Attention and Fluency of L2 Learners in Task-Based Reading: An Examination Using Eye-Tracking

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Abstract

Research suggests that proficient L2 readers have high levels of strategic competence, especially related to global strategy usage and metacognitive skills. Effective readers adjust their strategy usage based on the type of text and task at hand. However, prior research has often relied on surveys and other self-report protocols to assess task performance and these methods have major limitations. L1 research has utilized eye tracking technology to examine global strategy usage, yet such L2 eye tracking studies on selective attention are lacking. In the first study described, the eyes of Japanese participants (N=68) were tracked as they completed a task to find specific information located in one section of a facsimile of a Wikipedia page. The results showed that most participants read the text linearly, paying little or no selective attention to the table of contents or scanning to find the relevant information. Task performance was assessed by analyzing the eye-tracking data, recall of relevant information and a multiple-choice test that contained relevant and non-relevant items. The findings provide insight into what participants are really doing as they perform a reading task and suggest that learners may benefit from reading strategy training. In the second study, participants were assessed on their completion of an online reading fluency task after having performed equivalent tasks over a semester of study. The results provide insight into how the task instructions were interpreted by subjects and a range of different outcomes is illustrated. There are further implications for research and task design and especially setting up and preparing participants for tasks so that they understand what is required to complete a task efficiently.

Keywords: *eye tracking, gaze tracking, selective attention, reading fluency;*