

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN READING ABILITIES THROUGH PHONOLOGICAL PROCESSING SKILLS AND PROFICIENCY IN A SECOND LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

During the past decades, the way that researchers and educators understand and describe the process of reading has been revolutionised. The present article examines the current developments in reading abilities among second language readers. The developments are further discussed in terms of a theory of general second language proficiency encompassing both oral and written language. Implications on the nature of second language reading, the database in second language reading, text-and knowledge-driven operations in second language reading, and second language reading classroom factors have been provided. Assessment of comprehension is briefly reviewed, and recommendations are provided for theoretical, cultural, and educational implications. An overview of an experimental fluency programme that attempts to address multiple components in the development of reading abilities has also been discussed.

Keywords: Language Proficiency, Phonological Processing, Reading Abilities.

INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, the number of children learning to read in a second language has grown rapidly worldwide. Developing literacy skills in a second language is not only a pressing concern for immigrant children, but also for children who speak a majority language. The combination of more immigration, increased alternative education programmes based on language options, and escalating requirements for multilingual competence to navigate the global economy has prompted a new generation of research to investigate the impact of bilingual experience on the literacy development of young children (Kuo, Chen, & Ko, 2016).

As noted in one study (Relajo, Dela Rosa, & Pilao, 2016), the ability to read sufficiently and proficiently is the best way students can acquire various skills and knowledge, thus, reading is taught since the beginning of education, as both formal and informal. Unfortunately, even in the university level there are still students who fail to develop sufficiently in one or more skills involved in effective

reading. This problem rocks not only in the Philippines' educational system but other countries as well, thus, many educators, local and foreign alike, emphasise that reading and literacy instruction must be properly addressed through appropriate reading instructional materials. On the other hand, the reading background provided by the name is a potent factor in determining how well the student will succeed academically. When parents show an enthusiastic interest in their children's reading, when they read stories to them, they are laying strong foundations for pleasurable, independent reading. The presence in the home of variety of attractive, appealing books for children is particularly important. A reasonably comfortable place for reading also helps the child to enjoy reading. Those who came from impoverished or unpromising home environments never become excellent readers. Noisy surroundings, inadequate lighting, very high or very low temperatures, and distracting surroundings may interfere with comprehension. As a rule, when children come from

unfavourable home environment, there is likely to be unsatisfactory progress in reading comprehension.

Other intervention programmes may also be considered to reinforce reading abilities such as Expressive Writing (EW,) which may result in a host of health benefits. The results of this study offer insights into what factors contribute to ensure the efficacy of EW as an intervention tool. This may be attributable to the fact that EW affects people on a number of aspects: biological, cognitive, emotional and social – making a single explanatory theory unlikely. Secondly, a variety of mechanisms can be posited as to ensure its efficacy. Needless to say, future research should further explore its boundary conditions, including potential moderating variables. In addition to addressing theory-relevant questions, researchers and therapists must now address how, when and with whom this form of therapy is most beneficial and, at the same time, further evaluate how and why this intervention produces positive outcomes (Relojo, 2015a).

Fluent reading, often defined as speed and accuracy, is an important skill for all readers to develop. Students with Learning Disabilities (LD) often struggle to read fluently, leading to difficulties in reading comprehension. Despite recent attention to reading fluency and ways to improve fluency, it is not clear which features of interventions that are designed to enhance fluency are beneficial for the most struggling readers. The purpose of this study is to synthesize research on interventions that are designed primarily to build reading fluency for students with LD. The search yielded 24 published and unpublished studies that reported findings on intervention features, including repeated reading with and without a model, sustained reading, and number of repetitions, text difficulty, and specific improvement criteria. Findings suggest that effective interventions for building fluency include an explicit model of fluent reading, multiple opportunities to repeatedly read familiar text independently and with corrective feedback, and established performance criteria for increasing text difficulty (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002).

1. Aim of the Study

A host of study has already delineated the importance of

improving reading abilities among students. Enhancing the development of cognitive and academic skills of students remain a foundational competency of the practice of school psychology (Ysseldyke, et al., 2006). This is accomplished through evidence-based practices (Fiorello, & Primerano, 2005). The onus is therefore placed on practitioners to continuously reference empirical evidence to guide their practice. It is, however, the responsibility of researchers to provide answers to questions pertinent to practice (Fiorello, & Primerano, 2005).

In light of the previous studies, it is essential that this be explored further in order to ascertain how reading abilities takes place through phonological processing skills and its proficiency among second language readers.

2. Rationale of the Study

Learning and development of reading abilities must be accompanied by interest and a positive attitude. Children with interest in and a positive attitude towards reading are at an advantage in developing good reading habits, and taking advantage of opportunities to develop good reading abilities require good habits. In preschool, reading provides an opportunity for children to enjoy listening to stories, as well as to express their thoughts and feelings. At the same time, it raises their language ability, thus indicating the importance of developing intimate reading habits from infancy. Researchers have explained that through reading, children can improve not only their language proficiency, but also their reading interest, reading volume, and reading level (Bogner, Raphael, & Pressley, 2002; Guthrie, et al., 2004). Through reading activities, children can also engage in conscious study and meet the requirements of the modern era. Hence, activities that promote reading at a preschool and kindergarten level increase children's reading volume and develop their reading interest and ability constitute the primary subject of discussion in this study, in which the authors discuss whether children's overall reading volume is the most effective factor for developing their reading habits, language proficiency, comprehension ability, conscious behaviour, and reading interest.

3. Interlanguage Pragmatics

Pragmatic competence has become an increasingly crucial component of language pedagogy. One article reports on a quantitative and qualitative study of ten English language textbooks used in Chinese Universities with a particular focus on their coverage of pragmatic knowledge (Ren, & Han, 2016). Detailed analysis focused specifically on the mention of pragmatic information, the treatment of speech acts, and the representation of intralingual pragmatic variation. The findings show that, pragmatic knowledge is still under represented in most textbooks. The range of speech acts included is rather limited, and the ways that speech acts are presented seem to be based on writer's intuition. There is paucity of explicit metapragmatic information on speech acts. In addition, little attention is devoted to enhancing learners' awareness of intralingual pragmatic variation. The implications of these results for teachers and textbook writers are discussed.

Wu, & Takahashi, (2016) investigated Taiwanese English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners' developmental patterns of pragmatic transfer in the speech acts of giving and responding compliments. By so doing, the study examined the validity of a well-known hypothesis, which was often been misunderstood, in second language (L2) pragmatics research. The corpus of the study involved 249 participants: 132 Taiwanese-learners of English in Taiwan (TET), 85 Taiwanese-speaking Chinese in Taiwan (TCT), and 32 American native speakers of English in the US (AEA). A Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was used to collect the TET's Interlanguage pragmatics data and the TCT's and AEA's normative data. The results indicated that the Taiwanese EFL learners' developmental patterns of pragmatic transfer supported the "bell curve" hypothesis by Takahashi and Beebe (1987). Furthermore, the study also found: (1) compared with AEA, both the TET and TCT were more likely to ask questions when giving compliments; and (2) in addition to L2 proficiency levels, the types and contents of semantic formulas (e.g. culture-specific vs structure-based) affect the developmental patterns of pragmatic transfer.

A deep, developmental construct and definition of

fluency, in which fluency and reading comprehension have a reciprocal relationship, is explicated and contrasted with superficial approaches to that construct. The historical development of fluency is outlined, along with conclusions of the U.S. National Reading Panel, to explore why fluency has moved from being "the neglected aspect of reading" to a popular topic in the field. A practical, developmental instructional program based largely on the theoretical framework and research findings of Linnea Ehri is delineated. The nine essential components of that program include building the graphophonic foundations for fluency; building and extending vocabulary and oral language skills; providing expert instruction and practice in the recognition of high-frequency vocabulary; teaching common word parts and spelling patterns; teaching, modelling, and providing practice in the application of a decoding strategy; using appropriate texts to coach strategic behaviours and to build reading speed; using repeated reading procedures as an intervention approach for struggling readers; extending growing fluency through wide independent reading; and monitoring fluency development through appropriate assessment procedures. The position is taken throughout that teaching, developing, and assessing fluency must always be done in the context of reading comprehension (Pikulski, & Chard, 2005).

Another study (Abdi, & Tarbali, 2016) has been conducted to determine the effect of noticing and input enhancement in reading on speaking skill. The participants of this study were 30 learners attending a language learning institute in Ardebil in the form of two groups. Two of the groups were at the intermediate level based on the proficiency test. The two groups at the institute were assigned to one experimental group (enhanced input) and one control group (unenhanced input). First, the researchers used the pre-test of speaking, and then they had ten reading passages for each session. During the classroom, researchers had some in-class instructional activities and finally a post-test of speaking was given to the learners and for the assessment of learners' oral production, they used TOEFL speaking rubric. The analysis and comparison between pre-test and post-

test through paired sample t-test showed that noticing and input enhancement had helped learners group on intermediate level to learn more vocabulary items and improve their oral production.

4. Earlier Studies

Bardovi-Harlig (1999) showed how Interlanguage itself has been ignored in research on interlanguage pragmatics. Research has not established that pragmatic competence is independent of grammatical competence. Although grammatical competence may not be a sufficient condition for pragmatic development, it may be a necessary condition. A research agenda has been outlined in which the study of interlanguage become more central to the study of interlanguage pragmatics.

The problem of identifying and providing for individual needs in the classroom is the main theme of this book. Part I- The Reading Situation, includes a brief introduction to the author's point of view, a discussion of the evolution of our graded school system, and attempts to break this lockstep and reorganise the school to meet pupil needs. Part II - The Reading Problem, discusses the reading facet of language and goals of reading instruction. In Part III -The Nature of Readiness, social and emotional, as well as visual and auditory readiness, are discussed. Part IV - Developing Readiness, presents a programme of activities and materials designed to develop in each child the necessary background of experience, language facility, and visual and auditory discrimination. Part V- Reading Instruction, is concerned with the reading programme proper: initial reading experiences, ways of discovering specific reading needs and developing basic reading abilities, directing reading activities, and encouraging vocabulary development, with a concluding discussion of levels of differentiation of instruction and their importance in a democratic society. Extensive bibliographies conclude most chapters, and photographs illustrate many of the recommended classroom procedures.

However, it has been pointed out by Hyland and Milton (1997) that a major problem for second language students writing academic essays in English is to convey

statements with an appropriate degree of doubt and certainty. Such epistemic comments are crucial comments to academic writing where authors have to distinguish opinion from fact and evaluate their assertions in acceptable and persuasive ways. Despite its importance however, it is a known fact little about how second language writers present assertions in their writing and it is possible to measure their attempts to master appropriate forms against the work of expert writers. Based on a corpus of one million words, this paper compares the extension of doubt and certainty in the examination of scripts of 900 Cantonese-speaking school leavers writing in English with those of 770 British learners of similar age and educational level. A detailed analysis of the texts reveals that these L2 writers differ significantly from the native speakers in relying on a more limited range of items, offering stronger commitments, and exhibiting greater problems in conveying a precise degree of certainty. The researchers have highlighted a number of issues raised by the findings and make some pedagogical suggestions for developing competence in this important pragmatic area.

One research (Jiménez, 1997) investigated the strategic literacy knowledge, abilities, and potential of five low-literacy Latina/o students in middle school. Three of the students were bilingual in Spanish and English, and they received the majority of their instruction in a special education classroom. The remaining two students were selected from a bilingual at-risk classroom and were Spanish dominant. Qualitative research methods were employed for this investigation. These included classroom observations, student and teacher interviews, think aloud data collection sessions, and the use of a formative experiment as part of the research design. The formative experiment consisted of eight cognitive strategy lessons, which were audiotaped and later analysed to determine students' response to intensive cognitive strategy instruction. This instruction emphasised three strategies: resolving the meanings of unknown vocabulary items, asking questions, and making inferences. Students were also encouraged, as appropriate, to make use of their bilingual language abilities, such as searching for

cognate vocabulary, translating, transferring information, and reflecting on text in either or both of their two languages. Culturally relevant and familiar text was used as the basis for all of the instruction. With instructional support, the participating students implemented the focal strategies that were emphasised during the formative experiment. For example, students in the special education classroom made use of the Spanish language in a number of ways that enhanced their comprehension, such as searching for cognate vocabulary and reflecting on text in Spanish. Students also produced extended discourse while reading culturally familiar text, and this extended discourse often formed the basis for accessing prior knowledge and making inferences. Implications of this research include rethinking instructional design and expectations concerning the learning of low-literacy Latina/o students in middle school.

5. Conceptual Framework

The development of complementary materials is the definitive aim of current researchers and to come across solutions to the problems on the difficulties on reading of the students are projected to be achieved.

Earlier findings such as those proposed by Nation and Snowling (1998) suggest that children with specific reading comprehension difficulties were compared with control children on tests of language skill. The two groups performed at a similar level on tests requiring predominantly phonological skills, but the poor comprehenders performed less well on tests tapping semantic ability. Although the two groups were matched for decoding ability (as assessed by non-word reading), the poor comprehenders were worse at reading words with irregular spelling patterns and low-frequency words. These results show that despite having adequate phonological decoding skills, poor comprehenders have problems reading words that are typically read with support from semantics. These findings are related to connectionist models of reading development in which phonological and semantic processes interact.

For decades, the international education community has focused on schools as the primary vehicle of learning. However, learning assessments in dozens of developing

nations show that repeated attempts to affect student learning in schools have largely failed. Because students with perfect attendance in low-resource settings spend less than 25 percent of their time in a classroom, even if educational quality is excellent, focusing only on school-bound factors is inadequate to optimise learning (Dowd, et al., 2016)

Figure 1 shows the study dealt about the problems encountered by university students in reading comprehension, the least mastered skills according to their language competencies and the development of complementary materials to improve reading comprehension abilities. This also shows the gathering of data through documentary analysis and the tabulation of results in standardised exam. Findings and recommendations were based on statistical analysis and interpretation of data to help improve the students' achievement in English.

Findings indicated that students who are self-identified as high-performing readers talked about texts and strategies in ways that were different from students who self-identified as being average or low-performing readers. These differences remained regardless of students' assessed reading levels. Students who identified as high-performing readers discussed using comprehension strategies as a way to clarify or deepen their knowledge of content and support their interpretations of text. They also selected strategies based on what they believed would best help them address their specific comprehension problems. By comparison, students who identified as

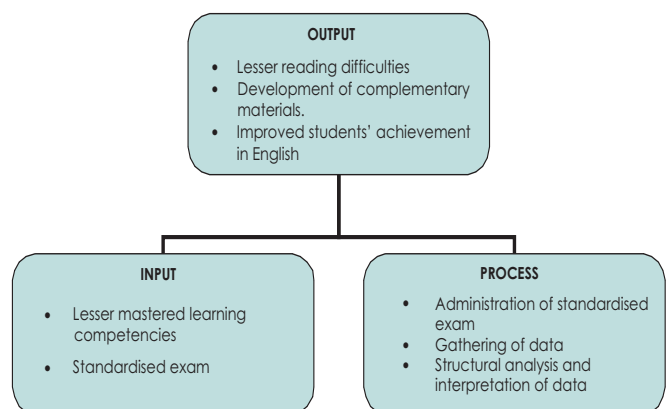


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Reading Abilities in a Second Language

average or low-performing readers separated their talk about strategies from their talk about the texts and tended to have one or two favourite strategies that they repeatedly used regardless of their success (Hall, 2012).

Further to the conceptual model illustrated in Figure 1, another conceptual model is illustrated in Figure 2 about the interface of reading development. Based on the effectiveness of Speed of Processing (SOP) skills, in particular rapid automatic naming, in kindergarten children to predict reading in first grade, the aim of the current study was to examine the connections between SOP skills and early literacy skills in kindergarten and their relationship to reading abilities in first grade. Ninety-six children were tested twice: first in kindergarten using speed of processing, early literacy, phonological awareness, language, and rapid naming speed measures; and a year later in first grade, using speed of processing and different reading ability measures (decoding, reading comprehension, and fluency). The children were divided into three groups according to their performance on the speed of processing measures: slow, average, and fast. In kindergarten, the group with slow SOP exhibited the lowest scores on all the measures, while the groups with average and fast SOP performed better, with no significant difference between them. In first grade, speed of processing skills affected the different reading abilities in a dissimilar way, and the three groups showed different patterns of reading ability. SOP in kindergarten explained approximately 11% of the variance in reading

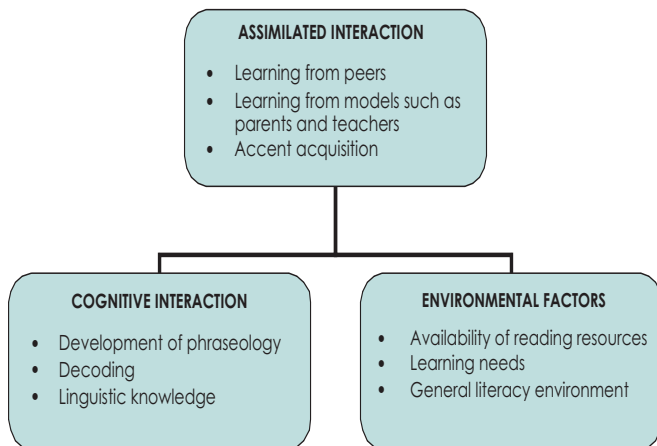


Figure 2. Conceptual Model on the Interface of Reading Development

in the 1st grade among the slow and average SOP groups. These findings have implications for early assessment and intervention (Shaul, & Nevo, 2015).

Over the past decade, fluent reading has come to be seen as a central component of skilled reading and driving force in the literacy curriculum. However, much of this focus has centred on a relatively narrow definition of reading fluency, one that emphasizes automatic word recognition. This article attempts to expand this understanding by synthesizing several key aspects of research on reading fluency, including theoretical perspectives surrounding automaticity and prosody. It examines four major definitions of reading fluency and their relationship to accuracy, automaticity, and prosody. A proposed definition is presented. Finally, the implications of these definitions for current assessment and instruction are considered along with suggestions for reenvisioning fluency's role within literacy curriculum (Kuhn, et al., 2010).

Conclusion and Implication

Although teaching has been characterised as a profound emotional activity, little is known about the link between emotional quotient of educators and their work attitude behaviour. Also, it is often said that passion and emotion fuel and educator's teaching experience, but there is a scarcity of knowledge as to what extent emotion could serve as a predictor of teaching attitude (Relojo, Pilao, & Dela Rosa, 2015). But of course, other things have to be considered. For instance, one study (Relojo, 2015b) has sought to explore and summarise more recent findings on the genetic underpinnings of Parkinson's Disease (PD) and Alzheimer's Disease (AD). Recent studies have contributed to our understanding of these two devastating diseases. As the most common neurodegenerative disease, AD accounts for about two-thirds of cases of dementia; ranging in various studies from 42 to 81 per cent of all dementia – with vascular causes and other neurodegenerative diseases such as Pick's disease and diffuse Lewy-body disease constituting the majority of the remaining cases. Meanwhile, it has been identified that PD is the second most common neurodegenerative disorder after AD. The cause of PD remains unknown, but

epidemiological studies suggest an association with pesticides and other environmental toxins, and biochemical studies implicate a systemic defect in mitochondrial complex. In light of the current findings and issues that centre on PD and AD, it has been highlighted the range of therapies available for those afflicted with these diseases.

The ability to read sufficiently and proficiently is the best way students can acquire various skills and knowledge, thus, reading is taught since the beginning of education both formal and informal. Unfortunately, even in the university level there are still students who fail to develop sufficiently in one or more skills involved in effective reading. This problem rocks not only the Philippines' educational system, but other countries as well, thus, many educators, local and foreign alike, emphasise that reading and literacy instruction must be properly addressed through appropriate reading instructional materials. On the other hand, the reading background provided by the home is a potent factor in determining how well the student will succeed academically. When parents show an enthusiastic interest in their children's reading, when they read stories to them, they are laying strong foundations for pleasurable, independent reading. The presence in the home of a variety of attractive, appealing books for children is particularly important. A reasonably comfortable place for reading also helps the child to enjoy reading. Those who came from impoverished or unpromising home environments never become excellent readers. Noisy surroundings, inadequate lighting, very high or very low temperatures, and distracting surroundings may interfere with comprehension. As a rule, when children come from unfavourable home environment, there is likely to be unsatisfactory progress in reading comprehension.

As noted by Hoff (2013) that on average, children from low Socio Economic Status (SES) homes and children from homes in which a language other than English is spoken have language development trajectories that are different from those of children from middle-class, monolingual English-speaking homes. Children from low-SES and language minority homes have unique linguistic

strengths, but many reach school age with lower levels of English language skill than do middle-class, monolingual children. Because early differences in English oral language skill have consequences for academic achievement, low levels of English language skill constitute a deficit for children about to enter school in the US.

Declaring all developmental trajectories to be equally valid would not change the robust relation between English oral language skills and academic achievement and would not help children with poor English skills to be successful in school. Remedies aimed at supporting the development of the English skills required for academic success need not and should not entail devaluing or diminishing children's other language skills. Moreover, fluent reading depends on a complex set of cognitive processes that must work together in perfect concert. Rapid Automatised Naming (RAN) tasks provide insight into this system, acting as a microcosm of the processes involved in reading. In this review, the authors examine both RAN and reading fluency and how each has shaped our understanding of reading disabilities. The authors explore the research that led to our current understanding of the relationships between RAN and reading and what makes RAN unique as a cognitive measure. The authors explore how the automaticity that supports RAN affects reading across development, reading abilities, and languages, and the biological bases of these processes. Finally, the authors bring these converging areas of knowledge together by examining what the collective studies of RAN and reading fluency contribute to our goals of creating optimal assessments and interventions that help every child become a fluent, comprehending reader (Norton, & Wolf, 2012).

As reading shifts from the page to the screen, research focuses primarily upon the nature and effects of hypertextual reading. However, many of the texts that university students read for academic purposes are digitised texts that begin life as paper-based books and papers and are read on-screen. Applying the principles and practices of hermeneutic phenomenology, this study sought to gain insight into university students' experiences

of reading digitised texts such as e-books and PDF files (Rose, 2011). Researchers, however, can seek for research collaborators through Academic Social Networking Services (ASNS). But as highlighted by Relojo, and Pilao (2016), these ASNS are still on their early stages to fully gauge their impact on how these have facilitated collaborative partnerships among researchers, particularly to Early Career Researchers and those seeking interdisciplinary collaborations. Just like any other websites, these platforms could potentially encounter financial issues in the future, which may result to discontinuation of their services. But for the meantime, the research community cannot deny the fact that these services are becoming increasingly popular in scholarly communication. In academia, researchers could take advantage of these networking platforms, to build meaningful and lasting collaborative partnerships. Finally, it has been argued in a number of studies that improved exploration of the issues surrounding fluency and comprehension will contribute to our understanding of both reading development.

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