

## Navigating in foreign language texts

Lundquist, L. (2008). Frederiksberg, Denmark: Samfunds Litteratur.

Reviewed by Jean Brick

Lundquist's *Navigating in foreign language texts* has been written to assist university students in reading foreign language texts. It approaches the problem of improving reading in a second language (L2) in the belief that learners can successfully transfer the principles used for processing first language (L1) to L2 reading and that if students are consciously instructed, this transfer will be all the more effective. While English is taken as the central language, the author also presents examples of her analytical approach in French, Spanish and German.

The text is divided into three sections that deal with top-down and bottom-up processing in reading and the role of cohesive features. This leads to the identification of a number of reading strategies that allow the reader to build a coherent and globally consistent mental model of a text. Finally, two e-learning programs aimed at developing the reading strategies identified by Lundquist are described.

In Chapters 1 and 2, Lundquist discusses top-down processing and first describes how readers build up a mental model of the text by using headings and opening sentences to activate prior knowledge and make predictions. Chapter 2 outlines the role of genre (very loosely defined), discourse and text type, collectively referred to as contextual clues, in determining an interpretation program for a text. This leads to the formulation of the first of Lundquist's major strategies: use prior knowledge, prediction and understanding of genre, discourse and text type to activate an expectation frame, which will determine the subsequent interpretation of the text.

Chapter 3 examines the contribution of bottom-up processing in foreign language reading. Lundquist starts by discussing the importance of chunking; that is, of breaking sentences down into units of meaning. She points out that readers automatically use their understanding of syntax in their native language to chunk, and goes on to claim that if readers develop an awareness of their use of chunking in L1 reading, they will be able to transfer this ability into their foreign language reading. Chunking demands the ability to recognise the structure of a sentence, and here

Lundquist points to the importance of the verb, or, rather, the importance of the verb frame, by which she means the verb and the number of *players* and *satellites* associated with it. Terms such as *player* and *satellite* are adopted rather than more conventional terms such as *direct* and *indirect object* and *prepositional phrase* in order to avoid alienating the reader with technical terminology. Recognition of the verb frame allows the reader to both predict the structure of the sentence and to identify the function of each of the players.

This discussion leads in to Chapter 4, which deals with vocabulary and the packaging of information into propositions. Lundquist describes several strategies for dealing with unfamiliar words, including guessing from context, using cognates, developing an understanding of word derivation, and the use of prefixes and suffixes. She then goes on to describe the ways in which information in a sentence is packaged in propositions. Readers are encouraged to recognise how propositions are related through subordination and embedding, and how they are situated through adverbials. Finally, they are expected to recognise lexical markers of subjectivity that alert them to how the *sender* expects the text to be interpreted.

Chapter 5 moves from the level of the sentence to the level of the text, identifying features that create a coherent text, including argument overlap (the use of co-referential expressions), anaphora, logical connectors and subordination. Using these features, readers trace paths of coherence through a text, and it is with this step that Lundquist brings together the various strategies she has discussed into an overall approach involving 13 sequential strategies, which, she argues, result in readers developing a clear and consistent mental model of the text.

Lundquist concludes by describing two freely available e-learning programs that seek to develop the reading strategies she has identified. TeXtRay focuses on developing the bottom-up strategies of sentence analysis, while NaviLire is concerned with identifying paths of coherence in specific text types.

*Navigating in foreign language texts* undoubtedly offers a useful approach to helping university students with high levels of competence in L2 English, French, Spanish or German to improve their foreign language reading. Its use by students of more diverse language backgrounds or lesser levels of L2 competence is more problematic. First, the assumption that L1 reading strategies

can easily be transferred to L2 is questionable. Substantial research suggests that this is true only after a certain threshold level in L2 is reached (Grabe and Stoller 2002; Pichette, Segalowitz and Connors 2003). Nor are all learners able to construct mental models with equal degrees of facility. Walter (2004) found that success in mental structure building in L2 is dependent on success in similar structure building in L1, and that L1 readers differ significantly in their ability to construct mental representations, even when their sentence to sentence understanding is similar.

While Lundquist suggests that strategies are transferred rather than knowledge, she perhaps takes insufficient account of the role of negative transfer, notably with regard to text structure and the order of information in sentences. She also does not deal with cases where readers in fact have little or no knowledge of the topic of the text (a common situation for students in the early months of tertiary study), beyond noting that such students will have difficulty in activating top-down strategies involving the use of prior knowledge.

In her discussion of vocabulary, Lundquist does not consider the claim of researchers such as Nation and Gu (2007) that the reader needs to understand 95 per cent of the words in a text in order to successfully guess the meaning of an unknown word. The emphasis that she places on using cognates is appropriate in the case of closely related languages such as French and Spanish (although the problem of *faux amis* cannot be ignored), but is likely to be much less useful in the case of more distantly related languages.

Having said this, *Navigating in foreign language texts* is likely to be a useful addition to a language teacher's library, not least because it presents a model of the reading process that reflects many of the complexities involved in developing efficient and effective second language readers, and because it outlines the model in a reader-friendly fashion.

## References

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