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Reviews

Patricia Carrell, Joanne Devine and David Eskey (eds.)

Interactive approaches to second language reading. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988. (Paperback 289 pp.)

Second language teachers will readily agree that being able to read in the second language is of critical importance to their students. Yet much of the most valuable recent reading theory and research is inaccessible to the ordinary teacher because of the specialist vocabulary in which it is reported. A definition of reading as 'an interaction of both "top-down" and "bottom-up" processes - that is processes that utilize background knowledge and schemata and are hence concept driven, as well as those that are primarily text or data driven' (xi) would be intelligible only to those who have a knowledge of schema theory. This book may do something to change that.

The authors are concerned to present a clear picture of second language reading from an interactive perspective. They discuss theory, research, and classroom applications with the needs of a broad professional readership in mind, so they explain all key terms, and generally present an excellent collection of material in an accessible way.

Contributors to the book are drawn from both America and Britain, so the picture of reading is rather broader than usual. Some seminal papers, such as that of Carrell and Eisterhold (1983), have been reprinted, but there is a great deal of original material. Further, the reprinted material has generally been adapted to the particular purposes of this volume.

The general introduction establishes the distinctive emphasis of the book while providing a succinct account of the development of an interactive approach to reading. Thereafter, the book is divided in four sections. Part I deals with interactive models of reading, Part II with interactive approaches to second language reading theory, Part III with empirical studies of interactive approaches to second language reading, and Part IV with theoretical and practical implications of interactive approaches for second language reading pedagogy. These divisions allow adequate attention to be paid to different aspects while treating them as interrelated - the interconnections being skilfully suggested in the general introduction as well as in frequent cross-references.

Thus both those who go to the book for specialist information and those who come to it with a serious interest but very little knowledge of the field are catered for.

The four sections of the book are particularly well introduced. In Part I, for example, readers are given a clear summary of each of the chapters, and then attention is directed to the key concepts by the following questions:

- (1) How have models of the reading process evolved recently, from passive to active to interactive?
- (2) What are the different senses in which the term *interactive* is used to describe and think about reading?
- (3) What are some of the different levels, stages, factors, and aspects of reading that *interact*?
- (4) What is meant by *bottom-up* and *top-down* processing of text?
- (5) What is the particular role in reading comprehension of prior background knowledge already stored in memory?

Part I explores various models of reading, with particular attention being given to the interactive models. Goodman's model is used as a point of departure in tracing the establishment of a view of second language reading as like reading in a first language: the reader *actively* processes information, drawing on background knowledge in doing so. Ironically, Goodman does not see his model of reading as top down, but his work has deeply influenced others who emphasise the reader's application of his knowledge as crucial to the process of reading. The reader is seen by them as an active, decision-making individual who has to employ a number of skills and strategies in arriving at meaning. The authors have used a brief critical review of Goodman's model to show how effective classroom practice must be based on a sound theory of reading instruction, informed by a theory and model of reading.

Some will be disappointed that greater attention has not been given to Frank Smith in the chapter by Samuels and Kamil. However, the authors have carefully defined their position. They succeed in showing how Ausubel (1963) and others had recognised a clear role for prior experience in constructing meaning, but that it was not until computer scientists had simulated human cognition that schema theory clearly emerged. Grabe's chapter is the most complex and challenging. It explores the term *interactive*, pointing out the different ways in which it is used by contemporary writers, and suggests important ways in which the term needs to be redefined.

Part II explores the nature of interactive reading and suggests reasons why second language readers may fail to process text interactively and so read badly. Throughout there is a studied effort to avoid simplistic explanation. Eskey, for instance, argues convincingly for careful attention to be paid to the development of decoding skills, avoiding the danger of an over-emphasis on the higher-level skills. And Carrell points to the deleterious effects of unidirectional processing of text. All the contributors are concerned to show that the new emphasis on top-down processing should not lead to a neglect of bottom-up strategies or skills.

Those with an interest in research will find the investigations in Part III of particular interest. In each case, the empirical studies have been concerned with complex questions, so it is not surprising that the findings are not generally conclusive. Nevertheless, they do provide evidence that should be taken seriously. It seems, for instance, that the ways readers conceptualise the reading process are directly related to their different types of reading performance. Researchers will find the clear accounts of the research most valuable in setting up and defining their own projects, and teachers will be challenged to adapt their own practice in the light of these chapters.

Part IV, which is concerned with the theoretical and practical implications of seeing second language reading as interactive, presents a complex picture. As in the rest of the book, there is a laudable avoidance of simplistic answers. However, one would have expected this part to have offered more to the teacher. Carrell succeeds in making specific pedagogic suggestions without compromising her academic integrity, but the other two chapters rather scant the classroom. Many would welcome articles based on them, written for *FORUM* or *ELT Journal* with these particular needs in mind. The pedagogic implications noted by the writers of Part IV should be given the widest possible coverage.

Taken as a whole, this volume is a splendid contribution to applied linguistics. Reading researchers will find it invaluable. Every postgraduate course in reading should make it a core text. And teachers who are prepared to make the effort will mine it to their own enrichment and the profit of their classes.

E Ridge

Pat Pattison

Developing communication skills: A practical handbook for language teachers, with examples in English, French and German. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. (272 pp.)