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***Reading and Language Learning***

K. Koda, Editor

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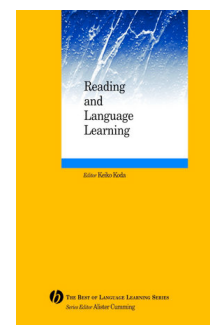
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Growing out of the conceptual theories of first language (L1) reading studies, research on second language (L2) reading has witnessed considerable progress during the past several decades and “is no longer the mere imitator of first language research and models” (Bernhardt, 2005, p. 141). L2 reading researchers have examined various factors (e.g., word recognition ability, metalinguistic awareness, and vocabulary knowledge) that influence reading processes in a second language, aiming to construct viable theoretical frameworks based on the specificity of L2 data (Koda, 2004). Despite the progress of the field, there remain a number of important issues regarding the connections between L1 and L2 literacy development, and between L2 reading and second language acquisition that deserve researchers’ keen attention. This edited volume, *Reading and Language Learning*, employs a cross-linguistic perspective that addresses this research gap by examining the reciprocity between L2 reading and second language learning. The book consists of six articles that were originally published in the journal of *Language Learning* in 2007, all of which, according to the editor, “treat *L2 reading* as a complex, multilingual, multifaceted construct” (p. 32).

The first three articles, “Reading and Language Learning: Crosslinguistic Constraints on Second Language Reading Development” by Koda, “Acquisition of Literacy in Bilingual Children: A Framework for Research” by Bialystok, and “Schema Theory and Knowledge-Based Processes in Second Language Reading Comprehension: A Need for Alternative Perspectives” by Nassaji, reviewed key issues in second language reading research, including crosslinguistic language constraints, bilingualism, and the roles of schema theory and knowledge-based comprehension.

Koda’s article examines the variety of constraints on L2 reading development. The author explains how the variance in metalinguistic awareness of different language systems may affect second language reading, pointing out that research on transfer has been shifting its focus from “characterizing L1 influences” to “identifying the resources available to L2 learners at the onset of literacy learning” (p. 17). Bialystok’s piece focuses on how bilingualism functions as an important factor that exerts significant effect on children’s literacy development. The author maintains that three fundamental skills—oral language proficiency, concept of printing and text, and metalinguistic awareness—deserve further investigation in L2 reading research in order to

provide concrete explanations about how children cope with the actual reading processes. Nassaji's article challenges the insufficiency of the widely explored schema theory, arguing that schema theory overlooks the creative and constructive nature of knowledge building and learning to read. Accordingly, the author proposes an alternative perspective for L2 reading research based on Kintsch's construction-integration model, which refutes the top-down, expectation-driven conceptualization of knowledge, and emphasizes the constructive nature of L2 reading.

The last three articles, "Inhibition or Compensation? A Multidimensional Comparison of Reading Processes in Dutch and English" by Stevenson, Schoonen, and de Glopper, "The Relationship between Text Comprehension and Second Language Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition: A Matter of Topic Familiarity" by Pulido, and "Commonalities and Differences in Word Identification Skills among Learners of English as a Second Language" by Wang and Koda, present three empirical studies that respectively look into the comparisons of reading processes in different languages, the connections between L2 reading comprehension and incidental vocabulary acquisition, and word identification skills across languages.

Stevenson et al. employed think-aloud protocols and compared the reading strategies used by Dutch high school students as they read in Dutch and English. The results showed that neither the simple inhibition nor the compensation hypothesis model captured the complexities of the reading processes. Rather, foreign language readers focused on local textual information as they tried to comprehend the global meanings of the texts. Pulido's study examined the connections between the level of text comprehension and the acquisition of new vocabulary. By utilizing a repeated-measures approach on adult L2 Spanish learners across different proficiency levels, the researcher confirmed the consistent relationship between text comprehension and vocabulary gain and retention. However, results also suggested that the relationship between input processing and vocabulary intake appeared to be inconsistent, with topic familiarity functioning as an important variable. In their study, Wang and Koda explored whether Korean and Chinese ESL college students were sensitive to the frequency and regularity features of English written words, and whether the distinctions in L1 orthographies affected the levels of sensitivity. By using a naming and auditory category judgment task, the researchers revealed that both the Korean and Chinese students demonstrated faster speed and more accuracy in identifying frequent and regular words. Nevertheless, the Korean students were generally better in terms of naming words and retrieving auditory meaning than the Chinese students, confirming the interrelatedness of L1 orthographies and L2 reading.

Discussing both theoretical and empirical advancement in L2 reading research on the reciprocal relationship between reading and second language acquisition, this edited volume provides a comprehensive overview of the current research development in this particular direction. The review articles present in-depth analyses of how crosslinguistic constraints, bilingualism, and schema theory have been taken up and developed in L2 reading research. In addition, the articles in which empirical studies are reported seek to explore new perspectives that could be employed to investigate key issues in L2 reading research. Stevenson et al., for example, point out the inadequacy of previous research that tended to perceive reading strategies as composed of broad categories while paying little attention to the impact of each specific strategy. By addressing various aspects of the relationship between reading and L2 learning, between L1 linguistic background and L2 reading, the book fulfills its goal of treating L2 reading as a complex and crosslinguistic construct.

Despite all its strengths, the book seems to lack a convincing overarching rationale that clarifies the necessity of selecting the six articles to form this special volume and how they

connect with each other in discussing the interdependence between L2 reading and language learning. Although the editor briefly explains in the beginning of the book that the common feature of the articles lies in their emphasis on the multifaceted nature of second language reading, no further information is provided as to how the different issues discussed in these articles represent the essential facets of L2 reading. Without an explicit account of how the specific topics addressed in the articles contribute to a general understanding of the reciprocity between reading and language learning, the book's mission of shedding light on the construct of L2 reading is inevitably compromised. It would have been helpful if the editor had included a preface to outline the background on which the volume was developed, and elucidated how the articles together produce unique insights about L2 reading.

Overall, this edited volume offers substantial discussions on the connections between L2 reading and second language learning, covering a variety of key issues of L2 reading at different levels. By including both theoretical reviews and empirical studies, the book helps graduate students as well as senior scholars who are interested in doing research on L2 reading to develop a conceptual and practical understanding of what has been done, what can be done, and what needs to be done to advance the field. Seeking to unfold the "complex, multilingual, multifaceted" nature of L2 reading (p. 32), the book encourages future researchers to dig into the interface between reading development and second-language learning.

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