Reviewed work:

*Insights into Second Language Reading.* (2005). Keiko Koda. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. http://www.cambridge.org/ Pp. 320. ISBN 0-521-54513-7. $32.99

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The new book by Keiko Koda on second language (L2) reading research is a welcome addition to the currently available books on L2 reading. Koda is one of the world's leading researchers on L2 reading, and this book highlights her strengths as a researcher. Overall, it assembles a convincing interpretation of the abilities involved in the development of L2 reading comprehension. The book has two major goals. First, it synthesizes a wide range of reading research, both first language (L1) and L2, to explain the major component abilities contributing to reading comprehension development. And second, it presents a persuasive argument for the ways in which L2 reading comprehension differ from L1 reading comprehension, thus calling for a distinct theory of L2 reading abilities.

Overall, the book is organized to reflect the cognitive componential view of reading that is dominant among both L1 and L2 reading researchers (and for good reasons). In Chapters 1 and 2, Koda introduces the two major goals of the book and a number of fundamental concepts in the study of L2 reading. In Chapters 3 through 10, she organizes the book around component reading skills, describing major research findings and providing links between the research described and a consistent interpretation of L2 reading comprehension. Chapters 11 and 12 discuss reading assessment and reading instruction, linking implications from the research in earlier chapters to assessment and instructional practices.

The first two chapters address key themes that recur throughout the text. Koda frames the study of reading as involving three major processes: decoding, text information processing, and situation model building. Text information processing involves the combining of words and syntactic units to form a network of major and secondary meaning units that represent the textual information (with relatively minimal reader interpretation). The situation model represents a second level of discourse processing that involves strong textual interpretation through extensive

inferencing, reader background knowledge, and reader attitudes, interests and goals. These three major processes reflect three key competencies by readers – visual word recognition, incremental information integration, and prior knowledge consolidation. This framework underlies the organization of the major section of the book that follows.

Other key ideas developed in the first two chapters include the differences between L1 and L2 reading. L2 reading (for older students) usually involves beginning with L1 literacy skills already in place (as opposed to early child L2 reading). L2 readers draw on L1 literacy experiences and language resources; they begin to develop L2 reading skills before L2 language competency is fully developed; and they engage in dual-language processing that includes assistance and interference from the L1 as well as linguistic processing that involves both languages. There are also reader variables, socio-cultural variables, and contextual variables that limit any universal statements about L2 students' reading comprehension.

Five major themes are developed specifically in Chapter 2: 1) the issue of transfer from L1 to L2 for reading, 2) the important theoretical concepts that emerge from connectionist accounts of cognitive processing abilities (including reading), 3) the centrality of cognitive component skill research for understanding reading development and individual differences among readers, 4) the status of the developmental interdependence hypothesis, and 5) the status of the linguistic threshold hypothesis.

The discussion in Chapter 2 is very helpful in cutting through sometimes complicated and unclear explanations of these topics. In Koda's discussion, she highlights why transfer is an important issue for L2 reading, highlighting differences between L1 and L2 reading. She points out the importance of research on components skills for understanding L2 reading, she provides succinct descriptions of developmental interdependence and the linguistic threshold hypotheses and takes the very reasonable view that these two hypotheses are complementary, rather than competing, views of L2 reading.

She also points out key issues that a connectionist approach emphasizes: knowledge is developed by exposure and experience with the skills needed, learning is a process of building form-meaning relationships, learning is incremental over extended periods of time, automaticity is an outcome of skills development, and overlearned information (e.g., L1 resources and processes) will be activated by new (L2) input. All of these concepts are crucial aspects that influence research on L2 reading.

The major part of the book, Chapters 3 through 10, can be sorted into three sub-sections. The first part covers word recognition, vocabulary knowledge, and intra-word processing, all addressing aspects of decoding. The second set of chapters focus on information integration and discourse processing, covering sentence processing, discourse processing, and text structure and comprehension. The third sub-part, individual differences and reading strategies, steps back from specific component skills processing and looks at these skills as integrated abilities contributing to reading comprehension. Reading strategies represent ways to vary and adjust component reading skills while also strengthening them through more effective reading practice. All of the chapters begin by introducing major concepts and findings from L1 reading research.

Then, as applicable, each chapter discusses cross-linguistic variation in the specific skill. Finally the chapters address L2 research on the specific skill.

Chapters 3 through 5 on decoding abilities are written with great authority. These chapters reflect not only key research studies from other researchers, but also major research contributions by Koda. In word recognition, Koda emphasizes the roles of the component sub-skills of orthographic, phonological, morphological, and semantic processing for word recognition, and how word recognition is necessary for efficient reading comprehension. She stresses the impact of differing L1 orthographic systems on L2 word recognition processing and provides persuasive evidence for this type of transfer effect. She also provides strong evidence for the notion of orthographic distance between the L1 and the L2, showing how differing orthographic distance influences L2 word recognition. In addition, she also highlights the importance of rapid and automatic word recognition for reading development, noting that limited word recognition abilities tend to cause over-reliance on context use and lead to comprehension difficulties. Many of these points are reinforced persuasively by the research reported in chapter five on intraword awareness and word knowledge development. Overall, Koda's explanations converge very nicely with the recent volume on *Second language writing systems*, edited by Cook and Bassetti (2005).

The bottom line for word recognition, and its impact on reading comprehension, is that efficient readers must be able to recognize words both rapidly and very accurately (not an either-or interpretation). In order to be both rapid and accurate, intraword awareness is critical. This view also links back to the long standing views of Charles Perfetti (Perfetti, 1985; Perfetti, 1992; Perfetti & Hart, 2001) on the importance of complete and accurate word recognition as central to reading comprehension abilities, and Koda effectively brings these concepts into L2 research through her own research and in the synthesis presented in these chapters.

The chapter on vocabulary (Chapter 4) is a fairly standard overview of issues relating vocabulary knowledge with reading. Vocabulary is a crucial component skill that supports early reading comprehension development. As readers advance in their abilities, the relation between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension becomes reciprocal. Vocabulary knowledge helps improve reading, and reading exposure and experience lead to vocabulary knowledge gains. One important and less commonly discussed aspect of vocabulary knowledge is the role of dual language lexical organization in L2 reading. The chapter introduces the Bilingual Interactive Activation Model for lexical processing by bilinguals and stresses the idea that there is a continuing role of L1 lexical knowledge in L2 reading processing.

Chapters 6 through 8 address the abilities of the reader to draw information out of sentence and text-level input in order to develop the network of ideas that represent the comprehension of the text and the reader's interpretation of text meaning. Chapter 6 makes a serious effort to assemble and interpret the current research evidence on sentence processing and its impact on reading. However, the chapter also reflects the rather limited research on L2 sentence processing as it applies specifically to reading. Rather than providing persuasive arguments, this chapter offers more speculative interpretations. This end result is in keeping with the limits of L2 research in this area.

The two chapters specifically on discourse processing (Chapters 7 and 8) are on firmer ground and provide a current perspective on both L1 and L2 research in this area. The description of discourse processing draws directly on Kintsch's (1998) and Kintsch and Rawson's (2005) view of discourse comprehension, as does the work of almost all L1 reading researchers. In Chapter 7, Koda also introduces useful discussions of inferencing while reading and the role of background knowledge in reading comprehension. As readers, we tend to make relatively few inferences to maintain textual coherence while we read, though we engage in more elaborative inferencing that involve linkages to background knowledge and evaluations of the text as we reflect on the text information.

Chapter 8 focuses more specifically on the ways in which text structure awareness contributes to reading comprehension. I found the discussion of expository text processing and structure awareness to be stronger than the discussion of narrative text awareness. This preference may reflect an EAP bias on my part, but I generally find the research on narrative structure awareness less persuasive, for both L1 and L2 research contexts. L1 research on the role of narrative structure awareness is complicated, and many L1 readers who are at or above grade level by the 5$^{th}$ grade do not show gains from explicit narrative structure awareness training. In contrast, there is strong evidence in L1 reading research that expository text structure awareness improves comprehension and learning, and Koda could have presented more of this L1 evidence. However, Koda's discussion of Kintsch and Gernsbacher is very useful at a more general level, and her review of L2 studies examining the role of expository structure awareness on reading comprehension is very good.

Chapter 9 provides the key synthesis of component skills research by describing the effectiveness of component skills research for understanding reading comprehension. Koda outlines key findings from studies that identify component skills as predictors of reading ability differences. In doing so, she provides a synthesis of Chapters 3 through 8 by reporting that each of these topics are represented well in research on factors that demonstrate individual differences in reading ability. The chapter provides a good example of L1 multiple component skills research and reviews a number of important L2 studies of components skills and their impact on L2 reading comprehension. It closes with a good basic review of the impact of working memory on reading comprehension, a topic not addressed directly in earlier chapters.

The chapter on reading strategies reviews definitions of reading strategies and reading strategy classifications. I admit to having a different perspective in reading strategies than that presented in this chapter, so I did not feel that this chapter was one of the more effective ones in the book. The definitional problems around reading strategies are only exacerbated by attempting to describe metacognition as metacognitive strategies (as somehow opposed to cognitive reading strategies), which I find to be unhelpful. Metacognition is an awareness of how to use strategies of various types to achieve important general goals in reading (goal setting, monitoring, attempts to reestablish comprehension, evaluation). Each type of reflective awareness engages a number of strategies, all of which are cognitive strategies. Having explained myself, I found the back and forth movement in the chapter between metacognition and metacognitive strategies less than satisfying. But then again, most of us have our own views on some of the more controversial areas of reading, and strategy research certainly generates some controversy. The chapter does appropriately reflect the relative lack of research on L2 reading strategies and specifically the

limited research on how reading strategies influence L2 comprehension improvement. But it is also good to know that there are still major, relatively unexplored areas in L2 reading for future researchers.

The last two chapters address two general areas of reading that draw on implications from research: assessment and instruction. Both chapters provide good foundational information. In the case of the assessment chapter, Koda reviews the basics of reading assessment and closes with a brief discussion of specific L2 issues in reading assessment. In the final chapter on comprehension instruction, the focus is on implications to be drawn from research that would inform reading instruction. Along the way, there are some general suggestions for instructional practices. There is little discussion of detailed teaching practices, and that is appropriate for a book devoted to a synthesis of L2 reading research.

At the beginning of this review, I noted that Koda's book had two main goals. One is to emphasize the distinctions between L1 and L2 reading (while also recognizing the influence of L1 reading research on L2 research). Koda has done this quite well through her L2 discussions in each chapter, many of which highlight specific L2 issues or point out findings for L2 reading that differed from L1 research. However, it is also true that many L2 research results do converge very strongly with L1 research results – a point that should not be lost.

Koda's second goal was to argue that a cognitive component skills view of L2 reading would provide important insights into the development of L2 reading comprehension abilities. After a careful reading of Koda's book, it is clear that such a research orientation is very productive. It identifies important abilities needed for efficient reading comprehension and it provides many strong implications for reading instruction. Now the task for the future is to test a number of those implications directly and extensively. The ultimate goal is to move from implications to demonstrated applications. Koda's book provides the necessary insights into L2 reading to lead us along the way.

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