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Strategic reading: Towards a better understanding of its role in L2/FL learning and teaching contexts

ABSTRACT
Evolving approaches to the conceptualization of reading have created conducive grounds for rethinking the role of strategic reading in second/foreign language contexts. However, despite a wide recognition of the effectiveness of strategic reading, such critical issues as strategy identification, modelling reading strategy taxonomies, and their implications for establishing principles for actual classroom practice are still being debated on. This article intends to look more closely at current insights into the strategy dimension of the reading process, which, according to the current author, play an enlightening role in defining the utility of reading strategies in helping second/foreign language learners reach their goals in reading and through reading. Hence, the article mainly focuses on promoting text comprehension, language and reading skills improvement, and content learning from text. The author articulates the need for a better understanding of how the potential effects of strategic text processing can be addressed in L2 reading practice.
Keywords: L2 reading, strategic text processing, reading strategy, reading to learn, metacognitive awareness

1. Introduction

While enhancing learners' reading skills is an unquestionable goal in modern education, be it in a first (L1), second (L2) or foreign language (FL), many problems pertaining to the development of reading skills in formal conditions have still not received sufficient clarity. It is worth noting that despite divergences between the three learning situations mentioned above, the reading process and its development share a wealth of similarities. In fact, due to advances in theoretical and empirical research conducted in a variety of monolingual or multilingual reading environments, the interpretation of the reading process has been rethought. The picture of reading contemporary language teachers get shows a construct based on the interaction of a multitude of processes and factors. This characteristic of reading is well-captured by Alexander et al. (2012) as the multidimensionality

of reading, which results from an interplay between cognitive, neurophysiological, sociocultural, and motivational processes.

A consideration of the highly interactive nature of reading in recent years has brought about, among others, a change in rendering two vital issues. The first concerns the dichotomy between 'learning to read' and 'reading to learn', which used to be interpreted as two self-contained stages in reading development. The updated view maintains that it is the two interrelated processes that operate simultaneously (for further discussion see Chodkiewicz, 2014). The other shift in thinking that has taken place has addressed the juxtaposition between reading as unobservable text processing and reading as a product, that is a level of comprehension reached by the reader. The recent position holds that the reading process and the product cannot be kept apart due to "a recursive interaction" between them (Rapp & van den Broek, 2005, p. 278). As a consequence of the interactivity of components including readers' memory, their background knowledge, language and cognitive skills, as well as text properties, individual readers embark on highly varied paths, which lead them to different reading outcomes.

As far as classroom reading practice is concerned, it is typically organized into a sequence of cooperative events in which both learners and teachers play well-defined roles. While an array of reading strategies are explicitly taught or embedded into classroom tasks, many other strategies become part of learners' competences in a natural way, as a consequence of their cognitive growth. What is more, incorporating reading strategies into L2/FL classrooms, which can substantially raise the quality of teaching, requires specialist knowledge on strategy development and use. Yet, referring to the definitions and taxonomies of reading strategies available in the relevant literature, teachers have to be fully aware of the fact that the knowledge they consult is intricate and may not be fully helpful in formulating goals for their reading-based instruction.

The current article reflects on some issues which appear to be particularly significant in guiding L2/FL learners in becoming strategic readers, and which are believed to be of practical value to classroom teachers. The problems raised concern the status of the strategy dimension in the process of reading, conceptualization of L2 reading strategies, and their classification, as well as insights drawn with the purpose of creating well-informed guidelines for classroom practice. Support is given to Oxford's (2017) following opinion: "L2 learners need reading as a major resource in their lives, and it must be taught explicitly in ways that will stimulate interest and self-efficacy. As part of L2 reading instruction, it is crucial to teach reading strategies" (p. 471).

2. The reading process in L1 and L2 and its strategy dimension
Before the conceptual explanations of reading strategies per se are addressed, it is useful to look more closely at the status of reading strategies from the perspective

of modelling the reading process. In language teaching, it is commonplace to interpret reading as discourse processing, which captures how a global representation of text meaning is constructed by embracing word identification and sentence parsing operations, previously described in separate models (Rayner & Reichle, 2010). A dominating cognitive constructionist approach assumes that the reader gets involved in three concurrently activated processes. First, in search of the main units of meaning the reader processes the surface code, that is language material found on the page. Then, a number of propositions (text base) are formulated as a result of the reader processing linguistic knowledge and discourse conventions with an important role played by inferencing processes. All those cognitively-driven operations lead to a gradual construction of the situation model of the text in readers' minds, and due to its integration with background knowledge, personal interpretations of the text can be reached. If any comprehension breakdown is to appear, strategies helpful in providing some repair are called for (e.g., Kintsch, 2005, 2012; Ruddell & Unrau, 2013; van den Broek, Espin, McMaster, & Helder, 2017).

A key issue in interpreting reading from the cognitive constructionist perspective concerns purpose-orientation of the reading act. In performing multi-level operations while processing textual information, readers employ a range of strategies consistent with the goals set forth for a given task. The goal-directedness of the reading process is commonly linked to the concept of 'standard of coherence', which defines a degree of comprehension the reader intends to reach in his/her individual interpretation of the text (Graesser, 2007; van den Broek, 2012; van den Broek et al., 2017). Coherence building strategies are found to play a highly significant role as they enable readers to make up for their limitations in attentional capacity and working memory, and activate background knowledge so as to integrate different portions of the text (van den Broek, 2012). A recent suggestion from Britt, Rouet and Durik (2018, p. 30) is that a finer distinction be kept between quantitative and qualitative senses of standard of coherence, the former denoting effort invested by the reader (e.g., in memorization), and the latter indicating different dimensions of coherence reached in an individualized way.

With the recognition of the notion of strategy as a component of the reading process, another vital distinction is manifest, namely that between strategic vs. automatic (skill-related) processing of information (Rapp & van den Broek, 2005; Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008; van den Broek et al. 2017). Strategic processes are invoked when automatic processing does not ensure a satisfactory comprehension result, that is in the case of comprehension failure, when the repair is needed. Readers can reread the text, use discourse markers or consult their prior knowledge. If further inferences are to be made, both text signals such as headers or font, as well as background knowledge, and other sources can be used (Rapp & van den Broek, 2005; van den Broek et al., 2017).

Despite an adherence to universal models of reading in language-related instruction, the specificity of L2/FL reading has also been tackled. It is obvious that apart from comprehension and knowledge acquisition while reading a text, the goal of L2/FL readers is to improve their command of the target language. This requires that they focus on language resources which are indispensable in lexical processing, parsing and inferencing, and which underlie the reading process. Hence, in identifying word meanings while reading, L2 learners' attention will be directed to the available contextual clues, and parsing processes will lead to noticing how phases and sentence segments are built (e.g., Birch, 2002; Dakowska, 2015; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Grabe, 2009; Hudson, 2007; Bernhardt, 2005, 2011). One of the key issues investigated in L2/FL reading has concerned the complex relationship between content processing and vocabulary. Recent research findings have confirmed that the potential of strategy use in the pursuit of the established task goals not only directs text processing but also impacts the amount of incidental vocabulary learned in L2 (e.g., Horiba & Fukaya, 2015).

A step forward in exploring L2 reading phenomena has undoubtedly been the made with the development of a compensatory approach (Bernhardt, 2005, 2011; Mc Neil, 2012; Bunch, Walqui, & Pearson, 2014; Chodkiewicz, 2014). The L2 compensatory reading model offered by Bernhardt (2005, 2011) aims to account for the interrelated processing of different factors in L2 reading and their capability of compensating for each other. The researcher assigns 50% of variance to two well-researched factors, that is L1 literacy (alphabetics, vocabulary, etc.) and L2 language knowledge (grammatical form, vocabulary knowledge, cognates, etc.), and the remaining 50% of unexplained variance to under-researched factors, including background knowledge, interest, engagement, motivation, reading strategies, etc. Having further analysed relevant empirical research, McNeil (2012) provides a modified compensatory model, in which he reduces the amount of unexplained variance by half through the incorporation of two more factors, namely strategic knowledge and background knowledge. Importantly, by referring to strategic knowledge, McNeil is able to propose a difference between lower and higher proficiency readers. It is lower-proficiency readers who are claimed to depend on L2 language knowledge and background knowledge much more than on their L1 reading ability and strategic knowledge, while higher-proficiency readers use the same amount of L1 reading ability, yet a reduced amount of L2 language knowledge and background knowledge, because these are compensated for with a substantial use of strategic knowledge. By implication, systematic enhancement of the strategicness of learners' reading skills contributes to an increase in their literacy attainment.

A new development in modelling text processing is connected with the conceptualization of multiple text reading, typical of content area education. The so-called 'Transitional Extensions Model' (Fox & Alexander, 2009) broadens

the interpretation of text processing by referring to between-text connections found in all the text types, be it informational or argumentative, static or fluid (hypertexts). Responding to texts collaboratively and critically, readers refer to the topic or domain knowledge built across texts. In a similar vein, the so- called 'Documents Model' maintains that reading multiple texts on a given topic requires an expansion of a situational model of text comprehension across a number of texts in order to integrate the authors' views, even conflicting ones. A claim is thus made that an 'Intertext Model' be combined with the 'Integrated Model' so that a general situation model of the text be based both on the content of the text as well as on the information coming from other sources exploited by readers. Reaching one's goals in multiple text reading is possible only when readers apply a full repertoire of reading strategies (Bråten & Strømsø, 2011; Britt, Rouet, & Braasch, 2013; Britt et al., 2018).

3. Conceptualising reading strategies and clarifying some vital distinctions

The debate on the scope of the concept of reading strategies in both L1 and L2 contexts, which has continued since the 1980s, has drawn attention to many pedagogically relevant problems including the importance of the outcomes of the reading comprehension process, text difficulty, as well as the structure of reading tasks performed by readers (e.g., Koda, 2005; Perfetti & Adlof, 2012; Britt et al., 2018). Reading strategies, defined as procedural knowledge intentionally used by readers, have been found to be a powerful tool in enhancing reading flexibility and deliberate control over reading goals, with the possibility of revising them when necessary (Afflerbach, Pearson & Paris, 2008; Anmarkrud & Bråten, 2012; Chodkiewicz, 2014). Koda (2005) suggests that strategies should be characterized as being "deliberate, goal/problem-oriented and reader-initiated and controlled" (p. 205). Likewise, Alexander and the Laboratory (2012) emphasize the intentionality of strategy use and their purpose-orientedness, yet they also note the importance of effort their application requires. Of didactic value is the fact that reading strategies are learned and automatized with practice, which means that they can be taught in a systematic way either implicitly or explicitly (van den Broek, 2012).

Despite the fact that researchers have created numerous taxonomies of reading strategies arranging many item lists of strategy types into well-thought out hierarchies, continued discussions on reading strategies have led to an increased understanding of some more general distinctions of pedagogic worth. One of them concerns the classification of reading strategies into surface vs. deep level strategies, which highlights the difference between readers' responses to some minor reading problems (e.g., restating, rereading, or checking word meaning) and deeper reader interventions as required in analyzing a problem, questioning the author or looking for evidence (Alexander et al., 2012). Indeed, the depth of text processing has

become a primary issue in reading-based instruction in both L1 and L2 settings when special interest was taken in reading to learn, that is in designing reading tasks with an emphasis on knowledge acquisition (see Chodkiewicz, 2014 for further discussion). McNamara (2011) draws attention to deep reflective reading, whose effectiveness is ensured by strategies which augment readers' inferences and connections between prior and newly acquired knowledge. Similarly, Bråten and Anmarkrud (2013) underline the pivotal role of inferential processing of text content, which depends on the depth of its comprehension. McNamara (2011) adds that the strategies readers employ determine both the depth of text processing and the amount of time readers take to complete their tasks. Yet, teachers do not have direct access to reader strategies as they are not verbally expressed; it is only by examining students' retrospective self-reports that they can find out which strategies their learners use.

An interesting suggestion comes from Koda (2005), who proposes a twofold division into a narrower and a broader definition of reading strategies. Her intention is to stress a difference between strategies defined as text processing understood in terms of acquisition, storage, and retrieval and some overt activities based on a combination of mental learning processes and underlying reading strategies. Koda (2005) also notes that although readers are guided by their own 'internally generated' purposes, in formal instruction, which is also purpose-driven, they are expected to work with 'externally imposed' goals. Therefore, teachers need professional knowledge about the ways in which both reader-initiated behaviours and those induced by pedagogical tasks can contribute to reading-based practices.

A similar argumentation has been brought forward by Kobayashi (2009, p. 131), who suggests using the term 'external strategies' in order to indicate the cases in which readers perform cognitive operations based on deeper processing of information, accompanied by such activities as paraphrasing, summarizing, organizing, explaining, or evaluating. In Kobayashi's view, external strategies cover text highlighting and different forms of notetaking (including explanations, summaries, and intertextual elements), as well as personal ideas.

Apart from theoretical considerations concerning the characteristics of reading strategies and the scope of the concept, varfying attempts have been made to find ways of classifying reading strategies. In the sections to follow, some L2 strategy taxonomies recognized as influential in recent literature will be selectively overviewed.

4. Towards a classification of reading strategies – focus on L2/FL classroom perspective

As rightly underscored by Britt et al. (2018), one of the main problems teachers face is establishing goals that enable readers to process a text or a sequence of texts and learn from them while simultaneously pursuing other purposes set forth in

classroom tasks. In capturing the specificity of L2/FL reading-oriented instruction, the major goals can be defined as follows: (1) understanding the content of a particular text (reading comprehension), (2) learning from the content of the text (disciplinary reading), (3) furthering language development, and (4) enhancing reading skills and strategies (e.g., Hudson, 2007; Grabe, 2009; Bernhardt, 2010; Chodkiewicz, 2014, 2018). The attainment of such goals undeniably requires that learners adopt a large repertoire of reading strategies, a number of which have already been mentioned in the discussion so far.

The emergence of different classifications of L2 reading strategies means that their authors take varying perspectives on the main facets of reading. Koda (2005) makes a pertinent observation that "although differences in the reported strategies are modest, deviations occur in the way they are classified, as a consequence of researchers' own disparate view of reading processes and strategies" (p. 207). Indeed, of special interest to L2 teachers, as already pointed out, is understanding how particular strategies can be incorporated into overt classroom activities so that they are consistent with the learning and teaching goals pursued. In the sections below, some insights emerging from reading strategy classifications found of relevance to L2 settings will be touched upon.

For example, based on a set of eneral learning strategies, Anmarkrud and Bråten (2012) classify reading strategies into memorization, organization, elaboration, and monitoring strategies. The four types of strategies refer to the main operations which determine how content information is acquired, organized, and transformed by readers moving on purposefully through a text. Thus, memorization strategies, limited to selecting and rehearsing information, underlie highlighting or repeating sentences. Grouping or ordering information, that is organization strategies, play a key role in text summarization and outlining. Integrating information from the text and other sources, as well as linking text content with readers' background knowledge requires the use of elaboration strategies. Finally, monitoring strategies exhibit the power of regulating comprehension processes by detecting problems and solving them. It is worth noting that all those strategies can be associated with some kind of deliberate activities L2 readers are prone to take up in the process of reading.

Likewise, a broad distinction between cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies widely adopted in L2/FL instruction has its source in a general taxonomy of learning strategies (cf. O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Whereas cognitive strategies are defined as deliberate actions which help manipulate information to enhance learning, metacognitive strategies are taken to have the power of regulating cognitive processing by planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning. An exemplary hierarchy of L2 reading strategies offered by Ediger (2006, p. 305–306) comprises over 50 reading strategies grouped into metacognitive strategies (purpose-oriented and comprehension-monitoring strategies), and cognitive

strategies (for interacting with the author and the text, involving different ways of reading, for handling unknown words, and involving prior knowledge). Some other specialists (e.g., Hudson, 2007; Grabe, 2009) present the view that it is the readers' metacognition level that helps them pursue their goals consciously and select the strategies they need. Grabe (2009) states: "metacognition about comprehension represents what we know about strategies and how to use them effectively" (p. 224). The concept of metacognitive awareness of reading strategies has been accepted in the so-called Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategy Inventory (MARSI), a well validated questionnaire, also successfully used with reference to L2 academic reading for 16 years (Mokhtari & Shorey, 2002; Mokhtari, Dimitrov, & Reichard, 2018).

A range of reading strategies have been assigned to a broader category of 'reading to learn', which defines strategies aimed at learning from text to realize readers' complex purposes (Chodkiewicz, 2014; Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Such reading goals require that both readers' interests and attitudes are involved in deep processing of text content so that newly gained information is integrated with their prior knowledge, reflected on and evaluated (Grabe, 2009; Aukerman, Brown, Mokhtari, Valencia & Palincsar, 2015)). In Ediger's (2006) view, reading to learn strategies encompass reflecting on what one has read, underlining the text, paraphrasing it, notetaking, and thinking about its future use. Grabe and Stoller (2019) note that reading to learn tasks, enriched with an element of cooperative learning, can help naturally consolidate content knowledge, reinforce language structures and skills, recycle vocabulary as well as practice reading and study skills.

As argued above, also language aspects are a focal point in L2/FL reading. Lexical, grammatical and syntactic processing of the text supports L2 or FL learners in tackling their language deficiencies. Anderson's (1991) typology, for instance, ascribes considerable value to paraphrase strategies, which support text comprehension by finding cognates between L1 and L2, analysing lexical items, translating words into L1, or simply paraphrasing the text. Ediger (2006, p. 306) singles out a self-contained category of handling unknown words which includes using contextual information and checking a word in a dictionary, but also skipping unknown words. A broader category developed by McNamara, Ozuru, Best and O'Reilly (2007, p. 467), called 'Strategies to Interpret Words, Sentences, and Ideas in the Text', entails such text-focused strategies as marking, annotating, and close reading of the text, which are helpful in creating a text base. Dakowska (2016), on the other hand, claims that EFL reading-based practice requires special adjustment of strategies so that readers' attention can be drawn to discourse level. She underscores the importance of discourse processing as it raises readers' awareness of how written discourse is created. Some helpful activities are: inserting paragraph titles, memorizing lexical phrases, filling in close tests, retelling, or summarising.

Another preferred typology comprising pre-, while-, and post-reading strategies is consistent with natural reading processes and compatible with the well-known organization of L2/FL reading-based lessons into the pre-, while-, and post-reading stages. A fairly detailed sequential approach to the implementation of L2 reading strategies advocated by Hudson (2007) is based on the taxonomy of general reading comprehension strategies developed by Paris, Wasik and Turner (1996). With as many as 11 strategies in each category, readers are first assumed to set goals for their reading, identify the text genre, and make predictions. While processing the text, they concentrate on checking comprehension and generating inferences so as to identify main ideas. Consolidating and applying new information and evaluation belong to post-reading strategies (Hudson, 2007, pp. 108–110). On balance, the taxonomy sets forth useful guidelines both for activity design and the progression of L2 classroom tasks.

In a similar vein, Grabe and Stoller (2019) highlight the beneficial effects of sequencing reading activities and strategies during the pre-, while-, and post-reading stages regarding reading to learn contexts, with content becoming a core focus of pedagogical practice. In their opinion, however, the while-reading stage seems to be the most neglected component of teachers' decisions in this respect. Generally, the sequential use of reading strategies that ensures natural processing of textual material can be a vital factor in L2 and FL instructional contexts.

5. Implications for second/foreign reading practice

Having analysed a range of issues dominating recent discussions on strategic reading in L2/FL settings, it is imperative to underline that despite the lack of unanimity of experts' opinions, it is obvious that organizing efficient L2 reading practice requires deep understanding of an interplay of numerous variables, strategic reading being one of them. The most important recommendation is that from primary to tertiary educational levels, L2 readers should be provided with optimal assistance in coping with their limited language proficiency so that both content and language-oriented goals can be reached. Although classroom teachers implement activities built on and around a selected reading passage, they have to be fully aware of L2/FL long-term teaching goals that go much beyond promoting single-text comprehension. Exposed to multiple texts, L2 learners should be given an opportunity to acquire new content through reading while simultaneously improving their reading literacy skills and general language competence. All this can be achieved only when they develop into strategic readers, capable of reaching the goals set before them.

In an effort to enhance strategy-oriented reading instruction provided to second/foreign language learners, teachers should make informed decisions concerning appropriate task design so that specific strategy types can be deployed either explicitly or implicitly. Yet, they also have to be aware of the fact that

learners will use some strategies beyond teachers' reach as their personal tools. What requires teacher reflection, as pointed out by numerous specialists (e.g., Hudson, 2007; Dakowska, 2016; Grabe & Stoller, 2019), is the problem of adequate sequencing and integration of strategy-based reading tasks. Finally, L2/FL teachers should bear in mind that reading and learning from text gives a good ground for promoting learners' critical thinking skills and reading appreciation, as well as increasing their motivation to read more in future.

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