Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage

The Oxford Handbook of Reading

by Alexander Pollatsek & Rebecca Treiman (Eds.)

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Reviewed by/ Revu par

Iman Tohidian

University of Kashan

Pollatsek and Treiman's collection of articles on reading is well-organized into five main parts. The authors provide illuminating ideas for practitioners as well as those who join the research community to work on reading as a complex phenomenon.

Commonalities and differences among writing systems and how these might have facilitative and debilitative effects on speakers' reading abilities are introduced first. Then, as writing system structures are discussed, pertinent historical and methodological overviews of the cognitive processes to read a single word are illuminated. The authors' main concern, then, is the skill of visual word recognition. Finally, the first chapter is wrapped up by a focus on the cognitive processes of the mind, the power of eye movements, and the early information obtained by readers as soon as their eyes see the words.

With an overview of the recognition processes of the mind and eyes, the second chapter of the text explicitly deals with practical techniques for word recognition. An alternative word identification approach with a focus on the role of word frequency and the representation of letter-order underpins the effect of divergent languages with cross-linguistic purposes of reading amongst adult bilinguals. The development of how one language affects the other during learning is also discussed in the second chapter.

Latter chapters in the text are well organized to engage readers with the ideas expressed in the book. The third section commences with a chapter investigating the possible incorporation of sounds in the processes of both skilled and silent readings of words and its embedded procedures, then follows with an attentive and rigorous overview of the underling reading processes in the mind with a focus on: descriptions of syntactic and semantic processes of reading; number of concurrent processes during reading; the order of these two processes of syntactic and semantic interpretations; the adoption of both strategy-based and memory-based models of reading comprehension; and an investigation of Chinese writing systems as non alphabetic forms. Two further chapters also investigate the concept of fixation and its interdependence with reading, such as eye movements and the perceived information from one fixation to the next. This section is concluded with a description of the E-Z Reader model to give a computational model of eye movements during reading.

The fourth section of the handbook moves toward the development of reading ability amongst children as it begins with children's learning how to read; their aim to learn how to read by spelling on the one hand, and pronunciation on the other hand during four phases of development. Then, a review of empirical research findings on children's empowerment through spelling ability in alphabetical language systems is provided. The next chapter is concerned with the emergence of dyslexia from childhood with a focus on genes and environment. And the concluding chapter of the text illuminates other skills and abilities that are improved upon during the development of reading in childhood.

Finally, the first chapter of part five highlights the pivotal role of early environment children experience from the beginning days after birth, so the effect of surrounding community in general, and the role of parents particularly as input-providers are discussed. Two other chapters deal with primary grade instruction and the policies behind the instructional syllabi, while the latter chapter specifically explores the already cited issue with a focus on African American English (AAE) dialect. The next chapter emphasizes the teachers' ample expertise and knowledge for teaching reading to children. It is also highlighted that there should be materials and syllabi that are specifically designed for children. Finally, the concluding chapter of the handbook looks at teaching literacy among adolescents and some problems and barriers they might encounter due to recent and new challenges in educational contexts.

As an innovative and thought-provoking source about the task of reading, authored by pioneers in the field, the Handbook can be adopted for teaching at a graduate as well as postgraduate levels in such divergent fields as ELT (English Language Teaching), the psychology of reading, and/or cognition and disability. Safari and Rashidi consider language learning a "nonlinear, complex, and dynamic system" which "its complex behaviour as a whole is influenced by a large number of factors, forces, and agents" (Safari & Rashidi, 2015, p. 22). Hence, reading with its complex, baffling as well as labyrinthine nature of, structure urges researchers to illuminate the clues of reading.

References

Safari, P. & Rashidi, N. (2015). Language learning as chaos/complexity system: Evidence based on Iranian EFL learners' backgrounds. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry (TOJQI)*, *6*(4), 22-56.