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Abstract
The study evaluates the word decoding skills of sophomores in a university of technology. It mainly examines if they, without school's formal instruction and drills of phonics, are able to acquire the knowledge of letter-sound correspondences by themselves after learning English for at least seven years. Their common problems while decoding are also analyzed. Three measures conducted in the study are: Word Decoding Test, Word Meaning Test, and Questionnaire Survey.

Base on the criteria that most frequent spellings of 44 sounds induced from literature review and the phenomena observed from preliminary test (to another 47 students), 94 pseudo-words and 94 real words are created and selected to construct the Word Decoding Test to 58 subjects. The adoption of real words works as the comparison of subjects' performance on decoding pseudo-words. Their performances on unfamiliar words or words they already know can also be observed through the results of Word Meaning Test of real words. The results of questionnaire survey explore some influences or factors─students' learning background, attitudes to English pronunciation, and strategies to dealing with unknown English words─that possibly relate to subjects ' decoding skills.

Subjects' performances on four categories of consonant spelling patterns and five categories of vowel sounds (10 sub-categories of spelling patterns) are presented with numbers and percentages of correctness/errors as well as common errors made to each grapheme. These graphemes' error hierarchies (from high to low degree) are also arranged to show what kinds of grapheme-phoneme correspondences are easy or hard for subjects to generalize and put into practice.

The results of the study show that subjects can develop slight decoding skills after learning English for more than seven years. Most of them are simply aware of grapheme-phoneme relationships of consonants, but many have difficulty generalizing the knowledge of letter-sound correspondences of various vowels. Those graphemes difficult to native speakers are hard for these subjects as well. Some of them are not able to apply the letter-sound relationships appeared in those real words they already know to newly encountered words. This indicates that subjects simply know a word but are not aware of its letter-sound relationships without teachers' instruction. One more phenomena that not every student who chooses the correct meaning for a real word can sound out

that real word correctly can possibly result from some students' ignoring pronunciation ability.

According to major findings, some pedagogical implications are reached and presented in the study under two titles: something EFL teachers need to know and grapheme-phoneme correspondences that are difficult for EFL students to internalized. Finally, suggestions for future studies are also included.

Advisory Committee Dr. Ming-Tyi Wu - advisor

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