Recalibrating the Flesch Readability Index for the Twenty-first Century

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Rudolf Flesch’s formula, developed in the 1940s, has withstood the test of time. Yet research indicates that the interpretation of scores attained today by the Flesch Readability Formula may differ somewhat from the original interpretation suggested by Flesch, in terms of the school grade levels that correspond to the index. In this paper I give an overview of the history of readability studies. Then I return briefly to the 1940s to examine the seminal works of Rudolf Flesch in greater detail. From there I demonstrate that the same reading materials that Flesch studied years ago do not yield the same results today, even when analyzed according to his own formula. Finally, I suggest a modified interpretation of the scores, an interpretation suitable for the twenty-first century.

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