

## **NJBE TESOL Conference, May 24, 2011 – New Brunswick, NJ**

### **Poster Session: Dictionary Use in Reading**

#### Presenters:

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### **Section I: Rationale and Literature Review**

As reading teachers in the American Language Program at Bergen, we noticed that students are using various dictionaries in their reading tasks, and that there are certain differences in their dictionary use strategies. This observation has led us to question if dictionaries are useful in low-intermediate and intermediate ESL reading classes, and how they affect the overall reading test results.

Prior studies show that there was a significant correlation between the number of words looked up and the comprehension scores of less proficient learners. According to Knight (1994) dictionary use helped these learners reach the comprehension threshold. An additional study (Nation 1990, 2001) has shown that learners with a low vocabulary do not benefit from dictionary use since they don't have enough comprehension of basic (3,000) word families. These learners struggle to comprehend the passage and using a dictionary often uses too much of their cognitive resources (Laufer 1997). In addition, the syntactic and semantic implications cannot be comprehended by the less proficient learner, therefore adding to confusion of the translation. More proficient learners use a variety of vocabulary strategies including inference rather than depending exclusively on dictionaries for comprehension (Gu &

Johnson, 1996). These learners are less likely to look up words at random since they use context and word families to understand the passage.

A study (Belinski and Liu, 2001) of Hmong students showed that LEP students with intermediate English proficiency had a significant test score gain due to using a dictionary, whereby it had little effect on lower and higher level proficiency students. Our study at BCC indicates that intermediate students can benefit from monolingual dictionary usage. These students selectively use the dictionary to look up words that are either relevant to the passage's main points or reading task. This strategy allows adequate coverage of the passage while not spending too much time looking up words that can be understood from context.

## **Section II: Research Questions**

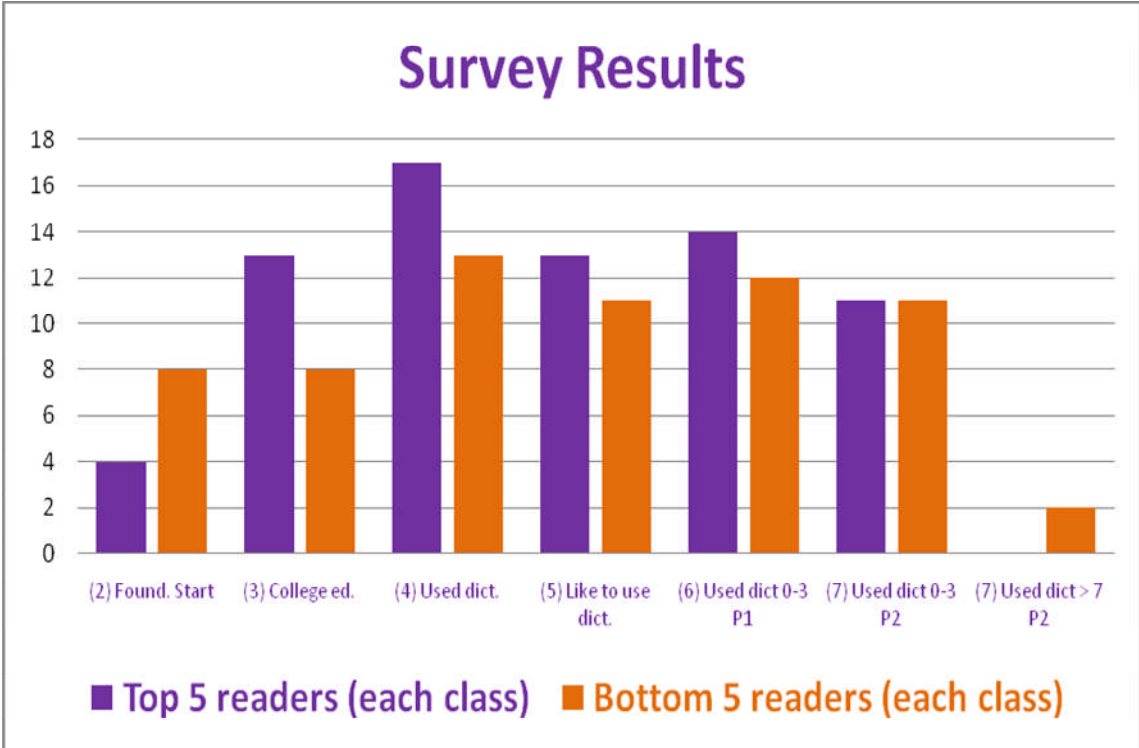
Research has been done in the past twenty years on the use of dictionaries in L2 reading and L2 writing. The following is the summary of what we have found in this area related to our own research topic:

- 1. Are dictionaries useful in low-intermediate and intermediate ESL reading classes?**
- 2. Is there any difference between good readers and weak readers in the use of dictionaries?**

### **Section III: Procedures**

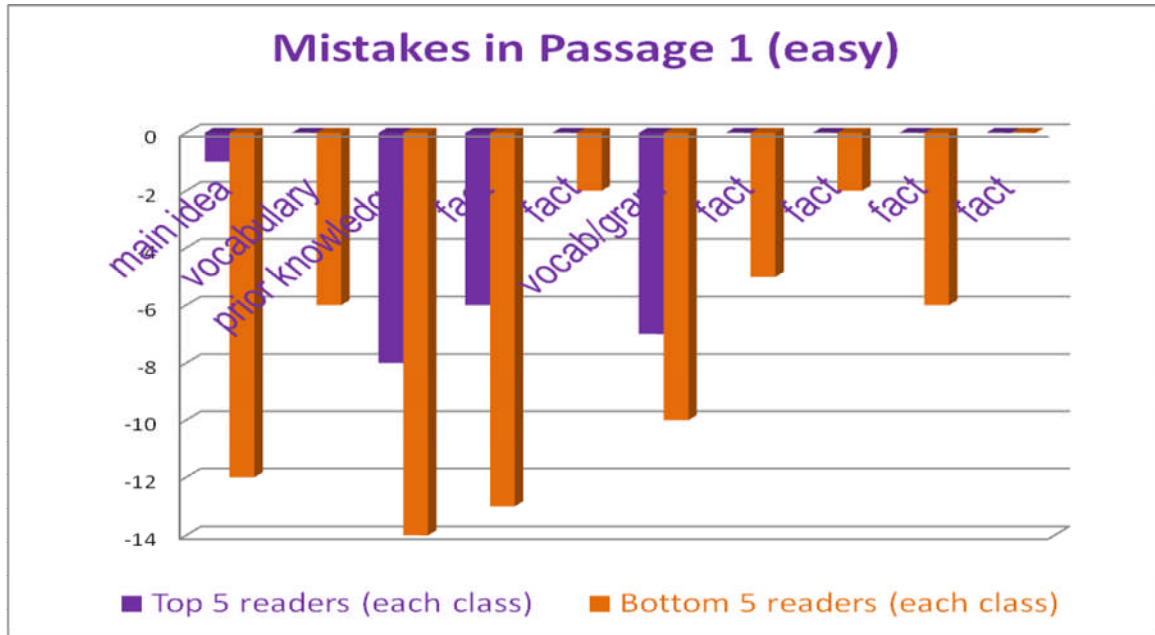
Three classes of 63 ESL students from various linguistic backgrounds participated in this experiment. The participants studied in low-intermediate and intermediate level reading classes at Bergen Community College in the spring of 2011. Two reading passages were used with 10 multiple choice questions in each, and a survey questionnaire for students to fill out after they completed the readings. Before the experiment was conducted, the participants were told to bring a dictionary that day for a reading quiz. No other instructions were given such as what type of dictionary they could use in the quiz. As a result, dictionaries of different kinds were seen being used in the classrooms: English-English dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries, and electronic dictionaries.

After all the data were collected, the top 5 and the bottom 5 participants from the two low level reading classes were analyzed and compared. The results showed that good readers tend to be better educated, to start at a higher level, to have a dictionary, and to like to use the dictionaries but use them more “sparingly.”

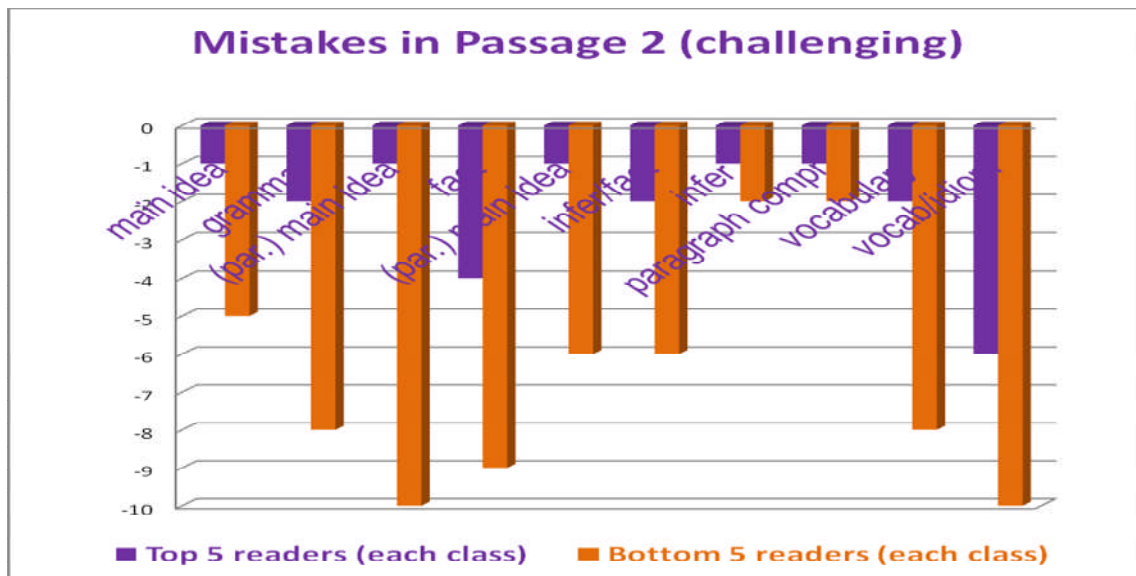


Further analysis has shown that the weaker readers tend to have difficulties in the cognitive aspects of the reading process: main ideas, prior knowledge, and inference while reading easier passages. While reading more challenging passages on the other hand, the weak readers began to exhibit serious problems in vocabulary and vocabulary/idioms. (See charts below.)

## Passage 1



## Passage 2



## **Section IV: Results and conclusion**

The experimental results show that the biggest difference between strong and weak readers is to comprehend questions related to the main ideas. In the main idea questions, the researchers found that the use of dictionaries is not as important as cognitive skills such as making inferences, activating schema, using logic, etc. Very little difference is exhibited between the two reading groups, when the passage is less challenging, in the vocabulary questions, which are usually associated with the dictionary use. However, when the reading passage becomes a little more difficult, the results have shown something interesting: that the weak readers tend to rely more on the dictionaries than the strong readers, and that they tend to stay with the dictionaries longer while reading. An unexpected finding of this experiment is that some weak readers don't use dictionaries at all, regardless of the difficulty level of the reading passages.

## **Section V: Suggestions for the dictionary use in reading**

- Reading students should use the dictionary (English –English), but only when necessary, as a “band-aid”, for words that are absolutely necessary for understanding
- Use uniformly assigned dictionaries
- Teach proper and efficient dictionary use
- “Train” students to look up relevant words and not waste time on nonessential words for comprehension

## **Section VI: Suggestions for future research**

- To find differences how students use dictionaries in reading and writing tasks (Our colleagues delivered a paper at a TESOL Convention on “How ESL writers use dictionaries in their writing process,” in which they found that no use or less use of the dictionaries in writing process help students in their writing tasks.)
- To find how different types of dictionaries affect the comprehension for the ESL students in the reading process.

## **Passage I**

The capital of France, the city of Paris is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Paris is called the City of Light. It's also an international fashion center. What stylish women are wearing in Paris will be worn by women all over the world. Paris is also a famous world center of education. For instance, it is the headquarters of UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.

The Seine River flows right through the middle of the city, thereby dividing the city into two parts. Thirty-two bridges cross this scenic river. The oldest and perhaps most well known is the Pont Neuf, which was built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Sorbonne, a famous university, is located on the Left Bank (south side) of the river. The beautiful white church Sacre Coeur lies on top of the hill called Montmartre on the Right Bank (north side) of the Seine. Other famous places in Paris include the famous museum the Louvre as well as the cathedral of Notre Dame. However, the most famous landmark in this city must be the Eiffel Tower, which was built between 1887 and 1889. The Eiffel Tower is accepted today as an important part of Paris, but when it was first proposed, many people, both famous and common, were against its construction.

Paris is named after a group of people called the Parisii. They built a small village on an island in the middle of the Seine River about 2000 years ago. The island, called the Ile de la Cite, is where Notre Dame is located. With almost 10 million people, that Paris area has changed considerably from its humble beginning.

## Multiple Choice Questions:

- 1) The main idea of paragraph 2 is
  - A. Throughout the world, Paris is well-known
  - B. Paris has many famous sights
  - C. The Seine River divides the city into two parts
  
- 2) The word 'headquarters' in paragraph 1 means
  - A. Clothing
  - B. Main office
  - C. 25 percent
  
- 3) We may conclude that Notre Dame is located
  - A. On the Left Bank
  - B. On the Right Bank
  - C. On neither bank
  
- 4) The Pont Neuf was built in
  - A. The 1500s
  - B. The 1600s
  - C. The 1700s
  
- 5) The population in the Paris area is around
  - A. 7 million
  - B. 10 million
  - C. 13 million
  
- 6) The Eiffel Tower, the most famous landmark in Paris,
  - A. Was built by famous people
  - B. Has always been a popular place in Paris
  - C. Was not considered a good idea before 1887.
  
- 7) "The Seine River flows right through the middle of the city, ..." (in paragraph 2). The word "flow" in this sentence
  - A. Is a verb and means movement of water
  - B. Is a noun and means movement of water
  - C. Is an adjective and means very long
  
- 8) Women around the world usually

- A. Like New York fashion
- B. Follow the fashion trend in Paris
- C. Don't like the stylish women in Paris

- 9) Paris
- A. Has around 100,000,000 people
  - B. Was built about 2,000 years ago
  - C. Has as many as 16 bridges across the Seine River

- 10) The Louvre is
- A. A famous university
  - B. A famous bridge
  - C. A famous museum

## Passage II

### WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT EXERCISE

Exercise is good for you, doctors say, but most people really know very little about how to exercise properly. What do you know about exercise? Take this true-false test. You will probably be surprised!]

A.

Exercise, everyone advises! But immediately, when you **try**, you run into problems. There is so much contradictory, sometimes incorrect advice about exercising that you become confused.

**Test** yourself on the following true-false quiz. **It** will tell you what you need to know.

1.

*The best way to reduce the mid-section of your body is to do abdominal exercise.*

False. Many people believe that when specific muscles are exercised, the fatty tissues in the immediate area are “burned up.” The truth is that exercise burns fat from all over the body and not from one specific area, regardless of the type of exercise. Of course, if you reduce the fat throughout your body, you will certainly see results around your waistline too!

2.

*To maintain an adequate level of physical fitness, you need to exercise only twice a week.*

False. Studies conducted by NASA, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, show that unexercised muscles lose their strength very quickly. After 48 to 72 hours, you must use muscles again to re-establish the good physical effects. And what does that mean to you? NASA scientists concluded that while daily exercise is most beneficial, three alternating days each week will maintain an adequate level of physical fitness.

3.

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4.

*You burn more calories jogging one mile than walking the same distance.*

False. You use the same amount of energy whether you walk or jog the mile, since in both cases you are moving the same weight the same distance. The speed doesn't matter. Of course, if you jog rather than walk for 30 minutes, you'll cover more distance, and therefore burn more calories.

5.

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6.

*Walking is one of the best exercises.*

True. Walking helps circulation of blood throughout the body, and thus has a direct effect on your overall feeling of health.

B.

How long it takes you to become physically fit depends on how unfit you are when you start. If you are out of condition, you certainly can't shape up in 21 days. However, shaping up **doesn't do any good** unless you plan to stay in shape, and that means exercising from now on. It takes as much exercise to stay in shape as it does to get there. But the work won't seem as hard after a while because your body will be in good condition and all moves will seem easier.

## Multiple Choice Questions "Exercise."

- 11) This article explains:
- A. The difficulties of exercising.
  - B. Why exercise is good for your health.
  - C. Important information to know about exercise.
  - D. Where to exercise.
- 12) In paragraph A, "it will tell you ...," **it** refers to:
- A. The true-false quiz.
  - B. Exercise.
  - C. The advice.
  - D. Problems.
- 13) Paragraph 1 explains:
- A. How to reduce one specific area of your body

- B. Why you can't reduce just one area of your body
  - C. How to do abdominal exercises.
  - D. How to burn up fatty tissue.
- 14) According to paragraph 4, you will burn more calories if you:
- A. Jog for 30 minutes.
  - B. Walk for 30 minutes.
  - C. Run quickly for 30 minutes
  - D. It doesn't matter. You will burn the same amount of calories.
- 15) Paragraph 6 explains:
- A. Why you feel healthy.
  - B. How blood circulates throughout the body.
  - C. Why walking is one of the best exercises.
  - D. Several effects of walking.
- 16) According to the last paragraph, once you become physically fit:
- A. You will stay that way naturally.
  - B. You must keep on exercising to stay fit.
  - C. Exercise will be hard work.
  - D. Shaping up isn't any good.
- 17) The author of this article probably:
- A. Exercises regularly.
  - B. Doesn't like to exercise.
  - C. Exercise 10 minutes a day
  - D. Exercises every 21 days.
- 18) In paragraph 4, "You use the same amount of energy whether you walk or jog a mile" means:
- A. You use more energy if you jog a mile.
  - B. It is harder to jog than to walk for one mile.
  - C. If you go the same distance, you use the same amount of energy.
  - D. Walking and jogging are the same.
- 19) In paragraph A, line 1 the word 'try' refers to:
- A. Running into problems.
  - B. Becoming confused.

- C. Exercising.
- D. Testing yourself.

20) In paragraph B, line 3 'doesn't do any good' means:

- A. Isn't good.
- B. Isn't useful.
- C. Doesn't exercise.
- D. Doesn't stay in shape.

## **Survey**

**This is a short survey about your reading habit and reading comprehension skills. It is designed for a study and has no impact at all on your course grade. Thank you very much for your participation.**

- 1) What is your name: \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 2) What level did you start to study at Bergen Community College?
  - A) Foundations level
  - B) Level One
  - C) Level Two
  - D) Level Three
  
- 3) Did you ever attend college or university in your country?
  - A) Yes, but I didn't finish
  - B) Yes, I did and have a university degree
  - C) No, I didn't but I have a high school diploma
  - D) Other. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 4) What kind of dictionary or dictionaries did you use in this reading exercise?  
(You can choose as many as you want in this question.)
  - A) English-English dictionary
  - B) English-(your native language) bilingual dictionary
  - C) Electronic dictionary – bilingual
  - D) Electronic dictionary – English only
  - E) I didn't use any dictionaries
  
- 5) Generally speaking, do you like to use dictionaries while reading in English?
  - A) Yes, I like to use a dictionary.
  - B) No, I don't like to use a dictionary even though I have one at home.
  - C) No, I don't like to use a dictionary because I don't have one.
  - D) Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 6) How many times did you use the dictionary when you read the **first** passage?

- A) 0 – 3 times
- B) 4 – 6 times
- C) 7 – 9 times
- D) More than 10 times

7) How many times did you use the dictionary when you read the **second** passage?

- A) 0 – 3 times
- B) 4 – 6 times
- C) 7 – 9 times
- D) More than 10 times

8) Generally speaking, do you like to read?

- A) Yes, I like to read in English
- B) Yes, I like to read but only in my language.
- C) No, I don't like to read in general
- D) No, I don't read because I don't have time