CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature in 6 major areas of reading apropos (1) reading approaches, (2) L2 reading, (3) background knowledge, (4) pre-reading activities, (5) semantic mapping and (6) language proficiency, along with a summary.

2.1 READING APPROACHES

There are various methods that each reader applies when trying to get the meaning from the text. Bottom-up, top-down and interactive approaches are three prominent reading models expressed by the reading process of each individual reader.

2.1.1 Bottom-Up Approach

The bottom-up models are data-driven, or text-driven, because they predominantly depend on information revealed on the printed page (Anderson, 1999). Decoding, simple decoding, letter/word recognition, lexical access, syntactic parsing and semantic parsing are several examples of bottom-up skills (Eskey, 1988; Urquhart and Weir, 1998).

Many researchers believe that, with bottom-up models, the reader approaches “each word letter-by-letter, each sentence word-by word and each text sentence-by-sentence in a linear fashion” (Grabe and Stoller, 2002, p. 33). To put it simply, Urquhart and Weir (1998) explain that bottom-up approach assumes that, when approaching a printed text, the reader begins by scanning every letter to discriminate. After that, he/she converts the letter into phonemes and matches the phonemes with the graphemes. Then, the reader recognizes string of letters as words. Next, the reader fixes on the following word and repeats the mentioned process until he/she is able to apply syntactic as well as semantic rules to assign meanings to the sentences.

Furthermore, the readers who use this reading approach seem to concentrate on exact translation of each print item rather than using their background knowledge to comprehend the meaning of the text. Grabe and Stoller (2002) note that, to make their own interpretation, readers who put bottom-up models into practice tend to

translate every word in the text almost without applying background knowledge. Additionally, Grabe (2002) suggests that word recognition not encourage reading comprehension (p. 52).

2.1.2 Top-Down Approach

In contrast to the bottom-up approach, the top-down approach is considered reader-driven or knowledge-based. This reading model presumes that reading is regulated by the reader's expectations, not the text (Grabe and Stoller, 2002; Silberstein, 1994; Urquhart and Weir, 1998).

A top-down approach depicts a reader as someone who forms expectations or goals before approaching the reading text. According to Urquhart and Weir (1998) and Grabe and Stoller (2002), in this purported 'psycholinguistic guessing game', the reader reads merely to confirm or reject his/her expectations and hence may ignore chunks of texts irrelevant to his/her established purposes. Furthermore, Grabe (2002) states that, in this type of reading approach, background knowledge acts as a model of interpretation. As a result, to succeed in the reading task, the reader must apply apposite inference in order to correctly comprehend the text. In details, in 1967, Goodman (cited in Urquhart and Weir, 1998, p. 43) sees that the reader who uses these reading models scans solely one line of a text and focuses on a point in that line and then gathers cues to prove or disprove the expectation. However, the cues are restricted by language knowledge and background knowledge of each reader.

To conclude, the top-down approach of reading illustrates reading as a method of recreating meanings of the texts rather than decoding symbols of letters. Thus, each reader may interpret the same text differently depending on personal experience and background knowledge (Grabe and Stoller, 2002).

2.1.3 Interactive Approach

At present, many researchers view interactive models as "the most comprehensive description of reading process" because interactive models are the combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches to reading (Anderson, 1999, p.3). Since neither bottom-up nor top-down approaches seem to be adequate for gaining

reading comprehension, the reader may make use of both approaches; in other words, an interactive approach. Carrell (1988) also agrees that in an effective L2 reading, both bottom-up and top-down strategies should function interactively.

In the viewpoints of Eskey (1988), 2 versions of the term 'interactive' are:

I. The interaction between the reader and texts. This version makes a clear distinction between information provided by the text and by the reader. From the given information in the text and the mind of the reader, the reader will build up his understanding of the text by relating the contexts to his/her background knowledge.

II. The interaction between two pieces of information. The first piece is obtained by means of text decoding (bottom-up processing) and the other piece is provided with the help of cognitive process (top-down analysis). Both pieces of information depend on background knowledge and information-processing skills.

Consequently, this reading approach emphasizes the importance of reading ability and background knowledge in the reading of text by each reader. A good reader thus has to be proficient in using bottom-up and top-down models.

2.2 L2 READING

Grabe (2002) notes that L2 reading is one of the most arduous skills "to develop to a high level of proficiency" (p. 49). Thus, this section puts emphasis on L2 reading (second language reading) by providing several definitions of L2 reading and distinctions between L1 reading and L2 reading.

2.2.1 Definitions

Although the term 'L2 reading' has been long implemented, it is apparently difficult to clearly define it. Certain definitions only discriminate between L2 reading and L1 reading. According to Koda (2005), regardless of divergence between ages, prior literacy experience and language proficiency of each individual learner, the easiest definition may be that L2 reading generally reflects learning to read in a second language. Moreover, Singhal (1998) notes that, in many cases, L2 reading is interpreted as a slower version of reading in L1. He also remarks that factors such as cultural,

linguistic, and educational backgrounds of each individual reader have a great impact on L2 reading contexts.

On the other hand, Grabe (2002) signifies that “L2 reading can best be understood as a combination of skills and abilities that the individuals being to bear as they begin to read” (p. 51). He explains that L2 reading requires cognitive process and that “basic comprehension for main idea from a text” is the most essential capability for L2 reading (p. 50). However, as a result of the variations on purposes and other elements of L2 reading, Grabe admits that it is difficult to define L2 reading in solely short sentences.

2.2.2 Differentiation First Language and Second Language Reading

Even though both L1 and L2 reading tasks deal with reading texts, they are not processed in the same way. In this section, the differences between L1 and L2 reading regarding 1) language involvement, 2) initial stage of instruction, 3) transfer effects and 4) genres are discussed in detail.

1. Language involvement

Compared to L1 reading, L2 reading is observably more complex because two languages are involved in the reading process. From Koda’s perspective (2005), reading in L1 requires only knowledge of one language (native language); whereas readers have to make use of knowledge and skills from both their native tongue and the target language in order to accomplish an L2 reading task. Similarly, Grabe (2002) concurs that L2 reading is a complex task. The reason is that L2 readers are forced to deal with two different languages, with two experiences concerning general education, and with different motivations, attitudes, L2 culture and purposes.

Furthermore, L2 vocabulary is a vital factor in L2 reading. According to Swaffar, Arens and Byrnes (1991), beginning L2 readers tend to have problems in their L2 reading tasks because a small amount of L2 vocabulary cannot ensure L2 reading comprehension. Swaffar, Arens and Byrnes illustrate that there is no guarantee that learners of English who are able to use ‘I am running.’ correctly will be able to comprehend ‘He’s been running for president all his life.’ The reason is that the same L2

learners might not perceive that ‘run for’ (be a candidate in an election) does not share the same meaning as of ‘run’ (jog or move at a pace faster than that of walking).

In addition, languages of L1 and L2 may be extremely different. Thai and English is a case in point. The grammatical structures and orthography of Thai language vastly differ from those of English. For example, plurals of nouns and verb tenses in Thai are unmarked, Thai adjectives and adverbs sometimes act as verbs, Thai verbs do not have inflected forms and there are no articles in Thai (Smyth, 2001). As a result, compared to German readers of English, Thai readers of English apparently have more difficulties in English reading activities because the target language of English is very distinctive from the native language of Thai.

2. Initial stages of instruction

Initial stages of reading instruction also play a vital role in L1 and L2 reading comprehension. Several researchers (Grabe, 2002; Koda, 2005; Wallace, 1988) assent that L1 reading and L2 reading differ from each other since the very first step of instruction.

Wallace (1988) notices that a good number of children are never taught to read formally. Instead, similar to acquiring speaking ability, they attain reading skill during their daily activities. Likewise, Koda (2005) notes that the starting points between L1 and L2 reading are dissimilar. Native speakers begin reading by means of oral communication after mastering certain basic linguistic features in their L1 while L2 learners usually begin their L2 reading instructions before acquiring adequate linguistic knowledge of the unfamiliar target language. Therefore, L1 reading instruction encourages learners to link printed words with stored oral vocabulary but L2 reading instruction focuses on building linguistic knowledge (p. 7).

In addition, Grabe and Stoller (2002) state that, differing from L1 readers who normally learn to read after mastering adequate linguistic knowledge, the vast majority of L2 readers are forced to broaden their linguistic knowledge at the same time they learn to read. As a result, L2 reading tasks are very difficult for L2 beginners as L2 beginners possess only limited L2 knowledge (Grabe, 2002). For example, most L1 readers begin reading with at least 6,000 known words in L1 and with adequate grammatical and structural knowledge of their L1. On the contrary, many L2 readers

begin their reading instruction with a small amount of L2 knowledge on vocabulary as well as grammatical structures. Thus, no one should assume that L2 reading can be mastered in a much briefer period than that of L1 reading skill (p. 54).

3. Transfer effects

Transfer effects are characteristics of L2 reading (Lightbown and Spada, 1999). In addition, transfers of L1 syntactic knowledge in L2 reading tasks are common for L2 readers at all proficiency levels (Grabe, 2002).

Transfer effects are the patterns of L1 that L2 learners apply in their L2 tasks (Lightbown and Spada, 1999). Grabe and Stoller (2002) define 'transfer' as the way an L2 learner uses L1 knowledge such as phonological, syntactic and strategies in his/her L2 tasks. According to Grabe and Stoller (2002), when L2 readers face reading materials that are above their levels, they will rely on resources from their L1 such as language and knowledge about the world in order to comprehend the texts. If learners make use of suitable L1 resources, a positive transfer effect will be reached. On the contrary, the text will be falsely read if L1 resources are misleading. The latter type of transfer is considered negative interference (Grabe and Stoller, 2002; Lightbown and Spada, 1999).

On the one hand, the positive transfer supports L2 reading comprehension. According to Grabe and Stoller (2002), the positive transfer effects include productive reading strategies, flexibility in monitoring comprehension and skills for analyzing and acquiring new words.

On the other hand, L2 readers may not able to comprehend the target texts if they apply negative interference. In an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) class with a heterogeneous group of students from Asia, Africa, South America and Europe, some students interpreted William Carlos William's poem entitled *This is Just to Say* as a love letter between sisters, while some students did not at all accept this blank verse as a poem (Silberstein, 1994). Apparently, students, who drew on negative L1 interference, based their interpretations on their L1 culture or text structures and misleadingly shed light on the poem or failed to recognize it as the poem.

4. Genres

Genres refer to text types of the reading text. According to Wallace (1988), genre of the text enables readers to apprehend the text because each genre has a

distinguishing structure and unique content. Furthermore, textual organization of each genre is separable. For example, ‘menu’ is a list of food choices. Obviously ‘menus’ provided in an expensive restaurant and menus supplied in a cheap café are different (Wallace, 1988). While all readers tend to be familiar with all genres in L1, certain kinds of genre in L2 texts are not available in L1 literature. Poetry, for example, is a major genre in both Thai and English literature. However, neither Petrarchan nor Shakespearian sonnets are present in Thai poetry.

In addition, while readers may have no difficulty in reading meeting arrangements and newspapers in L1, these two text types are not suitable for all levels of L2 readers (Swaffar, Arens, and Byrnes, 1991). For example, lower-level L2 readers tend to understand text types that offer tangible information such as menus or meeting arrangements, but might fail to comprehend messages in the newspapers or authentic academic texts (p. 61).

Furthermore, difficulty arises when L2 readers engage in L2 texts that are not organized the same way as those of L1 (Grabe and Stoller, 2002). Grabe (2002) also claims that the patterns of text organization of L2 texts “may be uncommonly read by learners in their L1 context” (p. 56). In other words, to achieve L2 reading, L2 readers need to aware of genres of L2 reading.

2.3 BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Roles of background knowledge have been greatly discussed in the field of L2 reading (Anderson, 1999; Carrell, 1987). A number of research investigations (Johnson, 1982; Krekeler, 2006) illustrates that background knowledge plays a significant role in L2 reading comprehension. Gillet and Temple (1990) even state that reading is a measure of one’s background knowledge. In addition, Chan (2003) find that background knowledge is very beneficial to low proficient L2 readers because it can compensate for their lack of L2 proficiency. Additionally, Johnson’s study (1982) and Krekeler’s study (2006) show that background knowledge has a greater role than language proficiency on reading comprehension for the participating subjects. Hence, this section concerns definitions of background knowledge, types of background knowledge and culture.

2.3.1 Definitions

In general, the terms background knowledge and prior knowledge are employed in an interchangeable manner (Strangman and Hall, 2007). Anderson (1999) provides following comments about background knowledge:

…Background knowledge includes all experience that a reader brings to a text: life experiences, educational experience, knowledge of how texts can be organized rhetorically, knowledge of how one's first language works, knowledge of how the second language works, and cultural background and knowledge, to name a few areas. Background knowledge is also referred to as schema in the reading literature (p.11).

Similarly, in 1995, Dochy and Alexander (as cited in Strangman and Hall, 2007, http://udl.cast.org/ncac/BackgroundKnowledge5184.cfm) describe background knowledge as a person's knowledge as a whole. In the same way, Grabe and Stoller (2002) define background knowledge as "Prior knowledge that readers utilize in interpreting a text. This includes general, cultural and topic-specific knowledge" (p. 257).

2.3.2 Types of Background Knowledge

According to Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) and Carrell (1987), background knowledge can be categorized into 1) formal schemata and 2) content schemata:

1. Formal schemata

Formal schemata are background knowledge about language itself. According to Carrell and Eisterhold (1983), this type of prior knowledge refers to "background knowledge of the formal, rhetorical organization structures of different types of texts" (p. 560). To put it simply, Alderson (2000) concludes that this type of background knowledge is "knowledge of language" (p. 34). Thus, provided that the readers do not have adequate knowledge of language such as linguistic and structural knowledge, reading difficulty will arise (p. 34).

Likewise, according to Carrell (1987), this type of background knowledge focuses on readers' expectations about relations and the orders of each piece of information in the text. Adunyarittigun Dumrong (1996) adds that this type of background knowledge would assist readers in preceding structures of the texts they

engage with. For example, when a crime occurs in a detective story, with formal schemata, the reader is able to predict the chain of events as follows: a crime takes place, certain possible suspects are identified, evidence is discovered, the evil man is arrested and the case is solved (Barnett, 1988).

2. Content schemata

Content schemata cover overall knowledge of each reader. This type of background knowledge is relative to the content area of the reading text that the reader brings to the text. For example, washing clothes, the economy in Mexico, the history of Canada, Halloween in Carbondale (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983).

Commonly, content schemata deal with the culture or content of the passage (Barnett, 1988). Alderson (2000) notes that content schemata are composed of knowledge of subject matter/topic, of the world and of cultural knowledge. Obviously, reading will be a difficult task if the reader knows absolutely nothing about the content or subject matter of the text. In the same way, readers may interpret reading texts differently according to different knowledge of the world and cultural knowledge.

2.3.3 Culture

Culture of the target language is an important factor in comprehending L2 texts because “Reading comprehension involves one’s knowledge of the world, which may be culturally based and culturally biased” (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983, p. 553). Additionally, Swaffar, Arens, and Byrnes (1991) note that culture literacy is more than factual knowledge and thus L2 learners should understand both L2 texts and L2 culture.

Additionally, Alvermann and Phelps (1994) note that lack of cultural knowledge can cause obstacles to new learning. That is to say, L2 readers who lack culture awareness may misinterpret L2 texts because they falsely apply their native culture and beliefs with the foreign texts (p. 120).

As a result, in order to entirely understand L2 reading texts, L2 readers must be cultural-competent readers who are armed with knowledge regarding beliefs, attitudes, feeling and behaviors of the target world (Wallace, 1988). For example, without knowledge of Christianity, beliefs, famous writers and scientists, and arts mentioned in Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*, L2 readers of English would not understand the messages

presented in the novel and would wonder why Professor Langdon is that overwhelmed when he finally finds the location of the Holy Grail. Even though the popularity of this novel is worldwide, apart from native speakers of English, only L2 readers who possess adequate cultural competence are able to grasp the meaning of symbols and the storyline.

In general, writers of text assume that the audience will share similar norms and backgrounds (Wallace, 1988). As a result, L2 reading can be a troublesome task for L2 readers who lack knowledge of the L2 world. The reason is that a mismatch between the readers' limited knowledge and the writer's assumption of the readers' knowledge will occur and, accordingly, the readers may fail to understand the text.

Clearly, deficient background knowledge or misleading background knowledge will result in reading perplexity. As a result, reading teachers can be the ones who help L2 learners to increase or modify their background knowledge before engaging in the reading tasks.

2.4 PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Many researchers (Anderson, 1999; Carrell, 1988; Kirkland and Saunders 1991; Moore, Readence and Rickelman, 1993) agree that activation of background knowledge should be achieved before the readers read a text; in other words, during pre-reading activities. Apart from triggering prior knowledge and helping learners to see how much they know about the topic, pre-reading activities help students to predict the content and construct meanings (Anderson, 1999; Roe, Stoodt, and Burns, 1998). Therefore, questions, story prediction and graphic representation of information can assist students in activating their background knowledge (Alvermann and Phelps, 1994; Gillet and Temple, 1990; Moore, Readence, and Rickelman, 1993).

2.4.1 Questions

Background knowledge can be activated by asking questions and then eliciting answers from students. According to Moore, Readence, and Rickelman (1993), asking questions can play a vital role in reading comprehension as questions can stimulate students' curiosities, help enhance formal and content schemata of the students and, most importantly, developing comprehension abilities of the students. Five pre-

reading activities, namely, Directed Reading Activity, Directed Reading-Thinking Activity, Directed Inquiry Activity and Survey Technique, are discussed as follows.

1. *Directed Reading Activity*, also known as Directed Reading Lesson, includes pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading activities (Roe, Stoodt, and Burns, 1998), but asking questions to activate background knowledge can be operated during pre-reading activities. For this strategy, it is crucial that the questions must relate to the reading text. Teachers may ask text-implicit or experience-based questions to activate background knowledge, build motivation or set the reading purposes of the students (Moore, Readence, and Rickelman, 1993). For example, the teacher asks students about their knowledge about the word 'villain', students then discuss the meaning and, after that, the teacher makes a summary (Roe, Stoodt, and Burns, 1998).

2. *Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DRTA)* reinforces prediction. Prediction helps students to make a connection between their background knowledge and new information in the text they will be reading (Gillet and Temple, 1990). In DRTA, each reader propounds questions/hypotheses and then reads the text to prove/disprove the hypotheses. After that, he/she generates new questions and modifies previous questions (Moore, Readence, and Rickelman, 1993). Also, "What do you think will happen?" and "Why do you think so?" are two principle questions of DRTA (Gillet and Temple, 1990).

3. *Directed Inquiry Activity (DIA)* is a modification of DRTA. DIA shares many components with DRTA but DIA makes use of six fundamental questions, to be exact, Who?, What?, When?, Where?, Why? and How?

4. *Survey Technique* is recommended to cover 30 minutes in the real classroom. Firstly, students create their own questions by analyzing the title of the reading, then the subtitle and the visual aids. Next, students read the introductory and concluding paragraph. Afterwards, students derive the main idea of the text.

2.4.2 Story Prediction

Prediction is a crucial element in interactive reading. Furthermore, in order to successfully predict the text, students should have some content schemata. To encourage students to forecast the story, Anticipation Guide, PreReading Plan, Visual Reading Guide and previews can be utilized.

1. *Anticipation Guide* encourages students to concentrate upon concepts in the text" and can be applied with all levels of students (Moore, Readence and Rickelman, 1993). Moreover, this reading activity arouses students' motivation and shoves students to justify, adjust or obliterate his/her background knowledge. In this strategy, students are challenged to judge the statements given by the teacher according to their background knowledge. Hence, the statements are major concepts to be read.

2. *PreReading Plan (PReP)* examines and makes use of background knowledge of each student. According to Roe, Stoodt, and Burns (1998), this reading technique does not only activate prior knowledge of students but also helps the teacher to access content schema of students. Discussing the major concepts and accessing students' background knowledge relevant to the text to be read are two chief components of PReP. In the discussion, the teacher asks questions related to the text, and elicits answers from the students with the explanations, or lets students brainstorm ideas. After the discussion is finished, the teacher should know how much students know or misunderstand about the topic. The teacher then can adjust materials to fit students' knowledge.

3. *Visual Reading Guide (VRG)* lets students predict the messages of the reading by making use of graphics or pictures available in the text. The teacher should stress the importance of specific graphics presented in the story and let students analyze and discuss each of the graphics to formulate main ideas or key concepts about the story to be read. This reading strategy can make the connection between information in the visual aids, background knowledge of each student and information presented in the text.

4. *Preview* small parts of the text can effectually develop background knowledge of students for the text (Alvermann and Phelps, 1994). According to Graves, Cooke, and Laberge in 1983 (as cited in Alvermann and Phelps, 1994, p. 125), an effective preview should make connection between textual comprehension and students' background knowledge, and should provide specific information of the content. Hence, the text used for previewing must be carefully selected.

2.4.3 Graphical Representation of Information

This type of pre-reading activity helps L2 students to connect pieces of information so that students can show relationships among the concepts (Moore,

Readence, and Rickelman, 1993). Outlining and word map are pre-reading activities that directly activate, justify and access students' background knowledge.

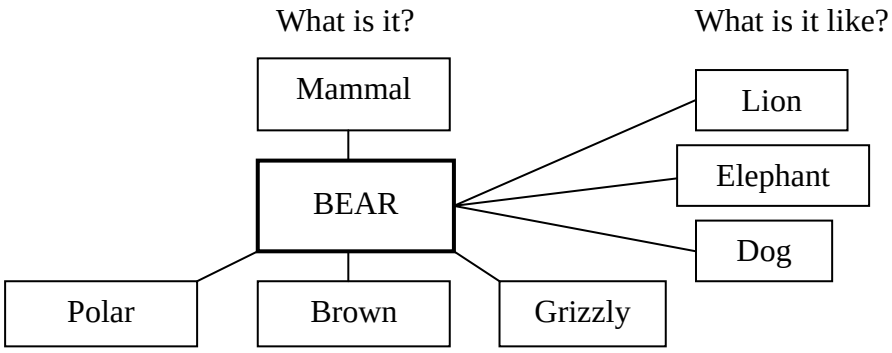
1. *Outlining* helps students to organize major ideas and related details in a hierarchical association. Outlining can improve factual recall. The following is an example of outline from Moore, Readence, and Rickelman (1993):

Fibers

I. Natural
- A. Vegetable
  - 1. Cotton
  - 2. Linen
- B. Animal
  - 1. Wool
  - 2. Silk

II. Man made
- B. Chemical
  - 1. Acrylic
  - 2. Rayon
  - 3. Nylon
  - 4. Polyester
  - 5. Acetate

2. *Word map* represents the definition of a word and its pertinent concepts. Apart from activating students' background knowledge before reading, a word map helps students to make connections of the word rather than to get plain definitions from a dictionary. Word map employs three groups of word relationships, that is, 1.What is it?, 2.What is it like? and 3.What are some examples? However, this technique seems to be best applied with a noun. The following word map for 'bear' is taken from Moore, Readence, and Rickelman (1993):



2.5 SEMANTIC MAPPING

Semantic mapping is an alternative pre-reading activity. It is an easy way to boost students' background knowledge, form the relationships of information to generate expectations about what they will read, and show the teacher how much students know about the topic (Allen, 2007; Chia, 2001; Gillet and Temple, 1990; Zaid, 1995). In addition, Watcharaporn Khaenphao (2005) finds that semantic mapping improves reading comprehension of Thai learners of English and helps students to increase scores in a reading test. Furthermore, semantic mapping is beneficial to L2 instruction, especially in reading and writing, because it can compensate for L2 deficiencies (Kang, 2004). Therefore, definitions of semantic mapping and how to apply semantic mapping in the classroom are discussed as follows:

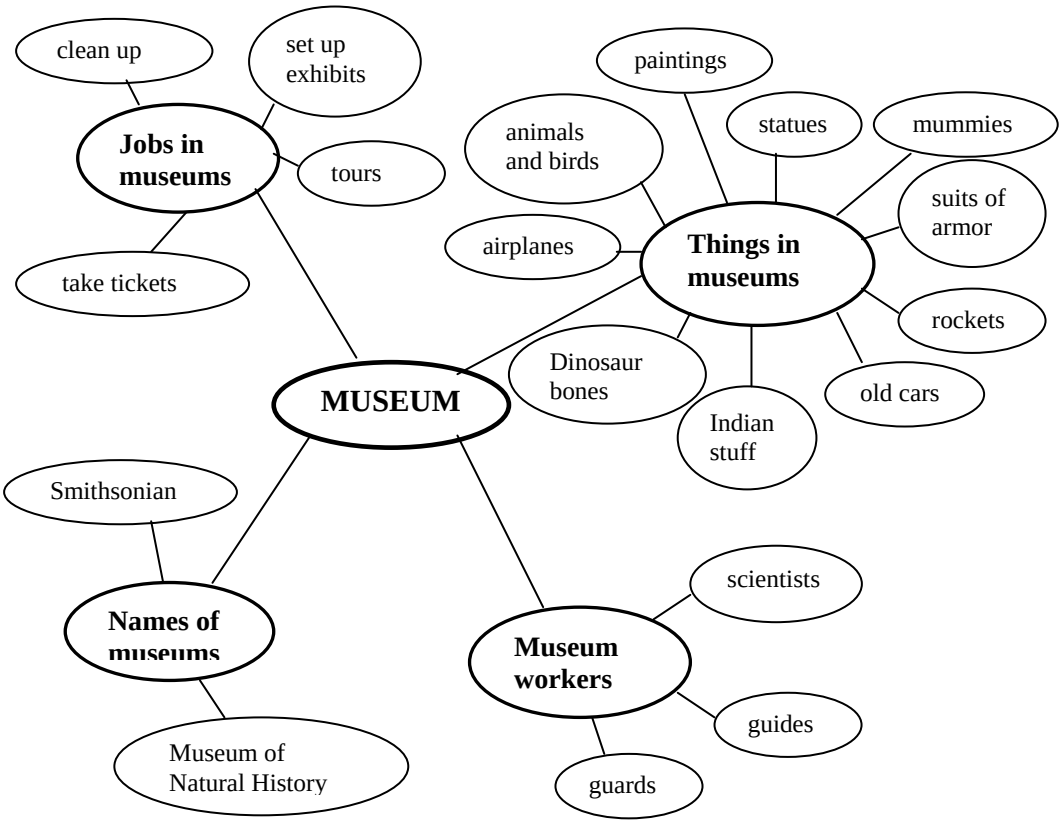
2.5.1 Definition

According to Chia (2001), semantic mapping is an organization of vocabulary concepts. In addition, Kang (2004) defines semantic mapping as a creative method of representing information in the form of graphic description of the connection between ideas. He also adds that the semantic map is a web-like organizer which "places the general topic in the center that is connected to the sub-concepts with unlabelled links" (p. 59). Likewise, Estes (1999) states that semantic mapping is a strategy to link ideas in order to make a concept and that semantic mapping can encourage comprehension of learners. Two major objectives of semantic mapping are to organize background knowledge of the learners and to prepare learners for the text they are going to read.

In addition, Zaid (1995) notes that semantic mapping is a student-centered activity, an interactive process, and a predictive activity. Semantic mapping is student-centered because it focuses on students' background knowledge and students are the ones who give the inputs for the semantic map. Moreover, semantic mapping is interactive as students actively work with each other in order to brainstorm ideas to create the semantic map. Finally, semantic mapping is a predictive activity because it provides the overviews of the text. Besides, words produced by each student can suggest his/her predictions about the text to be read.

2.5.2 How to Apply Semantic Mapping in the Classroom

There are many ways to operate semantic mapping in the classroom. The teacher may write the target word on the board and then elicit vocabulary items from students. In the following example by Gillet and Temple (1990), the teacher has the students read a text about the organization of museums and workers in the museums. To make use of this pre-reading technique, the teacher writes ‘museum’ on the board and if students look unconfident, the teacher can ask questions to start the elicitation, for instance, “What is a museum for? or “What might be in the museums?” After that, the teacher writes students’ responses on the board. As a brainstorming process, all words from students should be written down. Next, the teacher helps students to organize the elicited words into categories. Students may suggest the name for each group of words.



Clewell and Haldemos in 1983 (as cited in Moore, Readence, and Rickelman, 1993, p. 52) suggest another option in applying this pre-reading activity in the classroom. Firstly, the teacher draws a circle on the board. Secondly, he/she writes the

main idea or vocabulary of the text that will be read in the center of that circle. Thirdly, students brainstorm and the teacher or students list the heard words on the board. Fourthly, information that is directly relevant to the main idea is identified and circled. Next, each vocabulary item is linked in the word spokes. Fifthly, the class discusses the semantic map with addition, deletion or modification of ideas. In the last step, each student should be aware of his/her background knowledge on the topic, learn new words and relate each word to the main idea.

2.6 L2/ LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Language proficiency, in other words, language ability, is another factor that affects L2 reading comprehension. Several definitions of language proficiency and relationships between L2 proficiency and L2 reading comprehension are discoursed as follows:

2.6.1 Definitions

Richards, Platt, and Platte (1993) define language proficiency in *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* as:

[A] person's skill in using a language for a specific purpose… Proficiency refers to the degree of the skill with which a person can use a language, such as how well a person can read, write, speak, or understand language. Proficiency may be measured through the use of a proficiency test (p. 204).

In addition, L2 proficiency covers several language skills such as vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Koda (2005) claims that, regularly, L2 proficiency includes vocabulary and grammar knowledge, and reading comprehension. Similarly, Kirkland and Saunders (1991) assert that L2 proficiency includes sufficient reading comprehension skills, fair usage of grammar and vocabulary, and writing competence.

Farhady in 1983 (as cited in Maleki and Zangani, 2007, http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/March_07_am&ez.php) defines proficiency as the ability to determine the extent to which learners are able to perform in a real language use situation.

Noticeably, definitions of language proficiency are various. In short, in 1995, Del Vecchio and Guerrero (as cited in Laija-Rodríguez, Ochoa, and Parker, 2006,

p. 89) mark that a variety of the definitions towards language proficiency share two major features. First, those definitions mention four linguistic elements, namely, speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Second, each of the definitions discusses ‘language proficiency’ within a particular context.

2.6.2 L2 Proficiency and L2 Reading Comprehension

According to Koda (2005), L2 proficiency is a fundamental requirement for effective L2 reading. Aebersold and Field (1997) even remarks that L2 proficiency is the preeminent factor in L2 reading comprehension and that L2 reading will not be improved unless L2 learners have adequate L2 abilities. In addition, Chan (2003) finds that, high proficient L2 learners are able to comprehend the reading text well regardless of their lack of background knowledge.

On the contrary, Devine in 1988 (as cited in Aebersold and Field, 1997, p. 27) notes that insufficient L2 proficiency causes reading problems. In 1980, Clarke (as cited in Aebersold and Field, 1997, p. 27) indicates that low-proficient learners of English in general fail to comprehend English texts because of their weaknesses in L2 proficiency.

To conclude, this chapter discusses six major concepts associated with the topic of this research investigation, to be precise, reading approaches, L2 reading, background knowledge, pre-reading activities, semantic mapping and language proficiency. The results of research studies presented in the chapter appear to be that both background knowledge and L2 proficiency influence L2 reading comprehension. However, relationships between background knowledge and L2 proficiency in L2 reading cannot be completely finalized because, possibly, their roles and relationships vary in particular settings.