

A CASE STUDY OF TWO READERS: TRANSFERENCE AND USE OF READING STRATEGIES IN RELATION TO THE READER'S LITERARY COMPETENCE AND THE LANGUAGE IN WHICH S/HE READS

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ABSTRACT. *In this paper we present a case study of two EFL learners where we investigate the influence of a) the language/s in which most of the reading is conducted on the transference of reading strategies from Spanish (L1) to English (L2) and the influence of b) the reader's literary competence on the acquisition of good-reader strategies. Our assumption concerning the first issue is that reading in both languages favours the transference of reading strategies from the L1 to the L2, whereas reading in just one language hinders such process.*

As regards the reader's literary competence, we believe it is a valuable asset concerning the adoption of good-reader strategies.

The results of the research evince that the informant who read in both languages transferred strategies from the L1 to the L2. Besides, his extensive literary competence had a positive effect concerning the use of good-reader strategies, two facts which were not observed in the informant who read sporadically in English and whose literary competence was rather limited.

KEYWORDS: *transference of reading strategies, literary competence, good-reader strategies.*

RESUMEN. *En este artículo presentamos un estudio de caso llevado a cabo con dos estudiantes de Filología Inglesa en el que se investiga la influencia de a) la lengua en que mayoritariamente se lee en la transferencia de estrategias de lectura del español (L1) al inglés (L2) y la influencia de b) la competencia literaria del lector en la adquisición y uso de estrategias de lectura características del buen lector.*

En relación a estas dos variables, creemos que la lectura continuada, en este caso tanto en inglés como en español, favorece la transferencia de estrategias de una lengua a otra, y que el poseer competencia literaria es un factor que influye de forma positiva en la adopción de estrategias propias del buen lector.

Los resultados de la investigación muestran que el informante que leía en ambas lenguas transfería estrategias de lectura de la L1 a la L2 y que su competencia literaria influía de forma positiva en el uso de estrategias características del buen lector, dos hechos que no se observaron en la informante que leía esporádicamente en inglés y cuya competencia literaria era más bien escasa.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *transferencia de estrategias de lectura, competencia literaria, estrategias del buen lector.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the field of FL reading, two of the issues in which there has been a great deal of research are a) the transference of reading strategies from the L1 to the L2 as well as the variables that influence such process and b) the skills/strategies which are necessary for the process of reading to be effective. Since there is often overlap in the use of expressions such as “reading skills” and “reading strategies”, we will use them interchangeably throughout this paper to refer to cognitive mechanisms to which the reader resorts in order to achieve a meaningful and coherent interpretation of a text.

As regards the transference of strategies from one language to another, the debate seems to be centred on the following question: does the extrapolation of reading strategies from the L1 to the L2 depend on the subject having already acquired effective skills in his/her L1 or does it take place once the reader has fully mastered the L2? Alderson (1984: 1) reformulated these two hypotheses in the field of FL reading as follows: is reading in an L2 a reading problem or a language problem?

The results of the study carried out by Carrell (1991) evince that L1 reading ability played a major role in the comprehension of L2 texts among native speakers of Spanish enrolled in advanced ESL classes in the U.S. This was not the case among U.S. college learners in Spanish classes, for whom L2 proficiency made a more significant contribution.

A recent study which seems to agree with the idea that effective reading depends more on possessing good-reader skills in the L1 than on possessing a high degree of competence in the L2 is that carried out by Fecteau (1999), who compared the English and French reading comprehension and inferencing skills of U.S. college students attending an introductory course on French literature. Her findings suggest that L1 reading strategies contribute more to L2 comprehension than does L2 proficiency.

The opposite stance is exemplified by Clarke (1980), who made a study in which he compared informants (divided into good and bad readers) for their reading ability in their L1 and L2 (Spanish and English respectively). He concluded from his research that there is no direct transference of reading strategies across languages and that foreign language competence is essential for transfer to take place, i.e., there can not possibly be transference of reading strategies from the L1 to the L2 if the reader’s proficiency in the foreign language is low.

Bernhardt and Kamil (1995) reach a compromise between these seemingly opposite views and advocate that the original question of whether reading in a foreign language reflects language or reading skills should focus instead on the amount of L2 linguistic knowledge and degree of L1 literacy skills that lead to effective reading, since they believe both variables do contribute to the process of FL reading.

As regards the skills which are necessary for effective reading, it is worth mentioning that both interactive reading models and schema theory underlie most current research in the area (Devine 1988; Grabe 1991).

Concerning the use of interactive models of reading, it is important to remark that the ability of the reader to combine successfully bottom-up and top-down approaches is

considered to be of primary importance in order to achieve a meaningful and coherent interpretation of a text. According to Hudson (1998: 48) “reading is seen as bidirectional in nature, involving both the application of higher order mental processes and background knowledge as well as the text processing itself”. This assertion implies that bottom-up models, which assume that a reader constructs meaning linearly, from letters, words, phrases, clauses and sentences, and top-down models, where the reader goes beyond the strict textual level, are too simplistic when taken separately, i.e., reading is not just following either a top-down or a bottom-up approach: reading is viewed as a far more complex phenomenon where both models interact for the sake of effective comprehension.

Devine (1988) concluded from her research (based on two informants defined as sound- and meaning-centred readers) that readers do have internalized models of reading which they activate when approaching a text, i.e., they possess a series of assumptions about what constitutes effective reading which, according to the author, are vital in allowing them to achieve a successful balance between top-down and bottom-up models.

Schema theory focuses on the fact that readers bring several types of knowledge which they have stored in their minds, be it knowledge of the world, of literary conventions, of textual structure, etc., to the process of deriving meaning from texts and that the effective use of such schemata is a good predictor of successful reading comprehension. A schema can be defined as a mental structure deriving from all the particular experiences we have had and, according to Nuttall (1996: 7) “the way we interpret depends on the schemata activated by the text; and whether we interpret successfully depends on whether our schemata are sufficiently similar to the writer’s”. As will be demonstrated in our research, a good reader will resort to whatever schema s/he has stored in his/her brain in order to make sense of what appears, both implicitly and explicitly, in a text.

Despite the fact that there is a wealth of research on the use and transference of reading strategies across languages, there are still many open questions concerning the personal variables that might affect such process. Our research centres precisely on two such variables, namely the literary competence of the reader which, we believe, determines mainly his/her use of good- or bad-reader skills and the language (L1 or L2) in which most of the reading is conducted, which we consider as a factor of vital importance when it comes to the transference of strategies from the L1 to the L2. We hope our findings will serve as a contribution to the discoveries already made in this area.

2. METHOD

2.1. *Hypotheses*

The hypotheses which we aimed to validate in our research were as follows: 1.a) the EFL learner who reads extensively in both Spanish and English will transfer reading strategies from one language to another when approaching a reading task. On the other

hand, 1.b) the EFL learner who reads in just one of the languages mentioned above will not be able to approach English and Spanish texts in similar ways and, therefore, will not transfer strategies from the L1 to the L2.

In this research we also aimed to verify that 2.a) the EFL learner whose literary competence is extensive will make use of those skills cited in the literature as characteristic of good readers. Conversely, 2.b) the EFL learner with a limited literary competence will not have acquired the skills which are necessary in order to approach successfully a reading task. By “literary competence” we mean loosely the reading experience, maturity and skills which emerge after years of reading on a regular basis, especially when such task is viewed by the reader as a source of pleasure and enjoyment.

2.2. Informants and sample criteria

In order to obtain data on which to base our research, it was necessary to choose two informants who fitted a specific profile. In order to verify our hypotheses we needed:

- a) an EFL learner who read extensively in both Spanish and English. Concerning this issue, it is important to remark that the informant’s reading experience was not to be limited to the strict academic context, that is, to those books which s/he had to read because they appeared in a specific course. Instead, we decided to select someone who could be considered a true reader, that is, a person who reads not only for academic purposes, but also for pleasure, in order to verify whether the informant’s reading equally in Spanish and English made him/her transfer reading strategies from one language to another and whether the fact of possessing an extensive literary competence made him/her a better reader as regards reading skills.
- b) It was also necessary to choose an EFL learner who read mainly in one of the languages involved in this study. In this case, it was more appropriate to select a student of English Philology who, due to the demands of the degree’s syllabus, which includes a great number of courses whose main component is the reading of literary texts, read more extensively in English than in his/her mother tongue.

We proceed now to give a more individualized account of each informant: informant A was twenty-two years old; he had been studying English for eleven years and, at the time when the research was carried out, he was in the 4th year of English Philology at the University of Murcia. He declared to read on a regular/daily basis both in English and Spanish and he perceived reading as an activity out of which he obtained pleasure and enjoyment.

Informant B was twenty years old; she had been studying English for nine years; she was enrolled in the 3rd year of English Philology at the University of Murcia and read mainly in English and for academic reasons only, from which we deduced that it

was not an activity she did out of pleasure. Besides, her frequency of reading was not held constant, since it was something she did sporadically.

The sample criteria did not take the form of a questionnaire where students of English Philology had to answer questions related to their reading experience such as how much they read or in what language they read most. Using such method we could not know for sure whether the students were being sincere or not. Therefore, we opted for choosing two students who we knew quite well, since they had been our classmates in some courses and, on many occasions, we had had conversations with them from which we could deduce their reading tastes, how much they read or if they considered reading as a source of enjoyment or just as an activity limited to the well-known “compulsory reading” tasks.

2.3. Data elicitation procedure

The data elicitation procedure consisted of retrospective commentaries, that is, on verbalizations made by the informants at several stages of the reading process regarding different aspects of their approach to the two reading tasks. This means that we asked our informants questions about how they approached the texts, mainly in the middle and at the end of the tasks. It is important to point out that some of those questions were guided in the sense that we did not limit ourselves to ask them what they were doing at a specific moment of the reading process, because such vague and general questions would have clearly resulted in simplistic answers devoid of the kind of information we needed in order to validate our hypotheses. Instead, we asked them more concrete questions, namely whether they had read the title, why they had read it, whether they could summarize the main ideas of the text or whether they were resorting to any previous experience that might facilitate their understanding of the events narrated in the texts.

The informants were not instructed to make their verbalizations in any language in particular since we thought that, if asked to verbalize in English, proficiency in the L2 might have interfered in the process of reporting how they were approaching the reading tasks. In fact, both informants decided to make their retrospective commentaries in Spanish.

After the retrospective commentaries, our informants were given a questionnaire (Appendix A at the end of this paper contains the whole questionnaire) including both open and close questions (yes/no questions and multiple choice questions). The decision of making them answer a questionnaire after finishing the two reading tasks rather than before starting them had two reasons behind. We thought that it would be easier for our informants to answer a set of questions about how they approached a reading task having just finished one, than answer those questions in a fairly abstract way with no real newly read text on which to base their decisions. This is of primary importance if we take into account that many of the questions they had to answer were highly specific and therefore, it would have been more difficult to answer them generalizing from past experiences of reading tasks.

In more general terms, the questionnaire had a second purpose irrespective of its being a post-reading task: it served mainly as a way of matching our informants' retrospective accounts and what we observed they did while reading with the answers they wrote in the questionnaire. This allowed us to get two different sources from which to obtain contrasted data and from which to get a higher degree of reliability.

The questionnaire as such consisted of thirty-five questions which can be divided into two sub-groups: questions associated to different reading strategies which made reference to top-down and bottom-up models of reading and questions of a more general kind with which we tried to elicit data concerning several aspects of the informants' approach to a reading task.

2.4. Tasks and materials

In order to elicit the data necessary to carry out this study, an important element was to set our informants two reading tasks: one in Spanish and another in English. Now we proceed to give a detailed account of the tasks and the conditions in which the informants had to face them.

First of all, it was necessary to choose a room with little noise or external factors that might have distracted our informants making them lose concentration. In order to avoid this external variable that could have perfectly influenced negatively the informants' full engagement with the texts, we chose a room in the library, where noises from people and cars could hardly be heard.

Secondly, we decided that each informant should face the reading tasks alone. We made this decision on the basis that, if put together, any of the informants could have followed or adopted reading habits from the other. For example, we thought that if one of the informants decided to underline words or paragraphs, the other might feel tempted to do the same, which would have clearly prevented the subjects from reading a text as they usually do at home.

Before the informants were given the texts, we said to them that they should read them just as they would do at home, doing whatever they do when they set about reading a book or any piece of language in their daily lives. Most importantly, they were told that they were not there to sit an exam, but to help us carry out a study, the aim of which was never explicitly explained to them. It was necessary in this respect to make them feel as comfortable as possible so that they did not feel constrained in the view of feeling observed. Besides, when the informants were accomplishing the two reading tasks, we pretended to be fixing our attention in something else apart from them with the aim of preventing them from feeling anxious about our presence.

Finally, it must be remarked that we did not restrict the time allotted to the informants to complete the two reading tasks, since we thought that the fact of having a time limit could represent a source of pressure and anxiety for the subjects, interfering therefore in the atmosphere and conditions in which we wanted them to read the texts,

which were to simulate as closely as possible the way in which they actually read in non-controlled situations.

The texts we chose to carry out our research were: a text in Spanish drawn from the book *Todavía...* (1974) by Rodrigo Royo (Editorial Planeta, Chapter VIII). The text in English, entitled "The Fire" (from the book *Hiroshima*, written in 1963 by John Hersey), was included in the *Practical Anthology of American Literature* (1996) by Julián Rodríguez. Both texts were around seven hundred and fifty words long (Appendix B at the end of this paper contains an excerpt from each text).

The two texts were carefully chosen following a series of criteria that were ultimately related to certain reading strategies.

We selected a text, both in English and in Spanish, which had a title from which the informants could make predictions as to what the text might be about on the basis that the ability to make predictions from titles is considered as characteristic of good readers. In the case of the Spanish text, we must add that the chapter we chose, as the rest of the chapters included in the book, lacked a title. However, we decided to summarize the main events narrated in the chapter in a title that we ourselves made up. Thus, our title "La Partida de Cartas" allowed us to observe whether the informants were able to picture in their minds what in fact was going to happen in the passage.

In the case of the English text, there was a title, "The Fire", which was accompanied, in brackets, by the name of the book from which the passage was extracted, *Hiroshima*. As can be seen, the title of the book is a clear reference to World War II, concretely to the atomic bomb launched on Japan and this could provide our informants with a clue as to the historical context of the text, something we wanted them to infer in the process of reading but not before. So we opted to delete this information in order to investigate if our informants were able a) to guess the historical context of the text by using such clues as the Japanese nouns that abound throughout the text and b) to resort to any information they might know about such event to facilitate or enrich their reading. It must be remarked that these two elements ultimately refer to a strategy that good readers use: the resort to different kinds of schemata, in this case schemata containing historical knowledge, to facilitate their reading.

Secondly, both texts contained words which are not thought to be part of the everyday vocabulary used by an average EFL learner. With this idea in mind, we intended to investigate whether our informants were able to infer the meaning of such unknown words and which means they used to do so: looking at the context in which they appear, looking words up in the dictionary, etc. This last resource, in turn, entails another element to study, namely which type of dictionary they chose, what definition our informants selected and on what grounds they made such decisions. That is why we gave the informants three dictionaries: one in Spanish and two- monolingual and bilingual- in English.

Besides, both texts contained main and secondary ideas and this fact had a clear function, namely it was used to investigate whether the informants were able to distinguish what constitutes a main idea and what does not. Furthermore, the two texts contained a subject-matter which was not highly specialized, as would have been the

case of law, economics, etc. Controlling this variable, we made sure that, if the informants did not understand the text, it was not due to deficient knowledge of the subject-matter, but to other factors attributed to issues more closely related to the goals of our research such as the lack of literary competence or the use of bad-reader strategies.

Another important aspect is that the two texts lent themselves to be “actively interrogated”. This has to do with a strategy used by good readers which consists of questioning facts stated either explicitly or implicitly in the text in an attempt to engage fully with it and, particularly, as an attempt to go beyond it.

Finally, both texts lent themselves to be visualized, that is, in view that they dealt with concrete rather than with abstract elements, they made it possible for the readers to picture in their minds what was in fact going on, what characters were doing or what the setting was like. This strategy, as the ones mentioned above, is also characteristic of good readers.

3. RESULTS

The list of strategies we offer below is drawn from Nuttall (1996). We must remark that this author does not offer a list of strategies properly speaking. What she does is to comment on certain reading skills that can improve or hinder the process of reading. What we did was to select those skills and write them in the form of a list. However, it is important to add that we regarded this list of strategies as something open to the incorporation of new ones since it was the informants’ approach to the texts what ultimately determined the addition of the strategies they punctually used while accomplishing the two reading tasks. We now proceed to list the strategies used by the informants in each of the tasks.

Informant A, when approaching the text in Spanish, made use of the following strategies: use of historical knowledge, knowledge of the world and other types of schemata; active interrogation of the text; flexibility; realizing one’s problems; identifying main and secondary ideas; prediction; inferencing; visualization of the text and judicious use of the dictionary. These strategies were also used when approaching the text in English, so that there was transference of reading strategies from the L1 to the L2. Besides, all the strategies adopted by the informant are characteristic of good readers.

The only good-reader strategy that informant B used when dealing with the text in Spanish was inferring the meaning of the word “faetón” by resorting to the context in which it appeared. When reading the text in English, she limited herself to translating the text into Spanish and looking some words up in the dictionary. As we can see, there was not transference of reading strategies from the L1 to the L2. We can also say that her range of strategies was extremely limited and that, on the whole, those strategies are characteristic of bad readers.

4. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

4.1. *Informant A*

Informant A, before dealing with the text in Spanish, sat comfortably in the chair and showed a rather calm attitude. Besides, despite feeling observed, he showed a great deal of concentration: the informant seemed to be engrossed in the text, a behaviour which we interpret as an indication that he was actually enjoying it, a feature which characterizes good readers.

When the informant started to read the text in Spanish, the first element to which he paid attention was the title and, after being asked about it, his immediate response was the exclamation: “¡espero que haya una partida de cartas!” His words show that he used the title of the chapter he had to read, “La Partida de Cartas”, to make predictions about the possible development of the text. In addition, the title reminded him of the many evenings he used to spend playing cards with his friends, which is a clear indication that the informant resorted to background knowledge, concretely personal knowledge, in order to bring to the text any of the experiences contained in that specific schema so as to share a wider range of experiences with the text and, indirectly, with the text-writer. This strategy (resorting to prediction and background knowledge) was also used when the informant approached the text in English. In this case, the title (“The Fire”) reminded him of a story he had read before.

In the middle of the reading process, we stopped the informant and asked him to provide a summary of what he had read in the Spanish text thus far. When doing so, he made reference to the setting, the characters and the main events. He did not include any unnecessary details, which shows that he was able to recognize main and secondary ideas. This strategy was also used by the informant when summarizing the text in English, since he only mentioned the main facts, i.e., that there had been an explosion and that, as a result, there were ill people lying on the floor.

When the informant resumed the reading of the English text, he concentrated on a specific passage which he considered to be important for the subsequent development of the story but which he did not completely understand. We have interpreted this behaviour as showing the activation of four reading strategies at the same time: a) there is active interrogation of the text, that is, he “asked” the text about information which he could not fully grasp; b) there is also flexibility since at that point he adapted his reading speed to a specific reading purpose since, in order to concentrate on a problematic passage, he read it slower than the rest of the text; c) the informant realized his problems while reading since he felt that the word whose meaning he could not grasp was of primary importance for the subsequent development of the story and d) not only did he use these top-down strategies, but also, representing a second step, he resorted to a strategy associated to bottom-up models of reading, namely looking words up in the dictionary (“punt” in this case) without trying to infer their meaning. However, this strategy can be considered as characteristic of good readers since it involves the

interaction of the two models of reading in the correct order: once he concentrated on a difficult passage in order to grasp its meaning (flexibility and active interrogation of the text), it became necessary for him to pay attention to grammar and vocabulary and, viewed in this way, looking words up in the dictionary is not negative at all since a) this bottom-up strategy was not used systematically, but only when the word in question was necessary for the correct understanding of a passage and b) it was a means to facilitate his understanding of the text once he realized that he could not infer the meaning of the word by resorting to contextual clues.

It is important to mention that the kind of dictionary he chose in order to look up the unknown word was a monolingual dictionary. When we asked him why he had made that choice, he answered that it was the dictionary that he frequently used. We interpreted this habit of using a monolingual dictionary as an indication that, for the informant, reading in an L2 does not consist of translating into the L1 (a belief associated with bad readers). Moreover, the informant used the monolingual dictionary judiciously, another good-reader strategy since, taking into account the context in which the word appeared in the text, he chose the definition that best fitted that context.

Concerning the text in Spanish, the informant also adapted his reading speed to the purpose for reading: to make a summary, to concentrate on a specific passage, etc. Besides, he stated that while he was reading the text, he was picturing in his mind what was in fact going on because that helped him visualize the characters and setting of the story.

During the reading process, the informant also resorted to inferencing strategies both in the English and in the Spanish texts. Concerning the text in Spanish, he inferred the meaning of “faetón”, since the references in the previous lines to horses was a clue that made him restrict the possible range of meanings of the word. As regards the text in English, he also resorted to inferencing processes, although not at word level. In this respect, the informant noticed that there were constant references throughout the text to Japanese names and to the explosion of bombs, clues that led him to deduce that the historical context underlying the text was World War II. That is why he also resorted to knowledge of history in order to facilitate or enrich his understanding of the text.

At a more advanced stage of reading we asked the informant whether he thought that the formal pattern of the texts was of any help for him in order to understand them. With this question we wanted to know whether he made use of formal schemata when reading. His answer was that, although his main concern in a first reading was not the formal structure of the text, he was nevertheless able to distinguish in both texts an introduction and a subsequent development of events. The conclusion we drew from his answer was that he made use of two strategies simultaneously: a) use of formal schemata and b) having a clear purpose for reading which, in some sense, also involves flexibility. The former entails that the informant paid attention to the formal aspects of the texts in order to distinguish their main parts, whereas the latter implies that he knew to what elements of the text (form, content, etc) he had to pay attention depending on the purpose for reading: a first reading to get the gist of the text (in which case he would concentrate on content) or an in-depth reading (in which case he would look at content and form as a whole).

Finally, it is important to add that the informant did not vocalize while reading and that he did not point with his finger or with a ball-pen to the lines of the two texts, a behaviour which is displayed by good readers.

Now we offer an account of the answers given by informant A in the questionnaire that he completed after finishing the two reading tasks.

Informant A wrote that he did pay attention to the title of a text when he started to read it, but he also admitted that the title is not always a reliable indicator of the main topic of a story. That is why, when asked whether he was able to anticipate what a text might be about after reading only some passages, he wrote that, although some specific information could lead him to create expectations about the subsequent development of a story, he preferred to read the whole of it in order to prevent misinterpretations.

As regards the questions with which we tried to elicit data about how the informants used schemata, in this case formal schemata, informant A answered that it was easy for him to distinguish the introduction, development and conclusion of a story, but he also remarked that not all texts follow that specific structure. He also answered that he did not believe in the fact that each paragraph necessarily corresponds to an idea. However, he added that he believed that the structure of a text does determine the ideas that are expressed in it.

Concerning the question about the use of other schemata while reading (such as those related to the use of background knowledge, historical knowledge, etc), informant A answered that he did apply any knowledge that he might have about a certain topic in order to facilitate and enrich his understanding of a text.

In one of the questions, we wanted to know whether our informants “asked” a text for information, that is, whether they concentrated on problematic passages in order to get clues which could lead them to successful interpretations. Informant A answered that, most of the times, he would like to ask the writer rather than the text itself and that instead of asking a text in order to get clues, he tried to construct the meaning of the text using it as a source of information. His literal words were: “No pregunto al texto, intento construir el significado desde él”.

Informant A also answered that he thought that ambiguity might be an integral part of a piece of language and that when he could not make any sense of a text, he admitted that maybe his approach to the text had not been the appropriate one.

In another question, we asked the informants if, after reading a text, they made drafts containing the main ideas of the text or any other information which they considered to be of any interest to them. Informant A answered that he made drafts only when he read interesting and engaging texts.

As regards the question with which we intended to know whether the informants thought about the author’s purpose when reading a text, informant A answered that he did, and added that when he did not agree with the writer’s purpose, he tried to impose his own, which shows that he “resists” reading.

He also answered that, in order to understand a text, he paid attention to both grammar and words and that he only looked up the meaning of those words which are

necessary for the correct understanding of a text, always choosing the definition which best suits the context in which the word in question appears. Besides, he answered that he only memorized the meanings of the words that he found interesting. When asked about how he tried to guess the meaning of the words that he did not know, he answered that by resorting to contextual clues. Furthermore, he answered that, when reading in English, he used a monolingual dictionary in order to look up the words that he did not understand.

We also asked the informants whether a) they could be able to understand a text with certain words omitted; b) whether they could infer the grammatical category of a word in relation to the context in which it appears and c) whether they found it easy to establish connections between the words in a text (i.e. between nouns and pronouns, verb and subject, semantic fields, etc). As regards the first question, Informant A answered that understanding a text with certain words omitted depends on the genre to which the text belongs. For instance, he asserted that, whereas it would be easy in narrative texts, he would not be able to understand a poem with some of its words omitted. Concerning the second question, informant A answered that he could guess the grammatical category of a word as long as it appears within a sentence, but never when that words appears in isolation. As for the last question, he answered that he found it easy to deal with intertextual reference in a text and that he usually ignored semantic fields except when he read poetry, which shows how clearly he selects the textual elements to which he has to pay attention depending on the genre that he is reading.

Concerning the questions with which we intended to know whether the informants read silently or aloud and whether they read pointing the words of the text with their fingers, informant A answered that he read silently without pointing words with his fingers.

Finally, we intended to know whether the informants thought that punctuation marks could help them understand a text. Informant A answered that punctuation was for him an essential element in texts, especially literary texts, and that he considered it as important as other textual elements.

4.2. *Informant B*

As a first remark, we can say that, unlike informant A, the second informant was rather tense throughout all the reading process, touching her hair frequently and biting the ball-pen that she held in her hand as an indication of her nervousness and anxiety. This type of behaviour shows that she approached the texts as if they represented some kind of problem for her, as a task that she should finish as soon as possible rather than as pieces of language from which to obtain pleasure and enjoyment, a behaviour which is typically associated with bad readers.

When informant B started to read the texts, we asked her if she had read the title. She answered that she had, but only because it was the first thing she had seen, from which we deduced that she did not resort to the title with the aim of creating expectations about the possible development of events in the text.

In the middle of the reading process, we asked the informant to make a summary of the main ideas of the text in Spanish, but she started to mention unnecessary details such as "... era una partida de cartas ... que era de la época del *Buscón* ... y utilizaban cinco cartas y una baraja española ...", which is an indication that she did not know how to distinguish between main and secondary ideas, since she did not even mention the main character of the story, Don Enrique.

The same bad-reader strategy was used when approaching the text in English since, when asked to make a summary of what she had read up to a specific point, the informant enumerated unnecessary details: "pues va que ... de un lugar donde ha habido un incendio y ... este lugar ... eeh ... hay un sitio que hay un incendio donde se situa la acción y está lo suficientemente lejos como ... como que todavía queda algo vivo, ¿no? Y ahí se encuentra gente y sobre todo llegan al principio... los primeros en llegar fueron una madre y un niño y... les daban arcadas. Luego llegó el cura o algo así". Moreover, she declared that she needed to read both texts again in order to provide a satisfactory summary of the events narrated in the stories, whereas for a good reader one reading would have sufficed. This fact reveals that informant B did not show flexibility, that is, that she was not able to adapt her reading speed to the purpose for reading.

As regards the use of inferencing strategies in the text in Spanish, informant B did guess the meaning of the word "faetón" by resorting to contextual clues, concretely to a reference to horses which appears in the previous line. However, this strategy was not used systematically during the whole reading task. For example, she was not able to infer the meaning of the word "arrecido" in spite of the fact that there is a reference in the text in which we learn that the action takes place in a cold, rainy day: "Hacía frío aquel día de enero. A ratos, llovía y, a ratos, lo que caía era aguanieve y como que quería ponerse a nevar en serio". Although informant B was not able to infer the meaning of the word "arrecido", she did not look it up in the dictionary either, from which we deduced that, again, she did not realize her problems while reading. However, she did look up the meaning of the word "pelliza", which was not essential for the understanding of the text and which, moreover, was a word whose meaning could be perfectly deduced from contextual clues since, as we read, we learn that the main character, Don Enrique, went towards the fire of the public house "sin quitarse la pelliza, forrada con piel de borrego, y comenzó a desentumecerse". After reading these words, informant B should have inferred that "pelliza" refers to an article of clothing.

Concerning the text in English, the informant repeated the same behaviour that she had shown in the Spanish text since she did not use inferencing strategies properly, which also implies that she was not aware of her problems. When dealing with the text in English, she admitted to overlook those words that she did not know instead of trying to infer their meaning by resorting to contextual clues. For instance, she underlined the word "retrace", which she did not understand, but did not look it up in the dictionary. With respect to this issue, the informant did look up a word in the dictionary ("retch"), but such word was not essential for the understanding of the passage in which it was included since the verb "to vomit", which appeared before, was enough in order to

understand what happened to the people who drank contaminated water. Furthermore, she used a bilingual dictionary to find the meaning of the word in question, which evinced that she was used to conceiving the process of reading just as translating a piece of language. Informant B, in fact, recognized that she was translating the text into Spanish because that made the process of reading easier for her.

Concerning her use of formal schemata, we realized that there was a contradiction between two facts: on the one hand, during the retrospective commentaries, the answer that she gave to the question of whether she could perceive the structure of the texts was that she did not pay attention to that aspect. However, she could recognize a correlation between paragraph-idea. From this fact we can infer that, despite her recognition of some kind of formal structure in the texts, the association she made between paragraph-idea involves wrong assumptions concerning the use of the formal schema strategy since it is not true that an idea always corresponds to one paragraph (in fact, what the informant thought to be a main idea did not correspond to a single paragraph).

At the end of the reading process, we asked informant B whether she was able to visualize the setting and the main characters of the stories, but she answered that she was not used to picturing in her mind those elements of a text, another feature that is associated with bad readers.

Finally, it is important to remark that during the two reading tasks she pointed to the lines of the texts with her finger or with a ball-pen and that she vocalized while reading, two features displayed by bad readers.

In general terms, the reading strategies employed by informant B, both in the English and in the Spanish texts, are bad-reader strategies.

Now we offer an account of the answers given by informant B in the questionnaire.

Informant B answered that she paid attention to the title of a text before starting to read it, but she admitted that she was not able to anticipate or predict the topic of the story using the title as a source of information. Although we agree with informant A that the title of a text may not be a completely reliable predictor of the subsequent development of the events narrated in it, it is nevertheless considered as a good-reader strategy to make predictions using the title as a source of information and then proceed to enrich or even modify those predictions as we continue reading.

As regards the questions related to the use of formal schemata, informant B answered that she was able to distinguish between main and secondary ideas and between the introduction, development and conclusion of a text. However, this was not confirmed during the two reading tasks, since neither in the English text nor in the Spanish one was she able to provide satisfactory summaries of the events narrated in the stories. The fact that informant B found it difficult to summarize the main events narrated in a text is also apparent from her answer to a question with which we intended to know whether the informants adapted their reading speed to the purpose for reading. Informant B answered that she would need to read a text carefully and looking up unknown words in a dictionary in order to provide a summary of what she had read.

In another question related to the use of formal schemata, informant B answered that she believed that each paragraph corresponds to a main idea, a wrong and simplistic assumption about the formal schema strategy since one idea may be developed in more than one paragraph.

Concerning the use of other schemata, such as the use of background knowledge to facilitate reading, she answered that she did not apply any knowledge that she might have about a certain topic in order to enrich the understanding of a piece of language, which clearly defines her as a bad reader.

As regards the strategy of active interrogation of the text, we asked the informants whether they tried to solve their problems of comprehension approaching the text with an inquisitive attitude. Informant B answered that she did not ask a text for anything at all and that, besides, she was not able to infer what “ask a text for something” meant.

Concerning the question with which we intended to know whether the informants accepted ambiguity at the end of a text, informant B answered that she did but that she never thought about the author’s purpose when she finished reading a book or any other piece of language.

Informant B also answered that she never made drafts containing the main ideas of a text or any other information that she might consider important or interesting.

As regards a question related to the textual components on which the informants relied in order to achieve comprehension (grammar, words or both), informant B answered that she paid attention to grammar and words alike. However, this was not confirmed when reading the two texts, since she overlooked many words that she did not understand. Furthermore, despite stating in the questionnaire that she tried to guess the meaning of unknown words by resorting to contextual clues, we observed that she was not able to infer the meaning of words like “arrecido” or “retch”, even when it was perfectly clear from context what their possible meaning could be.

Another feature which shows that informant B is a bad reader is that, when asked about the procedure which she followed in order to look words up in a dictionary, she answered that she always chose the first entry, instead of selecting the definition that best suits the context in which the word appears.

As regards the question in which we asked the informants whether they looked up in the dictionary all the words that they did not understand or only those that were essential for the understanding of a text, informant B chose the second alternative. She also answered that, when she did look up unknown words in a dictionary, she only memorized the meanings of those words which she found interesting. She also answered that, when reading a text in English, she used a bilingual dictionary, which is an indication that she regards a text in the L2 as a piece of language to be translated into the L1.

Concerning the questions in which we asked the informants whether a) they could understand a text with certain words omitted; b) they could infer the grammatical category of a word using the context in which it appears as a source of information and c) they found it easy to establish connections between the words and semantic fields of a text, informant B answered that a) she would be able to understand a text with certain

words omitted; b) she could infer the grammatical category of a word in relation to the context in which it appears and c) she finds it easy to establish connections between the words and semantic fields of a text.

Informant B also answered that she read silently and pointing to the words of the text with her finger, a feature displayed by bad readers.

As regards the question related to the use of punctuation marks to achieve effective comprehension, she answered that she did notice punctuation marks and that, therefore, they could help her understand a text.

The general conclusions drawn from the analysis of what the informants did during the two reading tasks and their answers to the questionnaire are as follows: informant A transferred all the good-reader strategies that he had in the L1 to the L2. He is a good reader from the point of view of strategies, which we interpret as being mainly a consequence of his extensive reading experience and literary competence. The fact that informant A is a good-reader is also apparent from the analysis of the answers that he wrote or chose in the questionnaire.

Informant B, on the other hand, only used bad-reader strategies both in the English text and in the Spanish one. Concerning the text in Spanish, although she was able to infer the meaning of “factón”, this was not something that she did systematically throughout all the reading process. As a result, we can say that, quantitatively, her bad-reader strategies outweighed the good ones. Likewise, the vast majority of the answers that she wrote or chose in the questionnaire are associated with the behaviour adopted by bad readers and, moreover, although some of her answers are related to the use of good-reader strategies, they can not be considered as completely reliable data given the lack of correspondence between what she answered in the questionnaire and what she actually did while reading.

We believe that informant B had mainly a reading problem, since she had not developed in Spanish good strategies that she could transfer to the L2, chiefly as a result of her not reading extensively both in her L1 and L2. In this respect, we have rejected the hypothesis of the informant's having a language problem alone. It is obvious that when reading in an L2, she will be likely to find more unknown words than when reading in the L1, but if it were only a language problem, she would have had some good-reader strategies in her L1 that she was unable to transfer to the L2 as a result of her low proficiency in English, since we realized that she had to struggle with the text in order to get the gist of it. Consequently, the fact that she had only bad-reader strategies in both her L1 and L2 is an indication of her having a reading problem that clearly outweighed the problems vocabulary and grammar posed her.

5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The results of this research corroborate our four hypotheses with one exception. Informant A, who read extensively both in Spanish and in English, transferred reading

strategies from the L1 to the L2. Moreover, his literary competence made him use those strategies mentioned in the literature as characteristic of good readers.

Concerning the informant who read more frequently in English than in Spanish, we hypothesized that she would not be able to transfer reading strategies from Spanish to English, that is, that she would approach the two texts differently. However, the results evince that the informant used the same bad-reader strategies both in her L1 and L2, a fact which we attribute to her lack of literary competence, which made her approach the two reading tasks using skills that clearly hindered the process of effective reading.

Numerous studies, such as the one carried out by Clarke (1980) conclude that for reading strategies to be transferred across languages, the reader needs to have a certain level of proficiency in the L2; otherwise, the linguistic constraints of the foreign language could invalidate the aforementioned process. In our research, levels of proficiency were not considered since the two informants had been studying English approximately during the same period of time, which does not entail that their competence in the L2 was exactly the same. In fact it was not, as we could observe during the reading tasks, and levels of competence in the L2 did influence the process of reading and transference, especially in the case of informant B, but that was the conclusion we drew after the analysis of results and not one of the hypotheses that prompted our research. Accordingly, it would be an important contribution to the research already done in the area to go deeply into how the variable "L2 proficiency" interacts with other variables, such as age, cultural background, literary competence, etc. as regards the use and transference of reading strategies from the L1 to the L2.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

- 1) When you start reading a text, do you read the title first?
 - a) yes
 - b) no

- 2) Then, if you take heed of the title, do you think you are able to guess the topic of the text?
 - a) yes
 - b) no

- 3) After reading some passages of the text, are you able to sum up what it is about or do you need to read the whole text?

- 4) At this stage, can you guess or create expectations about what might happen next?
 - a) yes
 - b) no

- 5) Little by little, are these expectations:
 - a) changed when you read the whole text?
 - b) maintained when you finish reading the text?
 - c) enriched by new ideas you acquire in the process of reading?

- 6) After reading a text, is it difficult for you to distinguish between main and secondary ideas?
 - a) yes
 - b) no

- 7) Do you think that each paragraph corresponds to a main idea?
 - a) yes
 - b) no

- 8) Is it easy for you to distinguish between introduction, development and conclusion?
 - a) yes
 - b) no

- 9) During the process of reading, do you “ask” the text for information, i.e, do you concentrate on passages you do not understand in order to elicit clues?

- a) yes
 - b) no
- 10) When you do not understand a text, do you usually admit that maybe your approach to the text has not been the appropriate one?
- a) yes
 - b) no
- 11) Do you admit that ambiguity might be an integral part of a text or do you think that when the end is tricky there must be a problem of interpretation on your part?
- 12) Do you usually think about the author's purpose when you read a text?
- a) yes
 - b) no
- 13) If you think about it, what clues help you guess the author's purpose in writing the text?
- 14) Do you read silently or aloud?
- 15) Do you translate into Spanish when you read in English?
- a) yes
 - b) no
- 16) If you are asked to read a text in order to provide a summary of its main ideas:
- a) you read it carefully, looking up unknown words in the dictionary
 - b) you read it quickly, without paying attention to unknown words
- 17) And what about if you have to look for specific information?
- a) you read it carefully, looking up unknown words in the dictionary
 - b) you read it quickly, without paying attention to unknown words
- 18) Do you normally read pointing the words with your finger?
- a) yes
 - b) no
- 19) Do you usually apply any knowledge you may have about a certain topic in order to get a full understanding of a text?
- a) yes
 - b) no

- 20) Once you find a language problem in a text (a word you do not know, complex grammar, etc), what strategies do you use in order to solve it?
- 21) When you find these language problems, do you usually read the text again underlining the words and expressions you do not know?
- a) yes
 - b) no
- 22) After reading a text, do you normally make drafts on a sheet of paper about ideas or other aspects you have found interesting?
- a) yes
 - b) no
- 23) In order to understand a text, what do you pay more attention to?
- a) words you do not know
 - b) grammar
 - c) both
- 24) When you find a grammatical problem in a text (complex syntax, long sentences, etc), do you know how to cope with it in English as well as in Spanish?
- a) yes
 - b) no
- 25) Why could it be different?
- a) on account of the different vocabulary
 - b) on account of the different structures
 - c) it is no different for you at all
- 26) When you do not know the meaning of a word, do you directly look it up in the dictionary or do you try to guess its meaning?
- 27) If you try to infer its meaning, what clues do you use to do it?
- 28) Could you infer the grammatical category of a word by means of the position it has in the sentence and the words that follow and precede it?
- a) yes
 - b) no

- 29) If you finally have to look up an English word in the dictionary, what dictionary do you use: bilingual or monolingual?
- 30) How do you look it up?
- a) choosing the first definition you find in the dictionary
 - b) you look at the context where the word appears and then you read all the definitions and choose the most appropriate one
- 31) If there are many words in a text that you can not understand, do you look up all of them in a dictionary or only those that are essential for the understanding of the text?
- 32) Do you memorize the meaning of all the words that you look up in a dictionary or only the meaning of the words that are essential for the understanding of the text?
- 33) Do you find it easy to establish connections among words in a text, i.e, between nouns and pronouns, verb and subject, words belonging to the same semantic field, etc?
- a) yes
 - b) no
- 34) Could you understand a text with certain words omitted?
- a) yes
 - b) no
- 35) Do you think punctuation marks can help you understand a text?
- a) yes
 - b) no

APPENDIX B

Excerpt from the text “Todavía...”

Don Enrique había salido de Alea hacia las diez de la mañana, rumbo a Valencia. Con los dos hermosos caballos andaluces que tiraban de su elegante faetón, se podría hacer el viaje en una jornada; pero en pleno invierno los días eran cortos y a su cochero, Pascual, no le gustaba fatigar a los caballos, a los que amaba como a las niñas de sus ojos. Por eso don Enrique, siempre que tenía que ir a Valencia, hacía el viaje en dos jornadas, deteniéndose a cenar y dormir en la Venta del Llano, una posada clásica situada a unos setenta kilómetros de Alea y cincuenta de Valencia.

Hacía frío aquel día de enero. A ratos, llovía y, a ratos, lo que caía era aguanieve y como que quería ponerse a nevar en serio. A pesar de lo bien acondicionado que estaba el faetón, todo él acolchado, con burletes en las portezuelas, que cerraban con la precisión de una escopeta inglesa, cuando llegó a la Venta del Llano, al hacerse de noche, don Enrique estaba arrecido. El dueño de la Venta lo saludó con grandes reverencias y él se acercó al fuego, sin quitarse la pelliza, forrada con piel de borrego, y comenzó a desentumecerse. [...]

Luego, [don Enrique] le ordenó al mesonero que les [a tres hombres sentados en una mesa] sirviera lo que quisieran de su parte. A la tercera ronda de mutuas invitaciones, se hicieron amigos. Cenaron juntos y, a los postres, uno de ellos propuso:

-¿Qué tal si organizamos una partida? ¿Le gustan a usted las cartas?- agregó, dirigiéndose muy en concreto a don Enrique-. Estas noches de invierno son tan largas...

Fue así como se organizó la partida de golfo, una especie de póquer con baraja española, de cinco cartas y cuatro envites, un juego verdaderamente criminal, que ya se jugaba en España en la época del Buscón.

Excerpt from the text “The Fire” (from the book Hiroshima)

All day, people poured into Asano Park. This private estate was far enough away from the explosion so that its bamboos, pines, laurel, and maples were still alive, and the green place invited refugees- partly because they believed that if the Americans came back, they would bomb only buildings; partly because the foliage seemed a center of coolness and life, and the estate's exquisitely precise rock gardens, with their quiet pools and arching bridges, were very Japanese, normal, secure; and also partly (according to some who were there) because of an irresistible, atavistic urge to hide under leaves. Mrs. Nakamura and her children were among the first to arrive, and they settled in the bamboo grove near the river. They all felt terribly thirsty, and they drank from the river. At once they were nauseated and began vomiting, and they retched the whole day. Others were also nauseated; they all thought (probably because of the strong odor of ionization, an "electric smell" given off by the bomb's fission) that they were sick from a gas the Americans had dropped. When Father Kleinsorge and the other priests came into the park, nodding to their friends as they passed, the Nakamuras were all sick and prostrate.