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Reading Comprehension in ESL: A Selected, Annotated Bibliography.

The annotated bibliography, developed as a part of a course in methodology for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), focuses on classroom techniques for developing reading comprehension. References appear under the following five headings: (1) background information on theory; (2) interaction; (3) current research findings; (4) vocabulary skills; and (5) classroom procedure. Many of the 66 items are included in more than one category. The bibliography contains citations of books, collections of articles and reports, and journal articles dated mostly since 1985. Each citation contains basic bibliographic information and a brief annotation. (MSE)
This bibliography draws on sources which can help the ESL/EFL teacher with questions concerning reading comprehension. References appear under 5 headings: 1) background information on theory, 2) interaction, 3) current research findings, 4) vocabulary skills, and 5) classroom procedure. Please note that many of the references can be cross-indexed under several of the 5 headings. The sources are drawn from books, collections of articles and reports, and from journals with the majority of material dating from 1985.

**BACKGROUND**


Traces history of the notion of a schema and outlines basic elements of the theory, including an examination of the components of encoding (attention, instantiation, inference) and retrieval (retrieval plans, editing and summarizing, and reconstructive processes).


Identifies the directions that researchers have taken in the study of the sociolinguistic nature of reading and explores (1) reading as a cognitive activity embedded in social and linguistic contexts and (2) reading as a social and linguistic process.

Defines the term "structure of text" from a historical approach giving several points of view, examines prominent text analysis procedures, and evaluates past and future directions of text structure. Meyer and Rice point out the value of text structure analysis in determining comprehension.


Gives a brief history of reading models beginning in 1879 and ending in the 1980's, indicating researchers and their contributions; gives a discussion of problems with construction and characteristics of reading models; presents in detail several recent models.


Discusses the three most prevalent theoretical positions regarding listening and reading: code, meaning, and psycholinguistics. The authors argue for the interactive concept of listening and reading. Empirical studies are reviewed to support the interactive concept. The authors also discuss "closing the gap" between auding and reading.


Gives account of early reading research including areas of interest from nineteenth century to present day research: eye movements, field of vision, perceptual span, word recognition, comprehension, memory organization, legibility, and oral to silent reading. States some past as well as current problems in research including reliability, appropriateness of topic, lack of contact with teacher and curriculum, failure to study enough beginning readers as subjects, political and economic factors.
Interaction


Argues the importance of using de Beauguier and Dressler's seven standards of textuality, cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality, and intertextuality in the study of reading in a second language. The theory is based upon the need for the second language learner to interact with the text in order to comprehend successfully.


Proposes some comprehension strategies designed to help L2 readers to become interactive readers (i.e., using both top-down and bottom-up strategies in an overlapping fashion). Carrell discusses use of grammatical and vocabulary skills in bottom-up processing and use of background knowledge via various recognized methods (such as LEA and SO3R), text-mapping strategies, predicting, and use of anomalies and nonsense passages in top-down processing.


Discusses the importance of reading as a second language skill and briefly outlines the history of theories of reading in a second language including references to the major contributors in the field. Carrell argues for the reading being an interaction of both top-down and bottom-up processes.

Explores the "bidirectionality" (Carrell's term) of text-based and knowledge-based processing of text in ESL reading comprehension. Carrell argues that over reliance on either bottom-up processing or top-down processing creates schema interference, thereby hindering the reader's comprehension. She discusses five possible causes of the lack of bidirectionality: 1) absence of relevant knowledge structures (schema) 2) failure to activate appropriate schemata 3) skill deficiencies 4) misconceptions about reading, specifically about reading in a second language and in response to typical classroom evaluation 5) individual differences in cognitive styles.


Presents an overview of schema theory as based upon a psycholinguistic approach and explores the relationship of culture-specific background knowledge and EFL/ESL reading methodology. Classroom activities and procedures for a reader-centered program are given.


Uses the results of a research project conducted at University of Michigan to argue that language competence may have a greater role in second language reading than had previously been assumed. Instead, a balance of the two is needed plus an awareness of explanations for students' diverse reading problems. By using a system which focuses on both language and reading skills, more reading problems will be addressed.

Reviews the relevant research on the relationship of general language competence and second language reading proficiency and draws implications for the classroom from that research. Devine supports an interactive approach which stresses the overlapping of bottom-up and top-down processing and therefore calls for holistic or integrative instruction.


Argues that the new concept of interaction between top-down and bottom-up reading processes is necessary in understanding ESL reading problems. Because second language readers initially have difficulty in decoding rapidly, it is wrong to assume that by simply stressing background knowledge and "guessing" strategies, the readers' problems will be solved. Instead, an interactive model of reading should be employed.


Discusses 1) ways both "bottom-up" and "top-down" reading strategies can be viewed as interactive, 2) possible weaknesses of earlier reading models, 3) implications for teachers of second language reading. Specific applications of top-down and bottom-up reading skills are also discussed.

Clarifies relationships among the uses of the term "interactive" as it occurs in ESL reading research, first language research, and research on written texts as well as the concepts "interactive process" and "interactive model" as they appear in reading research and finally the notion of "textual interaction" as being used by Biber and Grabe. Grabe also addresses problems of ESL readers in conjunction with the various interaction concepts.


Presents reading as a search for meaning and as a cognitive operation. It presents methods to help students develop skills of problem solving. Discusses the social aspect involved in learning to read.
RESEARCH


Reports the results of research which indicate that training on the top-level rhetorical organization on expository texts significantly increased the amount of information that ESL students could recall. Prior to this study some investigators had begun to suggest a variety of techniques for teaching various aspects of text structure, but there were no research findings whether explicitly teaching text structure facilitated ESL reading comprehension. The article first reviews previous research done to answer this question when English is a native language. The training for the ESL students showed positive results in recall of detail and quantity of information, as well as a positive reaction by the students.


Presents the results of a first-time study conducted to determine the effects on ESL reading comprehension of both culture-specific content and formal schemata. It was determined that each plays a significant, but different, role in the comprehension of text. Although more research is needed, the article makes ESL teachers aware of the important role of background knowledge of text content, and that they must often be facilitators of appropriate, relevant information. Since rhetorical form was more important in the comprehension of top-level episodic structure in event sequences and temporal relationships among events, teachers should help students recognize and use this skill to facilitate comprehension and recall.


Discusses currently used methods of reading research, experimental and descriptive: miscue analysis, the think-aloud method, the Fillmore interview method, computerized on-line method, longitudinal case study, ethnographic research, and metacognitive studies.
Connor draws comparisons, evaluates the methods, and says that benefits will occur due to the wide choice of research available.


Reviews a study of Malay students, half "practised" readers and half "unpractised" readers of English, that assesses attitudes and linguistic competence, draws general conclusions, and suggests implications for a reading program. Cooper's findings dictate that a reading program should give massive assistance in building lexical competence, but that great stress must be placed on training students to take advantage of the larger text so that students are drawn away from word-by-word analysis and encouraged to use their inference and prediction powers.


Reports results from an on-going study of ESL students that explores the relationship between language proficiency and reading strategies. Proficient language students are good readers who employ the interaction of various processes, not just top-down ones. Other findings suggest that teaching of second language reading should use the holistic approach of real-world language which avoids excessive, isolated emphasis on vocabulary and grammar drill.


Compares students involved in ESL's more successful immersion program to those involved in the minority language program (minority students in regular school programs). It suggests four main factors the school should keep in mind to effect a change and promote success: mother tongue maintenance, prior experiences with literacy, relevance of reading materials, and levels of proficiency demanded by the school.

Reviews briefly schema-theory and draws distinctions among linguistic, content, and formal schema. James suggests classroom implications in terms of reading material, prereading activities, and postreading activities. A general theme is the admonishment to teachers to find the level of their students and supply material accordingly despite previously or currently popular theories.


Investigates in an empirical study the transfer of Japanese ESL students' reading strategies from their first language to their second language. Koda argues that Japanese students differ significantly from English-speaking students and provides evidence that the students transfer a reading strategy from their Japanese reading experience which English readers do not use: phonological recoding. Japanese ESL students do not obtain lexical sounds through phonetic analyzing as extensively as native speakers.


Focuses on the cultural dimensions of second language reading. Reports findings of ethnographic research done with Nigerian students. Major differences occur between literate cultures and oral cultures. Comprehension problems result from difficulties with complex interactions of lexical, syntactic, rhetorical, and schematic factors.

Reports an empirical study that focuses on the relationship between English as ESL readers' performance on a schematic concept formation task and their performance on a reading task. The results suggest that an ESL student who exhibits proficiency in a nonverbal task also has proficiency in internalizing the construction of a simple story; i.e., in forming hypotheses about the schema families, finding common features, and evaluating the fit of hypotheses against the different characteristics of the text.


Reviews three techniques for controlling a reader's intent while reading text: 1) "presenting readers with learning objectives that specify what is to be acquired from the text, 2) inserting questions into the text, and 3) asking readers questions that specify more than the recall of specific information (i.e., higher order questions)" (p. 66). The underlying premise is that reader's comprehension can be improved if the reader's intent is directed. Numerous empirical studies are reviewed, giving positive support to the authors' premise; however, it must be noted that the studies all take place in artificial settings, not real world settings.


Reports an empirical study using think-aloud protocols to investigate the similarities between first and second language reading, showing the processes to be highly individualized but with a high degree of overlap in use of high-order reading strategies, which further indicates that reading instruction in L1 carries over into L2.

Presents the current state of the art research on the role of cultural background knowledge and its effects on children's reading. It advocates the use of Fillmore's (1981) interview method in assessing the effects of cultural background knowledge on children's L2 reading.


Provides evidence from an empirical study that cultural knowledge plays a part in comprehension. Texts are never totally explicit and require the reader's contribution of his/her schema. Meanings are distorted according to the reader's previous world knowledge. Teachers, knowing the student's limitations, can produce appropriate interpretation by comparing the events cross culturally and can avoid texts with heavy cultural loadings.


Reports the results of an empirical study on the use of three prereading activities for EFL students: pictorial context, vocabulary preteaching, and prequestioning. The activities produced an increase in motivation as well as comprehension. Of the three activities, vocabulary study was least effective.
VOCABULARY


Recommend the teaching of vocabulary through study of component units (root and affix meaning) and exposure to many different contexts with an emphasis placed on words used most frequently.


Presents background information on the subordinate role of vocabulary instruction and criteria for elevating it to a more prominent position. It gives factors and research information to consider in teaching both active and passive vocabulary, appropriate techniques available, and the need for the teacher to arouse the students' interest so that their vocabulary growth will not be limited to just the classroom.


Suggests that a semantic field approach to passive vocabulary acquisition is a more effective and efficient vocabulary builder than the traditional approaches which are not based on meaning. This study used a keyword and an association of 5 related words verifying previous research that long-term retention of information is aided by organizing that information into some type of cognitive categories.


Stresses the importance of 1) learning a relatively small number of words correctly, 2) reading at least seven books a semester, and 3) combining reading and
writing activities in place of isolated grammar drill.


Describes and gives rationale for use of the Language Experience Approach (LEA) for beginning reading for either children or adults. LEA uses the experiences and existing vocabulary of students to construct their own reading materials. The underlying rationale is 1) what a student can/does think about, he can talk about 2) what a student says can be written (or dictated to the teacher) 3) what has been written can then be read.


Emphasizes the value of contextual exercises for vocabulary learning. Examples of cloze, words-in-content, and context enrichment exercises are given.


Investigates the comprehension of students using inconsiderate and considerate text passages. In terms of comprehension, four text factors were identified: structure, coherence, unity, and elaboration. Results suggest the students may not realize that they frequently acquire partial or erroneous knowledge for word meaning in inconsiderate text and yet are satisfied with the information they acquire. Amount of helpfulness of contextual information is to be judged by proximity, clarity, explicitness, and completeness.

Argues that "narrow reading and perhaps narrow input in general is more efficient for second language acquisition." Krashen says narrow reading provides acquisition of both structure and vocabulary because there are many exposures in a comprehensible text. These texts provide built-in review coming from reading in one area at a time, an area in which there is already a degree of comprehension.


Argues the merits of vocabulary learned in context. Lists of contextual aids appropriate for TESOL are given. A detailed program for developing skills that focuses on word building and types of guessing is outlined.


Gives specific ways to use dictionary work in the ESL classroom. The use of nonsense words can effectively show the multiple uses of a single word while introducing humor.


Describes reading problems, presents techniques developed to address the problems, and offers a cognitive explanation of them. Students frequently know vocabulary items but cannot make associations between basic concepts. Concept-relationship experiences in categorization, analogy, and definition are stressed so that students develop cognitive networks to relate bits of information according to categories and interrelationships.

Focuses on strategies the ESOL reader uses to process the interpretation of nonlexicalized compounds. Discusses six hypothesis and their strategies for reading expository material and the use the ESOL reader makes with one or more of three types of competence (linguistic, textual, pragmatic). Helpful guidelines are given for a number of effective strategies for noun-compound interpretations.


Presents a procedure for selecting and presenting vocabulary in a content area to facilitate reading, to allow the use of authentic materials, and to increase comprehension. Specific vocabulary of content area is combined with the general vocabulary preparation which uses the SRA Reading Laboratory and standard reading texts.


Proposes 8 assumptions in his chapter "Lexical knowledge and the teaching of vocabulary" concerning word knowledge and their implications for vocabulary teaching. The syllabus should be based on what it means to know a word, and the techniques of teaching vocabulary should be a reflection of this knowledge.


Argues that although beginning learners operate with lexical associations that are quite different from those of native speakers, semantic organization develops over time. Therefore, classroom activities are suggested which encourage semantic networks so that the learner can have the same degree of meaningfulness from words that native speakers have.
PROCEDURE


Demonstrates the use of questions based on prediction and explanation that check reading comprehension for EST (English for Science and Technology) by inserting questions at mid-points to be used during the reading instead of the traditional placement, at the end of the reading. Adamson suggests that this method teaches correct use of reading strategies.


Explores some of the cognitive activities that people must engage in to comprehend and remember information. The authors illustrate how language comprehension depends on the activation of relevant knowledge such as general knowledge surrounding a situation. Students need ways of asking themselves and others appropriate questions which aid comprehension, clarify concepts, and develop evaluation techniques.


Gives advantages for using newspapers: 1) current, relevant, topical conversational material for the student 2) provides either a simple lesson or an advanced one 3) has great adaptability. Bryden outlines in step-by-step detail a lesson plan using daily newspapers.

Presents the concept of comprehension monitoring (any behaviors that allow readers to judge whether comprehension is taking place and actions to help the reader compensate if necessary). Students can be helped to monitor themselves through summarizing, predicting, and questioning.


Outlines some criteria for selecting poetry for ESL readers and offers suggestions for developing activities for the classroom.


Presents theory, research, and techniques of reading, and their implications for the second language reader. The book’s 8 authors each develop one of these areas as well as assessment, CARI, and text evaluation. Although each section is complete in itself, there is a unifying theme: the need of awareness of special problems of ESL readers and the crucial role the teacher plays in aiding reader comprehension.


Gives advantages and suggestions for use of a puzzle which can be used for the simplest activity (spelling, word recognition) or for more complex activity (advanced vocabulary work). Students can make them themselves, for all that is needed are paper, pen, and imagination.

Views reading as a constant process of guessing, predicting, checking—taking comprehension from what is known to what is unknown. Presents reading as a variety of skills including understanding, interpreting, identifying, distinguishing and clarifying. The author lists various techniques aiding comprehension, such as inference, understanding relations within sentences, and linking sentences and ideas.


Describes explicitly the procedures for making, using, and evaluating cloze tests for the purpose of selecting suitable levels of reading material.


Explains and gives examples of ways in which teachers can develop and use cloze passages to teach reading skills. Fixed deletion and rational deletion are discussed with examples included.


Describes approaches to improve ESL reading strategies in both bottom-up and top-down processing. Language skills activities include exercises that teach grammatical markers, syntactic clues, morphological analysis, and context through substitution and deletions. Text-related skills concentrate on recognition of rhetorical devices used for generalizations and examples in expository prose and practice in skimming and scanning with prereading activities that focus on cultural specific concepts.

Discusses the use of oral reading in ESL. Although there are times for use of oral reading (diagnostic purposes), it is a bad teaching practice when used for students to read aloud for the class. Instead, silent reading skills (skimming, reading for information, reading that requires the ability to take chunks rather than individual words) must be taught.


States the positive points for various uses of the cloze format. By using this approach students are pushed into guessing and using context clues. Both vocabulary and functional words can be deleted. Also suggestions for pair and group work are given as well as use of relevant topics, natural language, and listening activities.


Argues that first day reading techniques should use real discourse in the target language regardless of the obstacles, e.g., non-Roman orthographies, no cognates with English, no readily discernible relationship with English. Opening day activities are given for languages that reflect the above examples.


States the problems between culture and reading comprehension and offers specific suggestions for the role of the teacher in overcoming the problems as well as suggesting specific classroom activities.

Chapters 6 & 7 take students through 6 stages of reading development as an integrated part of language study, not a specialized field; wants readers to use the techniques as vehicles and models, not as an end. Reading activities should be directed toward normal uses enabling the students to extract meaning from something of interest to themselves. The teacher selects suitable passages which encourage the students' interest and aid their progress through the various stages until autonomy and independence are reached.


Discusses several current reading comprehension strategies: 1) reader-generated question (e.g., use the first sentence of the text to elicit student questions), 2) write-before-you-read (students write on own experience on the topic before reading the selection) 3) Krashen's Sustained Silent Reading.


Describes a technique for teaching students to understand English passages through structural and contextual clues. Lewis Carroll's poem "Jabberwocky" is used to unblock and improve students' previous reading strategies. The method startles students into new ways of seeing textual analysis. Detailed steps and examples are given.