COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS FOR PARAGRAPH READING (AN EFL LEARNING STRATEGY FOR THE BUILDING OF HIERARCHICAL COMPREHENSION ABILITY)

Damianus Talok
Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
FKIP, Unwira Kupang
damianustalok@ymail.com

ABSTRACT

In classroom reading, comprehension has to be treated as the top priority. The important point is that teachers are required to prepare comprehension questions in three levels, namely: literal, inferential and critical. In addition to this, it is proposed that understanding of a reading text may possibly be done by doing comprehension activities from one paragraph to another paragraph. Arguably, this propounded strategy mey help students to have better comprehension of what they read.

Key Words: literal question, inferential question, critical question, paragraph, reading

INTRODUCTION

In the EFL curriculum for primary and secondary education in Indonesia, reading becomes the top priority aside from listening and speaking. Why? The advantages of reading are twofold. Firstly, the advantage is from the point of view of the concept of language learning. In reading students will meet many new English words. Of course, students are attempting to retain the new words they meet in their memory. If they very often meet such new words in their readings, such new words will permanently be retained in their memory (Floyd, 1984: 33). In addition, in teading students will also meet various sentences constructed in different patterns and tenses as of the rules of the English language. So convincingly, students will also learn such patterns and tenses both consciously and subconsciously.

This will make students to have such kind of "sense of language", in that they can create sentences which are distinct from those they have ever learnt. Thus, the first advantage is that students may acquire the so-called English grammatical and lexical knowledge.

Secondly, through reading students can obtain various messages. They are varied in terms of contents, e.g., sports, culture, communication, tourism, politics, economy and real social lives, etc. with such varied messages, students can enrich and extend their thinking horizons. New and fresh messages are other points added to the language knowledge that students may gain from reading. These two advantages are what we, as teachers of English, want our students to gain in the classroom reading activities. Of the two advantages, the latter, which is comprehension of contents of reading texts, is central (Ur in Talok, 2011; 2012).

As a matter of fact, in the classroom reading, comprehension of a text is first, and lexical and grammatical aspects are second. In other words, efforts to build studnets' comprehesnion of a given text must be placed at the top priority. If comprehension of a given text is thoroughly done, provided that students understand the text they read, teachers of English may procced to do activities on vocabulary and grammar.

In the classroom setting, for the purpose of building students' comprehension of what they read, teachers of English need to construct questions. Accordingly, answers provided by

students to each question have to reflect their comprehension of what they read. Asking question is, indeed, among others, on of the best ways for building, as well as, for monitoring students' comprehension.

This article aims to discuss about the nature of questioning, questions in reading, three kinds of comprehension questions, an example of the three kinds of questions and closing.

THE NATURE OF QUESTIONING

Questioning is very human. From morning to night, man questions. He/she questions almost about everything. It is because he/she does intend to know anything as of what he/she questions about. Indeed, questions are very closely realated to what the questioner intends to know. It is like a coin. The two sides connot be separated. One side must be with another side. The question goes hand in hand with one's curiosity to know.

Curious feeling is what really makes man questions. This feeling refers to the propensity of man to know. Man has, indeed, desire to know more and more. There is almost no confined desire to know. Moreover, the life man is undergoing is so complex that it is so hard to understand what life is all about. The life appears to have no end. Thus, man is curious to know ar least to have a rough picture or knowldege of what life is.

This is the nature of man. He/she wants to know, more particularly what he/she really intends to know for it is in his/her need. To state in different way, no man does intend not to know or not to seek for what he/she wants to know or to possess.

Questioning has both social and linguistic rules to obey. In the context of social rules, questions are regulated in social context. What to question, to whom the question is addressed, when and where the question is raised, and how the question is raised, indeed, determine how questions are constructed in order to fit appropriate social contexts in which such questions are to be addressed. Meanwhile, in the context of linguistic rules, constructed questions must obey conventional rules of language. From this stand point, a question is, in its form, different from a statement. If the statement takes "Subject + Verb + Object" (SVO), then a question, in general, takes Auxiliary/Modals + Subject + Verb (AuxSVO) + *Object) or WH- Question words + (*auxiliary) + Subject + Verb + Object. (*) *means optional.*

In addition, there is still another point to obey. It is in relation to content to ask. Here, different types of questions recquire different patterns of questioning. This is in line with what Orlich, Harder, Callahan, and Gibson (1998: 227) they argue that: "*if you assign a particular importance to different types of questions you ask, then you will need a method for veryfying that you are indeed using the desired questioning patterns.*"

QUESTIONS IN READING

Ledesma, Lidya; Eunic G. Torres, Loudes V. De Castro; Celia F. Parcon; Elisca S. Saldana; MA Nuria B. Castells (1986); Hildebrant (2011; 2012), inspired by the Bloom's taxonomy propound three types of questions, namely literal question Ledesma, et al (1986) and Hildebrant (2011; 2012); interpretive question (Ledesma, et al, 1986) or inferential question (Hildebrant, 2011; 2012), Applied/Generalization (Ledesma, et al, 1986) or critical question (Hildebrant, 2011; 2012). It is word nothing that the interpretive question is used by Ledesma, et al (1986); meanwhile, inferential question is used by Hildebrant (2011; 2012). Essentially, however the two terms refer to the same concept. They agree that this type of question requires an answer indicating the result of drawing conclusion or else in making logically appropriate interpretation based on data in a selected reading text by students when they are going through the text.

Simmilarly, of the third type of question, terms coined by Ledesma, et al (1986) and by Hildebrant (2011; 2012) speak of the same essence. They agree that this type of question require the answer represnting the generalization of the text. The answer must indicate the overall

content or message of the text. In addition to this, here, students can come up with an alternative thought, one that is different from what the text proposes, yet it is still inspired by the text.

In almost the snae vein, Ataburan (2010) speaks of questions which must reflect the dimension of developing students thinking hierarchy following Bloom's philosophy (1965). Very explicitly he enumerates questions that require the working of students' mental force in relation the following memory, translation, interpretation, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

The first two questions, namelt memory and translation, only require students to provoke the working of their low level mental force, since these questions are commonly about knowledge and comprehension. Meanwhile, others recquire students to operate their high level mental force. Students are recquired to engage with high thought, since the answer given to these questions need their logical interpretation, application ability, analysis ability, synthesis ability, and ability of evaluation.

THREE TYPES OF QUESTIONS IN CLASSROOM READING

Orlich, Harder, Callahan, and Gibson (1998) propose three distinct questioning strategies, namely: convergent, divergent, and evaluative. The convergent questioning is a strategy of constructing question which leads a common set of responses. They wrote: *"convergent questioning strategy, for the most pat, elicits short responses from students and focuses on the lower level of thinking – that is on the knowledge and comprehension levels"* (p.223). meanwhile, for the divergent questioning strategy, they argue that such questions are to lead to a wide array of responses. Bassically, a made question of this type proposes different responses form different focuses in a reading text. To a certain extent, it is also aimed at "reshaping of students behavior patterns to elicit high level of students' thinking and responses" (229). With the last questioning strategy, it aims to provke students' ability to make evaluation. Students are asked to be critical on what a reading text has as its contents. This requires high level questions. Thus, it is requires high level responses from students too.

The three questioning strategies are, indeed, inspired by the taxonomy of Bloom (Orlich, Harder, Callahan and Gibson, 1998: 91). The taxonomy comprises, from the low level one to the highest one, knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Each requires specific ways of making questions. It is worth nothing that questions will clearly lead students to respond accordingly.

Armed with such concepts, questions for comprehension are certainly as what has been promoted by Ledesma, et al (1986) and Hildebrant (2011; 2012). The proposed types of questions are as follows:

a. Literal Questions
These questions aim to elicit answers explicitly stated in a reading text. To elicit answers of such questions, students may go quickly to the reading text to identify their answers. They are not demended to exercise a very thorough reading. In other words, answers to such questions are easy to meet in an assigned reading text just in a quick reading. These questions are very commonly in knowledge and comprehension levels.

b. Inferential Questions
These questions aim to elicit anwers indicating students' ability in making conclusion or appropriately logical interpretation based on data in a selected reading text. For this, students are required to thoroughly understand what is read. Specifically, since responses are related to making of conclusion, students are demanded to have ability in applying any concept as what is in the text, analyzing data in the text, and synthesizing parts of messages in the text into a whole as asked of.

c. Critical Questions

These questions aim to elicit answers from students indicating the generalization of the text they read. Or else, the answers indicate the alternative ways distinguishing them from what is in the reading text. This is the highest level type question.

UNDERSTANDING PARAGRAPH PER PARAGRAPH FOR OVERALL COMPREHENSION

Comprehension of a reading text is the actualization of the memory working system of readers. More concretely, a reader is, when reading, simultaneously, creating a similar text in his or her brain of what is read. As teachers, it is demendes to make to make what is in reader's head known. Thus, activities to monitor students' text retained in their memory are of obligatory. The text retained or created in readers' brain is, indeed, what comprehension is. This is what comprehension may fully mean.

As a matter of fact, as shared by teachers (in DTM Module 1 Training in Kupang, 2011), students, indeed, find difficulty to remember all information from the text they have read if activities of comprehension are provided after the text is completely read. Among many reasons, there is no one that is due to the working system of the students memory. The students could not retain the information in their memory of what they have read from the text. Some parts of messages from what they read got lost when they finished reading. Thus, to reread the text to find out what is asked as to indicate that they understand the text being read is urgently necessary. However, teachers admit that the re-reading does not do more good. Often, they still fail to find the information from the text. More particularly, harder is to find answers for inferential and critical questions.

Many ways have been promoted to help student retain and remember what they gain from reading tetxs. Onc of them is as what the diagnistic teaching model (DTM) proposes (hildebrant,2011;2012).understanding the whole text is better done by understending paragarph by paragraph. Questions leading to monitor students' comprehension of a paragraph are suggested to be placed after the paragraph. It is done by providing the three types of questions are after the whole reading text is read. To make it workable a thorough preparation to a syllabus mandatet material in accordance with the folowing steps has to be taken. First, a text is broken into paragraphs. Second, after every paragraph questions leading to understand thoroughly of the paragraph are affered. Literal and inferential quenstions are better in this part. It is worth noting that critical questions can be given after all paragraphsthoroughly disscused. Third, students may first do a coral reading. Afterwartds, they may bey given time to read silently in order to answer the given questions. Finally, a discussion on some given criticital questions. Can be done after all paragraphs have been discussed. Beter understanding of a text is made possible throuhg understanding paragarph by paragaraph of a text. Many experiences from the field have become convinccingly good evidences as to prove that DTM is, indeed, one of the best ways to build students' comprehensiun abilty (talok, in the global literaciy professional development ducument, 2011).

EXAMPLE OF COMPRHENSION QUESTIONS FOR PARGRAPH CYCLONE TRACY

DESTROYS DARWIN

The city of darwin, australia was devastatetd early on Wednesday, december 25, by cyclone tracy. At least 40 people are known to be dead, and hundreds arc badly injuret. Ninety fife percent of the city' a buildings have been damaged by winds thet reached speesds of 200 kiometres an hour.

Questions
1. Where is the city of Darwin? (literal)
2. What devastated the city of Darwin? (literal)
3. When was the city of Darwin devastated? (literal)
4. Why were many people dead and badly injured? (inferential)

5. Why were so many city buildings ruined? (inferential)

It is thought that 20.000 people are homelss. Most of Darwin's houses have lost roofs and walls, and many look like crushed matchboxes. The streets are littered with damaged cars andbuilding materials such a glass and iron. Electric cables and phone lines are down, and water pipes have been torn away.

Questions
1. What is the reason that more than 20.000 people were homeless? (inferential)
2. What happened to most Darwin's houses? (literal)
3. What were in the streets in the city of Darwin after the big wind? (literal)
4. What was, indeed, the city like after the Cyclone Tracy? (inferential)

A man using a radio transmitter reported, "Darwin looks as though it has been hit by an atom bomb."

Questions:
1. What did the reporter say about Darwin? (literal)
2. Why was the damage of Darwin compared to a hit by an atom bomb? (inferential, see also the previous paragraphs)

The hospital has no roofs. The airport buildings have been destroyed, and parked aircrafts are a mass of twisted metal. Many boats have been tossed ashore, and at least four fishing boats are missing.

Questions
1. Did the hospital have roofs? (literal)
2. What did the airpot look like? (inferential)
3. What happened to boats? (literal)

Warning sirens had been bluring efery 15 minutes since noon on Tuesday.

Questions
1. How often did sirens blur? (literal).
2. When did sirens start bluring? (literal)

Sergeant taylor of the darwin police said, ''there was little that anyone could do. You can't hold your roof on.''

Questions
1. Who was sergent tylor? (literal)
2. What did seargent tylor say? (literal)

Many people tried to find shelter in bathrooms and basement, under beds, or inside closets.

Questions
Where did people try to find shelter?

When Cyclone Tracy struck at about 1 A.M., the winds were blowing from the northeast. At about 4 A.M., there was a brief lull as the eye of the strom passed over, but the gales retruned with even greater fury soon afterwad, coming from the southwest.

Questions
1. At what time did thecyclone tracy strike? (literal)
2. What happened at 4 .A. M? (literal)
3. Where did the greater gales come at about after 4 A.M.?(literal)

The city is being evacuated and will have to be totally rebuilt, (from hildebrant, 2011)

Questions

Why was the city being evacuted and totally rebuilt? (inferential), included is the knowledge from previous paragraphs)

Comprehension Questions
1. What happened on December 25, 1974, that destroyed the city of Darwin look like?
2. What did the city of Darwin look like after the Cyclone Tracy struck it?
3. Why did the reporter say that Darwin look like as thoughmit had been hit by a atom bomb?
4. What steps were taken for the city after being hit by the Cyclone Tracy?

CLOSING

To help students better understand a reading text they read, it is suggested to do two things. First, questions must be made in three types, namely: literal, inferential and critical. With these, students are not only trained to know literal information explicitly stated in the reading text. As well, they are not only demanded to draw conclusion or make logical interpretation based on data in the reading text. However, they are recquired to make generalization of the whole reading text. Or else, they may create an alternative idea, one that is possibly different from what the reading text contains.

Second, understanding a reading text as a whole is better done by understandingparagraph by paragraph. This helps the working system of students' memory better retain needed information of what they read.

REFERENCES

Floyd, Jean, MA. 1984. *Study Skills for Higher Education. A Use for English Course.* Collins Educational. London

Hildebrant, Phyllis. 2011. Model Pembelajaran Diagnostik. Module 1. Panduan Lokakarya untuk Master Trainer. Dikembangkan oleh International Reading Association (IRA) dalam kerjasamanya engan Indonesia Reading and Writing Association (PBTM)

Hildebrant, Phyllis. 2012. Model Pembelajaran Diagnostik. Module 2. Panduan Lokakarya untuk Master Trainer. Dikembangkan oleh International Reading Association (IRA) dalam kerjasamanya engan Indonesia Reading and Writing Association (PBTM)

Hildebrant, Phyllis. 2012. Model Pembelajaran Diagnostik. Module 3. Panduan Lokakarya untuk Master Trainer. Dikembangkan oleh International Reading Association (IRA) dalam kerjasamanya engan Indonesia Reading and Writing Association (PBTM)

Ledesma, Lydia G; Eunice G. Torres, Loudes V. De Castro; Celia F. Parcon; Elisea S Saldana; M A Nuria B Castells (1986). *Reading in Freshman English.* National Book Store. Metro Manila. Philippines

Orlic, Donald C; Robert J. Harder; Richard C. Callahan; Harry W. Gibson. 1998. *Teaching English Strategies. A Guide to Better Instruction.* Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston

Ur, Penny. 1996. *A Course in Language Teaching. Practice and Theory.* Cambridge University Press. London'

Talok, Damianus. Semantic Mapping: An EFL Learning Strategy for Reading Comprehension. *Reference Journal of Language and Language Teaching.* Vol. 1, Num. 3, May 2011, pp 88-92

………………………….Diagnostic Teaching Model (DTM): A Better Way for Comprehension (Notes from Teachers). 2011. A Report for Global Literacy Professional Development Project for Indonesia

………………………….Summary: Building the Highest Reading Comprehension Ability (an EFL Learning Strategy for Reading Comprehension). *Reference Journal of Language and Language Teaching.* Vol. 1, Num. 4, November 2011, pp 189-192

………………………….2011. Diagnostic Teaching Model (DTM): A Better Way for Comprehension (Notes from Teachers). 2011. A Report for Global Literacy Professional Development Document, Indonesia