Surveys on L2 Readers’ Perspectives on
L2 Reading Competence at Developmental Stages

Kim, Seung Jung
(Korea University)

I. Introduction

Reading competence in English has probably become far more important than ever before. In today’s Information Age, it must be essential that a country gather as much information as possible about other countries in order to be successful in securing greater benefits from diplomacy and trade with them. This practical goal is more likely to be realized with the aid of English competence due to the fact that approximately 80-90% of the total amount of information circulated around the world is written or spoken in English (김부자, 2004). More importantly, reading competence can be a basis for the development of other types of competence such as listening, writing, and speaking (Hirai, 1999; Krashen, 1988; Shrum & Glisan, 1994).

Because of the importance of reading competence in English as an L2 (second/foreign language), L2 teachers and researchers have conducted many studies to answer the question of what can facilitate L2 reading performance and the development of L2 reading competence, with the ultimate goal of establishing more effective L2 reading instruction (Joh, 2004; Kang & Cho, 2008; Kim, 2007; Lee, 1999; Song, 1999). It is probable that findings and implications from previous studies could provide L2 reading teachers with useful guidance in achieving their ultimate goal.
In accordance with the guidance, an L2 reading teacher can tailor his/her instruction to be appropriate for his/her L2 students’ proficiency levels and needs (Park, G., 2004; Willis, 2004).

When an L2 teacher adopts the guidance, he/she, however, must be cautious because there has been an inconsistency among findings from previous studies. For example, Song (1999) reported findings of her study that L2 reading strategies were the most important predictor of success in L2 reading performance, followed by L2 syntactic knowledge and L2 vocabulary knowledge respectively. On the contrary, Joh (2004) found that L2 vocabulary knowledge showed a higher correlation with L2 reading performance (.63, p <.01) than L2 syntactic knowledge (.55, p<.01). Joh (2004) further found that there was a high correlation between L2 students’ prior (background) knowledge and L2 reading performance, and the correlation was higher with the high L2 proficiency level than with the low proficiency. But Park G. (2004) reported that L2 readers in the low-proﬁciency level could beneﬁt more than those in the high level from the prereading activity of providing L2 background knowledge. The inconsistency (see Kang & Cho, 2008) suggests that an L2 teacher take into account information from his/her own students before planning his/her L2 reading instruction.

Along with this theoretical background, as the researcher of the current study, I conducted a survey to collect information from 131 undergraduates. I, an L2 reading teacher, was motivated by previous studies that implicitly or explicitly suggested the importance of needs analysis for the plan for more effective L2 reading instruction (see 손석철, 2004; 박미경이, 2004; Joh & Choi, 2001; Park, G. 2004; Song, 1999). Having acknowledged the inconsistency, I did not intend to generalize findings of the current study to Korean EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. Instead, I was sincerely eager to understand characteristics of my own students according to their developmental stages. Also, I wished to provide some insights to Korean EFL reading teachers who would have EFL students sharing similar characteristics with those of mine. With the research purpose, my research topic was to understand “what was necessary for my EFL students to improve their