

**THE EFFECT OF BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE
ON THE READING COMPREHENSION
OF ADVANCED ESL STUDENTS**

By

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Bachelor of Arts

Marion College

Marion, Indiana

1982

**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
July, 1988**

Thesis
1988
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Moder and the ESL Composition teaching assistants at Oklahoma State University for allowing me to use class time to conduct this study. I also want to express my gratitude to Dr. Ravi Sheorey for his special interest in this project, and his assistance in compiling and interpreting the statistical data. Without his help I would not have been able to complete this part of my degree requirements. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Dr. Carol Moder and Dr. Bruce Southard, for their help.

Special thanks goes to my wonderful parents who have helped and supported me throughout all my schooling and work, and to God without whom I would be nothing.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Reading is a process whereby the reader visually and mentally decodes what a writer has encoded. According to Goodman (1971), a psycholinguist who has studied the reading process extensively, reading basically involves three processes that are inter-dependent. The first is the grapho-
phonic process. The reader must recognize the symbols of writing and know their corresponding sound values. The second process the reader uses is syntax. He must be able to recognize and predict sentence structures and use markers such as function words to derive meaning. The third process involves semantics. The reader must be able to apply semantic knowledge to the the reading passage in order to get to the meaning of the passage. This process involves the readers' ability to draw upon his previous experience and knowledge in order to comprehend the reading passage (pp. 137-138). Reading comprehension, therefore, involves many sub-skills, and reading is a process by which all the sub-skills interact to allow comprehension. Wardhaugh (1979) describes reading in this way:

When a person reads a text, he is attempting to discover the meaning of what he is reading by using the visual cues of spelling, his knowledge of probabilities of occurrence, his contextual-pragmatic knowledge, and his syntactic and semantic competence to give a meaningful interpretation to the text (p. 133).

In the process of reading, a reader uses the many linguistic skills that he has been taught and learned. The recognition of orthographic symbols, syntactic structures, and the meanings attached to them are not naturally acquired skills such as listening and speaking. Reading skills must be taught to and mastered by both first and second language learners. When learning a second language, one must re-learn a new set of symbols, structures and corresponding sounds and meanings. This can pose a great difficulty, especially if the target language is quite different from the student's first language.

Why should anyone learn to read, and why teach reading? Why is reading important to language learning and language competency? Cates and Swaffer (1979) give one reason for teaching reading as follows:

Written texts seem to offer the optimal conditions for the internalization of a new grammar and for the development of competence. Texts not only provide orthographic cues to vocabulary and syntax; they also afford the learner greater processing

time than does spoken language (p. 4).

Reading allows any student to become more proficient in the language. Also reading is such a vital part of our world that it is sometimes quite difficult to function in a modern society without being able to read. Therefore, it is important to teach reading skills, including the use of background information.

However, simply because a student can read does not mean he understands what he is reading. Even though a reader understands all the vocabulary of a passage and has learned the linguistic skills involved in the reading process, he may not fully comprehend the meaning of the passage unless he is familiar with the content. Research in native language reading has shown that reading not only involves linguistic knowledge, but also the reader's general knowledge of the world and experiences, or what is termed "background knowledge." In studies conducted by Bransford and Johnson (1972), prior knowledge of a given context had a significant effect on the reading comprehension of native speakers of the reading passage. Every reader brings to the reading passage things he knows and has experienced in the past. In this way, each reader builds up a source of background knowledge, and uses that knowledge to test the accuracy of and comprehend each new text. In other words, background knowledge facilitates reading comprehension.

When reading in a foreign or second language, the amount of new texts may be limitless, and, therefore, back-

ground knowledge needs to be built up in the new language. Until this background knowledge can be acquired, especially that which is culture-bound, the reader will encounter many unfamiliar texts and may have problems comprehending these reading passages. Levine and Haus (1985) discovered that background knowledge was a significant factor in the reading comprehension of American high school students reading Spanish. Studies involving both native and non-native readers have revealed that background knowledge is a significant factor in reading comprehension, and lack of background knowledge might hinder comprehension.

Although empirical studies have been conducted showing the effects of background knowledge on the reading comprehension of both native and non-native readers, most of the studies have used altered or made up texts. Very few studies have been conducted using "real" texts. Also, many of the studies have been conducted using the subjects' own evaluation of their comprehension and their ability to recall the passages. Very few of the studies used actual tests of reading comprehension for assessing the effects of background knowledge.

The Hypothesis

Because a second language learner does not have the cultural background knowledge of the second language equivalent to that of a native speaker, he will encounter many new contexts when reading in the second language. Foreign stu-

dents entering an American university must be at an advanced level of language learning, and yet, because they are in a new cultural environment, they will encounter many unfamiliar topics while reading magazines, newspapers, and textbooks. This study attempts to discover whether this lack of background knowledge hinders reading comprehension for the advanced, university level ESL student.

Among the questions to be explored are the following:

1. Will the lack of knowledge about a culturally biased topic affect the reading comprehension of advanced ESL students enrolled in an American university?
2. Will the students' lack of background knowledge affect their reading comprehension scores on a multiple-choice cloze test using a magazine article on a culturally biased topic of which they have little knowledge?
3. How will skillful and less skillful readers' comprehension compare when both groups lack background knowledge on a given topic?
4. How will skillful readers with low background knowledge compare to skillful readers with high background knowledge on the culturally biased cloze test?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Reading comprehension has been the object of many empirical studies for several years. Psycholinguists first began studying reading comprehension as a part of language processing. Psycholinguists, such as Goodman (1971) and Smith (1971), first posed that reading is a circular process, and that once the reader understands the passage, he tests its accuracy against previous information from the test as well as his previous knowledge. Background knowledge involves the entire make-up or schemata of a person's previous experience and learned knowledge. Although it is difficult to assess to what extent a reader's previous experience interacts in the reading process, several empirical studies have been conducted trying to assess the effect that background information or the lack of background information has on reading comprehension. Researchers have used a variety of methods and procedures, but most results have shown the same conclusions, although the results differ from native English readers to non-native ESL readers.

Research with Native English Readers

Early research in background knowledge and reading comprehension was conducted with native English readers. Bransford and Johnson (1972) were among the first to conduct studies in the area of background knowledge and reading comprehension. They used native English readers, and predicted that subjects who received appropriate knowledge prior to reading a passage would be able to comprehend the passage easily, and would, therefore, be able to recall the passage relatively well. On the other hand, subjects who read a passage without being given prior knowledge would not comprehend or recall the passage as well. Bransford and Johnson (1972) made up two passages using grammatically correct English; however, the passages did not make sense unless the reader saw a picture and a title that gave the passage a context. The first passage was about a man serenading a lady, and the second passage was about washing clothes. They divided their subjects into three groups of no context (no title or picture) with the reading passage, context before, and context after the reading passage. Subjects were given as much time as they needed to read the passages, and then they were asked to rate their comprehension on a seven point scale and also recall in writing as much of the passages as possible.

Results of the study indicated that subjects who read the passages without being given a context had significantly lower comprehension and recall ratings compared to the

context before group, who had the highest comprehension and recall ratings. Although the subjects were familiar with the topics of the passages, they could not easily comprehend the passages unless a context (in this case a title and picture) was given prior to the reading. Therefore, Bransford and Johnson (1972) conclude that prior knowledge of a topic does not guarantee comprehension, but that the appropriate information must be present during the process of comprehension. However, the fact that the context before group did significantly better than the other groups suggests that prior knowledge is a factor in reading comprehension.

Following the work of Bransford and Johnson (1972), Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert and Goetz (1977) conducted research using ambiguous texts to assess the effects of background knowledge. They used two passages, both with two possible interpretations. The first passage could be interpreted as a prison situation or a wrestling match, and the second passage could be interpreted as either a card game or a music group rehearsal. The subjects of the study included 30 college students planning a career in music and 30 college student enrolled in a weight training program. Subjects read both passages, and then took a ten question multiple-choice test. Each multiple-choice question had two correct answers depending on the interpretation of each passage. Results indicated that there was a significant interaction between the passages and the subjects' backgrounds. The music students interpreted the card game/music rehearsal

passage as a music rehearsal, and the weight training students interpreted the prison/wrestling match as a wrestling match. Subjects generally gave consistent interpretations to the passages. Their background schemata influenced the way they interpreted the passages.

Spilich, Vesonder, Chiesi, and Voss (1979) and Chiesi, Spilich, and Voss (1979) researched the effects of previously acquired knowledge on the processing of new information. They questioned subjects on the topic of baseball to determine high and low knowledge groups. After reading a passage about part of a baseball game the subjects were asked to reconstruct the passage and take a completion test. Analyses indicated significant differences in high and low knowledge individuals. High knowledge subjects had greater ability to relate the actions of the game in the passage to the whole structure, and to maintain important information in memory.

After these more or less general studies of background information and reading comprehension, more specific studies were conducted using children, adolescents and adult subjects. Pearson, Hansen, and Gordon (1979) studied the effects of background knowledge on young children's reading comprehension. They gave 25 above-average second graders an individual, oral knowledge test containing eight questions about spiders. The ten highest, scoring five, six, and seven, and the ten lowest, scoring two and three, scorers were selected as subjects for the study. The students read a

passage about spiders and were individually asked wh- questions to determine explicit and inferential knowledge. On both the explicit and inferential questions the students with high background knowledge about spiders did significantly better than the students with low background knowledge, especially for implicit information ($p < .025$).

Pearson, Hansen, and Gordon (1979) conclude that prior knowledge facilitates reading comprehension and particularly inferential comprehension.

Stevens (1980) used 108 ninth graders at different levels of ability to study the effects of background knowledge on reading comprehension. The subjects were given the 1971 S.R.A. High School Placement Test, Reading Subtest, and their scores ranged from grade level equivalents of 4.4 to 12.5. From the results of this test the subjects were divided into low, intermediate and high levels of ability. Their knowledge was assessed by 100 multiple choice questions on twenty-five varying, factual topics. Reading passages on the topics were taken from the McCall-Crabbs' Standard Test Lessons in Reading 1969, and students were assigned passages and questions based on both high and low background knowledge. The resulting statistics indicated that knowledge was a significant ($p < .01$) factor for all ability groups. Stevens'(1980) study implies that if background knowledge is lacking, comprehension will suffer.

In order to discover the effects of background knowledge on adult readers, Ribovich (1979) conducted research

using two groups totaling 49 undergraduate students at West Virginia University. One group was studying economics, and the other group were working on degrees in education. Ribovich (1979) wanted to determine whether two groups of adults with different academic backgrounds would respond differently to the same reading passage, and whether their reading abilities varied from their own academic field to an unfamiliar academic field. Ribovich (1979) chose two reading passages and modified them slightly to achieve an eleventh grade reading level. One passage was on economics and the other on education. Subjects recorded the amount of time it took them to read each passage, ranked the difficulty of the reading, and in ten sentences, recalled the message of each passage. The results indicated that the economics students had a significant advantage over the education students on the economics passage, but there was no significant difference between the groups on the education passage. Ribovich (1979) concedes that education is not as specialized as economics, but that background knowledge is a factor for reading comprehension of a specialized topic.

Research with Non-Native Readers

Research first began with non-English readers in order to compare them with native readers and discover more about the reading processes of native readers, and to discover more about the extent of the effects of background knowledge on reading comprehension. As research in English as a sec-

ond language developed, empirical studies were conducted to learn more about non-native reading processes in order to better understand how to teach ESL reading comprehension. Steffensen, Joag-den, and Anderson (1979) based their research on the theory that background knowledge provides the framework for comprehending reading, and readers with different backgrounds will give different interpretations to a reading passage. Their subjects included 19 Indian students studying in a four-year college in the state of Maharashtra, India, and 20 Americans studying in a junior college in Illinois. The reading passages were two letters, written in English with the same amount of sentences and identical sentence structures, describing typical American and Indian wedding ceremonies. The subjects read the letters, and were then asked to write down as much as they could remember. The researchers found that the American students recalled the letter about the American wedding significantly better than the Indian students, and the Indian students recalled the Indian wedding significantly better than the Americans. They conclude that background knowledge has a profound influence on how well a reading passage will be comprehended, learned, and remembered.

Comparative studies with native and non-native ESL readers reveal that non-native speakers process reading in a slightly different way than native speakers. Carrell and Wallace (1983) and Carrell (1983) conducted studies similar to the Bransford and Johnson (1972) study using context vs.

no context. Carrell and Wallace (1983) constructed three passages based on topics they assumed were novel, somewhat familiar, and familiar to their subjects. They controlled the passages for length and complexity. Their subjects consisted of 36 native English speakers, 50 advanced ESL students and 26 intermediate ESL students. After reading the passages, subjects were asked to rank their prior knowledge of each topic on a scale of 0 (never heard of) to 5 (know about). Rankings one through four were given different degrees of familiarity with the topic. The three texts did differ significantly in familiarity ($p < .0001$). Each group was then divided into a context (title and picture) and a no context group for all three passages. Subjects were given as much time as they needed to read the passages, and then rated their comprehension on a 1 (difficult to understand) to 7 (easy to understand) scale. After reading, the subjects also wrote down as much as they could remember of each passage. Results of this two-way study (context and familiarity) indicate that context is a significant factor in native speakers reading, but neither of the ESL groups appeared to have used the context in reading. Familiarity with the topic had a significant effect on native readers' comprehension, but there was no significant effect of familiarity on the comprehension of ESL readers. Carrell and Wallace (1983) conclude that ESL readers, both intermediate and advanced, do not appear to use background information (in this case context and familiarity) in processing read-

ing. The ESL readers appear to process the literal language of the passage without making connections between the text and background information. They do concede, however, that all three texts were opaque or not clearly written and did not contain content-specific lexical items.

Carrell (1983) conducted a subsequent study of the effects of prior knowledge of the passage topic (familiarity vs. novel), prior knowledge of the content (context vs. no context) and the effect of lexical items in the text. (transparent vs. opaque). Her subjects included 48 native English speakers, 66 advanced ESL students, and 42 intermediate ESL learners. Carrell (1983) used Bransford and Johnson's (1972) passages about the serenade and washing clothes, and altered the lexical items to create opaque and transparent versions of each passage. The passage on washing clothes was defined as familiar and the serenade passage was defined as novel to all three subject groups. All subjects read the familiar and novel and transparent and opaque texts, and each group was divided into context (title and picture) and no context groups. After reading the passages the subjects rated their comprehension on a 1 (very hard to understand) to 7 (very easy to understand) scale. Subjects were also asked to recall the passages in writing. Results of the study indicate that for native readers both content and familiarity play a significant role in comprehension and all three components significantly affect recall. For the ESL subjects, only context had a significant effect on the

comprehension of the advanced ESL group, and none of the components had a significant effect on the intermediate ESL group. Familiarity was the only factor that had a significant effect on the recall of the advanced ESL subjects, and none of the three factors had a significant effect on the recall ratings of the intermediate ESL subjects. Carrell (1983) concludes that non-native readers do not process reading as native readers do; they do not appear to use context or non-linguistic cues such as background information. ESL readers tend to be bound to the text, processing the literal language without making connections between the text and appropriate background knowledge.

Johnson (1982) conducted a different kind of study to determine whether prior cultural experience would have an effect on ESL students' reading comprehension. Her subjects were 72 advanced ESL students who had recently attended a city-wide Halloween celebration. The reading passage was a constructed text which contained general information about Halloween and about the celebration which was assumed familiar to the subjects, and historical background about Halloween which was assumed unfamiliar to the subjects. The students were tested on vocabulary prior to reading the passage so that they knew the vocabulary of the passage. After reading the text, students recalled as much of the passage as they could in writing. Johnson (1982) took note of how much information was recalled and gave special attention to recall sentences that were identical with the text. Results

revealed that subjects' recall was better for the familiar portion of the passage; and therefore, prior experience with the culture seems to affect ESL students' reading comprehension. Johnson (1982) concludes that prior knowledge obtained from real world experience is effective for good reading comprehension.

A more recent experiment on the effects of background knowledge involved native-English high school students studying Spanish as a foreign language. Levine and Haus (1985) administered a nine item multiple-choice test to assess the students' knowledge of baseball. Using the results, they divided the students into a group with limited knowledge and a group with high knowledge of baseball. All the students read a report of a baseball game from a Spanish language newspaper. The students then took a twelve item multiple-choice test asking both implicit and explicit questions. Results indicated that background knowledge had a significant effect on reading comprehension for both implicit and explicit information.

Summary

Empirical studies tend to support that reading comprehension is a process in which background knowledge does play a role. Good readers (in this case native readers) use background information along with textual and contextual cues to process reading. Prior knowledge of the topic of the reading passage is a significant factor in the reading

process of native readers. However, most research with ESL readers shows that non-native readers do not utilize background information to process reading as native speakers do. Non-native readers are more bound to the literal text, and do not make connections between the text and their background knowledge. There are two main problems that exist in the current research. First, nearly all of the studies used made-up or altered texts as reading passages. With the current stress on authentic teaching materials, one could justifiably ask if these passages adequately measured reading comprehension. Also, most of the studies used recall and the students' own ratings of their comprehension as the basis of their results rather than standard reading comprehension tests, and many times subjects rated their own comprehension highly while their recall ratings actually revealed that their comprehension was low.

CHAPTER III

THE STUDY

Purpose

Recent theories and methodology in second language teaching have stressed the necessity of authentic materials in all areas of language learning. Of all the empirical studies showing the effects or significance of background knowledge on reading comprehension, very few have actually used authentic, real-world reading passages. Also, most researchers have used written recall and the subjects' own judgments of their comprehension of a passage to determine the significance of background information. Because of these two factors, I designed a study to determine the effects of background knowledge on the reading comprehension of advanced ESL students using a culturally biased magazine article for the reading passage and a multiple-choice cloze test to assess reading comprehension. A pilot study was run to determine whether such a study would be valuable, and to aid in the making of the materials.

Subjects

A pilot study was conducted using 18 university level

ESL students at Oklahoma State University. These subjects responded well to the study, and although the pilot was run at the end of the fall semester so that most of the students had been in the United States at least four months, it was determined that most of them had very little knowledge of the topic. Therefore, I decided that university level ESL students would be the subjects for my study.

The subjects of this study consisted of 65 advanced level ESL students enrolled in three separate sections of ESL Freshman English Composition I at Oklahoma State University. The 65 subjects included 48 men and 17 women. The students were from 22 different countries (See Table I) and 16 different native language backgrounds (See Table II).

TABLE I
SUBJECTS' NATIVE COUNTRIES

Bangladesh	2	India	1	Pakistan	10
Botswana	1	Indonesia	14	Palestine	2
Columbia	1	Iran	1	Saudi Arabia	1
Cyprus	2	Kenya	1	Singapore	2
Equatorial Guinea	1	Korea	1	Taiwan	4
Holland	1	Lebanon	2	Tunisia	1
Honduras	1	Malaysia	14		
Hong Kong	1	Nigeria	1		

TABLE II
SUBJECTS' NATIVE LANGUAGES

Arabic	6	Greek	2	Korean	10	Setswana	1
Bengali	2	Hindi	1	Malay	7	Spanish	3
Chinese	11	Indonesian	13	Mandarin	3	Tiv	1
Dutch	1	Kiswahil	1	Persian	1	Urdu	10

For the purposes of this study, I wanted the students to be quite unfamiliar with university life in the United States. Therefore, I chose students in Freshman English Composition I at the beginning of the semester, expecting that most of them would have been in the United States only a few weeks. The amount of time the students had been in the United States ranged from less than one month to three years. Thirty-one students had been in the U.S. less than one month. The average length of stay in the United States was six months. I did not exclude any of the students from the study on the basis of how long they had been in the United States. Ages of the students ranged from 16 to 35 with an average age of 20. Ten of the students had been to the United States previously, and 21 had been to an English speaking country before.

Materials

In order to discover whether the lack of background knowledge would affect the reading comprehension of advanced ESL students, I first needed to select a passage which

contained information that would be considered common knowledge in American university culture but about which most foreign students would have little knowledge. I also wanted an authentic reading passage. I chose an article titled "The Rush to Rush" by Goad (1985) in Seventeen magazine. The topic of the article was sorority rush week.

The multiple-choice cloze test has become an acceptable method for testing reading comprehension. Oller (1973), who has done extensive research in assessing cloze as a measure of second language proficiency, recommends the cloze procedure as one that accurately measures reading comprehension:

It turns out that the cloze procedure has some remarkably consistent characteristics of stability and sensitivity. . . It also appears to be a useful measure of reading comprehension. In the majority of cases, studies have revealed correlations of .80 and above, with standardized tests of reading comprehension (p. 106).

Since the multiple-choice cloze is an acceptable method of assessing reading comprehension and is relatively easy to construct, I decided to construct a cloze test using the sorority passage. The article covered two pages, and because I wanted to create a cloze test of fifty items or less, I chose a portion of approximately 350 words that contained lexical items dealing with sorority life such as "Greek," "sorority," "rush," and so forth. To create the

cloze test, I left the first and last sentences intact and deleted every seventh word. I typed the passage, replacing the deleted words with blanks. During the pilot study, the 18 students were asked to fill in the blanks with words they thought were appropriate. I was then able to use most of their answers as distractors in creating the multiple-choice sorority cloze (See Appendix A).

Based on what I already knew about sorority life, information I gathered from American students familiar with sorority life, and information from the article, I created ten multiple-choice questions to determine how much the subjects knew (i.e. how much background knowledge they had) about sororities. Because I did not want students to guess the answers but choose answers based only on their knowledge, I included the option "I don't know" as one of the distractors. I also included biographical questions on this questionnaire. The biographical questions included questions about age, native language, and length of stay in the United States (See Appendix B).

In order to determine the reading level of the subjects and divide them into good (more skillful) and poor (less skillful) readers, and because reading comprehension was being tested, I needed to determine the reading level of the subjects. To do this, I used a twenty-five item general multiple-choice cloze test that had already been pre-tested for reliability and used for placement purposes at Oklahoma State University. (See Appendix C). I also used

computer answer sheets from Oklahoma State University's Bureau of Tests and Measurements for the students to use on all three items.

Procedure

The study was conducted two weeks after the start of the Spring semester of 1988. During the pilot study, I discovered that there would not be sufficient time during one 50 minute class period for the students to complete all of the test items; therefore, the questionnaire and tests were given to the three sections of ESL Freshman Composition I on two consecutive class days. All of the materials were prepared with instructions so that the students could easily understand what they were to do. On the first day, the subjects completed the questionnaire containing biographical information, ten multiple-choice questions to assess their knowledge of sorority life, and the reading proficiency multiple-choice cloze test. The next class day they completed the multiple-choice cloze test using the sorority passage. At the time the questionnaire and tests were given, the subjects were given oral instructions on how to complete a cloze test.

The subjects were told that they could take as much time as they needed to finish the tests, and most of them took about thirty minutes on each day. The pilot study revealed that students who took the time to read the passages and write their answers on the test blanks before marking

their answer sheet did better than those who simply marked the answer sheet. Therefore, the tests were prepared so that the subjects could write their answers on the test before marking their answers on the answer sheets, and they were encouraged to do so. On the first day, as soon as a student had completed the questionnaire he was given the reading proficiency cloze test to complete. The sorority cloze test contained fifty items, and therefore, took longer to complete.

Statistical Analysis Used

Three different sources were used to analyze the data obtained from this study. First, the Oklahoma State University's Bureau of Tests and Measurements scored all the answer sheets and analyzed the means and standard deviations for each test item.

Secondly, the IBM mainframe version of the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) was used to calculate the correlations among the variables in the study. Especially important were the correlations of the subjects' background knowledge, general reading proficiency, and the sorority cloze test. Correlations were also obtained and compared for skillful and less skillful readers. Other correlations performed by SAS were those among the number of months each subject had been in the United States, and the number of years they had studied English.

SAS was also used to perform a t-test to compare the

means of the skillful and less skillful readers on each of the three tests, and to compare the means of skillful readers with high and low background knowledge.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This chapter contains the results of this study of the effects of background knowledge on reading comprehension. Sixty-five advanced ESL students enrolled at Oklahoma State University were given three separate test items. First, they were tested for their knowledge of a culturally biased topic (sorority rush activities on U.S. campuses) using a ten item multiple-choice test. Second, they were tested for general reading proficiency using a 25 item multiple-choice cloze test. Third, the subjects were given another multiple-choice cloze test for reading comprehension based on the culturally biased topic.

The main focus of the study was to try to respond to the following questions:

1. How does a lack of background knowledge of a culturally biased topic correlate with reading comprehension of a passage dealing with that topic?
2. How do skillful and less skillful readers compare when reading a culturally biased passage?

3. How will skillful readers with high background knowledge compare to skillful readers with low background knowledge on the culturally biased cloze test?

Results

After the subjects of the study had completed the questionnaire containing biographical information and ten multiple-choice questions about sorority life, the general reading proficiency multiple-choice cloze test containing 25 items, and the multiple-choice sorority cloze tests containing 50, the Oklahoma State University's Bureau of Tests and Measurements scored the answer sheets and calculated the mean, standard deviation, and reliability for each of the three items (See TABLE III).

TABLE III
MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND RELIABILITY LEVELS

	Sorority Questionnaire	Reading Proficiency	Sorority Cloze
Mean	2.18	19.40	29.83
Standard Deviation	2.10	3.52	6.72
Reliability	0.80	0.76	0.83

The sorority questionnaire contained ten items, and

the subjects' mean score was 2.18 with a standard deviation of 2.10. The range of scores was 0 to 8. The questionnaire had a split-half reliability level of .80. The multiple-choice cloze to assess reading proficiency had 25 items, and the subjects' mean score was 19.40 with a standard deviation of 3.52. The range of scores was 7 to 25. The split-half reliability for this test was .76. The multiple-choice cloze using a sorority passage contained 50 items. The subjects' mean score was 29.83, and the standard deviation was 6.72. The range of scores was 15 to 47, and the split-half reliability was .83.

The data obtained was then subjected to statistical tests available in the Statistical Analysis System (SAS) to determine the statistical significance of the data obtained in the study. Correlations of the three test items were calculated using the variables of the number of months the subjects had been in the United States and the number of years they had studied English (See TABLE IV).

TABLE IV
CORRELATIONS A

	Sorority Questionnaire	Reading Proficiency	Sorority Cloze
Months in USA	.15	-.27*	-.04
Years of English	-.06	.20	.13

* $p < .05$

The only significant correlation was the negative correlation between the number of months in the United States and the subjects reading proficiency (-.27).

Correlations were also compared for the three tests (See TABLE V).

TABLE V
CORRELATIONS B

	Sorority Questionnaire	Reading Proficiency	Sorority Cloze
Sorority Questionnaire	_____	.35*	.49*
Reading Proficiency	.35*	_____	.69*

* $p < .05$

The correlation for all subjects between the ten multiple-choice questions assessing background knowledge (sorority questionnaire) and the 25 item reading proficiency cloze test was a low, positive correlation of .35 ($p < .0042$), and the correlation between the sorority questionnaire and the 50 item cloze test using the sorority passage (sorority cloze) was a moderate, positive correlation of .49 ($p < .0001$). The correlation between the reading proficiency and the sorority cloze was a moderately high correlation of .69 ($p < .0001$). All of these correlations, as indicated above, were statistically significant.

When all the correlations had been analyzed, correla-

tions were calculated for skillful and less skillful readers. The purpose of this analysis was to discover whether subjects at different proficiency levels would be affected differently by their lack of background knowledge on the sorority cloze test. "Skillful readers" were defined as subjects who had a general reading proficiency (cloze) score of 21 or above, and "less skillful readers" were defined as subjects with a general reading proficiency (cloze) score of 18 or below. Subjects who scored between 19 and 20 were dropped from this part of the study. The skillful readers' group consisted of 24 subjects, and the less skillful group consisted of 22 subjects. The correlation of both groups were assessed separately for all three test items (See TABLE VI and TABLE VII).

TABLE VI
SKILLFUL READERS' CORRELATIONS

	Sorority Questionnaire	Reading Proficiency	Sorority Cloze
Sorority Questionnaire	_____	.36	.70*
Reading Proficiency	.36	_____	.57*

* $p < .05$

TABLE VII
LESS SKILLFUL READERS' CORRELATIONS

	Sorority Questionnaire	Reading Proficiency	Sorority Cloze
Sorority Questionnaire	_____	.04	.23
Reading Proficiency	.04	_____	.64*

* $p < .05$

For the skillful readers the correlation between the sorority questionnaire and the general reading proficiency cloze test was a low, positive correlation of .36 which was not significant ($p < .0825$), the correlation between the questionnaire and the sorority cloze test was a moderately high, positive correlation of .70 ($p < .0001$), and the correlation between the general reading proficiency test and the sorority cloze test was a moderate positive correlation of .57 ($p < .0035$). For the less skillful readers the correlation between the sorority questionnaire and the general reading proficiency test was a very low, positive correlation of .04, and it was not statistically significant ($p < .8474$). The correlation between the questionnaire and the sorority cloze was also a low, positive correlation (.23), and it too was not significant ($p < .2851$). The correlation between the general reading proficiency and the sorority cloze was a moderately high, positive correlation of .64 ($p < .0013$).

A t-test was performed on the data to compare the means of the skillful and less skillful readers for each of the three tests (See TABLE VIII).

TABLE VIII
RESULTS OF T-TEST

	Sorority Questionnaire Means	Reading Proficiency Means	Sorority Cloze Means
Skillful Readers	3.04*	22.67*	34.45*
Less Skillful Readers	1.36*	15.68*	25.50*

*p < .01

The mean score of the skillful readers group on the questionnaire was 3.04, and the less skillful readers' mean score was 1.36 with a significance level of $p < .01$. On the general reading proficiency test the skillful readers had a mean score of 22.67 while the less skillful readers had a mean score of 15.68. The significance level between these two means was $p < .0001$. For the sorority cloze test, the skillful readers had a mean score of 34.45, and the less skillful readers had a mean score of 25.50. The significance level between these two scores was $p < .0001$.

Although skillful and less skillful readers had been clearly defined, I did not control these groups for background knowledge on this first t-test. The range of scores on the sorority questionnaire for background knowledge was 0

to 8 for skilled readers, and 0 to 4 for less skilled readers. In these defined groups there were no less skilled readers who had as high a background knowledge score as the skillful readers. This accounted for the significant difference between the means on the sorority questionnaire as shown in Table VIII. Because of this, I could not tell if the correlations and t-test results were due to the effects of background knowledge or the effects of poor reading ability. I then decided to perform a second t-test and control for background knowledge. For this analysis, skillful readers were defined as those subjects with a reading proficiency (cloze) score of 21 or above and a sorority questionnaire score of 4 or less, and less skillful readers were defined as subjects with a reading proficiency (cloze) score of 18 or less and a sorority questionnaire score of 4 or less, making the groups more or less equal in background knowledge. This time the skillful readers' group consisted of 15 subjects, and the less skillful readers' group consisted of 22 subjects. Correlations were again calculated for each group (see TABLE IX and TABLE X).

TABLE IX
CORRELATIONS FOR SELECTED SKILLFUL READERS
BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE 0-4

	Sorority Questionnaire	Reading Proficiency	Sorority Cloze
Sorority Questionnaire	_____	.58*	.52*
Reading Proficiency	.58*	_____	.73*

* $p < .05$

TABLE X
CORRELATIONS FOR SELECTED LESS SKILLFUL READERS
BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE 0-4

	Sorority Questionnaire	Reading Proficiency	Sorority Cloze
Sorority Questionnaire	_____	.04	.24
Reading proficiency	.04	_____	.64*

* $p < .05$

For skillful readers, the correlation between the sorority questionnaire and the general reading proficiency cloze test was a moderate, positive correlation of .58 ($p < .0218$), the correlation between the questionnaire and the sorority cloze test was also a moderate, positive correlation of .52 ($p < .0446$), and the correlation between the general reading proficiency test and the sorority cloze

test was a moderately high, positive correlation of .73 ($p < .0218$). For the less skillful readers, the correlation between the sorority questionnaire and the general reading proficiency test was a very low, positive correlation of .04 which was not statistically significant ($p < .8474$), the correlation between the questionnaire and the sorority cloze was a low, positive correlation of .24 which was also not significant ($p < .2851$), and the correlation between the general reading proficiency test and the sorority cloze test was a moderately high, positive correlation of .64 ($p < .0013$).

A second t-test was then performed on the data for the new groups discussed above (see TABLE XI).

TABLE XI
RESULTS OF T-TEST
BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE 0-4

	Sorority Questionnaire Means	Reading Proficiency Means	Sorority Cloze Means
Skillful Readers	1.33	22.60*	31.80*
Less Skillful Readers	1.36	15.68*	25.50*

* $p < .01$

The mean for the skillful readers on the sorority questionnaire was 1.33 and for less skillful readers it was 1.36. Because both groups were controlled for background

knowledge, there was no significant difference in these means ($p < .95$). The mean of the skillful readers on the reading proficiency test was 22.60 compared to the less skillful readers, mean of 15.68. The difference was statistically significant ($p < .0001$). Skillful readers' mean on the sorority cloze test was 31.80, while the less skillful readers mean was 25.50 ($p < .01$).

For the final part of the study, the skillful readers' group was further divided into two sub-groups with high and low background knowledge, respectively. Skillful readers with high background knowledge were defined as subjects who scored 21 or above on the reading proficiency cloze test, and who scored between five to eight points on the sorority questionnaire for background knowledge. This group consisted of nine subjects. Skillful readers with low background knowledge were defined as subjects who scored 21 or above on the reading proficiency cloze test, and who scored zero to three on the sorority questionnaire. This group consisted of 12 subjects. Subjects who scored four on the sorority questionnaire were dropped from this part of the study.

A t-test was performed to find out if the means of these two groups would be significantly different on the sorority questionnaire and the sorority cloze test (See TABLE XII).

TABLE XII
RESULTS OF T-TEST
SKILLFUL READERS: HIGH AND LOW BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

	Sorority Questionnaire Means	Reading Proficiency Means	Sorority Cloze Means
High Background	5.8*	22.78	38.89*
Low Background	0.67*	22.08	30.33*

*p < .001

As the above table indicates, the t-test results revealed that the two groups of skillful readers were significantly different on both the sorority questionnaire and the sorority cloze test. The mean score for the skillful readers with high background knowledge on the sorority questionnaire was 5.8, and the mean score for the skillful readers with low background knowledge was 0.67 ($p < .001$). On the reading proficiency test, the two groups did not differ significantly ($p > .05$). However, the mean score for the high background group on the sorority cloze test was 38.89, while the low background group's mean score was 30.33 ($p < .001$).

Separate correlations were also performed for these two sub-groups of skillful readers (See TABLES XIII and XIV).

TABLE XIII

CORRELATIONS

SKILLFUL READERS: HIGH BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

	Sorority Questionnaire	Reading Proficiency	Sorority Cloze
Sorority Questionnaire	-----	.54	.84*
Reading Proficiency	.54	-----	.38

*p < .001

TABLE XIV

CORRELATIONS

SKILLFUL READERS: LOW BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

	Sorority Questionnaire	Reading Proficiency	Sorority Cloze
Sorority Questionnaire	-----	.13	.31
Reading Proficiency	.13	-----	.70*

*p < .001

The only significant correlations in this part of the study were the correlations between the sorority questionnaire and the sorority cloze test for the high background knowledge group, which was a high, positive correlation of .84 ($p < .001$), and between the reading proficiency cloze test and the sorority cloze test for the low background knowledge group, which was a moderately high, positive correlation of

Discussion

The first thing I wanted to know was how background knowledge correlated with reading comprehension. As shown in Table V, the correlation between the subjects' background knowledge (the sorority questionnaire) and their reading comprehension of a culturally biased passage (the sorority cloze test) was a moderately low, positive correlation (.49). This indicates that if background knowledge plays a role in advanced ESL reading comprehension, it does not appear to have a great influence. However, when taking the sorority cloze test, the subjects did not have to rely only on their background knowledge for all of the test items, but could also rely on their grammatical knowledge as well. Therefore, the correlation between background knowledge and reading comprehension does not have to be high, and should in fact be a moderate correlation. This observation is also supported by the moderate correlation between the sorority cloze and the reading proficiency cloze also shown in Table V (.69). Because both tests measure reading comprehension, the correlation should be quite high; however, it is not because background knowledge became a factor in the sorority test. Therefore, for the group as a whole, background knowledge seems to have had some affect on reading comprehension.

The second question I wanted to answer was how skillful and less skillful readers compared in their reading compre-

hension use of background knowledge. The general reading proficiency test was used to define skillful and less skillful readers. Skillful readers were defined as subjects who scored 21 or above on the general reading proficiency cloze test, and less skillful readers were defined as subjects who scored 18 or below on the general reading proficiency cloze test. (Subjects who scored 19 and 20 were dropped from this part of the study.) A t-test was performed in order to see if the groups were significantly different. As Table VIII shows, these skillful and less skillful readers differed significantly on all three tests, including the sorority questionnaire for background knowledge. In order to control for background knowledge, skillful readers were redefined as subjects who scored 21 or above on the reading proficiency cloze test and 4 or less on the sorority questionnaire for background knowledge, and less skillful readers were redefined as subjects who scored 18 or below on the reading proficiency cloze test and 4 or less on the sorority questionnaire. A second t-test was performed for these groups and as Table XI shows, the groups now differed significantly only on the reading proficiency cloze test and the sorority cloze test. Therefore, the groups now had similar background knowledge.

As shown in Tables IX and X, the correlation between the scores of skillful readers' background knowledge (the sorority questionnaire) and their reading comprehension of a culturally biased passage (the sorority cloze test) was a

moderate, positive correlation (.52), while the less skillful readers' scores on these same tests did not have a significant correlation between these two variables. Again, because the test required some grammatical knowledge as well as knowledge of the topic, the correlation would not be expected to be a high one, and because the less skilled readers are significantly different than the skillful readers in reading ability, they were not able to use their background knowledge when taking the sorority cloze test; they were more linguistically bound than the skillful readers.

Table VI shows the correlations of skillful readers' scores on the sorority questionnaire for background knowledge ranged from 0 to 8. This group with higher background knowledge had a moderately high, positive correlation between background knowledge and their reading comprehension of the sorority cloze test (.70). This seems to indicate that as background knowledge increased so did the subjects' reading comprehension.

The last question to be answered was how skillful readers with high background knowledge (scores of five to eight on the sorority questionnaire) compared with skillful readers with low background knowledge (scores of zero to three on the sorority questionnaire). As Table XII shows, a t-test revealed that these two groups differed significantly on both the sorority questionnaire and the sorority cloze test ($p < .001$). As shown in Tables XIII and XIV, the correlation between background knowledge and reading compre-

hension of the sorority passage was a high, positive correlation of .84 ($p < .001$) for the skillful readers with high background knowledge. The skillful readers with low background knowledge did not have a significant correlation between background knowledge and reading comprehension of the sorority passage ($r = .31, p > .05$). Therefore, it appears that skillful readers with low background knowledge were indeed affected by their lack of knowledge on the sorority reading test, while skilled readers with high background knowledge were able to apply their knowledge of sororities to aid their reading comprehension. All of this seems to indicate that as ESL readers become more proficient, they are more able to apply their background knowledge to aid their reading comprehension, and thus become more native-like in their reading ability.

In support of this are the correlations between the reading proficiency cloze test and the sorority cloze test. Because both these tests test reading comprehension in the same way (multiple-choice cloze), one would expect perfect or close to perfect correlations between scores on these tests. However, none of the groups or sub-groups' scores for these two tests had even close to perfect correlations. The highest correlations were found among the group as a whole (.69) as shown in Table V, the skillful readers with background knowledge scores of zero to four (.73) as shown in Table IX, and the skillful readers with low background knowledge (.70) as shown in Table XIV. Because these cor-

relations are not perfect, it would appear that background knowledge was a factor in the sorority cloze test. Low or insignificant correlations, as in the case of skillful readers with high background knowledge, might suggest that background knowledge became a greater factor for those subjects.

Significant correlations were also noticed between the reading proficiency cloze test and the sorority questionnaire for background knowledge. This factor raises some interesting questions about reading ability and the subjects' ability to answer multiple-choice questions. The total group of 65 subjects had a low, positive correlation of .35 between the reading proficiency cloze and the sorority questionnaire as shown in Table V, and the skillful readers had a moderate, positive correlation of .58 while the less skillful readers' scores between these two variables did not significantly correlate. This suggests that the better readers were able to do better on the sorority questionnaire even though the range of scores between skillful and less skillful readers was the same (0-4). Because of this correlation, one might suppose that the better readers knew more about the topic because perhaps they had been in the United States longer than the less skillful readers. However, the skillful readers had been in the United States an average of three months at the time of the study, while the less skillful readers had been in the United States an average of seven months. So this could not account for the different correlations. Also skillful readers could have

guessed more correct answers on the sorority questionnaire than the less skillful readers, even though there was an "I don't know" option; however, both groups used the "I don't know" option an average of four times per subject. The only other factor that could account for the difference in correlations between the reading proficiency cloze test and the sorority questionnaire for background knowledge is that the skillful readers, because they are skillful readers read more often, and could, therefore, be better informed than the less skillful readers, or they could simply be better at using grammatical cues.

Implications

This study has a number of implications for ESL reading teachers. If the goal of ESL teaching is to produce students who are native-like in their English proficiency, then ESL teachers should be aware of the differences between ESL readers' reading processes and those of native readers, especially at the advanced level. Native speakers use the visual cues of orthography and their corresponding sounds, their knowledge of and ability to predict syntax to derive meaning, and their previous knowledge and experience to understand the meaning of what they read. Non-native ESL readers on the other hand, appear to use only their knowledge of English orthography and syntax to derive meaning. Even though an ESL reader has no previous knowledge or understanding of the topic of the passage, he can adequately com-

prehend it to some extent because of his knowledge of the English language. However, one has to wonder if that activity can be called "reading" per se. Can we say that a student is proficient in reading simply because he can read? Or, does reading go beyond the simple ability to read to the deeper ability to understand the full meaning of the passage? Teachers of English as a second language need to provide background knowledge as a component of reading. Perhaps if background knowledge and understanding were taught and stressed as much as the ability to decode orthography and syntax, ESL readers would begin processing language as native speakers do. Making certain that unskilled as well as skillful ESL readers fully understand the topics of reading passages is clearly important, especially when the topic is based on an aspect of American culture with which they may not be familiar. As a result of this study, I think that less skilled readers would benefit by being given background information prior to the reading task and taught how to use that information while reading.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The Problem

The reading process involves recognition of orthography, knowledge of syntactic structures, and ability to apply background knowledge to the reading passage. Full understanding of a reading passage occurs when a reader decodes the written text and draws upon his previous knowledge and experience to test and analyze new information. Research has shown that native readers use their prior knowledge of the passage topic to comprehend the meaning of each new context. Non-native ESL readers typically encounter many new contexts about which they may have little or no prior knowledge. The objective of this study was to evaluate whether non-native ESL students also use background knowledge in reading, and if they do, to what extent it affects their reading comprehension. The question was also raised of whether a difference existed between skillful and less skillful ESL readers' use of background information.

Subjects, Materials, and Procedure

The subjects of the study were sixty-five advanced ESL students enrolled in International Freshman Composition I at Oklahoma State University. In order to assess whether these subjects used their background information in reading and to what extent, they were first given a ten item multiple-choice questionnaire to assess their knowledge of sorority life. They were then tested for general reading proficiency using a twenty-five item multiple-choice cloze test using a reading passage on a general topic. Good and bad readers were assessed using this reading proficiency test. The subjects were then given a fifty item multiple-choice cloze test using a passage taken from a magazine article about sororities. The results were calculated and run on a Statistical Analysis System to analyze the correlations.

Results

The results of the study revealed a low, weak correlation (.49) between the subjects' prior knowledge of the topic and their reading comprehension of a passage based on that topic. When skillful and less skillful readers were compared, the results revealed that skillful readers used their background knowledge more than less skillful readers did. The correlation between the sorority questionnaire for background knowledge and the sorority cloze test was .52 for skillful readers, and there was no significant correlation for less skillful readers. Results of the t-tests showed

that there were statistically significant differences between the skillful and less skillful groups. In the final part of the study, skillful readers with high background knowledge were compared to skillful readers with low background knowledge. Results of the t-test revealed that these two groups differed significantly both in background knowledge and the sorority cloze test. The correlation between background knowledge and the sorority cloze test for the high background knowledge group was the highest in the study (.84). These correlation seems to support prior research (Carrell and Wallace, 1983; Carr 11, 1983) which showed that non-native ESL readers do not use background information in their reading process like native readers do. However, background knowledge does appear to have some effect on ESL reading comprehension, and as ESL readers become more proficient, background knowledge has more of an effect on their reading comprehension.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research along these lines would be helpful in adding to the knowledge of the non-native reading processes. More research needs to be done with advanced ESL students using authentic reading passages based on culturally biased topics to see if ESL readers are hindered in their comprehension due to a lack of prior knowledge of the topic.

Another study of this kind could benefit more by a comparison of native and non-native readers under these same

circumstances. Perhaps in this type of test situation native readers might react in much the same manner as these non-native subjects. Another factor that should be taken into consideration is pre-testing the background knowledge test to see if people, knowledgeable about sororities, would give the correct answers. Also further research should be done using different methods of testing reading comprehension. The multiple-choice cloze, although an acceptable method of testing reading, does have some draw-backs. The subjects were able to look at a list of distractors, and perhaps by process of elimination or by sheer guess work, come up with a correct answer. Perhaps an answer to this would be to use a selected-deletion cloze test, deleting all words requiring background knowledge about sororities. Although this study supports other studies using different techniques, a different testing method might reveal a different dependency on background knowledge.

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APPENDIX A

SORORITY CLOZE TEST

Name: _____ Date: _____

THE RUSH TO RUSH

Directions: This test consists of a passage from which some words have been taken out and blanks put in their places. Your task is to select the deleted word which is included in the four choices you have been given. (You may write your choices in the blanks provided.) After you have filled out all the blanks, indicate your answers by blackening the circles that correspond to them on your answer sheet.

In the early to mid-sixties, Farrah Fawcett was a Tri Delt and Phyllis George was a Zeta. Maybe not their greatest claim (1) _____ fame, but at the time, they (2) _____ thought so. In those days, you (3) _____ no real choice but to go (4) _____ "rush"--the selection process sororities use (5) _____ pick their members. It was the (6) _____ thing to do if you wanted (7) _____ your mother would have called a (8) _____ college experience. Or if you wanted (9) _____ "in" to meeting the "right" people. (10) _____ sounds awfully calculating, doesn't it? But (11) _____ in the 1920's and on through (12) _____ mid-60's, that was often the idea (13) _____ a young woman's going to college. (14) _____ an education, yes, but by all (15) _____, do run in good circles. And (16) _____ better way than through your sorority? (17) _____ is a sorority? Ask a crowded (18) _____ of members and non-members, and you'll (19) _____ many

answers, some based on what (20)_____ experienced, others on what they've heard, (21)_____ still others on how they've seen (22)_____ portrayed in movies like "Animal House."

(23)_____ any case, it all begins with (24)_____-- a week of parties where members (25)_____ to know you--the rushee--and (26)_____ versa. Most schools have rush the (27)_____ prior to the start of the (28)_____ semester; very few have deferred rush, (29)_____ occurs at the beginning of the (30)_____ semester.

The social events during this (31)_____ aren't your typical, everyday parties. A (32)_____ list of rules keeps everyone in (33)_____. Parties are strictly timed (from thirty (34)_____ at the beginning of the week (35)_____ at hour at the end.) No (36)_____ may be served--only punch; and (37)"_____ boxing" (isolating and pressuring a rushee (38)_____ join) is strictly taboo. Also important (39)_____ letters of recommendation written on your (40)_____ by alumnae (graduate members of the (41)_____). Even a legacy (a rushee whose (42)_____ or mother belongs to a particular (43)_____) must have "rec" letters.

Rush week (44)_____ broken up into three periods. During (45)_____ first period, rushees put on their (46)_____ dresses and endure what is at (47)_____ a grueling process of walking from (48)_____ sorority house to another, wanting to (49)_____ once there, but instead

having to (50) _____ on their best face and come up with
clever conversation.

THE RUSH TO RUSH
ANSWER SHEET

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. a. was
b. to
c. of
d. that | 11. a. some
b. beginning
c. this
d. back | 21. a. because
b. and
c. that
d. what |
| 2. a. were
b. have
c. probably
d. had | 12. a. to
b. till
c. the
d. out | 22. a. this
b. from
c. Greeks
d. the |
| 3. a. had
b. want
c. got
d. have | 13. a. that
b. which
c. of
d. behind | 23. a. On
b. Of
c. In
d. By |
| 4. a. through
b. into
c. to
d. in | 14. a. For
b. Get
c. First
d. Pursuing | 24. a. this
b. rush
c. having
d. once |
| 5. a. is
b. for
c. to
d. so | 15. a. means
b. over
c. they
d. to | 25. a. get
b. used
c. have
d. that |
| 6. a. same
b. first
c. steady
d. proper | 16. a. still
b. even
c. what
d. get | 26. a. what
b. vice
c. good
d. same |
| 7. a. that
b. what
c. it
d. for | 17. a. House
b. What
c. How
d. Why | 27. a. first
b. main
c. week
d. time |
| 8. a. worst
b. interesting
c. well-rounded
d. good | 18. a. people
b. some
c. full
d. room | 28. a. fall
b. each
c. next
d. beginning |
| 9. a. an
b. get
c. be
d. to | 19. a. raise
b. get
c. have
d. see | 29. a. it
b. some
c. but
d. which |
| 10. a. The
b. It
c. What
d. But | 20. a. they've
b. you
c. have
d. from | 30. a. every
b. spring
c. first
d. new |

31. a. week
b. rush
c. year
d. you
32. a. book
b. long
c. number
d. paper
33. a. shape
b. ruled
c. line
d. apart
34. a. minutes
b. times
c. days
d. hours
35. a. of
b. to
c. after
d. during
36. a. violence
b. body
c. alcohol
d. one
37. a. the
b. hot
c. some
d. no
38. a. to
b. that
c. should
d. in
39. a. some
b. find
c. are
d. small
40. a. favor
b. behalf
c. paper
d. transcript
41. a. town
b. class
c. sorority
d. family
42. a. sister
b. father
c. brother
d. cousin
43. a. race
b. class
c. family
d. sorority
44. a. has
b. is
c. new
d. the
45. a. it's
b. which
c. the
d. what
46. a. best
b. typical
c. traditional
d. old
47. a. times
b. called
c. large
d. comfort
48. a. the
b. which
c. one
d. this
49. a. be
b. get
c. walk
d. collapse
50. a. go
b. put
c. be
d. do

APPENDIX B

BIOGRAPHICAL/SORORITY QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____

Country: _____

Native Language: _____

Age: _____ Male/Female: _____ Class: FR SO JR SR

When did you come to the United States? (month and year)

Have you ever been to the United States before? Yes No
If yes, when and for how long?

Have you ever been to any English-speaking country before?
Yes No

Number of years you have studied English?

Please complete the following statements by circling the letter of the answer that best fits in the blank. If you do not know the answer, circle the letter "e". Then indicate your answer by blackening the circle that corresponds to your answer on the answer sheet provided.

1. A sorority is a society of _____.

- a. elementary school children
- b. college women
- c. college faculty
- d. college men
- e. I don't know

2. To be chosen for membership in a sorority, one must go through a week of _____.

- a. rush
- b. initiation
- c. pledging
- d. all of the above
- e. I don't know

3. Sorority names are _____.
- a. English letters
 - b. Latin letters
 - c. Arabic letters
 - d. Greek letters
 - e. I don't know
4. Sorority rush week is usually held _____.
- a. the first week of school
 - b. before school starts
 - c. the final week of school
 - d. at the end of each semester
 - e. I don't know
5. Sorority members whose relative(s) were or are members of the same sorority are _____.
- a. legacies
 - b. automatic members
 - c. pledges
 - d. novices
 - e. I don't know
6. During their first semester, sorority members are called _____.
- a. rushees
 - b. initiates
 - c. pledges
 - d. novices
 - e. I don't know
7. Sorority members usually live in _____.
- a. a dormitory
 - b. a house
 - c. their own home
 - d. any of these
 - e. I don't know
8. Sorority members are chosen on the basis of _____.
- a. grades
 - b. talents
 - c. personality
 - d. all of the above
 - e. I don't know
9. Sororities help their members in _____.
- a. finding jobs
 - b. studying
 - c. social activities
 - d. all of the above
 - e. I don't know
10. Sororities are known for _____.
- a. friendships
 - b. parties
 - c. community service
 - d. all of the above
 - e. I don't know

APPENDIX C

READING PROFICIENCY CLOZE TEST

Name: _____ Date: _____

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST

Directions: This test consists of a passage from which some words have been taken out and blanks put in their places. Your task is to select the deleted word which is included in the four choices you have been give. (You may write your choices in the blanks provided.) After you have filled out all the blanks, indicate your answers by blackening the circles that correspond to them on your answer sheet.

People learn languages for many reasons. They also have different methods of learning. Some people study languages because they are (1)_____ to travel. They only want to shop, order food, ask for directions, and (2)_____ some appropriate greetings. These people are (3)_____ as concerned with learning grammar rules (4)_____ writing as with learning vocabulary and (5)_____ phrases. Other people study a language (6)_____ they are students. They hope that they will learn to read in specialized fields (7)_____ as chemistry and medicine. These people (8)_____ concentrate on grammar, vocabulary, and reading (9)_____. Pronunciation and conversation skills will hardly (10)_____ be needed, and these students would (11)_____ not spend time learning them. Still (12)_____ group of people studies languages in (13)_____ to be better prepared for an exciting new life in a different country (14)_____ their native language is not usually (15)_____.

Survival for these people really means

(16) _____ their newly acquire language skills very
(17) _____. In the majority of cases, they (18) _____
taught by teachers who neither speak (19) _____ understand
their students' languages. They get (20) _____ to spending
five or six hours (21) _____ day learning all the language
skills (22) _____ well as becoming aware of differences
(23) _____ various cultures. These people must have
(24) _____ given a little bit more encouragement
(25) _____ other people. Those of us who haven't lived in
other countries do not fully realize that only a very
courageous person would be able to emigrate to a new country
and successfully cope with the difficulties of adjusting to
a new life and learning a new language at the same time.

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST
ANSWER SHEET

1. a. going
b. afraid
c. like
d. interested
2. a. use
b. also
c. they
d. talk
3. a. worry
b. studying
c. such
d. not
4. a. with
b. are
c. or
d. to
5. a. common
b. make
c. as
d. sentence
6. a. and
b. because
c. with
d. that
7. a. are
b. courses
c. like
d. such
8. a. who
b. should
c. are
d. don't
9. a. good
b. story
c. lessons
d. skills
10. a. should
b. not
c. to
d. ever
11. a. always
b. rather
c. be
d. have
12. a. another
b. are
c. many
d. some
13. a. foreign
b. purpose
c. order
d. case
14. a. for
b. where
c. that
d. and
15. a. custom
b. easy
c. spoken
d. use
16. a. learn
b. to
c. that
d. using
17. a. bad
b. important
c. fluently
d. hard
18. a. have
b. wanted
c. are
d. will
19. a. to
b. nor
c. and
d. English
20. a. chances
b. used
c. tired
d. time
21. a. in
b. a
c. by
d. for
22. a. as
b. are
c. and
d. very
23. a. ways
b. country
c. for
d. among
24. a. been
b. not
c. had
d. to
25. a. for
b. learning
c. than
d. to

VITA²

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