

## Summary

This book explores the reading process in a foreign language. Focusing on the process rather than the product of reading, it examines the question of how L2-readers act mentally when confronted with foreign language texts. How do they plan, regulate, and control their reading process? Previous studies in this field have described a number of L2 reading strategies, and have often operated within the theoretical framework of metacognition (Anderson 1991; Block 1985, 1992; Davis & Bistodeau 1993; Hosenfeld 1977, 1979; Sarig 1987). It is argued here that these investigations have analyzed the reading process much like individual problem-solving and have neglected, to a certain extent, the pragmatic nature of the reading process, especially the mental cooperation of author and reader in order to reach a certain goal. To shed more light on the inner coherence of single reading moves, this book thus analyzes the L2 reading process from a functional pragmatic point of view as mental action.

The main sources for the data collected for this exploratory interpretative analysis were think-aloud protocols complemented by other types of process and product data. In the larger context of a (German) psychology lecture and a related (English) reading skills class, 11 German undergraduate students of psychology were asked to think aloud while reading an American textbook on psychology. Their utterances, non-verbal communication and physical actions such as note-taking, underlining, or consulting a dictionary were videotaped and transcribed in great detail.

The first step of the analysis focuses on the mental action of the reader in what Brown (1980:455) has called the “automatic pilot state” when readers proceed without experiencing any comprehension problems. The starting point for the analysis is the fact that the goal of the mental cooperation between author and reader is the acquisition of new psychological knowledge. Therefore, four types of knowledge on the part of both author and reader are developed: the theme of knowledge, the non-known, the means to knowledge and the newly known. With reference to these, the analysis reconstructs the reader’s pattern knowledge from empirical examples. The reconstructed dilated pattern of action shows the goal-oriented interplay of single reading moves as a functional unit. On the basis of the empirical examples, the following mental processes are characterized with regard to the whole pattern: thematic identification, thematic elaboration, integrative identification, integrative elaboration, associative elaboration and integration. Furthermore, the data show that these L2-readers also plan their reading process with regard to topical organisation to a considerable extent. This planning allows for regulation and control of the L2 reading process on a higher processing level and, at the same time, facilitates reductive-organising processes crucial for learning.

The second part of the analysis concentrates on incongruous understanding. In an effort to develop a basis for an error analysis of reading, content- and function-related incongruities are differentiated and analyzed. The data suggest that content-related incongruities during construction of the theme and the non-known as well as functional incongruities in general seem to have especially severe detrimental consequences for the process of knowledge acquisition.

Finally, the analysis turns to the reader's mental action during what Brown (1980:455) has termed the "debugging state". How do readers realize comprehension failures and what do they do about them? Referring on the one hand to Baker's (1985) work on standards of comprehension and on the other to Ehlich & Rehbein's (1986) analysis of the pattern of cognitive-operative reasoning, comprehension failure is characterized as the identification of a specific action context and its negative evaluation with regard to the continuation of this action. This negative evaluation is based on the incoherence or inconsistency of any of the different types of knowledge. The empirical data reveal six mental processes involved in comprehension-securing action: compensatory integration, compensatory integrative conclusion, revising integration, dissociated translation, compensatory elaborative conclusion and compensatory internal conclusion. The analysis suggests that good readers tend to analyze comprehension failures congruously according to different standards and tend to deal with them interactively, that is, by going back to the text. In contrast, poor readers in this exploratory study showed a tendency to analyze their comprehension failures incongruously and to choose mentally less challenging, mainly knowledge-driven action without going back to the text.

Thus, three different levels characterize the reading process as mental action. First of all, the activity on a level higher than the reading process itself determines the reader's intention. Secondly, as receptive linguistic action, reading is mental action which enables the reader to reconstruct the pattern of action set up in the text by the author and thus allows for cooperative action between the two of them. On a third level, reading involves comprehension-securing action which is, in contrast to the second level, text-related individual mental action. However, it is closely related to the speech action of effective reasoning. These insights into the action character of reading call into question L2-reading instruction which either lacks an authentic higher-level activity or teaches so-called good reading strategies in an isolated, that is a non-functional way. They further suggest specific questions for future research concerning action-oriented L2-reading instruction.