

Second Language Reading Research and Instruction: Crossing the Boundaries

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Second language (L2) reading serves dual roles in L2 learning – both as a literacy skill for comprehension and as a source of L2 input (Eskey, 2005; Grabe, 1991). However, L2 reading researchers have traditionally focused on either one of the two dimensions at a time, with the other largely unattended, as is reflected in the discrepancies between literacy-oriented research and language-oriented research. With its primary goal being comprehension, literacy-oriented research has fueled most notably a whole language approach, and a skills approach, to L2 reading instruction. The whole language approach highlights the importance of higher-level processes based on background knowledge, whereas the skills approach emphasizes lower-level processes such as orthographic processing, morphological analysis, and word recognition, among others. By contrast, with language-oriented research, the acquisition approach conceptualizes reading as a vehicle for delivering L2 input that is conducive to the development of L2 competence. As can be expected, the theoretical and pedagogical chasms among these approaches have thus yielded unbalanced views on the nature of L2 reading and, more importantly, on its relationship with L2 acquisition.

Against such a theoretical background, *Second Language Reading Research and Instruction: Crossing the Boundaries*, edited by ZhaoHong Han and Neil J. Anderson, emerges as a rigorous attempt to address the timely issue of how to nurture a symbiotic relationship between L2 reading and L2 acquisition. Specifically, authors of the different chapters shed light on how best L2 reading should be taught to serve dual purposes – that is, for the development of L2 reading ability, and that of L2 competence. With the wide spectrum of perspectives and topics covered, the volume provides an encompassing overview of where L2 reading research and instruction have been, and where they should be heading so that the disparities identified in the field of L2 reading could be resolved. In terms of organization, the volume consists of two major sections: Part 1, comprising four chapters on recent L2 reading research, and Part 2, composed of another four chapters which revolve around pedagogical recommendations for L2 reading instruction.

Part 1 begins with Shiotsu's research on the relationship between word recognition ability and reading proficiency. The underlying rationale is that lower-level processing needs to be automatized so that attentional resources can be freed up for more efficient higher-level processing (e.g., inferencing), which contributes to better comprehension. A total of 219 L1-Japanese EFL students participated in the study. In order to measure visual orthographic processing ability, lexical-semantic access, passage comprehension, and sentence comprehension speed of the participants, four tests were administered to the participants. The findings suggest that the more skilled readers relied more heavily on orthographic regularities than the less skilled ones, probably because they were more familiar with such regularities. Moreover, the more skilled readers were also faster in their lexical-semantic access, while the less-skilled ones were slower in accessing word meanings. Based on the results, Shiotsu recommends that developing learners' fluent word recognition (i.e., in terms of both word form and meaning) should be incorporated into L2 reading instruction.

In chapter 2, Horst argues that extensive reading has an important place in L2 reading instruction because of its potential in facilitating the development of definitional vocabulary knowledge and lexical access speed. Appraising the benefits of extensive reading from the perspective of second language acquisition, Horst identifies extensive reading as an important source of comprehensible input, modified input, as well as focus on form. Additionally, findings from a quasi-experimental study on the efficacy of an extensive reading program in building vocabulary knowledge and lexical access speed reveal that participants who finished at least one book developed both types of lexical competence. On this basis, Horst arrives at the conclusion that the opportunity to read large amounts of text and to see words repeatedly in a variety of contexts may have accounted for the substantial gains detailed in the study.

Chapter 3 discusses the relationship between vocabulary acquisition and three learner-related factors: namely, background knowledge, passage sight vocabulary, and general L2 reading proficiency. Pulido reviews relevant theories and empirical findings, and concludes that these three factors modulate learners' processing and learning of lexical items by means of influencing reading processes. Specifically, background knowledge relieves the demand on readers' attentional resources at the level of understanding the content of a text, thereby freeing up resources for more effective short-term lexical input processing. Research has also shown that lower-level processing, and, by extension, incidental vocabulary gains, could be enhanced with even a minimum level of L2 reading proficiency. Finally, a larger L2 passage sight vocabulary allows for wider text coverage, and hence leads to a greater level of vocabulary development during the course of reading. According to Pulido, learners who are advanced in these three aspects are more likely to make greater incidental vocabulary gains (i.e., enjoy deeper lexical processing because of richer and more efficient text comprehension) as a result of reading.

In chapter 4, Leow synthesizes research on the effects that the three major types of text modification – simplification, enhancement, and glossing – have on comprehension and acquisition. His motivation is to determine whether textual modification would direct learners' attention to the targeted items (e.g., vocabulary, forms, or structures) in the text, and whether learners exposed to modified input would perform better in terms of: (1) comprehension, as well as (2) the acquisition of the targeted L2 features. Research on text simplification has yielded inconsistent evidence with regard to its putative positive effects on comprehension, offering little support for its potential effects on promoting intake. Similarly, research findings pertaining to textual enhancement remain inconclusive as to whether such enhancement would facilitate learners' comprehension and L2 acquisition. On the other hand, research comparing a glossed condition and an unglossed one apparently suggests that glossing overall promotes L2 comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Moreover, different types of text modification were found to have differential effects on directing learners' attentional resources to target-like language forms. Leow recommends that teachers gain perspective of the crucial role of attention and awareness in L2 development, especially in terms of input processing and attention-drawing through repeated exposures to the target forms in context.

Part 2 addresses pedagogical issues with regard to how L2 reading should be taught. It opens with chapter 5 – Freeman and Freeman's recommendations to teach L2 reading from two different views: a word identification view, and a socio-psycholinguistic view. A word identification view adopts a skills approach, emphasizing bottom-up decoding processes;

whereas on the other hand, a socio-psycholinguistic view is largely top-down and holistic, treating reading as a universal process of comprehension relying on background knowledge. To illustrate how these different views are deployed in actual teaching settings, scenarios that correspond to each of the views are presented. In their final analysis, Freeman and Freeman suggest that L2 reading instruction should focus on transferring L1 reading experiences into L2 reading, thus highlighting the need to teach reading as a general literacy ability in learners' L1(s). In this connection, the socio-psycholinguistic view could be an ideal approach for teaching L2 reading.

In chapter 6, Anderson introduces his ACTIVE reading approach, which consists of (1) Activating prior knowledge, (2) Cultivating vocabulary, (3) Thinking about meaning, (4) Increasing reading fluency, (5) Verifying reading strategies, and (6) Evaluating progress. Pedagogical recommendations are provided for each of these components. To activate prior knowledge, Anderson suggests classroom activities such as pre-reading discussions, learning text structures, and making predictions. To cultivate vocabulary during reading, he stresses the importance of diverse vocabulary learning strategies and the need to raise students' morphological awareness. In terms of thinking about meaning, he recommends encouraging students to (a) formulate their own questions about the reading, (b) summarize what they understand from the reading, and (c) question the author. As for improving reading fluency, Anderson suggests a list of classroom activities, including shadow reading, rate-buildup reading, repeated reading, as well as class-paced and self-paced reading. In order to verify strategies, he suggests asking students to produce verbal reports that raise their awareness of their own strategy use; he also reminds researchers and teachers of the dynamic and interactive nature of L2 reading processes. To assess reading progress, he recommends the use of reading logs, reading rate graphs, and records of repeated reading.

In chapter 7, Cobb introduces various uses of computer programs in L2 reading instruction, particularly in relation to vocabulary building. Web-based programs such as *Vocabprofile* can serve as a powerful tool to improve L2 readers' low rates of vocabulary acquisition and narrow coverage of the vocabulary acquired through reading. More specifically, Cobb believes that computer programs can: (1) offer abundant amounts of reading materials which serve to reduce the gap in L2 readers' lexical coverage, (2) be a referential gadget in text selection in a way that maximizes L2 readers' vocabulary acquisition, (3) help teachers to create a dedicated and contextualized word frequency list, and (4) facilitate the transfer of vocabulary knowledge into reading novel text. Based on the discussion, Cobb argues that Web-based programs, though often bypassed by many L2 reading researchers and teachers, have the potential to cast light on a new direction for L2 reading instruction, given their wide variety of uses and user friendliness.

Finally, in chapter 8, Han and D'Angelo discuss how best to strike a balance between comprehension-based (i.e., semantic) processing and language-based (i.e., syntactic) processing in L2 reading instruction. In their view, L2 reading instruction has displayed an overriding focus on extracting meaning from a text, overemphasizing the role of learners' background knowledge. This tendency has led to the unbalanced development of L2 reading competence – that is, strong general understanding but weak local comprehension. As such, there is a need for a well-adjusted teaching method for L2 reading instruction. Han and D'Angelo propose the Dual Approach as an

alternative pedagogical approach, which aims at balancing reading for both communicative and acquisitional purposes. Specifically, instruction should begin with achieving comprehension, which paves the way for attending to linguistic forms, especially for form-meaning mapping. Practical strategies such as input enhancement, processing instruction, and narrow reading are among those that are recommended for the Dual Approach.

One merit of this volume is its venture to cross the boundaries between approaches originating from different epistemological bases, as well as between L2 reading research and classroom practices. As a start, the book brings together chapters written by (i) researchers in L2 reading, who regard comprehension as the goal in and of itself, and (ii) SLA researchers, who consider comprehension as a means to the goal of L2 learning. By juxtaposing these two contrasting views, the volume not only provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of L2 reading research and instruction, but also reveals naturally the dearth of research that tackles the relationship between L2 reading and L2 acquisition. As such, the volume clearly foreshadows prospective directions for future L2 reading research, with a view to illustrating the symbiotic relationships between the dual dimensions of L2 reading, and its pertinence to L2 acquisition. Furthermore, connections are made between research findings and teaching practices within and across chapters, thus creating a synergy throughout the volume. Within each chapter, the author(s) provide(s) very specific teaching suggestions based on their seasoned understanding of the nature of L2 reading. Across chapters, the theoretically-oriented and practically-oriented perspectives to L2 reading serve to complement each other, thus presenting a comprehensive picture of where the field is currently.

In addition, the volume also presents shared understandings of L2 reading among researchers, and hence serves as a useful channel for readers to grasp the unique complexities of L2 reading from the crosslinguistic influence of the L1 writing systems on L2 orthography acquisition, through the essential role of vocabulary in L2 reading comprehension, to the importance of micro and macro comprehension strategies. Among these components, vocabulary is highlighted as having received extensive attention from L2 reading researchers, as can be seen from the dominance of the comprehension-oriented approach to L2 reading. While comprehension is undeniably the core construct of any L2 reading instruction, components of L2 reading other than vocabulary – notably, grammar, which lies at the conjunction between literacy-oriented and language-oriented approaches – warrant a much larger amount of empirical research on the dynamics of the process of L2 reading comprehension, and its relationship to L2 acquisition.

Overall, the volume makes a significant contribution in deepening readers' understanding of L2 reading in general, and in raising readers' awareness of the need for synthesizing and integrating disparate perspectives. In doing so, the book leads readers to specific future directions for L2 reading research and instruction, which would hopefully overcome the discrepancies between the theoretical and pedagogical approaches. Ultimately, the volume empowers its target audience – L2 reading researchers and teachers – to promote the joint development of L2 reading ability and L2 competence.

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