

6. Conclusions

Let us now provide the conclusions reached after conducting this research project. This section will first discuss the research problem and goals, and then, the research questions presented in chapter one will be answered. Then, the inferences that can be drawn from all the research results will be addressed, taking into consideration the literature presented in chapter two and the expectations of the study.

The research problem this study wanted to explore was whether bilingual readers transfer the reading strategies used in their L1 to their L2, and whether this transfer helps them improve their reading comprehension. Also, the research objectives were to determine: 1) the extent to which bilingual International Relations college students transfer reading strategies when reading texts in Spanish and English, 2) the extent to which this transfer helps International Relations students understand the readings, and 3) the level of awareness International Relations students have of reading strategy use and of their comprehension monitoring process.

The research problem and objectives lead us now to answer the four research questions posed in chapter one. The first question was, ‘what kind of reading strategies do bilingual International Relations college students use (if used) when reading texts both in their L1 (Spanish) and their L2 (English)?’ First, it is important to mention that one can use reading strategies in any kind of text; however, it is more common to employ them in academic contexts. Therefore, a specific area of academic interest had to be chosen in order to assess the reading comprehension process.

As mentioned previously, the International Relations major was chosen as their students should possess a high level of English proficiency in order to attend content courses. A single academic program was also chosen in order to assess more easily just one academic discipline and to see if general conclusions could be carried out through this investigation. The answer to the first research question is that bilingual International Relations college students did use different kinds of strategies when reading. However, no distinction can be made between the kind of strategies used in Spanish and in English. The most used reading strategies were cognitive, such as: 1) underlining, 2) using dictionaries, 3) writing down, 4) guessing from the context, and 5) using prior knowledge.

The other category of strategies which was also used was the metacognitive with the self-monitoring process. On the other hand, if we take into consideration Mokhtari and Reichard's (2002) inventory we can say that the most used kind of strategies were the global and the problem-solving. From this, the most used global strategies were: 1) 'I thought about what I knew to help me understand what I read,' 2) 'I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text,' 3) 'I used context clues to help me better understand what I'm reading,' 4) 'I checked my understanding when I came across conflicting information,' 5) 'I decided what to read closely and what to ignore,' and 6) 'I critically analyzed and evaluated the information presented in the text.'

Then, the most used problem-solving strategies were 1) 'I tried to get back on track when I lost concentration,' 2) 'I adjusted my reading speed according to what I was reading,' 3) 'When text became difficult, I re-read to increase my understanding,' and 4) 'I stopped from time to time and thought about what I was reading.' The global strategies were used more in the Sustainable Development texts to make a general analysis of the

readings. The problem-solving strategies were more used in the Political Science texts to overcome obstacles as they included more jargon and technical words.

The second research question included in this study was: 'Are the L1 reading strategies transferred to the L2 reading?' If we take only into consideration the observable use of strategies, we could say that the answer to this question is yes. In general, students did carry out the same strategies from Spanish to English. The strategies which were transferred were: 1) underlining important information, 2) using dictionaries, 3) drawing brackets, arrows and asterisks, 4) making notes, and 5) scanning the text to check length and topic.

On the other hand, if we take into account students' responses to the strategies inventory, the answer to the research question is not all the L1 cognitive reading strategies are transferred to L2 reading. From the inventory the strategies that were transferred and the strategies that were not depended on each participant, however, the techniques which always transferred were 1) 'I took notes while reading to help me understand what I read,' 2) 'I thought about what I knew to help me understand what I read,' 3) 'I skimmed the text first by noting characteristics like length and organization,' 4) 'I adjusted my reading speed according to what I was reading,' 5) 'I decided what to read closely and what to ignore,' 6) 'I used reference materials such as dictionaries to help me understand what I read,' 7) 'I used context clues to help me better understand what I was reading,' 8) 'I went back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas in it,' 9) 'I asked myself questions I would like to have answered in the text,' 10) 'I tried to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases' and 11) 'I underlined or circled information in the text to help me remember it.'

The strategies from the inventory which were not always transferred were: 1) ‘I had a purpose in mind when I read,’ 2) ‘I previewed the text to see what it was about before reading it,’ 3) ‘I thought about whether the content of the text fitted my reading purpose,’ 4) ‘I paraphrased to better understand what I read,’ 5) ‘I used typographical aids like bold face and italics presented in the text,’ 6) ‘I checked my understanding when I came across conflicting information,’ 7) ‘I tried to guess what the material is about when I read,’ and 8) ‘when reading, I translated from English into Spanish.’

Some peculiar cases became apparent when conducting this research and when trying to explore strategy transfer. Most of the students (participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 10) carried out the tactics used from Spanish to English. The main reason was because they learned about them in Spanish courses and never in English. However, participant 3 learned about strategies in English courses in high school, but she never received this education in Spanish. She also transferred strategies but from English to Spanish. She did a reverse transfer, as the one explained by Cook (2003, as cited in Talebi, 2013, p. 432).

A similar thing happened with participant 9. She never have had strategy instruction in any language, however, her dominant language is English and not Spanish. This participant intuitively uses strategies in English and does the same exact thing in Spanish. At last, two particular cases were present. Participants 7 and 8 learned about strategies in both Spanish and English. Therefore, they know which techniques combine better with which language. However, they did transfer some strategies both from Spanish to English and from English to Spanish.

The third research question was: ‘Are International Relations students aware of reading strategy use and of their comprehension monitoring process?’ In general, the International Relations students who participated in this study are aware of their reading strategy use. As mentioned in chapter five, the interview let us find out that six of the ten participants are aware of the kind of reading strategies they use. These participants could mention some of the techniques they learned and some other strategies they personally use. Even though it was mentioned before that eight participants learned about reading strategies in school, not all of them were aware that they use them until they reflected on them. The level of awareness in each participant was not the same. The most aware participants were definitely participants 3 and 7 who mentioned exactly what they do when reading; this could actually be observed when they read all the texts.

On the other hand, participants were not aware of their comprehension monitoring process. In the interview they were told what a monitoring procedure was and they had to reflect on whether that happened regularly or not when reading. Most of the participants took a long time before answering. Then, the majority said that they think it does happen; while answering they unconsciously reflected on their own experiences.

The fourth and last research question was: ‘Do International Relations students use their L1 while reading in their L2?’ This question was difficult to answer as this is something that mostly happens in the mind and cannot be easily observed. In the interview, students were asked this question; one participant said she uses her L1 every time, four other students said they occasionally use it when encountering difficult words, and five readers said they never use it.

In this sense, there was an element which could be observed that helped answer this question, when reading participants 2, 5, 7, 8, and 10 used the bilingual dictionary. Participant 2 was the student who said she always uses Spanish when reading in English. Then, participants 5 and 8 said they used their L1 occasionally. And participants 7 and 10 were the ones that said they never use their mother tongue. So a possible answer to this question is that participants in general do use Spanish as a tool to better understand English readings but are not aware that they use it.

Now that we have answered the research questions it is time to define if the objectives have been met. The first objective was to determine the extent to which bilingual International Relations College students transfer reading strategies when reading texts in both Spanish and English. After conducting this research, we can conclude that the extent of transfer is between 70 and 80% as not all strategies were transferred. Even though all students transferred strategies, they did not transfer 100% of the strategies they used from one language to the other. As mentioned in chapter five, the students' strategy transfer depended on the type of text they were reading.

The second objective was to determine the extent to which the transfer of strategies helps International Relations students understand the readings. It is important here to mention that the mere transfer of strategies does not help readers understand the readings. What helps students understand the readings is the accurate and effective use of the reading strategies in each reading regardless of the language.

Finally, the third objective was to determine the level of awareness International Relations students have of their reading strategy use and of their comprehension monitoring

process. Talking about the reading strategies, we can say that students have a medium level of awareness of them using these tactics. They could recognize the strategies but were not fully aware of their use. Finally, the level of awareness that students have of their comprehension monitoring process is very low as only four of the ten students (participants 2, 4, 6, and 7) could recognize it explicitly.

We should continue now with the general conclusions of the present research study. After conducting this project and observing how International Relations college students performed when reading texts in both Spanish and English, we can conclude that in order to be successful while reading one must be located in a comfortable place in which the reading process is carried out uninterrupted and at a fluent pace.

Readers in general need to learn the importance of identifying the main ideas, key words, and relevant information from just the text and not to always rely on comprehension questions. We might not always have a questionnaire to guide our thoughts and our reading process. Through reading strategy use we might accomplish such goal.

Continuing with the topic of reading strategies, we can conclude that all readers at some point make use of these important tactics which enhance reading comprehension and help overcome reading problems. The number of strategies used by each reader does not signal that a reader is good or poor. In this sense, this study supports Grabe's position (2009), which does not agree with Anastasiou and Griva (2009), and says that a poor reader is not defined by the number of strategies they use when reading but by how effectively and accurately they employ the chosen strategies.

Next, from the strategies used in the present research study we can say that the most used and the ones who proved to be the most effective ones were: 1) underlining both with a highlighter and a pen, 2) making notes relating prior knowledge to the information of the text, 3) drawing brackets, arrows and asterisks, 4) scanning the text before reading to check length and the topic of the document, 5) going back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas in it, and 6) trying to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases. Even though we have said before that the choice of strategies to use when reading depends on the text itself, it can be said that the above strategies seem useful across the board and might be used no matter what type of document we encounter.

As mentioned above, those six strategies proved to be the most effective ones. However, not all participants used them accurately. Some readers just made notes which did not mean anything or that were not related to the readings. Others tried to guess the meanings of words but failed at it as they were not focused and were not reading in context. Finally, the majority of the participants who checked the length of the texts did it only to see how much they had to read and not to create a purpose before reading.

Talking about the reading purpose, as Reichl (2009) states, it is important to determine the goal of doing it before reading and define how that process will be carried out. None of the ten participants delimited a purpose for reading in the Political Science texts. This could have definitely helped them in administering their time, selecting better their reading strategies, and to recall effectively where the information requested in the questionnaires was. On the other hand, it was evident that when reading the Sustainable Development texts readers did determine their purpose and could read better.

As students had to read the texts with a time limit, it was prudent to tell them about two of the strategies related to fast reading which are skimming and scanning. We could observe that after explaining these two strategies, students performed better in the last two readings. They controlled their time better and were also able to recall more information than before. Even though students did a good job when reading, in the comprehension questionnaires this improvement was not reflected. From the above results, we can see that readers sometimes use strategies for the mere purpose of using them even if they do not know how to use them accurately. These kinds of performances in the readings are clearly exposed in a weak performance during the comprehension activities.

The majority of the International Relations college students who participated in this research project perceived themselves as being good readers. Personally, the researcher thinks that they are definitely not poor readers as they demonstrated their capacity to use diverse reading strategies, to adapt to the reading circumstances and to perform relatively well on the comprehension questionnaires. However, they cannot be considered good readers to the full extent of this concept as it was clear that their comprehension process, use of strategies and control of their monitoring process need improvement.

This research project can also conclude that being aware of the kind of strategies one uses when reading and how to use them considerably helps the accuracy and effectiveness of the text comprehension. However, we agree with Grabe (2009) when he says that not all proficient use of strategies is consciously used.

We can also conclude that what helps considerably in the effectiveness of reading strategy use is their instruction. With it students are able to practice them and acquire the

necessary skills to use them later on when reading. Therefore, all language teachers should worry and devote more instruction to teaching the reading processes more accurately and deeply.

More work needs to be done in this area of L2 reading in order to explore more deeply all the factors that affect the reading processes, reading strategy use and reading comprehension. As a researcher, I think that there should be better ways to assess reading strategy use because as observers we cannot know what is going on in the readers' minds. Students often provide inaccurate results of what they did because they tend to neglect certain strategies employed or they say they use more than those they actually apply.

Also, further research in other academic disciplines should explore reading strategy use, a possible transfer, the metacognitive awareness in reading and how all this affects comprehension mainly in second language processes. In the same way, future research studies should include more participants in order to try to provide generalizations in results and in conclusions.

The final thoughts of this research study are that as seen throughout this written project the act of reading is not as easy as we commonly think and expect it to be. Reading does not only involve the written words, it also involves prior knowledge, use of strategies, a self-monitoring process, the meaning we get out of written words, the author's thinking, the reader's thinking, among many other variables. As Carlos Ruiz Zafon (2001) said, "books are mirrors: you only see in them what you already have inside you" (n. p.)