

## Introduction

Reading plays a significant role in language learning as it can direct learners to acquire target languages (Garbe, 1986; Krashen, 1985). Garbe (1986) claims that reading is probably the most crucial skill that second/foreign language learners need as they can develop target language knowledge as well as cultural background knowledge through extended reading (p. 25). Despite the important role reading plays in the second language curriculum, it has been found that reading can be problematic and anxiety-provoking for many students (Saito, Horwitz & Garza, 1999). Foreign language (FL) anxiety has been considered as one of the major affective factors that influence FL learning (Aida, 1994; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Zhao, 2009). However, most early research regarding language anxiety has focused on speaking since it was thought to be the most anxiety-provoking skills among all the four language aspects (Aida, 1994; Phillips, 1992; Young, 1986; Zhao, 2009). It was not until recently that different anxiety levels were found in learning different language skills (Aida, 1994; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Phillips, 1992; Saito *et al.*, 1999; Shi & Liu, 2006), and many questions concerned with FL reading anxiety such as the relation between background variables and FL reading anxiety, and the sources of eliciting FL reading anxiety remain unclear.

Much research has pointed out that insufficient background concepts and unfamiliar cultural background may cause reading anxiety (Frisson & Pickering, 2007; Saito *et al.*, 1999; Vande Berg, 1993); however, the exact background knowledge that college students in Taiwan lack of is still waiting for answers. Considering the ideas mentioned above, this present study attempts to show the impact of different topics on college students' affective feelings. Specifically, this research will focus on the following topics: entertainment/leisure, culture, health, business/money and relationships. These five topics arranged in descending order appear most frequently in a survey analysis of 20 reading textbooks, as can be seen in Appendix A. The 20 surveyed reading textbooks are listed in Appendix B.

The current research extends the knowledge base related to FL reading anxiety

by examining the impacts of different topics. In so doing it seeks to uncover the sources of eliciting FL reading anxiety with the implication that instructors can better select reading materials, reform their classroom instruction, and help students come up with appropriate anxiety-coping strategies. In view of the preceding research purposes, the primary research questions to be addressed in this paper are as follows:

- (1) Which topics do the learners feel more relaxed with when reading?
- (2) Which topics do the learners feel more anxious about when reading?
- (3) What factors are associated with the reading anxiety caused by different topics?

## **Literature Review**

### ***Foreign Language Anxiety***

FL anxiety is a common phenomenon that exists in many language learners (Aida, 1994; Lucas, 1984), and general agreement has been made that FL anxiety negatively influence language learning and performance. For instance, many of the participants in Yan & Horwitz's (2008) study reported that they could perform better when they were in an anxiety-reduced atmosphere. Aida (1994) found there was a moderate negative correlation between anxiety and course grades ( $r = -.38, p < .01$ ). The high anxiety students received significantly lower grades than the low anxiety students. Similarly, Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986) revealed that Spanish and French students with higher FL anxiety levels tended to receive lower scores than students with lower anxiety levels.

Although some researchers argue that a right amount of language anxiety can facilitate learning and motivate learners (e.g., Alpert & Haber, 1960; Scovel, 1978), and students' performances are affected by many other factors (i.e., language aptitude, materials, and class activities), many language instructors and researchers are still concerned about the feasibility that anxiety may operate as an affective filter (Krashen, 1982) which prevents a learner from learning a target language.

### ***Foreign Language Reading Anxiety***

Saito *et al.* (1999) examined the concept of FL reading anxiety, the anxiety that learners experience in reading a FL, by comparing the FL classroom anxiety level with the FL reading anxiety level. They found that students with higher levels of FL anxiety tended to have higher levels of FL reading anxiety and vice versa ( $r = .64$ ,  $n = 3.8$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In addition, they found the two anxiety levels shared approximately 41% of the variance, leaving 59% unexplained. Therefore, they claimed that FL reading anxiety is related to but distinct from FL anxiety.

### ***Sources of Eliciting Reading Anxiety***

Saito *et al.* (1999) reported two reasons why reading can be anxiety-provoking for FL learners: the unfamiliar writing scripts and unfamiliar cultural background. From a cognitive perspective, word recognition is a very important part in the reading process. It can be imagined that learners will feel immediately anxious when they try to decode the meaning from the words written in a very unfamiliar writing system in a reading passage. In contrast, unfamiliar cultural background might not cause immediate anxiety as unfamiliar writing scripts do. Learners might find at some point of reading that they can understand the words and make meaning out of sentences but still cannot make sense of the whole reading passage due to their unfamiliarity with the target language culture. For instance, Yuan (1998) found that many L2 readers complained about having problems understanding the passage they read, even though they have looked up every vocabulary. As readers bring background knowledge to the text rather than merely decode words, it is possible to foresee that readers may feel anxious at this stage. Saito *et al.* (1999) stress the importance of cultural knowledge and rhetorical structure in L2 reading as do numerous L2 reading studies (e.g., Engin & Seen, 2005; Frisson & Pickering, 2007; Vande Berg, 1999). They argue that “anxiety is also anticipated when a reader can decipher the words of a FL text, but not its sense, because of incomplete knowledge of the cultural materials underlying the text” (Saito *et al.*, 1999, p. 203).

### ***Background Knowledge in Foreign/Second Language Reading***

Background knowledge differs in accordance to one's social class, family status, level of education, type of education, professional experience and past experience (Engin & Seven, 2005). Background knowledge sways one's cognition toward the world, and it is operational in many domains (i.e., cultural, technical, religious, vocabulary and topic familiarity). Research on the cognition and learning psychology shows that people comprehend something new by connecting it to their past experience and background knowledge (Barlett, 1932; Droop, 1998; Rumelhart, 1980). As reading is a sociocognitive process in which readers access and interpret the meaning actively by referring to their prior knowledge and experiences, background knowledge is indeed important for learners when reading.

A growing number of research studies are now available to shed some light on the relationship between background knowledge and FL reading. Chen & Graves (1995) examined the effects of previewing and providing background knowledge on Taiwanese college students' comprehension of reading materials. They suggest that going over the background knowledge will make reading more enjoyable and comprehensible. Besides, having some of the difficult words in the passages explained can help students read and understand the story.

### ***Foreign Language Reading Anxiety and Performance***

Previous research done in different target languages has showed that FL learners experience anxiety when they read, and the FL reading anxiety levels affect reading acquisition and performance negatively (Breznitz, 1991; Sellers, 2000). For instance, Sellers (2000) investigated anxiety and reading comprehension in Spanish learners. The results demonstrated that highly anxious students are prone to recall less passage content than did the less anxious students. Furthermore, results from cognitive interference questionnaire indicated that highly anxious students are prone to be distracted and have more interfering thoughts than the less anxious students did.

## Method

### *Participants*

There were 112 college students majoring in English that took part in this study. Those students were recruited from National Kaohsiung University of Applied Sciences (NKUAS) and Wenzao Ursuline College of Languages (WTUC). Table 1 gives detailed information about the number of students participating in the study.

Table 1 Participants

School	NKUAS		WTUC
Major	English		Foreign Language Instruction
Class	News English	English Competence Training	Selective English Reading
No. of students	30	37	45
Total	112		

One reason for selecting English majors to be the subjects was that they had more chances to read lengthy and authentic texts covering a wide range of topics. The other reason was that these students had taken at least two years of English reading courses and received formal instruction in English. As these students had years of experience in reading passages with different topics and textual formats, it was believed that they could provide reliable information derived from their personal experience.

### *Reading Materials*

There were 5 texts chosen from each of the five topic categories. They were “The Best Shopping Street in the World” belonging to the category of entertainment/leisure, “Who Took That Tooth?” belonging to the category of culture, “Hello Toes!” belonging to the category of health, “Lee Yusan: The Force behind the Jimmy Liao Brand” belonging to the category of business/money, and “The Changing American Family” belonging to the category of relationships. The five topic categories were chosen as they appeared the most frequently in a survey

analysis of 20 reading textbooks. The number of words for each passage was limited between 350 and 363 words with the same text format: font 12, heading-presented, margin 2.4cm, non-illustration and solid.

In order to avoid that the difficulty levels of the sample passages may become a confounding variable, and affect the reliability of the results, the lexical density was controlled between 45% and 60%. Lexical Density Test measures the proportion of the content (lexical) words over the total words. King, Adam, Flynn & Richard (2008) suggest that texts with more information loads have a higher lexical density of around 60-70%, and texts with lower levels of density have a measure of around 40-50%. The result of the analysis is shown in Table 2. A copy of each reading passage is included in Appendix C.

Table 2 Analysis of the Five Reading Passages

Title	The Best Shopping Street in the World	Who Took That Tooth?	Hello Toes!	Lee Yusan: The Force behind the Jimmy Liao Brand	The Changing American Family
Words	350	363	351	363	357
Lexical Density	53.35%	45.88%	50.85%	57.92%	50.57%

### ***Demographic Information about the Participants***

Before the main sections of the questionnaire, there was a section that sought to obtain the background information of the participants, including their gender, age, the school they attended, their year in the college, major, the amount of time spent in reading English each week, the purposes of reading in English, the topic preferences and frequencies of reading each topic.

### ***Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Questionnaire***

The Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale was employed to examine the levels of foreign language reading anxiety generated by reading different topics in this study. The instrument was developed by Saito *et al.* in 1999. It consists of 20

questions with a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The internal consistency coefficient of the FLRAS was .86. This statistic evidence showed that the FLRAS had a good internal reliability and suggested that the scale focused on a single construct (Saito *et al.* 1999).

In calculating the total scores of the FLRAS, a numerical value was given to each of the items in the FLRAS. For the negative statements, such as item 1 in the FLRAS “I get upset when I’m not sure if I understand what I am reading in English,” the scoring rule was: “strongly agree” (5 points), “agree” (4 points), “neither agree nor disagree” (3 points), “disagree” (2 points) and “strongly disagree” (1 point). For the positive statements, such as item 12 in the FLRAS “I enjoy reading English,” the scoring rule was reversed, i.e., “strongly agree (1 point), “agree” (2 points), “neither agree nor disagree” (3 points), “disagree” (4 points) and “strongly disagree (5 points). There were 20 items in the FLRAS, so the possible range of the score was 20 to 100. The higher score indicated a higher level of FL reading anxiety and vice versa.

### ***Procedure***

The subjects were instructed to circle the number that best described their opinions after reading each passage. There were 5 passages with different topics; therefore, this procedure was repeated 5 times. The order of the passages given to the students followed the frequency of their appearing in the survey analysis of 20 reading textbooks, that is, entertainment/leisure, culture, health, business/money, and relationships. In order to prevent the possibility that the order would affect rating, half of the students received the passages in a reversed order: relationships, business/money, health, culture, and entertainment/leisure.

### ***Data Analysis***

The set of questionnaires used for investigation consists of 2 sections: the demographic information about the participants and the FLRAS. The students’

background information and the descriptive statistics of their responses to the FLRAS, such as means, standard deviations, and percentages were computed by Microsoft EXCEL 2007. To compute and compare the mean scores of the FLRAS for each topic, an SPSS one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied.

## Results and Discussion

### *Results of the Demographic Information of the Participants*

A background survey was used to obtain information about the participants' background and English reading experience in this study. The participants in this study included 112 college students from two universities in the southern area of Taiwan. There were 25 males and 87 females. By class, there were 45 seniors and 67 juniors. The age of the participants ranged between 16 and 20. The participants reported an average time of 4.6 hours in reading English outside of the classroom per week. When asked about their purposes for reading English, around 44% of them reported that their purpose was for examinations, 32% reported for homework assignments, 21% reported for interest, and 2% reported for career, as can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 Participants' Background Information

No. of Students	112
Gender	25 males 87 females
Age	16-20
Year in College	45 seniors 67 juniors
Average Time Spent on English Reading Per Week	4.6 hours
Purposes of Reading	Examination: 44.5% Assignment: 32.1% Interest: 21.2% Career: 2.2%

The participants were asked about their preference for reading topics and their frequency of reading each topic type. Regarding their topic preference, there were more participants preferring to read passages related to entertainment/leisure and



relationships than health, business/money and culture. Table 4 summarizes the participants' preference for reading topics.

Table 4 Participants' Topic Preference

Rank	Topic	Count	%
1	Entertainment/Leisure	98	29
2	Relationships	83	25
3	Health	56	17
4	Business/Money	52	15
5	Culture	47	14

Regarding their frequency of reading each topic type, the participants read the articles about entertainment/leisure (26%) and relationships (22%) most often. Their frequency of reading the articles about business/money (20%) and culture (19%) were almost the same, and their frequency of reading the articles about health (13%) was the lowest. Table 5 shows the participants' frequency of reading each of the 5 topic types.

Table 5 Participants' Frequency of Reading Each Topic Type

Rank	Topic	Count	%
1	Entertainment/Leisure	86	26
2	Relationships	75	22
3	Business/Money	67	20
4	Culture	63	19
5	Health	45	13

### *The Levels of FL Reading Anxiety among the Five Topics*

As shown in Table 6, participants experienced different levels of FL reading anxiety when reading different topics as measured by the FLRAS. Among the 5 topics, the participants had the highest level of FL reading anxiety when reading the article about health ( $M= 59.87$ ,  $SD= 8.55$ ), followed by the articles about culture ( $M= 59.36$ ,  $SD= 7.93$ ) and business/money ( $M= 58.42$ ,  $SD= 7.61$ ). In contrast, the participants felt more relaxed when reading the article about entertainment/leisure ( $M= 52.11$ ,  $SD= 7.87$ ) and the article about relationships ( $M= 53.09$ ,  $SD= 8.77$ ).

Table 6 Mean Score of the FLRAS for Each Topic

Topic	Mean	Std. Deviation
Health	59.87	8.55
Culture	59.36	7.93
Business/Money	58.42	7.61
Relationships	53.09	8.77
Entertainment/Leisure	52.11	7.87

The ANOVA source table, Table 7, summarizes the result of the study. The sum of square between the five topics was 6050.668,  $df = 4$ , MS 1512.667, F 48.017, and  $p < .001$ . The  $p$  value was significant at the .05 level. The result indicated that there was a significant difference among the participants' levels of FL reading anxiety when they read the five different passages.

Table 7 Summary of Repeated Measures ANOVA on the Levels of FL Reading Anxiety of the Five Topics

Source of variance	SS	df	MS	F	$p$
Reading anxiety levels of the five topics	6050.668	4	1512.667	48.017	< .001
Participants	22949.284	111	206.750		
Error	13987.332	444	31.503		
Total	42987.28	559			

To establish the effect size of different topics on the levels of FL reading anxiety, a percentage was determined by the variance of topic types,  $\eta^2$ . In this study,  $\eta^2$  was 14.07, indicating a moderate relationship between the five types of topics and the levels of FL reading anxiety. Specifically, 14.07% of variability in FL reading anxiety levels could be accounted for by the variables of topic types.

### ***Factors Associated with Reading Anxiety***

After determining there was a significant difference in the levels of FL reading anxiety when the participants read the passages with different topics, the researcher further identified the factors that might have been central in generating FL reading anxiety. Accordingly, a chi-square analysis of the relationships between the reading topics and the FLRAS items was also performed. The items for which there was a significant relationship ( $p < .05$ ,  $df = 16$ ) between topic types and response

frequencies are marked with an asterisk (\*). Chi-square relationships were located in 12 of the total 20 FLRAS items. The researcher grouped these 12 items into 7 categories: (1) reading comprehension, (2) learning experiences, (3) background knowledge, (4) linguistic features, (5) reading process, (6) reading enjoyment, and (7) perceived difficulty in reading.

### *Reading Comprehension*

Students need to activate the appropriate background knowledge in order to read and induce semantic comprehension from the passage they are reading (Bügel & Buunk, 1996; Frisson & Pickering, 2007; Kim, 2002; Lee, 1986). Accordingly, it is not surprising to find that items 2 and 3 showed significant differences among the five topics. Table 8 displays the participants' answers to the items concerning their ability to read and comprehend.

Table 8 Students' Responses to the Items Concerning Reading Comprehension

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. I get upset when I'm not sure whether I understand what I am reading in English.					
Entertainment/Leisure	5	37	30	22	4
Culture	2	40	26	28	4
Health	3	37	35	24	2
Business/Money	4	37	23	34	2
Relationships	3	33	35	27	3
* 2. When reading English, I often understand the words but still can't quite understand what the author is saying.					
Entertainment/Leisure	3	12	22	54	8
Culture	8	24	35	30	3
Health	7	34	24	33	2
Business/Money	9	29	33	24	4
Relationships	3	14	15	61	7
* 3. When I'm reading English, I get so confused that I can't remember what I'm reading.					
Entertainment/Leisure	2	15	27	45	12
Culture	4	39	24	29	4
Health	4	40	32	21	3
Business/Money	3	35	32	29	1
Relationships	2	14	27	54	4

<sup>a</sup>SA=strongly agree, A=agree, N=neither agree nor disagree, D=disagree, SD=strongly disagree.

<sup>b</sup>Response frequencies identified with an asterisk are significantly related ( $p < .05$ ,  $df = 16$ ) to the reading topics based on a chi-square analysis.

<sup>c</sup>All percentages refer to the number of students' selections with statements indicative of FL reading anxiety to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

The organizational and/or cohesive complexities of the texts added to the linguistic burden of FL reading may cause learners to be discouraged and feel insecure (Vande Berg, 1993). When reading the health and business articles, there were significantly more participants concurring with item 2, “when reading English, I often understand the words but still can’t quite understand what the author is saying.” There are two reasons to account for such a phenomenon.

First, words may have different meanings in different contexts. For example, “table” not only means the piece of wood that we put things on, but can also be a verb meaning to postpone. Similarly, “board” means “committee members” in business. Laufer (1989) elaborates on this by using the concept of “deceptively transparent words (DT words)” (p. 16). Laufer (1989) explained why the participants may have difficulties in understanding the meaning of the texts even if they assumed they could understand the vocabulary in the texts because of the arbitrary of word meanings. The finding suggests that if learners misinterpret and misunderstand the word meanings, it is very likely that it would lead to nervousness and confusion, and a consequential misunderstanding of the passage.

Second, in order to get the meaning of a text, readers require both linguistic knowledge and background knowledge when reading. Eskey (2002) suggests that to comprehend a text, readers must “simultaneously engage in decoding and interpreting the text to construct a plausible meaning for it” (p. 6). In light of this, merely understanding the meaning or definition of words is not enough to understand the meaning of the texts. However, Horwitz (1988) indicates that many students have the false belief that learning a FL/L2 involves only memorizing vocabulary and grammatical rules. This untrue belief may cause learners to feel disappointed and frustrated when they realize they cannot succeed in language learning by following their learning conviction.

The levels of comprehension on reading passages may affect students' levels of FL reading anxiety. The participants seemed to have better comprehension regarding the passages of entertainment and relationships. There were more than

half of the participants disagreeing with item 3, “when I’m reading English, I get so confused that I can’t remember what I’m reading,” when they read the entertainment and relationships passages. The result indicates that the participants could better understand the passages of these two topic types. This may be because they read the two types of topics more often and had more background knowledge about them. The efficient comprehension may be the reason why the participants had a lower level of FL reading anxiety. By contrast, there were more participants expressing that they were confused and could not remember what they were reading regarding the passages of culture, health, and business/money—the passages which elicited a higher level of anxiety. The result shows that the participants had more difficulties in reading and understanding these three passages. The difficulties students encounter in FL learning can be a threat to their self-perception (AY, 2010). FL education is a complex process, which involves learners’ self-perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors particular to environments of FL language learning (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). From this perspective, it is plain to see why the participants had a higher level of reading anxiety when they read the passages of culture, business/money and health, and had a lower level of reading anxiety when they read the passages of entertainment/leisure and relationships.

### ***Learning Experiences***

Research has shown that one’s language learning experience may well arouse his/her FL reading anxiety (Cheng, 2002; Young 1992). Table 9 displays the participants’ responses to the items concerning their learning experiences. There were 2 out of the 3 items that differed significantly among the 5 topics.

Table 9 Students' Responses to the Items Concerning Learning Experiences

	SA	A	N	D	SD
* 4. I feel intimidated whenever I see a whole page of English in front of me.					
Entertainment/Leisure	4	20	26	45	6
Culture	6	44	28	17	5
Health	3	40	30	24	3
Business/Money	1	41	33	22	3
Relationships	4	18	25	48	5
* 14. Once you get used to it, reading English is not so difficult.					
Entertainment/Leisure	18	37	21	22	2
Culture	6	19	32	41	2
Health	4	21	37	37	1
Business/Money	18	54	22	3	3
Relationships	7	46	31	13	3
17. I don't mind reading to myself, but I feel very uncomfortable when I have to read English aloud.					
Entertainment/Leisure	3	15	37	39	5
Culture	3	9	31	52	5
Health	4	17	23	54	2
Business/Money	3	16	28	48	5
Relationships	6	13	25	52	4

<sup>a</sup>SA=strongly agree, A=agree, N=neither agree nor disagree, D=disagree, SD=strongly disagree.

<sup>b</sup>Response frequencies identified with an asterisk are significantly related ( $p < .05$ ,  $df = 16$ ) to the reading topics based on a chi-square analysis.

<sup>c</sup>All percentages refer to the number of students' selections with statements indicative of FL reading anxiety to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

An unpleasant learning experience may cause a higher level of FL reading anxiety. As can be seen in item 4, "I feel intimidated whenever I see a whole page of English in front of me," there were significantly more participants agreeing with it regarding the topics of culture, health, and business/money. This finding showed that the participants felt intimidated and uneasy with these three topics. This may be attributed to their unpleasant reading experience as MacIntyre (1999) argues that anxiety develops from negative experiences early in language learning experience. Evident from their demographic information, the participants read English for examinations and homework assignments the most often. Besides, they were less interested in the topics of business/money, culture, and health. Consequently, these participants might feel they were forced whenever they had to read the passages

related to these topic types. As suggested by Zheng (2008), unpleasant learning experience could, under some circumstances, become a “traumatic experience” and may bring down one’s self-esteem and self-confidence as a learner (p. 5).

Despite the fact that the participants considered reading culture, health, and business/money articles to be anxiety-provoking, it is worth mentioning that in item14, “once you get used to it, reading English is not so difficult,” 72% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with this statement when they read the business/money article. A percentage this high leads one to believe that most of them possessed positive expectations for their English proficiency in reading the business article.

### ***Background Knowledge***

The situation concerning the role of culture and background knowledge in reading anxiety echoed the hypothesized causes of FL reading anxiety proposed by Saito *et al.* (1999), as relatively much greater context knowledge is required when reading culture, health, and business/money articles, it is not surprising to find that items 5, 19, and 20 showed significant differences among the 5 topics. Table 10 indicates the participants’ answers to the items concerning the effects of background and culture knowledge on their reading process.

Table 10 Students’ Responses to the Items Concerning Background Knowledge

	SA	A	N	D	SD
* 5. I am nervous when I am reading a passage in English when I am not familiar with the topic.					
Entertainment/Leisure	4	18	22	49	6
Culture	4	42	35	17	3
Health	4	39	29	25	2
Business/Money	4	39	42	12	3
Relationships	5	26	28	37	4
* 19. English culture and ideas seem very foreign to me.					
Entertainment/Leisure	5	17	29	40	9
Culture	4	28	40	25	3
Health	5	31	30	29	4
Business/Money	5	35	30	25	4
Relationships	5	23	24	43	4

\* 20. You have to know so much about English history and culture in order to read English.

Entertainment/Leisure	4	18	23	43	12
Culture	3	39	22	27	9
Health	6	17	30	41	5
Business/Money	5	10	41	40	4
Relationships	4	14	26	42	14

<sup>a</sup>SA=strongly agree, A=agree, N=neither agree nor disagree, D=disagree, SD=strongly disagree.

<sup>b</sup>Response frequencies identified with an asterisk are significantly related ( $p < .05$ ,  $df = 16$ ) to the reading topics based on a chi-square analysis.

<sup>c</sup>All percentages refer to the number of students' selections with statements indicative of FL reading anxiety to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

In their background survey, the participants indicated that they read the articles related to health, culture, and business/money the least often. This infrequent exposure to these types of topics might cause them to feel uneasy and anxious when reading them. Besides, there were a high percentage of the participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with Item 5 that stated “I am nervous when I am reading a passage in English when I am not familiar with the topic,” and Item 19, “English culture and ideas seem very foreign to me” when they read the culture, health, and business/money articles. There were also many participants agreeing with item 20, “you have to know so much about English history and culture in order to read,” when they read the culture passage. The finding conformed to the research done by Shi and Liu (2006) in which unfamiliar background may cause reading anxiety among the Chinese ESL learners. Previous research has provided ample evidence for the importance of background knowledge in reading (e.g., Bernhardt, 1991; Dochy, Segers & Buehl, 1999; McKeown, Beck, Sinatra & Loxterman, 1992). Chen and Graves (1995) suggests that readers have to “relate the materials to their background knowledge and rely appropriately on their prior knowledge and the text” in order to acquire meaning from the texts (p. 664). As the participants seldom read the passages about business/money, health, and culture, they may have a tougher time to interpret and comprehend them. As a result, it was not surprising that they felt more anxious when reading these types of topics.



### *Linguistic Features*

The linguistic features such as grammar, pronunciation and writing system did not significantly affect the levels of FL reading anxiety among the 5 topics. Table 11 shows the participants' responses to the items concerning the linguistic features of texts.

Table 11 Students' Responses to the Items Concerning Linguistic Features

	SA	A	N	D	SD
6. I get upset whenever I encounter unknown grammar when reading English.					
Entertainment/Leisure	5	29	20	37	9
Culture	4	26	32	31	6
Health	2	27	31	37	4
Business/Money	4	32	37	24	4
Relationships	5	32	22	30	10
8. It bothers me to encounter words I can't pronounce while reading English.					
Entertainment/Leisure	1	27	22	32	18
Culture	4	15	25	51	5
Health	2	17	26	50	5
Business/Money	3	21	22	46	8
Relationships	2	17	23	47	11
10. By the time you get past the funny letters and symbols in English, it's hard to remember what you're reading about.					
Entertainment/Leisure	1	11	24	61	4
Culture	1	10	27	58	4
Health	4	14	23	52	7
Business/Money	2	21	14	59	4
Relationships	2	12	20	62	5
11. I am worried about all the new symbols I have to learn in order to read English.					
Entertainment/Leisure	2	9	32	45	12
Culture	2	9	29	53	7
Health	1	9	33	49	8
Business/Money	2	5	40	43	10
Relationships	3	9	30	49	9

<sup>a</sup>SA=strongly agree, A=agree, N=neither agree nor disagree, D=disagree, SD=strongly disagree.

<sup>b</sup>Response frequencies identified with an asterisk are significantly related ( $p < .05$ ,  $df = 16$ ) to the reading topics based on a chi-square analysis.

<sup>c</sup>All percentages refer to the number of students' selections with statements indicative of FL reading anxiety to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

There were generally more participants indicating that they did not worry about the unknown grammar in the texts except for the business/money text. The

result showed that although many of the participants did not particularly feel frustrated when they encountered unfamiliar grammatical patterns, the sentences with high grammatical complexity in the business/money passage may still affect some of the participants to a certain extent. As shown previously, the business/money article contained longer sentences and higher lexical density than the other four articles; as a result, the participants may have a harder time processing the article.

Concerning the phonological awareness of words when reading, more than half of the participants did not feel upset when they encountered the words they could not pronounce. This may be because they were not required to read aloud the passages. Besides, the participants were told to read the 5 articles for pleasure and general understanding only. They knew that there was no comprehension check or vocabulary test after they read. As they read only for such purposes, they may pay more attention in getting the gist of the texts rather than the pronunciation of each vocabulary.

With respect to the effect of the writing system on the level of FL reading anxiety, the result of this study was somewhat different from what has been found by previous researchers. For instance, Saito *et al.* (1999) proposed that an unfamiliar writing system would elicit a higher level of FL reading anxiety. Likewise, Huang (2001) suggested that the differences in the writing systems may evoke higher levels of FL reading anxiety. She found that the English native speakers in her study felt worried about the new symbols that they had to learn in order to read Chinese. However, the participants in this study were not concerned about the writing system when they read. This might be because they had learned English for at least more than 9 years, and they were used to this writing system. As a result, although the writing systems of Chinese and English are so different, they did not worry about the diversity of writing system between their native language (Chinese) and target language (English).

### **Reading Process**

The number of vocabulary words students do not understand in articles may cause them to use some reading strategies (Anderson, 1999). The significant differences among the 5 topics in items 7 and 9 also support this assumption. Table 12 presents the participants' responses to the items concerning their reading process.

Table 12 Students' Responses to the Items Concerning Reading Process

	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>
* 7. When reading English, I get nervous and confused when I don't understand every word.					
Entertainment/Leisure	2	21	17	51	9
Culture	4	38	30	26	2
Health	2	43	31	21	3
Business/Money	2	44	32	21	2
Relationships	2	22	28	46	3
* 9. I usually end up translating word by word when I'm reading English.					
Entertainment/Leisure	2	17	17	51	13
Culture	2	29	22	42	4
Health	4	37	28	27	4
Business/Money	5	36	26	29	4
Relationships	3	20	15	45	18

<sup>a</sup>SA=strongly agree, A=agree, N=neither agree nor disagree, D=disagree, SD=strongly disagree.

<sup>b</sup>Response frequencies identified with an asterisk are significantly related ( $p < .05$ ,  $df = 16$ ) to the reading topics based on a chi-square analysis.

<sup>c</sup>All percentages refer to the number of students' selections with statements indicative of FL reading anxiety to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

There were significantly more participants concurring with item 7, "when reading English, I get nervous and confused when I don't understand every word" and item 9, "I usually end up translating word by word when I'm reading English" while reading the culture, health, and business passages. This evidence demonstrated that the participants used different reading strategies when reading different topics.

The result suggested that when reading the business/money, culture, and health articles—the ones that the participants had less topical background knowledge, they rely on the decoding of vocabulary items. In other words, they tended to use a bottom-up strategy in which they translated word by word into their

native language and discarded the chance to count on their metacognitive skills/competence.

On the other hand, when reading the entertainment/leisure and relationships passages—the ones that the participants had more content schemata, they processed the passage in a concept driven way in which they not only used the lower-level skills (linguistic competence) but also higher-level skills to synthesize the texts with their background knowledge (McClelland & Rumelhart, 1981, p. 377). That being said, when reading the texts of leisure/entertainment and relationships, which the participants had more generic knowledge on, the learners would orientate themselves more towards top-down processing. This finding lent support with previous research that found readers using different strategies when reading background familiar and unfamiliar passages. For instance, Pritchard (1990) found the readers used more conceptualized methods such as “relating to experience,” “speculating beyond text,” “skipping unknown words,” and “using knowledge of format” when reading the background familiar passage than the background unfamiliar passage (p. 284).

Different reading processes may affect the levels of FL anxiety. Palacios (1998) suggests that students do not need to go through a process of translation in order to understand the target language; however, some students think the process of translation is a must. Accordingly, this erroneous belief may cause them to have unrealistic expectations about the language learning process. When students are unable to learn the language or obtain meaning from the texts in accordance with their expectations or convictions, it is understandable that they may have FL reading anxiety.

### ***Reading Enjoyment***

The participants showed significantly different levels of enjoyment, confidence, and satisfaction among the 5 reading topics. Table 13 gives the participants' responses to the items concerning their enjoyment in reading.

Table 13 Students' Responses to the Items Concerning Reading Enjoyment

	SA	A	N	D	SD
* 12. I enjoy reading English.					
Entertainment/Leisure	14	54	16	13	2
Culture	3	23	35	37	3
Health	2	18	35	43	3
Business/Money	7	25	32	34	2
Relationships	8	49	25	14	4
*13. I feel confident when I am reading English.					
Entertainment/Leisure	14	49	22	13	1
Culture	2	20	43	31	4
Health	1	21	39	34	4
Business/Money	4	27	44	23	2
Relationships	9	37	36	13	4
*18. I am satisfied with the level of reading ability in English that I have achieved so far.					
Entertainment/Leisure	21	36	24	17	3
Culture	4	6	35	48	7
Health	2	9	29	52	9
Business/Money	8	18	24	46	4
Relationships	11	45	23	16	5

<sup>a</sup>SA=strongly agree, A=agree, N=neither agree nor disagree, D=disagree, SD=strongly disagree.

<sup>b</sup>Response frequencies identified with an asterisk are significantly related ( $p < .05$ ,  $df = 16$ ) to the reading topics based on a chi-square analysis.

<sup>c</sup>All percentages refer to the number of students' selections with statements indicative of FL reading anxiety to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

As evident from the demographic information about the participants and item 12, "I enjoy reading English," in the FLRAS, the participants preferred to read the articles related to entertainment/leisure and relationships more than health, culture, and business. The lack of interest in these three topics may cause the participants to be demotivated and reluctant in reading. As the participants were more interested in the topics related to entertainment/leisure and relationships, they may want to know more about them, and thus, had a higher level of motivation and a lower level of anxiety. Young (1991) states that in order to create a low-anxiety learning environment and increase learner autonomy, more attention should be given to learners' interest and motivation (p. 434). As the participants in this study enjoyed reading the entertainment/leisure articles and the relationships articles, they may be eager to learn more about these two genres and thus, had a lower level of FL

reading anxiety. By contrast, the participants were less fond of the topics of health, business and culture; as a result, they might feel irritated and grudging when reading them. This finding corresponded with Scovel's (1978) viewpoint that the affective factors such as emotional reactions and motivations of learners are sources of FL anxiety (p. 131). Consequently, owing to the lack of interest in these three topics, it is likely that the participants may have higher levels of FL reading anxiety when reading them.

The participants in this study had lower levels of confidence and satisfaction with their ability in reading the culture and health articles. There were more participants feeling diffident than confident when reading the culture and health articles as indicated by the results of item 13, "I feel confident when I am reading English." As the participants were not self-reliant when they read these two types of passages, it was understandable that they may feel anxious in the reading process. This finding supports with the results of previous studies that suggest anxiety comes from the learners' lack of self-confidence and beliefs about language learning (Engin & Seven, 2005; Greenberg *et al.*, 1992; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey & Daley, 1999).

Besides, only 10%, 11%, and 26% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with item 18, "I am satisfied with the level of reading ability in English that I have achieved so far" regarding the topics of culture, health, and business articles respectively. Such low levels of satisfaction showed that the participants had higher expectations on themselves and were not content with their own reading proficiency levels. Since the participants were all English majors, they may wish themselves to have better progress. However, when their expectation was not met, they might feel disappointed and think language learning was unpleasant and anxious.

### ***Perceived Difficulty in Reading***

The participants' responses to the items concerning the difficulty of reading

with other language skills did not differ significantly among the 5 topics. Table 14 gives the participants' responses to the items regarding a comparison of reading with other language skills. There were 2 items concerning the participants' perceived level of difficulty in reading as compared with other language skills in the FLRAS. Neither of the items was found to have a significant relationship with regard to the type of topic.

Table 14 Students' Responses to the Items Concerning Reading and Other Language Skills

	SA	A	N	D	SD
15. The hardest part of learning English is learning to read.					
Entertainment/Leisure	2	25	21	39	12
Culture	3	28	30	31	8
Health	1	32	21	35	11
Business/Money	10	22	26	29	12
Relationships	3	16	27	47	7
16. I would be happy just to learn to speak English rather than having to learn to read as well.					
Entertainment/Leisure	6	26	29	32	7
Culture	11	22	21	40	5
Health	5	26	25	36	8
Business/Money	8	29	21	36	6
Relationships	6	29	18	40	7

<sup>a</sup>SA=strongly agree, A=agree, N=neither agree nor disagree, D=disagree, SD=strongly disagree.

<sup>b</sup>Response frequencies identified with an asterisk are significantly related ( $p < .05$ ,  $df = 16$ ) to the reading topics based on a chi-square analysis.

<sup>c</sup>All percentages refer to the number of students' selections with statements indicative of FL reading anxiety to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

There were more participants reporting that reading was not the most difficult language skill despite their high level of FL reading anxiety when reading the culture, health, and business/money passages. This may be because the teaching curriculum in high schools and junior high schools basically adopts the grammar translation method which focuses on literacy skills. As a result, the participants may have had abundant opportunities to learn to read in English, and thus, they did not deem reading as the most difficult skills. In fact, according to the recent report of the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT) which summarized the scores of the tests for each language skill between 2002 and 2007, the students in Taiwan

outperformed themselves in the reading skill than the other language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, and writing (2008, pp. 2-3).

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The finding shows a significant negative correlation between topic familiarity and the levels of FL reading anxiety. The participants had a higher level of FL reading anxiety when they read the business/money, culture, and health articles—the ones that they read less often and had only little interest in. In contrast, they had a lower level of FL reading anxiety when they read the entertainment/leisure and relationships passages. Such discrepancies could be explained by looking into their (1) ability to comprehend when they read, (2) prior experience in learning to read, (3) use of background knowledge, (4) problems with the reading process, (5) enjoyment of reading.

### ***Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions***

First, the findings accentuate the importance of introducing background information related to the article before reading. Instructors' introduction to a topic might activate students' prior knowledge about the topic and arouse their interest in reading the passage. By providing students with the topical background knowledge, they will have a general picture about the content of the article. Accordingly, they will be able to better process the reading material by referring to what they already know about the topic rather than merely decoding the vocabulary. Besides, if the instructor can arouse students' interest in the topic of the passage, students may be eager to know more about it, and thus be more willing and motivated to read the article.

Second, group discussion may be applied in reading instruction. As Vanda Berg (1993) suggested, "small group activities offer an excellent means of managing learner anxiety" (p. 28). Group activities may make the learning environment more enjoyable and lively. As the participants indicated that they felt



depressed when they were unable to comprehend the passages they were reading, instructors may have some comprehension questions for students to discuss with their peers after or during the reading process. Students can share their ideas and thoughts with their group members in group discussion sessions. The use of group discussion enhances students' active participation behavior and prompts them to critically think about what they read. Besides, as many Taiwanese students worry about "losing face," they may feel more comfortable and less timid to discuss their bewilderment about the article unfamiliar to them with their peers in small groups rather than asking their teachers questions in front of everyone.

Third, group or individual brainstorming about the keywords and the main ideas of the passages can be applied prior to reading. The result suggests that the number of unfamiliar words may evoke FL reading anxiety; therefore, instructors can have their students brainstorm and forecast what words they might encounter later on when they read. By pre-teaching key vocabulary words, the burden caused by unfamiliar vocabulary words may be lowered. Besides, after students pre-learn the vocabulary, they will have a second chance to see those words again while they are reading. As they could read the new vocabulary twice at least, they might have better memory for the new words. Furthermore, by brainstorming and forecasting the possible key words and main ideas of the article, students become more mentally ready to take the reading challenge, and accordingly, their levels of FL reading anxiety could be lowered.

### ***Limitations of the Study***

Even though this body of research has the undeniable merit of offering insights into FL reading anxiety, it has some limitations. One of the concerns is that the findings may not be able to generalize to all Taiwanese EFL learners. The participants recruited in this study were three intact groups from 2 universities in southern Taiwan. Although the results may be applied to the students in similar conditions, whether the results can be obtained from other college students remain

unclear because the English learning curriculum at each school may be different. As a result, it would be desirable to conduct a large-scale study to investigate more students from different schools. Besides, the participants in this study were all English majors with similar academic backgrounds. As the background familiarity may impact on FL reading anxiety (Frisson & Pickering, 2007; Saito *et al.*, 1999; Vande Berg, 1993), it is recommended future research may invite non-English majors (e.g., business majors, nursing majors and/or technology majors) to explore the link between academic backgrounds and FL reading anxiety.

The other concern is that this study used questionnaire as the only instrument to obtain information about the affective feelings in FL reading among college students. As a consequence, the validity of the findings depended on the participants' willingness to honestly respond to the items of the questionnaire. It is suggested that future research may combine interview with survey research to triangulate the results and gain a deeper and more thorough understanding in different factors in relation to the levels of FL reading anxiety.

### ***Suggestions for Future Research***

This study represents only the beginning of research needed to investigate the reading passages with different topics and text formats. It examined how different topics and text formats can be possible sources of FL reading anxiety. The experience from conducting this study and the results themselves point to several issues that merit further investigation.

To begin with, the participants recruited in this study were mainly female students. Previous research has indicated that gender differences between males and females show variations in reading habits (Bugel & Buunk, 1996; Shen, 2006). Therefore, the types of topics females and males prefer to read, and the time they spend reading them may be different. As topic preferences may affect the levels of FL reading anxiety, future study may delve into the reading process between different genders.

Next, results from this study suggested that different topic types did elicit different levels of FL reading anxiety among college students. According to the analysis of each item in the FLRAS, the number of unfamiliar vocabulary words and the lack of background knowledge were two of the factors that evoked anxiety when reading. Consequently, an experimental research design is recommended for examining the effects of teaching strategies on the levels of FL reading anxiety. For instance, future research can examine the effects of pre-teaching key words and introducing the background knowledge contained in the texts before reading on the reduction of FL reading anxiety.

Finally, future research may replicate this study to investigate how other reading topics affect the levels of FL reading anxiety. This study only examined five topics that appeared the most often in 20 reading textbooks. As there is different background knowledge embedded in different topics, more comparisons of the levels of FL reading anxiety elicited by various topics would deepen the understanding of how topic types affect the apprehensive levels among students. The results of this kind of extensive comparison would provide invaluable suggestions for teaching procedures in English reading classes.

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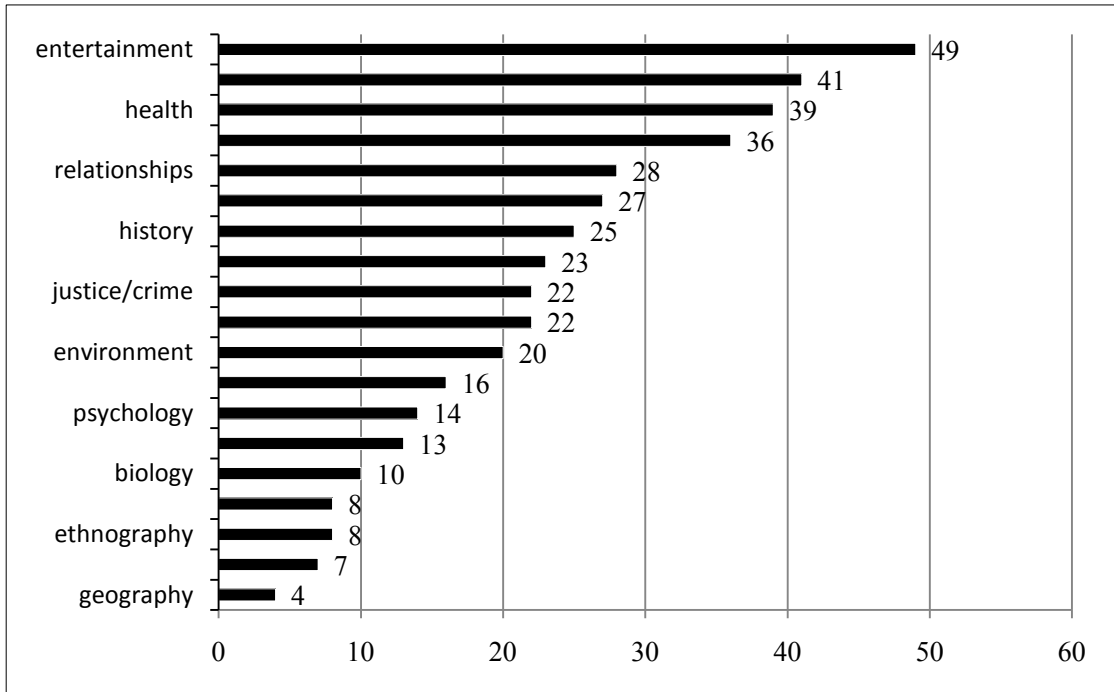
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**Appendix A: The Number of Times Each Topic to Appear  
in 20 Textbooks Surveyed**



**Appendix B: Reading Textbooks Surveyed**

Anderson, N. J. (2003). <i>Active skills for reading: Book 4</i> . Thomson. ISBN: 08-3842-647-6	Barton, L. & Sardinas, C. D. (2004). <i>North Star: Reading and writing, Intermediate</i> . Pearson Education. ISBN: 02-0175-571-8
Blass, L. (1991) <i>Worldbeat: Current readings for ESL students</i> . McGraw-Hill. ISBN: 00-7005-866-0	Clarke, M. A., Dobson, B. K. & Silberstein, S. (1996). <i>Choice reading</i> . The University of Michigan Press. ISBN: 04-7208-329-5
English, A. K. & English, L. M., (1998). <i>North Star: Focus on reading and writing, High Intermediate</i> . Longman. ISBN: 02-0184-669-1	Fjeldstad, M. C. (2002). <i>The thoughtful reader</i> . Thomson. ISBN: 01-5507-059-2
Graber, B. & Babcock, P. (2004). <i>Reading for the real world</i> . Compass. ISBN: 19-3222-278-2	Kim, E. & Hartmann, P. (2002). <i>Interactions one: Reading skills</i> . McGraw-Hill Contemporary. ISBN: 00-7233-068-6
Maker, J., & Lenier, M. (1985). <i>College reading book 3</i> . Wadsworth. ISBN: 05-3404-269-4	Malarcher, C. (2003). <i>College reading workshop</i> . Crane. ISBN: 89-8446-258-6
Malarcher, C. & Janzen, A. (2005). <i>Reading Challenge 3</i> . Compass. ISBN: 19-3222-261-8	McCraney, L. (2006). <i>An introduction to critical reading</i> . Wadsworth. ISBN: 14-1301-621-9
Methold, K. (2008). <i>Short articles for reading comprehension 3</i> . Compass. ISBN: 97-8159-966-1650	Mikulecky, B. S. & Jeffries, L (1998). <i>Reading power</i> . Longman. ISBN: 02-0184-674-8
Robertshaw, S. D., Hamblen, R. E. & Feldman, R. (1990). <i>Reading first: Building reading competence</i> . Heinle & Heinle. ISBN: 08-3843-384-7	Smith, L. C. (2005) <i>Exploring content 2: Reading for Academic success</i> . Longman. ISBN: 01-3140-200-5
Smith, L. C. & Mare, N. N. (1994). <i>Issues for Today: An intermediate reading skills text</i> . Heinle & Heinle. ISBN: 08-3845-025-3	Wholey, M. L. & Henein, N. (2007). <i>Reading matters 3: An interactive approach to reading</i> . Houghton Mifflin. ISBN: 06-1847-514-1
Wegmann, B. & Knezevic, M. (2002). <i>Mosaic one reading</i> . McGraw-Hill Contemporary. ISBN: 00-7232-979-3	Whalley, E. & Blass, L. (2006). <i>Reading for a reason: Expanding reading skills</i> . McGraw-Hill. ISBN: 00-7125-163-4



## Appendix C: Sample Reading Articles

### Sample Reading Article (Business/Money)

Lee Yusan: The Force behind the Jimmy Liao Brand

Jimmy Liao is a Taiwanese author of illustrated books that have inspired numerous play, film, TV drama, and animated film adaptations over the past decade. Action figures based on the main characters in his picture books, reproductions of his illustrations, and other licensed products are part of a cultural phenomenon that generates more than NT\$1 billion in annual sales in Taiwan, Hong Kong, mainland China, and even as far away as Europe and America.

Lee Yusan was born in the 1970s, during Taiwan's economic takeoff. Thanks to her unique vision and Jimmy Liao's creative genius, the two were spared a trial-and-error period such as the one that was so evocatively portrayed in Jimmy's book *A Chance of Sunshine* and formed a collaborative partnership that has brought Jimmy's art onto the global stage.

"I don't like people calling me Jimmy's manager!" insists Lee Yusan, executive director of Jimmy S.P.A. Co., Ltd., a company exclusively devoted to marketing the Jimmy brand. Lee thinks that a cultural broker shouldn't view her client as an individual author or an individual work, but as the core of a cultural brand and business.

Lee and Jimmy Liao first forged a good working relationship in late 2000, when she was head of marketing design at Grimm Press and helped him design his website. When Lee left Grimm Press, she worked with Jimmy to found Jimmy S.P.A.

Lee told Jimmy that she hoped to work with by setting up a company, rather than serving as his personal agent. Jimmy agreed, and he, his elder sister, and Lee together put up NT\$1.5 million to start the company.

When they began their partnership, Jimmy was a middle-aged man who had survived a battle with leukemia and was determined to devote himself heart and soul to his art, while Lee was a young woman with a background in literary publishing who had no inkling of what it would take to get a business off the ground. Who could have predicted then that the dream they hatched in an old apartment would today be a cultural brand that generates annual sales of more than NT\$1 billion and is loved by Chinese-speaking people around the world?

Adopted from Huang, K. (2008, March). Lee Yusan: The force behind the Jimmy Liao brand. *Taiwan panorama*, 80.

### Sample Reading Article (Culture)

Who Took That Tooth?

Many cultures follow special customs when a child's baby teeth fall out. Many of these customs include stories and beliefs related to creatures, real or magical, taking the teeth. In Asia, for example, birds and other animals are thought to play a role in taking baby teeth. In the West, though, a fairy is thought to visit. In all cases, it is considered lucky for the animal or fairy to take the offered tooth.

In Korea, they have the custom of throwing lost teeth up on the roof of a house. According to tradition, a magpie will come and take the tooth. Later, the magpie will return and bring a new tooth for the child. This custom is also followed in other Asian countries. In both Japan and Vietnam, children follow a similar convention of throwing lost teeth onto the roofs of houses.

Other nations, though, have teeth folklores which include other animals. In Mexico and Spain, for instance, tradition says a mouse takes the tooth and leaves some money. But in Mongolia, dogs

are responsible for taking children's teeth away. Dogs are highly respected in Mongolian society and are considered guardian angels of the people. There are legends saying that the new tooth will grow in good and strong if the baby tooth is fed to a guardian angel. Accordingly, parents in Mongolia will put their child's lost tooth in the fat of a piece of meat and feed it to a dog.

The idea of giving lost teeth to an angel or fairy is also a common tradition in the West. Many children in Western countries count on the Tooth Fairy to leave money or presents in exchange for a tooth. Based on tradition, children put the lost teeth under their pillows before going to bed. In the wee hours while they are sleeping, the Tooth Fairy takes the teeth and leaves something else under the pillows. In France, the Tooth Fairy leaves small gifts or candy. In the United States, however, the Tooth Fairy usually leaves money. These days, the rate is \$1 to \$5 per tooth. That can add up to a lot of money from the Tooth Fairy!

Adopted from Malarcher, C., & Janzen, A. (2005). Who took that tooth? In *Reading challenge 2*. (p. 12). New York: Compass publishing.

### Sample Reading Article (Entertainment/Leisure)

#### The Best Shopping Street in the World

A recent survey has shown that the busiest shopping street in the world is not in London, New York, or Paris, but in Warsaw. It's called Nowy Swiat which means *New World*. An incredible 14,000 Poles walk down this main street every hour.

It is a wonderful place to shop. The sidewalks are very wide. There are statues, palaces, attractive townhouses, exclusive cafes, and stylish restaurants. The buildings aren't too tall. They look old, but in fact the whole city was rebuilt after World War II.

There aren't any billboards or neon lights. There isn't any loud music, and there aren't many tourists. People think that Polish stores have nothing to sell, so nobody goes shopping here. The world doesn't know about this paradise for shoppers-yet.

It is now possible to buy almost everything in Warsaw. There are a lot of stores from the West, but the interesting thing is that Polish manufacturers are now producing high quality goods. They are good because they are not mass produced for world consumption.

Nowy Swiat has a lot of small stores, specialty stores, chic stores. It doesn't have the huge department stores that sell the same things everywhere.

If you want an exquisite handmade suit, Nowy Swiat is the place to go. It isn't cheap. You will pay up to \$2,000. For beautiful French baby clothes, go to *Petit Bateau*. You will pay \$75 for a pair of baby blue jeans. However, not everything is expensive. At a store called *Pantera* you can buy leather goods—handbags, purses, coats and belts. And there are a lot of small boutiques that sell men's and women's clothes that aren't too expensive.

If you're tired, stop at *Café Blikle*. This is a fashionable place to meet. You'll find a lively atmosphere and a lot of well-known Poles. The frozen yogurt and ice cream are both excellent, and its famous doughnuts are delicious.

It is possible to travel the world and find the same things for sale in every county. But Warsaw is different because its stores are unique—and they're on Nowy Swiat.

Adopted from Soars, J., & Soars, L. (2001). The best shopping street in the world. In *American Headway 2* (p. 31). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## Sample Reading Article (Health)

### Hello Toes!

These days many people realize it is important to do exercise, so they work out regularly. Many doctors recommend running, walking, and biking, exercises that are good for the heart and lungs. Furthermore, both men and women realize the importance of weight training, exercise that makes your muscles stronger. However, there is one more important part of exercise: stretching.

Stretching has many benefits. One of the main benefits of stretching is better flexibility. Flexibility is the ability to move your muscles and joints easily. Being flexible improves how you stand, and it corrects any differences in your muscles. These muscle imbalances may cause injuries. Additionally, stretching helps you warm up for other exercise. If you stretch before working out, your muscles, knees and hips become looser. Then your body is better ready for jogging, lifting weights, or other exercise. A third benefit of stretching is that it reduces the aches and pains caused by exercise. When you exercise, your muscles can become shorter or tighter. This can hurt after exercise. Stretching keeps the muscles looser and lengthens the muscles. Fourth, stretching helps circulation. Circulation is the movement of blood through the body. Better circulation allows nutrients to move more easily throughout your whole body. Finally, stretching reduces stress. Stretching relaxes your muscles, and that relaxes your mind.

Although stretching is very healthy for you, there are some “dos and don’ts” of stretching. You should try to stretch at least three times a week. Each stretch should continue for 10 to 30 seconds. For example, when you touch your toes, try to hold this stretch for up to 30 seconds. Each stretch should be repeated four times. Another tip is, don’t bounce when you stretch. Bouncing can pull or tear your muscles. Instead, stretching should be a smooth movement. Finally, you shouldn’t stretch immediately after walking into a gym or waking up in the morning. Wait until your body has warmed up before stretching.

By following these simple rules, you can get a start on better health. With all its benefits, don’t you want to add a little stretching to your life?

Adopted from Malarcher, C., & Janzen, A. (2005). Hello toes! In *Reading challenge 2*. (p. 84). New York: Compass publishing.

## Sample Reading Article (Relationships)

### The Changing American Family

With all the recent changes and the stress in modern society, many people wonder if the traditional structure of the family can survive. For instance, the American family unit is in the process of change. In the first half of the twentieth century, there were mainly two types of families: the extended and the nuclear. An extended family includes mother, father, children, and some other relatives, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins, living in the same house. A nuclear family is composed of just parents and children living under the same roof.

As the American economy progressed from agricultural to industrial, people were forced to move to different parts of the country to get good jobs. These jobs were mainly in the large cities. Now, in fact, three-quarters of Americans live in urban areas, a mere 2.5 percent of the nation’s total land mass. Of the 118 million in the civilian labor force, only 3 million still work in the farm.

Since moving for better jobs often split up the extended family, the nuclear family became more prevalent. At present, 55 percent of the families in the United States are nuclear families. But besides these two types of traditional family groupings — extended and nuclear — the word *family* is now being expanded to include a variety of other living arrangements.

American families today are made up of many diverse combinations. With one in two

marriages ending in divorce, there is an increase in single-parent homes: a father or mother living with one or more children. About one household in ten is headed by a single parent. Divorce has also led to more "blended families." Blended families occur when previously married men and women marry again and combine the children from former marriages into a new family. Some married couples are deciding not to have any children at all, so there is an increase in two-person childless families. Many couples are also deciding not to get married legally, and so there is an increase in couples just living together. There are also more people living alone: single, widowed, divorced. About one in five Americans lives alone.

Adopted from Wegmann, B., & Knezevic, M. P. (1996). The changing American family. In *Mosaic one: A reading skills book* (p.p. 44-45). McGraw-Hill.