EXPLORING EFL LISTENING

COMPREHENSION

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1989

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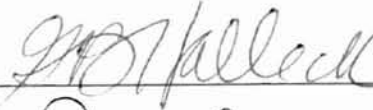Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
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1992

Submitted to the faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
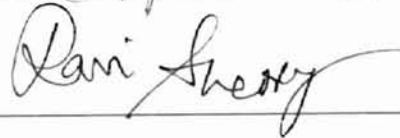the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
December, 2000

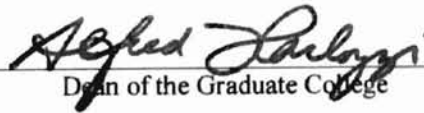EXPLORING EFL LISTENING

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the cooperation and participation of students and teachers at Kayadzi Primary School in Malawi, and the encouragement and patience of my advisory committee. Thank you Mr. Malala, Mr. Chalunda, Mr. Umale, Dr. Ravi Sheorey, and Dr. Gene Halleck.

A special thanks to Dr. Carol Moder, chairman of the advisory committee, whose guidance and direction kept me on the right track, or dragged me back to it when necessary.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A journey into uncertainty

While most teachers in America were wrapping up the school year to get ready for summer vacation, I was just beginning. On June 1, I entered the school office, a bench under a mango tree. Most of my classes would take place in the two classrooms just north of the mango tree. All my papers were in order, giving me permission to teach and do some research at a primary school in Malawi. The letter from the Department of Education in Lilongwe was picked up the day before I took the three-hour journey to the largest village in Central Africa. This event marked the beginning of a journey-a journey through the winding roads of Malawi, and also the intricate maze of listening comprehension.

It was fitting that the first lesson I was assigned to teach included a section on Malawian riddles. While I could solve most of the riddles, there were a few that I struggled with. The answers were in the teacher's guide, but they were all listed together in a different order from the presentation of the riddles themselves. I discussed the four riddles I found most difficult with the other teachers.

1. We climb the hill with our hands.

2. Soldiers all around, a white man in the middle.

3. Sweep the yard so that the tall men should come.

4. An elephant died thousands of miles away, but his horns have reached here.

I had narrowed the possible answers to *nsima*, ashes, rain, fire, and teeth and tongue.

I knew that *nsima* was a dish that resembles a mound of corn meal mush. I had been given some for lunch, but I had never seen the word in print. It is usually considered finger food; thus, "we climb the hill with our hands." This was easily understood once I recognized the lexical item. My colleagues agreed.

After a rather lengthy debate, we decided that "ashes" must describe the elephant's tusks. Of course, there was some missing information in this riddle, central for its understanding. The elephant was

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burned in a forest fire and the wind blew the ashes from his horn thousands of miles. This was a reasonable explanation.

There was another lengthy debate concerning the riddle about the soldiers all around and the white man in the middle. Some teachers said that it referred to the teeth and tongue, which fit the part about the soldiers all around. However, the tongue is not white, so teeth and tongue cannot fit both parts of the riddle. For this reason, we concluded that the solution for the riddle must be "fire." The flames are the soldiers and the white man refers to wood in the hottest part of the fire, which turns white in the process of becoming ash.

I never could understand the last riddle, even after the teachers had explained it to me. Perhaps it was because I could make no sense of their explanations. By the process of elimination, the only answer remaining was "rain." How that was related to "Sweep the yard so that the tall men should come" was beyond my comprehension.

Perhaps of all the orientation activities I could have been given, this was the most appropriate. For the next seven weeks, I would be asking the upperclassmen at this primary school to jump through essentially the same hoops that I had to go through in order to solve the riddles. I would use narratives instead of riddles in my study to see if the students could overcome limited vocabularies and cultural differences in order to create meaning from a text. Often, as in the riddle about the elephant, the information needed to "solve" the narratives was not included in the text; the students would have to infer the information in order to make appropriate responses. Sometimes the students would understand the explanations; other times, they would not.

Why did the students understand some explanations and struggle with others? I asked the students to explain what made some questions harder than others, but the task was too daunting for them. They did not know how to tackle such a question. I would have to research my answer in a different way. Thus, I began the intellectual journey into the minds of the students, hoping that through research I might extract from them what they could not verbalize.

The first thing an explorer needs, whether traveling through African jungles or African minds is a map. Chapter II is our map. Therein, I will establish a framework to guide us through the maze of listening comprehension in the classroom of English as a foreign language (EFL). We will look to the research in

psycholinguistics, information processing, discourse analysis, and story grammar for issues that will highlight how comprehension works. This map combines research from all these fields, proposing inference as a means of exploring comprehension in the EFL classroom. The main path is the theory that comprehension is the interaction of decoding and inferring. Two types of inference focus on the interactive nature of comprehension: scriptal and textual inference. Three more types of inference are closely related to the narrative text: causal consequences, causal antecedent, and intent.

Chapter III adds more specific details to our map. In the framework of Chapter II, I propose general theoretical issues of how the texts and the participants' background knowledge and culture could affect listening comprehension. Throughout this study, I refer to the setting as a foreign language classroom. Some who are aware that the official language of Malawi is English may have expected the setting to be an ESL classroom. However, since the only time the students used English was in the classroom, and exchanges outside classroom were conducted in a language other than English, I considered this an EFL classroom. In Chapter III, I introduce you to the educational setting, the students, and the narratives and questions that will influence, provide, and elicit the responses we will use to explore EFL listening comprehension in Chapter IV.

In Chapter IV, we begin our exploration of the nature of EFL listening comprehension. I analyze eight students' responses to forty-six comprehension questions of five texts. This exploration is guided by four questions:

1) Do the students prefer decoding or inferring? If inferring, what kind?

2) How frequently are the responses reasonable?

3) What type of inference is most often drawn reasonably: causal consequence, causal antecedent, or character intent?

4) How do cultural and educational values affect comprehension?

In analyzing the responses within this framework, several themes evolved and patterns emerged that revealed the weaknesses and the strengths of the student's comprehension process. By determining the strengths and the weaknesses of the students' comprehension process, I was able to discover some of the issues that contribute to some questions being harder than others.   In Chapter V, we explore the implications of our discovery. How can we use what we know about the nature of the students'

comprehension process to develop activities for the EFL classroom? To answer this question, we need to pinpoint cultural and educational issues to which EFL teachers should be most sensitive. Knowledge of the nature of the EFL listening comprehension process and sensitivity to the issues that enhance and impede it should guide EFL teachers in developing activities to help their students increase their comprehension.

What began as a question for thirty students at one of the primary schools in Central Africa's largest village is now a riddle for the EFL teacher: what makes some questions harder than others? To find the answer, we must journey into the minds of eight of the school's brightest students. Bon voyage!

CHAPTER II

NAVIGATING THE PROCESS OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION

A Review of Literature

One of the most important processes in learning, whether learning a foreign language or solving a riddle, is comprehension. This process involves logically putting together ideas and negotiating meaning from the relationships among the ideas. Without comprehension, people would not be able to make sense of the language and ideas around them.

In our journey through the mind, we must rely on the work of other explorers into the theory of comprehension in order to understand the nature of this process. Though there is no map, per se, of the comprehension process, there have been a number of models and theories proposed. By combining these models and theories, we can create our own map to use when exploring listening comprehension in the foreign language classroom.

In drawing up a map of these issues, it is important to understand the most important components of the EFL listening comprehension process so that the researcher can recognize them while assessing the process. We will use this map to clarify several issues. The two main issues involve 1) finding a model that best informs us about the process of listening comprehension for students and 2) determining the nature of this process in foreign language classrooms. A number of theorists have proposed solutions for these issues.

The goal of this paper is to go beyond the theories to determine a viable means of assessing listening comprehension. Within the classroom context, because of this goal, a number of questions arise. How do previous models of the comprehension process help us in the assessment of listening comprehension in the EFL classroom? How will the models help us observe the listening comprehension process in novice and low intermediate listeners? What kinds of methods improve novice comprehension? How can we implement these in the classroom so that students can understand and listen to the target language more effectively? What are the most likely impediments?

To answer these questions, we will first consider the theories of researchers who have proposed models of how comprehension works. The first models are those of psycholinguistics: models that primarily focus on what happens in the mind of the reader. Some researchers have found this model to be inadequate because it underemphasizes the role of the text in comprehension. The alternative interactive approach to understanding comprehension will be discussed as well. Both the psycholinguistic and the interactive approaches focus on reading comprehension, but, because of the overlap in the two kinds of comprehension, they have applications for listening comprehension as well. These applications will be discussed as we develop a framework for a model of listening comprehension.

After establishing the theoretical framework for our map of the listening comprehension process in Part 1, Part 2 will look at more practical concerns: How to explore listening comprehension. We will look at the types of questions that other researchers have used to guide them in understanding the process of comprehension. The practical framework, when combined with the theoretical framework, creates a general map for exploring listening comprehension in the EFL classroom.

Part 1: Theoretical Framework

In order to compose a map of the listening comprehension process, it is necessary to explore two different avenues of research: comprehension and listening. Comprehension occurs in two modes: reading and listening. While our major interest is in the listening component of comprehension, we cannot ignore the research from reading comprehension. Research in reading comprehension proposes a framework that is equally relevant for describing the process of listening comprehension.

One hundred years ago, many viewed reading as a bottom-up process. They thought if students could learn to decode the words, meaning would come. Then, psycholinguists proposed that there was more to reading than word recognition; they created models of the comprehension process that emphasized what happened in the mind of the reader as he or she comprehended the text. These later psycholinguistic models downplayed, and often ignored, the importance of decoding.

In reaction to this, contemporary researchers proposed that comprehension requires the interaction of bottom-up, or decoding, and top-down, or psycholinguistic, processes. Their research has focused on how the words of the texts interact with what the reader already knows to create meaning. This model is

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more useful for examining comprehension in the context of English foreign language (EFL) classrooms because the focus on both top-down and bottom-up processes allows us to pinpoint more accurately the areas where miscomprehension may occur with EFL students.

While listening is not a crucial component of psycholinguistic and interactive models of reading, the idea of bottom-up and top-down processes is a crucial component of listening comprehension. Thus, a rudimentary understanding of the reading comprehension models is helpful in order to understand the comprehension process in listening.

Psycholinguistic models

In order to understand the nature of the comprehension process, Kenneth Goodman (1967, cited in Goodman, 1988) constructed one of the first top-down models as a means of explaining a process which he called a psycholinguistic guessing game. Goodman's major premise is that the process of comprehension is a process of generating hypotheses. A newer version of his model defines the process in a series of four steps (Goodman, 1988, p.52). The first step of comprehension involves word recognition, but this part of the process gets very little attention. The focus of this model is how one assimilates information. This begins in the second stage when the reader makes predictions. In the third stage, these predictions are either confirmed or revised. The fourth stage, which Goodman points out may occur at any time, is the termination of the activity. Goodman (1988) stresses that his is only a partial model, constructed in response to the situation in the 1960's when there seemed to be little knowledge concerning the comprehension process.

Yetta Goodman and Carolyn Burke (1980) built upon this theory. In describing the process of comprehension in reading, they add another component to Goodman's (1988) model: integration. According to the Goodman and Burke (1980) model, the reader must 1) select cues and predict material, 2) check the semantic and syntactic acceptability of his or her selection and prediction, and 3) integrate the concepts interpreted from the text with his or her own world view. These three stages are discussed below.

In the first stage of comprehension, the reader predicts what letter, word, or idea will come next. The predictions are made based on the content of the material as well as the format. The average reader is usually not conscious of this activity when doing it.

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In the second stage of comprehension, predictions generated in the first stage are either confirmed or rejected. If the prediction can be confirmed, the reader integrates it with his or her general world knowledge. If not, the reader must reject the prediction and generate a new one.

Stage 3 of the comprehension process, which evolves from confirmed predictions, involves the integration of new knowledge into memory. At this stage, the interpreter of narrative integrates such elements as characterization, setting, plot, and theme, as well as point of view into his background knowledge. A clearer picture of this part of the process is found in the work of Fisher and Smith (1977).

Fisher and Smith propose that elements such as characterization, setting, plot, and theme appear in knowledge as scripts. A script is a skeletal representation of repeated experiences. The similarities across the experiences are stored together in memory. When new information is received, the script is retrieved and the new information assimilated into it. This process involves an analysis of how the information fits into the interpreter's script. The more closely the information resembles information that is already in the script, the more easily it is assimilated into knowledge.

There is slightly more emphasis on decoding in the Goodman and Burke (1980) model, which the Goodman (1988) model leaves out. Goodman and Burke (1980) include the decoding of semantic and graphic concepts as part of the prediction-confirmation-integration process. In the first stage, the reader predicts the letter or grammatical structure that might come next. Then he or she confirms this hypothesis. If true, he or she integrates it into knowledge.

In spite of the semantic or graphic predictions that Goodman and Burke (1980) consider, the psycholinguistic model of comprehension is more concerned with retrieval and structuring of knowledge in the reader's mind than it is with the text. In the first stage of comprehension, the purpose of word recognition is to identify the knowledge structure which needs to be accessed in order to make an accurate prediction. In the second stage of comprehension the text is compared to the knowledge structures in order to confirm the prediction. In the third stage, "new" knowledge structures are created by the predictions and confirmations. Interpretation is entirely the work of the reader; the text plays a minor part. The result of this focus on the reader is that reading, according to this model, is one-sided. There is no communication. There is relatively little interaction between the reader and the text.

Interactive models of reading comprehension stress the importance of word recognition in the process of comprehension for non-native readers. Barnett (1986), Grabe and Eskey (1988), and Swaffer (1988) point out that non-native readers have developing linguistic systems and skills while native readers are already fluent in the linguistic system. Because of this fundamental difference, the non-native reader is apt to focus his cognitive attention more on unfamiliar word meanings than on connecting ideas (Swaffer, 1988). Barnett (1986) posits that because native readers have already mastered the linguistic and syntactic codes, their knowledge of syntax helps them predict. Therefore, proficiency in syntax and reading affect reading comprehension. According to Eskey (1988), proficiency and fluency are achieved when word recognition becomes automatic.

Whereas the psycholinguistic models of reading comprehension downplay the role of decoding, the interactive models do not downplay the role of predicting, confirming and integrating new information into knowledge. They posit that fluent readers balance decoding and integration (e.g. Carrell, 1988; Eskey, 1988; Grabe, 1988; Eskey and Grabe, 1988). The interactive model is a more complete model, more complete because it considers both the top-down and bottom-up components of the process of comprehension.

Proponents of this model propose that comprehension may be described as the interaction of two processes: top-down processes, and bottom-up processes. Carrell (1988) identifies grammatical skills and vocabulary development as skills that aid the students in bottom-up processes, those that are most associated with decoding. Top-down processes are aided by skills such as building background knowledge, text mapping strategies (making graphic representations of the relationships and connections of concepts in the text) and prediction. The relationship of top-down and bottom-up processes is summarized in this statement by Grabe (1988): "Interactive models assume that skills at all levels are interactively available to process and interpret the text" (p. 52).

According to Carrell (1988), over-dependence on either type of skill contributes to a lack of understanding. Students who rely too much on their decoding skills overload short-term memory, making it difficult to make connections among text concepts. Over-reliance on top-down processing is equally devastating; such readers guess too much and miss the message of the text. Thus, it is important for readers

to use both skills efficiently.

The importance of balancing top-down and bottom-up processes is emphasized again in the work of Eskey (1988). He asserts that accurate readers are "those whose perception and decoding have become automatic" (p. 93). For the EFL/ESL reader to become proficient at reading, his word recognition cannot continue at a slow, laborious pace. It must be automatic in order for readers to maintain a balance between top-down and bottom-up processes. Good readers, Eskey (1988) concludes, are good decoders and good interpreters.

By combining all the models and theories discussed so far, a model of comprehension emerges that reflects interactivity of top-down and bottom up processes in which prediction, confirmation, and integration play an important role. The reading process begins with decoding. In foreign language comprehension, at this point, cognitive attention is given to recognizing words and syntactic structures (Swaffer, 1988). According to Goodman and Burke (1980), students predict letters and grammatical features, implying that, even in decoding, there is prediction and confirmation of predictions. Goodman and Burke propose this process is automatic for native readers.

For nonnative readers, especially those who do not have the five-thousand-word vocabulary of native beginning readers, word recognition is not so automatic (Grabe, 1989). Thus, at this stage, the emphasis for EFL/ESL comprehension instruction should be, as Eskey and Grabe (1988) point out, to develop the students' skills toward an automatic recognition of words and grammatical structures. Faster word recognition would facilitate greater accuracy in identifying knowledge structures to access for the most accurate predictions.

Within this model, one of the most difficult barriers is that of the second stage: confirming predictions. If the reader cannot confirm his predictions, then he must stop and rethink the problem, regress and pick up additional clues until the material makes sense, or build additional context (Goodman and Burke, 1990, p.7). While these skills are crucial for interpreting the text, Collins, Larkin, and Brown (1980) emphasize a different skill that is even more critical: "to ask the right questions" (p.405). As long as readers keep asking the wrong questions, that is, those questions that lead to unhelpful predictions, they will not be able to integrate the ideas of the text with their general knowledge.

The third phase of interpretation is knowledge-based. It culminates in the creation of new text

structures (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983), and an interpretation of the text that is more inferred. Such interpretation occurs in light of the reader's knowledge of goals and human behavior, and derives from general knowledge.

In order to understand the comprehension process of EFL students, the researcher must provide them with opportunities to venture into this third stage of comprehension to determine whether they can extract implicit meaning from the text. The theories and models reviewed so far imply that comprehension in reading is a process of decoding, predicting, and confirming. How can the researcher use these theories in constructing a model of the process of listening comprehension? This will be the focus of the next part of our discussion.

Listening models

Whereas in reading the student must decode graphemes and syntactic structure, in listening, he must decode graphemes and a syntactic structure which, as Rubin (1994) points out, includes redundancy and ellipsis not usually present in written texts. Much of the curriculum designed to teach listening comprehension has a clear focus on pronunciation (e.g. Morley, 1984; Bohlken and Macias, 1992). However, pronunciation cannot be the sole focus for listening comprehension; meaning is derived from much larger units of discourse.

As with reading comprehension, it is important to balance bottom-up processes and top-down processes. Schnell (1992) found that while vocabulary was adequately stressed for reading comprehension, EFL students in China were not proficient in word recognition when listening to messages. One of the factors that he identifies as leading to this deficiency is "the factual distraction." The students were so busy processing word by word that they missed the context of the message. This inaccuracy of interpretation is a consequence of neglecting the top-down processes. While word recognition is of great importance in listening comprehension, if there is no attention given to the context of the message, the student is doing little more than decoding a list of words. Top-down processes help the student identify the relationships among the words; the relationships create a context for the words that make them a message instead of a list. Successful comprehension combines top-down processes with bottom-up processes of recognizing words and syntactic structures (Carrell, 1988; Grabe, 1989).

Van Duzer (1997) supports the notion that listening comprehension should include both top-down

and bottom-up processes. Of the seven steps she presents as the process of listening comprehension, the first three relate to decoding, and the last four are associated with higher levels of comprehension. Although her model seems to progress more linearly than interactively, she, too, discusses the importance of both bottom-up and top-down skills in listening comprehension.

Therefore, in considering an appropriate model for listening comprehension to guide the researcher through the maze of EFL listening comprehension, one must choose one that looks at the whole process. That is, the model must consider the top-down processes with bottom-up processes to get a full picture of all the components of comprehension in listening. The bottom-up processes are observed easily enough; outsiders can monitor a student's ability to decode the message at least on the surface. It is more difficult to observe top-down processes.

How can we observe higher-level comprehension skills in listening activities? Other researchers have tried to address this problem, though not within a framework of interaction. In the next section, we will investigate methods that other researchers have used and the types of questions that they asked to assess higher levels of comprehension. We will adapt the ideas of these researchers to fit into our theoretical framework. In this way, their work will help guide us in our exploration of the interaction of bottom-up and top-down processes in EFL listening comprehension.

Part 2: Methods of Exploring Listening Comprehension

What type of assessment activities would consider both top-down and bottom-up processes? To determine this, it is imperative to identify exactly which comprehension skills could reveal the top-down processes of the listener. How are these skills exhibited so that the researcher could in some way identify the listener's internal processes? Two studies give direction for answering this question.

Buck's (1991) study on how listening tests work essentially seeks to know what type of questions could elicit responses that reflect the higher cognitive processes of EFL students in listening comprehension. . In Buck's study, six Japanese participants of varied proficiency levels heard a short narrative text divided into 13 sections. After each section, they were asked questions. They could respond in either English or Japanese. Buck asked the students to justify their answers.

As ideal as Buck's study seems to be for the exploration of EFL listening comprehension, there

are several difficulties in reproducing it in this study. One is that the researcher must be fluent in both the target language and the native language of the students. Buck was fluent in both Japanese and English, giving the Japanese students the opportunity to respond in their native language. This was advantageous in Buck's study because it gave the students the opportunity to formulate a response that reflected their comprehension without the interference caused by a lack of proficiency. However, unless the researcher is fluent in the native language of the participants, this part of the study is not feasible.

Another major difficulty in adopting this study exactly as it is and reproducing it in Malawi is related to writing the inference questions. Buck's test consists of questions that required the participants to make one of five types of inference, but the theory behind the classification of these questions centers entirely upon what Buck himself considers logical. Three of the categories dealt with logical inference; two others were problematic.

The inferences that were logical involved identifying a character's feelings and information that is directly stated in the text. Buck's participants answered both types of questions correctly. Another type of question required prediction. This type of question could be easily reproduced, but the difficulty, as Buck points out, is in marking the responses. He regarded anything coherent as correct.

Two more types of questions asked the student to make a deduction about some aspect of the story or make an "obvious" inference. Because this category of inference is based on Buck's sense of logic, they are difficult for other researchers to reproduce. Not only do Buck's obvious inferences assume the students define certain cultural events in the same way, but they are based on his culturally biased interpretations of the story. For example, Buck assumed that since the character was stealing small things on a predictable schedule, the character was an amateur thief. This assumption does not consider the motive of the thief, who, in this story, was not stealing things because of their monetary value. In short, the types of questions from Buck's study are difficult to reproduce because the categories are not well defined. Because the categories are not well defined, the types of inference questions are not as useful. Although Buck does discuss the influence of students' background knowledge, it is not clear how the students' responses fit into an interactive comprehension process. The idea of using inference in order to explore top-down processes in EFL listening comprehension is appealing, but the inferences need to be defined more clearly and developed in the context of interaction.

An earlier study, Slackman and Hudson (1984), highlights the role of the text and background knowledge in the comprehension process. These researchers posit two sources of implication: scriptal implication, which derives from the listener's background knowledge, and textual implication, which is dependent upon the text. Scriptal implication requires the students to access event scripts, or draw upon previous knowledge, in making inferences. Textual implication requires the students to "infer relations between story propositions that could not be inferred on the basis of text alone" (p. 2). The story the children in their study were told sheds light on how the sources of inferences are distinguished:

It's Susan's birthday tomorrow. She and her mother go to the store. They get some candy and ice cream, then they pay the cashier. Then, they take their groceries home.

Script inference: Why did they give money to the cashier?

Text inference: Why did they buy candy and ice cream?

(Slackman and Hudson, 1984, p. 17)

There is no explicit information regarding why Susan and her mother gave money to the cashier. In fact, there was no mention in the text that they gave money; the text said 'they pay the cashier.' However, from previous knowledge (the script) about going to the store, the child knows she selects what she wants to buy, gives the cashier money in exchange for what she has selected, then takes the items home. By inserting the items, candy and ice cream, into the "what" of the script, the child infers that they gave money to the cashier in exchange for the candy and ice cream.

The children were not given any explicit information regarding why Susan's mom paid the cashier or why they bought candy and ice cream. However, American children are familiar with what is eaten at a birthday party. By connecting two propositions from the text (birthday and ice cream), the students are able to infer Susan and her mother are buying ice cream to eat at Susan's birthday party.

Children who do not eat candy and ice cream at birthday parties would find this inference difficult. For them, there is no close connection between birthday and ice cream. The relationship between the two events is a loose one, only temporal, so determining the motivation for buying candy and ice cream would be one of speculation. Thus, even with textual implication, the integration of the text and knowledge structures may require the participant to access scripts. The propositions in the text may be connected, but it

is up to the listener to determine the strength of the connection.

In charting a map of the comprehension process that would be useful for assessing across cultures, it is necessary to determine the types of propositions that would be present in all narratives. From this, we may determine the types of inferences that may be used to assess higher levels of comprehension. The variables that would influence any scripts or knowledge structures and would affect the strength of the connections between text propositions should be considered in the final analysis of the comprehension process.

Types of inference

What type of inference is found in narratives? By definition, a narrative is a sequence of events. Theoretically, these events are based on the motivation of characters (Thorndyke, 1977). They revolve around the theme. which Thorndyke describes as the major goal of the character. The conflict that a character faces is seen in his or her subgoals, or attempts to fulfill the main goal. The outcome of the attempt to fulfill the main goal is the resolution of the story. Thorndyke's story grammar emphasizes the importance of character intent in narratives; Labov emphasizes the importance of sequencing.

According to Labov (1983) narrative texts are based on two types of sequencing: forward and causal. He represents these as two rules:

$$E(i) = E(i) + E(i+1) \quad \text{forward sequencing}$$

$$E(i) = E(i-1) + E(i) \quad \text{causal sequencing}$$

$E(i)$ represents the initiating event of the sequence. Both types of sequencing can be represented in relation to the question, "How did that come about?" Forward sequencing occurs when the action is the consequence of a previous event. Causal sequencing occurs when the action is the cause of later events.

Because of the importance of sequencing to stories, inference that would presumably be present in any story would include that which either predicts consequences or causes. The listener who recognizes a chain of events would be able to infer from the text what events may come later and what events or actions led to the occurrence of a particular event. The skills involved in inferring such events would include the ability to identify consequences and causal antecedents of events in a narrative.

There is a third element often inferred from narratives that is closely related to the sequence of narrative events. The goals of the characters, and their attempts to attain those goals play a major part in

determining the types of events as well as their sequence (Thorndyke, 1977). The text elaborates on these goals, as well as their attainment. The knowledge structure of the listener only provides a means of sorting and organizing them.

Since the structure of narrative depends heavily upon the sequencing of events, and to some degree the goals of the characters within the stories, the types of inference that would highlight the students' ability to perform higher level comprehension skills should be grounded in these two elements. Two studies provide a foundation for defining the types of inferences found in narrative. Nicholas and Trabasso organized a taxonomy of inferences. Graesser and Clarke's (1985) study postulates the best way to elicit inferences regarding sequencing and character intent.

Within Nicholas and Trabasso's (1980) taxonomy, such inferences are classified as "extrapolative inferences." These inferences "correlate facts and expectations about what must have happened in the past, what the effects of the focal event are, and what will probably happen in the future" (p. 256-257). The researchers list twelve types, which are divided into four categories: past, facilitative; past, preventive; future, facilitative; and future, preventative. Three types of inference are in each category. Of these three types, one is related to causal consequences (preconditions, interfering preconditions, consequent events, consequential non-events); one is related to causal antecedent (causes, obstructions, postconditions, obstructed postconditions); and one is related to character intent (motivations, preventive motivations, expectation, and negative expectation). Because the inferences that Nicholas and Trabasso describe are related to narrative and the types of inference are clearly defined, their study is useful for research into the inference process in the context of narrative. Inference regarding causal consequence, causal antecedent, and character intent, Nicholas and Trabasso's subcategories, will be the focus of this study.

Causal consequence

Causal consequences would be the result of what Labov (1983) referred to as forward sequencing. The listener would, from the events that are explicit in the text, deduce what might happen next. This type of inference, which Buck (1991) called prediction, was asked of his participants in the question, "What do you think Susan will do next?" Graesser and Clark (1985) also found that the question "What happened next?" was most helpful in eliciting predictions during narrative comprehension. In their study, the participants' responses to this question included events, states, and actions that were causal consequences of

events in the text.

Causal Antecedents

Like causal consequences, causal antecedents are based in both the text and knowledge. Both depend on the script the interpreter has constructed regarding causal relationships in the sequence of the narrative. The interpretation of causal antecedents relies on the listener's ability to construct a sequence of events and determine cause and effect. As Trabasso, Secco, and van den Broek (1984) propose, the analysis of causal relations among narrative events provides an account of the range of variables needed to understand a story. Such relationships must be inferred for successful listening comprehension (Richards, 1983).

Nicholas and Trabasso (1980) suggest that "By answering 'how' and 'why'...[extrapolative inferences] build complete models of the state of the world (and all its contents) prior and subsequent to the occurrence of every event, linking each event to every other" (p. 246). Graesser and Clarke (1985) found that 'how' and 'why' questions elicit causal antecedents. In their study, the question, "Why did the heroes fight the dragon?" elicited responses such as "The heroes did not want the dragon to keep their daughters" and "The heroes were brave" (p. 60). The first response is a better causal antecedent than the second response; the second response is more of a character trait. The first response gives a more concrete reason for the heroes to fight the dragon.

As seen in Graesser and Clarke's study, a question can elicit a wide variety of responses. This could be due to the wording of the question or the ability of the participant in formulating or interpreting questions and answers. The question of why the heroes fought the dragon, because it was related to the goals of the character, could have elicited responses regarding character intent as well as causal antecedent. The wording, the students' ability, and the diversity of types of responses are all issues the researcher should consider in a study of this nature.

Character intent

Two pairs of researchers, Nicholas and Trabasso (1980) and Graesser and Clarke (1985), regard causal antecedent inference and intent inference as belonging to the same category. They posit that this category may be identified with the questions, "why" and "how." There is a very thin line when dividing

these two types of inference. The response "the heroes did not want the dragon to keep their daughters" could just as easily be called a response that identified character intent. Graesser and Clarke (1985) do not make a distinction. Neither do Nicholas and Trabasso (1980). For those two studies, the goals of the researchers were quite different from the goals of this study. Nicholas and Trabasso were classifying various types of inference. Graesser and Clarke were concerned with how native speakers processed them. This study is most concerned with the instructional applications of these theories.

Therefore, since the two types of inference refer to two different types of skills—that is, sequencing and goal identification— for this study, a distinction will be made between character intent and causal antecedent. When possible, the questions will be worded in such a way that they will either probe for the identification of a charater's goals or will probe for more event oriented, sequential relationships. However, since one question can elicit several different types of responses, the distinction will most often be made according to the type of response that is elicited.

A distinction between sequence and goals is seen in Richards' (1983) list of skills needed for listening comprehension, which indicates the identification of causal antecedent and the identification of a character's intent can be distinguished as two different types of inference. One of the inference skills he lists involves the ability to deduce cause and effect from events. This is related to the skill of sequencing; thus, the student who successfully deduces cause and effect successfully identifies causal antecedent. Another of the skills involves the ability to infer situations, participants, goals, and procedures. The student who has this ability would be able to identify the goals or intent of a character in narrative. The distinction between causal antecedent and intent would be that causal antecedent considers how a particular event influences another event while intent looks at how a particular thought or intention influences behavior.

When we view listening comprehension as an interactive process, we must consider variables on both sides of the interaction. The implicit and explicit goals of the characters and sequencing of the narrative are the text's contribution to the interaction. The student's ability to identify causal antecedent, causal consequence, and character intent will influence his or her interpretation of the text. This interpretation, the student's contribution to the interaction, is shaped by his or her knowledge structure.

Variables of the knowledge structure

There are a number of variables that shape the knowledge structure of the interpreter; we will

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focus on the three that directly impact EFL comprehension: fluency, familiarity with the text, and culture. A student whose fluency in the language is low will find it difficult to interpret a message since he cannot decode the words. His ability to perform bottom-up processes in comprehension will affect his interpretation of the text. In addition to being able to recognize the words and syntax in the text, the student must be familiar with the organization and content of the text. The student who does not understand the ideas of the text will have difficulty interpreting it even if he does have the skills to decode all the words accurately. The student needs previous contact with similar types of texts in order to perform top-down processes. In the EFL classroom, the students' familiarity with both the content and form of the text is influenced by their culture. Several studies illustrate the effect that fluency, familiarity, and culture have on EFL interpretation of the text.

Fluency

The interpretation of a text from another language is going to be restricted by the words the interpreter can recognize because his vocabulary is limited (Carrell, 1984). In her study, Carrell compared the reading comprehension of ESL students with that of native speaking fourth graders and found that their performance was similar. Their linguistic systems were still developing. This development is important for the interpretation of texts.

The importance of fluency to the interpretation of the text is demonstrated in a story recounted by Headlam (1990). While in Jamaica, Headlam was listening to a little boy read from an American primer. The boy came across a word he could not recognize, "carpet." Headlam tried to help him decode the word, but found the task challenging since the boy had never seen a carpet. She finally told him that it was like a mat.

Familiarity with the text

Headlam's anecdote also illustrates the importance of one's familiarity with the content of the text. Once the boy, with Headlam's help, had decoded 'carpet' he still had difficulty because the concept was unfamiliar. However, sometimes, even when the word has been properly decoded, if the student is not familiar with the content or form of the text, the interpretation is jeopardized.

The familiarity of the students with the content and form of the text should be considered when

designing an assessment instrument for novice and low intermediate learners. Because the students' linguistic systems and knowledge structures are still developing, the researcher should choose materials that target grammatical and lexical concepts and content the students have been exposed to, but have not yet mastered. If the material is totally unfamiliar, the students are most likely to give up trying to comprehend at all. However, if the content and form of the material is just a little above the fluency and development of the students, and the content is familiar enough to keep them from being frustrated, then there is room for the students to stretch and grow in their ability to comprehend.

Culture

Not only should the text be developmentally appropriate for the participants, it should also be culturally appropriate. Background knowledge is intricately tied to his culture, thus influencing top-down processes and one's familiarity with the text. Culture also determines the words that will be most recognizable, influencing the bottom-up processes.

Johnson (1982) concludes that misinterpretation of the text by foreign language students could be a result of culturally conditioned associations with particular words. Cultural background influences the way the interpreter will decode the text and integrate it into her knowledge structure. A word used in the text may convey a different meaning to the person interpreting it. Different perspectives on the content of the text and the scripts that have been accessed will also influence the meaning that one derives from the text.

The work of Reynolds, et al (1982) shows the role cultural perspective plays in interpreting a text. They gave Anglo American and African American students a letter written by an African American student about a "sounding." While the Anglo-Americans had no script for "sounding," African Americans knew it as a form of insult. The study centers upon a letter. In the letter, a boy tells about a situation that occurred in the school cafeteria. After describing the exchange of insults he had with his friend, he wrote, "We really got into it then. After a while, many people got involved-4,5, then 6. It was a riot." After the gym teacher "settled things down," the boys were sent to the principal, who expelled them for a week and called their parents.

African American students interpreted the event as a playful exchange of insults. Anglo American assumed the letter was about a fight. Words like "riot" and "really got into it," and the consequences of the

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event were consistent with "sounding," and a physical fight. The two groups interpreted the letter according to the schema dictated by their particular culture. The researchers concluded, "When reading material covers an area in which there is clear cultural difference, there are large differences among groups in comprehension" (p 365).

A study by Steffensen and Colker (1982) further illustrates the influence of culture on comprehension. American and Australian Aboriginal participants were given two texts about medical practices: one from their culture, and the other from a different culture. All the participants interpreted the texts according to their own cultural perspective. When tested on the texts, the students recalled information from their own culture more quickly and tended to distort information from the other culture. From these studies, Steffensen and Colker (1982) concluded that different belief systems affect comprehension, retrieval, and inference.

The 1987 study by Carrell further illustrates the effect of different belief systems on comprehension and retrieval, as well as recognizing the role that rhetorical organization plays in ESL comprehension. She presented the participants in her study with texts that would be either familiar or unfamiliar to them in terms of content or form. The content would be culturally familiar or unfamiliar, based on the participant's religion; the texts were about a saint and a Muslim holy man. The rhetorical organization either followed an episodic structure of one episode occurring after another (familiar organization) or two episodes interleaved (unfamiliar organization). The students were able to recall more events from the stories that were culturally and rhetorically familiar.

These variables of fluency, background knowledge, and culture influence the way in which the knowledge structure of the participants has been constructed. If the students encounter too many unfamiliar words, they will find it difficult to integrate the text with knowledge because they would not know how to sort and organize the new content. The same situation would arise if their background knowledge is insufficient for the text. Cultural knowledge is a part of background knowledge. As illustrated in Carrell's study, a lack a familiarity with the content and form of a text leads to difficulty in comprehension. If the listener is not familiar with the content, he cannot make any connections between text and knowledge, let alone appropriately infer connections that are not explicit.

Summary

The use of inference is just a small path on the map of listening comprehension as viewed within an interactive model, but a starting place. There have been some trails blazed before us. These studies give us direction. Goodman led us away from the myth that comprehension is static and totally dependent upon the text. He proposed that the task of comprehending is active, "a psycholinguistic guessing game." Grabe (1988) and Carrell (1988), who ushered us into the realm of ESL comprehension, brought us back to earth, suggesting that comprehension was more than just guessing; for them, comprehension is a balance between bottom-up, text-based processes and top-down, psycholinguistic processes. These well-developed trails lead us through the terrain of reading comprehension.

The paths of listening comprehension are narrow and less traveled. There have been a few to guide us through this terrain, though. Buck (1992) used various types of inference to explore a means of assessing EFL listening comprehension. Though this avenue of research seemed to match ours in purpose, the types of inference he elicited were not grounded in the interactive theory of our previous explorations. The Slackman and Hudson (1984) study posited two sources of inference: scriptal and textual. These sources of inference are better suited for exploring listening comprehension as an interactive process.

To find a type of inference that would be useful for exploring EFL comprehension and would be grounded in the interactive theory of comprehension, we visited the story grammars of Thorndyke (1977) and Labov (1983) and proposed three types of inference that could be generated from any narrative: causal consequence, causal antecedent, and character intent. Such inferences show us the textual side of the interaction. Graesser and Clarke (1985) and Nicholas and Trabasso (1980) defined these inferences for us and suggested ways of eliciting them.

The ability of students in Malawi to make these types of inferences will allow us a glimpse into how their knowledge structures interact with narrative texts. This is a new path; it seems no tour guides are available. In Chapter III, we will explore this path, meeting the participants, the texts, and the questions that will allow us to analyze the interaction between EFL students and culturally familiar text and will guide us through the maze of EFL listening comprehension.

CHAPTER III

EXPLORING EFL LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Methods

In order to investigate a means of assessing the listening comprehension process in EFL students who have little fluency in English, participants in this study answered questions regarding narratives that had been read to them. The questions were designed to challenge students toward higher levels of comprehension processing. Because this was a field-based case study, rather than an experimental study, the questions were designed to fit into the ongoing instructional context. Thus, while the questions were created to elicit the various types of inferences discussed in Chapter II, the specific form and number of each type of question were not controlled. The framework in which the texts and the question were presented was continually, and often spontaneously, adapted to meet the instructional needs of the students in the context of any given lesson. The texts used were narrative, all but one of which came from a textbook published by the Malawi Institute of Education. This means that, theoretically, all but one of the texts should be culturally familiar. Because the study was done in a rural area, where students have less access to the English-speaking world, the participants are truly EFL students, regardless of the fact that they live in a country whose official language is English.

Participants

Malawi is a small country in the heart of Africa colonized by the British, then freed during the 1960's. Up until 1994, the country had two official languages: English and Chichewa. Now the only official language is English, but in the daily lives of the people, Chichewa prevails. In many villages, there are still some people who cannot speak English.

In the school where I taught in June and July of 1999, the students were fluent in Chichewa, but few had a grasp on the English language. The first four years of primary school are taught in Chichewa,

with some lessons in English. During these first four years, the students are steadily exposed to more English in the classroom. Beginning in Standard 5, the students take classes in mathematics, social studies, science, agriculture, crafts, and physical education as well as English and Chichewa. At this year of primary school, all classroom activities except Chichewa classes are taught in English.

The English books published by the Malawi Institute of Education focus on the major aspects of language learning: reading, writing, listening, speaking, and grammar. All areas receive an equal amount of attention in the teachers' guide. At least, every unit is composed of a lesson devoted to one of the activities. The listening activities include announcements and other expository texts as well as narratives. Most of the stories for this study were taken from the teachers' guides for the 4th, 7th, and 8th standards.

A 'standard' is equivalent to a 'grade' in the United States. Children in their first year of school are in Standard 1. The ages vary in each Standard since it is not uncommon for at least one third of a Standard to be retained. Children in Standard 1 are typically five or six years old, though some may be as old as eight years. The range is similar in Standards 2 and 3, with the age span covering no more than three years from youngest child to oldest. The greater disparity begins in Standard 4 where most of the children are eight or nine years old, but a handful of students are in their early teens. Though primary school is free, it is not mandatory. For this reason, parents may keep their children at home if they need help in the fields. If the students stay in the same class several years, as some do-- dropping out, then coming back to school when their parents no longer need them for farm chores--then it is no surprise that the age range should be so great in the upper grades. The average age of the students in Standard 7 is about fourteen years old. In Standard 8, the average age jumps to eighteen years old.

At the end of Standard 8, the students take an exit examination. This test is a standardized test given throughout Malawi to all students who wish to finish primary school. If they do not pass, they may stay in Standard 8 and take the test again. If they pass with distinction, making one of the top scores in the nation, they can apply for secondary school. If they pass, they get a graduation certificate and return to the farm or look for work.

There were many students who participated in this study, but erratic attendance made it difficult to keep track of all of them. There were often thirty students from Standard 8 in attendance on a given day, but they were not always the same students. Eight individual students attended often enough that their

activities could be tracked and a profile made of their responses. These eight students are the focus of this study. Their names have been changed to preserve confidentiality.

<u>Sample</u>

Because the sample was selected based on their attendance, this could not be considered an accurate cross-section of students. There were fewer girls than boys in the class, just as there were in the sample. There were eight girls in the entire class. The girls in the sample represent the top of the class in terms of performance. The boys in the sample also represent the top of the class. The number of boys in the sample, however, is a smaller percentage of the total. There were at least thirty boys in the class. Through a short questionnaire, information was collected on each of these students regarding their personal information, literacy attitudes, and attitudes toward school. Three of the students in this study are girls--Beth, Vav, and Heth--and five are boys--Al, Gim, Dahl, Hei, and Zane. Let me introduce them.

Beth, who is 17, is very quiet. She enters the classroom unobtrusively, slipping into her desk on the front row. She likes to read books. At home, her father tells her stories in Chichewa. At school, English is her favorite class, though her production skills are not fluent. She is shy.

Vav is far from shy. It is not unusual for her to cut up in class, though she is serious about school and gets her work done. She likes to sing and is recognized at school for her musical ability; her job is to lead the national anthem in opening assembly. At 14, she likes to read, especially about Princess Diana. Her favorite subject in school is English "because is simple," and though her production skills are a little better than Beth's, she speaks Chichewa when she has a choice. It took four weeks of the headmaster's prodding for her to lead the national anthem in English rather than Chichewa.

Heth, like her best friend, Beth, is reserved. She is 15. She has no books at home, but her grandfather tells her stories. Like the other two girls, her favorite subject is English, but she seldom seeks opportunities to speak it. However, she writes English more fluently than most of her peers.

The boys in the sample were more aggressive than the girls in seeking out opportunities to practice English. Like the girls, they all reported that English was their favorite subject. Perhaps everyone's favorite subject was English because their English teacher asked them to fill out the questionnaire.

Gim's reason for liking English was more than just an attempt to please the teacher. He likes English "because I want to communicate with people from other countries like you. More over it is a world

communicating language." True to the spirit of his response, Gim, who is 18, likes to read in Chichewa and English. He has books at home. His parents tell him stories in Chichewa. He is a bright student, but the last few weeks of school his attendance became sporadic, and when he did come, his performance lagged. Zane, 18, is even more aggressive than Gim about finding opportunities to speak English. He seeks opportunities to use English with anyone he can: the researcher, the headmaster, and other students. He has textbooks at home, which he likes to read. He reported that he especially likes reading in English and reading the holy book. His grandmother tells him stories about Jesus in Chichewa and Kiswalus, another language of Malawi.

Al, 13, likes to read. His speaking skills are similar to those of the girls. His writing skills are worse. Nevertheless, he has a good attitude about school. He is also creative. He and his brother build toys out of bamboo.

Dahl, 18, also likes to read. Like Al and the girls, his speaking skills are not too strong. His attendance was sporadic. He came on the day when there were only twelve students in attendance, but few other days besides that. He never wrote a composition for me, so there is no assessment of his global writing skills.

Hei, 18, refused to participate in class at the beginning of the study . He answered "yes" or "no" when forced, but never volunteered to answer. However, in the last few weeks of the study, he became more aggressive in seeking opportunities to practice his English. He reported that he likes English books and that his 'brotherhood' tells him stories about Ali Baba. I have no idea what he meant by brotherhood; it could be either a group of friends his age or his brothers.

Overall, the questionnaires reflected a group of students with good attitudes toward literacy, but little opportunity to develop literacy skills outside the classroom. Most of them were highly motivated in spite of the challenges and pressures of their deficiency of background knowledge. While the fluency of the students here seems to be very low, the students in this sample were noticeably more fluent than students in the lower Standards. At least, most of them could follow easy texts in English. Yet, fluency varied. A few students could not understand very much at all. A few were fluent enough to hold up their end of communication during a lesson. The rest fell somewhere in between. Most of the students tried to learn in spite of their lack of fluency. They struggled with the unfamiliar accent of the American English teacher.

<u>Fluency</u>

To gain a clearer understanding of the students' fluency in English, I relied on my own observations. For this reason, the assessments are subjective. The assessment of their speaking ability is based on my interaction with them during the study. This assessment is based on the length of discourse they volunteered and their eagerness to practice what English they knew. The assessment of their writing skills is based solely on the compositions they wrote for the midterm. Table III.1 summarizes my assessment of the writing and speaking skills of the students in this study. The method of assessment is discussed in detail below.

TABLE III.1

Fluency

Student	Gender	Age	Speaking skills	Writing skills
Al	M	13	Weak	4
Beth	F	17	Weak	4
Gim	M	18	Moderate	10.5
Dahl	M	18	Weak	NA
Hei	M	18	Weak	7
Vav	F	14	Moderate	7
Zane	M	18	Strong	10.5
Heth	F	15	Moderate	7.5

<u>Assessment of Writing Skills</u>

The instrument used to determine the writing skills of the students was also a part of the student's midterm examination in English. The students were instructed to write a letter to a friend telling about the American teachers who had come to their school. The criteria I used for evaluating the essays consisted of twelve questions covering five components of writing fluency:

Form

1. Does the essay look like a letter with salutation, body, and close?

2. Does the body consist of three coherent paragraphs?

Content

3. Does the letter talk about the American teachers?

4. Do the paragraphs have a main idea and supporting ideas?

5. Can the ideas be understood?

Organization

6. Are the paragraphs clearly separated (indented or lines skipped in between)?

7. Do sentences have a clear subject and verb with a logical relationship?

8. Is the word order comprehensible?

Grammar and Spelling

9. Is the verb tense reasonably correct?

10. Are pronouns used somewhat accurately?

11. Are most words spelled correctly?

Comprehensibility

12. If an English speaker received this letter, would she know how to answer it?

If, in evaluating the writing sample, I could answer yes to a question, the student received one point. If the student clearly tried to address the issue, but miserably failed, he or she received partial credit. While I did not retain the writing samples of the students from the midterm exam, I kept a record of the scores. The highest possible score was 12. Though theoretically the lowest score could be zero, any student who attempted the assignment received at least one point for the effort, even if I could not answer 'yes' to any of his questions. The highest score of the thirty students who participated in the midterm examination was 10.5, the lowest of those who attempted an answer, 1. The students struggled most with word order, sentence structure, paragraph unity, spelling, and verb tense. All but one of the students, Dahl, took the writing test. The results are shown in Table III.1 (p.27).

Assessment of Speaking Skills

Two specific behaviors were assessed in judging the fluency of the students in speaking English: the tendency of the student to use English, and the length of discourse. The headmaster often initiated English conversations with the students. Students who would try to respond were rated as moderate in their tendency to use English; this included most of the students in the sample. Zane who initiated the conversations himself is described as one with a high tendency to use English (see Table III.1, p.27).

The length of discourse is also a factor in assessing English fluency. Within Standard 8, many

students often gave monosyllabic answers, usually "yes" or "no." Most of the students could be encouraged to answer with 'yes' or 'no'; quite a few preferred to give no answer at all. A few students consistently gave phrase-length or sentence-length responses. Only one student in the whole school even attempted paragraph-length discourse. The eight participants in the study were more likely to give the longer responses. The length of discourse was evaluated subjectively by the researcher. Al, Hei, and Vav seldom spoke more than a few words at a time. Beth, Gim, Dahl, and Heth were capable of putting together an entire sentence, but seldom spoke more than that at one time. Zane could construct more than a sentence at a time.

The assessment of the students' speaking skills in Table III.1 is based on a combination of the amount of language they produced when they had to speak, their motivation in initiating English conversation, and the quality of the language that they produced. The weak students, Al, Beth, Dahl, and Hei, spoke little when spoken to, never initiated a conversation in English, and struggled to formulate anything in English more complicated than greetings and monosyllabic responses to questions. The moderately strong students, Gim, Vav, and Heth, spoke when spoken to, and, though they usually avoided English conversation, their language skills were developed enough to form sentences. The strongest student, Zane, often initiated conversations, and though he, like his classmates, did not have full grammatical control, he could form paragraph length discourse and sustain conversations for more than ten minutes.

The literacy attitudes and the fluency of the students shape the way in which the students will decode the texts that they are presented. In the bottom-up processing of texts, fluency is an important factor. Two other factors contribute to the top-down processing of the texts: the student's familiarity with the text and the culture of the participants. The discussion of these issues will be included in the discussion about the texts used in this study.

Texts

At the headmaster's request, I used the curriculum already in place. All but one of the stories used in this study came from the teachers' manuals published by the Malawi Institute of Education. I chose the listening activities I wanted to use rather than following along in the book. Some of the listening activities

that the book suggested were expository in nature; I did not use these since my focus was on narrative. For listening activities, the teachers were instructed to read a passage aloud from the teacher's manual and to discuss it with the students. No passage, whether expository or narrative, was more than a few paragraphs long. A few guiding questions were included; teachers were encouraged to ask their own. The full texts of the stories and questions used in this study are included in the appendix.

Source and presentation

Within the narrative, I wanted a variety of stories. Some of the stories have animal characters: *The Tortoise and the Hare, Fisi and Mkango, The Lion and the Fox,* and *Town Rabbit and Village Rabbit.* One story was of people doing familiar activities: *Mayi Changa* involves selling clothes at the market. A third group of stories, fairy tales, feature rags to riches scenarios: a bull that danced so Orphan Maria could have a new house; a woodcutter, Takatuliang, wins the princess' hand. *Takatuliang Bukti Cinta*, the longest story, comes from an Indonesian picture book.

The procedure for presenting the stories and questions was similar to that proposed in the teacher's manual. We began the lesson by talking about the title, the pictures if there were any, and the concepts that would be introduced in the story. Before I read the stories, I wrote the comprehension questions on the board. I modified the procedure in the teacher's manual, adding my own questions and repeating the stories over and over again. I read only a part of the story at a time. After each part, I would ask the students to respond to the questions that they could answer. In an ideal assessment situation, the researcher can tightly control the questions and the texts, but since this was an instructional setting, and the main goal was to develop the student's listening skills, I had to be more flexible. Thus, when the students could not answer, I reread the narrative until they could answer the questions. It was not unusual to repeat parts of the story five or six times. After dealing with the questions in the first part, we would continue the story, then answer questions from that part as well. In dealing with the second part, I started the story from the beginning when the students needed the story repeated. When the students could answer those questions, we would continue to the third, fourth, and fifth parts, rereading when necessary. I was the only one who had access to the written text.

Table III.2 summarizes the source and several aspects of the method for presenting each of the stories used in this study, as well as the number of words in each story. The table also shows what feature,

if any distinguishes one story from the other stories. The variations may refer to the form of the text itself as with *Takatuliang*, a picture book. Other variations refer to a deviation from method, as in the dramatization of *Mayi Changa* or the translation of The *Tortoise and the Hare* into Chichewa. The stories are listed in the table and in the appendix in the order they were presented.

Except for the stories of *The Tortoise and the Hare* and *Orphan Maria*, written responses were collected from the participants in this study. The written responses to *Takatuliang, Mkango and Fisi, The Lion and the Fox, Mayi Changa* and *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit* will be analyzed and discussed in Chapter IV. Though I collected written responses to the story of *Salim and Salome*, these responses will not be analyzed since the students read the text instead of listening to it. Nevertheless, the full texts of these eight stories, and the students' written responses to the questions of *Takatuliang, Mkango and Fisi, The Lion and the Fox, Mayi Changa,* and *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit* are included in the appendix.

TABLE III.2

The Stories

Story	Source	# of words[1]	Question Format[2]	Variations
Tortoise and Hare	Hill	113	Short answer	Translated
Takatuliang	Asa	1505	Multiple choice	Indonesian picture book
Mkango and Fisi	MIE 4, p.35-36	261	Multiple choice	
The Lion and Fox	MIE 7, p.117	225	short answer	
Mayi Changa	MIE 7, p.7	157	short answer	Dramatized
Salim and Salome	MIE 7, p.25	213	short answer	Midterm
Orphan Maria	MIE 4, p.145	215	short answer	Practice
The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit.	MIE 7. p.144	282	short answer	Skills training

1 The number of words here represents the number of token words for both the story and the questions.
2 Many of the stories have mixed question formats, what is shown here is the predominant format.

Analysis of Stories

For this study, the texts needed to be narrative in form, at least partially familiar to the students in regard to content, and allow for a focus on listening comprehension. Of the eight stories listed in the appendix, six were labeled "Listening Comprehension" activities in the teacher's guide published by the Malawi Institute of Education: *Mkango and Fisi, The Lion and the Fox, Salim and Salome, Orphan Maria,*

Mayi Changa, and *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit.* There were other listening comprehension activities but they either emphasized informational elements rather than narration or could not generate the types of inference questions under investigation. *Takatuliang Bukti Cinta,* a story from Indonesia, did not come from the Malawi Institute of Education. It was included for its ability to highlight the possible effect of cultural familiarity on comprehension.

Several aspects of the text need to be considered for the effect that they would have on the interactive process of EFL listening comprehension: the form of the text, its readability, and the familiarity of the text for the readers. In Carrell's (1987) study, the students who were familiar with the content and form of the narratives they read were able to comprehend them more easily. Thus, both the form and the content of the narratives need to be considered to predict the familiarity the students will have with the text. To determine the familiarity of form, the stories were analyzed in regard to their adherence to Thorndyke's (1977) story grammar. Chapter II highlights the importance of goals and sequencing for drawing inferences in narratives. This assumes that the form of the narratives includes a setting, theme, plot, and resolution. Students should be cognizant of this form, even if at a subconscious level, in order to draw the inferences necessary for comprehension.

To determine the familiarity of the content of the text, the words and lexical complexity of the stories were analyzed using Flesch's scale for readability and a scale that I devised to gauge the cultural familiarity. In the interaction between listener and text, these scales will help predict the likelihood that students can comprehend. The scales also provide a means of comparison that would show whether one story is more difficult than another.

Conformity to Story Grammar

The stories come from three different genres of narrative. *Mayi Changa* and *Salim and Salome* are realistic stories. The concepts are of things that happen in the daily lives of the students: going to market, going to work, and going to school. The other eight stories represent fantasy. Two of them, *Takatuliang Bukti Cinta* and *Orphan Maria* have human characters that do things outside the realm of the daily lives of the students. In *Orphan Maria,* the fantasy extends to things that do not even happen in anyone's real world: a bull dances and a mansion appears for Maria. While the events of Takatuliang's world could possibly occur in the real world, it is not likely a world with which the students would be familiar. They

may be able to relate to Takatuliang's poverty, but it is not likely that any will marry a princess.

This particular type of rags to riches fantasy is not inherent in Malawian culture. A more familiar fantasy for the students in Malawi is one that includes anthropomorphic animals. These were quite prevalent within the narratives suggested as listening activities: *The Tortoise and the Hare, The Lion and the Fox, Kalulu and Fisi,* and *The Village Rabbit and the Town Rabbit.* The adaptability of such stories for the culture is reflected in the names of the animals. In the story of *Fisi and Kalulu,* the animals have Chichewa names, the same names that represent the animal in Chichewa. Kalulu, which means *rabbit* in Chichewa, is most often the rabbit's name in animal stories. Mkango, which means *lion* in Chichewa, is the lion's name in many animal stories.

One way of analyzing these narratives involves a more precise look at their structure. The most basic story formula includes a setting, a theme, plot, and the resolution of the main goal (Thorndyke, 1977). *The Tortoise and the Hare* opens with an arrogant hare challenging the other animals of the jungle to a race. The conflict comes when the hare, whose goal was to win the race, is passed by the turtle. The resolution is that the turtle wins, and the hare does not realize his goal. *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit* follows this formula more closely. In the setting, the Village Rabbit goes to visit the Town Rabbit. The goal of the rabbits is to live peacefully and prosperously. The conflict comes when robbers break into the Town Rabbit's house, shattering the Village Rabbit's peace of mind and removing his prosperity. The Village Rabbit resolves this problem by adjusting his definition of prosperity, moving back to the peace and security of his village.

To determine the influence of the conformity of the narratives to story grammar upon the comprehension of the students, I asked comprehension questions regarding character intent. These questions are discussed in the last part of this chapter in the section titled, Questions and Responses. The influence of story grammar as reflected in the responses of the students will be discussed in Part 3 of Chapter IV, in the discussion concerning the students' performance on questions regarding character intent.

Readability and cultural familiarity

To gain an idea of complexity of the stories, the Flesch readability formula was applied. This gives an estimate of the ease of reading based on the number of syllables and sentences in a 100-word passage. Applying the scale to all the stories gives an estimation of their difficulty in relation to each other.

The results are shown in Table III.3.

TABLE III.3

Familiarity

Story	Flesch	Most likely (%)	Maybe(%)	Not likely(%)	Rank
Tortoise and Hare	5.2	69	31	0	7
Takatuliang	4.7	55	38	7	8
Mkango and Fisi	4.6	89	11	0	3.5
The Lion and Fox	3.9	87	13	0	5
Mayi Changa	4.3	83	17	0	6
Salim and Salome		100	0	0	1
Orphan Maria	4.4	90	10	2	2
The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit.	4.5	89	9	2	3.5

Since the Flesch readability formula scores passages based on the length of sentences, *The Tortoise and the Hare* presumably has more complex sentences; it was scored at a fifth grade level. The other texts, except for *The Lion and the Fox*, are written on a fourth grade level. The range is small, 1.3 grade levels, so, generally, these texts are of similar difficulty. Because the differences are so minimal, readability will not be considered a significant variable for this study. Thus, it will not be discussed further.

Flesch's formula cannot account for cultural familiarity. To determine the cultural familiarity of the passages, they must be analyzed in the context of the culture, identifying words and concepts that may or may not be represented in the environment of the listeners. These words would be most likely connected to one of their scripts. An analysis of this type, though subjective, is needed in order to distinguish between the stories that contain words that are familiar to the students and stories that are most likely to contain unfamiliar words.

A content analysis of the stories regarding the representation of words and concepts available in their environment of the student was conducted in order to determine the cultural familiarity of the words in the text. A list was made of the content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) in each story. Each word was analyzed and sorted according to its likelihood of being familiar. "Bell" is a concrete word that can be seen, touched, and heard in the student's environment; therefore, it is most likely to be familiar. A word that is possibly familiar to the students, but difficult to describe is "brave." To explain the meaning of

this word, one must do more than just display the object or model it for the students; therefore, it is only somewhat likely that the students will recognize it. Abstract nouns were put in the 'maybe' category along with words or phrases that have no representation in the students' environment. An example of an unfamiliar phrase is "running water." Even the headmaster's wife had to fetch her water from the well. Each word was counted only once when calculating the percentage of familiar, possibly familiar, and unfamiliar concepts in the text. There is a possibility that the students could be unfamiliar with any or all of the words. The purpose of devising this measurement of cultural familiarity is to predict the words that have the greatest possibility of being recognized. The results are shown in Table III.3 (p.34).

In the story of the rabbits, 'rabbit' or 'rabbits' has a token frequency of twenty times. Regardless of the high token frequency and the two different forms, rabbit is still counted as only one word (type frequency). The total number of words is also calculated in this way for this analysis. Thus, the familiarity total does not match the word count in Table III.2 (p.31), which shows token frequency of both stories and questions. The stories are ranked according to the percentage of words that are most likely familiar in Table III.3.

Ninety percent of the words in *Orphan Maria* would most likely be familiar to the students. Thus, this story was most likely to be the easiest for the students to interpret. In the most unfamiliar texts, *The Tortoise and the Hare* and *Takatuliang*, 69% and 55% of the words should have been familiar. While it is not too surprising that a text from another culture, *Takatuliang*, would have the fewest recognizable words, the ranking of *The Tortoise and the Hare* is unexpected. This can only be explained in two ways. First, the diversity and the difficulty of the vocabulary influenced the ratio of familiar words to types of words found in the text. Because the text is so short, even a few words can raise the ratio. Another explanation could be that I told the story of *The Tortoise and the Hare*, so the vocabulary is mine rather than that ordained by the Malawi Institute of Education. I used more distinctive verbs, such as 'plodded' and 'tiptoed' instead of 'walked.' I also used more specific adverbs, such as 'reluctantly' where the Malawian texts might not use an adverb at all. Eighty-three to ninety percent of the vocabulary of the stories from the Malawi Institute of Education was most likely familiar.

In studying higher levels of comprehension in EFL students, it is important to know their levels of fluency and background knowledge so that we can at least have a general idea of how the texts will be

interpreted. As shown in Carrell's (1992) study, the more fluent students with more background knowledge should have a more accurate interpretation of the text whereas the less fluent students with little background knowledge will find comprehension more difficult.

Her study showed that the content and form of the text also plays a role in determining the ability of the students to interpret it. Theoretically, more familiar words and more familiar genres should lead to better comprehension. The exact role that these elements might play in the comprehension process of schoolchildren in Malawi will be determined from the responses they gave to comprehension questions. This, along with other cultural and educational issues will be discussed in the last part of Chapter IV.

In order to determine the interaction of text and knowledge in the listening comprehension process of EFL students in Malawi, I had to rely on observation and intuition. One day's impressions influenced the next day's lesson plans as I attempted to provide situations for students to practice drawing inferences.

Procedure

There were three classes in which I was a regular observer-teacher: Standards 4, 7, and 8. The headmaster asked me to teach the upperclassmen, Standards 7 and 8, because he considered them the most critical. In the next couple of years they would be taking their exit text; he wanted them to pass it. The headmaster also thought that the students in these classes would most easily understand me. I asked to teach Standard 4 because, at the beginning stages of this study, I thought that I would be comparing the inference process at two distinct levels. However, after the first class with Standard 4, I determined that studying their inference process would be difficult. Only two students in the entire class could answer questions spontaneously.

The first day I taught in Standard 4, I told the story I had told the entire assembly of students the day before: *The Tortoise and the Hare*. Before retelling, only one student could identify the animals in the story, "a rabbit and a frog." Recognizing that this was the product of a mistranslation, I did not overtly correct the student. "Good job," I said, then asked if there was anything else that the students could remember from the story of *The Tortoise and the Hare*.

The students could not identify any other parts of the story. When I asked, "What did the rabbit and the frog do at the beginning of the story?" there was only silence. I retold the story, then asked the

students to act it out. The rabbit was to say, "I am the fastest. I challenge you to a race." The audience was to say "Ready, Set, Go!" before the rabbit and frog raced. In the first reenactment, the rabbit won, not stopping for a nap. When I asked if the rabbit had acted as the one in the story, there was no answer. I reminded the students that the rabbit was supposed to sleep before asking them to act out the story again. The rabbit won again. The second group of actors did a better job. Except for the rabbit in the fourth group to act out the story, all the students needed me to say their lines for them to repeat after me. The audience also needed me to say "Ready, Set, Go!" all five times that we acted out the story.

With such little comprehension demonstrated by Standard 4, I reverted to teaching them by the method they all understood and responded to: the echo method. "I will sing a line. You sing after me." I found that the only activities that held their attention were those that included either music or movement. These constraints led me to focus my study on the students in Standards 7 and 8.

Field Entry

The first day that I climbed the steep hill to the primary school for school, I was greeted by the headmaster. He had one of the teachers bring cokes to us while he discussed the school with us as well as other pleasantries. It was soon discovered that we had not visited the district education officer. Since my friends had a vehicle, the headmaster asked if they would take us into town. The drive to the nearby town took about twenty minutes. The district education officer was not there, but her assistant was; he welcomed us with open arms. In the ten-minute visit that followed, he spoke of a foreign English teacher that had come to his secondary school. As we left, he assured me that my students would have as good an experience with me as he had with his English teacher so many years ago.

When we returned to the school for orientation, the headmaster called an assembly under the mango tree. Standards 1 and 2 had been dismissed from school and had gone home. Standards 3 and 4 had just been dismissed, but they stayed to see what the American teacher would do. All the students (approximately 300) sat under a mango tree while the headmaster addressed them, introducing me to them and their teachers. The choir sang when the headmaster had finished introducing everyone. At first I thought it was in Chichewa, but I recognized a few words "In his time, God will make a way in His time," a song I know in English. Their improvisations and modified rhythm made the song unrecognizable at first. Their ability to harmonize made the song worth listening to in any language.

When the choir had finished and the headmaster had made a few more remarks, he asked me to address the group. I told them the story of the tortoise and the hare as I knew I would tell most of the stories during my study, interrupting the story with questions to determine their ability to make inferences. The headmaster translated the story and questions into Chichewa. This translation was completely spontaneous; I had not rehearsed the story, nor even told the headmaster that I would be telling a story.

I began, "One day, all the animals of the forest were visiting together. A hare boasted that he was the fastest animal in the jungle. He challenged the tortoise to a race. The tortoise reluctantly accepted the challenge and the race began."

After introducing the characters and the situation, I asked the students who they thought would win the race. They predicted, "Rabbit." Asking questions in the middle of the text seemed to cause some confusion.

I continued the story, "The rabbit ran far ahead of the turtle until there was a long distance between them. Since he was so far ahead, the rabbit decided to take a nap."

I asked the students what would happen while the rabbit was asleep, but no one wanted to answer. For fear of disturbing the rhythm of the story, I continued.

"The turtle plodded along slowly. He tiptoed past the rabbit. When the rabbit awoke, he was surprised. The turtle was already crossing the finish line."

When I asked for the main idea of the story after I had told it, one of the older children, who I later discovered was Zane, answered, "Hurry, hurry, the rabbit has no speed." Later, when the headmaster was rephrasing the moral of the story in the context of learning English, he rephrased the moral of the story as "Slow but sure wins the race."

Since this incident, I have learned several things about Malawian culture that could be considered background knowledge of my students. The Standard 4 English book actually has this story as one of the listening comprehension lessons toward the beginning of the school year. The students are exposed to many hare stories; Kalulu (the Chichewa word for rabbit) is the central character in many of the fables that English students are exposed to. They recognize the characters as tortoise and hare, not rabbit and turtle.

In my retelling of this story, before I realized the students would more readily recognize the characters as tortoise and hare, I changed the names to rabbit and turtle. This did cause a small problem for

my translator who, not recognizing 'turtle,' thought I said 'toad,' so that the Chichewa translation became the story of The Rabbit and the Frog.

When the children had all been dismissed, I had a mini-orientation course. We arranged my schedule so that I would be teaching about five thirty-five minute periods per day. The headmaster gave me a notebook for writing lesson plans and asked two of his experienced teachers to show me how to write lesson plans. It was not different from what I had learned as a teacher; in some ways it was much simpler. There were five columns across the two pages of the notebook with the headings, "Work Planned," "Method," "Reference," "Work Done," and "Remarks." The column of "Work Planned" included the objectives of the lesson, usually copied right out of the teacher's manual. Interspersed, and often indistinguishable from the objectives, were the activities that the students would be doing. Some of the items from lessons planned for the first day include admitting and denying, describing people and objects, reading a letter to a newspaper, and letter writing. The column for "Method" included items like question and answer, pair work, group work, game, discussion, demonstration, and role-play. These loosely corresponded to the activities and objectives of the work planned. The bibliographic information was located under references. I was instructed to write what I had done with the class under "Work done," and comment on how I think the lesson went under "Remarks." I was not shown anyone else's lesson plan book where this was filled in.

General observations

The school day generally began before 7:00 am. The students who arrived early swept the classrooms and the schoolyard in preparation for the new school day. Then, all the students lined up by grade, parallel to the church and under the mango tree. One of the teachers gave commands such as "hands up" and "hands down," "attention," and "at ease" which the students followed. Sometimes, the teacher would give the instructions in Chichewa, but this was a chance for the students (and teacher) to show off what English they knew. When the ranks were silent, the headmaster would give a few announcements in both English and Chichewa before asking the student song leader, Vav, to begin the national anthem. The first few weeks of my stay, the students sang the national anthem in Chichewa. The headmaster encouraged them to sing in English, and, for the last four weeks, they did.

My classes were all at the beginning of the day, giving me little opportunity to observe the other

teachers. On three occasions I was able to observe classes in progress that I was not teaching. This gave me a small glimpse of how Malawian teachers view the learning process.

The first class that I had an opportunity to observe was a social studies class in Standard 6. The teacher offered to let me teach the class, but I declined, asking if it would be okay for me to watch him teach. He was flattered and, after instructing a student to get me something to sit on, continued his lesson. He lectured the students about a period in Malawi's history, writing the main points on the board in outline form for the students to copy. The instruction was primarily in English, with several explanations given in Chichewa that I could not understand.

The second class that I observed, though only briefly, was Standard 2 under the mango tree. I was also taking pictures at the time, trying to get candid shots of the students, so I sneaked up from behind. The teacher was teaching a Chichewa reading lesson to the students. She had a chart with syllables written on it: nda, nde, ndi, ndo, ndu. The teacher would say each syllable as she pointed to it; the students would echo.

The third class I could not see, but could only hear. I was in the church building; Standard 5 was on the other side of the wall. It wasn't their usual spot, so this was a rare opportunity. From the other side of the wall I could hear the English teacher for Standard five say, "The sweater is red. What color is the sweater?" She said this several times before the students repeated the words after her.

Most of the teachers at the school where I worked were student teachers. The Malawi Department of Education designates three levels of student teachers. All teachers have successfully completed four years of secondary school. At the lowest level, student teachers have completed a two-week orientation course. The second level has completed a three-month residential course in addition to the original orientation. The third level spends six weeks at the college preparing for their final examination. During their training, student teachers are observed by the headmaster of the school, other experienced teachers, the primary education officer for their zone, and their college tutor. To be a qualified teacher, a person must successfully pass the examination and complete one to three years of training, depending on the terms of their contract; the normal program is two years. The student teachers are solely responsible for the daily activities of their classroom; the qualified teachers are usually a few steps away teaching their own classes.

It is not difficult for the experienced teachers to teach their own classes while watching the student teachers teaching theirs. There is a great shortage of classrooms in Malawi; the school where I taught does

not receive special treatment. There are two classrooms, about 15 by 20 feet. These are usually used by Standards 7 or 8, but the lower Standards might move there for a few days when the primary education officer or a college tutor comes to visit. Standard 6 usually meets in a church about ten feet away from the classrooms. The floor is dirt; the windows have no glass. The doors are made of bamboo poles. Both the classrooms and the church have desks for the students to sit in. A bench is attached to a slanted tabletop with a little cubbyhole about three inches high underneath. The benches are about three feet long and eight inches wide, enough room for two students to sit comfortably. Sometimes three of the smaller students sit at one desk.

The other five Standards meet outside, a blackboard propped against the tree. The students sit on rocks or bricks, organized in rows and columns just as the desks are arranged in the classrooms. Standard 2 meets under the mango tree. A metal rod is suspended from the lowest branch of the mango tree; this is the bell that signals the beginning and end of classes. This spot under the mango tree is the site for many other activities: the teacher's lounge after Standard 2 goes home, the gathering place for school assemblies, a children's Bible class on Sundays, and community political rallies.

Participant Observer

I began teaching my second day on the field. The schedule was somewhat flexible, but ideally, I was assigned to teach five periods in the morning before taking a break. Theoretically, I had an hour or two after the first five periods that I could use for observing the other classes. Usually that observation period consisted of substituting for another teacher. Consequently, eighty to ninety percent of my observations were done as teacher. Since I was assigned to Standards 7 and 8, the procedures and observations will focus primarily on them.

In the beginning, I tried to follow the activities in the book, using my study as enrichment activities. Thus, after finishing the scheduled activity from the book on the first day, I returned to the story of *The Tortoise and the Hare* in Standard 7. I first asked for volunteers to retell the story from assembly the previous day. When there were no volunteers, since no one seemed to remember it, I wrote the theme of the story and the main points on the board:

> 1) The rabbit challenged the turtle to a race
> 2) The rabbit slept
> 3) The turtle won.

Next, I asked the students to act out the story. The rabbit was encouraged to say, "I am the fastest. I challenge you to a race." The turtle was to accept the challenge with the words "OK" or, if they were really brave, "I accept your challenge." To begin the race, the entire class was to say together, "On your mark, get set, go!" I chose a different cast for each replaying of the story, usually volunteers, though I had to volunteer a few. The fourth rabbit was able to say his lines without prompting. It was also on the fourth replay that the class was able to say their lines without prompting. The rabbit won the first race. When I asked if that was how it was supposed to happen, most of the class eventually agreed that this was not how the story went. After that, the turtle always won the race.

When I reviewed the story the next day, the students were able to recall the three main points of the story, though the second point took some prompting. They were not able to recall the theme, "Slow and sure wins the race" so I wrote it on the board for them.

I returned to the story a week later and retold the fable. I asked them to summarize the story. There was dead silence. The first answer was "Hurry, hurry, the hare has no speed." I regarded this as a good theme, but not an appropriate response for summarizing. It did, however, reflect that the students and I were on the same story and they did at least remember something about it from the previous week. One brave student said, "The rabbit fell asleep." I wrote it on the board and asked the students what else happened in the story. There was silence. Eventually, someone else volunteered, "The rabbit challenged the tortoise to a race." There were no other verbal responses, so I asked, "Who won the race?" After a time of silence, one of the students responded that "The hare lost the race." I wrote the responses in the order they were elicited, then asked the students to put the events in order. Sequencing was not a difficult activity.

Standard 8 also dramatized the play. The rabbit did not need help with his lines. The students did their "Ready, Set, Go" with no prompting after the first demonstration. They could not pick out the main idea, but with guidance, they could identify four events in the story:

> 1) The animals had a meeting. The rabbit challenged the turtle to a race.
> 2) The turtle agreed.
> 3) The rabbit slept.
> 4) The turtle won.

One of the first reading activities we did together in Standard 8 was a poem in their book called *My job*, by Catherine Chisale-Howse (MIE 8, p.74):

The cock crows
The dog barks
Reminding me of my job

Plants and flowers wither
Leaves and grass bow
Dirty clothes in a basket
An iron on the table
Reminding me of my job

The ticking of a clock
On the wall
The sound of a bell
At school
Remind you of your job

I come on foot
You come here riding
You and I work hard
All for bread

I asked the students to read everything that reminded the author of her job, then wrote their responses on the board. They were silent for the first few minutes, so I started them with "cock." They were able to list other things such as dog, plants, flowers, leaves, grass, dirty clothes, and iron. Once the list was on the board, I asked them what the author's job was. There was no response. I asked them "Is she a doctor?" When one of the students was brave enough to say, "no," I affirmed him, then encouraged him to tell me why. He was silent. I pointed out that medicine would have reminded a doctor of her job. I followed a similar routine asking if the author was a nurse, politician, or teacher. Some agreed that she was a teacher, but I reminded them that a teacher would be reminded of her job by pencils or books. I, then drew their attention to "dirty clothes" and "iron." "Who uses these things?" I asked. After a few moments, one of the students replied, "housewife."

Next, I asked them "What reminds you of your job according to the poem?" The students volunteered "clock" and "bell." I asked them to look for more, not realizing that they had already named everything. No more answers were volunteered, so I asked where this job was. There was no answer. I asked if it was at a hospital; the students said "no." I asked if it was at a restaurant; the students said, "no." I asked again, "Where is it? What does the poem say?" One student answered, "the cock crows," so I revised the question. "Where does the poem say that your job is?" Finally, one of the students said, "school."

After asking my two questions, I found that the questions in the book were very similar. Question

1 was "What reminds the speaker of her job?" One student said, "watch." Another said, "bell." I reminded the students that the bell reminds "you" of "your" job. Finally, they read the list that was still on the board. The second question "What time of day do plants wither?" was answered with the same methodical guesswork as the other questions had been. First one student said "morning." Sensing this was an incorrect response, a second student volunteered, "afternoon."

The third question was "What job does the writer do?" Even though we had discussed this question at length no more than ten minutes before, there was no response. I asked the question again and waited. The students grew restless, then finally one responded, "housewife."

The fourth question, "What word reminds you about the weather?" received an immediate response, "heat." I asked whether the poem was written about wintertime. The students replied, "no."

The fifth question was a rephrasing of one we had discussed in class much earlier: "what thing is associated with school?" The students were silent for a while, almost as if they had never heard a question like this before. Finally, one of them answered, "bell."

The last question was a new one: "Why do people work?' The answer, "for bread," was volunteered moderately quickly, but the true meaning of having to work to buy bread was something that I had to explain to them. Overall, though slow, they did eventually answer inference type questions. Even though the text was a poem (as opposed to a narrative), it proved to be good practice for the students in answering inference type questions.

Election Day fell on Thursday at the end of my third week in Malawi. All but twelve of the students decided Friday should be a holiday as well. The teachers were happy to let me teach the twelve students who showed up whatever I wanted to teach for as long as I wanted. This gave me the opportunity to discuss *Takatuliang* (see the appendix, Story 2, 127), an Indonesian story that I had brought. I soon discovered that the students would not answer spontaneously. In creating the questions, I had predicted some of the responses that the students might give. From these I designed 19 multiple-choice questions for the students to respond to. The tenth question, which required prediction, was left open. Even with the multiple-choice questions, I encouraged them to write their own answer if they had one that was different from the choices on the board. There were a couple of spontaneous responses. Though there were only 32 pages in the book, it took us 3 hours to read it and answer the 20 questions.

Mkango and Fisi (see Appendix, story 3) came from Standard 4's English teacher's manual, but I adapted it for Standards 7 and 8. I chose it because of the obvious intent inferences that could be generated from it. I wrote the questions on the board, read the questions, and followed the procedure I outlined earlier. However, I discovered that there was little student response. Because the students had difficulty spontaneously responding to questions in the beginning stages of this study, I provided multiple-choice answers for them to choose from. Most of the choices were created as I wrote the questions on the board, though I did use a few guiding principles. First, the questions did not introduce any concepts or characters that were not in the text. I did not try to trick the students with words that sounded alike but had no meaning in common. Second, when I could, I tried to include two or three questions that represented different interpretations of the text. Thus, one answer would be correct if the student made a literal interpretation of the text. Another answer would be correct if the student was able to make an inferential interpretation.

An example of this type of question occurs in the story of *Mkango and Fisi*. In this story, a jealous hyena wanted to get the rabbit in trouble, so he falsely told the rabbit's employer that rabbit knew the medicine that would cure the employer's wound. When called to produce the cure, the rabbit said that he would need a hyena's heart to make the medicine. Thus, the question "Did rabbit need hyena's heart to make the medicine?" has different responses according to interpretation. If students made a literal, text-level interpretation, their answer would be "yes." However, students were able to go beyond the text to see that rabbit was defending himself, they could answer "No."

I used a similar pattern for providing possible responses with *The Lion and the Fox* (see Appendix, story 4). *The Lion and the Fox*, though found in the book for Standard 7, was used for Standard 8 as well. It, too, is a good story for examining the inference process regarding character intent. As with previous stories, open-ended questions were consistently met with silence. I wrote multiple-choice questions in order to get some kind of response. In this story, to ensure that the entire class participated, I asked the students to vote for the answer that they considered the best. I asked Beth, Hei, Zane, and Heth to write their answers on a piece of paper in addition to voting.

In the middle of the fifth week of the study, I tried to wean the students away from multiple-choice questions. I began in Standard 8 the story of *Mayi Changa* (see Appendix, story 5). Though the story came

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from the English book intended for Standard 7, it took a long time for the students to figure out the meaning of the story. They might have been too preoccupied with the upcoming midterms to give their attention to this listening comprehension activity.

A few days before the headmaster scheduled midterms, he brought me a copy of the English section of the exit exam that he had received from the department of education. He asked me if I could design a similar test for students in Standard 8 to practice during the midterms. The test had three parts. In the first part the students were instructed to write a letter to a friend, outlining what activities to tell their friends about. The second part consisted of a short reading passage with comprehension questions for the students to answer. The last part was multiple-choice questions to test the students' recognition of structural patterns.

I used a story, *Salim and Salome* (Appendix, Story 6, p.134) from the Standard 7 English book for the reading section of the test. I wrote questions that followed the format of the Malawi exit exam. The headmaster and deputy headmaster administered the test while I was out of town. When I returned, they asked me to mark the exams, which I did, taking note of the responses that the students had made. Their responses will not be analyzed in this study since they are responses to a written text. In addition to this, the questions, which I drew from the teacher's manual, were not as effective for eliciting inference as they need to be to shed light on the nature of comprehension as an interactive process; most of them could be answered through decoding.

The story on the actual Malawi Exit Examination was closer to the stories of *Mkango and Fisi* and *The Lion and the Fox*. The theme of outsmarting one's opponent was quite apparent. The questions for the story did require some inferential interpretation. Many of the animal stories feature the themes of trickery and deceit. The Malawian English curriculum included about five or six animal stories per year.

Up until the last week of school, I had generally followed along in the book, doing the weekly activities as they suggested them, except for some improvisations on the listening exercises so that I could use my own inference questions with the narratives. In the last week, though, I began to overtly present material concerning cause and effect, word association, and intent.

At this point, it seemed to me that I had emphasized extrapolative inferences quite frequently. However, I wanted to know the students' basic ability for making inference. To gain a general impression

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of how the students' process might work, I designed activities that would allow me to observe how the students performed in specific skills related to the inference process. I used logic puzzles to assess the general ability of the students to note and fix inadequacies, a basic task of inferring. I also did association games to assess the students' ability to match concepts that they would encounter in the stories with concepts and ideas they already knew. These activities were often, though not always, accompanied by stories which allowed the students to practice making the inference in the context of narrative.

I began with some logic puzzles that I used as listening activities, though I did write some of the main points on the board. In the first activity, I introduced my three nieces, showing their pictures. I wrote my nieces' names, though not in birth order, the ages of the oldest and the youngest, and two questions on the board:

Miss Hill's nieces
Brittney   1) How old is Brittney?
Katy-3 years old   2) In what order were they born?
Marissa- baby

One important piece of information was given orally: "Brittney is one year younger than Katy." I repeated it for them several times. I expected the activity to be difficult for the students. After they had thought about the question for a while, I began modeling the process. First I asked the students how old Katy was. They read it from the board. I once again repeated "Brittney is one year younger than Katy." I then asked, "If Brittney is one year younger than Katy, and Katy is three, how old is Brittney?" One person guessed "one." Another guessed "four." When a student finally answered "two," I wanted to make sure it was not just a guess. "How do you know?" I asked. It was just a guess, perhaps a reflection that the students had not properly decoded the phrase, "is younger than." I asked what "younger" meant. When there was no answer, I told them what younger meant, supporting the explanation with several examples like "Katy is three, Marissa is a baby. Katy is three years older than Marissa." When the baby part confused the students, I wrote Katy and Marissa's age in months (at that time, 44 and 6). "Katy is 38 months older than Marissa." After a few more examples, the students were able to decode "is younger than" and tell me that Brittney was two. Then we were able to put the girls in the order of their birth.

My partner did a similar activity about the three children in her family, then I did two more logic puzzles. For one of the logic puzzles, I drew a group of squares on the board to represent the seating chart of my family at the dinner table. The diagram was accompanied by the following information:

James- youngest child
Jonnie- oldest child
Ron- father
Sharon- mother
Steven- two years older than James
Tim- two years younger than Jonnie
Children sit in the order they were born.

One consistent problem experienced by all the students was the decoding of "Mother sits on father's left." Their first attempt at decoding this sentence led them to put mother on the left side of the table and father on the right. I did this activity with both Standards 7 and 8, and this was a consistent mistake. After telling the students that they were wrong, I allowed them time to think about what "on Father's left" could mean. An error at this stage of the problem would throw the entire solution out of kilter. About half of the students were able to solve the problem after this misunderstanding had been cleared up. Later, when the headmaster had agreed to solve the puzzle, he made the same error of putting mother on the left end of the table. He was surprised that some of his students had been able to solve them. The students found these exercises quite difficult, but with lots of encouragement, they were able to complete them.

In Standard 8, the next activities and discussion were cause and effect. To introduce the concept, we sang the song, "The Wise Man's House," which consists of two episodes: 1) The wise man built his house upon the rock. The rains came tumbling down. The house stood firm. 2) The foolish man built his house upon the sand. The rains came tumbling down. The house went 'splat.' Some vocabulary and concepts that needed to be explained were quickly clarified with drawings on the board.

I also used drawings for the second activity, in which I asked the students, "If you _____, what will happen?" This led to a review and graphic representation of a story we had done the week before, *Mayi Changa* (Appendix, story 5). I added two new prediction questions: "Where is Mayi Changa going?" and "What will she do there (at the market)"? My partner was not teaching a class at the time, so I recruited her to help me dramatize the last part of Mayi Changa, which the students were still having difficulty in interpreting. When my partner grabbed my hand and pretended to bite it, they finally understood the story. For the first time they could understand why the owner of the hand ran away screaming.

During the next lesson, I wrote the questions on the board for the story *Orphan Maria* (see Appendix, story 7). To prepare them for the story, we discussed the questions and talked about what genre the story might be. Half the class thought that it might be a true story. From the questions, this was an

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appropriate assumption. The other half thought that the story might be a fairy tale. I asked them to listen to the story to find out what type of story it was. I read the first part of the story and asked the questions. They were silent, so I asked them if I needed to read it for them again. I actually needed to read it several times, but they were eventually able to answer the questions on their own. When I asked at the end if it had been a fairy tale or true story, the class was still split: half said, "true story," half said, "fairy tale." We discussed the elements of fairy tale until the entire class was convinced that it was a fairy tale. The lesson was rather long. I was scheduled to teach two periods of English that morning, for a total of seventy minutes, but when I took two hours, the other teachers seemed unconcerned.

The next day, I began with an association game. Since the school is less than two miles from Lake Malawi, I knew that "lake" would be a relatively easy association. When I asked the students what they thought of when I said, "lake," they wanted to respond with a definition of lake. I told them that their response should be only one word. Some students passed when it was their turn to volunteer a word, but overall, the class came up with a pretty long list of associations: washing, swimming, fishing, transportation, and electricity. I gave them a second word to associate: book. There was little participation. It seems that they could only think of two words: "story" and "words."

To assess the role that the availability and accessibility of background knowledge in the process of comprehension, I designed a questionnaire which I gave to the students before I read them the last story, *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit* (Appendix, Story 8, p.135). The first three questions dealt with their global knowledge of stories:

Figure III. 1 Matching

    8.1 What 3 things are found in every story?

    8.2 Who will the characters be in this story?

    8.3 Will this story be real or imaginary?
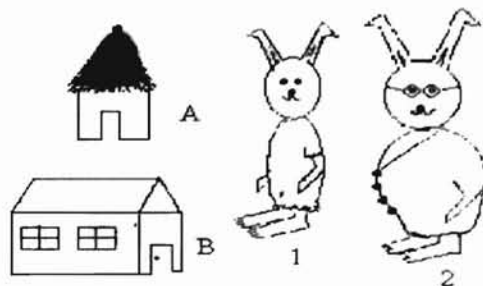
The students could base their predictions and associations on which I had drawn on the board (see Figure III.1). These illustrations were also the context for the next three association questions regarding the wealth of the rabbit and the type of house he might live in:

    8.4   Match the rabbits to the houses.

8.5   Where would you find a house like A?

8.6   Where would you find a house like B?

Two more questions dealt with the nature in which students might discern a character's intent.

8.7   Why do robbers/ thieves break into people's houses?

8.8   If a stranger came into your house at night, what would you do?

The last two questions of the questionnaire reveal the availability of a cause-effect script in the participants' knowledge. These, too, were accompanied by an illustration (see Figure III.2).

Figure III.2 Cause Effect
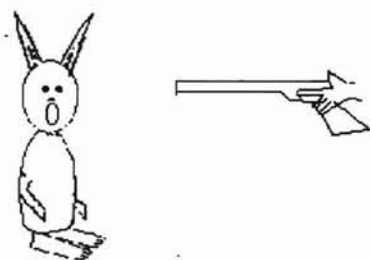
8.9   What will happen to the rabbit?

8.10   Why is the rabbit afraid?

The students needed 45 minutes to write their answers for these first ten questions. After presenting the students with these general questions, I read the story of *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit*. It was broken into four sections of 38-166 words for this activity. The sections were divided loosely according to Thorndyke's story grammar, which was discussed earlier in this chapter in regard to the familiarity of the form of the texts. The comprehension questions for the story were written on the board and read aloud to the students, one section at a time. The first section of the narrative was read to the students. The questions were read aloud again before reading section one a second time. The same procedure was followed for section 2, except that the section was read four times along with the questions. Sections 1, 2, and 3 were all read together four times with Question 17, "What happened next?" reread at the end of section 3. I checked that the students had written answers to Question 17, the causal consequence question, before going on to section 4. Section 4 was read twice to the group followed by Questions 18 and 19. The students requested that I read the entire story three more times. They were dismissed when they were finished. The answer sheets were collected and added to the other answer sheets to be analyzed.

The responses to both parts of the comprehension activity associated with the story of *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit* were recorded. What they reveal about the nature of EFL Listening will be discussed throughout Chapter IV. Before discussing what the responses reveal, though, I will clarify the

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procedure for designing questions and analyzing the students' responses.

Questions and Responses

The questions asked of the students during the course of this study grew out of the stories themselves. I knew what types of questions that I wanted to ask, those that would give the students the opportunity to draw inferences, particularly the extrapolative inferences defined by Trabasso and Nicholas (1980). I let the questions develop naturally from the story, within the framework of assessing students' ability to perform higher comprehension processes in spite of lower fluency levels. The questions have been coded according to the number of the story in which they were asked and their placement in that story. Thus, the third question of the second story is Question 2.3.

I varied the format of the questions as well as the type of questions that would be asked. Because of the low fluency of the participants, if I wanted to receive any answers, I had to ask simple questions. Open-ended questions were difficult for the students to answer. In the rare cases when they did answer, it was difficult to evaluate these responses. Thus, the research would need to depend on easier types of question formats such as multiple-choice or short answer.

Keeping this in mind, I used a simple format, either multiple-choice, short answer, or yes-no questions, in order to assess higher and lower level comprehension processes. Overall, across the five stories that received written responses, I asked a total of forty-six questions. I omitted five multiple-choice questions from the analysis because they did not fit into any of the four analyses, and thus, gave no insight into the study of EFL comprehension. Of the forty-one remaining questions, fourteen were short answer; twenty-two were multiple-choice; five could be answered with yes or no. The questions were analyzed in four different ways: the reasonability of response, contrast of decoded and inferred responses, contrast of textual inference and scriptal inference, and performance for extrapolative inference. The multiple-choice questions will determine what the students can recognize in relation to the interactive process of comprehension. Some of the choices reflected decoding. Other choices reflected a response that would have to be inferred either from the text or from a script. Some choices were not reasonable. The fourteen short answer questions allow us to explore what the students can produce on their own in relation to the interaction of text and knowledge in comprehension. Table III.4 identifies each question according to the

types of analyses in this study.

TABLE III.4.

Grouping of Questions for Analysis

Question Extrapolative	Format	All Reasonable	Contrasts		
			Decoded or Inferred	Text or Script	
2.1	MC	No	-	-	-
2.3	MC	No	Yes	-	-
2.4	MC	No	-	-	-
2.5	MC	No	Yes	-	I
2.6	MC	No	-	-	I
2.7	MC	Yes	Yes	-	C
2.8	MC	No	Yes	-	-
2.9	MC	Yes	-	-	C
2.10	SA	-	-	-	-
2.11	YN	No	-	-	-
2.13	MC	No	-	Yes	A
2.17	MC	No	-	-	I
2.18	MC	No	-	Yes	C
2.19	MC	No	Yes	-	I
2.20	MC	Yes	-	Yes	-
3.1	MC	No	-	-	-
3.2	MC	No	-	-	-
3.3	MC	No	-	-	I
3.4	MC	Yes	-	Yes	I
3.5	MC	Yes	-	Yes	C
3.6	MC	No	-	Yes	A
3.7	YN	Yes	Yes	-	I
4.1	MC	Yes	Yes	-	C
4.2	MC	Yes	-	Yes	-
4.3	MC	No	-	-	I
4.4	SA	-	-	-	-
4.5	YN	Yes	Yes	-	I
5.1	SA	-	-	-	-
5.2	YN	No	-	-	-
5.3	SA	-	-	-	I
5.4	SA	-	-	-	C
5.5	SA	-	-	-	A
8.11	SA	-	-	-	-
8.12	YN	No	-	-	-
8.13	SA	-	-	-	-
8.14	SA	-	-	-	I
8.15	SA	-	-	-	A
8.16	SA	-	-	-	I
8.17	SA	-	-	-	C
8.18	SA	-	-	-	A
8.19	SA	-	-	-	A
Total	**41**	**27**	**8**	**7**	**25**

The type of choices varied from questions to question so that some questions contrasted decoding and inferring, others scriptal or textual inference, and still others, reasonable and unreasonable responses. These contrasts will show what inclination students have toward a particular component of EFL listening comprehension. While all of these questions and responses will be discussed and contrasted in Chapter IV, the procedure of sorting and analysis gives an overview of the types of questions and responses that I encountered.

Multiple-choice and yes-no questions were sorted and analyzed a second time according to the types of choices the students encountered. Sometimes the students have to make a choice between a reasonable and an unreasonable response. Seventeen of the questions had both reasonable and unreasonable responses. In Table III.4, these are identified as "no" in the "All Reasonable" Column. Question 8.12, "Did Village Rabbit have new clothes?" has a right answer and a wrong answer. If the student says "yes," he probably missed the clue, "His clothes were worn out." If the student says, "no," then he has properly decoded the passage.

Nine of the questions had only reasonable responses. This could be a multiple-choice question, such as Question 4.1, "What will happen to goat, sheep and cow?" A student who decoded the story, interpreting it literally, would choose the response "Lion will tell them his last words." A student who distrusted the Lion might think, "Lion will eat them," a response that is supported by other clues in the text. Both answers are reasonable. In Table III.4, these questions are identified as "yes" in the "All Reasonable" Column. Eight questions contrast a respondent's preference for decoded or inferred interpretation. Question 2.19, "Why didn't the princess choose one of the princes?" illustrates this type of contrast. Very prominently displayed in the text is the concept that Takatuliang sacrificed a part of himself. In fact, Sangiang Mapaele, the princess in the story, says of Takatuliang, "He sacrificed a part of himself." Thus, the students who properly decoded the story and the question chose this response. The students who remembered that the princess was choosing a prince based upon the value of the gift he brought might choose "Their gifts were not valuable" or "Takatuliang's gift was more beautiful" based on an inferred interpretation. Questions of this nature that form this part of the analysis may be identified by the "yes" in the column marked "Contrasts: Decoding or Inferring."

Seven questions gave the students the opportunity to choose between scriptal or textual inferences.

An example of this type of question is Question 4.2, "Where are the other animals when Lion talks to Fox? A student may infer from the text that the other animals are in the cave since the fox has seen them go in, but has not seen them come out. A student could make an equally valid inference that the other animals have been eaten based on the script that lions are carnivorous. There are other clues in the script that support the idea that the Lion was laying a trap for the other animals: the fox's cleverness and a 'dying' lion that was up walking around. Questions that contrast scriptal and textual inference are marked "yes" in the column, "Contrasts: Text vs. Script."

The fourteen short answer questions will show the level of interaction within the listening comprehension process. This type of question requires the student to produce responses that reflect differing levels of decoding or inference. Whereas in multiple-choice questions students could only pinpoint various types of responses, and there is the possibility that the students were guessing, short answer questions reflect more accurately the continuity of the student's interpretation of the text. This continuity is the catalyst for observing the amount of interaction actually engaged by the student during comprehension, and will be discussed in Chapter IV.

I analyzed and sorted all questions, both multiple-choice and short answer, according to Nicholas and Trabasso's (1980) taxonomy, focusing on what they classified as extrapolative inferences. I chose extrapolative inferences because they are most likely to be found in all narratives: causal consequence, causal antecedent, and character intent. There were seven questions about the causal consequence (C), six questions about the causal antecedent (A), and twelve questions about a character's intent (I). Question 8.17, "What will happen next?" is a typical question for problem causal consequence. The student has to determine from the sequence of previous events what the next event might be. Another type of question that tests the students' knowledge of sequencing in narrative is the causal antecedent. To formulate an answer to Question 5.5, "Why did the owner of the hand go away screaming?" the students must determine what actions in the text might have caused the owner of the hand to scream. Questions like 2.5, "What did the princes want to do?" call upon students to identify the goals and ideas that motivate characters to behave in a certain way.

After sorting and classifying the questions, I analyzed the responses of the students. Several analyses were conducted according to various characteristics of the responses: level of interaction,

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reasonableness, and the type of inference elicited. A final analysis of the themes that emerged in the previous three analyses led me to infer the effect of cultural and educational values on listening comprehension. The results of all four analyses are recorded in Chapter IV. Before discussing the results, I will clarify the procedure and issues of the first three analyses in more detail.

Interaction

The responses of the students to the comprehension questions revealed one of three types of interpretation: decoding, textual inference, and scriptal inference. In cases when the student has decoded properly, and has gone on to draw an inference, the mode of the inference is based on its relationship either to the text or to the script. A response that reflects that the listener has connected two ideas in the text would reflect a textual interpretation. A response that reflects that a listener has connected ideas within the text based on concepts outside the text would reflect a scriptal interpretation.

The procedure for grouping short answer and multiple-choice questions differed, even though the questions ended up in the same groups. Multiple-choice questions were sorted according to the types of responses written in the question. If the students were given the opportunity to simply decode an answer or actually infer one, and both options were written out, then the question was put into the group of "Mixed" interpretations, even if the students all chose the same response. With short answer questions, the multiplicity of responses could not be seen until the students had responded. So short answer questions were grouped according to the responses that were received, as opposed to what could have been received.

For example, Question 8.11, "Why did Village Rabbit eat roasted maize sometimes?" is a short answer question for which all the students made the same textual inference that Village Rabbit was poor. This is a textual inference in which the students connect the proposition that "Village Rabbit was poor" with the proposition, "He ate roasted maize when there was not enough flour in the house." The students could have simply decoded the text, and responded "not enough flour." If one of the students had answered in this way, there would have been a mixture of responses. However, since there was only one type of interpretation, this short answer question can only be regarded as a textual inference response. See the appendix, Story 8 (page 135) for the text, questions and responses to *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit*.

Question 4.5, "Was the lion sick?" is an example of a question that shows the inclination of a

student toward a particular type of interpretation. The response may be gleaned by simply decoding, or it may be inferred from a script. The interpretations are vastly different. Through decoding the story, the participant learns in the first sentence that the lion "told all the animals in the forest that he was sick and dying." By simply decoding the text, the student would respond that "Yes, the lion was sick." However, if the students noticed that the lion was doing healthy activities like getting up and coming out of his cave, and connected this to the proposition that "Fox was clever" then he could infer that the Lion was not sick. By observing with the fox that the other animals had not come out of the cave, and combining this with the scriptal knowledge that lions are carnivorous, the students could infer that the lion was not sick, but was devising a means of having his meal come to him. See the appendix, story 4 (page 154)for the text and responses to *The Lion and the Fox.*

The analysis of responses in relation to the type of process they require will show the intensity of the interaction between decoding and inferring. Proponents of interactive approaches to reading comprehension stress the need for a balance of both processes. The frequency and consistency of the students' inferred and decoded processes will show whether the students are relying too heavily on one process or the other.

Determining reasonableness of interpretation

Another factor in assessing the nature of EFL listening comprehension is the accuracy of their responses. However, there is a potential problem in determining the reasonability: the evaluation is subjective. What if the response expected by the researcher clashes with the response given by the student because of a difference in cultural values? To judge whether or not a response is reasonable, it is necessary for the researcher to have enough knowledge of the students' culture to distinguish between cultural clashes and inappropriate guesses. Therefore, in this study, a reasonable response is one that fulfills the following criteria:

- The response addresses the question.
- The interpretation has an identifiable relationship with the text.
- The interpretation has an identifiable relationship with the culture.

On the short answer questions, reasonable responses are those which contain the keywords. This keyword method allows the researcher to compensate for deficiencies in grammar. Thus, for Question 8.9

"What will happen to the rabbit?" the response "afraid for shooting" is regarded as reasonable even though the grammar is not. However, the assessment is not so lenient that the response "I am afraid" could be found acceptable. Even though, this, too, is definitely a grammar problem, describing the rabbit's (or one's own) current feelings is not an appropriate response for a question that asks for a future event. Whereas in the former response grammatical errors, the meaning is semantically similar, there is a vast difference in meaning between "I am afraid" and "The rabbit is afraid."

Most responses were easy enough to judge on such a lenient question, but one response to Question 8.15, "Why did robbers break into Town Rabbit's house?" was problematic: "area was bad." This could be a reasonable assessment, in general. However, based on the context of the question, and the paragraph describing Town Rabbit's "beautiful house" this is not a reasonable response. One might say that there is a clash of cultural values, but that assumption has little grounding; there was only one student in thirty-five who responded in this way.

The best example that would illustrate the clash of cultural values showed up in a question that was not included in the analysis. In response to Question 8.8, "If a stranger breaks into your house at night, what will you do?" Only two students of thirty-five said that they would call the police. (This is a curious response since the only phone in the area was at the grocery store three miles away.) Most of the other respondents said that they would welcome the stranger and see if he needed help. Given the context of the situation, this was regarded as a reasonable response.

Though a subjective evaluation, the classification of the responses according to reasonableness is necessary. Reasonable responses imply that the question and the text have been decoded successfully. As such, reasonableness gives us a standard with which to measure and compare the students' performance in drawing inferences.

Types of Inference

The third analysis of the data involved dividing the questions into four main categories based on Nicholas and Trabasso's taxonomy of inference. Three types of inference in this study fall under the category of extrapolative inference: causal antecedent, causal consequence, and character intent.

Extrapolative inference, which requires the ability to identify sequencing and character motivation is directly related to narrative. The students' responses to extrapolative inference reveal aspects of their

knowledge about the form of narrative, one of the scripts which they should, theoretically, access during comprehension. There were seven questions regarding causal consequence, six for causal antecedent, and twelve for character intent. Each type of question is defined below. The students' responses to these questions are shown and discussed in Chapter IV.

Causal consequences

Questions about causal consequence require the student to follow a certain series of events to its logical conclusion. A decoded response to a causal consequence requires only that the student identify the consequence of a particular behavior from a concept that is directly represented in the text. Story 4 (p. 132) begins with Lion calling all the animals to "visit him and hear his last words." If the message is simply decoded, the response to Question 4.1, "What will happen to goat, sheep, and cow?" can be reasonably answered, "Lion will tell them his last words."

Causal consequences that required the students to go outside the text abound. The response to Question 5.4, "What will Mayi Changa do when she sees a hand go under the sack?" is one of the clearest examples of a scriptal inference. Mayi Changa is a successful businesswoman who keeps her money under a sack. There is no mention of shouting in the text, but Vav responded, "He shouting them go out, got out." (Appendix, Responses to *Mayi Changa*). The students' performance on these questions will indicate their familiarity with sequencing, an important component of narrative.

Causal antecedent

Causal antecedent is also a sequencing skill, but it requires the student to determine the action or intent that led to a particular event. Question 5.5, Why did the owner of the hand run away screaming?" is an example of a question that will elicit this type of inference. In the story of *Mayi Changa*, a business woman sees a hand go into the sack where she keeps her money. She grabbed the hand and bit it hard. The would-be thief ran away screaming. The text does not explicitly say that the owner of the hand ran away screaming because of the pain of being bitten. It is left to the interpreters of the text to draw a connection between the concept of a hand being bitten and the concept of the owner of the hand running away screaming. The ability of the students to make this type of inference will show their ability to retain ideas and make connections with preceding text as well as their script concerning the sequencing of events in

narrative.

Character intent

Mkango and Fisi (Appendix, Story 3, p. 131) is well suited for interpretations deriving from intent inference. Question 3.4, "Why did Fisi say that Kalulu knew the medicine for the wound?" requires an inference. The student could connect Fisi's desire to make Mkango and Kalulu enemies with his statement that "Kalulu knows the medicine for a wound" to determine that Fisi's intentions were not that honorable. However, if the students connected these in a different way, they could interpret Fisi's intentions toward Mkango as good, and the fact that Kalulu knew the medicine for a wound and had not revealed it was the window of opportunity to him to attain his goal. By processing the text with this script, one could infer that Fisi really wanted Mkango to get well.

A response to the final question of the story, Question 3.7, "Did Kalulu need a hyena's heart for the medicine?" would reflect the respondent's inclination toward decoding or scriptal inference. Kalulu said "We need a hyena's heart." The decoder would answer, "Yes, Kalulu needed a hyena's heart for the medicine." The interpreter who recognizes Kalulu's response as a means of foiling Fisi's attempt to make Mkango and Kalulu enemies would infer that Kalulu said that he needed a hyena's heart as a means of protecting himself. This inference would be scriptal since there is nothing in the text that says Kalulu was foiling Fisi's goals. The ability of the students to identify character intent reveals their familiarity with the goal orientation presented in Thorndyke's story grammar.

Influence of Cultural and Educational Values

In doing the other three analyses, several themes and patterns emerge from the responses. These themes will be discussed in detail at the conclusion of Chapter IV. Responses of the students reveal the influence of an educational system that values repetition and rote memorization. Emotion is also a theme that appeared in a couple of different ways. The students' responses also identify several miscellaneous themes from their daily lives. These concerns of their daily lives surface in scriptally inferred responses. Some of the accessed scripts are appropriate for the story; others are not quite as useful for interpreting the text. While this analysis cannot be definitive concerning the factors that will influence the student's comprehension –there are so many variables and the interaction among the variables is unknown—it can

give us an idea of some of the issues involved in EFL listening comprehension.

Analyzing responses

A clue concerning the inference behaviors of EFL students in Malawi lies in their responses to the comprehension questions. Finding a way to describe these behaviors depends upon a close analysis of the responses. The analysis may be framed in four questions.

1) Do students prefer decoding or inferring? If inferring, what kind?

2) How frequently are the responses reasonable?

3) What type of inference is most often drawn reasonably: causal consequence, causal antecedent, or character intent?

4) How do cultural and educational values affect comprehension?

By answering these questions, we should be able to determine the strength of the interaction between text and knowledge in interpreting foreign language texts in listening situations. In Chapter IV, we will explore the nature of EFL listening comprehension, looking for themes and patterns in the discussion of interaction of decoding and inferring, the reasonability of responses, and extrapolative inference that will clarify the cultural and educational values that influence listening comprehension.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF STUDENT RESPONSE

Results and Discussion

Silence and blank looks were not uncommon responses from the EFL students at the Malawian

primary school where this study was conducted. Part of this could be attributed to low fluency. Part could

be attributed to their unfamiliarity with the foreign teacher. As the students became more familiar with the

teacher, they were more likely to attempt an oral response. Because of the initial reticence, I began asking

the students to write their answers on some activities. Not only did this increase the likelihood of receiving

a response, it also provided a more accurate record. In an area where the tape recorder is still a novelty,

written records were the most reliable and non-intrusive means of preserving data for future analysis.

The written responses have been transcribed from the original papers that the students gave me

and compiled into tables in this Chapter. Each response is coded according to the level of interpretation.

Italics indicate reasonable decoding. Parentheses indicate inferred interpretations; scriptal inferences are in

bold typeface. Additional columns compare the participants' performance as a group: percentage of

reasonable responses, a ratio of decoded interpretations to inferred interpretations, and a ratio of text

inferences to script inferences.

The second column indicates the type of inference the question probed. Twenty-nine questions

probed extrapolative inference: seven causal antecedent (A), nine causal consequence (C), and thirteen

character intent (I). Twenty-one questions probed non-extrapolative inference (N). I will synthesize the

information from these tables in an effort to answer these questions that frame this analysis:

1) Do students prefer decoding or inferring? If inferring, what kind?

2) How frequently are the responses reasonable?

3) What type of inference is most often drawn reasonably: causal consequence, causal antecedent, or character intent?

4) How do cultural and educational values affect comprehension?

The answer to the first two questions of this framework can be explored in an analysis of the questions I asked the students. There are five types: multiple-choice with no unreasonable response, multiple choice with both reasonable and unreasonable responses, yes-no questions with one reasonable response, yes-no questions with two reasonable responses and short answer questions. Of the forty-one questions across five stories, seven are multiple-choice questions with no unreasonable answer and two are yes-no questions for which either response is reasonable. These questions indicate the type of interpretation the student is most inclined to make. The definitions and contrasts of three types of interpretation will be discussed in more detail within the analysis of the students' responses to the nine questions that consist entirely of reasonable responses. The purpose of such analysis and discussion will be to discover the type of interpretation most prevalent among the students in this study.

Another fifteen multiple-choice questions and three yes-no questions show the nature of a student's interpretation in a slightly different context: the possibility of choosing an incorrect answer. The students' responses to these questions will indicate the frequency with which the student recognizes a reasonable response. With this type of question, improper decoding is made evident by the choice of an unreasonable response. Thus, an analysis of such responses will also contribute to our knowledge of the nature of the EFL inference process by showing the students inclination toward a particular type of interpretation when there is a possibility to choose an unreasonable interpretation.

Whereas the multiple-choice and yes-no questions show what type of interpretations the students recognize, fourteen short answer questions show what type of interpretation the student can produce. There is no contrast of decoding with inference and scriptal inference with textual inference. Responses to short answer questions are merely tagged as decoded, textual, or scriptal. An analysis and discussion of the responses to short answer questions will show what type of interpretation is most prevalent as well as the frequency at which the students can produce reasonable responses.

The answer to the third question of my framework for analysis, regarding the type of inference that the student makes most accurately, lies within an analysis of the response to various extrapolative inferences. Across the five stories, the students were given the opportunity to draw twenty-five extrapolative inferences: seven causal consequence, six causal antecedent, and twelve character intent.

To determine the influence of culture on the comprehension process of the participants in this study, we must note the themes and patterns in the students' responses. Throughout the study, the students preferred the answers that most closely resembled the text. This becomes most apparent when reading the responses the students produced for short answer questions. Also prevalent throughout the analyses is the students' familiarity with emotion. This is apparent in the analysis of responses to character intent, but even more prevalent when analyzing the uniformity in scriptally inferred responses. Not quite as prevalent as the other two patterns are smaller incidents which show the influence of cultural values. Nevertheless, all three issues regarding the influence of cultural and educational values on comprehension will be summarized in the conclusion of this chapter. To a lesser degree, we will also look at the influence, if any, that verbal fluency and the age of the participants have on inferential processing.

Through four analyses, we will explore the process and nature of EFL listening comprehension. A careful scrutiny of the types of responses the students gave to inferential comprehension questions will show

1) the tendency of the students toward decoding and inference, and their source of inference.

2) the accuracy and reasonability of their decoding and inferring

3) the types of extrapolative inference they make most accurately

4) the role of culture in comprehension.

It is this scrutiny that will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

What do the responses reveal about the interactive nature of comprehension?

The responses revealed three different types of interpretation. When the student simply responded using ideas paraphrased or essentially unchanged from the form of the text, he has decoded. When he integrates ideas from outside the text, then his interpretation is inferred. Four of the nine questions that presented no unreasonable choice contrast the students' preference for decoding or inferring. Four more

display the students' inclination toward scriptal or textual inference. This will be defined and analyzed after analyzing the questions that contrast decoding and inferring.

Decoding or Inferring

The contrast of decoding and inferring demonstrates whether the students are more inclined to top-down processing or bottom-up processing. If they rely on decoding, their response will closely resemble a concept in the text. An inferred response draws out an idea or concept that is implied by the text, but not directly stated. Eight questions highlight the students preference for decoding or inferring. These are shown in Figure IV.1.

The students' responses to these questions have been recorded in Table IV.1. The italic typeface indicates decoding. Parenthetical notation indicates inferring. The numbers in the right hand column indicate the number of decoded or inferred responses for a specific question.

The responses to Question 2.7, "What kind of gift will win the contest?" exemplify the contrast between decoding and inferring. The students heard, "King Simbau made a contest. Whoever could give Sangiang Mapaele the most valuable gift would prove that he loved her and would become Sangiang Mapaele's husband, whether rich or poor." Beth and Zane,

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Multiple Choice Questions: Decoding vs. Inference

2.3 Who will be the main characters in this story?
    a) Takatuliang
    b) King Simbau
    c) Sangiang Mapaele
    d) merchants
    e) princes
    f) Indonesia

2.5 What did the princes want to do?
    a) sell something to the king
    b) make an agreement with the king
    c) marry the princess
    d) nothing

2.7 What kind of gift will win the contest?
    a) the most expensive
    b) the most valuable
    c) the one which proved the giver loved the princess

2.8 What kind of people entered the contest?
    a) rich   b) poor   c) brave

2.19 Why didn't the princess choose one of the princes?
    a) they were ugly
    b) their gifts were not valuable
    c) Takatuliang's gift was more beautiful
    d) Takatuliang sacrificed a part of himself.

3.7 Did Kalulu need a hyena's heart for the medicine?

4.1 What will happen to goat, sheep, and cow?
    a) lion will tell them his last words
    b) lion will eat them

4.5 Was the lion sick? yes or no

Figure IV.1 Questions Contrasting Decoding and Inferring

who responded that the most valuable gift would win the contest, and Al and Hei, who responded that the gift that proved the giver loved the princess would win the contest, derived their answers directly from the text. They simply decoded the message. One could assume, as Heth and Dahl did, that a most valuable gift would also be the most expensive gift. This would lead to the inference that the most expensive gift would win the contest.

TABLE IV.1

A Contrast of Decoded and Inferred Responses

Question		Al	Beth	Gim	Dahl	Hei	Vav	Zane	Heth	D	I
2.3	N	d	(a)	-	C	c	-	c f	b	4	1
2.5	I	(b)	c	-	(b)	d	-	c	c	3	2
2.7	C	c	b	-	(a)	c	-	b	(a)	4	2
2.8	N	(a)	b	-	C	c	-	c	c	4	1
2.19	I	d	d	-	D	d	-	d	d	6	0
3.7	I	y	(n)	Y	(n)	-	y	y	(n)	4	3
4.1	C	-	a	-	A	-	-	a	a	4	0
4.5	I	-	(n)	-	(n)	-	-	(n)	(n)	0	4

Key: **bold** =scriptal response, *italics*=decoded response, (parentheses)=inferred response, D=number of decoded responses, I=number of inferred responses

Possible responses to Questions 3.7, 4.1, and 4.5 show a sharper contrast between decoded and inferred responses. Question 3.7 asked, "Did Kalulu need a hyena's heart for the medicine?" By simply decoding Kalulu's response, "We need a hyena's heart," the natural response would be, "Yes." After all, that is what Kalulu said. However, by making all the connections within the text regarding Kisi's motives and Kalulu's shrewdness, which is only implied by the text, the student could infer, "No, Kalulu did not need the hyena's heart." He only said that he needed a hyena's heart to deflect Mkango's anger and scare Fisi away. The participants had mixed responses on this question. Beth, Dahl, and Heth made the inference. Al, Gim, Vav, and Zane simply decoded.

The Lion and the Fox had two questions that distinguished between decoding and inference. The two possible responses to question 4.1, "What will happen to goat, sheep, and cow?" include a decoded response, "lion will tell them his last words" and an inferred response, "lion will eat them." All four listeners decoded the message, responding that Lion will tell the other animal his last words.

Question 4.5, "Was Lion really sick?" if decoded, would lead to the response, "yes." There were

two references to Lion's illness. In the first line, Lion told all the animals of the jungle that he was "sick and dying." Then, in his conversation with fox, the Lion says, "You know I am sick and dying." However, the students who could connect the ideas of "the fox, who was very clever," and the two statements that the animals did not come out of the cave with the knowledge that lions eat other animals, could infer, "no." The fox was clever; he saved his life by not going in. The lion had eaten the other animals when they went in to hear his last words. In their final evaluation of the story, after discussing it with the class, all participants inferred that the lion was not sick.

The students changed their interpretation in the story of *The Lion and the Fox*. In response to Question 4.1, "What will happen to Goat, Sheep, and Cow?" all four listeners simply decoded the message. They responded, "Lion will tell him his last words." However, by the end of the story, the students had inferred that the lion had ulterior motives. To Question 4.5, "Was the lion sick?" the students all responded that he was not. This change in the students' behavior, from reliance on decoding to inference could have been the result of the class discussion about the story. I pointed out some inconsistencies to the students – for example, a dying lion leaving his sick bed—and asked them to reconsider their answer. Before the discussion, I asked the class to vote on the answer that they thought was best; they all indicated they thought the lion really was sick. This response is more consistent with other responses.
Except for Question 4.5, the students chose the decoded responses more often than inferred responses. In order to more fully understand the nature of the inference process of EFL students, though, we need to analyze the student's responses within the context of the other three questions that contrast decoding and inferred responses. Table IV.2 shows the results for all questions that contrast decoded responses and inferred responses. Multiple-choice questions that gave no opportunity for an unreasonable response are highlighted by the bold print. The other questions and their responses will be discussed in more detail when determining reasonable responses.

When considering the responses in the context of all the questions that contrast decoding and inferring, there is a definite trend toward decoding. Overall, 69% (29/ 42) of the responses to multiple-choice questions favored decoding over inference.

In Chapter III, I recounted a lesson in which the teacher repeatedly said, "The shirt is red. What color is the shirt?" This lesson reflects a heavy reliance on memorization without much attention given to

meaning. In a culture where elementary education relies heavily on mimicking, there may be an inadvertent message that bottom-up processes should be favored over top-down processes. Just as one learns through recitation and repetition, one demonstrates comprehension through giving the response that closely parrots the text.

TABLE IV.2

Decoding vs. Inference in Multiple-Choice Questions

Question	Decoding	Inference	% Decoding	%Inference
2.3	4	1	80	20
2.5	3	2	60	40
2.7	4	2	66	33
2.8	4	1	80	20
2.19	6	0	100	0
3.7	4	3	57	43
4.1	4	0	100	0
4.5	0	4	0	100
Average	*3.6*	*1.6*	*69*	*31*

What happens when there is no choice that parrots the text? How do the students respond to questions of this type? Herein are two possible sources of inferential interpretation. Eight multiple-choice questions probed responses that were either scriptally or textually inferred.

Textual vs. Scriptal Inference

As discussed in Chapter II, Slackman and Hudson (1984) distinguish between two sources of inference: scriptal and textual. A textual inference relates to several concepts in the text, though the relationship is only implied. A scriptal inference relates a concept in the text to a concept outside the text provided by the listener's general knowledge. Thus, in classifying responses according to different sources of inferential interpretation, I asked this question, "Does this response require knowledge that is not in the text?"

Classifying the responses to Question 2.9, "Who will win the contest?" illustrates the process. In the story, princes and merchants have come from all the neighboring islands to ask King Simbau if they can marry his daughter. The story continues,

He [King Simbau] wanted his daughter to be happy. The person who would become

Sangiang Mapaele's husband must truly love her. King Simbau made a contest. Whoever could

give Sangiang Mapaele the most valuable gift would prove that he loved her and would become

Sangiang Mapaele's husband, whether rich or poor.

The contest was announced throughout the country, and even to the neighboring islands.

Common people were not brave enough to enter the contest. Besides, how could a common man

give the princess a valuable gift? But Takatuliang, a poor woodcutter wanted to try.

It may be inferred that the princes and the merchants are the contestants. The text does not directly state

this, but we do know that the princes and merchants "came to propose" and that the contest was devised in

order to find "the person who would become Sangiang Mapaele's husband." Because of their wealth, they

are also the most likely candidates to give the princess "the most valuable gift." All these relationships are

implied in the text; thus, the responses of "merchant" or "prince" would be textual inferences.

There are seven more multiple choice and yes-no questions that highlight the students' inclination

toward textual and scriptal responses. These are listed in Figure IV.2.

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│                  Multiple Choice Questions: Textual vs. Scriptal                  │
│ 2.13 Why was she silent?                                                          │
│            a) she was angry        b) she was sad        c) she had nothing to say│
│ 2.18 How will the princes react to Mapaele's decision?                            │
│            a) they will be sad            b) they will be afraid                   │
│            c) they will be happy          d) they will be angry                    │
│ 2.20 Why were the princes ashamed?                                                │
│            a) they did not give an expensive gift    b) they behaved badly         │
│            c) they lost the contest                                                │
│ 3.4 Why did Fisi say that Kalulu knew the medicine for the wound?                  │
│            a) he wanted Mkango to get well                                         │
│            b) he knew it would make Mkango mad at Kalulu.                          │
│ 3.5 What will Mkango do?                                                           │
│            a) he will die because Kalulu didn't give him the medicine             │
│            b) he will fire Kalulu                                                  │
│            c) he will give Fisi Kalulu's job                                       │
│ 3.6 Why did Fisi run away?                                                         │
│            a)   to get Mkango's medicine                                           │
│            b)   Kalulu needed his heart to make medicine for the wound            │
│ 4.2 Where are the other animals when lion talks to fox?                            │
│            a) in the cave somewhere      b) at home      c) the lion ate them      │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Figure IV.2. Questions Contrasting Textual and Scriptal Inference

The students' responses to these questions are recorded in Table IV.3. Scriptal responses are indicated by bold typeface. Textually inferred responses are indicated by normal typeface and parentheses. The numbers in the right hand column show the number of textually inferred responses and the number of scriptally inferred responses for a specific question.

If decoded accurately, Questions 2.13 and 2.20 contrast the students' preference for scriptal or textual inference. Al is one of three students to interpret the text inferentially in Question 2.13. The students

TABLE IV.3

A Contrast of Scriptal and Textual Responses

Question		Al	Beth	Gim	Dahl	Hei	Vav	Zane	Heth	T	S
2.9	C	(b)	(c)	-	(c)	(a)	-	(b)	(c)	3	3
2.13	A	(c)	(c)	-	(b)	(b)	-	(c)	a	2	3
2.18	C	(d)	(d)	-	(d)	(d)	-	(d)	(d)	6	0
2.20	N	a	(b)	-	A	(c)	-	(c)	a	1	2
3.4	I	(b)	(b)	(b)	(b)	-	a	(b)	(b)	0	6
3.5	C	(c)	(b)	(b)	A	-	a	(b)	(c)	0	5
3.6	A	(b)	(b)	(b)	(b)	-	(b)	(b)	a	5	0
4.2	N	-	(a)	-	(c)	-	-	(a)	(c)	2	2

Key: **bold**=scriptal response, (parentheses)=inferred response, T=textual inference, S=scriptal inference

have been asked to make an inference, this time, one regarding causal antecedent: "Why was Takatuliang's mother silent?" Here is what the text said:

The next day, his mother came back. She looked at Takatuliang. His concentration was completely on his work. Sweat dripped from his brow. His mother tried to talk some sense into her son. "Takatuliang, sweetheart, truly you don't understand. Stop dreaming. It is not possible for you to win the princess. We are of the lower class, child, and she is royalty. She will surely humiliate you."

Takatuliang replied, "Alas, mother, social status is only a consideration of those who refuse to strive for something better, only for those who refuse divine favor. Within me, there is spirit. There is talent and feeling and love than can change human fate."

His mother was silent.

There is nothing in this text to imply that Takatuliang's mother was angry. In fact, the tone of voice I used

in reading this was rather whiny. Heth was the only student to choose this response. A literal interpretation of the tone of this passage could imply that Takatuliang's mother was sad. Dahl and Hei chose this interpretation. Takatuliang's mother was unable to persuade her son that his dreams would cause him disappointment. Al, Beth, and Zane responded that Takatuliang's mother was silent because she had nothing to say. This obvious assumption could be inferred from background knowledge; when you don't have anything to say, you are silent.

Responses to 2.20, "Why were the princes ashamed?" reflect the influence of cultural scripts more clearly. The scriptal response would be that the princes were ashamed because they had behaved badly. 'Bad' behavior represents a judgment originating in the script of the listener. Not only had they been disrespectful by challenging the king, they had also brought a gift that had very little personal value. Beth made this type of inference. Hei and Zane inferred the princes were ashamed because they had lost the contest. Their inference required little input from knowledge, just the task of relating shame and defeat. In this question, the response that "their gifts were not expensive" is similar to the association of valuable and expensive in Question 2.7. Whereas in Question 2.7 making 'valuable' and 'expensive' synonyms results in an acceptable response, doing the same in Question 2.20 distorts the meaning of the passage:

The king was very wise. Calmly he said, "My daughter has surely chosen well. She has decided fairly. Your gifts were not so valuable; you had many others just like them, and you brought only one.

Here, the meaning of 'valuable' is not as tightly connected to money as 'expensive." The princes' brought gifts of jewelry, carpets, and silk. These were expensive, but they were not valuable because they did not demand very much of their giver. Thus, Dahl and Heth, who had inferred that the most expensive gift would win the contest in Question 2.7, inferred unreasonably in Question 2.20 that the princes were ashamed because "they did not give an expensive gift." Al, who chose a decoded response in Question 2.7. ends the activity as he began—with an unreasonable response. There is nothing in the text aside from the reference to their gifts.

Sensitivity to foreshadowing is needed in order to infer that the woodcutter would win the contest. The phrase, "whether rich or poor" points to the possibility that someone who is not a prince or merchant might win the contest, but this thought is passed over quickly. In the next phrase the improbability of a common man giving "the princess a valuable gift" is emphasized, demonstrating the impossibility that a

woodcutter would win. To make this inference, the listener must rely on the knowledge that incredible odds are usually beaten in fairy tales. The answers of half the students—Beth, Dahl, and Heth—reflected the possibility of drawing upon a fairy-tale script to make an inference. Al, Hei, and Zane drew inferences based upon the text.

Like the response to Question 2.9, responses to question 4.2, "Where are the other animals when Lion talks to Fox?" are evenly distributed between scriptal and textual inference. Beth and Zane chose the textual response, "in the cave somewhere." After all, the text does imply that Goat, Sheep, and Cow went into the cave to hear Lion's last words. Dahl and Heth chose the response, "the lion ate them." This interpretation requires the additional knowledge that lions are carnivorous. This inference is supported by inconsistencies in the Lion's behavior noted in the text. One who is dying is not likely to get out of his bed. Why would he go outside his cave?

So far, the scriptal inferences have had some basis in the text. In Questions 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6, a different type of scriptal inference emerges. Scriptal inference is of two natures: that which is implied by the text and that which is assumed by the reader solely on the basis of his or her knowledge. Both the implied and the assumed scripts are of interest. For the purpose of defining the accuracy of comprehension, especially when responses have been formulated for the students in multiple-choice questions, only the scripts that are related to the text in some way indicate comprehension.

Even when the student assumes a script that is not implied by the text, though the comprehension may not be accurate, he or she is still processing the information. The interpretation derived from unintended scripts still reveals something about the participant's process of comprehension. Three questions from *Mkango and Fisi* (Appendix, Story 3, page 131) illustrate this assumed scriptal inference. Question 3.4, "Why did Fisi say that Kalulu knew the medicine for the wound?" has two responses. The scriptal response, "he wanted Mkango to get well," is not implied in the text. It could be inferred by a naïve listener who missed the statement, "Fisi wanted to make Mkango and Kalulu enemies." This response is grounded in the humane reaction toward one who is sick; a compassionate character would want a sick person to get well. Vav is the only participant who made this choice. Though it has no support from the text, Vav's answers to other questions indicate that this is a script that she has consistently applied throughout her interpretation of the story. Just as it is natural to assume that compassionate characters wish

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for the sick to become well, it is also natural to assume that if the sick person does not get medicine, he will die. Based on her assumed script concerning human behavior, Vav interpreted a story in which Fisi wants Mkango to get well. Because Kalulu has not given him the medicine, he will die. In Table IV.3 Vav's responses have been recorded in bold typeface since she has accessed a script. However, since it is not a script that leads to accurate interpretation, there are no parentheses.

All of the other students were able to relate Fisi's intent of 'making enemies' to his behavior. This led the listener to a textually-based inference that the motivation for Fisi's revelation to Mkango was that "he knew it would make Mkango mad at Kalulu." Question 3.5, "What will Mkango do?" tests the students adherence to the event script regarding Fisi's jealousy in predicting what will happen next. If Fisi's scheme to make Mkango and Kalulu enemies works, Mkango will fire Kalulu and Fisi might get Kalulu's job. Heth and Al responded that Fisi would get Mkango's job. Beth, Gim and Zane responded that Mkango would fire Kalulu. Both of these are scriptal inferences derived from events that originate in the text.

Vav and Dahl focused on a different script. The response, "he will die because Kalulu didn't give him the medicine" reflects reliance on a cause-effect script that excludes the clues in the text regarding Fisi's intention. Their assumed scriptal inference shows that they have not fully understood the text. With Vav, there is evidence of a different script, which shows that she is making some sense of the text. Her previous response indicated that she had accessed a script based on compassion. Dahl's script is harder to identify. His previous response indicated he understood the enmity between Fisi and Kalulu. He seems to have forgotten about Fisi's evil intent as he focuses on a simpler cause-effect script.

The students' use of an assumed script as opposed to a textual inference is reflected in their responses to Question 3.6, "Why did Fisi run away?" The text states,

Mkango was very angry when he heard this. He called Kalulu and asked him for medicine for his wound. "We need a hyena's heart. We roast it and mix it with other medicine," Kalulu said. When Fisi heard this, he ran away.

By decoding this passage, the students may determine that the medicine for healing the wound includes a hyena's heart. If the students remembered that Fisi is a hyena, then the implication that Kalulu needs Fisi's heart is very apparent. Thus, the textually inferred response, "Kalulu needed his heart to make medicine for the wound," shows that the student has comprehended the relationships between two

propositions in the text.

The other response, that Fisi ran away "to get Mkango's medicine" is based on an assumed script. Kalulu told Mkango what type of medicine he needed for the wound. It could be assumed, especially by listeners who did not realize that Fisi was a hyena, that once you are told what type of medicine is needed, someone goes to get that medicine. Heth is the only student who chose this assumed script for Question 3.6.

Table IV.4 summarizes the types of inference drawn in each of the multiple-choice questions. To gain a fuller understanding of the students' preferences for implied, not assumed, scriptal or textual inferences, their responses need to be considered within the larger context of all multiple-choice questions. The responses to the other multiple-choice questions will be analyzed in the discussion of reasonable responses, but the results have been included here in Table IV.4.

TABLE IV.4

Scriptal vs. Textual Inference in Multiple-Choice Questions

Question	Text	Script	% Text	% Script
2.9	3	3	50	50
2.13	2	3	40	60
2.18	0	6	0	100
2.20	1	2	33	66
3.4	6	0	100	0
3.5	0	5	0	100
3.6	5	0	100	0
4.2	2	2	50	50
Average	2.4	2.6	48	53

Fifty-three percent (21/40)of the responses favored scriptal inference to textual inference. The questions that had the most uniform responses were those that appealed to emotion. In Questions 3.4 and 3.6 the textually inferred interpretation is related to the jealousy of Fisi.

Question 2.18, "How will the princes react to Mapaele's decision?" directly appeals to the students to identify an emotion. The responses are all the same. The response, "they will be angry," is based on the students' knowledge of human behavior. The princes wanted to win the contest. They brought gifts that they were sure would woo the princess. They were more than disappointed; they were angry. Other cultural scripts could have been applied, leading to the inference that the students were sad, especially in a culture

where anger is not an acceptable emotion. It is possible that the princes might have been afraid, but not very likely. It would be strange for them to feel happy.

The other questions, like Question 2.9 and 4.2, are concerned more with events than emotions. It seems Question 2.20, "Why were the princes ashamed?" should be a question of emotion, but it is not. Questions 2.18, 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6 give the students an opportunity to identify the reactions of the characters. Question 2.20 probes the events that lead to the reaction. Perhaps emotion is the one thing the students comprehend.

There are several other questions that deal with emotions and reactions instead of event structures. This issue is not the focus of determining reasonable and unreasonable responses, but it is an important issue when analyzing the effect of culture on comprehension. I will take up a more detailed discussion of this issue in the discussion of how background knowledge affects culture. In order to understand the effects of culture on comprehension, however, we need to first define reasonable and unreasonable responses.

<div align="center">How frequently are the responses reasonable?</div>

In Chapter III, I defined reasonable response as one that addresses the question and has an identifiable relationship with the text and with the culture. The two types of question formats require two types of tasks for both the students and me. In the multiple-choice questions, I knew the reasonable and unreasonable responses before I asked the questions. I wanted to see how well the students recognized reasonable responses. Responses to short answer questions show what the students will spontaneously produce. I had to analyze these more carefully. The two types of questions allow us to contrast the students' performance on recognition with their production.

After discussing the reasonable and unreasonable responses of multiple choice questions and short answer questions, we will compare the groups of responses and discuss the implications of these differences in determining the nature of the student's comprehension process. This discussion will lay a foundation for analyzing the students' interpreting behaviors in regard to specific extrapolative inferences and prepare the way for understanding the impact the participants' culture had on interpretation.

Multiple-choice and Yes-no

Eighteen multiple-choice and yes-no questions across three stories contrast the frequency of

reasonable responses with the frequency of unreasonable responses from the group. These are listed in

Figure IV.3.

Multiple Choice: Reasonable vs. Unreasonable

2.1 What will this story be about?
- a) I think the story will be about a chief who made something for a beautiful lady
- b) I think the story will be a fairy tale about a princess who buys things from merchants.
- c) I think the story will be about a poor man who wants to marry a princess
- d) I think the story will be about _____

2.3 Who will be the main characters in this story?
- a) Takatuliang
- b) King Simbau
- c) Sangiang Mapaele
- d) merchants
- e) princes
- f) Indonesia

2.4 Who is Sangiang Mapaele?   a prince   b) a merchant's daughter   c)princess

2.5 What did the princes want to do?
- a) sell something to the king
- b) make an agreement with the king
- c) marry the princess
- d) nothing

2.6 What was the king choosing?
- a) gifts for his daughter
- b) a husband for Sangiang Mapaele
- b) a person to help him run his kingdom

2.8 What kind of people entered the contest?   a) rich   b) poor   c) brave

2.11 Does Takatuliang's mother think he has a chance of winning the contest?

2.13 Why was she silent?   a) she was angry   b) she was sad   c) she had nothing to say

2.17 Why did Takatuliang stay in the contest?   a) he was sure he would win
   b) he wanted to prove his love to the princess   c) he was humble

2.18 How will the princes react to Mapaele's decision?   a) they will be sad
   b) they will be afraid   c) they will be happy   d) they will be angry

2.19 Why didn't the princess choose one of the princes?
- a) they were ugly   b) their gifts were not valuable
- c) Takatuliang's gift was more beautiful   d) Takatuliang sacrificed a part of himself.

3.1 Who did Kalulu work for?   a) Mkango   b) Fisi   c) himself

3.2 What was his job? a) cook   b) hunter   c) baby-sitter   d) nurse

3.3 Why did Fisi hate Kalulu?
- a) because he wanted to watch Mkango's children
- b) because Mkango gave him meat.

3.4 Why did Fisi say that Kalulu knew the medicine for the wound?
- a) he wanted Mkango to get well
- b) he knew it would make Mkango mad at Kalulu.

4.3 Why didn't the fox go in to see the lion?
   a) he was afraid of being eaten   b) he wanted fresh air.

5.2 Can most people afford to do business with her?

Figure IV. 3 Questions Contrasting Reasonable and Unreasonable Responses.

Table IV.5 shows the responses of the students to multiple-choice and yes-no questions in which their is a possibility of choosing an unreasonable response. The column on the right indicates the percentage of reasonable answers for each question. The bottom row shows the percentage of reasonable responses for each participant. Reasonable responses are those which have been decoded, indicated by italics, or inferred, indicated by parentheses. Scriptal responses are in bold typeface.

TABLE IV.5

Contrast of Reasonable and Unreasonable Responses

Question		Al	Beth	Gim	Dahl	Hei	Vav	Zane	Heth	%R
2.1	N	d-fairy	(c)	-	A	(c)	-	*a*	(c)	66
2.3	N	d	**(a)**	-	*C*	*C*	-	*c f*	*b*	83
2.4	N	(c)	B	-	A	Ab	-	b	b	17
2.5	I	(b)	*C*	-	(b)	D	-	*c*	*c*	83
2.6	I	(b)	A	-	A	*c*	-	*a*	*a*	17
2.8	N	(a)	B	-	*C*	*c*	-	*c*	*c*	83
2.11	N	(n)	Y	-	(n)	(n)	-	(n)	(n)	83
2.13	A	**(c)**	**(c)**	-	(b)	(b)	-	**(c)**	a	83
2.17	I	(b)	(b)	-	(b)	(b)	-	(b)	a	83
2.18	C	**(d)**	**(d)**	-	**(d)**	**(d)**	-	**(d)**	**(d)**	100
2.19	I	*d*	D	-	D	*d*	-	*d*	*d*	100
3.1	N	*a*	A	A	A	-	*a*	*a*	*a*	100
3.2	N	d	(c)	(c)	A	-	(c)	(c)	(c)	71
3.3	I	**(b)**	**(b)**	**(b)**	**(b)**	-	a	**(b)**	**(b)**	86
3.4	I	(b)	(b)	(b)	(b)	-	a	(b)	(b)	86
4.3	I	-	**(a)**	-	give L med	-	-	(a)	(a)	75
5.2	N	-	-	*Yes*	-	(most people afford)	*it is*	*yes*	(most people afford)	100
8.12	N	have new clothes	*not have new clothes*	No	*Have not new clothes*	R have piece of cloth	yes	*no*	yes	50
%R		75	76	100	71	69	50	83	72	

Key: **bold**=scriptal response, (parentheses)=inference, *italics*=decoded response, R=reasonable response

Two thirds of the students' responses (four of six) to Question 2.1 were considered reasonable. Question 2.1, "What will this story be about?" is followed by four choices: a) a chief who made something for a beautiful lady, b) a fairy tale about a princess who buys things from merchants, c) a poor man who wants to marry a princess. The fourth choice allows the student to write in his own response. Al was the

only student who ever chose to write in a response, and this is the only time that he did it. He wrote, "The story will be a fairy tale." The story is a fairy tale; Al's response, though brief is true.

Without the first part of the text, any of the other responses to Question 2.1 could have been reasonable; however, since Zane and Dahl had been give the first line, "King Simbau, the king of Simbau, an island in the Sulawesi Sea," their responses are not reasonable. The story is about a king, not a chief, so the first response is not reasonable. It could be argued that the boys may have interpreted the pictures of the king as pictures of a chief, however, there is no mention in the pictures or in the text of this chief/ king making something for a beautiful lady. The second response, the princess was buying things from merchants, could have been inferred from the pictures, but none of the students chose this response.

The third response to Question 2.1, which is, indeed, what happened in the story, is the most reasonable. It is also the most inferred. So far, the only knowledge for drawing this inference must come from their script about fairy tales. Except for his appearance on the cover of the book and his name in the title of the book, the poor man does not appear until the third page, after the listener has been introduced to the merchants and princes who want to marry the princess. The only way to know that this is what the story would be about based on the concepts presented by the text, is to guess. Such a guess would be based on the knowledge that impossible things happen in fairy tales. It is possible that the students went back to change their answer after the text was complete, but it is highly improbable. Beth, Hei, and Heth, the three students who chose this response, wrote their responses in ink. They might have filled it in later, but by the time this prediction was confirmed by the text, the question had been erased from the board. It is not likely that they remembered the choices anymore.

A fair amount of decoding is needed in order to respond to Question 2.3, "Who will be the main characters in this story?" The students had little text to guide them in their choice of response on this question, only the pictures, the title page and the first two lines: "King Simbau, the king of Simbau, an island in the Sulawesi Sea, had a beautiful daughter, Sangiang Mapaele." Of the six choices, only five are characters. The student would have to recognize that Indonesia is not a person and should not be a character. Indonesia does not occur in the text. I don't know why Zane chose this answer. Further decoding is needed to distinguish 'main' characters from minor characters. The main character, even in the Malawian narratives, has a name. Thus, the choice of a general noun as a main character would be an unreasonable

response. Al's choice of "merchants" as main characters shows that he possibly decoded the question wrong or did not understand the concept of "main character." The other choices are plausible since the first part of the narrative focuses on King Simbau and Sangiang Mapaele. Dahl, Hei, Zane and Heth's choices of King Simbau and Sangiang Mapaele show that they not only recognized these words as names of characters, but also knew that the main character is one whose name will occur in the text. At the point in the text where this question is asked, the only time the name of Takatuliang's name has occurred was in the title. Beth inferred the main character is the one closely associated to the title, even when the name doesn't appear in the setting of the narrative. Beth was the only student who identified Takatuliang as the main character. Since Takatuliang is only mentioned in the title at this point, Beth has demonstrated that she has the knowledge that those whose pictures and names are on the title page are mostly likely to be the main characters. Dahl and two other students chose Sangiang Mapaele. Heth chose King Simbau. These responses imply that these students could identify characters from the text. Al chose merchants, who, though they were in the next picture, were not a part of the story yet. Based on his response to this question, it appears that Al is a poor guesser and possibly, a poor decoder as well, but his performance on the rest of the comprehension questions show that this is not the case.

Al was the only student who made a reasonable response to Question 2.4, "Who is Sangiang Mapaele?" The question has only one reasonable response, "a princess." Sangiang Mapaele is the king's daughter, not a merchant's daughter, as Beth, Zane, Hei and Heth responded, nor a prince, as Dahl thought. Why was the predominant choice that Sangiang Mapaele was the merchant's daughter? One explanation for such a choice is that the students could not decode the concept "king's daughter" as "princess." It is also possible that they were parroting the word "daughter" which had occurred in the text.

Al was also the only student to choose the decoded response to Question 2.6, "What was the king choosing?" He chose the second response, "a husband for Sangiang Mapaele." It could be argued that, in a round about way, the king was choosing someone to help him run his kingdom. That is, one could scriptally infer such a response, based on the assumption that people in power hire relatives to help them carry out their business. Nepotism is not only familiar to many Africans, it is often a way of life. However, Hei is the only student who chose this response. Two-thirds of the participants responded that he was choosing "gifts for his daughter." This concept is not implied in the text. The picture in the book shows the king with the

princes and merchants in a situation that could have been interpreted as the king choosing gifts, but the text does not support such an interpretation.

Questions 2.5, 2.8, and 2.19 contrast decoding and inferring in questions that also include an unreasonable response. A good decoder would find the answer to Question 2.8, "What kind of people entered the contest?" within the text:

"Common people were not brave enough to enter the contest. Besides, how could a common man give the princess a valuable gift? But Takatuliang, a poor woodcutter wanted to try."

Faced with a choice of decoding the answer and choosing "brave" or inferring from "common people were not brave enough to enter the contest" that only the rich would enter, four of the students chose "brave." Al chose "rich." The text only tells of one poor person entering the contest, so Beth's response of "poor" is not reasonable. If the question is decoded correctly, one sees that a response should reflect a characteristic of the majority of the people who entered the contest.

Question 2.5, "What did the princes want to do?" also received a high percentage of reasonable responses, but in this case, the ratio of decoded to inferred responses was smaller. From the text, "Three princes came to propose." Beth, Zane, and Heth were able to decode the message that the princes wanted to "marry the princess." Al and Dahl inferred the princes wanted to make an agreement with the king. At this point there is very little information except that the princes had come to the see the king. If the students did not know what "propose" meant, then they could have used the text, the pictures, and their knowledge of how princes and kings behave to infer the princes wanted to "make and agreement with the king." Hei's response that the princes wanted to do "nothing" is not a reasonable response. The texts and the pictures support the concept that the princes clearly had some objective in mind.

The decoded response for Question 2.19, "Why didn't the princess choose one of the princes?" was that "Takatuliang sacrificed a part of himself." It comes almost directly from the text,

The king was very wise. Calmly he said, "My daughter has surely chosen well. She has decided fairly. Your gifts were not so valuable; you had many others just like them, and you brought only one. Look at Takatuliang. He brought a doll wrapped in an ancient cloth, but it was very meaningful because he gave all that he had. With great difficulty and labor he made his gift,

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giving one of the few things left by his father. Even more, he gave his own hair. He sacrificed something for the sake of love.

All the students chose the same response.

This could be due to the nature of the question. The students seem to favor decoded responses when they are closest to the text. The idea of sacrifice is very salient in the passage before question 2.19 is asked. In 2.8, the idea of "brave" was also very salient in the text. Eighty percent of the students chose the decoded response. In question 2.5, when decoding also involved finding a synonym for "propose," the percentage of inferences doubles to 40%.

Question 2.11 and Question 2.17 call upon the students to draw inferences, but the responses do not contrast a choice of scriptal or textual inference as much as they contrast inferred and unreasonable responses. This is especially true of Question 2.11, "Does Takatuliang's mother think he has a chance of winning the contest?" There are only two responses, "yes" and "no." The text implies that Takatuliang's mother does not think he can win the contest. She begs him to come home. She tells them that the princess would only consider him as a servant, if she even bothered to consider him at all. She is distressed by Takatuliang's tenacity with his project. All this suggests that she does not think he can win. There is nothing in the text to make one think otherwise. Everyone except Beth interpreted the passage with the reasonable inference.

In Question 2.17, "Why did Takatuliang stay in the contest?" though there were three responses to choose, only two were chosen by the group: "he was sure he would win" and "he wanted to prove his love to the princess." The second is an inferred response; the first is unreasonable. There is nothing in the text that implies Takatuliang thought he could win. In fact, his humility, which is implied in both the pictures and the text, is a clear indication that Takatuliang's intent for staying in the contest was not to win. Several times throughout the story, the listener is told that Takatuliang is making the gift because he wants to prove his love to the princess. Thus, the listener may infer that his reason for staying in the contest was to prove his love for the princess, not to win. Everyone except Heth made the inference.

Part of understanding the reasonableness of the students' responses, a part that may point out which students are haphazardly guessing at the answers, involves an analysis of the consistency of their responses. Such an analysis may be conducted by analyzing the responses within each text, then comparing

the types of responses across texts. The entire texts of *Mkango and Fisi* (Appendix, Story 3, page 131) and *The Lion and the Fox* (Appendix, Story 4, page 132) make sense only when one is consistent in his or her interpretation. Though it is feasible for the student to change from decoded to inferred interpretations once or twice, vacillating from decoded interpretations to inferred responses several would indicate that she is merely guessing.

In the story of *Mkango and Fisi,* interpretation hangs on the understanding of Fisi's jealousy. The responses to Question 3.3, "Why did Fisi hate Kalulu?" indicate that all of the students except Vav understood that Fisi was jealous of Kalulu. In fact, six students appended the phrase "he is jealous" to the choice "because Mkango gave him meat." Al, Beth, Gim, and Zane maintained this interpretation throughout the middle of the text, choosing the textually inferred response to both Question 3.5, "Mkango will fire Kalulu" and Question 3.6, "Fisi ran away because Kalulu needed his heart for the medicine." However, when asked Question 3.7, "Did Kalulu need a hyena's heart for the medicine?" Al, Gim, and Zane returned to the task of decoding. Beth is the only one who consistently inferred. Dahl and Heth, like Beth, inferred Kalulu did not really need a hyena's heart, but their interpretation is suspect since their responses are inconsistent. Heth seemed to understand Fisi's motivation of jealousy at first, but her response to Question 3.6, "Fisi ran away to get Mkango's medicine," indicates she has not continued to relate Fisi's jealousy to the events of the story. Perhaps, she has not fully decoded the relationship of Fisi, who is a hyena, with Kalulu's request for a hyena's heart. Her response to Question 3.7, that Kalulu did not need a hyena's heart for the medicine, although a reasonable inference, is suspect since all her other responses reflect decoding.

Dahl seems even more inconsistent in his interpretation. He abandoned the script for Fisi's jealousy from Questions 3.3 and 3.4. Rather than choosing the effects of Fisi's actions implied by the text, he chose an assumed script in Question 3.5, where he responded "Mkango will die because Kalulu didn't give him the medicine." Then, in Question 3.6, he returned to the script for Fisi's jealousy. In 3.7, he responded that Kalulu did not really need a hyena's heart. This may indicate that Dahl did recognize Fisi's evil intentions throughout the story, but in Question 3.5, he considered Mkango's point of view as most important; anything that happened to Fisi was not so important.

Vav's responses were consistent; her responses do not reflect that she did not consider Fisi's

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jealousy a central part of the story. She answered general decoding questions accurately. To Question 3.1, "Who did Kalulu work for?" she, like the rest of the students chose "Mkango." While in response to Question 3.2 Al thought that Kalulu was a nurse and Dahl thought he was a cook, Vav correctly understood that he was a babysitter. However, the rest of her responses indicate Vav focuses on Mkango's hurt: Fisi wanted Mkango to get well, Mkango will die because Kalulu did not give him the medicine, Fisi ran away to get medicine. Vav might have missed an important element of the story, but her interpretation is consistent.

To determine the consistency of four of the participants across stories, I analyzed the responses of Beth, Dahl, Zane, and Heth, in the story *The Lion and the Fox* (Appendix, Story 4, page 132). Except for Question 4.4, "What three animals went in to see Lion?" all the questions could be interpreted at least at two different levels. Though all the students began by decoding the answer to 4.1, "What will happen to Goat, Sheep, and Cow?" they eventually changed to an inferred interpretation so that, at the end, most of them respond, "The lion is not sick" to Question 4.5. Beth and Zane began with a textually inferred response to Question 4.2, "Where were the other animals?" In the story, the fox had said that he had seen the animals go into the cave, but had not seen them come out. Thus, one could textually infer the animals were in the cave. A scriptal inference would be reflected in the response, "lion ate [goat, sheep, and cow]." Heth and Dahl chose this response. However, Dahl did not show consistency in one level of interpretation; for Question 4.3, "Where are the other animals when Lion talks to Fox?" he volunteered his own answer, one that seems to be more appropriate in a previous story: "give lion medicine." Then, in 4.5 he returned to an inferred interpretation, indicating that he thought the lion really was not sick. Because Zane and Beth maintained an inferred interpretation from the third to the last question, their responses, like Heth's, reflected consistency. They understood the implication that Lion was hungry, not sick.

Table IV.6 summarizes the performance of each student for the multiple-choice questions. Even though responses to questions comparing decoding and inferring indicated a high proclivity (69%) toward decoding (Table IV.2, p.67) and questions comparing scriptal and textual inference indicated a slight inclination (53%) toward scriptal inferences (Table IV.4, 73), an analysis of the individual's performance as a whole gives a different picture: 37% (31 of 83) decoded, 40% (33 of 83) textual inference, and 23% (19 of 83) scriptal inference. These represent the choices of students in recognition tasks. How does this

portrayal of the comprehension process compare to that of the responses the students had to produce for themselves?

TABLE IV.6

Individual Performance

Student	%Reasonable	# Decoded	#Textual	#Scriptal	Total
Al	75	2	7	3	16
Beth	76	4	4	5	17
Gim	100	3	2	1	6
Dahl	71	5	5	2	17
Hei	75	3	5	1	13
Vav	85	2	1	0	6
Zane	88	7	4	4	18
Heth	71	5	5	3	18
% of Total		37	40	23	

Short Answer

There were fourteen comprehension questions that required the students to produce their own responses. Four of the questions occurred in the story of *Mayi Changa*, eight in the story of *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit.* The other two occurred in the stories of *Takatuliang* and *The Lion and the Fox.* All questions are listed in Figure IV.4.

I analyzed the students' responses to these short answer questions as I had the multiple choice. First, I compared the number of decoded responses to the number of inferred responses, taking note of whether the inferences were scriptal or

Short Answer Questions

2.10 What was Takatuliang thinking about?

4.4 What three animals went in to see Lion?

5.1 What business does Mayi Changa do?

5.3 Why did a hand go under the sack?

5.4 What will Mayi Changa do when she sees a hand go under the sack?

5.5 Why did the owner of the hand run away screaming?

8.11 Why did Village Rabbit eat roasted maize sometimes?

8.13 Which rabbit would most likely have rice and fish to eat almost every day?

8.14 Why did Village Rabbit go to town?

8.15 Why did Village Rabbit and Town Rabbit think their last hour had come?

8.16 Why did robbers break into Town Rabbit's house?

8.17 What will happen next?

8.18 Why did Village Rabbit want to stay in the village?

8.19 Why didn't Village Rabbit want to go to town again?

Figure IV.4 Short Answer Questions

textual. Though there was little possibility that the students would guess, I looked for consistency of interpretation within the stories to see if the students' behavior in choosing answers is consistent with their behavior when formulating their own answers. For example, does Vav, who interpreted the story of *Mkango and Fisi* without decoding one of the most important phrases in the story, often interpret stories without decoding the most important elements of the story? I also tabulated the number of decoded, scriptal, and textual responses, as I did for the multiple-choice questions in Table IV.6, to see if the students are inclined to produce a particular type of interpretation.

There are no specific questions, as there were in the multiple-choice section, that contrast decoding and inference at the same time. The students are producing the responses this time, so my analysis will focus on the types of responses the questions suggested and the types of responses the students gave. The story of *Mkango and Fisi* did not have any short answer questions.

Table IV.7 shows the responses of the students to these questions. The percentage of reasonable responses for each question is recorded in the far right column. The percentage of reasonable responses by each student is summarized in the last row. The responses are coded to show the type of interpretation the student made in formulating a response. Bold typeface indicates scriptal responses. Parentheses indicate inferred responses. Italics indicate decoded responses.

The stories of *Mayi Changa* and *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit* begin with questions that require decoding. The answer to Question 5.1, "What business does Mayi Changa do?" may be found in the very first line of the text: "Mayi Changa is a businesswoman. She sells second-hand clothes." Gim, Hei, Vav, Zane, and Heth all made reference to selling clothes. They were successful in decoding the text.

The next question requires some inference, but decoding is still the major factor. To answer Question 5.2 in *Mayi Changa*, "Can most of the people afford to do business with her?" the students must first decode "afford," then infer from what is implied in the text, "Lots of people buy from her because her prices are cheap," most people can afford her second hand clothing. All the students were able to produce a decoded response to this question.

The responses to Question 5.3, "Why did a hand go under the sack?" begins to show more variance. He's and Heth's response is an unsuccessful attempt at repeating the text, "She saw a hand go under the sack." They said, "Sack it is called a handbag." Clearly, they have not comprehended the text at all. The

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TABLE IV.7

Responses To Short Answer Questions

Question %R		Al	Beth	Gim	Dahl	Hei	Vav	Zane	Heth	
2.10	N	(they is love)	X	-	X	Takatuliang	-	jungle	(could win)	33
4.4	N	-	G,S,C	-	G,S,C	-	-	G,S,C	G,S,C	100
5.1	N	-	-	sell 2nd hand clothes	-	selling cloth	sales a cloth	sells 2nd hand clothes	selling cloth	100
5.3	I	-	-	(to steal)	-	sack it is called handbag	he wasn't wurneng to MC	(it need to stole MC's money)	sack it is called handbag	60
5.4	C	-	-	MC quickly grabbed the hand	-	To market to market	(he is shouting go out)	MC will be surprised	to market to market	40
5.5	A	-	-	(he wanted to steal, was caught	-	it is swiming	(because MC was shouting)	(he may get caught)	it is swiming	60
8.11	N	Poor	poor	Poor	poor	poor	Eating	poor	poor	88
8.13	N	(TR)	(TR)	(TR)	(in town)	every day R eat	Happy	(TR)	it was poor	66
8.14	I	(eat good food)	to visit his friend	Invited by TR to visit	Take new clothes to his brother	brother of R sit in town	Visiting TR	invited by TR	(find good food)	88
8.15	A	go there see well	think last hour had come	(robbers pointed gun at Rs)	X	not happy	want them baby	(they had break into house)	just a word game	25
8.16		area was bad	(still commodities)	(robbers stole all)	X	(because rich)	broke in bedroom	they had break hous	(because beautiful)	50
8.17	C	All things was fall	(TR will go to village & stay)	stole all TR's things	X	not happy	stole all the good things	(report to police, catch thief	they have beautiful home	25
8.18		(good area)	to find a piece of land	peace & quiet, knew everyone	X	not joining a piece of work	(wanted the people)	(afraid of what happen'd)	to find food	50
8.19		Wanted to go b/c see well	he think he find food	town was peaceful & quiet	X	want to go to go town join work	thank to rabbit again	peace and quiet	he didn't go to town	13
%R		77		60	83	33		33	45	79

Key: **bold**=scriptal response, *italics*=decoded response, (parentheses)=inferred response, R=reasonable response

remainder of their responses to questions in *Mayi Changa* are just as cryptic. Vav's response, "he was not wurneng to Mayi Changa" is also confusing. The only two students who produced a reasonable and decipherable response were Zane and Gim. Both boys made reference to stealing. There is no mention of stealing in the text, but the implication is strong. These responses would be scriptal inferences, based on an idea that is not in the text, but is certainly suggested by the text. The inference derives from the boys' script of possible situations in a market.

Responses to Question 5.4, "What will Mayi Changa do when she sees a hand go under the sack?" reflect a variety of interpretations of the story. Gim decoded the next part of the text and replied, "Mayi Changa quickly grabbed the hand." Vav, who has engaged the script concerning situations in the market, responds, "He shouting them go out got out" Zane's response is problematic. While it is possible that "Mayi will be surprised," this response does not address the question. Although the response is not reasonable, it does not reflect a lack of comprehension of the story. He misunderstood the question.

Responses to Question 5.5, "Why did the owner of the hand go away screaming?" demonstrate that the students did not really understand the text, "She quickly grabbed it and bit hard on it. The owner of the hand ran away screaming." This stems from the inability to decode "bit." Vav put the words of the question in a different order, responding, "Because Mayi Changa was shouting, he was running away." The boys continued interpreting using the script about stealing. Gim replied, "He wanted to steal...he was caught." Zane wrote, "He might get caught as a thief." All of these responses –those from Vav, Zane, and Gim—are scriptal inferences.

The answer to question 8.11, "Why did the Village Rabbit eat roasted maize sometimes?" is also found in the first paragraph of the text: "Village Rabbit was poor. He ate roasted maize when there was not enough flour in the house." Most of the students simply decoded the text and responded that Village Rabbit ate roasted maize because he was poor. Beth added a textual inference: "He had no money to go to mill." Vav seemed unable to decode the text, her response was an attempt to echo the question: "eating."

To answer Question 8.12, "Did the Village Rabbit have new clothes?" the students must decode the phrase, "His clothes were worn out." Half of the students had difficulty with this question. Vav and Heth said, "Yes." Al gave a longer answer to illustrate his lack of comprehension, "Village Rabbit have

new clothes because there is new clothes." Hei's lack of comprehension is demonstrated in an almost incomprehensible answer: "rabbit have a piece of cloth and expensive." Beth, Gim, Dahl and Zane, only half the group, were able to successfully decode and make a reasonable response to Question 8.12.

Question 8.13, "Which rabbit would most likely have rice and fish to eat every day?" like Question 8.12, has variations on two responses. The five students who comprehended the question gave a comprehensible textually inferred response, "Town Rabbit." Heth and Vav's answers, though understandable, answer a different question: "Because he is happy" (Vav) and "Because it was poor" (Heth). Hei's response was an attempt to duplicate the question: "every day rabbit eat."

All these responses, both to Questions 8.12 and 8.13, indicate that three of the students have very low abilities to decode. It is possible that the students confused the rabbits, and could not remember which traits belonged to which rabbit. This can be interpreted further in light of nine of the general knowledge questions that I gave the students before telling them the story of *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit*. Questions 8.2-8.6 were accompanied by Figure III.1 (page 49). Questions 8.9 and 8.10 were accompanied by Figure III.2 (page 50).

8.2 Who will the characters be in the story?

8.3 Will this story be real or imaginary

8.4 Match the rabbit to the houses.

8.5 Where would you find a house like A?

8.6 Where would you find a house like B?

8.7 Why do robbers/ thieves break into peoples houses?

8.8 If a stranger came to your house at night, what would you do?

8.9 What will happen to the rabbit?

8.10 Why is the rabbit afraid?

The students' responses to these questions are shown in Table IV.8. Question 8.4 of the general knowledge questions shows that three (Al, Hei, and Vav) of the four students who responded that the village rabbit had new clothes did not match the rich rabbit to the rich house. Hei and Vav also had difficulty decoding, "Which of the rabbits" in Question 8.13, neither identified a rabbit. Heth, who was able to match the rabbits in the general questions, did not apply the same assumptions to Questions 8.12 and 8.13. Her difficulty in

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decoding is apparent throughout the story. Al also struggled, though he did correctly identify the rabbit that

would eat the most expensive food in Question 8.13.

TABLE IV.8

Responses to General Knowledge Questions

Question	Al	Beth	Gim	Dahl	Hei	Vav	Zane	Heth	%R
8.2	(rabbits)	(rabbits)	(rabbits)	(rabbits)	(rabbits)	(animals)	(rabbits)	(hare)	100
8.3	Real	(imaginary)	(imaginary)	(imaginary)	real	(imaginary)	(imaginary)	real	63
8.4	b is rich	(1A, 2B)	1B, 2A	(1A, 2B)	b: rich	match houses	(1A, 2B)	(1A,2B)	50
8.5	(village)	(village)	(village)	(area, field)	(not town)	(village)	(village)	(village)	100
8.6	(town)	(town)	(town)	(town,district)	(town)	(town)	(town)	(town)	100
8.7	See story	(to steal)	(only to steal)	to help	(stealing)	(to steal)	(to steal)	Bring out	63
8.8	(help them)	(call police)	(help)	(help, food)	(food, sleep)	(is stealing)	(call police)	(welcome)	-
8.9	Afraid	(be killed)	be killed)	Hunter shoot)	afraid	(will die)	(will die)	(might die)	75
8.10	Love	ran fast	(maybe killed)	(hunter)	(gun)	(hunting)	(might die)	(being killed)	75

Key: (parentheses)=reasonable response

The reasonable responses to Question 8.14 reflect decoding as well as an implied script. In

response to "Why did Village Rabbit go to town?" five of the students alluded to Town Rabbit's invitation

for him to visit. The other responses reveal more about the nature of EFL listening comprehension. Heth

and Al make reference to finding or eating good food.

There is a reference in the text that Town Rabbit "ate fine food." The idea of hunger was also

very prevalent when the text was illustrating how poor Village Rabbit was: "He ate roasted maize because

there was no flour in the house." Thus, these responses could be considered scriptal inferences. Dahl 's

response is unreasonable. He seems to have incorporated some of the information from previous questions

in his answer: "To take new clothes to his brother." The idea of new clothes is not prevalent in the text at

all, just a fleeting statement that Town Rabbit had expensive clothes and shoes. The only place that "new"

is attached to "clothes" is in Question 8.12. The response is unreasonable because Village Rabbit did not

have any new clothes. Dahl should have known this since he responded to Question 8.12, "Village Rabbit

have not new clothes."

The remaining five questions in *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit* received very few

reasonable responses. Only two responses to Question 8.15, "Why did Village Rabbit and Town Rabbit think their last hour had come?" were reasonable. Both of these, "Because the robbers pointed a gun at them" (Gim) and "they had break into the house" (Zane) are textual inferences. Beth repeated the question, "think last hour had come." The other responses were undecipherable: "go there see well" (Al), "not happy" (Hei), "want them baby"(Vav), "just a word game" (Heth). It could be that poor spelling interfered with what these last four students wanted to say. I asked the primary education officer if she knew of cultural connection between some of the responses and the text, but she could not think of any.

Four responses to Question 8.16, "Why did robbers break into Town Rabbit's house" were reasonable. Two scriptal inferences alluded to the robbers' motivation of stealing (Beth and Gim). Two others focused on concepts from the text, citing characteristics of the house that would appeal to robbers: rich (Hei) and beauty (Heth). These would be textual inferences. Al's response that the "area was bad" was unreasonable since the area was not bad until after the robbers broke in. The question requires a response regarding the robbers' intent; this answer does not fulfill the requirement. "Broke the bedroom"(Vav) and "They had break house" (Zane) are also unreasonable, showing that the students had not properly decoded the question, "Why?" Once again, in Vav's and Zane's responses, we see that strategy of repeating or rearranging words in the question to come up with an answer. This strategy was not appropriate for this question.

There were two very different, yet equally appropriate responses to Question 8.17, "What will happen next?" The robbery was still a salient issue in Zane's mind. He thought that the rabbits would "report to the police and try to catch the thief." Beth focused on security. She wrote, "Town Rabbit will go to the Village and stay there." Al, Gim, and Vav all made references to everything being stolen. At least, I think that is what Al was referring to when he wrote, "all things was fall." This was not a reasonable response since everything being stolen was the antecedent for this question. Hei's response, "not happy," does not address the question.

Responses to Question 8.18, "Why did the Village Rabbit want to stay in the village," are of three levels of interpretation. Gim's response, "It was peace and quiet, Village Rabbit knew everyone," is decoded. It closely resembles the text. Vav's response, "He wanted the people" is also a decoded response, based on the concept that Village Rabbit liked the village because he knew everyone. The response that "it

was a good area" (Al) is implied. The village was peaceful and quiet. Combined with one's definition of a good area, one could scriptally infer Village Rabbit wanted to stay in the village because it was a good area. Certainly, it was better than the area of town where his brother resided. Zane's response reflects a sensitivity to the implications of the text: "Village Rabbit wanted to stay in the village because he was afraid of what had happened." Two of the responses, combined with an assumed script, show that students have decoded the word "peace" as "piece": "to find a piece of land" and "not joining a piece of work." Heth has returned to a script about looking for food, but still has Village Rabbit and Town Rabbit confused. Her response, "to find food" is unreasonable since this is not really the point of the story, though she has created a relationship between the story and her assumed script.

Table IV.9 summarizes the reasonability and the percentage of decoded and inferred responses to the short answer questions. The trend seems to be all or none. Either all of the reasonable responses to a question are decoded interpretations with none being inferred or all of the responses are inferred and none are decoded.

Only two questions, 5.4, "What will Mayi Changa do when she sees a hand go under the sack?" and 8.18, "Why did Village Rabbit want to stay in the village?" do not follow this pattern. Both questions ask the students to identify an action that one might take for self-preservation. Mayi Changa needed to protect her livelihood. Village Rabbit needed to protect himself. Question 8.18, "Why did the rabbits think their last hour had come?" also deals with self-preservation, but the question did not ask what the rabbits would do in reaction to their fear; it only asks to identify the reason for their fear. This, coupled with the struggle that most of the students faced in decoding "last hour had come" is responsible for the lack of decoded responses. The lack of decoding ability on this question is also evident in the drastic reduction of reasonable responses for the rest of the story.

The students began well, but their performance waned at the end of both stories. The percentage of reasonable responses started high, then tapered off. This could be due to the nature of the questions. The percentage of reasonable responses is greater than 60% for all of the questions that received decoded responses. Except for the 63% of reasonable responses to Question 8.13, "Which rabbit would most likely have rice and fish to eat almost every day?" none of the other questions that received inferred responses had a percentage of reasonable responses greater than 50. More inferred questions at the end of the stories

lead to a lower percentage of reasonable responses.

TABLE IV.9

Decoding vs. Inference in Short Answer Questions

Question	% Reasonable	Decoding	Inference	%Decoding	%Inference
2.10	33	0	2	0	100
4.4	100	4	0	100	0
5.1	100	5	0	100	0
5.3	60	0	2	0	100
5.4	40	1	1	50	50
5.5	60	0	3	0	100
8.11	88	7	0	100	0
8.13	63	5	0	0	100
8.14	88	5	2	100	0
8.15	25	0	2	0	100
8.16	50	0	4	0	100
8.17	25	0	2	0	100
8.18	50	1	3	50	50
8.19	13	1	0	100	0
Average	57		43	57	

In both stories, the comprehension dropped as soon as the questions were no longer general questions related to the story. In the story of *Mayi Changa*, Question 5.3, "Why did a hand go under the sack?" marks the first episode in the story. Questions 5.1 and 5.2 assessed comprehension concerning the setting of the story. In the story of *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit*, Question 8.15, "Why did the rabbits think their last hour had come?" begins the first episode of the story. The previous four questions assessed the students' comprehension concerning the setting of the story. For both "Why did" questions, there is a remarkable decrease of reasonable responses. Although the percentages rise in some of the subsequent questions, the former comprehension levels are not recovered. This is seen more clearly when considering the consistency of the students responses as they try to construct meaning from the stories. Al's responses to questions from *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit* demonstrate an inability to recover full comprehension. Three of the first four responses were reasonable. He incorrectly decoded "worn clothes" and responded in Question 8.12, "Village Rabbit have new clothes because there is new

clothes." Four of the last five responses are unreasonable. We see in his answers a struggle to maintain any type of theme. He inferred in Question 8.14 Village Rabbit went to town to eat good food, but the food theme is abandoned. His next response about going to town to see well makes no sense in the context of "Why did robbers break into Town Rabbit's house?" However, he does return to this theme in his response to Question 8.19, "Why didn't Village Rabbit want to go to town again?" He answered, "Want to go to town because you see well." To questions 8.16 and 8.18, he focused on the area, responding in 8.16 that robbers broke into Town Rabbit's house because the area was bad. Whereas in Question 8.16, the response is unreasonable since robbers would not break into a house because it is in a bad area, his response to Question 8.18 is reasonable when regarded as a scriptal inference. In 8.18, he said that Village Rabbit did not want to leave the village because the area was good.

While it is possible that Al's lack of comprehension for this story could be related to his being the youngest of the participants and also one of the weakest in proficiency, a comparison of his performance here and his performance on other stories does not support this assertion. In the story of *Takatuliang* (Appendix, Table 1, page 130), twelve of fifteen responses were correct. His responses to *Mkango and Fisi* (Appendix, Table 2, page 131) were also correct. Since the stories he responded to most accurately were those that consisted of multiple-choice questions, it appears that Al's greatest struggle may not be as much with comprehension as it is with trying to formulate his own answers.

An analysis of Beth's responses to *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit* reveals that if she answers correctly, it may be decoded or it may be inferred. Of six reasonable responses, three were inferred (Appendix, Table 5, page 135). To Question 8.18, "Why did Village Rabbit want to stay in the village?" her unreasonable response that Village rabbit stayed in town to "find a piece of land" gives evidence of an attempt at inferring. There was nothing in the text to imply that Village Rabbit was looking for land, unless she was using a cultural script that was unfamiliar to the researcher.

Like Al, Beth's proficiency was quite weak. However, her performance is not like Al's. She produced twice as many reasonable responses in the story of *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit* (Appendix, Table 5, page 135), but twice as many unreasonable responses in the story of *Takatuliang* (Appendix, Table 1, page 130). In producing answers, Beth has decoded more accurately and more often than Al. Her scriptal inferences are closer to the text, even if she does confuse the homonyms 'peace' and

'piece.' This would suggest that perhaps decoding and inference concerning behavior are independent of proficiency variables.

Dahl, another of the weaker participants in regard to proficiency, responded reasonably to three of the first four questions in *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit*, then did not answer anything else. This behavior was typical of many of the students who participated in the final story, but are not included in this study. Due to the absence of responses, it is difficult to assess the nature of Dahl's comprehension process. Since he did not participate in the story of *Mayi Changa*, there is no other information regarding his ability to produce responses.

Hei, like Al, could not recover comprehension once he made an unreasonable response to the "Why did" question. This occurred in both stories that required the students to produce responses. Like Beth, Hei reverts to writing whatever words he thinks he recognizes in the text, whether they make sense or not. In *Mayi Changa* he writes phrases like "sack it is called a handbag" and "market to market" in response to Question 5.3, "Why did a hand go under the sack?" and Question 5.4, "What will Mayi Changa do when she sees a hand go under the sack?" To Question 5.5, "Why did the owner of the hand go away screaming?" he responded, "it is swiming," which may have been an attempt to write "screaming." Hei and Heth worked as a team in the story of *Mayi Changa*, but the responses they gave are more similar to Hei's responses in *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit* than to Heth's. The attempt to take words out of the question to produce an answer is seen more often in Hei's responses. To Question 8.12, "Did Village Rabbit have new clothes" rather than a simple 'no' he wrote, "rabbit have a piece of cloth and expensive." The word 'expensive' came from the text, "Town Rabbit lived in a modern house with running water, a fine kitchen, and many beautiful rooms. He ate fine food and wore *expensive* clothes and shoes. " In response to Question 8.13, "Which rabbit would most likely have rice and fish to eat almost every day?" he wrote, "Every day rabbit eat." Heth did this only once in response to the last question, "Why didn't Village Rabbit want to go to town again?" she wrote, "He didn't go to town again."

Hei's other answers do show an attempt at consistency, though the responses "not happy" and "I was not happy" seem like more of a cop out. His last two responses change to a stronger topic, "work," which must come from a script for reasons he would go to town. However, the responses, "not joining piece of work" and "want to go to town to join work" do not adequately address the questions, "Why did

Village Rabbit want to stay in the village?" and "Why didn't Village Rabbit want to go to town again?"

In her responses to the questions of *Mayi Changa*, Vav demonstrated her ability to produce responses that reflect scriptal inference and gives evidence of maintaining a consistent interpretation. In her response to Question 5.4, she responded that Mayi Changa would shout at the thief, "go out, got out." Then, when asked why the thief ran away screaming, she responded, "Because Mayi Changa was shouting, he was running away."

Because of the consistency that Vav maintains in interpreting stories, her incorrect decoding of the first question in *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit* foreshadows a long struggle with comprehending this text, even if she is one of the more proficient students. She gives the shortest answer possible, and tends to use the words from the question to form her answer. In response to Question 8.16, "Why did robbers break into Town Rabbit's house?" she wrote, "He broke in the bedroom." In response to 8.17, "What will happen next?" she responds, "He stole all the good things." The text before the question stated: "The robbers stole all the good things in the house." Consequently, Vav's percentage of reasonable responses to this story is very low, only 22%. The two reasonable responses that she made were correctly decoded, and closely resembled the text.

Gim, who is one of the older, more proficient students, gives responses that are primarily the result of decoding. He can, and does, make inferences when appropriate, but if the answer can be reproduced from the text, that is the response he will produce. The two questions to which he gave unreasonable responses reflect his ambition to reproduce the text. To Question 8.17, "What will happen next?" he replied, "The robbers stole all Town Rabbit's things." This closely resembles the text, "The robbers stole all the good things in the house." It is an unreasonable response because it did not tell what happened "next" in the story, but what had just happened. His second unreasonable response was to Question 8.19, "Why didn't Village Rabbit want to go to town again?" He responded, "*Town* was peaceful and quiet"(italics mine). The text stated that the *village* was peaceful and quiet. The concept of peace and quiet, very directly related to the text, was accurate, but the place was incorrectly identified.

An analysis of Zane's responses reveals that Zane usually waits to make inferred interpretations. In the story of *Mayi Changa*, two of three responses were inferred. The response, "Mayi will be surprised when a hand goes under her sack," is difficult to characterize. He could be using a script about one's natural

response to a strange hand going into your money sack. However, this response seemed weak, and did not address the question, "What will Mayi do?" In the story of the rabbits, Zane's response to 8.16, "Why did the robbers break into Town Rabbit's house?" was unreasonable, "because they break the house." Although rearranging words from the question might make a reasonable response on some occasions, it does not work here. However, Zane is able to recover comprehension of the story. His responses to questions 8.17 and 8.18 show a depth of comprehension not present in any of the other responses by any of the other students. His inference that Village Rabbit wanted to stay in the village because he was afraid of what had happened reflects that he had a deeper understanding of the story than his classmates. He is also the only student who responded that the rabbits would call the police and try to catch the thieves who had broken into Town Rabbit's house.

The consistency of Heth cannot be determined from the other stories in the sample even though she responded to every question. Her responses to the short answer questions reveal an inability to compose her own inferred responses. Her responses to questions that allowed for multiple interpretations are hardly decipherable. For example, to Question 5.3, "What will Mayi Changa do when she sees the hand go under the sack?" Heth responded, "To market to market." This particular instance may be due to the influence of her partner, He, but the response to question 8.16 was her own. To the question, "What will happen next?" Heth responded, "They have a beautiful home." Robbers had just broken into Town Rabbit's house.

Table IV.10 summarizes the individual performance in producing responses to comprehension questions. On the short answer questions, the students tend to favor decoding over inferring when producing responses. Forty-eight percent (24 of 50) of the reasonable responses to short answer questions were decoded. Of the inferred responses, 73% (19 of 26) were scriptal.

Many of the responses the students produced were attempts to reproduce either the text or the question. This could be related to the predominant method of teaching in the culture. Students who have often rearranged words in the question to create a response would naturally fall back on this strategy when producing responses. Unfortunately, the strategy does not work too efficiently for inference questions. The low percentage of reasonable responses on short answer questions confirms the inadequacy of such a strategy when demonstrating knowledge of the implications of the text.

TABLE IV.10

Individual Performance on Short Answer Questions

Student	%Reasonable	# Decoded	#Textual	#Scriptal	Total
Al	55	1	1	3	9
Beth	60	3	0	3	10
Gim	83	5	1	4	12
Dahl	33	2	0	1	9
Hei	31	3	1	0	13
Vav	42	2	1	2	12
Zane	79	5	1	5	14
Heth	43	3	2	1	14
Total		24	7	19	50
% Total		48	14	38	

The students' performance in regard to proficiency is shown in Table IV.11. In considering the students' performance on all types of questions, and relating that to proficiency and age, there are some trends, but, from the size of the sample, it is difficult to judge how significant they are. Generally, the percentage of reasonable responses was similar for both groups, though the weaker students, who averaged 67% reasonable responses, were two points higher than the moderate students. The stronger students were more likely to decode than the weaker students. Their average was 44%, compared to the weaker students' average of 34%. The average for both the weaker students and the moderate students in making scriptal inference was the same, 30%. Thus, the difference in making textual inference shows that the weaker students were more apt to do so. They averaged 37% textual inferences while the moderate students averaged 26%. Thus, we could infer from this data that the stronger students are more likely to use decoding strategies while the weaker students rely on inference. In inferring, the stronger students are more likely to rely upon scripts that are related to the text while the weaker students' most successful inferences are those that are more directly related to the text.

In summary, a comparison of the responses to short answer questions with responses to multiple-choice questions demonstrates several things about the nature of the EFL listening comprehension of these students. In considering all the student's responses in the context of this comparison, I have four observations. The impact of the students' culture in regard to these observations will be discussed in regard

to the relationship of their responses to the form and content of the narratives in which they occurred.

TABLE IV.11

Comparison Of Frequency Of Inference And Proficiency

	Age	Total	Frequency of Response				Percentage			
			D	T	S	R	R	D	T	S
Weak										
Al	13	31	5	10	7	22	71	23	45	32
Beth	17	36	9	7	12	28	78	32	25	43
Dahl	18	36	8	8	7	23	64	35	35	30
Hei	18	29	7	6	2	16	55	44	44	13
Average		*33*	*7*	*8*	*7*	*22*	*67*	*34*	*37*	*30*
Moderate										
Vav	14	21	5	3	2	10	43	50	30	20
Heth	15	41	9	7	10	26	63	35	27	38
Gim	18	21	9	4	6	19	90	47	21	32
Average	*28*	*8*	*5*	*4*	*6*	*19*	*65*	*44*	*26*	*30*
Strong										
Zane	18	41	15	8	12	35	85	43	23	34

D = decoding, T=textual inference, S=scriptal inference, R=reasonable response

First, the tendency of the students to choose or produce responses that are close to the text indicates the students are most inclined toward bottom-up processes. In both reasonable and unreasonable responses, the students most often chose or produced a response that resembled either an element of the text or the question. This strategy does not necessarily indicate successful decoding, nevertheless, it highlights a particular strategy in responding to questions that the students are most inclined to use. This strategy, when successfully used, is not likely to show a student's ability to infer.

Second, successful inference was more likely to occur for multiple choice questions than for questions in which the student had to produce a response. This could be related to the students' reliance on reproducing something that is close to the text. In the multiple-choice questions, there was not always a response that could be reproduced from the text. Such questions forced the students to choose something that did not closely resemble the text, which, in turn, led to more of a balance of inference and decoding in the multiple choice questions.

Third, an analysis of the responses to both multiple-choice and short answer questions revealed

the most successful inferred responses were to questions regarding the emotional reactions of the characters. The students understood the anger of the princes when Takatuliang, a poor woodcutter, was chosen over them. They understood Fisi's jealousy. They understood Mayi Changa's need to protect her money. If they were able to decode the action, they could infer reaction.

Finally, in regard to decoding and inferring, the stronger students relied more on decoding; the reasonable responses of the weaker students were more likely to be inferred. This may indicate that the weaker students, because of their lack of fluency in decoding most often rely upon things they already know in order to make sense of the text. They try to compensate for this lack of fluency by making the text the source of their inference more often than the script that they have accessed. Slackman and Hudson found that five-year-olds made accurate inferences as often as first-graders, but that they were more likely to draw scriptal inferences based on their real world knowledge than textual inferences. This finding is not consistent with these findings, where it was the more proficient students who made more scriptal inferences than textual inferences. The difference in findings is most likely a result of the introduction of the third variable: decoding. Slackman and Hudson's participants did not struggle with the vocabulary because they were working in their native language. The participants in this study were struggling to make sense of a foreign language.

To further understand the nature of the interaction, as opposed to the alternation, of processes in the listening comprehension of these students, I investigated the nature of decoding and inferring within the context of Trabasso and Nicholas' (1980) extrapolative inferences. Analyzing the data within this framework will show the interaction of the students' scripts regarding the form of narrative and how they apply those scripts when interpreting narrative.

What type of inference is most often drawn reasonably?

If one accepts Thorndyke's story grammar as a description of all narrative, Nicholas and Trabasso's extrapolative inferences should emerge naturally; at least they should for Westerners. It was on the basis of this proposition that I selected three types of inferences to probe from the students in Malawi. For this analysis, there are seven causal consequence questions, six causal antecedent questions, and twelve questions regarding character intent. Do the responses of the students reflect a familiarity with the skills of

sequencing and goal orientation that such questions require?

Causal Consequence

The skill in determining causal consequences includes the recognition of forward sequencing. If I do 'X" then "Y" will happen. In the five stories, there are seven questions that deal with causal consequence. These are shown in Figure IV.5.

Causal Consequence

2.7 What kind of gift will win the contest?
    a) the most expensive
    b) the most valuable
    c) the one which proved the giver loved the princess

2.9 Who will win the contest? a) prince   b) merchant   c) woodcutter

2.18 How will the princes react to Mapaele's decision?
    a) they will be sad   b) they will be afraid
    c) they will be happy   d) they will be angry

3. 5 What will Mkango do?
    a) he will die because Kalulu didn't give him the medicine
    b) he will fire Kalulu
    c) he will give Fisi Kalulu's job

4.1 What will happen to goat, sheep, and cow?
    a) lion will tell them his last words
    b) lion will eat them

5. 4 What will Mayi Changa do when she sees a hand go under the sack?
8.17 What will happen next?

Figure IV.5 Questions Regarding Causal Consequence

Table IV.12 shows the responses of the students to questions regarding causal consequence. Generally, a response to this type of question should include an event of some kind. On Question 8.17, when asked, "What will happen next?" Heth responded, "They have a beautiful home." This response is not a causal consequence of a robbery. Neither is He's response "I am not happy." Hei and Heth's responses do not reflect an understanding that a prediction of what happens should show action.

Responses to causal consequences also require the identification of initiating events in a sequence. Vav and Gim's responses, which refer to all of the Town Rabbit's things being stolen, refer to an event, but unfortunately, the wrong one. The text preceding the "What will happen next?" questions stated: "Luckily, they were only tied up. The robbers stole all the good things in the house." Vav and Gim's responses are problematic because an event cannot be the consequence of itself.

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TABLE IV.12

Responses to Causal Consequence Questions

Question		Al	Beth	Gim	Dahl	Hei	Vav	Zane	Heth	%R
2.7	C	*c*	*b*	-	**(a)**	*c*	-	*B*	**(a)**	-
2.9	C	**(b)**	**(c)**	-	**(c)**	**(a)**	-	**(b)**	**(c)**	-
2.18	C	**(d)**	**(d)**	-	**(d)**	**(d)**	-	**(d)**	**(d)**	100
3.5	C	**(c)**	**(b)**	**(b)**	*a*	-	*a*	**(b)**	**(c)**	-
4.1	C	-	*a*	-	*a*	-	-	*A*	*a*	-
5.4	C	-	-	*MC quickly grabbed the hand*	-	to market to market	**(he is shouting go out)**	MC will be surprised	to market to market	40
8.17	C	all things was fall	**TR will go to village & stay)**	*stole all TR's things*	X	not happy	stole all the good things	**(report to police, catch thief**	they have beautiful home	25

Key: **bold** =scriptal response, *italics*=decoding, (parenthesis)= inference, R=reasonable response

In addition to being events, causal consequences must show some connection with the initiating event to demonstrate comprehension. Al's short answer that "all things was fall" in response to Question 8.18, "What will happen next?" is confusing. It seems like an event, but unless 'things' is identified, we don't know of its connection to the proposition that the robbers stole everything. Heth and Hei's response to Question 5.4, "to market to market" is just as confusing as "all things was fall." Was "to market to market" supposed to indicate some sort of event? It seems that they were just picking words out of the discourse that they could understand.

Only two students demonstrated the ability to successfully infer a causal consequence. Beth's response that "Town Rabbit will go to the village to stay there" relates a plausible event. One could infer that Town Rabbit's fear might drive him back to the village with his brother. All six of Beth's responses to causal consequences were reasonable. Zane's response, "Report to the police, catch the thief" also displays that the participant has the skills needed to formulate a good response to causal consequence. His response to Question 5.4, "Mayi Changa will be surprised" predicts a reaction rather than an event, but is nonetheless plausible.

It is difficult to determine from this sample, the frequency of reasonable responses to questions regarding causal consequences. This is because more than half of the questions regarding causal consequences were among the multiple choice questions for which there was not an unreasonable response.

As seen in Table IV.13, the percentage of reasonable responses for the three questions that did have this designation ranges from 25 to 100.

TABLE IV.13

Contrasts of Causal Consequence Responses

Question	% Reasonable	Decoding	Text	Script	%Decoding	%Text	%Script
2.7	-	4	-	2	66	-	33
2.9	-	-	3	3	-	50	50
2.18	100	-	-	6	-	-	100
3.5	-	-	-	5	-	-	100
4.1	-	4	-	-	100	-	-
5.4	60	1	-	1	50	-	50
8.17	25	-	-	2	-	-	100

Table IV.13 shows the number of responses to each of the causal consequence questions that were decoded, textually inferred, or scriptally inferred. There is a very high percentage of scriptal inferences. This is not surprising. The nature of the task requires the students to go beyond the text in order to determine what will happen next. To maintain an interactive comprehension process, the students need to be flexible in their application of scripts. In Question 2.7, the scriptal inference that the winning gift would be expensive led the students astray in Question 2.19 because the students were not flexible in their decoding of 'valuable.' 'Valuable' can mean 'expensive,' but when the students could not alter the meaning of 'valuable' to encompass more than just expensive, they could neither decode nor infer a reasonable response for Question 2.19, "Why didn't the princess choose one of the princes?"

To questions 4.1 and 5.4, however, scriptally inferred responses show more interaction with the text. Gim's decoded response to Questions 5.4, "What will Mayi Changa do when she sees a hand go under the sack?" only shows that he can pick the causal consequence out of the text. The response demonstrates his knowledge of sequencing and his ability to reconstruct that sequencing. However, there is no clear interaction between text and knowledge, just the ability to perform bottom-up processes.
The students' decoded responses to Question 4.1, "What will happen to Goat, Sheep, and Cow?" also show a mastery of bottom-up processes, but no interaction between text and knowledge. Their response that "Lion will tell them his last words" comes directly from the text. It could be argued that the students have

not built enough knowledge of the story at this point to make an inferred response. It is just the first question; they haven't received any clues yet to guide them into inferring Lion's ulterior motives.

For questions 2.9 and 3.5 the application of scriptal inference has completely different implications regarding comprehension. The scriptal inference of Question 2.9, "Who will win the contest?" involves more than just the application of a sequencing script. The student must also access a script regarding the genre of fairy tales, in which the underdog is most likely to win. The students who predicted winners from among the characters that had spawned the need for a contest demonstrated that they either had no knowledge of this aspect of fairy tales or they were not ready to apply it yet. Perhaps, they were interpreting the story without considering the context of genre. In any case, the students who applied the script showed more interaction between their knowledge and the text.

For Question 3.5, accessing a script for human compassion was not exactly appropriate for the interpretation of *Mkango and Fisi*. The central theme of the story is Fisi's jealousy. The outcome should be related to the attainment or non-attainment of Fisi's goals. Thus, Vav's response that Mkango will die because Kalulu did not give him the medicine indicates that she has missed the central theme of the story. In this context, a textually inferred response is more demonstrative of an interactive process between text and knowledge.

Basically, all that can be inferred from this data is that most of the students recognize causal consequence. That is, when the students do not have to produce their own response, they can distinguish the consequences of various actions from a list of actions. This recognition indicates that the students have a script for sequencing of narratives. Whether their scripts for sequencing encompass forward sequencing and causal sequencing will be the focus of the next section.

Causal Antecedent

The converse of causal consequence, causal antecedent, requires a slightly different skill in comprehension. In identifying causal antecedent, the students had to relate events or reactions in the text to previous actions. Six questions tested the students ability to identify causal antecedent: These are listed in Figure IV.6.

As shown in Table IV.14, the students were not consistently successful. Only half (21 of 42) of the students' responses were reasonable. Of twenty-one reasonable responses, only two were decoded. The

number of scriptally inferred responses (8) was slightly lower than the number of textually inferred responses (11).

Causal Antecedent

.13 Why was she silent?   a) she was angry   b) she was sad   c) she had nothing to say

3.6 Why did Fisi run away?
    a) to get Mkango's medicine   b) Kalulu needed his heart to make medicine for the wound

5.5 Why did the owner of the hand run away screaming?

8.15 Why did Village Rabbit and Town Rabbit think their last hour had come?

8.18 Why did Village Rabbit want to stay in the village?

8.19 Why didn't Village Rabbit want to go to town again?

Figure IV. 6 Questions Regarding Causal Antecedent

TABLE IV.14

Response to Causal Antecedent

Question		Al	Beth	Gim	Dahl	Hei	Vav	Zane	Heth	%R
2.13	A	**(c)**	**(c)**	-	(b)	(b)	-	**(c)**	a	83
3.6	A	(b)	(b)	(b)	(b)	-	(b)	(b)	**a**	83
5.5	A	-	-	**(he wanted to steal, caught)**	-	it is swiming	**because MC was shouting)**	**he may get caught)**	it is swiming	60
8.15	A	Go there see well	Think last hour had come	(robbers pointed gun at Rs)	X	not happy	want them baby	(they had break into house)	just a word game	25
8.18	A	**(good area)**	to find a piece of land	*Peace & quiet, knew everyone*	X	not joining a piece of work	(wanted the people)	**(afraid of what happened)**	**to find food**	50
8.19	A	Wanted to go b/c see well	He think he find food	town was peaceful & quiet	X	want to go to town to join work	to thank rabbit	*peace and quiet*	he didn't go to town again	13
%R		60	40	80	40	20	60	100	0	

Key: **bold** =scriptal response, *italics*=decoding, (parenthesis)= inference, R=reasonable response

Zane was the only student who consistently identified causal antecedent successfully. In response to Question 8.15, "Why did the Village Rabbit and the Town Rabbit think their last hour had come?" Zane wrote that they thought their last hour had come "because robbers pointed a gun at them." Gim said it was "because they had break into the house." Only one of the other responses was an intelligible response, but Beth did not answer the question: "think their last hour had come." It is possible that the students did not

understand the phrase, "their last hour had come." Their inability to decode hampered their ability to infer. Only two students were able to infer an answer to this question.

Heth was consistently unsuccessful in identifying causal consequence. Twice, once in question 3.6 and once in Question 8.18, she made a scriptal response, but neither of these was counted as an inference since they were not grounded in the text.

For all the participants, the responses to Question 8.18, "Why did the village rabbit want to stay in the village?" were not totally unreasonable; they just were not well grounded in the text. A couple of students misinterpreted "peace" for "piece" and responded that the village rabbit wanted to stay in the village "to find a piece of land" (Beth) or "not joining piece of work"(Vav). A third student also gave a cause, though it was not related to the text, "to find food" (Heth). Heth may have been referring back to the beginning of the text where there is a reference that "fine food" had been prepared for the Village Rabbit when he came to visit his brother.

Table IV.15 shows that short answer questions regarding causal antecedent differ from multiple-choice questions according to the type of interpretation. As with causal consequence the students were more likely to successfully recognize the sequence than to successfully produce a response that indicates their ability to identify causal antecedent. More than eighty percent of the responses to the multiple-choice questions were reasonable. At most, sixty percent of the responses to short answer questions in this category were reasonable.

TABLE IV.15

Causal Antecedent

Question	% Reasonable	Decoding	Text	Script	%Decoding	%Text	%Script
2.13	83	-	2	3	-	40	60
3.6	86	-	6	-	-	100	0
5.5	60	-	-	3	-	-	100
8.15	25	-	2	-	-	100	-
8.18	50	2	-	2	50	-	50
8.19	13	1	-	-	100	-	-

The three decoded responses to Questions 8.18 and 8.19, "Why did Village Rabbit want to stay in the village?" and "Why didn't Village rabbit want to go to town again?" included some version of this phrase in the text: "He was thankful for the peace and quiet of the village."

This reproduction was typical of the responses to short answer questions regarding causal antecedent. Even the responses to Question 8.15, "Why did the rabbits think their last hour had come?" though inferred, closely resembled the text: "At night, armed robbers came to the house. They broke into it and pointed guns at them." Gim wrote, "Robbers pointed a gun at them." Zane responded, "They break into the house."

The response to Question 5.5, "Why did the owner of the hand go away screaming?" could have come straight from the text as well: "She quickly grabbed it and bit hard on it." Neither Gim's nor Zane's response indicates that they had decoded properly. An unidentifiable word was the cause for miscomprehension on Question 5.5. Mayi Changa was a story that was used twice, but the students did not seem to understand it any better the second time that it was presented. However, when the story was dramatized on the second day, and the word, 'bite', was demonstrated, the students could identify the reason for the owner of the hand to go away screaming. Even the 60% of reasonable responses to this question draw upon the idea of stealing, but they don't reflect recognition of the pain caused when bitten:

"He wanted to steal, he was caught" (Gim)

"He may get caught as a thief"(Zane)

"Because Mayi Changa was shouting he was running away." (Vav)

None of these responses give a possible reason for why he was screaming. Their answers make sense within the script that they adopted. They continued to interpret the story according to their script of a theft at the market: "He wanted to steal. He was caught" (Gim) and "He might get caught as a thief" (Zane). Vav's response that he was screaming because Mayi Changa was shouting at him shows that she, too, was interpreting the story according to the previous script; she also used words from the question in her answer. These students' attempt at continuity shows that they are at least aware of the sequencing that should occur in stories.

Character Intent

Causal antecedent requires the student to connect preceding events with subsequent events. Intent requires the student to connect preceding motivations with subsequent events. With this activity, the participants showed a little more success. There were twelve questions in the analysis regarding character

intent. These are shown in Figure IV.7.

Character Intent

2.5 What did the princes want to do?
        a) sell something to the king   b) make an agreement with the king
        c) marry the princess   d) nothing

2.6 What was the king choosing?
        a) gifts for his daughter   b) a husband for Sangiang Mapaele
        c) a person to help him run his kingdom

2.17 Why did Takatuliang stay in the contest?
        a) he was sure he would win   b) he wanted to prove his love to the princess
        c) he was humble

2.19 Why didn't the princess choose one of the princes?
        a)   they were ugly   b) their gifts were not valuable
        c)   Takatuliang's gift was more beautiful   d) Takatuliang sacrificed a part of himself.

3.3 Why did Fisi hate Kalulu?
        a) because he wanted to watch Mkango's children
        b) because Mkango gave him meat. (write in: jealous)

3.4 Why did Fisi say that Kalulu knew the medicine for the wound?
        a) he wanted Mkango to get well
        b) he knew it would make Mkango mad at Kalulu.

3.7 Did Kalulu need a hyena's heart for the medicine? Yes or No

4.3 Why didn't the fox go in to see the lion? a) he was afraid of being eaten   b) he wanted fresh air.

4.5 Was the lion sick? Yes or No

5.3 Why did a hand go under the sack?

8.14 Why did Village Rabbit go to town?

8.16 Why did robbers break into Town Rabbit's house?

Figure IV.7. Questions Regarding Character Intent

        Table IV.16 shows the responses of the students to questions regarding character intent. Of seventy-four responses, fifty-six (76%) were reasonable. Sixteen of those responses were decoded; forty were inferred. Of the forty inferred responses, twenty-five came from the text.

        The most difficult was Question 6.3, "Why did the hand go under the sack?" The sample of students who wrote their answers for this activity was small, and they were allowed to collaborate on the answers. However, this did not help the students who could not identify intent. Their responses were almost unintelligible: "a sack it is a handbag" (Hei and Heth) and "he was not wurneng to Mayi Changa" (Vav). In fact, most of the unreasonable responses to intent questions seemed to be answering an entirely different question. Question 8.16 asked the students to identify the intent of the robbers for breaking into Town Rabbit's house. These answers, though not entirely unreasonable, do not address the question: "area was bad," "they have a beautiful home," and "because broke in the bedroom."

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TABLE IV.16

Character Intent Responses

Question		Ai	Beth	Gim	Dahl	Hei	Vav	Zane	Heth	%R
2.5	I	(b)	*c*	-	(b)	d	-	*c*	*c*	83
2.6	I	(b)	a	-	A	c	-	a	a	17
2.17	I	(b)	(b)	-	(b)	(b)	-	(b)	a	83
2.19	I	*d*	*d*	-	*d*	*d*	-	*d*	*d*	100
3.3	I	**(b)**	**(b)**	**(b)**	**(b)**	-	a	**(b)**	**(b)**	86
3.4	I	(b)	(b)	(b)	(b)	-	a	(b)	(b)	-
3.7	I	*y*	(n)	*y*	(n)	-	*y*	*y*	(n)	-
4.3	I	-	**(a)**	-	give L med	-	-	**(a)**	**(a)**	75
4.5	I	-	(n)	-	(n)	-	-	(n)	(n)	-
5.3	I	-	-	(to steal)	-	sack it is called handbag	he wasn't wurneng to MC	**(it need to stole MC's money)**	sack it is called handbag	40
8.14	I	(eat good food)	*to visit his friend*	*invited by TR to visit*	*take new clothes to his brother*	*brother of R sit in town*	*visiting TR*	*invited by TR*	**(find good food)**	88
8.16	I	*area was bad*	**(still commodities)**	**(robbers stole all)**	X	(because rich)	*broke in bedroom*	*they had break house*	(because beautiful)	50
%R			89	91	100	64	57	33	83	75

Key: **bold** =scriptal response, *italics*=decoding, (parenthesis)= inference, R=reasonable response

In spite of these deficiencies, the students were more likely to answer questions regarding character motive accurately and consistently. Two thirds of the responses were reasonable. The responses are also more uniform. To Question 2.19, all the students responded that the princes would be angry about Sangiang Mapaele's choice. To Question 2.17, there was only one reasonable response; five students chose it. To Question 4.5, "Is Lion really sick?" all four students who participated in the activity responded, "no."

Table IV.17 summarizes the types of responses for questions regarding the elicitation of character intent. A higher percentage of reasonable responses occurred in this category than in any other analysis. Also, there were more reasonable scriptally inferred responses.

It is not surprising that the students should identify character intent so well. The short answer questions to which they responded most uniformly dealt with the character's reactions. Throughout the study, the questions that ask the student to predict an emotional response to a situation received the most uniform responses.

TABLE IV.17

Character Intent

Question	% Reasonable	Decoding	Text	Script	%Decoding	%Text	%Script
2.5	83	3	-	2	60	-	40
2.6	17	1	-	-	100	-	-
2.17	83	-	5	-	-	100	-
2.19	100	6	-	-	-	100	-
3.3	86	-	-	6	-	-	100
3.4	-		6	1	-	86	14
3.7	-	4	-	3	57	-	43
4.3	75	-	-	3	-	-	100
4.5	-	-	4	-	-	100	-
5.3	40	-	-	2	-	-	100
8.14	88	5	-	2	71	-	39
8.16	50	-	2	2	-	50	50

How do cultural and educational values affect comprehension?

Throughout these analyses, two major themes have emerged which demonstrate the role that culture plays in comprehension: learning by rote memory, fluency in the identification of emotions, and, to a lesser degree, other cultural values shaped the way the students approached and interpreted the text. Because this study was conducted in an institutional setting, all of these themes are closely related to the cultural values imposed by the educational system. Rote memory is a favored method of instruction. Emotions are a favorite unit; each year has one unit devoted to talking about feelings.

No cultural value had a greater impact on how the students approached the text than the method of teaching. Over and over, throughout all the analyses, evidence of this method is clearly apparent in the responses the students gave to the questions. Reasonable and unreasonable responses alike bore evidence of the students' attempts to reproduce the text or rephrase a question so that it looks like an answer. While this strategy works for some questions, it most likely shows an over-reliance on bottom-up processes.

This does not mean that the best comprehension can be assessed in responses that do not look like the text. The students had not yet developed a knack for asking the right questions, and monitoring or

judging the true value of the scripts they had accessed. This is seen in several situations. Vav's script on shouting does not help her identify the reason for the shouting when she cannot decode Mayi Changa's true reaction to someone trying to steal her money. Gim and Zane's scripts on stealing don't help them much either. Their comprehension is inefficient when, in the absence of decoding skills, they rely completely on inference. Their scripts help them construct meaning from the story, but it is not exactly the meaning that the author intended.

Similarly, Al's scripts about "seeing well" and good and bad areas do not help him grasp the intended meaning of the author. In order to grasp the intended meaning of the author, the students needed to continue to monitor feedback from the text while applying appropriate scripts.

The only evidence in this data of interaction between text and knowledge is found in the response of Zane to the questions of *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit*. In this story, some of Zane's responses reflect accurate decoding. A few of his responses are reproductions of the text, including an unreasonable response, but not all of them. The scripts he accessed about burglary make sense in the context of the story.

Gim's percentage of reasonable responses (90) was similar to Zane's, but his responses did not reflect the same depth of comprehension as Zane's. He continuously applied the strategy of reproducing the text. Even his inferred responses are reproductions of the text. There is no evidence of interaction between top-down and bottom-up processes.

Although reproduction of the text was the predominant strategy employed by the students, it was not the only one. When Hei couldn't formulate a response, he resorted to telling about emotions. This strategy showed his lack of comprehension. "I am happy" is not an appropriate response to "Why did the rabbits think their last hour had come?" His response of "I am not happy to Question 8.17, "What will happen next?" is equally inappropriate.

Zane resorted to a similar tactic when responding to Question 5.4, "What will Mayi Changa do when she sees a hand go under the sack?" His response, "Mayi Changa will be surprised," though a little better than Hei's responses, is still not entirely appropriate.

It is as if the students are using their greatest strengths when tackling comprehension tasks. One strategy is to reproduce the text as closely as possible. The other is to talk about emotions. Questions regarding emotions received more accurate and more uniform responses than any of the other questions.

However, when the students wrote their own responses to a question by identifying emotions, the strategy only worked one time for one person. Zane responded to Question 8.18 Village Rabbit was afraid about what had happened in town.

The students' references to emotions could be due to a greater familiarity with the topic. The English textbooks in Malawi did give a fair amount of instruction about various emotions. In the seven-week period that I was in Malawi, for each of the standards that I taught there was a unit about emotions.

There were other cultural values that affected the students' comprehension. Three incidents illustrate other, more specific cultural values that affect the students' comprehension. All of these are issues the students face in their daily lives. They are apparent in the students responses to the general knowledge survey I administered before reading *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit*, themes that emerge from the stories in the textbook, and a comparison of those themes with the cultural issues that surface in the text that originates in a culture foreign to Malawi, *Takatuliang*.

My intention in asking the students ten general knowledge questions before reading *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit* was to compare the content of what they could volunteer with their responses to comprehension questions in the story. The general questions would give me some idea of what scripts were accessible to the students before we read the story. The results of this type of analysis proved inconclusive, but I was able to pinpoint two issues that would shape the way the students interpreted the story.

Since the main episode of the story deals with a burglary, one of the questions I asked the students was, "If a stranger came into your house at night, what would you do?" Zane and Beth were the only two students in the entire school who said they would call the police. Other students said that they would welcome the stranger, ask him if he needed a place to sleep or something to eat. No wonder so many students were unable to answer Question 8.15, "Why did the rabbits think their last hour had come?" Not only did they have to deal with decoding the idiom, "last hour had come," but also had to wrestle with the concept of someone breaking into the house.

Though the students were familiar with anthropomorphic animals in other stories, they had never really considered all the implications of such a tale. One student whose responses were not analyzed in this study was tickled when he saw the rabbits wearing clothes and glasses. I took the anthropomorphism one

step farther in Question 8.13, when I asked, "Which rabbit is most likely to eat rice and fish every day?" Sixty-three percent of the participants in the study were able to respond to this question and infer that fine food for an anthropomorphic rabbit could be rice and fish (the students' idea of fine food). Many of the students whose responses were not analyzed in this study had difficulty with this question.

A couple of cultural issues emerged in the story of *Takatuliang* as well. To Question 2.6, "What was the king choosing?" the students were given three possible choices: gifts for his daughter, a husband for Sangiang Mapaele, and a person to help him run his kingdom. Earlier in this chapter, I proposed that in a culture where people are expected to find jobs for their relatives, it would not be too much of a stretch to say that, in a round about way, King Simbau was choosing someone to help him run his kingdom. This response assumes that the students have inferred the princes are relatives who have come to the king looking for a job. Incidentally, only one student gave this response. It is possible that this could have been what he was thinking; the script about looking for work is one that he accessed in the story of *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit*, too.

Though *Takatuliang* was included to contrast cultures, the students' responses do not reflect difficulty with cultural issues. The themes that surface in the texts published by the Malawi Institute of Education and are apparent in the students' responses to short answer questions —looking for work, fighting poverty and hunger, survival—are also apparent in *Takatuliang*. Although the story of *Takatuliang* came from a different culture, the theme of survival and rising above poverty was so familiar to the students that the story's origin in another culture was not really a factor in their comprehension. Most of the students had more difficulty with the concepts in the story of *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit*.

Conclusion

Based on the results of these four analyses, we can make several important conclusions concerning the nature of EFL listening comprehension. First, the students in this study primarily preferred bottom-up processes. This is evident from their responses. In producing their own responses, the students tried to reproduce either the text or the questions. The preferred method of teaching language, the one of which the students were most familiar, consisted of repeating after the teacher and answering questions by using the same words in a different order. From Table IV.2 (page 67), we see that when presented with questions that contrasted decoding or inferring, the participants in this study favored decoding. Overall, 44% of the

reasonable responses of the more proficient students were decoded, while only 34% of the less proficient students' reasonable responses were decoded (Table IV.11, page 97).

Which was more likely to be the source of their inference, the text or a script? Table IV.4 (page 73) shows that when students were presented questions that give them a choice between textual or scriptal inference, 48% of the inferences were grounded in the text ; 53% were grounded in a script. In contrasting moderately proficient students with less proficient students (Table IV.11, p 97), the moderate students were more likely to use a script while the less proficient students were most likely to use a text. This finding is based on the averages of each group so there are several exceptions, but in general, more proficient decoders were more likely to use a script when making inferences.

The students, when presented with questions that offered choices that were unreasonable, displayed a wide range of accuracy (Table IV.5, p.76). The fewest reasonable responses were given by Vav, 50%. Gim always recognized reasonable responses, though we see from his responses to short answer questions (Table IV.7, p.85), that he only wrote reasonable responses 83% of the time. The ability to produce reasonable responses shows even greater disparity among the students. Here, the scores range from 33% to 83%. On average, the students recognized reasonable responses 75% of the time and produced reasonable responses 57% of the time. These averages will give us a standard by which to measure the type of extrapolative inference that is most often drawn reasonably.

Causal consequence, though recognized by the students, was difficult for them to produce. While we cannot draw any accurate conclusions concerning the students' recognition of causal consequence— only one question presented the students with unreasonable choices—the low percentages of reasonable responses written by the students indicate this type of inference is not often drawn reasonably (Table IV.12, p. 100). From the 100% of reasonable responses to 2.18 we see that six the students recognized causal consequence at least one time, but less than 40% of the produced responses were unreasonable. This is less than the standard percentage of reasonable responses, so, if the students could recognize causal consequence, they encountered difficulty in talking or writing about it.

Causal antecedent was also one of the easier inferences to recognize, but a more difficult inference to write about. Table IV.14 (page 103) shows that the students chose reasonable responses to causal antecedent 83% percent of the time, but when called upon to write their own response, less than 60% of

them were reasonable. These findings for causal antecedent and causal consequence inference questions indicate that sequencing is a skill that the students recognize. However, they need help formulating the language to express sequencing.

The source of inference for causal consequence and causal antecedent is somewhat different. As recorded in Table IV.13 (page 101), all but one question regarding causal consequence received at least one response based on a scriptal inference. There are more inferences based on the text for causal antecedent (Table IV.15, page 104), but an equal number of questions received textual and scriptal responses. It is not surprising that causal antecedent questions have more responses based on the text. The stories in this study were all based on forward sequencing. This would make it possible to determine antecedents from the text. Since the consequence is often not revealed until after the question is asked, it usually requires a more scriptal response.

Character intent seems to be the easiest type of inference for the participants. Table IV.16 (p.107) shows that usually more than 75% of the responses to these questions were reasonable. Even the responses that the students produced have greater accuracy than the other two types of inference. On the most difficult question, 40% of the responses that the students' wrote were reasonable.

To some extent, the students' performance on the character intent questions highlights the affect their culture has on their comprehension. Though the students could not always identify the most devious of intentions, they could relate to the goals. This is remotely related to emotions and the ability of the students to empathize with the characters in the stories they read. Sometimes, especially when producing responses, their efficiency in the area of emotion led to their demise. Thinking that maybe a response of "I am happy" or "I am afraid," which worked so well in their lessons on feelings, could be applied to show their empathy with a character, they wrote what they knew, but in this situation, they did not know enough.

What do they need? From our exploration of the listening comprehension process of these students, can we devise a plan, can we determine a means of defining and meeting the educational needs of other listeners in other EFL classrooms? This and the implications of our findings for the EFL classroom will be the focus of our exploration in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

Implications and Applications for the EFL Classroom

This has been a long journey. Not just a journey to a jungle in Africa, but an intellectual journey, a journey through many minds and texts. Very few researchers have the opportunity to study novice level English students outside the United States. Even fewer have the patience. Considered as a whole, this study may form the basis for a theory of how comprehension works at lower levels of comprehension and how teachers and researchers can use that information to assess listening comprehension in the classroom and challenge their students to become more fluent in their understanding.

Based on the results of the four analyses in Chapter IV, we can make two important conclusions concerning the nature of novice EFL listening comprehension.

- Students preferred bottom up processing
- Students read into stories their own personal experiences

At first glance, these conclusions seem to conflict with each other. Although the first conclusion explicitly states a preference for bottom-up processes, the last conclusion involves the use of scripts, implying favoritism for top-down processing. The top-down processes of novice comprehension do not necessarily lead to accurate conclusions. Thus, the main pedagogical objective in novice listening comprehension is to guide students in accessing the appropriate scripts. Keeping this in mind, we will review the theoretical framework, then explore the implications and practical applications of guiding students in decoding and in accessing appropriate scripts.

Theoretical Framework

We have examined interactive models of EFL/ESL reading comprehension, studies in inference

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processing, story grammars, and a taxonomy of inference in setting up a framework with which to explore comprehension in an EFL setting. This framework, mapped under the guidance of Carrell, Grabe, Slackman and Hudson, and Trabasso and Nicholas, and Buck has proven indispensible in our exploration of EFL listening comprehension. Carrell and Grabe sketched a model for considering comprehension as an interactive process that includes both top-down and bottom-up processing. Slackman and Hudson's (1984) study defined two types of inferences that would prove useful in exploring the interaction of these processes. Trabasso and Nicholas' (1980) taxonomy defined three types of extrapolative inference that were of interest to use regarding the formal scripts the student accessed in relation to narrative.

Slackman and Hudson's (1984) study defined different sources of inferences. Although these definitions provided a useful means of exploring listening comprehension, since the study does not focus on cross-cultural aspects of drawing inferences, it is inadequate for defining the nature of the scripts accessed for scriptal inference. As noted earlier in this study, scriptal inferences have varied levels of usefulness in comprehension. Those that moved away from the text seemed to indicate a lack of comprehension and an over-reliance on top-down processes. Buck's (1991) suggestion that "care must be taken to ensure that items are passage dependent" (p.78) may prove useful in distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate use of scripts in future research. Grabe's (1988) definition of various types of scripts—content, formal, and metacognitive—may be a useful means of classifying various scripts. However, since this study focused more on the content scripts, our exploration of the implications and practical applications for the classroom will be limited to behaviors observed in the students' response to the content of the listening activities.

Implications

To help EFL students achieve better listening comprehension, we have explored eight students' responses to questions, searching for barriers to novice listening comprehension. The main cause of poor listening comprehension is the inefficient use of scripts. This cause stems from two behaviors exhibited by the students of this study: preference for bottom-up processes, inappropriate access of personal experience scripts. Both of these behaviors—bottom-up processing and top-down processing—are not bad in and of themselves. Good comprehenders use the same strategies. What makes these strategies barriers to these

students' comprehension was they used them inappropriately, and had not fully discovered how to keep them balance the two processes for efficient comprehension. Thus, the focus of pedagogical application should be to move students from an inappropriate to a more appropriate use and balance of bottom-up processes and top-down processes.

Preference for bottom-up processes

The students in Malawi most often produced responses governed by bottom-up processes. This is evident from their responses; in producing their own responses, the students tried to reproduce either the text or the questions. The preferred method of teaching language, the one of which the students were most familiar, consisted of repeating after the teacher and answering questions by using the same words in a different order.

Answers that resembled the text were frequent, both in reasonable and unreasonable responses. This could be the effect of hundreds of hours of instruction in rote memorization. Did the students understand what it meant when they were repeating, "The shirt is red. What color is the shirt?" A reproduction of the question or the text did not reflect efficient listening comprehension. Usually, the students who employed this type of tactic were trying to compensate for their inability to decode. They seemed to take the few words they could decode and construct a story from those. This is seen in Beth and Hei's use of "piece of land" and "piece of work" after hearing that Village Rabbit liked "peace and quiet."

Most of the students in this study were not consistently efficient in decoding. There were several instances when the students' responses indicated they had not correctly decoded a word in the text or in a question: 'valuable' in *Takatuliang*, 'bit' in *Mayi Changa*, and 'broke in' and 'last hour had come' in *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit*. These require various degrees of decoding. "Bit" is a very physical, very concrete action, but the students did not even recognize it until it was made visual for them. "Broke in" is a little more metaphorical in nature, but the context around it—robbers, steal—give clues to its meaning. "Valuable" as it was used in *Takatuliang* could be interpreted in similar settings as something expensive, in fact, the princes of the story had interpreted the king's reference to the most valuable gift to mean expensive.

To help students become better decoders, we as teachers need to provide novice students with meaningful context. Drama, pictures, and many opportunities to interact using a new word should be

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employed to help students experience the meaning of the word. Also, students need to learn skills for associating different words in context in order to decipher the meaning of a new word. In the classroom, students like Hei and Beth, who tend to create their own scripts may need more vocabulary building activities to help them become better decoders.

<u>Accessing scripts for top-down processing</u>

Efficient comprehension was not gained through a total reliance on top-down processes either. Students like Al and Heth who accessed scripts and continued to construct the story based on their script rather than on the message may have had more coherent stories, but those stories did not match those that were explicit in the message of the text. Al's references to a good area and a bad area did not really show that he understood the *Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit*. Heth's adherence to the food theme caused her to miss the central theme that security was more important to the Village Rabbit than wealth.

The students read into the stories concerns that they face in their own lives. Evidence of this is found in the scriptally inferred responses, some reasonable and some not so useful, in which the students talked about issues regarding survival. When these themes were in the stories, the students readily identified them. All the students recognized Village Rabbits hunger. Most correctly identified that he went to town to visit his brother. Both of these are common, everyday experiences in the lives of Malawian primary school students. Many students attributed even more of their 'going to town' scripts, inferring Village Rabbit was taking something to his brother or finding work. These inappropriate parts of the script, rather than enriching the students comprehension of the story, distracted them from the themes intended by the author.

Overreliance on an inaccurate script to construct comprehension is also apparent in the responses to *Mayi Changa*, the three students who constructed inferred interpretations did not comprehend one of the central actions of the text: 'bit.' Instead of relying on decoding strategies, which were inefficient because they could not decode; they relied too heavily on inferring strategies. Neither type of processing by itself helped the students interpret the message as the author intended for it to be interpreted.

The difficulty, then, is not just with the students' decoding skills, but also with the types of scripts they access. They seem to naturally use their personal experience to interpret stories. They use recognized lexical clues to construct meaning from the stories. Whereas it may be easy to advise teachers to help

students access the appropriate scripts, the actual application of such advice is a little rougher. Top-down processing depends on an accurate recognition of the lexical clues. For this reason, it may be more advisable for teachers to help students identify related words within the story (i.e. steal, robbers, broke in) and talk about the relationships. Extension activities could include creating new stories using the same concepts and new characters. Activities like this one will emphasize the use of scripts as well as provide more experience in decoding.

<u>Maintaining a balance</u>

Carrell's (1988) assertion that there needs to be a balance of top-down and bottom-up strategies is supported by the comprehension behaviors displayed by the Malawian primary students. Indeed, the one instance where a student demonstrated an efficient comprehension of the text demonstrates accurate decoding and flexibility in accessing different types of scripts. Zane was able to access the most appropriate scripts because he was able to decode accurately. In the story of *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit,* Zane's ability to decode "last hour had come" allowed him to understand the fear involved, which, in turn, allowed him to access an appropriate script for why Village Rabbit did not want to go back to town. Another student, Gim, who had the same number of reasonable responses in *The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit,* most of which resembled the text, demonstrated his ability to reconstruct important information from the text. However, since most of his answers closely resembled the text, he does not demonstrate the same intensity of interaction with the text. Like Zane, he could identify the reason for the rabbits' fear when the burglars broke in, but he did not consider the fear as a reason for Village Rabbit to stay in the village. He opted for a more text-based response, "He wanted peace and quiet."

In EFL classrooms, both the content and the vocabulary of stories should be familiar to the students in order to promote an interaction between top-down and bottom-up processes. In order to increase listening comprehension, pre-listening activities should focus on concept recognition as well as word recognition. Perhaps if we as teachers give equal time to bottom-up and top-down processes, our students will more quickly acquire the skills they need to maintain the balance in their comprehension.

Applications for Today's EFL Classroom

What makes some questions harder than others? In a word, familiarity. To decode, a student needs

to be familiar with the words. To infer, a student needs to be familiar with the content and form. Familiarity comes through exposure and practice. In order to create and environment that fosters progress in listening comprehension, the EFL classroom should present opportunities for students to practice.

To assess the comprehension process, teachers must be sensitive to what the students know and what skills the students use in processing the information. The process of comprehension involves the interaction of top-down and bottom-up processes. It is not enough to determine when the students decode and when the students infer. By asking questions to highlight the students' skills in one of these areas, researchers and teachers can determine the proficiency of the students at one skill or the other, but, as demonstrated in this study, proficiency in decoding or proficiency in inferring does not make efficient comprehension. Even alternating between the two skills does not indicate proficient comprehension; only interaction of the skills reflects comprehension. The questions need to elicit responses that reflect some aspect of the text without reproducing it.

The multiple-choice questions were best for assessing which of the processes the students were most apt to use when interpreting narrative. They also force the students to choose a response that does not mirror the text. The greatest advantage of using multiple choice questions was the ability to determine ahead of time the type of processing a particular response reflected. Multiple-choice questions have disadvantages, but for this situation, the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. The disadvantages can be counteracted. Multiple-choice questions invite guessing, but with a greater number of questions, the influence of guessing is minimized.

The shortcoming of the multiple-choice format in assessing the listening comprehension process is that it does not allow students to demonstrate their use of strategies. Multiple-choice questions in this sample did not allow the researcher to observe when the student could not determine the task; placing such a choice in among the responses could help in this respect. For example, on the short answer questions, there were a number of instances when the students responded with a causal antecedent though the question called for a causal consequence. This situation could be counteracted as well. When designing questions, the researcher could write a distracter which reflects the student's misinterpretation of the question. With these modifications, the test would allow researchers to better assess the process of listening comprehension in EFL students.

The responses of the students in this study indicate that more lessons need to overtly emphasize sequencing. Gim and Vav's responses to Question 8.17, "What will happen next?" imply that they do not really understand the question. Instead of telling what would happen next, they told what had already happened. Heth also gives a response based in the previous text, but it makes no sense at all. The struggle the students had in decoding these questions as well as causal antecedent questions may stem from an inability to decode tense and distinguish between "Why did" and "What will" or it may be because they are not familiar with "Why" questions. Whichever is the case, the students need more practice, and possibly some instruction, in how to express and formulate language in regard to events that precede other events. This instruction should include strategies in interpreting the language of questions that call for the identification of event sequences.

The types of inference questions that could be asked are certainly not limited to those of this study. Other types of inference questions could be asked, but care needs to be taken in defining them and defining the means of classifying the reasonable responses associated with them. A clearer definition would help the researcher avoid the pitfalls of not knowing what the inference is truly measuring or the appropriateness of accessing a particular script.

Parting Words

Looking at EFL listening comprehension in these contexts suggests some ways for building on to a theoretical framework for future exploration. It will help form a map for the next journey into the minds of EFL students. Practical applications of this study should be considered, too. They represent what can be done today in order to prepare for the next journey.

During the course of this study, as the students become more comfortable with Americans as teachers, as they became more familiar with the types of inference tasks I requested of them, and as life began to settle into a familiar routine, some of the students began to change. Heth and Beth, too shy to speak more than two words at a time in class, became bolder about approaching me. Though far from initiating a long conversation, they did seek me out to ask simple questions or to invite my partner, who was about their age, to join them in some of their activities. Hei, who barely said, 'yes' or 'no' during our first encounter, attempted sentences in our last class. Outside the classroom, he began responding in

English. Sometimes, it was only a couple of words. Sometimes, it was a question or a request. Vav, who was self-conscious about leading the national anthem in English for the first few weeks, sang several English songs at our farewell party. One of them was a song that I had taught in class. The others, she had learned on her own. Unlike the song the students sang when we met, which could not be distinguished as English or an African dialect, the song at our parting was in clearer English. Zane was consistently at the forefront, asking questions and trying out new words.

The progress of these students shows the importance of their exposure to different types of practice—not just memorization, but interaction with new content, new forms, and new skills. One day, if the students continue to practice, maybe they will be able to formulate an answer to the riddle of comprehension and become a personal tour guide in another journey through the maze of EFL listening comprehension.

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APPENDIX

STORIES, QUESTIONS, AND RESPONSES

STORY 1 THE TORTOISE AND THE HARE

One day, all the animals of the forest were visiting together. A hare boasted that he was the fastest animal in the jungle. He challenged the tortoise to a race. The tortoise reluctantly accepted the challenge and the race began.

1.1 Who do you think will win the race?

The rabbit ran far ahead of the turtle until there was a long distance between them. Since he was so far ahead, the rabbit decided to take a nap.

1.2 What will happen next?

The turtle plodded along slowly. He tiptoed past the rabbit. When the rabbit awoke, he was surprised. The turtle was already crossing the finish line.

1.3 What is the lesson of the story?

Story 2: *Bukti Cinta Takatuliang* (Takatuliang proves his love)

2.1 What will this story be about?
        a) I think the story will be about a chief who made something for a beautiful lady
        b) I think the story will be a fairy tale about a princess who buys things from merchants.
        c) I think the story will be about a poor man who wants to marry a princess
        d) I think the story will be about _____

2.2 Who wrote the story?   a) Bukti Cinta Takatuliang   b) Ill Anwar F
        c) Takatuliang   d) Ramah Asa   e) Sulawesi

King Simbau, the king of Simbau, an island in the Sulawesi Sea, had a beautiful daughter, Sangiang Mapaele.

2.3 Who will be the main characters in this story?
        a) Takatuliang   b) King Simbau   c) Sangiang Mapaele
        d) merchants   e) princes   f) Indonesia
2.4 Who is Sangiang Mapaele? a) a prince b) a merchant's daughter   c) princess

Three princes came to propose.

2.5 What did the princes want to do?   a) sell something to the king
        b) make an agreement with the king   c) marry the princess   d) nothing

There were also many merchants. Who should he choose as son-in-law? The king was confused. King Simbau did not want to make a bad choice.

2.6 What was the king choosing?   a) gifts for his daughter
                b) a husband for Sangiang Mapaele
                c) a person to help him run his kingdom

He wanted his daughter to be happy. The person who would become Sangiang Mapaele's husband must truly love her. King Simbau made a contest. Whoever could give Sangiang Mapaele the most valuable gift would prove that he loved her and would become Sangiang Mapaele's husband, whether rich or poor.

2.7 What kind of gift will win the contest?   a) the most expensive   b) the most valuable
                    c) the one which proved the giver loved the princess

The contest was announced throughout the country, and even to the neighboring islands. Common people were not brave enough to enter the contest. Besides, how could a common man give the princess a valuable gift? But Takatuliang, a poor woodcutter wanted to try.

2.8 What kind of people entered the contest? a) rich   b) poor   c) brave
2.9 Who will win the contest?   a) prince   b) merchant   c) woodcutter

Takatuliang thought and thought.

2.10 What is Takatuliang thinking about?

He went into the jungle. He selected a fine piece of wood, then cut it off the tree. Day after day he worked until he was tired, but he did not go home. His mother came looking for him. She wiped the sweat from his brow. She asked, "What are you doing in the jungle that keeps you from coming home?"
        Takatuliang answered, "I am working for my princess, Mom."
        The next day, his mom came back. She asked again, "What are you doing in the jungle that keeps you from coming home?" Takatuliang answered, "I am working to prove my love."
        When she heard this his mom was very surprised. Until now, she did not know her son planned to propose to the princess. She cried, "Takatuliang, O Takatuliang, you're chasing shadows. Be sensible dear,

you don't have any money."

2.11 Does Takatuliang's mother think he has a chance of winning the contest?
2.12 Does Takatuliang think he can win?

Takatuliang replied, "If that is how it is, I must create something to prove my love."

The next day, his mother came back. She looked at Takatuliang. His concentration was completely on his work. Sweat dripped from his brow. His mother tried to talk some sense into her son. "Takatuliang, sweetheart, truly you don't understand. Stop dreaming. It is not possible for you to win the princess. We are of the lower class, child, and she is royalty. She will surely humiliate you."

Takatuliang replied, "Alas, mother, social status is only a consideration of those who refuse to strive for something better, only for those who refuse divine favor. Within me, there is spirit, there is talent and feeling and love than can change human fate."

His mother was silent.

2.13 Why was she silent? a) she was angry   b) she was sad   c) she had nothing to say

She already knew that Takatuliang was strong-willed. She could only pray that her son's heart would not be broken. Takatuliang smiled at his mother, stood up and wiped a tear from her cheek. He helped his mother stand up, then led her out of the jungle.

The youth continued carving, chiseling, and shaping the wood to make a doll. He hollowed out a place for the eyes, chiseled a nose, and carved beautiful lips. He looked for small, dried seeds to put into the holes for eyes. He stained the lips red. The doll was ready, so Takatuliang went home.

However, at his house, Takatuliang was still thinking. He felt that his work was far from perfect. Would the princess want a bald, naked wooden doll like that? Surely she would laugh and make fun of it.

2.14 Does Takatuliang think that the doll is finished?
2.15 What will he do next?   a) take the doll to the princess   b) put clothes on the doll
                                     c) put hair on the doll   d) paint the doll's eyes

Takatuliang took an old piece of cloth, the only cloth his father had left him when he died. He tore off a piece of the cloth and sewed it into a dress for the doll. Then he made the greatest sacrifice. He cut his own wavy hair. Because the sap from the wood was sticky, the hair stuck as soon as he put it on the doll's head.

The day of the contest arrived. The contestants came before the king. Three princes sat in front, showing off their elegant clothes to Sangiang Mapaele. The merchants also sat in front. Only Takatuliang, with his worn clothing, sat in the back, hugging his doll.

The first contestant stepped forward. He was a prince from Tatelu Island. He said, "Princess, this is the true proof of my love: an ivory comb inlaid with diamonds and jewels."

Sangiang Mapaele asked, "How many combs like this do you have?"

The prince of Tatelu Island replied, "Lots of them, chests and chests full."

The prince of Darua spoke up: "This bolt of silk cloth proves my love."

Sangiang Mapaele asked, "How much silk like this do you have?"

The prince of Tatelu Island replied, "Lots of it, closets and closets full."

It was the third prince's turn. He came from Epa Island. He bowed, dangling a very expensive gold and diamond necklace between his fingers.

2.16 What question will Sangiang ask the Prince of Epa?

Sangiang Mapaele asked, "How many necklaces like this do you have?"

The prince of Tatelu Island replied, "Lots of them, boxes and boxes full."

After the merchants had taken their opportunity to show the proof of their love, it was Takatuliang's turn. He stepped forward uncertainly. Sangiang Mapaele saw him and asked, "What have your brought as a symbol of your love?" Takatuliang replied: "Not much. Only a doll."

2.17 Why did Takatuliang stay in the contest?   a) he was sure he would win
          b) he wanted to prove his love to the princess   c) he was humble

Sangiang Mapaele asked, "How many dolls do you have?"

          Takatuliang knelt down. He said, "Only one I made from wood. I covered her with my hair and wrapped her in my father's cloth. If I had twice as much hair and my father had two cloths, sure I would make many dolls to give my lady."

          "Do you mean this doll's hair is from your head? And this doll's clothes are made from your father's cloth?" asked Sangiang Mapaele.

          "That's true, Your Highness," replied Takatuliang. "My father died and it was the only cloth he left."

          Sangiang Mapaele was moved. So was King Simbau. He asked, "My daughter, who do you choose to be your husband?"

          "Father," said Sangiang Mapaele, "Only Takatuliang has shown proof that he loves me. I choose him."

2.18 How will the princes react to Mapaele's decision? a) they will be sad   b) they will be afraid
                                                    c) they will be happy   d) they will be angry

          Truly, the princes and merchants were angry. "Your honor, it is not fair. How can the princess choose him? How can she refuse our expensive gifts and take a cheap wooden doll?"

          The king was very wise. Calmly he said, "My daughter has surely chosen well. She has decided fairly. Your gifts were not so valuable; you had many others just like them, and you brought only one. Look at Takatuliang. He brought a doll wrapped in an ancient cloth, but it was very meaningful because he gave all that he had. With great difficulty and labor he made his gift, giving one of the few things left by his father. Even more, he gave his own hair. He sacrificed something for the sake of love.

2.19 Why didn't the princess choose one of the princes?
          a) they were ugly   b) their gifts were not valuable
          c) Takatuliang's gift was more beautiful   d) Takatuliang sacrificed a part of himself.

The princes and merchants were silent. They were ashamed.

2.20 Why were the princes ashamed?
a) they did not give an expensive gift   b) they behaved badly   c) they lost the contest

The wealth they brought meant nothing in comparison to Takatuliang's love. Because there was no hope, they went home, taking their gifts back with them.

TABLE A1 RESPONSES TO *TAKATULIANG*

Question		Al	Beth	Gim	Dahl	Hei	Vav	Zane	Heth	%R
2.1	N	D	(c)	-	a	(c)	-	a	(c)	66
2.3	N	D	**(a)**	-	*cz*	*c*	-	*c* f	*b*	83
2.4	N	(c)	b	-	a	ab	-	b	b	17
2.5	I	(b)	*c*	-	(b)	d	-	*c*	*c*	83
2.6	I	(b)	a	-	a	c	-	a	a	17
2.7	C	*C*	*b*	-	**(a)**	*c*	-	*b*	**(a)**	-
2.8	N	(a)	b	-	*c*	*c*	-	*c*	*c*	83
2.9	C	(b)	**(c)**	▪	**(c)**	(a)	▪	(b)	**(c)**	-
2.10	**N**	They is love	X	-	X	Takatuliang	-	jungle	(could win)	33
2.11	N	(n)	Y	-	(n)	(n)	-	(n)	(n)	83
2.13	A	**(c)**	**(c)**	-	(b)	(b)	-	**(c)**	a	83
2.17	I	(b)	(b)	-	(b)	(b)	-	(b)	a	83
2.18	C	**(d)**	**(d)**	▪	**(d)**	**(d)**	▪	**(d)**	**(d)**	100
2.19	I	*D*	*d*	-	*d*	*d*	-	*d*	*d*	00
2.20	N	A	(b)	-	a	**(c)**	▪	**(c)**	a	-

Key: **bold** =scriptal response, *italics*=decoding, (parenthesis)= inference

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Story 3: Mkango and Fisi

3.1 Who did Kalulu work for? a) Mkango b) Fisi c) himself
3.2 What was his job? a) cook, b) hunter, c) baby-sitter d) nurse

Long ago, Mkango the Lion was very rich. Kalulu the Hare was his worker. Kalulu's job was to look after Mkango's children. Every morning, Mkango went to the forest to hunt. He left meat for Kalulu to give his children. Mkango loved Kalulu because he looked after his children well.

Fisi, the Hyena, was not happy. He hated Kalulu because Mkango gave him a lot of meat to eat. So he wanted to make them enemies.

3.3 Why did Fisi hate Kalulu?
        a) because he wanted to watch Mkango's children
        b) because Mkango gave him meat.

One day, Fisi went to Mkango's house. Mkango said that he was ill. "Kalulu knows the medicine for a wound, why didn't he give you some?" Fisi asked.

3.4 Why did Fisi say that Kalulu knew the medicine for the wound?
a) he wanted Mkango to get well
b) he knew it would make Mkango mad at Kalulu.

3.5 What will Mkango do?
a) he will die because Kalulu didn't give him the medicine
b) he will fire Kalulu
c) he will give Fisi Kalulu's job

Mkango was very angry when he heard this. He called Kalulu and asked him for medicine for his wound. "We need a hyena's heart. We roast it and mix it with other medicine," Kalulu said. When Fisi heard this, he ran away.

3.6 Why did Fisi run away?
a) to get Mkango's medicine
b) Kalulu needed his heart to make medicine for the wound

3.7 Did Kalulu need a hyena's heart for the medicine? Yes or No

TABLE A2 RESPONSES TO *MKANGO AND FISI*

Question		Al	Beth	Gim	Dahl	Hei	Vav	Zane	Heth	%R
3.1	N	a	a	a	a	-	a	a	a	100
3.2	N	d	(c)	(c)	a	-	(c)	(c)	(c)	71
3.3	I	**(b)**	**(b)**	**(b)**	**(b)**	-	a	**(b)**	**b)**	86
3.4	I	(b)	(b)	(b)	(b)	-	a	(b)	(b)	-
3.5	C	**(c)**	**(b)**	**(b)**	a	-	a	**(b)**	**(c)**	-
3.6	A	(b)	(b)	(b)	(b)	-	(b)	(b)	a	-
3.7	I	y	(n)	y	(n)	-	y	y	(n)	-

Key: **bold** =scriptal response, *italics*=decoding, (parenthesis)= inference

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One day, Lion, king of the jungle, told all the animals in the forest that he was sick and dying. He told them to come and visit him to hear his last words. Goat, sheep, and cow went into the lion's cave to say good bye to their king. The fox who was very clever just waited outside and watched.

4.1 What will happen to goat, sheep, and cow?
      a) lion will tell them his last words
      b) lion will eat them

None of the other animals came out. Finally after a long time, lion got up and came out of the cave and saw the fox sitting there. The lion said to him, "Why don't you come visit me, my friend? You know I am sick and dying."

4.2 Where are the other animals when lion talks to fox?
      a) in the cave somewhere
      b) at home
      c) the lion ate them

The fox answered, "Pardon me, Your Majesty, but I did not wish to crowd you. I saw many animals go into your cave, but none of them have come out. Until some of them come out, I will stay outside in the fresh air."

4.3 Why didn't the fox go in to see the lion?
      a) he was afraid of being eaten
      b) he wanted fresh air.
4.4 What three animals went in to see lion?
4.5 Was the lion sick? yes or no

TABLE A3 RESPONSES TO *THE LION AND THE FOX*

Question		Al	Beth	Gim	Dahl	Hei	Vav	Zane	Heth	%R
4.1	C	-	*a*	-	*a*	-	-	*a*	*a*	-
4.2	N	-	(a)	-	(c)	-	-	(a)	(c)	-
4.3	I	-	(a)	-	(give L medicine)	-	-	(a)	(a)	75
4.4	N	-	G,S,C	-	G,S,C	-	-	G,S,C	G,S,C	100
4.5	I	-	(n)	-	(n)	-	-	(n)	(n)	-

Key: **bold** =scriptal response. *italics*=decoding, (parenthesis)= inference

Story 5 Mayi Changa

5.1 What business does Mayi Changa do?
5.2 Can most people afford to do business with her?

Mayi Changa is a businesswoman. She sells second-hand clothes. She moves from market to market to sell the clothes. Lots of people buy from her because her prices are cheap. This way, she makes a lot of money in a day.

One day, Mayi Changa went to Chipini market. Many people bought lots of clothes from her. She hid the money she received under the sack on which she was sitting. As she was busy giving change to a man who had bought a jacket, she saw a hand go under the sack.

5.3 Why did a hand go under the sack?
5.4 What will Mayi Changa do when she sees a hand go under the sack?

She quickly grabbed it and bit hard on it. The owner of the hand ran away screaming.

5.5 Why did the owner of the hand run away screaming?

TABLE A4 RESPONSES TO *MAYI CHANGA*

Question		Al	Beth	Gim	Dahl	Hei	Vav	Zane	Heth	%R
5.1	N	-	-	*sell 2nd hand clothes*	-	*selling cloth*	*sales a cloth*	*sells 2nd hand clothes*	*selling cloth*	100
5.2	N	-	-	*yes*	-	(most people afford)	*it is*	*yes*	(most people afford)	100
5.3	I	-	-	**(to steal)**	-	sack it is called handbag	he wasn't wurneng to MC	**(it need to stole MC's money)**	sack it is called handbag	60
5.4	C	-	-	*MCquickly grabbed the hand*	-	To market to market	**(he is shouting go out)**	MC will be surprised	to market to market	40
5.5	A	-	-	**(he wanted to steal, he was caught)**	-	it is swiming	**(because MC was shouting)**	**(he may get caught)**	it is swiming	60

Key: **bold** =scriptal response, *italics*=decoding, (parenthesis)= inference

Story 6 Salim and Salome

6.1 Where did Salome and Salim want to go?
6.2 What six things were on the list their mother gave them?

Salim and Salome wanted to go to a trading center. They wanted to buy gifts for their mother on Mother's Day. Salome said she would buy either a pair of shoes or a handbag. Salim said he would buy either a wristwatch or a chitenji. When their mother heard about this trip, she also gave them a list of things to buy. She wanted them to buy either pawpaws or pineapples, peas or green beans, and sweet potatoes or cassava.

6.3 Why did Salome buy shoes?
6.4 Who did she buy them for?

When they got to the trading center, Salome and Salim went into different shops to look for the things they wanted. Salome found that shoes were cheaper than a handbag, so she bought shoes. Salim found that a chitenji was cheaper than a wristwatch, so he bought a chitenji.

6.5 What did they buy at the market?

Then they both went to the market. At the market they found that pawpaws were bigger than pineapples, so they bought pawpaws. The also found that green beans were fresher than peas, so they bought beans. They also bought sweet potatoes because they looked better than cassava.

Story 7 Orphan Maria

7.1 Why was Maria unhappy?
7.2 Did her stepmother care about her?

Long time ago there was an orphan. Her name was Maria. Her mother died when she was young. Her stepmother did not take care of her. She did not give Maria enough food to eat. The food she got was bad. One day when she was asleep, her dead mother came and spoke to her. "Maria, my child, why are you unhappy?"

"My stepmother is unkind to me. Today I have not eaten anything. I am very hungry." Maria said. Her mother was very angry to hear this. She told her daughter a secret.

7.3 What kind of secret did Maria's mother tell her?
7.4 Why was her mother angry?

"When you go to graze cattle tomorrow, take the big bull aside. Then ask it to do what I have told it." The following day, Maria went out to graze her cattle. At midday, Maria took the big bull aside and said, "Do what my mother told you." The bull danced.

Then Maria saw that she was in a big beautiful home. It had everything inside it. Thereafter, Maria lived a happy life. She never went back to her cruel stepmother.

7.5 Why didn't Maria go back to her stepmother?
7.6 How did Maria get to the beautiful house?

Story 8: The Town Rabbit and the Village Rabbit

Once upon a time there were two rabbits. The rabbits were brothers. One rabbit lived in the village, so they called him Village Rabbit. The other lived in town, so they called him Town Rabbit. Village Rabbit was poor. He ate roasted maize when there was not enough flour in the house. He lived in a small hut. His clothes were worn out. His brother Town Rabbit lived in a modern house with running water, a fine kitchen, and many beautiful rooms. He ate fine food and wore expensive clothes and shoes.

8.11 Why did Village Rabbit eat roasted maize sometimes?
8.12 Did Village Rabbit have new clothes?
8.13 Which rabbit would most likely have rice and fish to eat almost every day?

One day, Town Rabbit invited Village Rabbit to visit him. Village Rabbit arrived at noon. Fine food and a beautiful bedroom was prepared for him. At night, armed robbers came to the house. They broke into it and pointed guns at them. Town Rabbit and Village Rabbit started trembling. They thought their last hour had come.

8.14 Why did Village Rabbit go to town?
8.15 Why did Village Rabbit and Town Rabbit think their last hour had come?
8.16 Why did robbers break into Town Rabbit's house?

Luckily, they were only tied up. The robbers stole all the good things in the house.
8.17 What will happen next?

The next morning, Village Rabbit returned to the village. He was thankful for the peace and quiet of the village. There he felt safe because he knew almost everyone. He decided he would never go to town again.
8.18 Why did Village Rabbit want to stay in the village?
8.19 Why didn't Village Rabbit want to go to town again?

TABLE A5 *RESPONSES TO THE TOWN RABBIT AND THE VILLAGE RABBIT*

Question		Al	Beth	Gim	Dahl	Hei	Vav	Zane	Heth	%R
8.11	N	poor	poor	poor	Poor	poor	eating	poor	poor	88
8.12	N	Have new clothes	not have new clothes	no	Have not new clothes	R have a piece of cloth	Yes	no	Yes	50
8.13	N	(TR)	(TR)	(TR)	(in town)	every day R	Happy	(TR)	it was poor	66
8.14	I	(eat good food)	to visit his friend	invited by TR to visit	take new clothes to his brother	brother of R	Visiting TR	invited by TR	(find good food)	88
8.15	A	go there see well	think last hour had come	(robbers pointed gun at Rs)	X	not happy	Want them baby	(they had break into house)	just a word game	25
8.16	I	Area was bad	(still com-modities)	(robbers stol all)	X	(because rich)	Broke in bedroom	they had break house	(because beautiful)	50
8.17	C	all things was fall	(TR will go to village & stay there)	stole all TR's things	X	not happy	Stole all the good things	(report to police, catch thief)	they have beautiful home	25
8.18	A	(good area)	to find a piece of land	peace & quiet knew everyon	X	not joining a piece of work	(wanted the people)	(afraid of what happened)	to find food	50
8.19	A	Wanted to go b/c see well	he think he find food	town was peaceful & quiet	X	want to go to town to join work	To thank rabbit	peace and quiet	he didn't go to town again	13

Key: **bold** =scriptal response, *italics*=decoding, (parenthesis)= inference

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