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Report on
Sheida Marzban's PhD thesis

Title: SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS' STRATEGIES OF READING MULTIMODAL TEXTS: THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON READING

This dissertation investigates an exceptionally important and current issue in second language education research: the use of multimodal texts in language teaching and the reading strategies learners use to understand these texts. In order to explore this topic multiple methods were used including eye-tracking, which is a praiseworthy achievement. The structure of dissertation is clear and logical, the text is easy to read. In terms of the language and format, the dissertation has been formatted and written in clear academic English. However, there are some formal inconsistencies and language-related issues, such as occasional short paragraphs, lack of references for statements, inconsistent of italics and absence of indentation. Furthermore, it remains unclear why the study is referred to as "pilot research" in multiple sections in the dissertation.

The introduction is organized in a logical way and effectively sets the scene for the research. I miss a more pronounced justification of the apparent research gap and the rationale for the current study, which is clearly adequate for a PhD dissertation. It is somewhat confusing to read Sections 1.2 and 1.3 without references as it is not clear whether the author is presenting her own opinions or referring to previous empirical studies. Many of the ideas are repeated in section 2.10, still without references.

The literature review summarizes the most important theories and empirical studies pertaining to the research topic, overviewing multimodal reading and age-related differences. The structure is logical, and the subchapters and sections are effectively signposted. My overall comment here concerns the fact that the review is mainly a summary of previous studies without achieving a good balance between description and evaluation. More specifically, I miss the critical overview of previous theoretical and empirical studies, which would help justifying the research gap in a valid way.

The methods sections lack several pieces information, including details about the population/populations of the study as well as some aspects of the sampling methods. It is unclear why some levels of measurement were simplified in the study (e.g., age) and why a categorical variable was approximated with a normal distribution. Additionally, it is also unclear how sample sizes were determined. Concerning the online questionnaire, there is a lack of information about quality control measures implemented to ensure that the instrument collects reliable and valid data. While there is information about the design of the test, there is a missing link to explicit references justifying both the design choices and its overall quality. Essentially, we know what the candidate did, but we lack insight into why those specific actions were taken. The follow-up questions appear to lack complexity, I am not sure about the quality of the data collected with them. I think the candidate uses the words population and sample interchangeably, which complicates understanding some of her points. In addition, the use of the word “experiment” requires clarification, as essential components like treatments and pre- and post-test measures or control group are absent. All in all, since the dissertation aims to present a complex study, a more precise methods section adhering to academic conventions would have facilitated a better understanding of the research.

The results of the research are summarized in several subchapters and sections, the structure is logically organized. However, certain pieces of information are not presented. Unfortunately, tables do not contain sample sizes, making it challenging to assess the potential levels of sampling error. Furthermore, it is unclear what motivated the use of both parametric and non-parametric statistical procedures. Test-values are often missing from the tables, and, in some instances, the measurement units are unclear. The level of significance cannot be zero, I am not sure what the zeros mean in the text and in some of the tables.

I genuinely appreciate the candidate's effort to discuss her results meaningfully and in a comprehensive manner. It demonstrates that she invested time in engaging with her findings and connecting them back to the reviewed literature. There seems to be a good balance between summarization and discussion, although I do miss the candidate's voice. It would be interesting to know which results surprised her most and why. Personally, I found Chapter 6 to be surprising after the discussion, I think information presented there is more suitable for the methods section.

The conclusion of the dissertation covers all the necessary elements, including limitations, future research directions, and pedagogical implications. While I would have appreciated a more synthetic approach to future research directions, it is commendable that they are linked to the apparent shortcomings of the study.

On the basis of the above considerations, I can conclude that this thesis presents an original piece of research on a timely and important topic, and, therefore, I think that it meets the requirements of a PhD degree. I am looking forward to discussing the dissertation with the candidate at the public defence.



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