
The Use of Translation as a Support Strategy in Reading Comprehension

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ABSTRACT: Reading, as A complex process, involves readers performing actions of planning, questioning, reviewing and evaluating. While reading academic texts, students tend to use strategies which help in better understanding and comprehension. Translation as a support strategy has played a significant role in different teaching methodologies through decades regardless of the importance that it has to some of them. This study measured the frequency of EFL learners' use of reading strategies in general and of translation strategy in particular. It utilized a quantitative method design and the data collection instrument was adapted from SORS (Survey of Reading Strategies) which measured the use of Global, Problem Solving and Support reading strategies. The participants were 118 senior students from four high schools in Tirana, Albania. The findings revealed that students tend to frequently use problem solving strategies and the strategy of translating the academic text into first language is among the least used strategies.

KEYWORDS: EFL learners, reading strategies, translation, reading comprehension, L2 reading instruction.

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a cognitive activity of enormous importance and complexity, used for knowledge acquisition. Studies on vocabulary knowledge have shown that reading proficiency is strongly connected with vocabulary knowledge, and competent readers have very significant recognition-vocabulary knowledge resources (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Thus, the flaws that are found in some readers induce great obstacles related to acquisition. Thanks to reading, people can access a vast world of information that is necessary in today's society. Higher level processing skills enable readers to set reading objectives, incorporate multiple reading strategies, draw conclusions, keep track of comprehension, form opinions about the author and the text, and critically assess the material they are reading (Jiang et al., 2020). It is the main tool of learning for students, as most of the school activities are based on reading.

Smith (1983) refers to two ways of understanding reading: grapheme decoding and its conversion to phonemes, and the individuals' ability to extract both explicit and implicit meaning of a written text. Besides that, according to Anderson (1999), reading supposes the processing of information of a class of symbols that constitute expressions in the communicative exchange that takes place through language. For the act of reading to take place, it is essential that the reader should be familiar with the system of signs and symbols that make up the text. Understanding a text is not a mechanical or passive activity, although some processes are quickly automated since the reader reads with some frequency once he has learned to decode. To understand, the reader must relate the content of the text to their previous knowledge (Carrell, 1991).

The process of forming words should be associated with the process of understanding meaning. Understanding reading involves extracting the meaning from a written text, both of words and of the relationships between words. Meaning can be extracted from the text, the implicit relations of the knowledge base that the readers have and their experiences about the world (Alderson, 1985).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading requires the activation of previous knowledge to make a possible connection between what the reader already knows or has heard about and what he will be reading. This kind of connection helps the reader to understand the text and it may also help to give meaning to new information while it organizes all of the occurrences, he has experienced throughout his life into an abstract structure (Nutall, 1996).

The reader also previews and predicts before reading the text. As part of many students' textbooks, the learners are required to guess the title or the meaning without reading or just by looking at the illustrations. Their previews help them to easily find the required information (Grellet, 1981). On the other hand, prediction helps the readers to guess and foresee events while reading the text. Prediction is also related to the reader's prior knowledge and makes him anticipate information without the need to read the whole text line by line (Alexander & Jetton, 2000). Successful readers interrogate themselves while and after reading in order to check meaning and make connections within the context (Vacca, 2004).

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Remembering and memorizing the text takes its place in reading comprehension as the reader, by memorizing, is not only able to answer the questions, but also to build his own understanding and knowledge which he may use later in similar situations. Memory strategies include strategies such as visualizing, determining importance, skimming, scanning, summarizing, synthesizing and evaluating.

Readers can visualize and create mental figures of received information and events from the text. In this way, related to different types of learners, visual learners and not only, can easily store information in their memory. However, they cannot visualize every element of the text, so they have to distinguish important information and try to keep it in mind. Before reading, skimming and scanning help readers take a quick look or find out the answer they were looking for. These two strategies save time to the reader as they do not have to read the whole text or when trying to capture the gist (Grellet, 1981, p. 14).

After reading, writing down or speaking out the most important ideas and elements of the text is said to improve readers' comprehension (Duke & Pearson, 2004). Summarizing the main ideas makes it easier to recall any information from the text without having to read the text again. On the other hand, synthesizing entails rearrangement of the given information with other information taken by the reader's knowledge and experience or external sources. This rearrangement of texts is coherent and continuous text with all the important details. Readers can also practice evaluating as a strategy where they can evaluate events or characters and give thoughts and judgements based on the given information.

On the other hand, translation has emerged as one such strategy aimed at bolstering learners' reading abilities while bridging connections between their first language (L1) and the target language (L2) (Malmkjær, 2010). Translation activities have been found to positively impact the acquisition of reading skills in a second language. Lee (2013) conducted a study involving English learners, where participants translated passages from English to their first language, Chinese, before undergoing a reading comprehension test. Results indicated higher scores on questions related to the translated passages, suggesting improved comprehension through translation. Similarly, Sakurai (2015) found that translating a text before reading it significantly increased the amount of reading done, overall proficiency level, and reading speed of university freshmen. Despite its potential benefits, translation is viewed as a distinct activity separate from core language competencies and is considered unnatural in language learning processes (Malmkjær, 1998). It is often criticized for hindering thinking in the foreign language and is deemed ineffective for assessing language skills due to interference between languages.

Nevertheless, Schaffner (1998) argues that translation exercises offer benefits to foreign language learning by improving verbal agility, expanding vocabulary, and enhancing understanding of language structures. Translation can also serve as a pedagogical tool across all proficiency levels, supporting and enhancing fundamental language skills (Leonardi, 2011). Nolasco and Arthur (1994) suggest that translation exercises foster creativity and encourage student participation, promoting cooperation and communication in the classroom. As translation may pose challenges and controversies in language teaching, it holds potential as a valuable tool for improving reading skills and overall language proficiency, particularly when integrated effectively into language learning curricula.

III.METHODOLOGY

This study employs quantitative research as data were collected through questionnaires. This section of the study gives more information on participants, data collection instruments, data analysis and procedures. This study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: Which are the most and the least frequently used categories of reading strategies?

RQ2: Which are the most and the least used strategies within the categories?

RQ3: How often do students translate the text into their native language while reading an academic text?

A. Research Design

Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) implemented SORS (survey of reading strategies) to measure college and university students' frequency of reading strategies while reading academic texts. This survey consisted of 30 questions with a variety of strategies groups as: General, Problem Solving and Support strategies shortly explained in the following paragraphs. SORS was chosen as the instrument of data collection due to the inclusivity that it provides for the most important reading strategies. They are perfectly structured and put into categories. The survey was easy to explain and understand by the target group. The format of the survey, all strategies inside one single paper, played a significant role and gave the students an opportunity to look at all strategies at the same time and better decide on the frequency of these strategies. The aim of this study was to show how often the students translated their text into the native language, but also to compare the importance and frequency of translation strategy and other strategies with and within the categories. A new survey could have been designed and conducted by the authors of this paper, but SORS includes most of the reading strategies and has been implemented in many other studies which validates the survey and makes it more reliable to other researchers.

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B. Participants

Senior college students were the target group of this study. Considering ethical procedures, all the students were informed at the beginning of the survey that the results will be used for publication. Surveys were conducted to four non-public high schools in Tirana with 45 students, 33 students, 28 students and 12 students, respectively. A total of 118 students completed the survey based on their experiences while reading academic literature. Senior students were chosen as the target group because they are supposed to have achieved the highest level of language proficiency since they are preparing to enter the state examination of Matura where their level of English will be tested.

C. Data collection instrument and analysis

A Likert scale questionnaire consisted of thirty statements and previously applied by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002). The survey was conducted to 825 participants whose age varied from middle school to college students. The statements were related to strategies while reading academic texts. The participants had to choose their answers from a level of agreement of 1 to 5 where 1 means "I never or almost never do this" and 5 means "I always or almost always do this". SORS (Survey of Reading Strategies) was conducted, data were collected, assessed and analyzed using SPSS. There were three reading categories: global, problem-solving and support strategies. All the strategies are mentioned and ranked in the following tables.

D. Procedures

Data were gathered and analyzed from questionnaires conducted with students from 4 non-public high schools in Tirana. The questionnaires served as the main instrument where this study was based on. The students completed the questionnaire with the guidance of their English teachers. Data were collected and analyzed according to the variables and the possible correlation between reading strategies instruction and the way students use them when given a particular reading task.

IV. RESULTS

The survey was designed into 30 statements which were related to three categories of strategies: Global, Problem-solving and Support. Data were organized into tables according to the research questions. Every strategy represents its own statements ordered from the most frequently used to the least used. This categorization was also prepared for all the statements.

The most and the least frequent strategies

Table 1 illustrates the frequency of three chosen strategies: Global, Support and Problem-Solving Strategies. According to the data, problem solving strategies ($M=3.8656$, $SD=.66107$) was the most frequently used category. Global strategies ($M=3.4308$, $SD=.59804$) aligned as the second, immediately followed by Support strategies ($M=3.3676$, $SD=.6797$) as the last category ranked.

Table 1

Frequency of three categories

Strategies	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Rank
Problem Solving	1.75	5.00	3.8656	.66107	1
Global	1.92	4.85	3.4308	.59804	2
Support	1.11	4.89	3.3676	.67973	3

Results of Global Strategies

Global Strategies consisted of thirteen strategies where the most frequently used strategy was the effort students do to guess what the content is about ($M=3.82$, $SD=1.145$), followed by an overall view of the text ($M=3.73$, $SD=1.327$) and checking understanding when coming across new information ($M=3.73$, $SD=.907$). The least frequently used strategies in this category were: the use of tables and figures to increase understanding ($M=3.23$, $SD=1.399$), typographical pictures ($M=3.06$, $SD=1.162$) and critically analyzing and evaluating information ($M=3.04$, $SD=1.191$).

Table 2

Frequency of Global Strategies

Global strategies	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Rank
trying to guess what the content is about	1	5	3.82	1.145	1
taking an overall view of the text	1	5	3.73	1.327	2

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Global strategies	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Rank
checking understanding when coming across new information	1	5	3.73	.907	3
thinking about what I know	1	5	3.64	1.114	4
reading with a purpose	1	5	3.53	1.137	5
deciding what to read closely and what to ignore	1	5	3.52	1.202	6
checking to see if my guesses are right	1	5	3.41	1.240	7
using context clues	1	5	3.37	1.173	8
thinking about whether the content fits my purpose	1	5	3.28	1.117	9
reviewing the text for its organization and length	1	5	3.25	1.349	10
using tables, figures and pictures to increase understanding	1	5	3.23	1.399	11
using typographical pictures like boldface and italics	1	5	3.06	1.162	12
critically analyzing and evaluating information	1	5	3.04	1.191	13

Results of support strategies

Students mostly prefer to underline or circle information ($M=4.12$, $SD=1.101$), as part of support strategies. They also often think about the information both in English and their mother tongue ($M=3.72$, $SD=1.297$) and read aloud ($M=3.56$, $SD=1.377$). Compared to the other strategies, the least used equally frequent strategies were translating into native language ($M=3.03$, $SD=1.455$) and taking notes while reading ($M=3.03$, $SD=1.423$), followed by the usage of reference materials such as dictionaries ($M=2.65$, $SD=1.339$).

Table 3

Frequency of Support Strategies

Support strategies	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Rank
underlining or circling information	1	5	4.12	1.101	1
thinking about the info both in English and mother tongue	1	5	3.72	1.298	2
reading aloud	1	5	3.56	1.377	3
paraphrasing or restating ideas	1	5	3.53	1.216	4
going back and forth to find relationships	1	5	3.46	1.129	5
asking myself questions about the text	1	5	3.22	1.304	6
translating into the native language	1	5	3.03	1.455	7
taking notes while reading	1	5	3.03	1.423	8
using reference materials like a dictionary	1	5	2.65	1.339	9

Results of Problem-Solving Strategies

All the eight strategies part of Problem-Solving strategies were ranked according to a descending scale from the most frequently used to the least. Trying to get back on track when losing concentration ($M=4.18$, $SD=1.066$) was listed as the most used strategy followed by paying closer attention to what students are reading ($M=4.05$, $SD=1.114$) and re-reading to increase understanding

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($M=4$, $SD=1.243$). Stopping and thinking from time to time was considered as the least used problem-solving strategy ($M=3.50$, $SD=1.237$). Students also try to read slowly and carefully ($M=3.93$, $SD=1.098$), picture or visualize information in the text ($M=3.79$, $SD=1.263$), guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases ($M=3.75$, $SD=1.169$) and adjust the reading speed ($M=3.73$, $SD=1.069$) with a slight difference between the frequency of usage.

Table 4

Frequency of Problem-Solving Strategies

Problem solving strategies	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Rank
trying to get back on track when losing concentration	1	5	4.18	1.066	1
paying closer attention to what I am reading	1	5	4.05	1.114	2
re-reading to increase understanding	1	5	4.00	1.243	3
reading slowly and carefully	1	5	3.93	1.098	4
trying to picture or visualize information in the text	1	5	3.79	1.263	5
guessing the meaning of unknown words or phrases	1	5	3.75	1.169	6
adjusting the reading speed	1	5	3.73	1.069	7
stopping and thinking from time to time	1	5	3.50	1.237	8

The most used strategies

Considering all the strategies together, trying to get back on track when losing concentration was chosen as the most frequently used strategy ($M=4.18$, $SD=1.066$) followed by underlining or circling information ($M=4.12$, $SD=1.101$) and paying closer attention to what I am reading ($M=4.05$, $SD=1.114$). The first and the third strategies were part of the problem-solving category, while the second most used was part of the support category.

Table 5

The most used strategies

The most used reading strategies	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Rank
trying to get back on track when losing concentration	1	5	4.18	1.066	1
underlining or circling information	1	5	4.12	1.101	2
paying closer attention to what I am reading	1	5	4.05	1.114	3

The least used strategies

On the other hand, we ranked the least three used reading strategies on an ascending scale and the first listed was the usage reference materials like a dictionary ($M=2.65$, $SD=1.339$), part of support category, followed by taking notes while reading ($M=3.03$, $SD=1.423$) and translating into the native language ($M=3.03$, $SD=1.455$), also part of the support strategies category.

Table 6

The least used strategies

The least used reading strategies	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Rank
using reference materials like a dictionary	1	5	2.65	1.339	1
taking notes while reading	1	5	3.03	1.423	2
translating into the native language	1	5	3.03	1.455	3

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V. DISCUSSION

This case study was designed to determine Albanian senior students' awareness of reading strategies while exploring academic texts. Relevant to Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) findings, the participants proved that as non-native speakers, they frequently use and are aware of these reading strategies. The findings from the questionnaires showed a dominance of problem-solving reading strategies ($M=3.86$) which were also dominant in the previous studies of Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) and Mokhtari and Reichard (2004). The number of the participants is relatively small compared to the overall number of senior students in Tirana, consequently there is a small effect size which indicates limited practical application and does not unfold adequate data to be generalized, but the finding shed light to reading strategies used by these students in respective selected high schools.

According to the results, senior high school students “usually” use problem-solving strategies ($M=3.86$) and “sometimes” use global ($M=3.43$) and support ($M=3.36$) strategies. The dominance of problem-solving strategies is related to the fact that these students are not native speakers, so they face difficulties while reading. They need strategies such as checking understanding, using context clues, critically analysing information and much more. On the other hand, global and support strategies have very light differences on the average, so they can be counted as the same frequency of usage.

The most used strategies among EFL learners were “trying to get back on track when losing concentration”, “underlining or circling information” and “paying closer attention to what I am reading”. Dominated by problem solving strategies with the first and third ranking, students have chosen to show their desire to concentrate and make sure that they understand what they are reading. On the other hand, the least used strategies were “translating into native language”, “taking notes” and “using reference materials”. Interestingly enough, students do not prefer to take notes ($M=3.03$) equally due to their lack of desire to translate the information ($M=3.03$). It is understandable that the least used strategies belong to the support category since they are time consuming.

The dominance of problem-solving strategies from non-native speakers is related to text comprehension since these strategies are crucial to a better understanding. Some of the most frequently used strategies from the problem-solving category were “I try to get back on track when I lose concentration”, “when text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading” and “I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading”. Learners may experience fear, confusion, and lack of motivation while reading as a result of comprehension issues, and problem-solving strategies may be preferable to overcome these difficulties (Berkowitz & Cichelli, 2004). The most frequently used strategy from this category was “trying to get back on track when losing concentration”.

Surprisingly, “stopping and thinking from time to time” ($M=3.50$) was ranked as the least used strategy among problem solving categories. This strategy is closely related to the first ranked strategies, but, however, most of the strategies in this category have a very slight difference among one another. “Trying to picture or visualize information in the text” and “guessing the meaning”, also part of cognitive reading strategies, is frequently used by high school students as they may find it difficult to concentrate. Nonetheless, problem solving strategies were chosen as the most used strategies.

Secondly, Global Strategies ($M=3.43$) were the next frequently used strategies represented by “trying to guess what the context is about”, “take an overall view”, “check understanding when come across new information” and “think about what they already know”. Obviously, these strategies set the stage before reading comprehension as students are encouraged to use their prior knowledge related to the topic.

Some strategies such as: “reading with a purpose”, “thinking about whether the content fits my purpose”, “reviewing the text for its organization and length” and “using tables, figures and pictures to increase understanding” were thought to be ranked as the very first frequently used strategies according to my learning style. Since they are reading an academic text, they should be aware of reading on purpose and thinking about whether the content fits their purpose. In order to justify their answers, sometimes students are not aware of the importance of reading during their studies. Test taking strategies should also be converted to memory strategies and purposes as this new information taken from the academic text may be useful in another discussion. In contrast, the results showed that these strategies were ranked 10th and 11th among global categories.

Lastly, Support strategies ($M=3.36$), very close to global strategies, were ranked as the third category but some of these strategies were sorted close to the most used strategies of the overall list. Most of the time, support strategies involve mechanisms to clarify information such as the use of additional information, dictionaries, references, going back and forth, translation to native language and much more. These techniques need resources and time to apply. Rather than opening the dictionary and finding the words, the learners prefer to continue reading and guess the meaning within the context.

It is understandable and predictable that the least used strategy was “using reference materials like a dictionary”, but it is not that common that students ranked “taking notes” as the second least used strategy. They receive a lot of new information in high school, not only during reading classes but in every course they take. Writing down the main ideas will help everybody to remember and reproduce the information. However, they translate the words into their native language more than they take notes. It may also be related to technology and the use of other gadgets, but this issue requires a more specialized research and discussion. These students have been learning English since primary school in third grade, due to the Albanian Education System. Translation as one of the least used strategies is justified because of the different and updated second language learning and

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teaching methodologies. They do prefer to read aloud and paraphrase, but they still prefer to think in both languages, which is in contrast with the usage of translation. However, underlining and circling is the most used strategy in this category which can also justify the minimal use of note taking. The target group's unwillingness to spend time justifies the category's ranking.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the frequency of EFL learners' use of reading strategies, particularly translation, among 118 senior students from four non-public high schools in Tirana, Albania. The results showed that students mostly use problem-solving strategies likewise similar studies (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002; Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002). On the other hand, it is interesting to note that students do not favor using translation as a reading strategy. Even though the number of the participants does not represent the majority of senior students in Tirana, Albania, the findings raise the possibility of a change in language learning approaches. Although translation has long been seen as a conventional method of language learning, this preference suggests a need for understanding techniques that are more immediate and immersive. Perhaps instead of using translation as a support strategy, there is an increasing emphasis on improving fluency and comprehension in the target language itself. Alternative teaching methods that enable students to think critically in the target language and foster a deeper engagement with the material may need to be investigated by educators. This research emphasized how crucial it is to modify teaching strategies in language education to take into account the changing requirements and preferences of students. It also highlighted the importance of modifying teaching strategies in language education to accommodate changing learner demands and preferences.

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