

New

Reading

Through

Interaction

by:

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Book Two

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Preface

Reading comprehension is believed to be one of the most useful and important skills for the educated in general, and for university students in particular. It is useful because most students at the college level obtain bulk of information about their major fields of study through reading. Furthermore, through reading they access to the materials published in professional scientific journals. Reading comprehension is an important skill because most international communication is performed through satellites and web sites that require ability to read. Therefore, in many EFL contexts, policy makers have decided to give priority to reading skill in their programs.

In Iran, too, reading comprehension is an established requirement for all university students. In fact, one of the main objectives of teaching English at the university level in Iran is to enable students to get information from the original sources in their major fields of study. To this end, certain programs have been implemented in order to help students achieve this objective. A good example is the attempts made by the "Center for Compiling University Textbooks, i.e., SAMT" in producing a number of books specifically designed for university students in different major fields of study.

It should be mentioned that setting objectives of EFL education to enhance students' reading ability should not imply, by any means, that other skills are ignored. Research on the nature of reading has demonstrated that reading is a complex mental skill. There are a number of subskills, strategies, and techniques that are involved in reading comprehension skill. Furthermore, proficiency in reading skill requires a good command of other language components and skills including phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Therefore, it would be a simplistic interpretation that focusing on reading skill would lead to ignorance of others.

It should also be mentioned that any textbook designed to help learners improve their reading ability should consider reading comprehension as a skill composed of many subskills. Therefore, the book should focus on training readers to be skillful readers. For the readers to be skilful, they should be given ample opportunities to practice application of the skills to a given text. This would be possible by designing and presenting the techniques in the book in a systematic way, providing opportunities for the students to practice the techniques, and

giving exercises through authentic tasks to help learners consolidate the techniques.

In spite of the fact that a good number of books on reading comprehension have been published both locally and internationally, the number of books that has treated reading comprehension from a scientific perspective is very limited. Most of the textbooks published on reading comprehension, especially the local ones, consist of a certain number of passages followed by some true-false, multiple-choice, or fill in the blank exercises. Of course, the value of these types of activities should not be denied, because they are useful techniques to assure the comprehension of the readers. However, they do not suffice for a successful reading comprehension program.

The Interaction Series, prepared by Elvin Kirn, Palema Heartman, and James Mental and published by McGraw Hill in five volumes, seemed an excellent set for improving comprehension of university - students, in general, and Iranian students in particular. The reasons justifying this position are many, a few of which are mentioned here. First, the books are designed on the basis of reading techniques and meet the scientific principles of the reading skill quite satisfactorily. Second, the reading materials seem quite authentic and the exercises fairly communicative. Third, the idea of the variety of materials and activities that has one of the major factors to motivate the readers is observed in the preparation of the books. Finally, The texts are arranged in a progressively difficult order both within each book and across the series.

Despite all these advantages, however, there are certain points that -reduce the value of the books to be studied as they are by Iranian students. First the volume of the books is too much to be covered by the students in the formal university courses. Second, the books have treated both reading and writing skills, of which the writing sections would not be very helpful to the Iranian students. Third, there were some passages that seemed culturally inappropriate for the context of Iranian educational system. Therefore, not to deprive the students of this good collection of books, on the one hand, and to avoid any inconvenience for both the teachers and the students, we decided to make certain modifications in the content, organization, and volume of the books to make them more useful for the purpose of improving the reading skills of the university students.

The major modification relates to cut and paste procedure. That is, we do not claim to have authored or revised the original books. What we have done include the following.

First, the five volumes were cut and arranged into three volumes in order to make them fit the reading courses in the university programs. Each volume consists of 14 units to match the formal sessions that reading classes meet during a university term. Second, as the result of the first, some parts of the books, which seemed to be either inappropriate or less interesting for Iranian university students, were removed from the books. Third, the writing sections were deleted because it was assumed that the focus of the university courses is on reading rather than writing. Furthermore, there are good books to be used in the writing courses.

Therefore, the five volumes are arranged in three volumes under the titles of "Reading Through Interaction, I, II, III" intended for Reading Comprehension Courses I, II, III, at the university, respectively. Each book consists of 14 units each of which is designed originally in three interrelated parts. Each part also includes three types of meaningful activities of pre-reading, reading, and post reading. To provide some guidelines for both teachers and students, the purpose and composition of each part is quoted from the chapter organization section of the original versions.

Chapter Organization

The book consists of certain chapters, each of which has a central theme. Each chapter is divided into three parts:

- ◆ **Part One** opens with artwork and prereading questions that set the context for the reading selection that follows—a controlled nonfiction passage about the chapter theme. A postreading exercise follows to help students check their general understanding of the reading selection and (in later chapters) of each paragraph. An exercise for guessing meaning from context is included, and some chapters contain exercises on making inferences, understanding pronoun references, noting details, and recognizing supporting material in a paragraph.
- ◆ **Part Two** also begins with artwork that sets the tone for the second controlled reading of the chapter. This reading is generally lighter than the one in Part One, and is usually fiction written in the first person. All chapters contain various exercises to help students expand their passive and active knowledge of vocabulary. In addition, exercises that relate the reading to students' lives and personal experience are included. Various study skills are stressed in this section to aid students in acquiring essential skills for academic reading such as following directions,

dictionary usage, and understanding paragraph organization. Some chapters contain exercises that practice skills such as finding main ideas and details, categorizing, and using possessive pronouns.

- ◆ **Part Three** contains realia such as advertisements, pages from brochures, bills and application forms to develop scanning skills. Some of this realia is, of course, simplified.

As a final note, we would like to reiterate that our goal was to provide the university students with a set of readable, interesting, and scientifically grounded books to help them improve their reading comprehension ability. We do not claim that this is our work. Nor do we claim that we have created it. However, we feel that preparing such books, though with minor modifications in the original, would be a good service to our academic world.

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