



Reviewed work:

Second language reading research and instruction: Crossing the boundaries. (2009).
ZhaoHong Han & Neil J. Anderson (Eds.). Ann
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Although the title of this volume suggests that ZhaoHong Han and Neil J. Anderson have set out to cross the boundaries between research and instruction in second language (L2) reading, in fact this goal is secondary to the main purpose of this edited volume. Their primary intention involves reconciling three approaches that have caused divisions on both sides of the research/instruction line: the whole language approach, the skills approach, and the acquisition approach. The chasm they wish to bridge lies between the different fields in which scholars study reading, including second language acquisition (SLA) and literacy development, not between research and instruction.

Intended for second language researchers, educators, and graduate students, this book offers a strong scholarly introduction to the constructs that have preoccupied L2 reading researchers and the assumptions that have driven much instructional design. Though the content of every chapter may not seem immediately accessible to readers who are not already well-versed in reading research, the contributors offer guidelines for future research and a range of highly applicable instructional approaches. This volume has much to offer current and aspiring researchers, teachers who strive for research-based curriculum design, and their educators.

After the editors' introduction, this book consists of eight chapters by various contributors, each followed by discussion questions, and an epilogue by William Grabe. While, the eight chapters fall into two sections, four on research and four on instruction, building theoretical and practical bridges from research findings to pedagogical recommendations remains a consistent priority throughout the book.

In Chapter 1, Shiotsu reports on her investigation of the differences between skilled and less-skilled readers in regard to word recognition fluency. After assessing her 219 Japanese learners of English as a foreign language (EFL)—based on measures of sentence reading speed and passage comprehension and measuring reaction times to words, pseudowords, and orthographically irregular letter strings—Shiotsu selected and compared 81 above-average readers and 58 below-average readers. She found that the more skilled readers were able to access meaning more quickly and had greater sensitivity to the orthographic regularities of English than the less skilled readers.

Horst, in Chapter 2, not only provides the results of a pilot study on extensive reading carried out in the context of an English as a second language (ESL) course at a Canadian community center, but she also demonstrates ways to investigate the effects of extensive reading using graded readers, corpus-based text analysis, and individualized assessments. Her findings suggest that learners who chose to engage in extensive reading gained vocabulary through incidental learning and that they gained more vocabulary knowledge and fluency than classmates who did not take advantage of extensive reading. Horst developed her measures of gain in vocabulary knowledge and lexical access speed based on the texts that learners actually chose to read using the online tools at the *Compleat Lexical Tutor* website, which are further discussed in Cobb's chapter (7).

In Chapter 3, Pulido summarizes research offering evidence that readers who are already at a higher proficiency level comprehend texts better and acquire more language ability through reading than their peers at lower proficiency levels. She argues that readers who process text more efficiently have more cognitive resources available while they read; as a result, they can draw on inferencing skills, background knowledge, and metacognitive strategies and thus experience greater comprehension and greater language development.

Leow, in Chapter 4, focuses on the roles of noticing, attention, and memory, and discusses ways in which these features have been operationalized in various studies of reading. Based on his own research and a number of other studies, Leow argues that input modification to highlight target words has little impact on retention of these words, though glossing may play an important role in text comprehension and vocabulary gain. Perhaps more importantly, Leow points to the failure of these studies to assess whether their participants actually attended to the highlighted words and contends that think-aloud protocols would provide a useful means of assessing learners' online responses to the unknown target words as they encounter them in texts.

Although these four chapters in Part I all offer pedagogic implications in addition to research findings, Chapter 5, the first chapter in Part II by Freeman and Freeman definitively marks the boundary between the two sections of the book. Constructing their chapter around two vivid vignettes of teachers in first-grade classrooms using highly divergent teaching methods, Freeman and Freeman contrast these teachers' underlying assumptions about what it means to read better

and present them as examples of two distinct perspectives: the word recognition view and the socio-psycholinguistic view. The authors maintain that the socio-psycholinguistic approach, which involves facilitating learners' use of background knowledge, linguistic cues, and psychological strategies, effectively integrates the goals of comprehension and acquisition in reading instruction.

In Chapter 6, Anderson delineates the research basis for his *ACTIVE* approach to reading instruction: *Activate* prior knowledge, *Cultivate* vocabulary, *Think* about meaning, *Increase* reading fluency, *Verify* reading strategies, *Evaluate* progress. As this framework provides the structure for the recently released ACTIVE Skills for Reading series (Anderson, 2007, 2008, 2009), instructors who use or are considering using these ESL textbooks will find these explanations valuable. However, the transparent and insightful connections between research and pedagogy in regard to each of these components provide a rich supply of guidelines and inspiration for any reading instructors. A further strength of this chapter is the discussion of reading assessment in the classroom and the emphasis on the importance of assessing reading comprehension in conjunction with reading fluency.

The focus of Chapter 7 by Cobb describes a series of corpus-based analyses of texts for academic and general purposes and specifies ways to make use of online corpus analysis tools available through Cobb's *Compleat Lexical Tutor* website at www.lex tutor.ca. According to Cobb's analysis, L2 users of English need to know around 12,000 word families in order to reach the target of 95% known words in new texts, but in order to know these word families sufficiently they must encounter them frequently in a rich variety of contexts. However, Cobb claims that a much smaller number of word families (2,570) can give learners access to 90% of words in academic texts, and he therefore advocates the inclusion of a vocabulary course in all academic programs that can help to ensure that learners know these key families.

In Chapter 8, Han & D'Angelo provide a cogent argument for providing learners with a dual approach to reading that integrates comprehension and language acquisition. In their view, instruction should promote semantic as well as syntactic processing, but semantic processing should precede syntactic processing. As do many of the contributors to this volume, these authors imply that a purely communicative approach to reading instruction that lacks attention to form will fail, though a structural approach will rarely succeed if it lacks meaningful contexts for the forms. Though the majority of this chapter is theoretical, the authors endorse pedagogical approaches described by other contributors including Freeman and Freeman's socio-psycholinguistic approach and Cobb's take on narrow reading for both comprehension and acquisition of forms.

The volume concludes with a comprehensive overview by William Grabe, whose works are cited heavily throughout the volume (e.g., Grabe, 2004; Grabe & Stoller, 2002). The discussion begins with components of reading comprehension and continues with overarching themes including the comparative roles of extensive reading, vocabulary knowledge, and fluency. Novices to reading research may benefit from reading this epilogue prior to the other chapters, though novices and experts alike will appreciate Grabe's recommendations for further research involving longitudinal studies, replications in different contexts, and a greater focus on comprehension in SLA studies, which typically focus on language knowledge and uptake.

The strengths of this book lie in the contributors, the studies that may serve as models for future research on extensive reading and vocabulary development, and the well-structured and explicitly research-based guidelines for instruction. Anderson's sections on "putting theory into practice" and Cobb's efforts to relate corpus analysis to large-scale and classroom-level instructional decisions may prove particularly valuable. Overall, the contributors offer a careful consideration of the interaction between reading for comprehension and reading for language acquisition in a variety of contexts and with a variety of methods.

The collection would be stronger, however, if it included a greater range of contexts, participants, and methods. While this volume discusses second language learners from a variety of different first language backgrounds, the vast majority of studies mentioned in this volume focus on English as the target language. The collection could have given greater attention to other target languages and the challenges of differing first language (L1) and L2 orthographies, as does Shiotsu (Chapter 1). Regarding methods, the research cited throughout the volume is predominantly quantitative research from experimental and quasi-experimental studies. In addition, the research section is weighted heavily toward vocabulary acquisition as a measure of reading development, though this preoccupation aligns with Cobb's contention that vocabulary is foundational to reading fluency. The emphasis on features of proficient reading that can be assessed quantitatively (word recognition, lexical access speed, passage comprehension) means that the research chapters in this volume (Ch. 1–4) have little to offer in regard to learners' actual use of strategies, background knowledge, discourse comprehension skills, and broader literacy skills as they read. As Grabe points out, there is also a lack of research on long-term development, which may be symptomatic of this gap throughout the field.

Grabe's epilogue highlights the value of this book for students, researchers and instructors: "The continued exploration of the relationships between SLA and reading comprehension...is necessary, and this volume will contribute strongly to further explorations" (p. 205). For graduate courses in L2 reading, this volume could be a useful companion to a textbook such as Grabe's (2009) *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice* or a complement to a collection of context-rich literacy case studies. Novice and expert researchers and instructors can engage with the material here and extend the bridges these contributors have begun to build across "the boundaries."

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About the Reviewer

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