Text Types and EFL Readers' Strategic Processing

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ABSTRACT

Research in L2 reading strategies has reported various factors affecting ESL/EFL readers' cognitive and metacognitive processing of texts. These include variables related to the reader, the text and the task assigned. Although L2 readers' variables (e.g., L2 reading proficiency, vocabulary knowledge, prior background knowledge) have received considerable attention from L2 reading investigators, there still remains lack of qualitative studies that investigate how variations in text types and reading purposes can impact the strategic processing of L2 readers with varying reading proficiency. Hence, this study, through think-aloud reporting and retrospective interviews, explored the reading problems and strategies reported by Saudi EFL readers processing expository and narrative texts for two purposes for reading. The qualitative coding of the verbal protocols yielded a constructed taxonomy of seventy strategic processes.

Of the three variables, text types (expository vs. narrative) proved to be the most influential, yielding significant differences for four out of six major categories and specific strategies, especially five bottom-up strategies. Generally, frequencies were found higher for the narrative text for the reading problems, word-attack strategies and bottom-up strategies, and higher for the expository text for the top-down strategies. With respect to the reading problems, the study findings are not consistent with those from previous studies which concluded that readers often encounter difficulties processing the expository than the narrative text due to the differences in readers' formal schema about text types. Second, differences in L2 reading proficiency showed some significant differences between good and poor readers in three major problems being monitored and three top-down strategies. Nonetheless, the qualitative findings revealed that EFL good and poor readers differed in how they employed the strategies. Finally, the most used strategy was the cognitively undemanding strategy of rereading, then paraphrasing in L1, followed by reading on, adjusting reading rate/speed of reading, and paraphrasing in L2