

proficiency, both of these factors appear to be important to address in second language reading pedagogy. Since the relative strength of the effects of first language reading and second language proficiency differed, the relative attention to be given to each factor in second language reading pedagogy may need to vary for different learners. Those learners/readers of a foreign language with low proficiency level need to increase their ability in second language and those learners/readers who have problems in L₁ reading skills and in the transfer of non language specific reading skills from their mother tongue to the second language need greater help with basic reading skills.

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developed for each passage. The multiple-choice format was selected because it is believed that this type test is the most common method of testing reading comprehension. Students were given 5 minutes to read each passage. Therefore, altogether subjects had 15 minutes to finish the entire test. To make the test more reliable a pretest and a posttest were conducted. Thirty advanced students majoring in English language of Alzahra University took this test.

Test B: It was the Michigan test of English language proficiency. The purpose was to determine the subjects' level of proficiency in English language. This test was divided into three parts. part I was a grammar test; part II was a vocabulary test; and part III was a test of reading comprehension.

Test C: It was an English reading comprehension test. The purpose of this test was to measure their reading skills in English language. It contained three passages which were selected from TOEFL. The passages were approximately equal in length varying between 300 and 340 words. Since I was interested in testing a range of proficiency levels in the second language and a range of reading ability levels, I wanted at least one of the three passages to be relatively easy and the others relatively more difficult in terms of lexical and syntactic complexity. For the first passage ten multiple choice questions, the second passage seven multiple choice questions, and for the third passage six multiple choice questions were developed. The questions mostly called for the drawing of inferences, and identifying the authors positions. Distractors were plau-

sible alternatives. Questions were based on the careful reading and a more profound comprehension of the text.

After scoring the tests, the results were put under a series of statistical analysis to provide answer for the research question. Statistical analyses were performed with the TSP package of statistical program on computer. The results showed that both first language reading ability and second language proficiency have significant effects on second language reading ability. However, what turned out to be extremely interesting in this study is the relative importance of these factors in L_2 reading. While both factors- first language reading ability and proficiency in second language-may be significant in second language reading, the relative importance may be due to other factors about the learner. One area to consider for explanation may be potential differences in directionality of reading. It may be quite different to read from right to left than to read from left to right. Another plausible explanation might be in terms of the differences in alphabet. The other explanation may be in terms of absolute level of proficiency in the second language. In our country, we study English as a foreign language not as a second language. Foreign language setting in which non- native language is not generally available in the surrounding environment may be the cause of subjects' low level proficiency. Therefore, because of this difference L_2 proficiency is more significant.

The result of this study showed the significant effects of both first language reading ability as well as second language

as important as oral skills if not more important. (Eskey, 1970).

A reading ability is often all that is needed by learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), as well as of other foreign languages. Yet despite this specific need for the foreign language, it is common experience, that most students fail to learn to read adequately in the foreign language. Very frequently, students reading in a foreign language seem to read with less understanding than one might expect them to have, and to read considerably slower than they reportedly read in their first language.

Jolly (1978) claims that success in reading a foreign language depends crucially upon one's first language reading ability rather than upon the students level of English. He asserts that reading in a foreign language requires "the transference of old skills, not the learning of new ones". Therefore, it would follow, students who fail to read adequately in the foreign language fail because they either do not possess the old skills, or because they have failed to transfer them. This view is shared by Coady (1979), who asserts that foreign language reading is a reading problem and not a language problem.

Yorio (1971) takes a contrary view. He claims that the reading problems of foreign language learners are due largely to imperfect knowledge of the language, and to native language interference in the reading process.

Here we have examined some view relating to the question of, whether poor reading in a foreign language is due to problems with reading as a set of strategies. The first view examined was that reading problems in a fo-

reign language were due to poor reading ability in the first language. The second view suggests that proficiency in the foreign language maybe more closely associated with foreign language reading ability. According to this view reading problems were due to language problem. The question of whether, at more advanced levels, foreign language reading might become a reading problem or language problem has not been investigated.

The objective of this study has been to find out the significance of reading skills and language competence in L₂ reading comprehension. More specifically this study intends to answer the following question:

Is comprehension a reading problem or language problem?

Which factor is more significant for Iranian students?

Do they transfer their reading skills from Farsi into English or do they use their proficiency in English?

To answer this question thirty advanced students majoring in English language of Allameh Tabatabaee University were used as the sample. Three tests were given to the subjects in three sessions. All the tests had been validated.

Test A: It was a Farsi reading comprehension test. The purpose of this test was to measure their reading skills in Farsi. It consisted of three passages. In order to control for any unwanted effects of content, all three passages were on general topics. The passages were approximately equal in length, varying between 350 and 370 words. Five multiple-choice comprehension questions were

The Significance of L₁ Reading and L₂ Proficiency in EFL Reading Comprehension

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Reading is perhaps the most thoroughly studied and the least understood process in education today. Reading is one of the most important activities in any language class, not only as a source of information and pleasure, but also as a means of extending one's knowledge and mostly of the language. For many students, reading is the most important of the four skills in a second language, particularly in English as a second or foreign language.

Certainly, if we consider the study of English as a foreign language around the world-the situation in which most English learners find themselves- reading is the main reason why students learn the language.

In addition, in advanced levels in a second language the ability to read the written language at a reasonable rate and with good comprehension has long been recognized to be