
Developing a Hierarchical Framework of Critical Reading Proficiency*

LI Huijie

Harbin Institute of Technology

Abstract

Critical reading is a high-level reading process which entails the ability to read with analysis and judgment. It analyzes not only *what* a text says but also *how* it says it. On the basis of reviewing the notions of critical reading and the descriptions of critical reading proficiency, this paper sets up a four-level hierarchical framework in order to provide the theoretical construct of critical reading testing. They are the levels of *structural analysis*, *rhetoric analysis*, *social relevance*, and *holistic evaluation*. A test focus inventory is accordingly developed to guide item writing, and the components include *analyzing paragraph*, *discovering meaning*, *evaluating arguments*, and *responding to text*.

Key words: critical reading proficiency; hierarchical framework; test focus inventory

1. Introduction

1.1 The importance of being critical

In *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English language*, the word “critical” is defined as “characterized by careful, exact evaluation and judgment”, and *critical reading* is used as an example to illustrate the definition. In language learning context, “being critical” does not necessarily connote negative meanings (Bean et al., 2002; Millan, 1995; Pirozzi, 2003; Poulson & Wallace, 2004). Instead of “finding faults”, it means “using careful evaluation, sound judgment, and reasoning powers” (Millan, 1995: 218).

Critical ability is presently regarded as the fourth literacy in addition to the

* This research has been supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (Grant No. HIT. HSS. 2009007) and also by the Fifth China Foreign Language Education Fund.

conventional “3R” literacies (reading, writing, and arithmetic) (Bean et al., 2002; Milan, 1995; Poulson & Wallace, 2004; Wassman & Paye, 1985). Having critical ability is highly valued in an academic context. It is considered one of the objectives of higher education. For example, the UK national framework for all higher education qualifications include such description:

Masters degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated a systematic understanding of knowledge and a *critical* awareness of current problems and/or new insights,...and have conceptual understanding that enables the student to evaluate *critically* current research.... (Poulson & Wallace, 2004: 4)

1.2 Significance of critical reading (CR)

Being critical is well applied to varied reading contexts. Goatly (2000) and Pirozzi (2003: 440) insist that advertising needs to be read and handled in a critical way. Millan (1995:268) summarizes eight critical questions in reading editorials on controversial issues from the op-ed (opinion editorial) pages of major newspapers. Poulson and Wallace (2004: 6) make a list of “being critical” in academic reading, which includes “adapting an attitude of skepticism”, “habitually questioning the quality of your own and others”, “scrutinizing claims”, “being open-minded”, and “being constructive”.

Critical reading is higher order thinking (Hancock, 1987; Paul & Nosich, 2007). According to Pennycook (2001: 4), critical thinking is a way of bringing more rigorous analysis to problem solving or textual understanding and a way of developing more critical distance from the writer. The significance of critical reading is summarized by Pirozzi (2003) as the following:

It can help a reader to evaluate textbook material and other types of reading, to uncover motivations and assess arguments, to consider options, products, advertisements and commercials, and to judge policies and programs offered by the various levels of government. (p. 197)

1.3 Necessity of assessing critical reading proficiency (CRP)

English learners, especially those at higher levels, have ready access to a variety of authentic English materials such as magazines, newspapers, journals, leaflets, and so on. They also turn to Internet websites in order to gather news and information within the shortest time. It cannot be denied that these modern activities call for critical reading ability.

However, there is no specific test directed to assessing critical reading proficiency. Spache and Berg (1984: 1) point out some drawbacks of conventional reading tests. They argue that an examination that is mostly made up of questions on facts or details will not help students to realize that they are reading at an extremely superficial level. They hold that students who do not progress beyond this point usually believe everything they read in newspapers, magazines, or books because they never question the facts or details. Stoyhoff and Chapelle (2005: 12) maintain that there should be “holistic, student centered, integrated and multidimensional” assessment practice. Based on the arguments,

the notion of critical reading test is conceived to meet the demands of assessing the higher level reading ability.

1.4 The goal of the paper

This paper aims to build up solid theoretical underpinning for assessing critical reading (CR) abilities, and the core task is to clarify the construct of critical reading proficiency (CRP). The goal of the paper is to develop a framework of CRP through synthesizing the definitions of CR and CR abilities. The framework is expected to serve as the theoretical construct of CR tests. A test focus inventory is accordingly designed to guide item writing.

2. Literature review

2.1 Critical reading

Earlier literature of CR focuses on discussing and questioning in reading. Hafner (1974: 40) defines CR as “a thinking process that is improved as individuals learn to use language more constructively and to clarify concepts through discussion that is generated and guided by skillful questioning”. Spache and Berg (1984: 143) develop the definition by regarding CR as the ability to read with analysis and judgment. They go further and point out that “critical reading requires a contribution by both the author and the reader and an interplay which usually results in a new understanding”.

Scholars show greater interest in CR in recent decades. They give definitions and illustrations to justify CR significance. Their main points are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of definitions of critical reading

Author(s)	Main points of the definition	Year
Poulson& Wallace	It asks for keeping an open mind, retaining a conditional willingness to be convinced, etc.	2004
Schwegler	Critical reading is active reading. It involves some activity on the reader's part.	2004
Pirozzi	It is high-level comprehension of written material requiring interpretation and evaluation skills.	2003
Bean, et al.	Critical reading, like writing, is an active process of composing.	2002
Garrigus	It requires to explain figurative language and to identify basic logical fallacies and emotional appeals.	2002
Milan	It requires to maintain objectivity and not to allow expectations, biases, or personal prejudices to interfere with understanding.	1995
Phillips & Sotiriou	It is more than the ability to understand the explicit meaning of the passage. It involves application, analysis, evaluation and imagination.	1992
Adams	It refers to distinguishing fact from opinion, recognizing intent, attitude, and tone; recognizing inferences and drawing conclusions.	1989
Clegg	It distinguishes between truth and distortion, information and propaganda, public policy and personal prejudice.	1988
Hancock	It requires to question, compare, and evaluate, to detect faulty logic and information... and then to determine to accept or reject the information.	1987

Author(s)	Main points of the definition	Year
Maker & Lenier	Critical reading enables to size up the author's arguments and to evaluate how well he supports them. A reader must think beyond what is stated and decide what the author is trying to imply.	1986
Wassman & Paye	Critical readers evaluate the writer's information and draw conclusions of their own.	1985
Raygor & Raygor	It requires to distinguishes among humor, satire, sarcasm, irony, and straightforward writing; to recognize implicit assumptions or inferences the author is making, etc.	1985
Spache & Berg	It is the ability to read with analysis and judgment.	1984
Hafner	It is a thinking process that is improved by way of using language more constructively and clarifying concepts through discussion and questioning.	1974

Presently, CR is recognized as active reading and the reader's part in reading is well emphasized. A reader is involved in voluntary activities such as "jotting down ideas and responses, evaluating the conclusions and information in a text, speculating about the consequences of a concept, or making notes to mention just a few possibilities" (Schwegler, 2004: 14). Bean, Chappell and Gillam (2002: 27) even propose that critical reading is an active process of composing. Pirozzi (2003: 325) gives a clear and comprehensive definition as follows:

Critical reading can be defined as very high-level comprehension of written material requiring interpretation and evaluation skills that enable the reader to separate important from unimportant information, distinguish between facts and opinions, and determine a writer's purpose and tone. It also entails using inference to go beyond what is stated explicitly, filling in informational gaps, and coming to logical conclusions.

CR in nonfiction is common in an academic context. It is applied to analyzing genre, discourse, diction, and arguments in textbooks. It is required as a part of *College Level Academic Skills Test* (CLAST) (Goldfarb & Johnson, 1989). Maker and Lenier (1986: 138) define it in the following way:

Critical reading in nonfiction is the process of making judgments about what you read and deciding what to believe and what not believe. Critical reading enables you to size up the author's arguments and to evaluate how well he or she supports them so that you can draw your own conclusions. Critical reading requires both literal and inferential comprehension. If you do not understand the facts and what they imply, you are not in a position to make any judgments.

CR is characterized as what Garrigus (2002) and Pirozzi (2003) have summarized:

- having purpose and setting goals
- asking questions and finding answers
- monitoring progress in reaching reading goals
- reading flexibly: looking forward or checking back if necessary

- allotting time and effort
- adjusting reading rate to difficulty level
- relating new information to previous knowledge
- coming to logical conclusions

(Adapted from Garrigus, 2002: 169 and Pirozzi, 2003: 197)

In CR, the reader's stance is highly stressed. Critical readers are regarded as active readers. They question, confirm, and judge what they read throughout the reading process (Collins, 1993). Critical readers are actively involved in the reading process. They are continually examining the evidence of a presentation and making inferences based on such evidence (Twining, 1985: 322). Critical readers evaluate the writer's information, draw conclusions of their own, and relate what they read to what they already know (Wassman & Paye, 1985: 187).

2.2 Position in reading proficiency

CR is a part of fluent reading process. It stands at a position in reading proficiency scale. By examining the scales, we can find out where critical reading is located in the proficiency ladder.

Literature survey shows several documents providing language proficiency scales. The documents, such as *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* (The American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages), *ILR Scales* (The Interagency Language Roundtable Scale), *Guidelines for Setting Proficiency Goal*, *Linguafolio Self-assessment Checklist*, and *European Language Passport Self-assessment Grid*, are designed to measure non-native language abilities.

ILR scales and ACTFL guidelines are the dominant scales measuring foreign language proficiency in the United States. The ILR reading scale consists of descriptions of six levels, from 0 to 5. At each level, except 5, there are base and plus levels. ACTFL identifies five levels of reading proficiency, from *novice* to *distinguished*. Both documents give descriptions of what one can do, what one cannot do and what texts one can read. Table 2 describes the relationship between reading levels of the ACTFL and ILR proficiency scales.

Table 2. Correspondence of reading proficiency

ACTFL proficiency guideline	ILR scale	ILR level	ILR Scale Descriptions
Novice-Mid	0	No Proficiency	Cannot recognize letters.
Novice-Low			
Novice-High	0+	Memorized Proficiency	Can recognize all the letters in the printed version of an alphabetic system and high-frequency elements of a syllabary or a character system.
Intermediate-Low	1	Elementary Proficiency	Sufficient comprehension to read very simple connected written material in a form equivalent to usual printing or typescript.
Intermediate-Mid			
Intermediate-High	1+	Elementary Proficiency, Plus	Sufficient comprehension to understand simple discourse in printed form for informative social purposes.

ACTFL proficiency guideline	ILR scale	ILR level	ILR Scale Descriptions
Advanced	2	Limited	Sufficient comprehension to read simple, authentic written material in a form equivalent to usual printing or typescript on subjects within a familiar context.
		Working Proficiency	
Advanced Plus	2+	Limited	Sufficient comprehension to understand most factual material in non-technical prose as well as some discussions on concrete topics related to special professional interests.
		Working Proficiency, Plus	
		Plus	
Superior	3	General	Able to read within a normal range of speed and with almost complete comprehension a variety of authentic prose material on unfamiliar subjects.
		Professional Proficiency	
	3+	General	Can comprehend a variety of styles and forms pertinent to professional needs. Able to comprehend many sociolinguistic and cultural references.
		Professional Proficiency, Plus	
Distinguished	4	Advanced	Able to read fluently and accurately all styles and forms of the language pertinent to professional needs. Able to relate inferences in the text to real-world knowledge and understand almost all sociolinguistic and cultural references.
		Professional Proficiency	
	4+	Advanced Professional Proficiency, Plus	
Native	5	Functionally Native Proficiency	Reading proficiency is functionally equivalent to that of the well-educated native reader.

It can be seen from the table that sufficient comprehension of authentic written material is required at *Advanced* or *R-2* level. CR abilities, such as comprehending underlying structure and discourse patterns and relating inferences in the text to real-world knowledge, are called for at the higher levels. Therefore, a conclusion can be drawn that *Advanced* or *R-2* level is the threshold of CRP, and that CR is a high-level reading ability.

That CR is a high-level reading is not only justified by its position in reading proficiency scale above, but also widely recognized by scholars devoted to developing reading abilities (e.g., Adams, 1989; Clegg, 1988; Milan, 1995; Pirozzi, 2003).

Pirozzi (2003: 325) defines clearly critical reading as a very high-level comprehension process. Adams (1989) categorizes reading with three levels, literal comprehension, critical comprehension and affective comprehension. CR is placed above the literal level. In more detail, Spache and Berg (1984: 1) describe that the development of reading skills, from the simplest level of literal recall to the more complex level of critical analysis, generally takes place along the following lines:

Word recognition → Recognition and recall of details → Categorizing details →
 Formulating a main idea → *Critical Reading* → Vocabulary development → Flexibility
 in reading → Reviewing → Summary

2.3 Comparison between critical reading (CR) and literal reading (LR)

CR is higher-level reading based on literal reading. Full literal comprehension is CR's threshold. The two kinds of reading share some common grounds, but they are different in purposes, process and above all, reader stance. The relationship between them can be illustrated by Figure 1. One should bear in mind, however, that the emphasis on CR does not mean that LR is ignored.

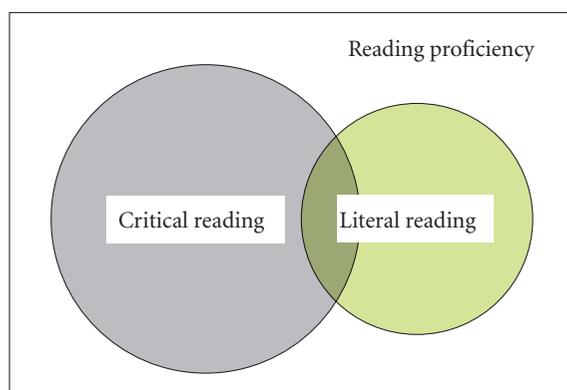


Figure 1. Relationship between critical reading and literal reading

Phillips and Sotiriou (1992: 268) make comparison between CR and LR as follows:

(In literal reading) your purpose for reading is mainly literal comprehension: to locate main ideas and supporting details as well as the structure of written material. Most of this material was *one-dimensional*. In critical reading, however, your purpose goes beyond surface content. You need to do more: to analyze, critique, react, understand more deeply. This reading material is usually more complex than most of your daily reading. This type of material is *multidimensional*. You may have to read this material two or three times before you can effectively discuss and write about it.

2.4 CLAST: a critical-reading oriented test

A college student is required to take the College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) if he or she wants an Associate of Arts degree from a Florida community college or admission to the upper division of any state university. CLAST includes four subtests: essay, English language skills, reading, and mathematics.

The reading section of CLAST measures twelve specific reading abilities. Three of them belong to literal comprehension skills and nine belong to critical comprehension skills. Twelve of the questions will test literal comprehension, and the other 32 will test critical comprehension. The reading section contains a series of readings of varying

lengths, but each under 500 words, followed by questions or incomplete statements test-takers are expected to answer or complete.

The twelve specific literal and critical comprehension skills needed to master are identified as follows (The CLAST website, 2007):

Literal comprehension skills are divided into three areas.

- 1) Recognize the main idea/ideas in a passage
- 2) Identify supporting details
- 3) Determine meanings of words on the basis of context clues

Critical comprehension skills are divided into nine areas.

- 1) Recognize the author's purpose
- 2) Identify the author's overall organization pattern
- 3) Distinguish between statements of fact and statements of opinion
- 4) Detect bias in the passage or by the author
- 5) Recognize the author's tone
- 6) Recognize explicit and implicit relationships *within* sentences
- 7) Recognize explicit and implicit relationships *between* sentences
- 8) Recognize valid/invalid arguments
- 9) Draw logical inferences and conclusions

3. Defining critical reading proficiency

The description of critical reading proficiency (CRP) is as diverse as it is of critical reading. Some scholars give checklists to illustrate what CRP is (Bean et al., 2002: 70; Clegg, 1988: 53; Garrigus, 2002: xvi; Milan, 1995: 217; Pirozzi, 2003: 325; Poulson & Wallace, 2004: 7; Raygor, 1985: 288). Some propose questions to check critical reading (Bean et al., 2002: 20; Hancock, 1987: 122; Milan, 1995: 268; Wallace & Poulson, 2004: 28; Wassman & Paye, 1985: 323). Others, such as Spache and Berg (1984), give direct description of CRP.

From the perspective of practical operation, *the Foundation for Critical Thinking* concentrates on assessing reading and listening as the fundamental cognitive structures of communication. Critical thinking in reading entails the ability to:

- create an accurate interpretation,
- assess the author's purpose,
- accurately identify the question-at-issue or problem being discussed,
- accurately identify basic concepts at the heart of what is written,
- see significant implications of the advocated position,
- identify, understand, and evaluate the assumptions underlying someone's position,
- recognize evidence, argument, inference (or their lack) in written presentations,
- reasonably assess the credibility of an author,
- accurately grasp the point of view of the author,

- empathetically reason within the point of view of the author.

(Adapted from *Foundation for Critical Thinking website*, 2007)

Garrigus (2002: xvi) depicts CRP at two levels in English for academic purpose (EAP) context: basic critical reading skills and high-level critical reading skills. The former focuses on paragraph analyzing, while the latter focuses on making inference and evaluating.

Basic critical reading skills refer to the ability to:

- Distinguish topical organization from organization by ideas
- Finding the main idea of paragraphs, multiparagraph units, and articles
- Identifying idea patterns of organization
- Recognizing transitions that signal relationships among pattern elements and supporting details

High-level critical reading skills require students to:

- Draw inference and state implied main ideas
- Synthesize two or more sentences to formulate divided main ideas
- Distinguish fact and opinion
- Evaluate evidence
- Explain figurative language (including analogy)
- Identify basic logical fallacies and emotional appeals

Others' lists (Clegg, 1988: 53; Pirozzi, 2003: 325) do not summarize CRP in categories or at levels. They use some phrases or words to remind readers of CR's focuses. Raygor (1985: 288) puts up a 15-item list to portray what good readers do in critical reading.

Wassman and Paye (1985: 323) insist on asking some key questions for critical comprehension. The questions are helpful to recognize and evaluate:

- Author's reliability and point of view
- Facts and opinions
- Language
- Author's tone, purpose, thesis and attitude
- Inference
- Critical judgment

Each focus is stressed by several questions, such as "Is the language dependent on denotative or connotative meanings?" and "What is the soundness of the author's arguments?" The questions are so inclusive that Hancock's eight critical questions (1987: 122) do not add new focuses. Bean et al. (2002: 20) also propose 8 questions for critical reading, the first 5 of which are asked to reveal a writer's basic values and assumptions. However, it is noticeable that the other three questions extend the dimension of CRP.

By critically considering these “how” questions, you will understand a text more fully and be ready to respond to it by considering three additional sets of questions:

1. Are this writer’s basic values, beliefs, and assumptions similar to or different from my own? (How does this writer’s worldview accord with mine?)
2. How do I respond to this text? (Will I go along with or challenge what this text is presenting? How has it changed my thinking?)
3. How do this author’s evident purposes for writing fit with my purposes for reading? (How will I be able to use what I have learned from the text?)

(Adapted from Bean et al., 2002: 20)

4. Developing a hierarchical framework of critical reading proficiency

Those checklists, questions and descriptions of CRP, reviewed in the previous section, may be summarized to provide a hierarchical framework of critical reading proficiency.

The first element which needs considering is that the minimum reading unit of CR is paragraph. The accurate understanding of the paragraph, in terms of viewpoints, main idea, and developing methods, will make contributions to a more comprehensive analysis at the next level.

At a higher level in critical reading, the abilities to recognize the writer’s purposes and tone, to evaluate the diction in the text, to uncover and assess arguments, to recognize appeals and logical fallacies, are essential to discover the underlying implications.

Any text is socially relevant. Therefore, next, it is profitable to embrace background knowledge. Knowing the writer’s background may be helpful to understand his arguments or even recognize the bias in the text; having background knowledge of the event mentioned in the text may be useful for keeping critical distance with the writer; possessing additional information of the topic, i.e., intertextual context knowledge, will be beneficial to make an objective evaluation of the text.

A holistic evaluation is the sublimating process in critical reading. At this level, a reader is able to understand how the writer supports his or her thesis with reason and evidence, to perceive how the writer hooks the intended reader’s interest, to compare whether the writer’s basic values, beliefs, and assumptions are similar to or different from their own, and to write a reasonable brief summary of the text or express their own viewpoints.

Table 3 presents these hierarchical levels in critical reading. The abilities are categorized at four levels: structure analysis level, rhetoric analysis level, social relevance level and holistic evaluation level. The first level is actually the threshold of CRP, and the following levels entail the abilities covered at the previous levels.

Table 3. A Four-level Framework of CRP

At structure analysis level
Being able to guess words in context
Being able to summarize the main idea of the paragraph
Being able to summarize the main idea of the text
Being able to deduce sentence inference in context
Being able to separate major ideas from minor ideas
Being able to recognize developing methods
Being able to recognize the pattern of paragraph organization
Being able to distinguish facts and opinions
Being able to distinguish among opposing viewpoints
Being able to understand graphics
At rhetoric analysis level
Being able to recognize text register and genre
Being able to recognize the writer's purposes
Being able to recognize the writer's tone
Being able to evaluate word choice
Being able to recognize misused and abused language
Being able to explain figurative language
Being able to recognize and understand the rhetorical devices
Being able to uncover arguments
Being able to assess arguments
Being able to recognize appeals in arguments
Being able to recognize logical fallacies
Being able to recognize manipulative techniques
At social relevance level
Being able to relate the text to culture background
Being able to relate the text to event background
Being able to relate the text to author background
Being able to relate the text to situational context
Being able to relate the text to intertextual context
At holistic evaluation level
Being able to read from critical distance
Being able to evaluate the text objectively
Being able to summarize the questions the text addresses
Being able to critique information presentation channels
Being able to examine the source
Being able to examine a text's ideology
Being able to know who are the intended audience
Being able to understand how the author supports the thesis with reason and evidence
Being able to perceive how the author hooks the intended reader's interest
Being able to read and then write a reasonable brief summary of the text

Being able to compare whether the author's basic values, beliefs, and assumptions similar to or different from the reader's own
Being able to decide whether accepting or challenging authority
Being able to decide whether the text fits with reading purpose
Being able to express a personal viewpoint

5. CRP test focus inventory

Bachman (1990: 40-8) points out three steps in language ability measurement, defining constructs theoretically, defining constructs operationally, and quantifying observations. The hierarchical framework schemed above defines the theoretical construct of CRP while the following inventory, based on the framework, reflects the CRP levels at an operational level. Table 4 shows the operational components of CRP, lists facets and provides detailed test focuses. It serves as a guide for item writing.

Table 4. CRP test focus inventory

Components	Facets	Details
Analyzing paragraphs	Main idea	Using signals to locate main ideas;
		Identifying unstated main idea
	Types of writing	Narration
		Description
		Exposition
		Argumentation/Persuasion (problem/solution, opinion/reason)
	Writer's purposes	Reporting and recording
		Expressing and reflecting
		Inquiring and exploring
		Informing and explaining
		Analyzing and interpreting
		Taking a stand (argumentation-persuasion)
Evaluating and judging		
Proposing solutions		
Seeking common ground		
Influencing others		
Responding emotionally		
Methods of paragraph development	Combination	
	Examples & illustration	
	Process	
	Comparison & contrast	
	Analyzing & classification	
	Cause & effect	

Developing a Hierarchical Framework of Critical Reading Proficiency

Components	Facets	Details
Analyzing paragraphs	Methods of paragraph development	Description/support
		Whole /part
		Opinion/reason
		Problem/solution
		Time sequence
	Patterns of paragraph organization	Analogy
		Combination
		Chronological order
		Spatial order
		Deductive order: from general to specific
Discovering meaning	Inductive order	
	Emphatic order	
	Using context clues to determine words	Synonyms, antonyms, examples and illustrations, opinion and tone
	Making inference	Implied ideas and conclusions. Valid or not?
	Distinguishing fact, opinion, belief	
	Distinguishing among opposing viewpoints	
	Tone	Adjectives; continuum of irony; allusion; symbols
	Choosing word: diction	Denotation and connotation
	Explaining figurative language	Simile, metaphor, analogy
	Misused and abused language	Weasel words
Sneer words		
Doublespeak		
Political correct language		
Jargon		
Evaluating arguments	Uncovering arguments	Clichés
		Understanding graphics
	Assessing arguments	Stated or underlying purpose; stated or unstated assumptions; intended audience
		Inductive arguments and valid evidence
	Balance	Deductive arguments
		Argument flaws (flawed analogy, flawed causal arguments, flawed definition, false arguments)
	Appeals in arguments	News and feature articles in the newspapers and magazines
		Appeals to the emotions (transfer, plain folks, testimonial, bandwagon appeal, flattery)
		Appeal to authority
		Appeal to fear
Appeal to patriotism, Appeal to prejudice		
	Appeal to sympathy, Appeal to tradition	

Components	Facets	Details
Evaluating arguments	Logical fallacies	Ad hominem argument
		Begging the question
		Either/or fallacy
		False analogy
		Oversimplification
		Slippery slope
		Two wrongs make a right
Other manipulative techniques (deceptive techniques)	Examining the source	Authority
		Bias
		Lying with facts
		Misleading statistics
		The reliability, recency, accuracy, and competence of the writer
Examining a text's ideology	Examining a text's ideology	Detecting propaganda
Responding to Text	Summarizing and paraphrasing	
		Expressing a personal viewpoint

6. Conclusion

CR is high-level reading which calls for the reader's active involvement. It entails the ability to read with analysis and judgment (Spache & Berg, 1984). It analyzes not just *what* texts say, but *how* they say it.

This paper presents a systematic introduction to the definitions of CR and integrates the definitions from different perspectives. Accordingly, a four-level hierarchical framework of CRP is devised to serve as the theoretical definition of CRP. The proposed levels, *the structure analysis level*, *the rhetoric analysis level*, *the social relevance level* and *the holistic evaluation level*, present the cognitive nature of critical reading and recognize the relationship among writer, text and reader. On the basis of the theoretical definition, a test focus inventory is developed as the operational definition to guide test item writing in practical sense.

References

- Adams, W. R. 1989. *Developing Reading Versatility*. Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
- Bean, J.C., Chappell, V. A. & Gillam, A. 2002. *Reading Rhetorically: A Reader for Writers*. London: Longman.
- Clegg, C. S. 1988. *Critical Reading and Writing Across the Discipline*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
- Garrigus, R. 2002. *Design in Reading: An Introduction to Critical Reading*. New York: Longman.

- Goatly, A. 2000. *Critical Reading and Writing: An Introductory Coursebook*. London: Routledge.
- Hafner, L. E. 1974. *Improving Reading in Middle and Secondary Schools*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.
- Hancock, O. H. 1987. *Reading Skills for College Students*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Maker, J. & Lenier, M. 1986. *College Reading* (2nd ed.). Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Milan, D. 1995. *Developing Reading Skills*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.
- Paul, R. & Nosich, G. M. 2007. *A Model for the National Assessment of Higher Order Thinking*. Critical thinking.org Copyright ©2007 Foundation for Critical Thinking.
- Pennycook, A. 2001. *Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Introduction*. London: LEA.
- Phillips, A. N. & Sotiriou, P. 1992. *Steps to Reading Proficiency*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Pirozzi, R. 2003. *Critical Reading, Critical Thinking* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.
- Poulson, L. & Wallace, M. 2004. Designing and Writing about Research: Developing a critical frame of mind. In L. Poulson & M. Wallace (eds.), *Learning to Read Critically in Teaching and Learning*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Raygor, A. L. & Raygor, R. D. 1985. *Effective Reading: Improving Reading Rates and Comprehension*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Spache, G. D. & Berg, P. C. 1984. *The Art of Efficient Reading*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Schwegler, R. 2004. *Patterns of Exposition* (17th ed.). London: Person Education, Inc.
- Wallace, C. 2003. *Critical Reading in Language Education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wassman, R. & Paye, A. 1985. *A Reader's Handbook*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (The American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages), <http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=4236>
- ILR Scales (The Interagency Language Roundtable Scale), [http://www.govtilr.org/Guidelines for Setting Proficiency Goal](http://www.govtilr.org/Guidelines%20for%20Setting%20Proficiency%20Goal), <http://www.sil.org/lingualinks/languagelearning/mangngyrlngglrnnngprgrm/GuidelinesForSettingProficienc.htm>
- Linguafolio Self-assessment Checklist, <http://www.ncssfl.org/LinguaFolio/index.php?checklists>
- European Language Passport Self-assessment Grid, http://europass.cedefop.europa.eu/img/dynamic/c1347/type.FileContent.file/ELPTemplate_en_GB.doc

(Copy editing: CAO Yongheng)

Another framework that has been used as a good example for the elaboration of the DIGCOMP proposal is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The CEFR provides a self-assessment grid built on three proficiency levels (each of them is then split into two sub-levels). The CEFR self-assessment grid is also supported by a more extensive toolkit that sets the standards for the evaluation of learning outcomes of foreign languages. The criteria for establishing levels are loosely based on the descriptors of the EQF (European Qualification Framework).⁹ We decided to go for thr