

ABSTRACT

While authentic texts are being increasingly used in the second language (SL) classroom and while communicative approaches to language learning have recommended the necessity for foreign language (FL) learners to be exposed to such texts, empirical evidence concerning the effects of authentic texts compared to those of simplified ones is still scant and ambiguous. Therefore, this study is designed to investigate the effects of English authentic and simplified texts on the reading comprehension and processing strategies of Palestinian twelfth graders studying English as a foreign language (EFL). In order to examine this issue, an empirical study was conducted over two phases. Phase I attempted to explore the effect of text version (authentic vs. simplified) on the learners' level of comprehension. Phase II, which combined both quantitative and qualitative methodologies involved investigating the reading strategies used by learners when they read the two text versions.

In Phase I, reading comprehension tests were administered to 134 twelfth grade EFL subjects. The text stimuli consisted of two pairs of texts, each based on a different topic. Each pair of texts included two versions: authentic and simplified. Each subject read two passages, one from each pair of texts representing the versions. Thus, each subject read an authentic passage and a simplified one. The same questions were answered by subjects for each text pair regardless of the text version. This procedure was followed to enable comparison of the amount of comprehension of the different text versions. In Phase II of the study, on the other hand, the think-aloud protocol technique was adopted. Twelve

subjects performed think-alouds in their first language while reading the authentic and the simplified passages in order to provide data on the processing strategies they used for comprehending each text version.

Concerning Phase 1, results of the paired T-test based on the scores from the reading comprehension tests for the authentic and simplified versions indicated that there was no statistically significant difference. However, it was interesting to note that the subjects scored a little higher on the authentic versions.

Phase II attempted to investigate whether there was a statistically significant difference in the amount and type of reading strategies across text version, students' academic orientation and their sex.

Although subjects' achievement was better on the authentic text as compared to the simplified ones, and although science-oriented students were more competent than literary-oriented students at strategy-use, the results of the quantitative analysis of the subjects' think aloud protocols pointed to no statistical significant difference regarding all the null hypotheses except for one where S-O students used a larger number of processing strategies as compared to L-O students.

Following a qualitative analysis to the reading strategies used by the subjects in their think-aloud protocols, a number of general patterns were revealed. Among them were the following:

- 1) S-O students were more systematic in monitoring their reading behaviors than L-O students.

- 2) Most of the subjects participating in the think-about procedure of the two text versions tended not to anticipate what the text would be about.
- 3) S-O students integrated new information more consistently and frequently than L-O students did.

Despite the fact that there isn't a statistically significant difference in most of the hypotheses tested, the general outcome of this study is of important value. No doubt that the results of the study point to the pressing need for more intensive research regarding the reading comprehension aspects investigated in this work.