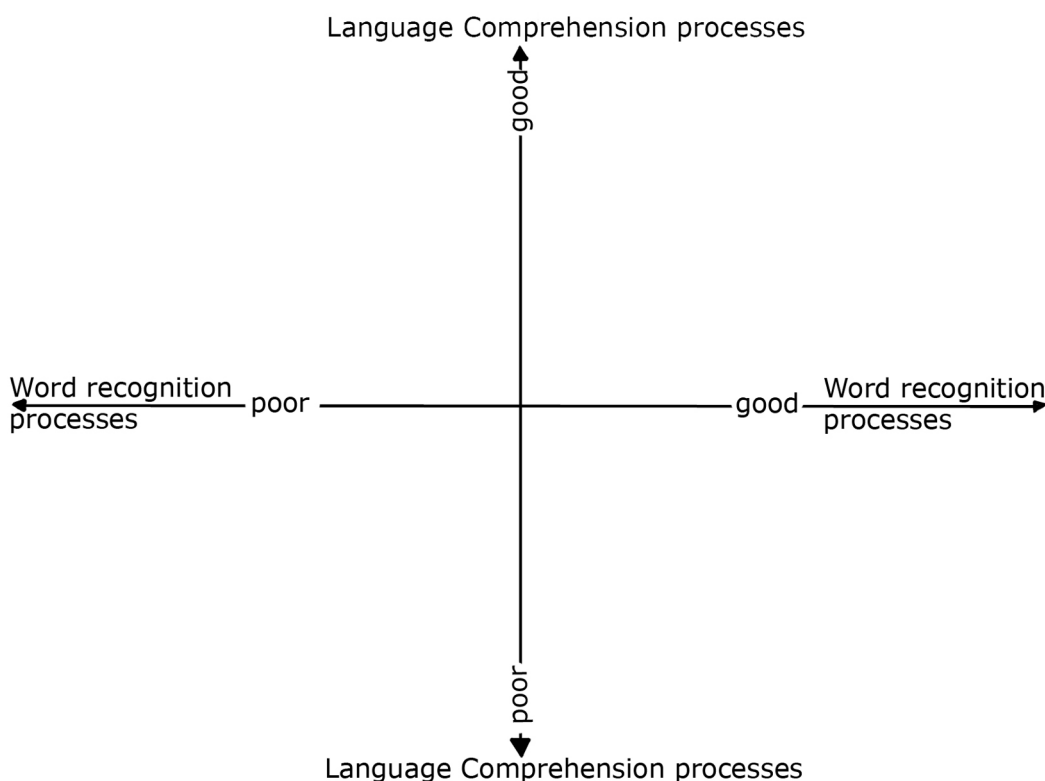


The Simple View of Reading

Appendix A of the Rose Report, (2006) examines the case for the change from the 'Searchlights' model (1998) to the 'simple view of reading', a conceptual framework for understanding how children develop reading skills, first put forward by Gough and Tunmer in 1986.

This framework separates out two essential components of reading and names them 'word recognition processes', and 'language comprehension processes'. They can be displayed as two separate dimensions on a diagram as shown below.



This separation of the processes is necessary for the display of the results of psychological research projects that have been carried out in each dimension separately. These results, and how they fit into the quadrants of the diagram, are discussed in pages 78–84 of the Rose report.

The simple view of reading states that:

Reading is the product of decoding and comprehension.

This is explained in the Rose report on page 75 paragraph 12.

Two components of reading identified in the simple view of reading first put forward by Gough and Tunmer (1986) are 'decoding' and 'comprehension: according to these authors, 'Reading is the product of decoding and comprehension'. We would not want to suggest accepting this statement as a complete description or explanation of reading; rather, we want to advocate the good sense of considering reading in terms of these two components.

The report goes on to define 'decoding' in paragraph 13.

However, it is important to be clear as to the meanings the authors ascribe to the terms used in the statement, so that we can understand what each component comprises. Gough and Tunmer make clear that by 'decoding' they mean the ability to recognise words presented singly out of context, with the ability to apply phonic rules a crucial contributory factor to the development of this context-free word recognition ability.

It defines 'comprehension' in paragraph 14.

They also make clear that by 'comprehension' they mean not reading comprehension but linguistic comprehension, which they define as 'the process by which, given lexical (i.e. word) information, sentences and discourse are interpreted'. A common set of linguistic processes is held to underlie comprehension of both oral and written language.

It explains the necessity for each component in paragraph 15.

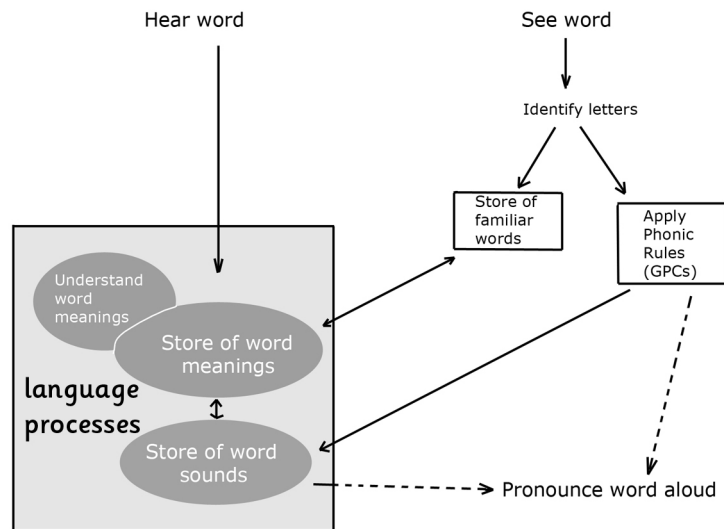
Gough and Tunmer further make clear that word recognition is necessary but not sufficient for reading because the ability to pronounce printed words does not guarantee understanding of the text so represented. Furthermore, linguistic comprehension is likewise necessary, but not sufficient for reading: if you cannot recognise the words that comprise the written text, you cannot recover lexical information necessary for the application of linguistic processes that lead to comprehension.

However, it can be seen from paragraphs 12-15, that the terms 'word recognition processes' and 'decoding' are not quite the same.

They define 'decoding' as 'the ability to recognize words presented singly out of context' and go on to say that 'applying phonic rules is a crucial factor' of this.

The report also features a diagram on page 86 to show a word recognition system.

Figure 4: Diagrammatic representation of the word recognition system, page 86 of the Rose report.



The right hand side of the diagram represents the processes that occur when a written word is seen.

The left hand side of the diagram represents the processes involved when a word is heard.

When a familiar word is seen, the child can immediately locate his 'store of word meanings' associated within his oral/aural vocabulary and recognize the word.

When, after identifying the letters, an unfamiliar word is seen, the child has to perform the following tasks.

He has to apply grapheme/phoneme correspondences (GPC) rules and split the word into its phonemes, assuming he has been taught these particular graphemes and phonemes.

Then he can access his 'store of word sounds' (in the shaded area representing spoken language) and this will allow him to pronounce the word aloud.

At this point I am not sure whether the 'store of word sounds' should be

called the 'store of letter sounds' because a child will need such a store in the aural/oral side of the diagram, to be able to identify the sounds of the letters. However, there is no such store on the diagram.

Also, a child will need to identify these letter sounds aurally before he can blend them together (synthesise them) to say the word aloud, i.e. pronounce it.

If a store of letter sounds is not identified in the diagram and the process of synthesizing (blending the letters together to say the word) is missing, then the diagram misses out the whole point of 'synthetic phonics'.

The Rose report in paragraph 52 of Appendix A informs us that:
'Children need to develop a store of phonic rules: processes to link graphemes to phonemes, and to blend phonemes into words. These processes are essential to reading unfamiliar words, and therefore form an essential part of the word recognition system.'

This complete subset of skills involving blending phonemes should be on the diagram somewhere, because it forms an essential part of all synthetic phonic processes. There is no trace of these skills in the diagram.

However, when the letters have been pronounced aloud and blended into a word, the child then has to access a 'store of word meanings' (in the shaded area because it is common to both written and spoken language). If the word is known from spoken language, so that it is in the oral/aural vocabulary, then that word can be understood straight away, i.e. 'language comprehension' has taken place.

We are told in paragraph 50 that the dotted lines leading to 'pronounce the word aloud' are optional since most reading is done silently. However, when a child is first learning to read, he will have to say the word aloud. So I am assuming that this is not optional, and the child will have to 'pronounce the word aloud' after he has applied the phonic rules.

If I assume that the term 'apply phonic rules' describes all the subset of skills needed, then the next stage that has to be completed is to access the 'store of word sounds.' i.e. the 'store of pronounced words', so that the 'store of word meanings' can be accessed and the word can be understood.

However, this is the point at which the simple view of reading splits 'word recognition' into its two components, 'decoding' and 'language comprehension'. The simple view of reading needs 'decoding'

(pronunciation) to be completely separate from 'language comprehension' to be a valid 'conceptual framework'.

If 'word recognition processes' include any part of 'language comprehension processes' then the whole conceptual framework falls apart.

This is because 'word recognition' (as shown in the diagram) will include 'comprehension'. 'Comprehension' will then be included in both dimensions of the simple view of reading.

This will render the 'factor analysis' of either component useless. All the evidence set out as 'factor analysis' in the Rose report Appendix A will not fit into any of its quadrants, and the simple view of reading will be invalidated.

So, it is very important for this intellectual basis that the two components, 'word recognition processes' and 'language comprehension processes' are completely separate. But how can anyone say, when they see figure 4, that this is a diagram to illustrate decoding only, when it clearly is not.

1. It is clear that the processes depicted by the diagram include word meanings.
2. It is clear that the term 'apply GPCs' involves hearing processes that are not shown in the shaded area of the diagram.
3. It is clear that word recognition, as depicted in this process, includes the comprehension of the word.
4. It is clearly labeled as a diagrammatic representation of the 'word recognition system' and this term cannot simply mean 'decoding' in this diagram.

If the authors of the Rose report truly believe that this diagram represents the 'word recognition system', then it cannot be used in conjunction with the simple view of reading because it places 'the meaning of the word/language comprehension' in both dimensions and totally invalidates it.

Marlene Greenwood 20th January 2012