

**The Impact of Linguality and Gender on the Strategic
Reading Behavior and Reading Ability of ESL Learners with Low and High
Awareness of Strategies in Reading Short Stories**

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Abstract

This study intends to find out the strategic reading behavior of male/female, mono/bi-lingual ESL learners of high and low reading strategies awareness in the reading of short stories. It was found that students using low and high reading strategies differed significantly in their mean reading scores and also that bilingual students had significantly higher reading scores than monolingual students. However, male and female students did not differ significantly in their mean reading scores. In addition, the interaction effect between reading strategies awareness and linguality was found to be non-significant, revealing that the pattern of reading scores were the same for mono and bilingual students irrespective of the reading strategies they have. The interaction effect between reading strategies and gender was also found to be non-significant, revealing that pattern of reading scores are the same for male and female students irrespective of the reading strategies they have. Therefore, it is implied that to increase the reading comprehension ability of ESL learners in their reading of short stories we need to increase their reading strategies awareness. In addition, monolingual students need more scaffolding from their teachers in their reading activities compared to bilingual students in reading short stories.

Key words:

Linguality, Reading, Reading Strategies for Short Stories, ESL.

Abstracto

Este estudio intenta hallar el comportamiento estratégico de lectura entre estudiantes femeninos y masculinos, mono/bi lingües de alta y baja estrategia de lectura en la lectura de cuentos cortos. Se encontró que los estudiantes que utilizan altas y bajas estrategias obtuvieron diferencias significativas en sus puntuaciones promedio de lectura y que los estudiantes bilingües obtuvieron a su vez promedios más altos de lectura que los monolingües. Sin embargo, el género de los estudiantes no marcó una diferencia significativa en las puntuaciones promedio de lectura. En adición, se encontró que la interacción entre la conciencia de las estrategias de

lectura y la lengua no fue significativa, ya que los patrones en las puntuaciones de lectura fueron iguales entre estudiantes mono y bilingües, sin importar las estrategias de lectura de cada uno. También se encontró que el efecto de la interacción entre estrategias de lectura y el género de los estudiantes no fue un factor significativo en el estudio, revelando de esta manera un patrón en las puntuaciones de estudiantes femeninos y masculinos, sin importar las estrategias de lectura de cada uno. Este hallazgo implica que para aumentar la habilidad de comprensión de lectura de cuentos cortos de estudiantes de ESL, se debe aumentar a su vez la conciencia de estrategias de lectura. En adición, los estudiantes monolingües, necesitan mayor andamiaje en cuanto a las actividades de lectura que les ofrecen sus maestros, en comparación con la que necesitan los estudiantes bilingües para la lectura de cuentos cortos.

Palabras clave:

lengua, lectura, estrategias de lectura de cuentos cortos, ESL.

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Introduction

Since reading is a problem-solving activity, the idea of strategic learning of reading has become the matter of investigation in recent years. Comprehension is the reason for reading. If readers can read the words but do not understand what they are reading, they are not really “reading”. Urquhart & Weir (1998, p. 95) define strategies as ‘ways of getting around difficulties encountered while reading’. Reading is a transaction between the text and the reader. As students read, they search for and construct meanings based on what they bring to the text and what the

text brings to them. Good readers, as they read, are both purposeful and active. Good readers have a purpose for reading. They may read to find out how to use a food processor, read a guidebook to gather information about national parks, read a textbook to satisfy the requirements of a course, read a magazine for entertainment, or read a classic novel to experience the pleasures of great literature. Good readers think actively as they read. To make sense of what they read, good readers engage in a complicated process. Using their experiences and knowledge of the world, their knowledge of vocabulary and language structure, and their knowledge of reading strategies (or plans), good readers make sense of the text and know how to get the most out of it. They know when they have problems with understanding and how to resolve these problems as they occur. An efficient reader employs a range of strategies including skimming ahead, considering titles, headings, pictures and text information, anticipating information to come, and so on (Grabe, 1991).

In reading courses in ESL bilingual contexts we should know the relationship between linguality, gender, text genre and strategic reading behavior. The term *bilingual* refers to individuals who can function in more than one language. Knowledge of two or more languages gives learners so many advantages. As Jiménez (1992) and Langer, et al., (1990) found successful bilingual readers know how to utilize their knowledge and abilities developed in Spanish to enhance their English reading comprehension. Jimenez et al., (1995) reported that proficient English and Spanish bi-literate readers, like expert monolingual readers, demonstrated remarkable strategic abilities when reading. They also found that bilingual readers tended to have a unitary view of reading and conceive many similarities between reading in Spanish (L1) and English (L2). On the other hand,

the less successful readers were found to not have a unitary view of reading. Finally, they found that the successful bilingual readers were aware of the transfer of knowledge across languages.

Bilinguals have the advantage of knowing two cultures and being able to communicate with a wider variety of people. As Cook (2004) states, learning another language *does* seem to change people's 'thinking' to some extent. Bilingual cognition research also supports the view that L2 users are differing from their monolingual peers in many ways, "in particular having a different knowledge of the L1 in terms of syntax, vocabulary, phonology, pragmatics, and so on"(Cook, 2004). Studies on gender differences using a reading strategy will help us learn how gender can affect development and achievement in L2 reading. It will also help teachers know the different needs of males and females in the learning process of reading. Recently, researchers have aimed to investigate how male and female learners differ in L2 reading performance and strategy use (e.g., Bugel & Buunk, 1996; Chavez, 2001; Young & Oxford, 1997). The findings of studies on gender differences in reading strategy use and reading performance are not consistent. Chavez (2001) found that females scored higher than males in a multiple-choice reading comprehension test. Bugel and Buunk (1996) found that male students scored higher than females in a reading test which had passages neutral in gender. Green (1991), Green and Oxford (1995), Kaylani (1996), Sheorey (1999), Ehrman and Oxford, (1989) found that females reported significantly higher use of metacognitive strategies than males. Young and Oxford (1997) investigated reading strategy use by 23 male and 26 female students in L1 (English) and L2 (Spanish). They found that males and females did not differ from another significantly in reading

comprehension performance. In the analysis of the students reading strategies they also found that males use monitoring and paraphrasing strategies more than females and that females used strategies in solving their vocabulary problems more than males. They concluded that gender-based differences in strategic behavior might not reside in general categories, but rather at the level of specific strategies. They suggested that some strategies might be gender-based. Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) in a study aiming at examining differences in metacognitive awareness and perceived use of reading strategies among 105 United States and ESL university students in the USA found that USA female students reported a significantly higher usage of reading strategies than did their male counterparts.

As teachers of English our main concern is to help learners acquire communicative competence. To this purpose we tend to focus on teaching standard forms of linguistic expression. However, EFL learners still have difficulties in comprehending the nuances, creativity and versatility which characterise even standard and transactional forms of English. Therefore, communicative competence is more than acquiring mastery of structure and form. In other words, communicative competence also involves acquiring the ability to interpret discourse in all its social and cultural contexts. For this reason, the use of literature in the English classroom can provide a powerful pedagogic tool in the learners' linguistic development. Literary texts can occupy a special place as the foundation of any English language program. They can provide a powerful pedagogic tool in learners' linguistic development (Savvidou, 2004). These can be based on reality or imagination.

There are many benefits to using literature in the EFL classroom. Apart from offering a distinct literary world which can widen a learners' understanding of their own and other cultures, it can create opportunities for personal expression as well as reinforce a learners' knowledge of lexical and grammatical structure. Moreover, an integrated approach to the use of literature offers learners strategies to analyse and interpret language in context in order to recognize not only how language is manipulated, but also why. An integrated approach to the use of literature in the language classroom offers learners the opportunity to develop not only their linguistic and communicative skills, but their knowledge about language in all its discourse types. The use of literary texts in the language classroom can be a potentially powerful pedagogic tool.

Reading literary texts for literary experience is different from reading them just for information. Rosenblatt (1985) offers a starting point for thinking about the reading of literary texts when she defines two general stances readers may choose when constructing meaning and responding to literature. In one stance (i.e., the efferent stance) the reader's purpose is primarily to gain information. The emphasis is on recalling, paraphrasing, and analyzing detail. In the second stance (i.e., the aesthetic stance) the reader's purpose is primarily to associate text with personal experience and feelings. The emphasis is on personally connecting with the text as one reads, developing deeper insights into the human experience, and responding thoughtfully and critically to the ideas and insights presented. Strategic readers understand that different texts require different approaches and strategies. Readers need strategies that help them read not only the words on the page but also read between and beyond the lines. They need to know the specialized language of

literary texts. Figurative language, style, irony, point of view, and theme take on particular meanings when employed in literary genres.

However, what seems to be underresearched in ESL studies is the effect of linguality and gender on the strategic reading of *short stories*. The outcome of this research will indicate whether mono/bilingual male/female students should be treated the same or differently in the reading of short stories. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated to guide this study:

1. Students using low and high reading strategies do not differ significantly in their reading scores.
2. Mono and bilingual students do not differ significantly in their reading scores.
3. Male and female students do not differ significantly in their reading scores.
4. There is no significant interaction between reading strategies and linguality for reading scores.
5. There is no significant interaction between reading strategies and gender for reading scores.

Methodology

Participants

A sample of male and female first year pre-university students (N=111) from private and governmental P.U.Cs with English as medium of instruction in the city of Mysore, India, comprised the participants of the present study. These colleges were randomly selected. Through a background questionnaire (See Appendix) two groups of students in terms of linguality participated in this study:

Group A (28 male and 27 female monolinguals)

Group B (26 male and 30 female bilinguals)

In the present project monolinguals are those students who use just one language (except English) as home language and are not able to communicate with others by using more than one language, while bilinguals use more than one language (except English) at home or in their communications. In this study English has not been considered as an additional language for those subjects who were not capable of using it as a means of communication in their daily conversations whether inside or outside of their homes.

Materials

The following materials were used:

- a) Language proficiency test (Nelson, series 400B): This test was composed of multiple-choice closed passage, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation sections. In order to have a reliable test of proficiency at the piloting stage, the test was given to 15 students. Its reliability through the K-R21 formula turned out to be .81. The time allowed for taking this test was 25 minutes as determined at the piloting stage.
- b) Test of reading comprehension for short stories in English: Two short stories entitled “Cut” and “Broken Promises” containing 1029 and 1025 words respectively were employed in this study. They were neutral in gender. Fifteen items were developed for each short story in order to make this teacher-made test. The time allowed was 40 minutes as determined at the piloting stage. To have a reliable test it was piloted on 15 students and through the K-R21 formula the reliability turned out

to be .74. Then after calculating the correlation coefficient (.71) between the Nelson test of proficiency and the test of reading in English in the piloting stage for the purpose of having a valid test, this test of reading turned out to be suitable for this study.

c) Questionnaire: Strategic approach, or the process of reading comprehension of short stories, was measured by means of a 24-item, five-point likert scale questionnaire (Never/ Seldom/ Sometimes/ Usually/ and Always *true of me*). This instrument was adopted from the available articles on the strategic reading of literary texts (e.g., Savvidou, 2004, Saskatchewan Education, 1997) and further adapted for the purpose of this study. In order to make sure of the internal consistency reliability coefficient of the instrument at the piloting stage it was given to 15 students of the similar group taking part in the study. Based on the data gathered, the reliability coefficient alpha was calculated to be 0.69. I also asked two experts in the field to rate the instrument in terms of how effectively it samples significant aspects of its purpose for providing estimate of content validity. (See Appendix)

Procedure

The investigators approached the pre-universities authorities in order to get their consent for conducting the study. The conditions for testing were strictly followed as far as possible. The researchers firstly read instructions printed on the top of the questionnaires clearly and then before the start of each test, the investigators cleared doubts. The way of answering the questions was made clear to the participants and in case of any difficulty they were encouraged to ask question and were provided with help. The subjects were also informed that their

performance will be kept confidential and will not have any effect on their final exam scores. The whole study was completed in three phases as follow.

Phase 1: In this phase the Nelson Proficiency Test (Series 400B) was administered to 175 male and female pre-university students to be answered in 25 minutes. Out of this number 111 of students whose scores were above the mean (Mean: 11) were selected for the purpose of this study.

Phase 2: Then the reading comprehension test was administered among the student to be completed in 40 minutes as determined at the pilot study in order to have an assessment of their reading ability in English.

Phase 3: Soon after completing the reading comprehension test the subjects were given the reading strategies questionnaire for short stories, which was a retrospective measure of their reading strategy awareness and use. There was no time limit to fill out this questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

The two-way ANOVA was employed in order to analyze the collected data. The statistical representation of analyzed data is given in the following tables:

Table 1
Mean reading scores of the pre-university students using low and high reading strategies along with linguality and gender

Variables		Reading strategies				Overall	
		Low		High			
		Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D
Overall		48.04	9.67	61.98	9.64	53.32	11.77
Linguality	Mono	43.89	7.62	49.13	12.09	44.65	8.48
	Bilingual	56.91	7.41	65.00	5.91	61.82	7.60
Gender	Male	46.21	8.95	63.18	5.86	49.67	10.84
	Female	51.08	10.22	61.55	10.71	56.77	11.65

Table 2
Results of Two-Way ANOVA for mean reading scores of the pre-university students using low and high reading strategies along with linguality and gender

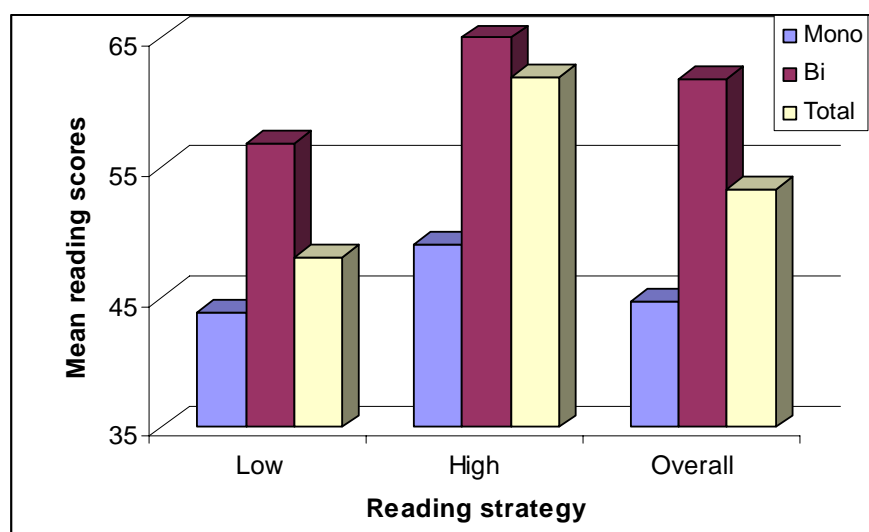
Source of variation	Df's	F value	P value
Reading strategies (A)	1, 107	14.324	.000 (HS)
Linguality (B)	1, 107	67.363	.000 (HS)
Interaction (A x B)	1, 107	0.660	.418 (NS)
Gender (C)	1, 107	0.620	.433 (NS)
Interaction (A x C)	1, 107	2.506	.116 (NS)

Note: HS-Highly significant; NS-Non-significant

As far as the first research hypothesis: “students using low and high reading strategies do not differ significantly in their reading scores” is concerned, students using low and high reading strategies differed significantly in their mean reading scores ($F=14.324$; $P<.000$). From the mean values it is evident that students who were using high reading strategy had significantly higher reading scores (mean

61.98) than students using low reading strategies (mean 48.04). Further, regarding the second research question: “Mono and bilingual students do not differ significantly in their reading scores” bilinguals were found to have significantly ($F=67.333$; $P<.000$) higher reading scores than monolingual students (means 61.82 and 44.65 respectively). Thus, hypotheses 1 and 2 are rejected as there were significant differences between students using high and low reading strategies as well as between mono and bilingual students. (See figure)

Figure
Mean reading scores of the pre-university students using low and high reading strategies along with linguality



With regard to the third research hypothesis: “Male and female students do not differ significantly in their reading scores” it was manifested that male and female students did not differ significantly in their mean reading scores as the obtained F value was found to be non-significant ($F=.620$; $P<.433$). Therefore, hypotheses 3 is accepted as the obtained F values were failed to reach significance level criterion.

However, with regard to the fourth research hypothesis: “There is no significant interaction between reading strategies and linguality for reading scores”

the interaction effect between reading strategy and linguality was found to be non-significant revealing that pattern of reading scores are the same for mono and bilingual students irrespective of the reading strategies they have. Lastly, for the last research hypothesis: “There is no significant interaction between reading strategies and gender for reading scores” the interaction effect between reading strategies and gender was found to be non-significant ($F=2.506$; $P<.116$) revealing that pattern of reading scores are same for male and female students irrespective of the reading strategies they have. As a result, hypotheses 4 and 5 were accepted as the obtained F values failed to reach significance level criterion and none of the interaction effects were significant.

Conclusion and implication

This study manifested that students using low and high reading strategies differed significantly in their mean reading scores and that bilinguals have significantly higher reading scores than monolingual students. However, male and female students did not differ significantly in their mean reading scores. In addition, the interaction effect between reading strategy and linguality was found to be non-significant revealing that pattern of reading scores are the same for mono and bilingual students irrespective of the reading strategies they have. Also the interaction effect between reading strategies and gender was found to be non-significant revealing that pattern of reading scores are the same for male and female students irrespective of the reading strategies they have.

Therefore, to have students with better abilities in reading short stories we need to increase their awareness of reading strategies. In addition, it was revealed

that bilingual students are at an advantage compared to monolingual students in mixed mono/bi-lingual ESL classrooms in which short stories are worked upon. Therefore, in classrooms in which male and female students with different linguality backgrounds attend it is important to take such differences into consideration. However, the fact that male and female students had the same reading performance will not let us think that from the beginning they have the same reading ability. However, it seems interesting if further research is done to see which gender will show more gain to a specific strategy or strategies if reading strategy instruction is given to them.

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Appendix

A-Name of the student:.....B-Gender: a) Male b) Female

C- Class studying:.....

D-Medium of instruction at high school: a) English b) Non-English

E-Language or languages which are used at home (Home language):

a)Kannada b)Urdu c) Hindi d)Telugu e) Marathi f) Others

(specify)

Reading Strategy Questionnaire

Directions: Depending on your language learning experience and needs, you may be using different types of strategies. Show how often you use the strategy when reading, by checking the appropriate box. It is important to answer in terms of how well each statement describes you, NOT in terms of what you think you should do.

THIS IS NOT A TEST. There is no right or wrong responses to these statements.

The scores you obtain will not affect your grades in any course. .

While reading:

1- I try to make use of my prior knowledge by previewing the text.

- 2- I consider the contributions of plot or sequence of events (including foreshadowing and flashback), cause-and-effect relationships, and events that are exposition, climax or turning point, resolution.
- 3- I make predictions about characters and plot before and during my reading.
- 4- I confirm my predictions (trying to figure out what will happen and verifying it in the text)
- 5- I consider the characters' defining traits, motivations, and developments throughout the text.
- 6- I understand differences between major and minor characters.
- 7- I consider the major character (protagonist) and his opposite character (antagonist) throughout the text.
- 8- I consider conflicts that motivate characters and those that serve to advance the plot.
- 9- I consider the details that provide clues to the setting, the mood created by the setting, and the role the setting plays in the text
- 10- I consider the point of view (the perspective of the author or speaker as well as the effects of first or third person narration and multiple narrators within and across text) when constructing the meaning of a text.
- 11- I consider the arrangement of words or phrases.
- 12- If I don't understand something such as a word or phrase, I guess its meaning using clues from the text such as part of speech, surrounding words, verb tense, singular and plural, synonyms and antonyms, appositive, punctuation marks, affixes, contrasts, description, cause-effect, use of *the*, etc.

13- I consider implied meaning or particular image associated with a particular word or phrase.

14- I consider diction (e.g., denotation, connotation, precision, multiple meanings, wordplay, imagery, idiomatic expressions, dialect, word contrasts).

15- I consider the figurative language (e.g., similes, metaphors as personification, allegory, symbolism, allusion, puns, etc).

16- I consider the similarities or differences in styles (e.g., formal, informal, conversational, scholarly, journalistic, poetic) of two or more texts.

17- I consider the theme (message) of the text.

18- I extend ideas found in a text by connecting them to ideas that have personal or societal relevance.

19- I try to remember what I read by forming mental pictures or images, for example I picture a setting, character, or event described in the text.

20- I evaluate what I read.

21) I do questioning for clarification while reading.

22- I make inferences (I determine the author's intent by reading between the lines and inferring what the author does not actually say).

23- I reflect and evaluate (responding to what they have read and passing judgment) after reading the story.

24) I monitor my own comprehension.

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