



Reviewed work:
Understanding Advanced Second-Language Reading.
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The main purpose of this book is to provide an innovative contribution to the field of reading in a foreign language by discussing the importance of adults' and adolescents' ability to learn how to comprehend foreign language upper-register texts¹ such as literature, essays, and commentaries which include a great deal of sophisticated morphosyntax, lexicon, and nuances. Using the theory of compensatory processing—the study of how prior and current knowledge resources assist each other and readers in comprehending superior-level texts—the author fundamentally argues that readers' first language (L1) literacy and second language (L2) grammatical knowledge often work together to enhance advanced second-language reading comprehension. The author also fosters the fundamental argument that a lot of common instructional procedures do not take L1 literacy into consideration when teaching reading comprehension in a foreign language and offers suggestions on how different instructional procedures can enhance

¹ The author uses the terms *upper-register texts*, *superior-level texts*, and *advanced-level texts* synonymously to refer to authentic academic texts that require readers to use higher-order thinking skills to process and comprehend target languages.

comprehension through the interaction between L1 and L2 phonological knowledge and word recognition. Overall, this book, which furnishes readers with applied linguistic analyses of advanced L2 reading comprehension in different languages such as German, Japanese, Spanish, and Indonesian, is an in-depth theoretical and empirical expansion of Bernhardt's (1991) *Reading Development in a Second Language*.

Chapter 1 begins by arguing that the foreign language instruction curriculum in Europe during the 19th century and in the United States of America (USA) during the 20th century was focused on reading only and negatively affected students' comprehension because most instructors did not use an oral approach to reading. Instead, students often used dictionaries while reading to help decode words and inauthentic reading texts characterized by mechanical translation and grammar activities that are created for teaching foreign languages. The author also argues that the field of reading in a foreign language has changed drastically during the 21st century, because it is no longer seen as a subfield of foreign language education, but as a major field of language teaching which distinguishes between "language and language as a linguistic system...and culture and subculture" (p. 3). Language refers to the generally accepted and unaccepted social norms of speech represented in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Language as a linguistic system encompasses all of the linguistic phenomena dealing with syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and phonology that characterize different speech communities. Culture refers to the ability of advanced-level readers to spontaneously shift social and behavioral registers when reading texts based on certain expressions used by characters representing a wide variety of different world cultures. Subculture refers to the ability of these readers to comprehend the nuances used in texts that represent specific cultural customs, traditions, and norms of different speech communities who share common phonological dialectal traits, but have different semantic, pragmatic, or syntactic dialectal traits.

In regard to these aforementioned traits, the author argues that foreign language readers' L1 literacy is much more precise, profound, and coherent in L1 than in L2 and therefore, L1 often works with L2 in order to help foreign language readers accurately comprehend upper-register texts. For example, the author includes an example of a native Spanish-speaking reader who provides substantial detail in complete sentences when summarizing an article written in Spanish about President Obama, whereas the native English-speaking reader's output is very brief, general, and demonstrates uncertainty about facts. Reader 1, the non-native reader states, "He is revolutionary like Jefferson, Kennedy, Reagan???" (p. 11), while Reader 2, the native reader produces, "Es un revolucionario como Jefferson, Kennedy y Reagan pero es centrista. (*He is revolutionary like Jefferson, Kennedy, and Reagan but he is centrist.*)" (p.11). The native reader has complete comprehension linguistic competence in L1 and the non-native reader has incomplete comprehension linguistic competence in L2. Although this argument is well substantiated in this example, the author does not discuss the possible reading comprehension struggles that advanced-level readers may have if they have incomplete comprehension competence in both L1 and L2. The author argues that in addition to analyzing complete L1 and incomplete L2 comprehension competence, the field of foreign language reading also needs to examine the interaction between incomplete L1 and incomplete L2 reading comprehension when advanced-level readers process and reconstruct meaning from upper-register texts.

Chapter 2 discusses the importance of L1 literacy theories such as those of Hudson (2007) and Grabe (2009) which focused on reading comprehension in L1 without considering how L1 and L2 interact when readers process foreign language upper-register texts. The author also reviews the following observation methodologies used to analyze L1 and L2 readers' comprehension during the process of reading foreign language texts: miscue analysis (top-down), eye movement (bottom-up), eye-mind assumption (bottom-up), and interactive models (top-down and bottom-up). Goodman's (1968) miscue analysis analyzed the grammatical and oral errors that readers make when processing advanced-level texts. Cattell's (1885) eye movement technique examined how readers interact visually with texts. Carpenter and Just's (1977) eye-mind assumption strategy analyzed how readers acquire information to determine how comprehension may be reflected in certain eye movement patterns. Coady's (1979) interactive model examined how readers comprehend information through prior knowledge, lexicon identification, and general semantic concepts. The author argues that these observation methodologies are inadequate for assessing advanced-level L2 reading comprehension and that compensatory-based methodologies such as Stanovich's (1980) interactive compensatory model and Bernhardt's (2005) compensatory model of L2 reading are much more adequate. The former methodologies focus on either top-down theories which emphasize that reading is conceptually driven or bottom-up theories which assume that lower-level comprehension processes such as word recognition must take place before higher-level processes while the latter methodologies suggest that any deficiency in readers' knowledge can be actively assisted by the interaction between L1 and L2 without specific consideration of a "hierarchical nature" of lower- and higher-level processes.

Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive review of L2 reading research studies compiled from various scholarly journals such as *Applied Linguistics*, *Journal of Research in Reading*, and *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. The author analyzes the research studies according to relevant issues that relate to compensatory theory by using the following semantic categories: background knowledge, strategies, testing, intrapersonal variables, transfer, phonological processing/word recognition, instruction, vocabulary, morphosyntax, and genre/text features. The author argues that the majority of the studies in all of these categories fail to examine the potential effect that L1 literacy and reading proficiency may have on L2 literacy and reading proficiency. For example, when discussing Stott's (2004) findings that Japanese readers' prior knowledge about the reading of authentic English language texts instead of inauthentic language texts leading to higher levels of comprehension, the author emphasizes the fact that this study does not consider the potential interactive relationship between L1 literacy and L2 grammatical knowledge which could facilitate readers' proficiency levels in comprehending upper-register texts. In addition to these findings, Upton and Lee-Thompson's (2001) and Morrison's (2004) studies of L1 to L2 transfer clearly showed that L1 influences L2 in text processing, although it still remains unclear how L1 assists L2 reading comprehension in different languages during the process of reading foreign language superior-level texts².

Chapter 4 begins by explaining the three major components of compensatory theory: L1 literacy, language knowledge, and *other*. L1 literacy deals with readers' overall ability to comprehend their native language in different contextual situations. Language knowledge focuses on readers'

² Authentic academic texts; please see the prior footnote for more information.

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grammatical competence. *Other* examines important linguistic (background knowledge of lexicon and phonology of L1 and L2) and social factors (motivation, frequency of exposure to L2, age, etc.) which may have a significant impact on readers' L2 comprehension of upper-register texts. This chapter also discusses how compensatory theory has been applied to L2 reading instruction through the Recall Protocol Procedure (Bernhardt, 1991). This procedure requires readers to read texts independently as many times as they want and later recall and write down as much information as they can remember in L1, L2, or any other language as best suits their learning needs. The purpose of this procedure is to try to determine how readers build their comprehension abilities through the interdependent interaction of L1 and L2 when reading brief, sophisticated, and nuanced texts. The author also provides examples of texts written in Spanish, German, and Urdu which are formatted differently (bullet points, scattered words, and double-spaced lines) but have the same content. These examples demonstrate that Western-world readers' L1 literacy plays a vital role in their comprehension process due to the assumption of viewing paragraph-formatted texts as automatically possessing cohesive meaning. The author fundamentally argues that instructors must employ teaching strategies that encourage readers to use their L1 literacy and knowledge in order to interact with and assist in their L2 reading comprehension processes.

Chapter 5 deals with a detailed discussion of the importance of using literary texts to determine how L1 and L2 interact with each other as advanced-level readers are frequently obliged to access abstract higher-order thinking processes in order to reconstruct the meaning of texts. Ratych (1985) found that the majority of advanced-level foreign language readers often make use of their L1 literary and cultural world knowledge when attempting to comprehend and reconstruct foreign language literary texts. The author argues that compensatory theory is often relevant to the L2 literary reading comprehension process because of readers' primary reliance on L1 knowledge to compensate for deficiencies in L2. To demonstrate how L1 and L2 interact with each other in reading authentic literary materials, the author provides two important examples: eight native English-speaking college students reading and reconstructing the meaning of German literature written in English; and another example of three of these students reading German literature in German and reconstructing the literature in English. The findings of the study show that when students exclusively used L1 to read German literature, they provided extensive detailed descriptions about style, content, and character comparisons using L1 cultural and world knowledge. However, when they used both L1 and L2 to read German literature in German, L1 cultural knowledge and language knowledge interacted with that of L2 which facilitated their ability to remember details of content, recognize German words such as "Schuh" *shoe* and "putzen" *to polish* or *to clean* (p. 93), and identify basic parallel relationships between characters.

Chapter 6 reviews the use of scoring and rating matrix assessment tools which examine how adult readers learn to comprehend foreign language texts written in English and German by writing down everything that they can recall after reading or while orally recalling these texts. In the case of English, the scoring matrix breaks up the phrases of the sentences that readers have to recall into text propositions which are scored using a one-point rating value system based on readers' ability to recall specific grammatical structures. The main purpose of using this scoring matrix is to determine if grammatical knowledge accounts for a significant portion of adult readers' second language reading comprehension. For example, the first three English text

propositions employed are “has become a word” (p.105, predicate phrase), “that evokes panic” (p. 105, relative clause, adjectival modifier of “a word”), and “on the part of the students” (p. 105, prepositional phrase, adjectival modifier of “panic”). These text propositions become more syntactically complex as readers proceed to recall more detailed passages of text. With regard to German, the same text proposition format is used except for having readers write down what they recall instead of allowing them to simultaneously write and orally recalling the text. The qualitative results of these two assessments, one in English and the other in German, show that grammatical knowledge is a strong indicator of the variance in, but not a major portion of adult readers’ second language reading comprehension. The author does not specify the type of data analysis software used to calculate the quantitative results of these reading comprehension assessments. However, the findings show that the correlation value between the rating and scoring assessments “ $r = .66$ ($p < .01$)” (p. 109), indicates that these two methodological tools are very reliable when determining the extent to which oral and written recall processes demonstrate the interdependent interaction between readers’ L1 literacy and L2 grammar knowledge. Overall, the author argues that more instructors need to be aware of the effective use of the abovementioned assessment tools in addition to the use of general pre- and post-assessment protocol questions that ask readers about their background knowledge, newly acquired language and conceptual knowledge.

Chapter 7 argues in favor of the compensatory theory framework by reviewing on-going and new research trends in L2 reading and the need to establish a set of general objectives for the field of L2 reading to differentiate this field from L1 reading. The author suggests that objectives such as “specification of first-language literacy level, measurement of second language grammatical level, [and] multiple texts employed” (p. 122), would be useful when applying compensatory theory to the comprehension of upper-register texts in L2 reading studies. These objectives allow researchers to focus on the interaction between L1 and L2 during the comprehension and reconstruction of foreign language reading texts. In addition to the need for a set of objectives, the author argues for the detailed specification of L2 reading comprehension strategies that are more effective in L2 than in L1 and vice versa so that instructors can more effectively assess to what extent readers depend on the semantics, pragmatics, morphosyntax, or phonological knowledge of L1 literacy.

Overall, this book provides readers with detailed theoretical and empirical knowledge related to how compensatory theory can be effectively applied to L2 advanced-level foreign language reading text processing. The theory does not favor hierarchical theories of text processing because of the conceptual assumptions that separate higher-level processes from lower-level processes. The book is successful in accomplishing the goal of affording readers solid background information which will allow current and future researchers to provide more quantitative and qualitative insights related to L2 comprehension of upper-register texts that consider the simultaneous interaction of L1 and L2 processes. However, this book includes many general research questions throughout each of the chapters that are not fully answered within the context of the chapters. The research questions posed in the final chapter come out of an in-depth discussion about current and future research that needs to be conducted in the field of L2 reading. Some examples of these questions are the following: “When does a reader revert to relying on background knowledge?” (p. 123), “Is translation the key second-language reading strategy?” (p. 125), and “Does this ability to perceive student comprehension processes actually

assist learners in their comprehension?" (p. 126). The end of the book includes a very extensive and useful appendix of resources which provide detailed information about the methodology and the results for many of the studies cited in each chapter.

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