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READING STRATEGIES AND LANGUAGE AWARENESS OF ENGLISH LITERARY TEXTS

This small-scale study of educated readers aims to contribute to the exploration of the process of reading literary texts in a foreign language. By means of a think-aloud procedure and post-task interviews, the study explores the repertoire of strategies used by educated, non-native readers of literature and their progress in the use and awareness of those strategies after receiving academic instruction. Results evidenced the use of a great variety of cognitive, support and metacognitive strategies although, over time, some of them became less frequent or even disappeared. The study shows that repertoires of strategies change in time but also that each reader changes differently. The article draws pedagogical implications and provides recommendations for further research into the process of reading literature in a foreign language.

Key words: adult, language awareness, language learning, literary texts, metacognitive strategies, reading, reading strategies

It is a common belief that literary texts in a foreign language are more difficult to understand than non-literary ones because of their levels of meaning and their apparent linguistic complexity. Some language researchers cast doubt on such a belief (Van Dijk 1977) [25], but others point out (Zwaan 1993) that literary texts differ in the associations of ideas, the suspense and the emotions they awake in readers [27]. Other applied linguists—and most literary theoreticians—have argued that such complexity is caused by the cultural load and the apparently higher degree of intertextuality inherent to literary texts (Pritchard 1990; Steffensen, Joag-Dev and Anderson 1979) [23; 20].

Probably because literature is perceived as such a special type of discourse with few connections with other academic and professional discourses, the activity of reading authentic literature in a foreign language has been scarcely researched. In fact, there is no research that documents thoroughly what happens when educated adult EFL learners read an authentic literary text. One may find studies on the relationship between comprehension, strategies and metacognitive awareness of strategies, but always with regard to non-literary text (Block 1992; Carrell 1983, 1991, *et al.* 1988) [2; 3; 4; 5], or to the theoretical potential of literature for language acquisition (Hauptman 2000) [11]. As Maley (2001) points out, most scientific research on reading includes data collected from low-level ESP courses, and investigations into the reading of literature are usually parts of doctoral ethnographic studies that tend to remain unpublished [11].

The scarce studies on the actual process of reading literature neither explore the repertoire of strategies triggered by literature, nor describe the complexity of such a process; they rather document the use of individual strategies (Pritchard 1990; Riley 1993) [20; 21]. Other studies exploring students' attitudes towards literature have only taken as participants native literature majors (Davis *et al.* 1992) [7] or low-level ESL educated learners (Lao and Krashen 2000) [15]. None, with the exception of the case study reported by Trenchs (1997, 1998a, 1998b), has been devoted to L2 intermediate or advanced educated readers who may be approaching the comprehension of a literary text [24]. A basis for the present investigation, the afore-mentioned case study, attempted to survey the reading strategies of such readers and to detect possible sources of comprehension difficulties. Its subjects relied on academic knowledge as a comprehension strategy and unconsciously reported on their use of metacognitive strategies, two behaviours worth the further exploration reported in the present article.

This small-scale research aims to study the process of reading a literary text in a foreign language as experienced by university students of Humanities—thus, by educated readers—both at the onset of and after their academic instruction. The hypothesis underlying the research was that, after four years of instruction in the Humanities, advanced, educated L2 readers should change the way they approach the reading of a literary text in a foreign language as regards strategy use and strategy awareness.

The questions guiding the study were: (1) What repertoire of strategies do learners put to use when reading a literary text in a foreign language? (2) Do the use of and awareness of such strategies change after receiving academic instruction? (3) May different readers develop differently in their use and awareness of strategies after receiving such instruction?

The existing studies exploring the strategies that learners put to use when reading in a foreign language recommend a qualitative methodological design including concurrent or retrospective verbal reports provided by the readers themselves (Block 1992; Davis and Bistodeau 1993; Ericsson and Simon 1996; Matsumoto 1993) [3; 7; 9; 17]. Thus, two reading sessions were conducted with each participant: one at the onset of their university studies and another session once their degree in Humanities had been completed. Four methods of data collection were designed for each of the sessions: (1) the reading of aliterary text while doing a concurrent verbal report, (2) an oral summary of the text during a semi-structured post-task interview, (3) a retrospective oral report during the same interview and (4) the observation of the readers' external behaviour while reading.

Each participant was told to read the text aloud; they could stop at any point they wished and had to verbalize what they were understanding, what was going through their minds and what they thought they were doing while reading. The instruments in each session were two literary texts of similar length (1142 and 1385 words, respectively), of similar linguistic difficulty and of academic significance for the participants. The texts chosen were 'Cat in the Rain' for the first session and 'Mr and Mrs Elliot', for the second one; both short stories were written by Ernest Hemingway (1963 [1939]) [12; 13]. In order to introduce the think-aloud procedure, the researcher exemplified it while performing a writing task so as not to bias the readers' reports (Victori 1995) [3]. They practiced the think-aloud procedure by reading parts of 'The Star' by Alasdair Gray (1984).

When readers had finished the think-aloud procedure, they retold the story in Ukrainian, their mother tongue, in order to document comprehension (Block 1992) [2]. A semi-structured post-task interview then ensued in which they were asked to say what they had understood and to comment on the task they had just performed.

Although this study focuses on only three L2 readers, the data which it yielded sufficed to uncover interesting phenomena, to explore the possibilities of the methodology employed and to prove the interest of a future larger-scale study. The participants' potential repertoire of L1 reading strategies was not taken into consideration since, however interesting it may be, the contrast between L1 and L2 reading processes was not an objective in the present study.

As expected, the repertoire of strategies put to use by the participants when reading the literary texts consisted of strategies which, individually, had already been reported in previous reading research on the reading of non-literary texts (Hosenfeld 1977; Block 1985; Carrell *et al.* 1988; Oxford 1990; Anderson 1991; Davis and Bistodeau 1993; O'Malley and Chamot, 1993) [14; 3; 5; 19; 1; 6; 16]. As Trenchs (1997, 1998a) had already reported, the cognitive strategies of evaluating and interpreting, emerged again in the reading of both literary texts [24]. No new strategies were put to use in either reading session.

In the second session there appeared the same kind of strategies as in the first one although, the frequency of each of them varied with each reader. It must be remarked that there arose a great variety of cognitive, support and metacognitive strategies which included the use of external resources, the reliance on linguistic knowledge of various kinds, the recalling of personal experiences and the creative interpretation of the text and of its implicit information. Such a variety suggests the complexity of the process of reading itself, even in inexperienced foreign literature readers.

Students' behaviours did not come as a surprise but, what was really interesting were the different ways in which in both sessions the participants put to use and combined those strategies differently to make meaning out of the texts.

The analysis of the oral summaries of the texts and the concurrent verbal reports shows that the three readers were successful in understanding plots, characters and implicit information in both literary texts; they were also able to provide personal interpretations of the author's intentions. Their success, however, depended on different repertoires of strategies. Oksana, who in the inter-

views was highly aware of her own strategies, was also the reader who used the widest repertoire in both reading sessions, although like her classmates, she was not conscious of the full range of the strategies she had used during the task.

The strategy of 'rereading portions of the text aloud' decreased significantly in the second set of sessions, but still remained one of the most frequent. In the first session this strategy, together with the strategy of 'relating text to previous or subsequent excerpts' (i.e. 'going back and forth'), made recursive reading and the analysis of contextual clues possible.

Rereading the text aloud was also used as a strategy to pause and think, to extract phonetic information from the words and to keep focused upon the task. 'Pausing in silence' was probably another strategy used to gain time to think and to reread; as Oksana said, "I think it is better for me to read longer excerpts and assess the information because otherwise I feel like I am contradicting myself from one sentence to another one".

Re-reading aloud and relating parts of the text appeared together with a significant 'reliance on the readers' morpho-syntactic knowledge', especially in Maria and Oksana.

Another most frequent cognitive strategy in both sessions was the participants' 'adding of implicit information'. Regarding the use of this strategy, each participant developed differently over time: one kept her use of it stable, another one increased its use and the third one decreased it drastically.

With regard to metacognitive strategies, data from all participants showed a decrease in their verbalization of 'assessment of text comprehension' but in the three cases there was an increase in verbalizations of 'monitoring the task of reading the text'. This may probably indicate that the three readers had become more self-confident and more conscious of the task itself. Their becoming strategically more aware correlates with research showing that strategic awareness and monitoring of comprehension are strategies shown by skilled readers.

One of the most significant changes was that, while in the first reading session all participants resorted to 'using background knowledge' in order to understand portions of text, this strategy almost disappeared in Pavlo's and Maria's second session. Oksana distinguished herself by increasing, in contrast, the quantity of references to background knowledge, which seemed to help her to understand the text.

What was surprising was the fact that, after years of academic instruction in the Humanities, there was not any significant increase in 'references to academic knowledge' related to literature classes. In contrast, Pavlo only made two references in his second sessions and Maria's references decreased. A possible explanation is that readers disregard this kind of knowledge when they read outside the academic context, or that the use has been internalized and it is no longer retrievable in think-aloud sessions. Oksana, again, distinguished herself from her classmates by showing a development over time in the opposite direction.

With regard to 'support strategies', there was no significant reliance on them in either session although an increased awareness of underlining and of its functions were observed in the three readers. Their comments in the interviews on why they used such support strategies provide us informative hints about when readers resort to them: (1) to mark "something that looks important", (2) to summarize information about characters, (3) "to recall reading", (4) to keep track of textual organization, (5) to mark comprehension difficulties, (6) to mark something that "was surprising", and (7) to mark "a part of the text I like".

The analysis of the data showed that the initial hypothesis of the study was correct, namely that, after years of instruction in the Humanities, advanced L2, educated readers would change the way they approached the reading of a literary text in a foreign language with regard to strategy use and strategy awareness. However, it was observed that, whenever changes in the use and awareness of strategies occurred, different readers changed in different directions, as if academic instruction facilitated the development of their successful 'personalities' as 'foreign literature readers'.

In the second reading session, Pavlo remained the reader with the smallest range of strategies. The decrease in assessment of comprehension and the increase in task monitoring suggest that he also seemed to become less worried about lack of comprehension but more conscious of his

strategies while reading. His higher linguistic proficiency and stronger self-confidence as an L2 reader was evidenced in his decrease in the conscious use of linguistic knowledge as a strategy. This lesser attention to linguistic details was accompanied by a more global approach to the text during the second session: he relied more often on the cognitive strategy of relating parts of the text and on summarising as a strategy of support. His higher linguistic and textual self-confidence could also be evidenced by a lesser reliance on background knowledge.

Maria seemed to become less worried about her comprehension problems and more conscious of her strategies. Like Pavlo, her increased proficiency made her less dependent on the use of linguistic knowledge, as may be seen in a drop in her references to morpho-syntactic issues. She also decreased her reliance on background knowledge, on academic knowledge and on the adding of information, which had previously distinguished her personality as a reader. What was surprising was that, in contrast to Pavlo, Maria's proficiency did not lead to a more global approach to the text. In contrast, there was a significant decrease in the cognitive strategy of relating parts of the text and no increase in summarizing as a support strategy.

Similar to her fellow students, Oksana became less worried about her lack of comprehension but remained aware of the reading strategies she could rely on. Surprisingly, her gain in reading ability—in fact, her decrease in the use of linguistic knowledge was by far the most marked—did not make her abandon her global approach to the text, as suggested by her increased awareness of textual organization. Departing from her fellow students' tendencies, she showed a comparatively higher reliance on background knowledge. Her individual development as a reader was also seen in her increased—although still scarce—verbalization of academic knowledge as a useful strategy for evaluating the text.

Both Maria and Oksana, who showed fewer comprehension problems than Pavlo, frequently resorted to 'analysis of textual organization' as a strategy. Pavlo even increased his frequency of use, a behaviour that Riley (1993) considers a strategy of good L2 learners and which became a necessary strategy when reading a story with flashbacks like 'Mr. and Mrs. Elliot'. In fact, the three readers showed initial comprehension problems with this story, and Oksana and Maria perceived anaphoric and cataphoric analyses as a way to solve them [21]. The three of them also elaborated 'summaries', a combination of strategies which, in Maria and Oksana, could be interpreted as a sign of a global approach to the text and of recursive reading. As reflected in their recurrent anaphoric analyses, their summarizing strategies and their retrospective comments, the three participants were observed to pay special attention to the beginnings of texts. Such a preoccupation correlates with Riley's (1993) findings that beginnings are better recalled than other parts of texts. Therefore, it seems likely that L2 readers will be able to perceive the special meanings that fiction writers attach to openings [21].

No participant made frequent use of support strategies in either reading session, and only Oksana's observed increase was of some significance. This scant reliance actually contradicts research into metacognition, which shows that L1 high reading ability students consider support strategies more valuable than low ability readers (Sheorey and Mokhtari 2001) [22]. According to those previous findings, if instructors wish their L2 students to approach the behaviours involved in L1 reading, it would follow that they should include the teaching of such strategies in the L2 classroom and make students more aware of the usefulness of such support. However, none of the participants in the present study seemed to rely on them significantly: this was the first contradiction between previous research and the data coming from participants who seemed to be successful in understanding literary texts.

Another similarity between Pavlo's and Maria's development points to a second contradiction, this time with regard to learners' use of their background knowledge. Research has shown that successful L2 readers use such knowledge to compensate for linguistic deficiencies (Steffensen *et al.* 1979; Carrell 1983) [23; 4]. Davis *et al.* (1988, 1992) even propose that reliance on such knowledge is essential when reading literature [7; 8]. However, both Pavlo's and Maria's decrease in its use shows that some L2 readers may not need it as they become linguistically proficient. We could also see this change in behaviour as a sign that the instruction which they received may have somehow changed their approach to the text, since in their foreign language and literature classes stu-

dents are instructed to support their interpretations on the basis of textual evidence. A similar effect of instruction could be hinted at by the fact that both Pavlo and Maria seemed to restrain themselves when evaluating the implicit information in the second text.

Finally, a third surprise emerged from Pavlo's and Maria's data, in this case as regards the explicit teaching of literary competence: while literature instructors believe that instruction does help in understanding and interpreting literature, the participants did not make frequent, explicit use of literature-related academic knowledge in the second session, and Maria even decreased such references. The fact that Oksana's changes in behaviour were different from those of the other two participants actually shows us that academic instruction may have different effects on different students. While in their second session Maria and Pavlo seemed to rely more globally on textual evidence, as emphasised by their instructors in the English language and literature classes, Oksana made more comments on the literary characteristics of the text and brought in her background knowledge and her previous knowledge about the author; she also dared to evaluate the text with more references to implicit information.

Despite these differences, other common changes over time were detected which allow us to glimpse some effect of the received instruction. First, although these readers did not rely frequently on support strategies in general, they all did slightly increase their use of underlining, a behaviour which could have been developed as a study habit at the university. Second, it does seem that these readers became more strategically aware, namely, more conscious of the reading task itself, since there was a clear increase—and a highly significant one in the case of Pavlo—in their task monitoring. Third, in the three participants there was a significant decrease in their re-reading the text aloud. This change in behaviour may be attributed to their accumulated reading practice, but other more significant explanations can be provided: (a) the students may have become more self-confident as readers and feel less need to rely on recursive reading and on reanalysis of previous excerpts in order to go on with the task, (b) they may have become faster in processing the text and may need less time to think, (c) they may feel less need to rely on phonetic information provided by the reading aloud and (d) they could concentrate on the task and stay focused on it more easily.

All in all, strategic awareness, self-confidence as readers of a text in a foreign language, concentration on the task and the development of distinct personalities point to an increasing maturity of the three learners as readers, which is what we may expect from instruction at the university.

The previously mentioned unexpected findings should make us rethink the instructor's role in L2 classes whose curriculum includes the reading of literary texts; in fact, the development of these three readers makes us reconsider some of the recommendations made in Trenchs reports of the case studies which served as the basis for the present investigation (1997, 1998a, 1998b) [24]. Thus, we may wonder whether instructors should really foster the use of support strategies, as well as the connections between literary texts and real-life experience, and whether literature instructors in L2 contexts should include metacognitive objectives in their curricula in order to make learners more conscious of the value of such knowledge. Further research into these issues is needed in order to discover whether literary texts may call for some reading strategies more often than others, or whether, considering the success of the three distinct 'reading personalities' with regard to text comprehension, there may exist more than one type of 'good L2 literature reader'.

The study opens several venues for further research since it could be enriched with a comparison of strategy use and strategy awareness when reading both literary and non-literary texts. If a large-scale study is to be undertaken following the methodology used here, reliability could be increased with other raters coding the data. A more detailed language test at the onset of the study could be added to ensure a more homogenous command of the L2 among all the participants. I would also recommend comprehension tests at the end of each session to gather more data on the degree of reading comprehension and to allow for a closer analysis of the improvement in L2 reading ability.

It has been mentioned that all participants resorted to analyzing textual organization. This raises the question of whether different story structures or plot configurations trigger different

strategies, as Riley (1993) observed in relation to non-literary texts [21]. Also, if some readers pay attention to author style (as the participants' comments on Hemingway evidenced), do different authors trigger different strategies? Hemingway's stories have been used as research instruments here, but one may wonder what happens when students read L2 poetry or drama.

Finally, although it has been seen how academic instruction may have similarly affected the participants' development as more mature readers, we have also observed differences in their personalities as readers after the academic studies. Thus, a future, larger-scale qualitative case study including observation of the university classes attended by participants, documentation on their teachers' pedagogical approach towards L2 reading and collection of data from reading sessions at several points in time during their academic studies could throw more light on the specific role of instruction in the development of educated adults as L2 readers.

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СТРАТЕГІЇ ЧИТАННЯ ТА МОВНА КОМПЕТЕНЦІЯ ПІД ЧАС ВИВЧЕННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКИХ ЛІТЕРАТУРНИХ ТЕКСТІВ

Це лімітоване спостереження за освіченими читачами має на меті доповнити дослідження процесу прочитання літературних текстів іноземною мовою. За допомогою методу обговорення у голос та співбесід після прочитання досліджено набір стратегій, які використовуються освіченими носіями англійської мови під час прочитання літературних текстів іноземною мовою, а також їхній прогрес у використанні та усвідомленні цих стратегій після отримання інструкцій викладача. Результати довели, що використання великої кількості когнітивних, супроводжуваних та метакогнітивних стратегій з часом втратило свою важливість, або ж зникло узагалі. Дослідження показує, що набір стратегій змінюється з часом, а також те, що кожний читач змінюється по-своєму. Стаття має педагогічний підтекст та надає подальші рекомендації для майбутніх досліджень процесу читання літератури іноземною мовою.

Ключові слова: дорослий, мовна компетенція, вивчення мови, літературні тексти, метакогнітивні стратегії, читання, стратегії читання

СТРАТЕГИИ ЧТЕНИЯ И РЕЧЕВАЯ КОМПЕТЕНЦИЯ ВО ВРЕМЯ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКИХ ЛИТЕРАТУРНЫХ ТЕКСТОВ

Это лимитированное наблюдение за образованными читателями имеет целью дополнить исследование процесса чтения литературных текстов на иностранном языке. С помощью метода обсуждения вслух и собеседований после прочтения исследовано набор стратегий, которые используются образованными не носителями английского языка, а также их прогресс в использовании и осознанности этих стратегий после получения инструкций преподавателя. Результаты показали, что использование большого количества когнитивных, сопроводительных и метакогнитивных стратегий со временем утратило свою значимость, или исчезло вообще. Исследование показывает, что набор стратегий меняется со временем, а также то, что каждый читатель меняется по-своему. Статья имеет педагогический подтекст и предоставляет дальнейшие рекомендации для будущих исследований процесса чтения литературы на иностранном языке.

Ключевые слова: взрослый, речевая компетенция, изучения языка, литературные тексты, метакогнитивные стратегии, чтение, стратегии чтения

