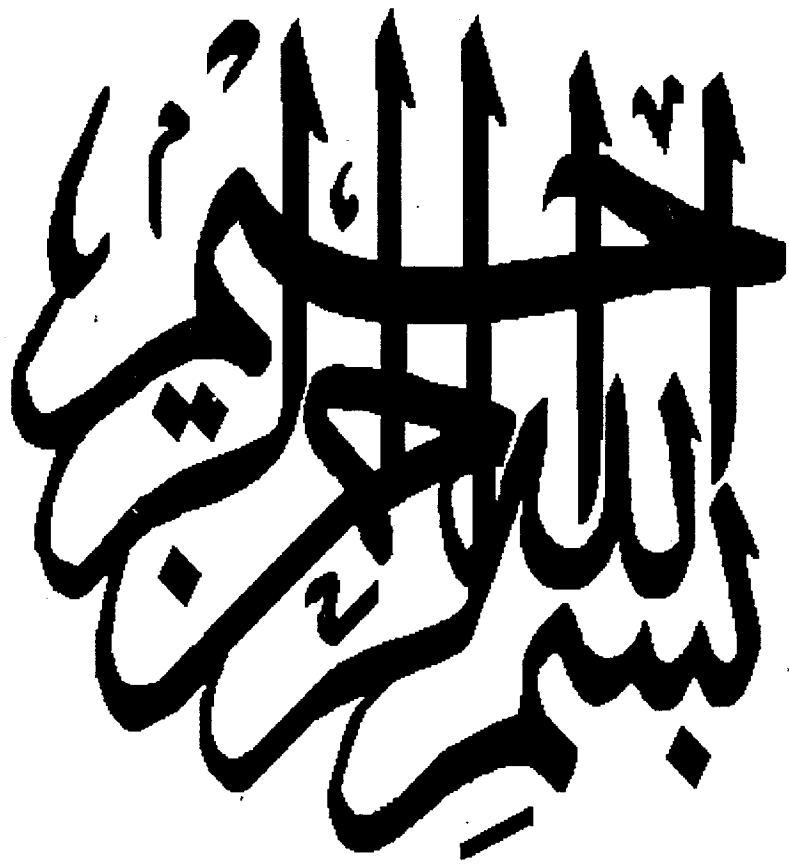

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Iran University of Science and Technology
Department of Foreign Languages

The Effect of Syntactic Simplicity and Complexity on Readability of the Text

by:

Hedayat Eslami

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language in the Foreign Language Department of Iran University of Science and Technology

Advisor: Dr. H. Farhady

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We hereby approve that this thesis

by:

Hedayat Eslami

Entitled "The Effect of Syntactic Simplicity and Complexity on Readability of the Text" be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in TEFL.

Committee on the Oral Examination:

.....

Dr. Hossein Farhady: (Chairperson)

.....

Dr.S. Mahmoud M. Tabatabaie: (Reader)

Dr. Parviz Maftoon

.....

Head of the Foreign Language Department

April 1999

IN THE NAME OF

THE MOST HIGH

DEDICATED TO:

My Father and Mother

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Table of Contents

Topic.....Page

Abstract

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

Background.....1

Statement of the problem and the purpose of the study.....3

Significance and Justification of the Study.....5

Research Question and Hypothesis.....7

Definition of Key Terms.....8

CHAPTER TWO: Review of Related Literature

Readability and Readability Formulas.....10

Approaches to Readability Research.....14

Brief History of Readability Research.....16

Readability Formulas and Graph.....17

Early Readability Formulas.....18

Lively and Pressy Formula (1923).....18

Vogel and Washburne Formula (1928).....19

The Lewerenz Formula (1929).....20

Lewerenz (1933).....21

Lewerenz (1935-38).....21

Lewerenz (1939).....21

Efficient Readability Formulas.....22

Washburne-Morphett Formula (1938).....22

Irving Lorge Formula (1939).....23
Kessler Formula.....23
Flesch Formula (1943).....24
Dale-Chall Formula (1948).....25
Dolch Formula (1948).....25
Wheeler and Wheeler Formula (1950).....26
Flesch: Level of Abstraction (1950).....27
Farr-Jenkins-Paterson (1951).....28
Gunning Fog Index Formula (1952).....28

Readability Formulas: Recalculations and Revisions.....29
The Lorge Formula: First Version.....29
The Lorge Formula: Revised Version (1948).....30
The Lorge Formula: Revised Version (1968).....30
The Large Formula: Revised Version (1969).....31
The Flesch Formula: First Version (1943).....32
The Flesch Formula: Revised Version (1948).....32
The Farr-Jenkins-Paterson Formula (1951).....33
The Dale-Chall Formula.....34
The Fog Index Formula.....36
The Deveraux Formula.....37
The Flesch-Kincaid Formula.....38
SMOG GRADING.....38
The Readability Graph.....40
The Spache Formula.....41
The Homan-Hewit Formula.....43
The Holmquist Formula.....44
The Coleman Formula.....44

Alternative Methods to Readability Formulas.....46

A Text-based Alternative-PHAN.....47
A Reader/Text-based Alternative.....48
Tria Reading.....48
Instructor judgement.....48
Cloze Procedure.....50
Knowledge-based Approach.....52
The SEER Technique.....52
The FLIP Chart.....54

The Appeals of Readability Formulas.....55

The Inadequacies of Readability Formula.....57

Factors Omitted From the Formulas.....59
Text-based Factors.....59
Reader-based Factors.....60
Reliability of Criterion Validity.....61
Formula Disagreement.....61
Sampling Variability.....62
Inappropriate Statistical Modal.....63
Comprehension.....63

Syntactic Complexity and Readability Formulas.....66

Syntactic Complexity and Text Comprehension.....66

Aspects of Readability Formulas in Text Comprehension....69
Sentence complexity/length.....70
Word length.....73

Studies of Simplified Syntax.....75

Sentence Reduction and Sentence Expansion.....80

The Notion of Text.....80
Types of Sentences.....81
Sentence Reduction.....83
Sentence Expansion.....90

CHAPTER THREE: Method

Subjects.....98

Instrumentation.....99

Design.....99

Procedure.....100

Data Analysis.....111

CHAPTER FOUR: Results and Discussion

Restatement of the Problem and Interpretation of the Results....114

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion and Implications

Conclusion.....126

Pedagogical Implication.....128

Suggestions For Further Research.....131

References

Appendices

Appendix 1: "Patterns of Reading Ease Scores" and "Human Interest"

Appendix 2: Flesch Reading Ease Table

Appendix 3: Interpretation Table for Flesch Reading Ease Score

Appendix 4: Readability Chart for the Dale-Chall Formula, Grades 4-16

Appendix 5: Dale list of 3000 familiar words

Appendix 6: Fry's Extended Readability Graph

Appendix 7: Stone's Revision of the Dale list of 769 words

Appendix 8: Worksheet for the Application of Spache Readability formulas, Grades 1-3

Appendix 9: Tables for Computing the Spache Readability Scores

Appendix 10: Tables for computing readability through Spache's 1974 formula

Appendix 11: The FLIP CHART

Appendix 12: The Language Proficiency Test : TOEFL

Appendix 13: Reading Comprehension Passages (Original versions)

Appendix 14: Modified Reading Comprehension Passages (Reduced)

Appendix 15: Modified Reading Comprehension Passages (Expanded)

Appendix 16: Revised Reading Comprehension Passages (Reduced)

Appendix 17: Revised Reading Comprehension Passages (Expanded)

Appendix 18: Revised Reading Comprehension Passages (Reduced)

Appendix 19: Revised Reading Comprehension passages (Expanded)

ABSTRACT

This study was an attempt to investigate the effect of syntactic complexity and syntactic simplicity on readability of text.To this end, a set of standard reading comprehension passages were syntactically modified in order to develop three different versions of the same text (Reduced, Original, Expanded) at different readability levels and with different syntactic characteristics. The two newly-developed tests were pretested in two phases with a sample of 139 students. The deficient items were revised. The reliability of tests, computed through KR-21 formula, turned out to be .73 and .76 for the Reduced and Expanded versions respectively, and the validity of the tests turned out to be .71 and .74 for the Reduced and Expanded versions respectively. In the next step, 257 students majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, English Translation, and English Literature took the three Syntactically Different Reading Comprehension Tests (SDRCT).The results of a One-Way ANOVA run on the three groups revealed that there were significant differences among their performance. The correlationas between the subjects' scores on the proficiency test and the three SDRCT turned out to be .77, .69, and .71 for the Expanded, Original, and Reduced versions respectively.In order to compare the performance of the homogeneous subjects on the three SDRCT, the subjects in each group were divided into three proficiency levels, Advanced, Intermediate, and Elementary, each taking three SDRCT. To determine which group, Reduced, Original, Expanded, performed better on each proficiency level, three separate One-Way ANOVA were conducted. The results revealed that: (a) For Advanced students, there was no significant differences among their performance on the three SDRCT. (b) For Intermedisate subjects, there was significant difference among the three groups. (c) For Elementary students, the results revealed that the subjects taking three SDRCT performed significantly differently from one another.The last statistical analysis was a

Two-Way ANOVA run to determine the degree of the interaction between three proficiency levels and three groups taking three SDRCT and to examine whether there were significant differences among three proficiency levels and three groups taking SDRCT. The results revealed that there was no interaction between these variables. It was concluded that, of the three SDRCT, the Expanded version was the most difficult version for Intermediate and Elementary students compared to Advanced students.Therefore, syntactic complexity seems to be a problem for Intermediate and Elementary students but not for Advanced students.On the other hand, syntactic simplicity seems to be useful only for Elementary students.

Chapter One

I.Introduction

Background

"Text difficulty or "text accessibility" is an important but much neglected topic in Applied Linguistics" (Fulcher, 1997, P.497). It has been an area of great concern for all who need to establish the appropriacy of a given text for a pedagogic purpose.In the last few decades, readability research in general has made rapid progress and the focus from a mechanical application of readability formulas has now shifted to the analysis of text structure and the processes involved in reading (Rye,1984, cited in Agnihotri & Khanna, 1992).

A considerable body of research exists which has examined the text in detail and related its nature to the readability process. Particular attention has been focused on those features of text which cause difficulty to the readers (Anderson & Urqhart, 1984).

In addition, studies made from almost every point of view have examined almost every linguistic peculiarity of the language as