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Reviewed work:

Second Language Reading Research and Instruction: Crossing the Boundaries. (2009). ZhaoHong Han and Neil J. Anderson (Eds.). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. Pp. 240. ISBN 9780472033508. \$32.50

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In *Second Language Reading Research and Instruction*, Han and Anderson present a collection of eight core chapters divided into two sections, the first presenting the findings of second language reading research, and the second consisting of explanations of and suggestions for second language reading instruction. As the subtitle of the book indicates, the purpose of the book is to cross boundaries. One of these boundaries is the boundary between research and instruction, which is crossed through equal attention to each in this volume.

A second, and likely more profound, boundary that exists in reading research is that between the study of reading as a skill and that of reading as a source of L2 input. This difference has long existed in reading research, and is one that, as the editors rightfully point out in the introduction, needs to be resolved. Han and Anderson highlight that this need is currently increasing due to a recent emphasis on content-based teaching, and the existence of such a dichotomy leaves teachers not knowing where to focus their efforts (i.e., on reading content or on reading skill). As a result, the chapters in this volume reflect this need to “cross the boundaries,” with equal attention paid to reading as a skill and reading as a source of language.

It is worth noting that this book could potentially be used either by a single reader or as a textbook for a course on L2 reading. At the end of each chapter is a page with about five questions that encourage the reader to go beyond the content offered in each chapter, and to apply the concepts presented to the real world using the reader's own knowledge and experiences. In addition, as the chapters are all written by separate authors about different topics, they do not necessarily have to be used in order.

The first chapter in the research section of the book presents a study by Shiotsu, which investigates the relationship between L2 word recognition and L2 reading proficiency, and the effect of L2 word recognition on L2 reading comprehension among L1 Japanese university EFL students. A fairly thorough review of the cross-orthographic word recognition literature is provided. In this study, three effects that are found in word recognition studies were investigated: word superiority (over non-words), orthographic pattern regularity, and the effect of access to meaning (tasks which require access to meaning and those that do not). What was interesting about this study was that the sentence comprehension test as well as the word recognition test stimuli were designed to result in extremely high accuracy rates. Although not stated in the chapter, this approach is perhaps due to cautions (by, e.g., Juffs, 2001; Wang, Koda, & Perfetti, 2003) that L2 reaction time data are often unreliable due to high error rates. The results of this study showed that although the high- and low-proficiency L2 readers performed similarly in terms of the word superiority effect, low-proficiency readers showed more of a meaning effect and high-proficiency readers benefited more from orthographic regularity. As a result of the decreased performance of the low-proficiency group when reading for meaning, the author advises that, unlike many of the current methods, classroom-based L2 word recognition training should be meaning-based as well.

Chapters 2 and 3, by Horst and Pulido respectively, investigate incidental vocabulary acquisition. Horst's study is of adult immigrants in Montreal, and investigated the effect of extensive reading. In the first of two experiments, Horst administered word definitional knowledge pretests and posttests to ascertain vocabulary gains from reading graded readers. Interestingly, the pretest was constructed from a corpus assembled from the 60 graded readers that were available to the students, and the posttests were constructed for each individual reader based on the particular books that that person had read. Findings showed that reader participants were able to recall and retain about one-third of the unfamiliar words encountered during reading; these results contrast with studies (e.g. Horst et al., 1998) that have shown positive but much more gradual vocabulary gains as a result of extensive reading. In addition, the authors kept to the "crossing boundaries" theme of this volume and conducted a second experiment to measure the results of extensive reading on word recognition speed (that is, reading as a skill). These results suggest that words that are encountered more frequently are recognized more quickly.

Pulido's chapter dovetails nicely, and provides a comprehensive description and review of reader-based individual differences that may play a role in incidental vocabulary acquisition, namely background knowledge, passage sight vocabulary, and general L2 reading proficiency. Pulido also gives descriptions of relevant experimental studies that illustrate the specific effects of each factor. These particular factors fit nicely with the themes of this book; they are all types of knowledge that can be taught, and they are all pieces of the input that can assist in performing a skill, namely inferencing. After a review of each factor, Pulido comes to the conclusion that

“the rich do get richer” (p.81; see also Stanovich, 1986); that is, individuals with greater background knowledge, greater passage sight vocabulary, or greater L2 reading proficiency tend to gain more in terms of incidental vocabulary acquisition. Pulido also outlines suggestions for pedagogical application of these factors.

In the fourth chapter, the last in the research-focused first half of the book, Leow asks the question of whether modification of L2 texts leads to improved comprehension and acquisition, and why. Text modification, a common practice in foreign and second language classes, is performed in order to make texts more comprehensible to learners, and to help guide learners’ attention to the parts of a text that the teacher or researcher wishes to focus on (e.g., specific vocabulary items or grammatical forms). Leow describes the theoretical underpinnings and gives examples of empirical studies for each of three types of text modification: simplified input (such as the graded readers used in chapter 2), input enhancement, and glossing. Concluding that in the literature to date, text modification has not been shown to be successful, Leow suggests a link in the chain of reasoning that needs to be examined, namely whether these methods of modification actually draw attention to what they hope to highlight. Leow states that the small number of studies that have implemented concurrent data elicitation procedures have shown that when reading manipulated texts, readers’ attention is often solely on comprehension of semantic elements, rather than on targeted linguistic forms (thus, again, showing the difference between reading as a source of input and reading as a skill). Leow suggests that the key might lie in the role that awareness plays, although there has been no empirical study to date investigating the role of awareness in modified text.

Chapter 5 begins the second half of the book, focused on second language reading instruction. This chapter, by D. Freeman and Y. Freeman, introduces the reader to two classroom teachers’ different methods of teaching their first grade classes reading skills, one emphasizing phonics and phoneme mapping (cf. chapter 1 by Shiotsu), and the second focusing on the socio-psycholinguistic view of reading (again returning to the skill vs. input dichotomy theme). Freeman and Freeman emphasize that the first method is more difficult and of less value for ELLs, and that instead, teachers should focus on building meaning through background knowledge and strategy instruction. The authors come to the conclusion that word recognition training will only help students to perform well on first-grade reading tests, and that schema building and strategy instruction will help all through school. It is interesting to note that this view may stand in contrast with compensatory models of reading (e.g., Stanovich, 1980).

The sixth chapter, by Anderson, describes a very explicit attempt to cross the boundary between L2 reading research and L2 reading instruction. In this chapter, Anderson describes the *ACTIVE Skills for Reading* textbook series for reading in English as a second language. This series was designed by Anderson based on six principles identified from L2 reading research: (a) Activate prior knowledge (as Pulido suggests in chapter 3), (b) cultivate vocabulary, (c) think about meaning, (d) increase reading fluency (as suggested by Shiotsu in chapter 1), (e) verify reading strategies (as suggested by Freeman and Freeman in chapter 5), and (f) evaluate progress. This chapter lives up to its claim of bridging research and instruction by outlining the research upon which each of the six principles is based, and providing a number of practical activities that teachers can actually use to implement instruction based on each principle.

Chapter 7, by Cobb, poses the question of whether the use of computers in second language reading is necessary or nice. That is, is it merely nice to have as a motivation booster, or is it an absolute necessity in order to provide a form of learning that cannot be accomplished any other way? Cobb describes how computers have been used to examine corpora, yielding results that show how many words readers typically need to know, and that the vocabulary knowledge of a typical adult L2 learner may not fit neatly into vocabulary frequency bands. Regarding L2 reading instruction, the main point that Cobb presents seems to be one of awareness by the teacher—awareness of the difference between L1 and L2 vocabulary knowledge, awareness of which words are most useful for learners to know, and awareness of how to choose appropriate texts for learners. Throughout, Cobb provides links to his extremely useful web site, the *Compleat Lexical Tutor*, and explains how to use the tools available.

In the eighth chapter, Han and D'Angelo introduce a new approach to second language reading instruction. This new approach is based on one of the boundaries that this book seeks to cross—that between the treatment of reading as a method of knowledge acquisition, or as a skill in itself, here defined as reading *comprehension* vs. reading *acquisition*. Popular current L2 teaching methods such as communicative language teaching focus almost solely on comprehension, with less attention paid to the study of linguistic forms. Such an emphasis results in an unbalanced development of L2 ability. The method outlined by Han and D'Angelo in this chapter is one that seeks to resolve this difference between communicative teaching and previous, grammar-based teaching methods (e.g., the structural approach) by incorporating a dual approach that takes comprehension-based instruction, and incorporates an acquisition-focused element. However, while the description of this approach makes it seem to be something brand new, the described pedagogical applications consist of methods that are actually quite old: input enhancement (Sharwood Smith, 1993), processing instruction (VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993), and narrow reading (Krashen, 1981). As this new approach to reading pedagogy theory develops, it will be important to also develop corresponding pedagogical applications.

Overall, this volume covers the spectrum of L2 reading, thus accomplishing its goal of crossing the boundaries between L2 reading research and L2 reading instruction, as well as between reading as a source of input and reading as a skill. It is obvious from each chapter that it is impossible to separate these dimensions, as each chapter includes both a review of research as well as practical suggestions for L2 reading teachers. As such, this volume would be an asset to any practicing L2 reading teacher, teacher trainer, researcher, or graduate student.

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