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# The Role of Reflectivity/Impulsivity and Gender in Task-based Reading Comprehension

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# In The Name of God

To my dear fiancee

بسمه تعالی

دانشگاه تربیت دبیر شهید رجائی

## صورتجلسهٔ دفاع پایان‌نامه تحصیلی دوره کارشناسی ارشد

با تاییدات خداوند متعال و با استعانت از حضرت ولی عصر (عج) جلسه دفاع از پایان‌نامه کارشناسی‌ارشد جناب آقای ابوالفضل ریحانی‌خواه رشتهٔ آموزش‌زبان‌انگلیسی تحت عنوان: بررسی نقش سبک‌های شناختی بازیابی/ آنی و جنسیت برروی آزمون تکلیف محور درک مطلب در مهارت خواندن، که در تاریخ ۹۱/۱۲/۲۷ با حضور هیأت محترم داوران در دانشگاه تربیت دبیر شهید رجائی برگزار گردید و نتیجه به شرح زیر اعلام گردید.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

## 1.1. Introduction

The fields of language learning and teaching in current years have gone through a strand in which different branches have joined to them. These branches which are interrelated to the matter of language learning are; personality, sociocultural and psychological factors. As these factors have entered the course of language learning, so they have affected and will affect the process of language learning.

Considering these different factors that are effective in language learning one can assume that psychological factors can influence language learners' performance. Psychological factors are important for those who are involved in the field of language learning and teaching as these factors are those which are directly related to the language learners' and teachers' inbuilt individual characteristics that can support or weaken their performance in the process of language learning. These different individual characteristics have been considered by different scholars. "While we all exhibit inherently human traits of learning, every individual approaches a problem or learns a set of facts or organizes a combination of feelings from a unique perspective". (Brown, 2006. p.118). One of the psychological factors which affects language learning is the learners' cognitive styles. It is a term that refers to consistent and enduring tendencies within an individual. One of the individual tendencies or

cognitive styles is the reflectivity/impulsivity dimension. An impulsive cognitive style implies an approach in a gambling way on the basis of "hunches" while the reflective cognitive styles tend to weigh all the possible considerations in a problem, reflect on it and then solve it.(Brown, 2006). In the present study, these two styles and the result of Task Based Reading Test (TBRT) have been examined to assess the performance of students with these two styles on the test.

## 1.2. Statement of the problem

The main problem which prompted the researcher to do this study was to find the answer to the question that whether those who have reflective cognitive style always outperform those who have impulsive cognitive style on a reading comprehension test. The problem came from those reading comprehension tests or activities which the researcher had been faced with personally or it had been seen by the students whom he was teaching. Sometimes it was perceived that in some kinds of comprehension questions the answer that immediately came into the mind and was answered on the test was correct without much thinking or reflection. Such a condition was seen in the question types such as true/false or outlining. It was thought that whether those who answer these questions faster are those who perform better on the test.

   If those who tend to answer these questions in a fast manner be considered impulsive learners and those who tend to answer them in a careful way be considered reflective learners, then the question is which group of students will outperform the other one when answering reading comprehension questions.

   Also, it is important to know which group will do better on different type of items. The solution to the mentioned problem is the utilization of these two cognitive styles in answering five types of Task Based Reading Test (TBRT) items to see whether those who have

impulsive cognitive style outperform students with reflective cognitive styles in performing the whole test or any group performs better in any type of task-based reading test.

## 1.3. Significance of the study

Different studies have been done on the impact of reflectivity/impulsivity cognitive styles on reading comprehension tasks. Most of these studies (Abraham, 1981. Doron, 1973. Goodman, 1970. Messer, 1976) have considered the distinct performance of these two cognitive styles on a reading comprehension test in which the performance of respondents have been assessed by a stable way in which they are supposed to answer some comprehension questions.

As the assessment of language learners performance cannot be valid enough if their comprehension is assessed through language learners performance in an invariable way, so the better way around would be to assess them by different types of comprehension questions or tasks which can augment the validity and reliability of reading comprehension test. (Messick, 1980).

The significance of the current study is that it assesses the comprehension of respondents through different types of comprehension questions such as true/false, outlining, skimming, writer's view and sentence completion.

The other significance of this study is the use of task-based reading comprehension test. As tasks can assess the students' understanding of the reading passages in a more authentic way than texts can ( Nunan, 1991).

## 1.4. Research questions

The main purpose of the current study was to examine the impact of reflectivity/impulsivity as cognitive styles on task-based reading comprehension test. The following research questions are made upon this topic:

1- Does cognitive style have any role in language learners' performance on sub-scales of reading comprehension?

2- Does language learners' gender affect their performance on sub-scales of reading comprehension?

## 1.5. Hypotheses:

Based on available literature on cognitive styles and task-based reading comprehension test and with regard to the above mentioned questions, the following null hypotheses may be drawn:

1- There is no difference between language learners with impulsive and reflective cognitive style in terms of performance on sub-scales of reading comprehension.

2-There is no difference between male and female respondents in terms of performance on sub-scales of reading comprehension.

## 1.6. Definition of key terms:

Cognitive styles

Theoretical definition:

Style is a term which refers to firm and long-time tendencies or precedencies which occur within an individual. The way we learn things in general and the way we attack a problem seem to hinge on a rather amorphous link between personality and cognition; this link refers to cognitive style (Brown, 2006). However, cognitive styles can be labeled as thinking styles, used in cognitive psychology to describe the way individuals think ,perceive and remember

information. Cognitive styles differ from cognitive ability which is measured by aptitude tests or so called intelligence test.

## Cognitive styles

### Operational definition:

   In this study, cognitive style is assessed by Eysenck's Impulsiveness Questionnaire. This questionnaire consists of nineteen questions on a Likert scale and it is divided into three levels called high, medium or low levels. Those who were at the low impulsive level were called reflectives and those respondents who had high impulsive cognitive style were labeled as mere impulsives while the respondents who answered the questionnaire in the midway were called medium.

## Task

### Theoretical definition:

   Nunan defines a task as: "A piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form" (1989: 10). He further argues that "the task should have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right".

### Operational definition:

 The definition of task in this study, was based on Nunan's definition in which students comprehend the reading passages, manipulate them cognitively while interacting with the text and focusing on the meaning. Task-based reading comprehension in this study was assessed through Salmani-Nodoushan's (2000) task-based reading test which consisted of five sub-

scales of reading comprehension which were True-False, Sentence completion, Writer view, Outlining and Skimming reading tasks. These reading sub-scales were supposed by the students to be answered according to the texts that came before the questions while all the tasks had a real life goal to motivate the respondents to do the tasks which were toward an outcome.

## 1.7. Limitations of the study

One of the limitations of the current study was related to psychological condition of respondents as they might have not been able to answer the required questions to show their real psychological and linguistic capacities.

## 1.8. Delimitations of the study: The delimitation of the study was the examination of the students only from the state universities and not from other open universities or institutions to represent all the students of language learning community.

# Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

## 2.1. Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of what has been done about the concepts related to this study. First of all different approaches about language and how it is viewed from different perspectives are taken into account. In the next part of this chapter different learning theories such as behavioristic or cognitive theories are discussed to make the readers be aware of some dominant approaches about learning.

The next part starts with the relationship between cognition and language learning and considers the individual differences as an important matter in language learning and the sources of individual differences. The concept of cognitive styles and specially the Reflectivity/Impulsivity dimension and related concepts are attended at this part.

Different components of impulsivity such as comprehension, extroversion, the concept of arousal, information processing and reading comprehension are explored.

Also, the task-based language learning and teaching is discussed in the rest of the chapter where the task definitions and features are described by different scholars and theoreticians. At the end of this chapter task-based language assessment is discussed by taking into account different theoreticians' views.

## 2.2. Language

Brown (2007) provides a composite definition of language:

"1- Language is systematic.

2- Language is a set of arbitrary symbols.

3- Those symbols are primarily vocal.

4- The symbols have conventionalized meanings to which they refer.

5- Language is used for communication.

6- Language operates in a speech community or culture.

7- Language is essentially human, although possibly not limited to humans.

8- Language is acquired by all people in much the same way; language and language learning both have universal characteristics" (p.7).

So, according to the above mentioned definition, language is a systematic way of communication which happens in a speech community and is special for human and consists of arbitrary symbols and is universal.

A person's understanding of the definition of the language determines, to a large extent, how to teach or learn that language. For example, if it is believed that non-verbal communication is important in second language learning, some attention in the curriculum will be devoted to non-verbal communication. (Brown, 2007).

Language is a system of sounds and meanings and structure with which we make sense of the world around us. It functions as a tool of thought; as a means of transmission of knowledge, as the raw material of literature and as the creator and sustainer or destroyer of human

relationships. It changes inevitably over time and it is not uniform from place to place. Because it is an important aspect of a person's sense of self; because it is a fundamental feature of any community, it is an important aspect of a person's sense of social identity (Carter, 1994).Language is learned by every normal human being, so there must be some basic needs involved in learning. There is an excellent definition of basic learning needs presented in 1990 at the world conference on education for all which declares: "These needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy , oral expression and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge skills , values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive to develop their full capacities ,to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development , to improve the quality of their lives , to make informal decisions and to continue learning."(Jomtien, 1990; p.27).This definition leads to a good understanding of learning needs but the question raised here is what learning is in itself.

## 2.3. Learning

A search in contemporary dictionaries reveals that learning is "acquiring or getting of knowledge of a subject or a skill by study, experience, or instruction." However, an educational psychologist would define learning even more succinctly as "a change in an individual caused by experience" (Slavin, 2003, p.138).

Brown (2007) defines learning as:

" 1- Learning is a change in behavior.

 2-learning involves some form of practice.

3-learning is relatively permanent.

4-learning involves active conscious focus on events outside or inside the organism.