this (3). Lacking language (4), the apes have no way of continuing in word and thought their separate experiences in the use of tools and techniques (5). When an ape has disposed of a problem (6) the knowledge he has derived from that experience remains static (7). He may remember it when and if another problem of the same sort arises (8), but he does not, in between times, ponder over his knowledge and devise means of applying it to further problems (9). Man does (10). His overt experiences with practical problems are, like those of the ape, separate and distinct (11).   But because man possesses language (12), he can continue his problem-solving activities beyond the actual physical experience (13) and so develop, in thought and discussion, new applications of his knowledge and improved means of solving problems (14). In short, by reason of language, man's experiences are continuous, not discontinuous as among apes, and so show far more rapid development (15).

Appendix 4

despite	fact	individual	ape	learn
easily	show	remarkable	progress	acquisition
knowledge	species	develop	culture	two

reason	lack	language	have	no
way	continue	word	thought	separate
experience	use	tool	technique	disposed
problem	derive	remain	static	remember
another	same	sort	arise	time
ponder	devise	means	apply	further
man	overt	practical	like	distinct
possess	solve	activity	actual	physical
discussion	new	application	improve	In short
continuous	discontinuous	far	more	rapid
development				

(In the order of appearance: 66 word units including 64 content words, 1 function word and 1 prepositional phrase)