

Developments in the Region Indonesia

2 ENGLISH READING SPEED AND THE MOTHER-TONGUE OR NATIONAL LANGUAGE

J. Bismoko

Sanata Dharma Teachers Training College
and

I. S. P. Nation

IKIP Negeri, Yogyakarta

In Indonesian schools learners are not required to do extensive outside reading. Also there is no tradition of reading for pleasure. Most reading is done to study, to get all the meaning from a particular short piece of writing. The reading of English is approached in the same way. There is therefore a great need for reading courses that will increase students' reading speed and thus allow them to alternate between fast reading and slow study reading according to the requirements of the material. As this need is a general one and is not confined to students of English, it could be best served through reading courses in the students' mother-tongue or school language. Presumably the improvement of the reading skill in Indonesian should transfer to reading in English or any other foreign language.

Earlier studies of reading speed transfer have dealt with transfer from English to the mother-tongue. In his experiment West (1941) found that training in English resulted in a speed increase of 266% in Bengali for Bengali students. West concluded that

Reading is a general power. It is not confined to one language, for improvement in the ability to read one language is 'transferred' and shows itself in improvement of the reading of another language... If practice in a foreign language improves the rate of reading in the mother-tongue, it follows that practice in the mother-tongue will probably improve reading in a foreign language... If such practice is needed it should obviously be given in the mother-tongue for preference.

This study deals with transfer from the National Language, Indonesian, to a foreign language, English. Indonesian is the language used in schools from the third year onwards.

Speed reading courses usually result in an increase of speed of approximately 100% with an increase in comprehension or with the maintenance of comprehension at a desired level, about 70% (see Fry 1963, Poulton 1961).

West (1941) suggests that by providing a few questions before a passage is read, increases in speed will be greater. These "before-questions" give rise to "a searching attitude" which is the main feature of efficient reading.

CURRENT RESEARCH IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Method

The subjects were students of Sanata Dharma Teachers Training College in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. One group was from the English Department, where most classes are conducted in English. The other was from the Education Department, where Indonesian is the medium of instruction. Each group was randomly divided in two. One half was given three before questions to look at before reading each passage. These three questions were included in the ten questions that had to be answered once reading was completed. In addition to this, a control group was also set up.

The course consisted of two English passages as an initial test, twenty Indonesian passages, and two more English passages as a final measure of transfer. The control group, which consisted of English Department students, received only the four English passages. The length of the passages ranged from 675 to 775 words. Each passage was followed by ten multiple-choice questions. Each question had four choices. The English passages were written within a 500 word vocabulary. The Indonesian passages were written within an 800 word vocabulary. The subjects in each group were given two passages per week. No homework was given and there were no associated lectures except one given at the beginning of the course. A small amount of individual advice was given.

Results

Effects of training in reading speed

<i>Groups</i>		<i>Indonesian</i>		<i>English</i>	
		<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>
Control	24	—	—	206	230
English Dept	(a) 16	213	375	206	364
	(b) 12	213	329	206	355
Education Dept	(a) 20	173	267	126	211
	(b) 20	171	270	133	237

(a) without before-questions

(b) with before-questions

The results show

For English Department students

- a) a gain of 65% in Indonesian reading speed.
- b) a gain of 75% in English reading speed as a result of transfer.
- c) a superiority of 5% for the method not using before-questions.

For Education Department students

- a) a gain of 54% in Indonesian reading speed.
- b) a gain of 72% in English reading speed.
- c) a superiority of 11% for the method using before-questions.

Comprehension remained at the desired level for both groups. The control group made an increase in speed of 12%. When this is subtracted from the average of the two experimental groups, the increase in English reading speed as the result of transfer is 65.5%.

Discussion

The results of the experiment show that there is a large amount of reading speed transfer from Indonesian to English. Where English is taught as a second language it would seem desirable for a variety of reasons, several of them not directly pedagogical, to give speed reading training in the national language or the mother-tongue. The necessary material is not difficult to prepare, consisting merely of passages with questions written in a controlled vocabulary.

The results regarding the use of before-questions is contradictory. One group showed a greater increase with before-questions, the other showed a greater increase without before-questions. It seems that before-questions do not necessarily have the effect suggested by West.

Initial reading speeds in Indonesian were higher than initial reading speeds in English. After training, one group from the English Department had a higher reading speed in English than in Indonesian. Also, the difference between Indonesian and English reading speeds, especially for English Department students, was not great. There are three possible reasons for this.

- a) The English passages were simpler than the Indonesian passages.
- b) Indonesian words are generally longer than English words. Many of the words on any page of English are monosyllabic. It was found when passages were typed that a 775 word passage in Indonesian completely filled a foolscap page, while a 775 word passage in English at the 500 word level filled about three quarters of a page. Thus, to read the same number of words in Indonesian as in English, it was necessary to read more lines and thus make more eye movements. This would have the effect of reducing the reading speed of Indonesian as measured in words-per-minute. Presumably in a monosyllabic language like Thai reading speed would be proportionably faster.
- c) Although Indonesian is the school language, very few students read Indonesian novels for pleasure. English Department students with a B.A. have usually read only about two or three Indonesian novels outside classes. The subjects of the experiment from the English Department however had considerable practice in reading simple English in reading box activities, and in extensive reading of books in simplified English.

CURRENT RESEARCH IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Generally Education Department students had lower scores than English Department students at all stages of the experiment. This is probably because the English Department tends to attract more students than the Education Department and thus can select better students.

Further research needs to be done to compare the effect on English reading speed of training in English with training in the mother-tongue or national language. As Indonesian was not the mother-tongue of most of the subjects in this experiment, training in the mother-tongue could be compared with training in the national language. One may predict however that whatever approach is used, the transfer will be considerable.

References

- Fry, E. *Teaching Faster Reading*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1963.
- Poulton, E. C. 'British Courses for Adults on Effective Reading', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 1961.
- West, M. *Learning to Read a Foreign Language*, Longmans, London, 1941.