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## Insights into Second Language Reading

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# Insights into Second Language Reading A Cross-Linguistic Approach

*Keiko Koda*

Carnegie Mellon University



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## *Series editors' preface*

In *Insights into Second Language Reading: A Cross-Linguistic Approach*, Professor Keiko Koda provides a comprehensive, psycholinguistically oriented introduction to the cross-linguistic study of reading in a second language (L2). Her goal is to establish a clear conceptual foundation for research on L2 reading competence (as distinct from necessary, but insufficient, general L2 linguistic proficiency) and its acquisition within well-defined, empirically testable frameworks. The main focus is cognitively mature adults literate in their L1, but research on other kinds of readers (young children, etc.) is also covered where appropriate. Both L1 and L2 reading research are reviewed with a view to differentiating the two processes, distinguishing between (notably, orthographic and phonological) knowledge, on the one hand, and skills in each, on the other, and identifying needed work on individual differences in L2 reading.

Part I provides an overview of the volume, before covering theoretical underpinnings for conceptualizing and analyzing L2 reading competence. Part II consists of six chapters treating the components of reading ability: word recognition, vocabulary knowledge (both how this helps reading and how reading helps build vocabulary), intraword awareness and word-knowledge development, information integration in sentence processing, discourse processing (including the role of coherence, inference, and background knowledge in comprehension), and narrative and expository text structures and comprehension. Part III pulls things together, highlighting connections among the components in a holistic portrayal of reading. Chapter 9 deals with individual differences (what characteristics define good and bad readers), and Chapter 10 focuses on the role of metacognitive processes in strategic reading. Finally, in Part IV, Chapter 11 covers the assessment of L2 reading, and Chapter 12 reviews research on the reading instruction and makes suggestions for pedagogy.

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*Understanding Second Language Reading: A Cross-Linguistic Approach* is one of the most comprehensive treatments of L2 reading available. It is a fine addition to the *Cambridge Applied Linguistics Series* and will assuredly be very useful to all those engaged in teaching and research in what has become an area of such major importance in applied linguistics.

Michael H. Long  
Jack C. Richards

## Foreword

For the past three decades, second language (L2) reading has attracted unprecedented research attention. A multitude of studies have sought ways to identify the factors either promoting or impeding effective reading in a second language. As the field expanded, the research focus progressively shifted from merely describing what L2 readers could or could not do to explaining the basis of their behavior. Currently, the conceptual trends in L2 research tend to lean toward first language (L1) reading theories. Although, to be sure, L1 constructs are the logical point of departure in pursuing new lines of inquiry, the “borrowed” research paradigms to date have not spawned viable L2 reading models. To achieve a clear understanding of L2 reading’s unique nature, we need coherent frameworks through which L2 data can first be analyzed and then synthesized into functional theoretical explorations.

Toward this end, *Insights into Second Language Reading* stems from in-depth analyses of the multiple dimensions of L2 reading. Reading is a multifaceted, complex construct in that it involves a number of component operations, each dependent on a wide range of competencies. Obviously, the complexity increases in L2 reading since, by definition, it involves more than one language. The ultimate goal of the analyses is to lay a conceptual foundation for building serviceable models of L2 reading capable of delineating how L1 and L2 reading theories must differ. Three specific objectives guided the pursuit: (1) providing detailed descriptions of the processing components inherent in L2 reading; (2) applying cross-linguistic analyses of research-based insights, derived primarily from monolingual studies; and (3) exploring potential new directions for expanding current research paradigms. It is to be hoped that, collectively, the analyses will establish a platform for enhancing effective L2 reading instruction. To wit, a shrewder grasp of the complexities governing effective L2 reading should enable L2 teachers to adapt their instruction to the diverse

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needs of individual learners, and thereby achieve greater instructional quality.

My interests in the integration of reading and L2 acquisition were formed in my graduate school days at the University of Illinois. I am deeply indebted to Muriel Saville-Troike, Gary Cziko, David Pearson, and George McConkie – all profound mentors – whose work and guidance helped mold my research directions. My thanks are also owed to Dick Anderson, Bill Nagy, and Chuck Perfetti, who not only were generous in sharing their thoughts but were wonderfully adept at triggering insights. Their noteworthy work inspired me to address, in various ways, how insights are best uncovered.

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