

Reading Development and Difficulties in Monolingual and Bilingual Chinese Children

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While language defines humanity, literacy defines civilization. Understandably, illiteracy or difficulties in acquiring literacy skills have become a major concern of our technological society. A conservative estimate of the prevalence of literacy problems would put the figure at more than a billion people in the world. Because of the seriousness of the problem, research in literacy acquisition and its breakdown is pursued with enormous vigor and persistence by experts from diverse backgrounds such as cognitive psychology, neuroscience, linguistics and education. This, of course, has resulted in a plethora of data, and consequently it has become difficult to integrate this abundance of information into a coherent body because of the artificial barriers that exist among different professional specialties. The purpose of the proposed series is to bring together the available research studies into a coherent body of knowledge. Publications in this series are intended for use by educators, clinicians and research scientists in the above-mentioned specialties. Some of the titles suitable for the Series are: fMRI, brain imaging techniques and reading skills, orthography and literacy; and research based techniques for improving decoding, vocabulary, spelling, and comprehension skills.

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 Springer

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Foreword

A book devoted to research on learning to read Chinese is an appropriate recognition of Richard C. Anderson's leading-edge work on Chinese literacy and education. Dick has been a pioneer in bringing issues of Chinese language and reading to the attention of the international reading community. His work with colleagues in China has taken place in a rich context of collaboration and exchange in Illinois and China. His professorial appointments at Beijing Normal University and National Taiwan University are apt symbols of his deep engagement with Chinese education.

A much broader recognition is required, however, because Richard C. Anderson's contributions span the broad fields of reading, learning, and education. His leadership in educational research is reflected in his presidency of the American Educational Research Association. The contributions of his research are acknowledged in awards too numerous to list, including, to name just one, the APA's 1997 Edward L. Thorndike Award for distinguished career-long contributions to the psychological study of education.

Well before he turned to comparative reading studies of Chinese, Dick directed the University of Illinois' Center for the Study of Reading, bringing together research on reading and on reading instruction. Dick's research on reading in English with colleagues at the Center was groundbreaking in its perspective and highly influential in its reach, in particular its emphasis on the idea that higher-level knowledge exerts top-down influences on comprehension. For example, he demonstrated that a reader's interpretation and recall of a story can depend dramatically on the background knowledge the reader has and also on the perspective taken during reading. Also influential was Dick's work (with his colleague William Nagy) on vocabulary growth and learning word meanings from the context. The articles Anderson wrote during the 1970s and 1980s are among the most highly cited in the research on literacy and education.

Substantively, this book is an accounting of some of the important discoveries that have been made concerning Chinese reading, both how it is similar to and different from alphabetic reading, and the broader aspects of Chinese literature that are part of the story of literacy development. The editors, two of Dick Anderson's highly accomplished former students and a student of a former student—Xi (Becky)

Chen, Qiuying Wang, and Yang Cathy Luo—have put together an important volume on Chinese literacy. Its chapters are a major contribution to the comparative study of reading, in which factors of language, writing system, and culture are critical. I was very pleased to be part of the 2010 University of Toronto conference that honored Dick's research on Chinese literacy and led to this book. It is a privilege to be able to acknowledge Dick's many contributions to literacy education and to anticipate this excellent set of chapters that reflect his leadership in bringing the study of Chinese reading to the attention of the English-speaking world.

Pittsburgh
June 2013

Charles Perfetti

Preface

This book celebrates the profound leadership and influence of Dick on Chinese reading research. It is based on the “Research in Reading Chinese and Related Asian Languages” conference Lydia Qiuying Wang, Yang Cathy Luo, and I organized at the University of Toronto in 2010 to honor Dick’s pioneering role in this field and his enduring contribution. Lydia and I were Dick’s students at the University of Illinois, while Cathy was my student at the University of Toronto. More than 150 reading researchers from the Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Australia, the USA, and Canada gathered at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) for the event. Among the chapter authors are several generations of Dick’s students: Hua Shu (1991), Lydia Qiuying Wang (2005), Li-Jen Kuo (2006), Jie Zhang (2009), Tzu-Jung Lin (2012), Junli Wei (Ph.D. candidate), and myself (2004), and his academic “grandchildren” Hong Li and Jinger Pan. Other authors include Che Kan Leong, Catherine McBride-Chang, Connie Suk-Han Ho, Keiko Koda, Min Wang, and their colleagues and students. Some of these prominent researchers have received Dick’s guidance in the early stages of their careers; all of them have been deeply influenced by his work over the years.

About 15 years ago, shortly after I arrived in Urbana-Champaign as a new doctoral student from China, I took the bus to the reading center to meet with my advisor Richard C. Anderson for the first time. Probably noticing that I was new, the bus driver started a friendly conversation with me. He asked me what I’d study at the University of Illinois. I was not sure. “Educational Psychology,” I said. That was the name of my department. “Oh,” the bus driver said enthusiastically, “so you will be working with children!” Children, I thought to myself, nobody ever told me about this! That was how much I knew about child development back then. Now, when I sit in my office at the University of Toronto, as an associate professor of children’s language and literacy development, and reflect on this experience, I realize how much Dick has changed my life, and the lives of many others like me.

As I am writing this introduction, Dick’s words come into my mind. “I invest in my students,” I remember him saying, “They are not slave labour. They are tomorrow’s colleagues.” Not until I became a professor myself, did I begin to fully understand the meaning of these words. An extremely accomplished reading researcher,

psychologist, and educator, Dick has been the director of the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign since 1976. In his office in the reading center hangs a “family tree” that he is proud of. The chart delineates his academic heritage, the giants that came before him, B. F. Skinner, Wilhelm Wundt, and his academic children (students) and grandchildren (students’ students). A lot of “children,” such as John Guthrie and Ian Wilkinson have long been leaders in the field of reading themselves. Remarkably, as his research in reading Chinese expands, Dick has more and more Chinese academic “children” and “grandchildren.”

Dick is a pioneer in research in reading Chinese, having been conducting research in this area for more than 30 years. He first visited China in the early 1980s as the leader of a Chinese Ministry of Education—US Department of Education delegation. At that time, China had just opened up to the outside world after decades of isolation. Higher education restarted in the late 1970s after the Cultural Revolution, but most Chinese professors were out of touch with modern developments in education and psychology. Many questions came into Dick’s mind as he set foot on this mysterious country. Is child growth and development the same in China and the West? What are the differences, and could there be any similarities, in reading Chinese and English, considering the very large differences in languages, writing systems, cultures, and traditions of schooling? Soon after, Dick began to pursue this exciting new direction of research.

Dick’s first Chinese student was Hua Shu, whom he co-supervised with Professor Houcan Zhang at Beijing Normal University. The plan was for Hua to come to the USA to study with Dick and then return to China to become the first person to get a Ph.D. in psychology at a Chinese university. Hua completed her studies as planned. She would later become one of the most influential psychologists in China and worldwide, leading the State Key Lab of Cognitive Neuroscience and Learning at Beijing Normal University. However, as it happened, Hua was not the first person to receive a Ph.D. in psychology from a Chinese university. That honor went to Wenling Li. Subsequently, Wenling came to work with Dick as a research scientist at the University of Illinois and stayed on for 12 years. Since Hua, Dick has had a large number of Chinese students from China and Taiwan. Now many of Dick’s students are professors themselves and the academic family is rapidly growing all over the world. Amazingly, Dick mentors his students’ students just as if they were his own students. The same generosity extends to colleagues, visiting scholars, or even people who just email to ask a question.

Together with his students and colleagues, Dick has established a comprehensive framework of research in reading Chinese. His early work in this area demonstrated that Chinese children learned new characters “incidentally” simply from reading. The rate of learning was similar to that of American children. Next came the studies showing that Chinese children making the best progress in reading utilized the information in semantic and phonetic radicals in compound characters. The major theme of his Chinese research in the 2000s was morphological awareness. Dick pioneered the study of compound words, showing that Chinese students had greater compound awareness than American students, and that morphological productivity was an important factor in insight into the structure of compounds. Another line of research focused on visual orthographic analysis of Chinese. This innovative work

was featured in a recent special issue of *Scientific Studies of Reading* on Chinese reading that Dick and I co-edited. Dick also studied bilingual Chinese children, contributing important empirical findings and theoretical ideas to the comparison of reading between monolinguals and bilinguals and cross-language transfer of cognitive and linguistic skills, notably the structural sensitivity theory. In sum, Dick's research has examined the development of metalinguistic, language, and print-based skills in both monolingual and bilingual Chinese children, providing a full understanding of the cognitive processes involved in Chinese reading.

With more than 200 publications, Dick is undoubtedly one of the most productive researchers of our time. However, Dick is not just interested in producing theories and publications. He has a deep concern for the education and well-being of Chinese children, especially those who are poor and who belong to minority groups. This concern is reflected in the large-scale intervention studies he carried out in China promoting Shared Book reading and systematic morphology-based instruction. These studies fulfilled an important need because of the absence in China of a tradition of parents reading books with their children and the "intensive" reading emphasis in the primary school Chinese curriculum. In fact, Dick's impact on the Chinese world goes far beyond his research. He helped found the Sunlory Education publishing company in China that produces evidenced-based, content rich, and age-appropriate reading and math materials for young Chinese children. Dick and his wife, Jana Mason, created some of the books themselves. Today, through the efforts of Dick and the company, hundreds of thousands of Chinese kindergarteners are using the Shared Book reading program Dick initiated. The program is used by kindergartens in every province in China, including remote provinces such as Xinjiang and Mongolia. Despite his busy schedule, Dick visits China every year, traveling all over the country to talk to teachers about reading theories and practice.

For a brief moment, I thought I was still at the reading center with Dick. Dick was always the first one to show up at work in the morning, and that was after a lengthy session in the gym. I remember the numerous parties he threw in his house, where he served delicious Japanese food he cooked and Jana played piano and showed off her paintings. I remember the fun trips to AERA, with us students following him from reception to reception pretending to be professors. I remember he was proud of me when I was offered the position at the University of Toronto, but was also slightly disappointed that I wasn't going back immediately to improve education in China. I went back to Champaign to attend Dick's retirement party in 2012. Our conversation was not about retirement, it was about his new projects, new students, and new horizons. Dick is an inspiration in every aspect of life.

Overview of the Book

This book consists of four sections, Psycholinguistic Study of Reading Chinese, Reading Disability in Chinese Children, Bilingual and Biliteracy Development in Chinese and English, and Children's Literature in Chinese. We have chosen to

structure the book this way because each section represents an important aspect of Dick's research framework. Among the authors of the book are leading experts on research in reading Chinese. We are pleased that the "Research in Reading Chinese and Related Asian Languages" conference and this book provide opportunities for them to review and synthesize extant research and explore important and exciting new directions.

The first section, *Psycholinguistic Study of Reading Chinese*, consists of five chapters which address Chinese reading at the levels of character, word, and text comprehension, as well as the role of motivation in reading achievement. The section opens with Chap. 1 by Jie Zhang, Tzu-Jung Lin, Junli Wei, and Richard C. Anderson. This chapter presents the idea that morphological awareness enhances reading development by increasing the efficiency of the working memory, which in turn facilitates vocabulary learning and reading comprehension. Theoretical and empirical supports for the relationships between morphological awareness, working memory, vocabulary, and reading growth are reviewed. The chapter is the first to link morphological awareness to verbal working memory, which opens new areas for future research endeavors.

Chapter 2 is based on Xi Chen's dissertation. In this chapter, Xi Chen, Richard C. Anderson, Hong Li, and Hua Shu examined the development of strategies in learning to read Chinese through three experiments. Experiment 1 showed that preschoolers relied on a few distinctive visual features to read their first words. Experiment 2 found that kindergarteners already developed some understanding of the phonetic strategy and the analogy strategy. The former refers to reading a phonetic compound character by using the information in the phonetic, while the latter refers to reading a compound by making an analogy to another compound that shares the same phonetic. Experiment 3 revealed that children in the fourth and sixth grade used consistency information to learn families of characters sharing the same phonetic. A model of Chinese reading development is proposed that addresses similarities and differences in reading Chinese and English.

In Chap. 3, Tong Li and Catherine McBride-Chang discuss the similarities and differences in reading Chinese characters and words. The chapter begins by distinguishing the concept of a character from that of a word in Chinese. Next, it reviews research on the acquisition of each, with particular attention to the role of orthographic structure in reading characters and the role of morphological awareness in reading words. The chapter concludes by addressing how character and word reading skills interact and bidirectionally influence one another.

Che Kan Leong, Shek Kam Tse, Ka Yee Loh, and Man Koon Ho, in Chap. 4, emphasize the principles and learning strategies underpinning children's text comprehension and written composition in Chinese. The topic-comment nature of Chinese sentences and text and their comprehension are discussed. Verbal working memory is shown to play an important role in reading. The knowledge telling and knowledge transforming approaches of Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) provide a viable framework in studying written composition in Chinese. The authors discuss different ways to enhance children's writing with examples in learning and teaching

and address issues in composing, including the quantity and quality of writing and the continuing quest to understand the reading-writing reciprocal relationship.

In the last chapter of this section, Qiuying Wang and Cassandra Coddington described a study examining Chinese beginning readers' motivation for reading and reading achievement in relation to parental and home influences. Children completed a questionnaire that assessed their perceptions of reading competence and reading difficulty, and their attitudes toward reading. Parents completed a survey of their values on reading, encouragement for challenging reading, support with printed materials and attitudes toward their child's reading. Results indicated that Chinese children's competence for reading was positively associated with reading achievement, while their perceptions of difficulty for reading were negatively associated with reading achievement. Parental and home influences were significantly associated with Chinese children's motivation for reading and reading achievement.

The second section of the book, *Reading Disability in Chinese Children*, consists of two chapters. In Chap. 6, Connie Suk-Han Ho, Yau-Kai Wong, Chor-Ming Lo, David W. Chan, Kevin Kien-hoa Chung, and Sau-Ching Lo review research findings regarding the cognitive profile of Chinese children with reading disability and discuss the relevance of the profile for intervention. In particular, the authors describe a successful Chinese tiered intervention model with core reading instruction curriculum, which they have developed and implemented in 37 primary schools in Hong Kong. Comparing the core reading components in Chinese and English suggests that different cognitive demands are needed for reading diverse orthographies—phonological training is essential for learning to read English, whereas orthographic and morphological training is significant for reading success in Chinese.

In Chap. 7, Jinger Pan and Hua Shu explored how Rapid Automatized Naming (RAN) is related to reading in Chinese children with and without dyslexia. The children were administered processing speed tasks, auditory temporal processing, RAN, phonological awareness, Chinese character recognition, and timed word list reading. Results showed that Chinese dyslexic children performed poorer than typical developing children in all tasks. Furthermore, principal component analyses revealed that RAN loaded on both phonological processing and processing speed components. RAN uniquely predicted Chinese timed and untimed word reading, while phonological awareness predicted only untimed Chinese word reading. The authors conclude the chapter with a discussion of the underlying mechanism and the role of RAN in Chinese reading.

The third section, *Bilingual and Biliteracy Development in Chinese and English*, comprises three chapters. In Chap. 8, Keiko Koda, Chan Lü, and Dongbo Zhang address two overarching questions: How are previously acquired sub-skills assimilated in learning to read in later acquired, or additional, literacy? How do assimilated skills enhance reading sub-skills development in later acquired literacy? Two empirical studies are reported. The first study focused on the intra- and interlingual relationships in oral vocabulary knowledge, phonological awareness, and decoding skills in Chinese heritage language learners in the USA. The second study examined cross-linguistic relationships in morphological awareness and lexical inference in

Chinese children learning English as a Foreign Language in China. Findings of the studies are discussed in light of systematic variations in L1-induced facilitation that are attributable to task demands, linguistic distance between two languages, and L2 grapheme-language mapping experience.

In Chap. 9, Li-Jen Kuo and Tae-Jin Kim report two studies with Chinese-English bilingual children to determine whether bilingual advantage in structural sensitivity identified in phonological processing (Kuo & Anderson, 2010) extends to morphology and syntax. Experiment 1 compared Chinese-English bilingual children to English-speaking monolingual children on the way they constructed novel adjectival compounds with a verb and an object. Experiment 2 focused on how the two groups differed in the way they acquired novel syntax. The findings of both experiments are consistent with the prediction made by structural sensitivity theory, which postulates that having access to two linguistic systems allows bilingual children to compare and contrast structural properties of language, thereby attending to more abstract level of linguist structures.

Min Wang, Candise Y. Lin, Chen Yang, in Chap. 10, present a longitudinal study that followed Chinese-English bilingual children from Grade 1 to Grade 2 to investigate the contribution of phonology, orthography, and morphology to biliteracy acquisition across time and across languages. Chinese onset awareness at Grade 1 predicted English real word reading at Grade 2, providing evidence for cross-language cross-time transfer. Within language across time, Chinese rime awareness at Grade 1 predicted Chinese character reading at Grade 2, while English phonemic awareness at Grade 1 accounted for unique variance in English real and pseudoword reading at Grade 2. These results highlight the importance of phonological awareness in reading development in bilingual children. The authors also discuss why transfer was not observed for orthographic or morphological awareness.

The final section of the book, *Children's Literature in Chinese*, contains two chapters. In Chap. 11, Belinda Yun-Ying Louie describes a systematic analysis of Chinese juvenile literature available in North America. In total, 1,034 titles of Chinese children's literature books available to the North American community were considered. These books were published in China, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and the USA. Five aspects of the books were analyzed including genres, readability, aural accessibility, cultural content, and appeal to Chinese language learners. The analysis revealed that the books were written for Chinese-speaking children who have the oral language capacity to understand when the stories are read to them. In addition, some of the contemporary realistic fiction titles were laden with strong Chinese sentimentalism that may be foreign to students who grew up overseas.

In Chap. 12, the final chapter of the book, Minjie Chen and Qiuying Wang examined 46 titles of award-winning picture books published from 1993 through 2009, tracing changes, progresses, and persistent flaws in how the culture and experience of ethnic Chinese had been portrayed in publications for American young readers. The authors analyzed the diversity of genres and subject matter in these books, and evaluated the accuracy of cultural representation in textual and visual contents, with attention paid to the relationship between cultural authenticity and authors' cultural

backgrounds. They highlight high-quality titles considered satisfactory sources for learning about Chinese culture, and make suggestions to publishers on ways to raise the standards of multicultural youth literature.

June 13, 2013

Xi Chen
Qiuying Wang
Yang Cathy Luo

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