

Analyzing the TOEFL ITP Reading Comprehension from a Test Preparation Textbook:

A Case Study and Its Classroom Application

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要約

TOEFL ITP リーディングを準備教材から分析する：分析のケーススタディと授業への応用

EAP (English for Academic Purposes) における研究は、TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) のテスト構成に影響を与えている。テスト機関である ETS (Educational Testing Services) からの研究でも、Enright, et al. (2000) による “TOEFL Reading Framework: A working paper” は、テストの状況、テキストのタイプ、タスクタイプという項目に分けて EAP の理論的枠組みの中で TOEFL リーディングを定義づけしている。TOEFL ITP (Institutional Testing Program) のリーディングセクションに関しても、Enright et al. (2000) によるフレームワークの適応が見受けられる。Enright et al. (2000) の枠組みによるリーディングテスト分析の研究は、テストについての情報が限られる現状で、テスト準備にたずさわる教員と学生ともに大きく役立つ。このようなことから本研究では、テスト・デザインの枠組みを利用して TOEFL ITP リーディングセクションの分析を行う。最初に Enright et al. (2000) によるフレームワークを解説する。次に、このモデルをもとに TOEFL ITP 準備用教材から抜粋したリーディング (1 パッセージと 10 の設問) をケーススタディとして分析する。さらにこの分析を行う作業を授業で応用した実践報告とその考察を行う。結論では、今後の研究について考える。

Keywords : English for Academic Purposes (EAP), TOEFL ITP reading, analytical framework, text types, task types, case study, classroom application

Introduction

In EAP (English for Academic Purposes), many studies have analyzed written academic texts and task types to assess learners' reading comprehension from text, discourse, and language elements (Cook, 1989; Swales, 1990; McCarthy, 1991; Jordan, 1997; Dudley-Evans and St. John 1998; Celce-Murcia and Olshtain, 2001; Gillet, 2008). Educational materials and assessment for EAP-based reading tests reflect such analyses (Glendinning and Holmstrom, 2004; Rogers, 2006; Gillet, 2008). Since it is an EAP-based test for academic study, TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) also reflects these analyses. “TOEFL Reading Framework: A working paper” (Enright,

et al., 2000) provides a framework for the TOEFL reading comprehension section, concerning situations, types of text and task designs, which are explicitly defined within EAP theory. This test framework is also relevant for reading comprehension in the TOEFL ITP (Institutional Testing Program), a paper-based version of the TOEFL.

Still, the test taking strategies for TOEFL ITP reading comprehension are not widely known. Many students seem unaware of the test structure suggested by Enright et al. (2000). In my experience teaching TOEFL ITP reading comprehension, for example, I noticed that students frequently read the questions and carelessly scan the passage, merely guessing answers in the end, due to insufficient knowledge about text types and task design. At present, the TOEFL ITP is required for many university students preparing to study abroad, who are studying EAP, and understanding its passage types and item design is essential for students to effectively prepare for the reading test. At this stage, researchers and teachers concerned with the field of EAP need to provide an analysis for TOEFL ITP reading comprehension, based on the framework of Enright et al. (2000). Such analysis could clarify appropriate reading strategies for many EAP students to comprehend the passages and answer the questions.

As a teacher involved in both EAP and TOEFL reading, I attempt such an analysis in this paper. First, I describe the analytical framework based on the model by Enright et al. (2000). Second, I analyze TOEFL ITP reading comprehension (one passage and ten multiple choice questions) as an example. Finally, I give an explanation of its classroom application in a reading class at Ritsumeikan University. In this class, I taught academic reading with many elements for TOEFL ITP preparation.

Analytical framework

The TOEFL reading framework (Enright et al., 2000) includes situation, text materials, and test rubrics. Among these, text and task types relevant to understanding the passages and questions in the TOEFL reading section are explained below.

Text types

In reference to reading materials for academic settings, particularly for general EAP, the four major types of text are expository, description, argumentation, and historical/narrative. Enright et al. (2000) describe the exposition, argumentation, and historical/narrative types used in the paper-based test for the new TOEFL reading comprehension sections as follows:

Exposition - Lengthy expository text passages may include descriptions, comparisons, contrasts, explanations, and elaborations that provide details about concepts, objects, persons, places, events and other phenomena (p. 20). — Typically, rhetorical function of the text guides the reader in a basic understanding of the passage. Readers who are new to the discipline are often

unfamiliar with the vocabulary that is introduced in expository passages; accordingly, they must utilize accompanying figures for clarification of new material, and must have well-developed reading and study strategies for choosing salient aspects of the passage (p. 21).

Argumentation - Argumentative/persuasive texts present a point of view about a topic and provide supporting evidence in favor of a position in the analysis of the topic. Good persuasive texts will include carefully crafted positions with reasons and evidence along with an analysis of the opponent' s errors in reasoning (p. 21). — Argumentative texts are typically found in editorials, essays, political satire, and other types of texts where intention is to present a point of view. The work of the reader is to analyze the writer' s perspective in relation to the topic and judge the worth of the writer' s presentation, line of reasoning and evidence (p. 21).

Historical/Biographical narrative - The most common types of college academic reading that contain narrative discourse are historical, biographical/autobiographical, or literally (fiction) text (p. 21). — The intent of this type of text is to inform the reader through a narrative of true events about significant outcomes in the history of the discipline, whether it is psychology, sociology, art, history, biology, or botany or about a significant impact the events have had on the lives of prominent individuals. Therefore, the task of the reader is to analyze these significant events and to infer the historical and conceptual link to the discipline or individual if not explicitly stated (p. 23).

Task types

Enright et al. (2000) define three types of tasks for the TOEFL reading comprehension test: reading to find information, reading for basic comprehension and reading to learn. The purposes of these three task types are defined in "TOEFL iBT tips" (p8, 2008) as follows:

Reading to find information

- effectively scanning text for key facts and important information
- increasing reading fluency

Reading for basic comprehension

- understanding the general topic or main idea, major points, important facts, and details, vocabulary in context, and pronoun references
- making inferences about what is implied in a passage

Reading to learn

- recognizing the organization and purpose of a passage
- understanding relationships between ideas
- organizing information into a category chart or a summary in order to recall major information

and important details

- inferring how ideas throughout the passage connect

Enright et al. (2000) explain that the TOEFL ITP covers the first two types intensively, while TOEFL iBT (internet Based Testing) includes all three task types. The TOEFL ITP reading section applies multiple question formats which are concerned with scanning, vocabulary in context, understanding main ideas and supporting details, and making inferences about the statement in the passage.

A case study of analysis

This section provides an example of analysis of a passage and questions for TOEFL ITP reading comprehension. The reading test used for analysis is from a TOEFL ITP preparation textbook titled “Hajimete No TOEFL ITP reading” (“Introduction to TOEFL ITP Reading”) (Kanbe, 2007) published by ALC Publishing Corporation. The passage is about the historical development of music in the U.S.¹⁾ and is followed by ten questions. Underlined sentences, words in gray, gray and bold, and italics below are all added to the passage by the author²⁾ for the purpose of analyzing the text structure.

The reading comprehension passage

1) **Rhythm and blues (R&B)** music grew up out of fundamental changes in American demographics in the period just **before World War II**. Many black Americans moved from rural to urban areas in this period, taking with them their own particular style of music. **By the end of the war**, rhythm and blues in many different guises had become popular in the cities of America.

2) **These early** R&B styles included the fast-moving, up-tempo **jump blues**. Riffs, a heavy reliance on the horn, and 12-bar blues beats were typical of this sub-genre. *The pioneer of jump-blues, Louis Jordan*, had previously been a big-band jazz artist and his hits were liked equally by both black and white fans.

3) **In contrast with** jump-blues, **club blues** was a mellow manifestation of R&B. This focused on the piano rather than the horn, and had more low-key, ballad-type tunes. Artists at the forefront of this musical movement included *the well-known Nat “King” Cole and Charles Brown*. Once again, these innovative musicians created a style of music that appealed to both black and white audiences.

4) **Out of these and other strains** of R&B emerged **rock’ n’ roll**. **By 1955**, when *Bill Haley and*

the Comets' "Rock Around the Clock" appeared in the mainstream American charts, rock' n' roll had been firmly established as the music of youth. Most artists used their lyrics to address teenagers and broached topics such as love, school, and rebellion.

5) The fact that rock' n' roll artists drew on different sources of inspiration accounts for the many different styles of the day. *Fats Domino and Little Richard* were strongly influenced by New Orleans R&B whereas *Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis* performed rockabilly, a combination of rock' n' roll and country-and-western.

6) **During the 1960s,** the music genre of rock' n' roll recorded memorable advances. *Eric Clapton and other musicians* used electronic amplification devices. **On August 15, 1969,** the Woodstock Festival in New York drew a massive audience of more than 400,000 rock fans. It was a milestone in the history of rock music. The event further established rock' s position in music history.

Analysis of the reading comprehension passage

The passage discusses music history in the United States since the early 1900s. The passage text type is a historical/narrative, covering the discipline of music, and the text structure is organized with some key phrases and words suggesting the time-order of music history development.

The text structure development is explained paragraph by paragraph as follows. In the first paragraph, the author starts with the growth of R&B music, which is largely influenced by demographic changes by the end of World War II. In the second and third paragraphs, the writer describes two different types of R&B with examples. Following that, the passage refers to the beginning of rock' n' roll that had become popular by 1955, especially for teenagers. The next paragraph describes the many different rock' n' roll styles. Finally, the writer indicates the advances of rock' n' roll in the 1960s, especially in 1969.

The passage includes the key vocabulary for the music genre such as R&B, jump-blues, club blues, rock' n' roll, many different styles, and genre of rock' n' roll. Gray markers in the text highlight the key vocabulary and important numbers and words indicating the time and year including the following: before the end of the war, by the end of the war, these early, by 1955, during the 1960s, and on August 15, 1969. The phrases showing comparison and relationship are 'In contrast with' and 'Out of these and other strains.' They are marked in gray and bold-face.

Finally, in the supporting sentences for each paragraph, the author introduces musicians for each genre. For R&B, *Louis Jordan, Nat "King" Cole and Charles Brown* are referred to. For rock' n' roll, *Bill Haley and the Comets, Fats Domino, Little Richard, Elvis Presley and Jerry Lee Lewis* are mentioned as well as *Eric Clapton and other musicians*.

In summary, a text type of historical narrative is written with a clear topic sentence and

supporting sentences in each paragraph, with signaling vocabulary that helps to indicate the beginning, development, and establishment of R&B and rock' n' roll.

10 test questions in the reading comprehension³ (**Right answer choice is in bold**)

30. According to the author, which of the following is NOT a characteristic of jump-blues?

(A) Up-tempo rhythm (B) Riffs (C) Horn-driven style **(D) Big-band style**

31. The word “manifestation” in paragraph 3 is closest in meaning to

(A) expression (B) public demonstration (C) show-off (D) challenge

32. The author mentions the movement of black Americans in paragraph 1 in order to

(A) demonstrate the military needs for World War II
(B) demonstrate how the American demographics change took place
(C) illustrate the difficulty of life in the rural areas
(D) illustrate how the demographic change influenced music

33. The word “strains” in paragraph 4 is closest in meaning to

(A) audiences **(B) forms** (C) norms (D) joys

34. Which one of the following can be inferred from the passage?

(A) Nat “King” Cole was a leading figure of jump blues.
(B) Rock music appealed to young people.
(C) R&B musicians mainly focused on white audiences.
(D) Rock music caused the disruption of school system.

35. The author implies all of the following EXCEPT

(A) R&B started after a large population migration.
(B) Club blues was quieter and more restrained than jump-blues.
(C) Rock' n' roll was first aimed at an adult market.
(D) Fats Domino had a different style from Elvis Presley.

36. The phrase “accounts for” in paragraph 5 could be best replaced by

(A) facilitates (B) justifies (C) depends on **(D) explains**

37. Why do you think the author mentioned “the Woodstock Festival” in paragraph 6?

(A) To mention that a large number of musicians lived in New York City in 1969
(B) To illustrate the organizational skills of Woodstock Festival producers
(C) To illustrate the popularity of rock music during the late 1960s

(D) To identify the use of electronic devices which can be heard from a distance

38. The word “milestone” in paragraph 6 is closest in meaning to

(A) high point (B) check point (C) ceremony (D) message

39. Which one of the following topics would the author most likely discuss in the next paragraph?

(A) The immense popularity of the Beatles

(B) The emergence of art rock in the 1970’s

(C) How Eric Clapton utilized electronic devices in the 1960s

(D) The influence of TV programs on music

Analysis of 10 test questions in the reading comprehension

There are ten questions about the reading passage above. The question categories include understanding the vocabulary meaning in context (31, 33, 36, and 38), scanning key words to find answers (30), making inferences about what is implied in the text (34 and 35), clarifying the author’s choice of particular words (32 and 37) and following the passage organization (39). These questions are categorized into task types as follows.

First is the reading to find information type, which question 30 is classified under. The key phrase for selecting the right answer is jump-blues, which is found at the beginning of the second paragraph. Second is the reading for basic comprehension type. There are four vocabulary questions, which must be understood in context. For example, in question 31, “mellow manifestation of R&B” is not a demonstration, but an expression. Other basic comprehension questions are questions 34 and 35, which are related to the skills of making inferences about the statement and scanning information in a passage. These two questions are more difficult than question 30.

In order to answer question 34, the possible answers have three different keywords that need to be scanned. These keywords are Nat “King” Cole (third paragraph), R&B music (second and third paragraphs) and rock music (fourth paragraph), which are in three different paragraphs. In question 35, students must find one choice not mentioned in the passage, and there are four keywords for scanning in four different paragraphs: R&B music (first paragraph), club-blues (third paragraph), rock’ n’ roll (fourth paragraph), and Fats Domino and Elvis Presley (fifth paragraph). As a result, for questions 34 and 35, students must survey the text paragraphs including main ideas and details, understand in which paragraphs these keywords are found, scan the appropriate area in a passage, and find the right answer by clarifying the inferred meaning. Consequently they are much more difficult questions than the others.

The author word choice must be understood in order to answer questions 32 and 37. Making the inference about the statement is applicable. Finally, for question 39, this is a reading to learn question, as it requires students to understand the historical/narrative text structure explaining

R&B and rock' n' roll since the end of the war.

Analysis summary

Summarizing the analysis of the text types and structure, the TOEFL ITP reading comprehension passage in this section has a historical/narrative text type and discourse features defined within the context of general EAP. The framework provided by Enright et al. (2000) is useful to understand the passage. We can understand the passage by seeing the text types, the passage structure, key discourse features, and signaling transitions and vocabulary.

For analyzing the reading section questions, the three task types are reading to find information, reading for basic comprehension, and reading to learn. Identifying the task designs among these questions helps students to understand how they should address these different questions. Analyzing also helps students to understand the level of difficulty among the questions. Questions 34 and 35 are more difficult than other types of scanning questions since they require multiple reading skills of surveying all paragraphs in a text, scanning keywords in the different paragraphs, identifying the areas in a passage, and making inferences about the stated meaning.

Classroom application

If students can write reports analyzing a passage and the design of questions in the reading comprehension, they are able to clearly recognize the test structure defined in EAP. In late May, I assigned students a report analyzing the TOEFL ITP reading comprehension about the history of American music. Students were given some samples of analyses using other reading passages, but the analysis described in the previous section was not shown.

For the pedagogical application, I tried to encourage student awareness of academic discourse used in college textbooks and TOEFL ITP reading comprehension. The reading class for International Business Administration majors at Ritsumeikan University from April to July used the "World Class Readings" (Rogers, B., 2006) textbook, which includes 15 units. Each unit is composed of one reading passage of approximately 800 words and questions designed like the reading tests in the TOEFL ITP and IELTS. The passage contents include social sciences, natural sciences, history, life, and arts. The text types are divided into exposition and historical/biographical narrative, rendering the text ideal for helping students recognize the key text types in both EAP and the TOEFL ITP.

The textbook methodology consists of reading practice, instructions for the reading passage, and writing a summary about the reading passage. First, students read a textbook passage and answer 10 questions by skimming and scanning. Subsequently, I lectured about the reading, then giving students handouts outlining the analysis of the passage text type and structure as well as an explanation of the 10 questions. In addition to the reading exercise and lecture, students were required to write a summary of the passage they read in each unit.

From the beginning of May, I also gave TOEFL ITP reading comprehension practice as learning materials. For this, I used handouts explaining an analysis of the reading comprehension. In late May, an assignment, explanation and instructions were given to students about analyzing the reading comprehension including a passage and test questions. The assignment was due two weeks later (June 11).

The instructions below are for analyzing the reading comprehension:

Assignment writing instructions

STEP 1 Before beginning analysis of a passage and questions of the TOEFL ITP reading section, note that the passage is one of the types defined in English for Academic Purpose: exposition, historical/narrative, or argumentation.

STEP 2 Look first at the given passage. Survey the passage and identify which parts are the introduction, body and conclusion. Recognize topic sentences and supporting sentences, and key features of discourse such as signaling transitions and vocabulary. Try to highlight the key features by coding through underlining or highlighting the text.

STEP 3 After identifying the key parts of the text, write an analysis of the passage in terms of the text type, discourse structure and vocabulary. This can be summarized in 400 to 500 words in Japanese or 100 to 200 words in English.

STEP 4 After writing an analysis of the passage, look at the questions and find the relevant keywords for answering the questions. Scan the passage to locate where these words are found.

STEP 5 Based on scanning the passage, explain how and why you can select the right answer choice. Pay attention to the differences in the task types, especially questions asking, "Which of the following can be inferred in the passage?"

STEP 6 Summarize your analysis of the passage and questions in your reading test. What are the important points for you? What should be done for promptly surveying and scanning the relevant section for appropriately answering questions?

STEP 7 Reflect upon your analysis of the reading comprehension task in relation to your previous learning. Are there any similarities or differences?

At the end of the first semester in July, I asked students to complete a questionnaire evaluating the class materials and methodology. Twenty-five students answered the questionnaire. The questionnaire includes such categories as the textbook, reading exercises and lecture, writing a summary of the passage in the textbook, and assignment analyzing the TOEFL ITP reading comprehension test, and students were given five choices to rate these categories: very effective, effective, somewhat effective, slightly effective, and not effective.

Table 1. Results of the questionnaire (N=25)

	VERY EFFECTIVE	EFFECTIVE	SOMEWHAT EFFECTIVE	SLIGHTLY EFFECTIVE	NOT EFFCETIVE
Textbook (World Class Readings 3)	2 (8%)	14 (56%)	6 (24%)	3 (12%)	- (0%)
Reading practice and lecture	1 (4%)	13 (52%)	9 (36%)	2 (8%)	- (0%)
Writing the summary (textbook)	7 (28%)	5 (20%)	11 (44%)	2 (8%)	- (0%)
Analysis on TOEFL ITP reading	9 (36%)	8 (32%)	6 (24%)	2 (8%)	- (0%)

Concerning the analysis of TOEFL ITP Reading (as an assignment), the results showed that 23 students felt relatively positive about the assignment, while 2 students felt it was slightly effective. Among the 23 students who felt relatively positive, 9 students felt the assignment was very effective, 8 students felt effective, and 6 students felt somewhat effective.

In the questionnaire, students who thought their learning was very effective and effective mentioned that they were able to understand the structure of the reading comprehension test in the context of EAP reading and that they became more capable of appropriately responding to test questions.

Summary and conclusions

In this paper, I have demonstrated that the test design of the TOEFL ITP reading comprehension section is defined in the context of EAP. The reading comprehension framework of Enright, et al. (2000), which I used for the analysis, is an excellent description of the test design. After explaining the framework, I analyzed the TOEFL ITP reading in terms of passage types and design of questions in the reading section. Finally, I introduced the classroom application of an assignment in which students analyzed the reading comprehension test. In the class, EAP reading textbook was applied, which suits the design of TOEFL reading test, so it was useful for an assignment. After the assignment, students strengthened their awareness of how the TOEFL ITP reading comprehension section is organized.

There are two possible directions for future research. This study showed only one text type of historical/narrative as an example and for classroom application. Future research could continue with student reports analyzing and comparing different text types. The framework of the reading comprehension section by Enright et al. (2000) is also more directly applicable for TOEFL iBT. As a

result, a future study on analyzing TOEFL iBT reading comprehension and its pedagogical application is the second possible direction.

Notes

- 1) Readability data in terms of analyzing the passage' s vocabulary profile is attached in the Appendix A. The passage is analyzed by the types of vocabulary including General Service List (GSL), Academic Word List (AWL), and Off-List Words.
- 2) Notes by the author
 - UNDERLINED topic sentences
 - WORDS IN GRAY** key words related to topic
 - GRAY AND BOLD** signaling words (indicating time-order, relationships, etc.)
 - ITALICS* examples
- 3) Notes by the author
 - Concerning the questions 31, 33, 36, 37 and 38, the term 'paragraph' is used instead of 'line' to indicate the approximate areas of the words and phrases in a passage.

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Appendix

Readability data

The data of Vocabulary profile

The data of vocabulary in the passage about the historical trend of American music is described in terms of General Word List (GWL) and Academic Word List (AWL). These two categories defined as follows.

General Service List (GWL)

General Service List (GSL) contains the 2000 most frequently used words derived from a corpus based on the frequency and range. Although the GSL was developed in the early part of the 20th century, it is still widely available. It is claimed that the GSL represents approximately 80 to 82 percent of words used in English (Nation and Warning, 1997). The GSL words are divided into the basic K1 1000 words and more intermediate K2 1000 words.

Academic Word List (AWL)

For the data of academic language, the Academic Word List (AWL) was developed under the initiative by Coxhead (2000). In selecting the data, any word item from the GSL was excluded. The project by Coxhead (2000) led to the AWL corpus which amounts to 3.5 million words selected through various texts in different academic disciplines, including Arts, History, Psychology, Sociology, Commerce, Law, Biology, Sciences, Mathematics and so on.

The types of vocabulary concerning the passage about the historical trend of American music is processed through the corpus 'Web Vocabprofile' (Cob, T; 2008), and the results are described as follows.

Types of Vocabulary	Number of words
GSL K1 (1-1000):	241 words (66.39%)
GSL K2 (1001 – 2000)	21words (5.79%)
AWL (Academic words)	22 words (6.06%)
Other-List Words	67 words (18.46%)
Others	12 words (3.3%)
Total	363 words (100%)