

***A Comparative Analysis of Awareness in  
Reading L1 and L2 Texts: EFL Thai Students'  
Strategies Use, Processing Speed and Linguistic  
Knowledge***

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This paper investigates the use of reading strategies and analyzes the reading behaviors of mature English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) readers. In brief, this study examines the reading performance of four Thai college students. Through the use of think-aloud protocols, interviews, and observations, I document EFL Thai students' use of reading strategies while they are in the process of reading and comprehending four English and Thai texts. The findings reveal that three broad themes emerge from the analysis: a) the most frequently-used strategies across readers in reading L1 and L2 texts, b) the effective use of reading strategies demonstrated by the students in reading L2, and; c) metacognition development in reading L2. However, the data did not provide adequate evidence to comment on the issues of the language transfer and cognates in reading L2 texts.

**Key words:** Metacognitive reading strategies, Bilingual reading processes, Cognitive processes, English as a foreign language learning, Think-aloud technique, Second language learning

## **INTRODUCTION**

Reading English materials has become important for students who study English as a foreign language (EFL). Many of these students are likely to have difficulties adjusting to a new school at college level where they have to read more English texts, which are not their first language. There are many technical terms and more complex sentences in reading academic texts, which provide information. There are multiple components for students to read successfully; for instance, motivation, learning opportunities, prior knowledge, study skills, cultural or language differences (Anderson & Armbruster, 1984).

According to Anderson and Armbruster (1984), many college students, as a result, are challenged with their study and commonly undergo the congruent learning problem in case they are not well-equipped with effective strategies to help them learn and read strategically. In other words, less able readers will find it more difficult in the literacy situation where they have to cope with challenging texts consisting of complex and sophisticated concepts to remember and complicated and lengthy sentence structures to read. Thus, to be successful readers at this level, students need to have multiple effective reading strategies to help them make sense of the texts being processed. These strategies require higher level thinking processes (Anderson & Armbruster, 1984). In brief, students require more awareness of the task demands. For example, they must know when to skip the trivia and when to pay special attention to the major details of the text. They must utilize the study strategies wisely and appropriately, and they must be able to monitor their comprehension while reading, and to apply alternative strategies when they realize that they fail to understand the text (Baker & Brown, 1984; Brown, 1980).

## **BILINGUALISM**

Numerous research studies in bilingual education have confirmed that

quality literacy instruction in the native language facilitates overall achievement and the development of English literacy skills (e.g., Peregoy & Boyle, 2001; Perez & Torres-Guzman, 2002). Given that literacy is a process of constructing meaning from context, it makes sense that readers will manipulate the context and cueing systems (the graphophonic, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic cues) of a language they speak fluently better than those of a language they do not know well (Goodman, Watson & Burke, 1987). Krashen (1985) report that successful bilingual students possess the three characteristics: a) high quality subject matter teaching in the first language, without translation; b) development of first language literacy; and c) comprehensible input in English. (p. 25)

## **INTERDEPENDENCE HYPOTHESIS**

There has been a great number of research studies about the influence of the first language on the second language, with the general result that the mother tongue is indeed a significant factor in second language development (Harley, Cummins, Swain & Allen, 1990). Cummins proposes his concept of “developmental interdependence hypothesis” (1979, p. 222), and explains that development of L2 competence as a function of the type of competence developed in L1 at the time when intensive exposure to L2 begins. When the usage of language functions, vocabulary and concepts of the L1 is promoted by the child’s linguistic environment outside the school, then a high level of L2 achievement is also likely to occur, at no cost of L1 competence. Conversely, when the L1 is not adequately developed at the start of the bilingual education, this will lead to low levels of L2. In summary, the hypothesis proposes that there is “an interaction between the language instruction and the type of competence a child has developed in his L1 prior to school” (p. 233).

Cummins (1984) described the interdependence hypothesis as follows:

To the extent that instruction in L<sub>x</sub> is effective in promoting proficiency in

Lx, transfer of this proficiency to Ly will occur provided there is adequate exposure to Ly (either in school or environment) and adequate motivation to learn Ly. (p. 41)

Cummins draws the conclusion that L1 and L2 literacy skills are interdependent. They are manifestations of a “common underlying proficiency” (Cummins, 1983, p. 116). High levels of L1 proficiency help acquisition, and high proficiency in L2 has a positive effect on L1 development. This is shown in the fact that L1 development does not suffer from the amount of instruction time dedicated to L2 instruction (and taken away from L1 instruction).

## **DEVELOPMENT OF READING ABILITY IN SECOND LANGUAGE**

A number of research studies in second language reading have explored how students develop reading in English as a second language. Prior research shows that when L1 and L2 learners learn a second language, they use similar strategies when they read (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 102). To illustrate, they appear to make use of sound-symbol, vocabulary, meaning, language structure and background and textual knowledge to decode and comprehend texts (Bernhardt, 2000). Although there are some similarities of the way they process texts, Bernhardt (2000) and some other researchers claimed that there are some differences. For example, Perego and Boyle (2001) claimed that “the two most important differences are second language proficiency and background knowledge, the powerful factors that affect comprehension” (p. 260). Grabe and Stoller (2002) commented that “in second language contexts, the issues become more complex in that L2 learners, while learning to read, must broaden their linguistic knowledge, deal with transfer effects, and learn to use L2-specific resources” (p. 41). Garcia (in press) commented that the reading comprehension performance of L2 learners is hard to analyze as it relates to the instructional, language, cultural, and affective factors that may affect the English reading development.

To sum up, learning to read is not easy, and it is especially difficult for adults learning to read in an L2. Students come from a variety of linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds. They enter the school system at different ages, with different levels of proficiency in their first and second languages (Ovando & Collier, 1985). Schools and teachers need to accommodate the needs of this diverse population. There are many variables that affect the second language development of L2 learners. Some students may acquire the second language faster than others. The reasons stem from the language proficiency as previously mentioned, the individual goals (such as careers and employment, education, social status, etc.), the context and situations in language learning (such as formal and informal contexts, the learning atmosphere, etc.), and the language inputs (such as meaningful instructions) (Baker, 2001). Broadly speaking, to optimize the conditions to promote students to acquire the reading skill is that teachers should incorporate the friendly classroom atmosphere, the understanding and respect of students' identity and culture, the effective instructions to teach them into the classroom. Besides that, the significant issues identified by empirical research must be taken into account to increase the reading development of the students: the support of the native language literacy, the prior knowledge and linguistic background of the learners, and socio-cultural factors in learning (Gass & Selinker, 2001). These issues are the central discussion on the basis of L2 reading development, with the focus on the adult learners. However, under some circumstances where the differences of the reading development between child and adult do not apply, the two general categories of L2 readers, beginning and intermediate, will be used to guide the discussion as Peregoy and Boyle (2001) suggest that "the development phases of second language readers contains no crystal-clear discrete stages" (p. 267).

## **RESEARCH IN METACOGNITION**

In the cognitive psychological literature, the concept of metacognition can

be literally defined as the learners' knowledge about knowledge (Sternberg, 1984). Flavell (1979) elaborated the concept of metacognition as the learners' awareness of, or control, over cognitive processes. That is, the learners are aware of the use of the cognitive knowledge resources that they have. Metacognitive learners actively plan and manage to use the appropriate strategies and evaluate them whether they are effective and appropriate in carrying out a task (Brown, 1982; Jacobs & Paris, 1987). According to Nickerson (1988), metacognition engages the learners to be in the conscious control of their planning, selecting, regulating, and evaluating the problem-solving activities in a learning situation. To paraphrase the idea, metacognitive processes involve the controlling, monitoring, and evaluating of one's effective use of cognitive strategies in performing a task.

In reading comprehension, if readers are able to control and monitor the reading strategies they use while they are reading and processing the text, and they know when to apply alternative strategies or take remedial steps when confusion occurs, they are believed to be proficient readers (Wenden, 1998). This is because it means they have 'task awareness', 'strategic awareness', and 'performance awareness' (Reynolds, Wade, Trathen & Lapan, 1989). They are aware of what they have to do with a reading task, and they effectively select the strategies they will use to attain the reading goal. They have in mind what strategies they plan to use or not to use during reading, such as they change the strategy they are using if they realize that the strategy in use is not effective and is not causing understanding.

Thus, metacognition has gained more popularity among the classroom researchers who are interested in building up students' potential in learning better. They believe that with the help of the teachers in fostering their students to use various strategies consciously, the students will gradually increase their self-awareness, and will finally become strategic and independent learners (Paris & Winograd, 1990). If students are provided with enough practice in familiarizing themselves with the metacognitive knowledge, they will begin to have a planning skill, a study skill, and an effective use of strategies in their learning (Romainville, 1994).

Although the research relating metacognition to literacy is extensive, the studies in metacognitive aspects of EFL reading in higher education have not been adequately examined. As an EFL student, I am aware that the ability to read well and strategically is the key element to achieve success in higher education. Many EFL students struggle when they read course materials required in class, and it takes time for many of them to overcome the difficulties (Zhang, 2001). Thus, the metacognitive reading strategies of successful EFL students need to be examined in order to better understand the phenomenon in which EFL students create meanings when they are processing texts. I am also interested in how much the teaching of reading in the EFL context underpins metacognitive approaches and in how EFL teachers can be supported in making their students more aware of the learning strategies they do use and could use in reading.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The overarching purpose of this study is to investigate what EFL Thai students knew about their reading and use of reading strategies across two languages, Thai and English, how they used certain strategies, and when they used them. With the main objective in mind, I further developed the following sub-questions.

1. How are successful EFL college students able to plan and execute their reading strategies? And what reading strategies do they use?
2. Are the students aware of the reading strategies they employ in the process of their reading materials? For example, are they conscious of selecting the strategies they use? And what do they do if they do not comprehend the text being processed?
3. How do they develop reading strategies?

## METHOD

### Participants

Creswell (1998) suggests that the purposeful selection of participants represents a key decision point in a qualitative study. Because the purpose of this inquiry is to tap the reading strategies of EFL students, it is suggested that the participants be highly proficient enough in the second language (Jimenez, Garcia & Pearson, 1996). I employed “maximum variation” (Miles, & Huberman, 1994) as a strategy to represent diverse cases to fully display multiple perspectives about the cases and identify important common patterns.

The criteria established for selecting EFL students in this study included those who a) are considered successful English learners; b) have at least 10 years of studying English; and c) are currently studying at graduate level. I was successful in contacting the students who were at that time studying in an educational institution in Bangkok. There were four of them, three female and one male, who met the criteria and were willing to participate in this study. Although the number of the participants is quite small, this investigation serves the main purpose as a qualitative study that seeks to find out the rich and thick descriptions of the cases undertaken (Stake, 1995). To make sure that my participants were appropriate, I made personal contact with them to discuss their academic standing and their language backgrounds. In addition, the students’ selection is based upon teacher’s judgment to confirm that their qualifications are consistent with the criterion-based participant selection. Below are the descriptions of the four informants. The names used here are fictitious.

*Profile of Student 1: Api.* Api is in his thirties. He was doing his graduate study in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in a university in Bangkok. His Grade Point Average (GPA) was 3.67 (with 4.00 being the highest grade). He had been teaching English at grades 5 to 9 to Thai students for 5 years.

*Profile of Student 2: Narat.* Narat is in her late twenties. She was pursuing



her master's degree in TEFL in Bangkok, and in the process of doing her thesis. After she obtained her bachelor's degree, she taught English in school in Thailand for about 2 years before she decided to further her education. Her GPA was 3.80.

*Profile of Student 3: Jit.* Jit was 33 years old, and also a graduate student in TEFL in an academic institution in Bangkok. She had 9 years of teaching experience in college level. Her GPA was 3.70.

*Profile of Student 4: Nop.* Nop is in her forties. She was a graduate student in Bangkok, with the focus on English as an international language. She had been teaching English for about 14 years to both Thai students and refugees. Her GPA was 4.00.

## **Materials**

### *Reading Passages*

In this inquiry, a total of four reading passages were used, two English texts, and two Thai texts. The first English text was an economic news article on "PM Marks Freedom from IMF" and had approximately 620 words in length; the other was a 520-word narrative text titled "The Pirates of Tarutao" (Adirek, 1994). The Thai texts included an 850-word editorial article taken from a Thai newspaper, which discussed the same economic issue as the English news article. The other Thai text was part of a chapter of the translated version of "The Pirates of Tarutao" consisting of about 1500 words. These passages were selected because they well represented narrative and expository texts in that students might read similar kinds of issues in everyday lives, and these passages allow students to use a variety of reading strategies when interacting with them.

### *Think-aloud Protocols*

I used a think aloud technique to help me analyze whether or not the participants understood the texts and what strategies they employed during

the reading experiment. The think-aloud protocols served as the primary data source to examine the readers' thinking and reading processes.

Data from the think aloud protocols were transcribed initially and then coded as the codes were modified recursively and iteratively (Patton, 1990). Analytic induction was also used to analyze the data to examine themes in search of the recurring issues related to the metacognitive reading strategies.

#### *Interview Protocols*

A semi-structured interview was used to elicit the flexible responses from the informants to illuminate individual perspectives and insights. In this study, two formal interviews were conducted to discuss their experiences and what they saw as the major metacognitive reading strategies. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.

#### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection through the multiple sources of information such as questionnaires, think-aloud protocols, and interviews were used. I followed the accompanying steps in gathering data.

The participants were scheduled to meet with me individually for one 2-3-hour session. The sessions lasted over 4weeks. Before the experiment, I provided the participants with the explanation of the tasks they were to perform. First, they were asked to complete a questionnaire, followed by the think-aloud sessions. In the think-aloud sessions, students were informed in advance that the session would be divided into two main phases: a practice period and the actual study. During the 20-30-minute practice period, they were given prior exposure to the think-aloud procedure, and were given a pen and instructed to make any notes in the passage whenever they wanted. There was no time limit. To model the think aloud strategy, I began by telling the participants that a reader should be thinking all the time while reading. I informed my participants that think aloud would help them to recognize how they worked with the text to make meaning in their own minds. Then I

demonstrated by thinking aloud using a short article. After the demonstration, I asked my participants if they fully understood the steps of thinking out loud while reading, and let them practice with two practice texts, one in Thai and the other in English, until they completely knew what they had to do.

After the practice session, the students were given the four passages placed in their order for the actual study: (1) the English news article; (2) the Thai editorial article; (3) the Thai narrative text, and; (4) the English narrative text. Then they explained what strategies and process they went through while interacting with the texts to make sense of them. To illustrate, the students first read the English news article on “*PM Marks Freedom from IMF*”, and followed by the Thai editorial article. After that, they read a narrative text titled “*The Pirates of Tarutao*” in Thai, and followed by the same text in English. After reading each text, the students were allowed to make additional comments, if any. In addition, students responded to a prompting question after reading each passage. The questions were very general and open, directing them to recall the major ideas of the reading passage.

Following the think-aloud sessions, I conducted an interview to gain insights about students’ learning experiences, and their comments on the instruction of English.

#### *Data Analysis*

In the analysis of the interview and think-aloud protocols, codes were formulated and modified as the data collection proceeded, according to the constant-comparative method (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Codes were reflective of the reading strategies employed by the participants in reading. The analytic induction was also used to analyze the data. I read the transcripts of the interview and think-aloud protocols and examined them in search of the recurring issues related to the reading strategies. Additionally, I conducted an individual content analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of each open-ended item to determine the categories that emerged across the responses. With multiple data sources, the findings were also triangulated in the sense

that the researcher analyzed all the data, particular themes were discussed with each participant, and overall themes were shared with all participants.

### *Coding Scheme*

In coding, I mainly followed the three classifications of reading strategies proposed by Jimenez et al. (1996) as a framework to classify the strategies when analyzing the obtained data.

The first classification is called text-initiated strategies, which includes using text structure, focusing on vocabulary, summarizing, restating the text, paraphrasing, using context, rereading, and decoding. The second classification is known as interactive strategies, which include inferencing, questioning, predicting, and confirming/disconfirming. The last category can be classified as reader-initiated strategies such as invoking prior knowledge, monitoring, visualizing, evaluating, noticing novelty, demonstrating awareness, searching for cognates, translating, code-switching, and transferring. (pp. 111-112)

## **Results**

Following the above framework to answer the research questions, I employed a thematic strategy of analysis across the data to organize the data and to assist in making judgments about the meaning and importance of the lines of inquiry. Three broad sets of conceptualizations or themes emerged: (1) the most frequently-used strategies across readers in reading L1 and L2 texts, (2) the effective use of metacognitive strategies demonstrated by the students in reading L2, and; (3) metacognition development in reading L2.

### *Theme 1: The most Frequently-used Strategies Across Readers in Reading L1 and L2 Texts*

Grabe (1991) comments that when compared with L1 students, L2 learners generally have more language proficiencies. This is because most L2 readers have already learned to read in their first language. In other words, they

already have some stock of linguistic knowledge before they learn to read L2 texts. The knowledge of reading in L1 may result in either as a support or interference. Thus, when L2 readers try to understand a text, the process of reading L2 texts can differ from reading in L1. For example, they must implement the linguistic knowledge to help them comprehend the text, they must use the translation strategy, and so on.

Consistent with the prior research findings, the analysis of this investigation showed that the students used a much wider range of metacognitive strategies when reading English texts, and there were major differences in the use of metacognitive strategies when the students were processing the Thai and English texts. The comprehension processing issues emerged from these differences were presented into two broad categories: (1) the use of metacognitive strategies demonstrated by the students in reading L1, and, (2) the use of metacognitive strategies demonstrated by the students in reading L2, with the supporting evidence from the think-aloud protocols.

*The use of Metacognitive Strategies in Reading L1 Texts*

**TABLE 1**  
**Summary of the Metacognitive Strategies Used in Reading L1 Texts**

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1. Text-initiated strategies
■ using text structure
■ rereading /reading ahead for clarification
■ summarizing
■ previewing materials
2. Interactive strategies
■ posing questions about the text
■ predicting the contents of the text or section of text
■ confirming/verifying predictions
■ interpreting
3. Reader-initiated strategies
■ invoking prior knowledge/relating new information to prior knowledge
■ critiquing the author/text
■ reflecting on what has been learned from the text

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The participants in this study were employing similar metacognitive strategies in reading the two types of Thai texts. In other words, they exhibited similar evidence of metacognition while engaging in a challenging literacy task. The examples of pedagogical practices indicative of a metacognitive emphasis included the following strategies: critiquing the text/the author, previewing materials, generating questions, verifying predictions, interpreting, rereading/reading ahead for clarification, relating new information to prior knowledge, and paying attention to text structure. The analysis showed that the strategies demonstrated by the students fall relatively evenly into the three classifications as proposed by Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson (1996): 4 text-initiated strategies, 4 interactive strategies, and 3 identified as the reader-initiated strategies.

Of all the strategies mentioned above, the data suggested that the most frequently-used strategies the students employed in reading Thai texts were:

(1) commenting on the texts, (2) summarizing, and (3) paying attention to text structure. Below are some examples of the strategies use from the think-aloud protocols

The example below arose from the think-aloud protocols when Nop read the editorial article. She said that the article overly complimented the successful administration of the government in dealing with the economic crisis. She then commented that: "Frankly speaking, it is not only the government's ability to solve the economic problem. There are also other factors. The author of the article admired the government too much. I feel sick of him."

Jit also made the similar comment on this part that: "Who said that the government should gain popularity from the people? It is only the author's opinion, not everyone thinks so."

Another student, Narat, accessed the text structure strategy when she read the "The Pirates of Tarutao" passage, describing the picture of the inside area of a prison, where the main characters were staying. She thought out loud after reading this paragraph that:

This paragraph depicts the prison compound which has a wall surrounded it. There are three buildings inside the prison. There are new characters here: Knox and his 5 subordinates are staying together in one building, Brown, and Rachan are in the second building, and the 3 policemen are in the last building. Wow, there are many new characters here. I should try to remember them; otherwise, I will get confused when they are later mentioned.

*The use of Metacognitive Strategies in Reading L2 Texts*

**TABLE 2**  
**Summary of the Metacognitive Strategies Used in Reading L2 Texts**

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1. Text-initiated strategies
■ previewing materials
■ rereading /reading ahead for clarification
■ skimming
■ summarizing
■ looking for important ideas
■ guessing the meaning of a new word from context
■ paying attention to text structure
2. Interactive strategies
■ posing questions about the text
■ predicting the contents of the text or section of text
■ confirming/verifying predictions
■ connecting one part of the text to another
3. Reader-initiated strategies
■ invoking prior knowledge/relating new information to prior knowledge
■ checking comprehension
■ identifying difficulties
■ demonstrating awareness
■ translating
■ taking steps to repair faulty comprehension
■ critiquing the author/the text

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The analysis indicated that the participants who are considered successful EFL Thai students employed many different strategies in reading across the

two text types, including the 18 strategies organized into three broad groups (text-initiated, reader-initiated, and interactive). The transcript from the participants' interview responses and think-aloud protocols supported this result. Overall the excerpts showed that the participants employed similar reading strategies during the think-aloud session. Speaking in generalities, there were four main ways for the participants to read informational articles. It appeared that they tried to memorize important details or key terms in order to be able to understand the text. They tended to focus on the reading at word or sentence level, and they tried to understand the message that the passage was trying to impart by translating it into their first language. If comprehension failed, they reread it.

After the analysis of the think-aloud protocols across the two types of English texts, it seemed that Nop appeared to be the most skillful reader among the participants. To offer a more accurate picture of being a fluent reader, it could be summarized from the work of Grabe and Stoller (2002, p. 17) that "Fluent reading is a rapid process, an interactive process, a strategic process, an evaluating process, a flexible process, a comprehending process, ..." To prove the point, Nop made fewer pauses when she read both English texts when compared with the other readers. She read them rapidly. She made the fewest miscues as well. It might be logical to infer that she processed most of the reading comprehension as she was reading the texts. That means her reading was an efficient process. It was noticeable that she read the texts with more ease and used fewer reading strategies than the other participants. This is because the evidence from the think-aloud protocols disclosed that she did not have much difficulty in processing the texts. In addition, she read the texts in larger chunks of words, and she made comments on the texts more often than the others. Her reflections on the texts demonstrated that she truly understood the texts and had insightful ideas to add to what was read. Furthermore, translation was not the most frequently-used strategies on her list. However, it was interesting to note that summarizing was the strategy that was on her list only. In Nop's case, it could be concluded that the reading strategies that she used the most in reading the two types of English texts



were reflecting on the texts, summarizing, and translation. The abilities to reflect on the texts and summarize are the critical strategies that require the students to synthesize the ideas presented, which, in effect, means the readers possess higher-level thinking.

*Theme 2: The Effective Use of Metacognitive Strategies Demonstrated by the Students in Reading L2 Texts*

Pressley (1998) stated that one qualification of skilled readers is that they are aware of what strategies they use. They consciously control and monitor their understanding, and they are able to report their thinking process. Grabe and Stroller (2002) commented that:

The most fundamental higher-level comprehension process is the coordination of ideas from a text that represent the main points and supporting ideas to form a meaning representation of a text. As good readers, we form a summary model of what the text is likely to mean. We also construct a more elaborated interpretation of how we want to understand text meaning. Beyond understanding and interpreting the ideas represented by the text, we establish purposes for reading, combine reading strategies as needed, make inferences of many types, draw extensively on background knowledge, monitor comprehension, form attitudes about the text and author, and critically evaluate the information being read. (p. 25)

In this study, the students reported a great deal of knowledge of strategies indicative of effective students. In other words, they had a wide range of strategies stored in their heads. Their reflections always included a lot of information about strategies for achieving the task demands during the think-aloud sessions. Moreover, they demonstrated the use of a set of powerful reading strategies, and adjusted the strategies each time when they tried to overcome the comprehension breakdown. From the analyses of the think-aloud and interview protocols, a set of effective strategies used repeatedly by the students in many different situations has proven to increase their comprehension of informational text. These strategies include:

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- Focusing on the main ideas
- Using prior knowledge and text clues to make predictions and to monitor and clarify or extend predictions
- Using internal and external features of informational text to predict and monitor
- Generating questions about informational texts
- Generating elaborations about text
- Summarizing texts
- Combining information across texts
- Reflecting critically and personally on informational reading
- Using oral and written language to formulate, express, and reflect on ideas

Generally speaking, the analyses illustrated how effectively the students coped with the challenging reading tasks in that all of the students tended to focus on the themes and main ideas and generally tried to process the reading for meaning when interacting with the texts during the experiment. These processes and their associated reading strategies were called 'surface' and 'deep' approaches respectively (Watkins, 2000). To paraphrase Watkin's ideas (2000), adopting a deep approach was the ability to draw some conclusions from the text that were not directly stated. On the contrary, students who had adopted a surface approach basically could not explain the authors' message and could only recall isolated factual portions of the passage. They could not go beyond what was stated in the text.

The subsequent report in this section deals with some instances of the students' use of effective reading strategies to cope with challenges in reading L2 texts.

First, consider the following demonstration of Nop's employment of reading ahead for clarification, generating questions and re-reading strategies in order to understand the central issue of a challenging paragraph when she tried to understand it. She also processed the information by thinking along with the text while reading.

Text: The land law, the condominium law, the property leasing law and the social security law would also be amended, with changes to provisions on

land ownership for farming and foreigners' ownership of condominiums.  
Nop: There is nothing difficult here. It is quite easy. Actually, if we read slowly and think along while reading, it will be faster and more effective to understand than reading quickly and having to go back to reread it. Thinking along while reading is better.

However, Nop used the rereading strategy when she thought that the part she did not quite understand was important. In addition, she went back to read the previous paragraph when she came across the same vocabulary that she recognized as important in order to guess the meaning from the context.

Text: His government would not increase the VAT rate to 10% from 7% required by IMF and would amend some of the 11 laws issued under IMF terms.

Nop: Here comes again the word *amend*. I came across this word before, but I still do not know its meaning. Oh, yes, it was in line 2 in the second paragraph. Let me read it again. *His government would not ... under IMF terms ... would amend some of the 11 laws ...* Does it mean to *reissue* the laws? In the earlier sentence, it also went like: ... plan to *amend* laws ... I think it should mean to *reissue* or to *change* law ... yes ... to *reissue* or to *change* 11 laws.

Not knowing vocabulary words does not mean that the readers cannot understand the text. Proficient readers choose to ignore the word if they think it is unimportant and would not affect the comprehension. Alternatively, if the word or phrase seems important, they will pay more attention to the word/phrase, by attempting to figure out its meaning by using appropriate schema or by inferring which of several meanings might suit the context.

The ability to assess one's own reading practice also shows that one is aware of his/her own strengths or weaknesses as a reflection in reading skill. The following excerpts from students' responses to interview questions which probed into their metacognitive strategies revealed that they used their reflections as opportunities for self-assessment, and tried to use new strategies to accomplish the reading tasks. Jit evaluated herself and reflected

her reading practice that:

I think I am a moderate English reader, but one thing I know is that I have improved my reading a lot since I study here at graduate level. As I told you, I have to read a lot at this level. Ummm ... I need to improve more. I want to be a more efficient reader ... Well, ... because I am not a native speaker so I usually read many times. First, I just scan though the article or whatever reading it is. Second time, I will highlight the main ideas or any important ideas, and take notes of the unknown words that I think they are important, and the words that I see often in the text. And for the third time, I will read more carefully to fully understand the text, and also I will try to remember the main ideas.

Finally, another effective strategy demonstrated by the students was the use of connecting the background knowledge with the text. It is very necessary for readers to use the prior knowledge and connect it with the reading text to create comprehension (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). The participants in the study demonstrated that they were able to relate what they were reading with their background knowledge. They also showed how important this strategy was using their prior knowledge to interact with the relevant topics. For example, while reading an English news article, which discussed the loans Thailand made from IMF, the students exemplified the integration of background knowledge with textual information:

Text: The prime minister thanked government officials for working hard in the past two years to improve the economy. Thailand was now free to follow its own path.

Api: Besides that, the prime minister thanked the government officials for their hard work in the past two years to improve Thai economy. Thailand was now free to follow its own path. I see ... now Thailand started to follow our economic policy freely in our own way. Actually, I don't have to read this news because I heard the prime minister speak on television. But it is also good to read once again so that I can learn new English words and their usage.

*Theme 3: Metacognition Development in Reading L2*

The theme presented in this section emerged when the participants related their learning experience with reading to the reading instruction they received in their country. My analysis from the talks that I had with the participants revealed that the reading instruction they received in their home country did not promote and build up students' reading strategies. It seemed that the students have developed metacognition in reading L2 texts by their own through several years of literacy learning experience. The students noted that teachers failed to provide adequate practice for students to become strategic readers. In other words, they felt that teachers often emphasized word meanings and content acquisition over building reading abilities and strategies. All of the students reported on this issue with similar responses to Api's reflection that:

I think we need to improve a lot about the reading instruction in our country. From the past, teachers did not promote students to read critically. We read the text and just tried to understand it. We believed everything in it. We were not guided to reflect what we thought about the author or the text. We were not trained to express our own opinions about what we read. Teachers would teach difficult words first. They mostly translated them for us, and then we read the text. We understood that to read texts meant we had to know every word.

It seemed that teachers did not promote metacognitive reading development for the participants effectively. Thus, they were limited in their learning opportunities to read strategically and in their development to become independent readers. Buehl (1996) comments that students tend to find it difficult to summarize what they are learning because they have not been trained how to synthesize what they read in their own words. When reading L2 texts, they become overwhelmed with many unfamiliar words and a lot of factual details; hence, they mainly look up the meanings of words, and overlook the need to paraphrase all of this into their own personal understandings.

Nop explained how things were going or what she thought about reading strategies she was encountering during her first year as a graduate student.

When I first did my graduate study, I struggled because I had to read a lot of English articles and texts. From my learning experience at school, teachers mostly translated the readings to us. So it took me a lot of time to adjust my reading behaviors. That was a long time ago anyway. As I read more, and learn to develop the reading strategies that I think are effective and suitable for me, I tend to read much better. Now I know that teachers should have students read and then check their comprehension. Students then have to use different strategies such as skimming, scanning, etc., to answer the questions. This instruction is more effective than just translating everything to them.

To sum up, the lack of knowledge and inadequate practice of reading strategies addressed a major problem for the students that affected them later when they first studied in the graduate level. The students discussed their experience and focused on the difficult time that they underwent in reading in the early phases of their studies. In the follow-up interview, their comments emphasized the importance they placed on internal and personal motivation of success, particularly effort.

### **Discussion**

What I have learned from the students about metacognitive reading strategies is that the students have developed metacognition in reading L2 by themselves, with very little guidance from teachers, through a long process of their experiences. They faced some difficulties in coping with challenging texts at the beginning of their graduate study. However, as a whole, the analysis revealed that these participants, when they were exposed to tremendous amounts of reading as graduate students, were capable of using appropriate strategies to regulate their learning events. It was suggested that emergent metacognition and reading ability may be related (Fang, 1999). Therefore, after several years of exposure to reading L2 texts, the participants

developed their reading skill through literacy tasks. As a consequence, their reading potential skyrocketed and their metacognitive reading strategies gradually and increasingly developed through the long process. This self-reading development assisted them in coping with new tasks and challenges.

This research reflects the nature of reading and the negative outcomes of the reading instruction in particular. This claim can be supported by the students' responses that they had hardly been trained the study skills and the reading strategies in their earlier educational levels. That is, the translation method was mainly used to teach them the meanings of every unfamiliar word by the teachers. They were not provided with opportunities to explore other effective strategies to aid their learning. So they were not highly metacognitive and struggled with readings when they had to depend more on themselves during their initial stage at the graduate level. It was the first time that they had to read a lot of informational texts analytically and critically to satisfy the course assignments. To promote and build up metacognition, research on language learning strategies suggests that not only the students would benefit from it, but the language teachers can profit from the students' learning awareness and can plan more effective instruction to guide them the use of appropriate strategies (Baker & Brown, 1984).

To promote effective instruction, it is interesting to note that the students in this study employed the following three strategies the most when reading L2 texts: translating, rereading, and determining meanings of the unknown words. The findings prompted me to try to research further in this respect. I found some interesting theories behind the findings, and I incorporated them with the evidence from the think-aloud and interview protocols for the discussion.

### *Translating*

The common phenomenon that L2 readers have is that they do not have ample opportunities to read L2 texts. They are not generally required to read L2 texts outside the classrooms. Thus, it takes a long time for them to

develop fluent processing. They need more exposure to expand the vocabulary power (Lundberg, 1999). L1 readers have exposure to the print several years before EFL students have. This marks the differences between L1 and L2 readers in that L1 readers develop fluency and automaticity through spending a longer time reading the texts. Consistent with the theory, the analysis disclosed that the translation was a common comprehension processing strategy that the students frequently used to paraphrase parts of a text for the purpose of clarification.

#### *Rereading*

The analysis of the think-aloud and interview protocols indicated that the use of the re-reading strategy was of high frequency when these participants tried to make sense of what they were reading. The students tended to focus on the reading at word or sentence level. The re-reading strategy was used to develop understanding by discovering new meaning. They tended to re-read texts to check that they had really understood the text and remembered something. Jit commented in the interview that:

You know, graduate students have to read a lot for every class because we have to prepare to discuss in class. And we need to read for information to complete each assignment. ... I would read several times, trying to catch the main ideas. If I still can't understand, I will go back to the same article or ask someone the parts I don't know.

#### *Determining the Meanings of Unknown Words*

Prior research findings demonstrate the strong connection between reading and vocabulary in both L1 and L2 contexts (Schoonen, Hulstijn & Bossers, 1998). In fact, vocabulary knowledge plays a more important role in reading L2 than L1 texts, especially at the lower grade levels. In this inquiry, the collected data did not provide sufficient evidence to comment on the issue of transferring and searching for cognates, which is one strategy used by some



L2 learners. I hypothesized that this is because the Thai and English languages are very different. As a consequence, the language difference did not permit the participants to draw upon the lexicon in Thai in order to understand the English text that contains cognate or related vocabulary.

However, vocabulary knowledge seemed to be one of the major problems that challenged the participants. Vocabulary had a lot of influence on their reading comprehension. They paused while reading if they hit ambiguous words, and attempted to guess the meanings. Most of them frequently came across unknown vocabulary words when reading English texts, but they were able to use different strategies to figure out the definitions of these words most of the time to make possible and accurate interpretations of text. If they failed to guess the meanings and if the words did not affect their understanding of the text, they would ignore them. Nop commented, "If I come across the difficult words, which often happens, I would underline or put a circle or something. I will read ahead first because I might be able to use the context to guess at the meanings. However, if I still cannot figure them out, I might use other strategies or a dictionary to help me. I will choose the important words to look up for meanings."

## **Conclusion**

It seems that the EFL reading programs in the country where the participants came from mainly involved the translation method used by the instructors. As a consequence, they did not actively interact with the text. Their main purpose of reading was to know the meaning of every unknown word and understand the details. However, in the graduate level coursework, they were required to process independently an enormous amount of reading materials, and were even expected by many of the professors to be critical and responsive constructors of meaning. Such contrastive circumstances have caused the difficulties that these students experienced at the beginning of their studies.

In the final statement, from the students' reflections, it is important that schools and teachers must take urgent and necessary actions to provide

students with ample opportunities to interact with the texts in meaningful and practical contexts, while, at the same time, guiding them to monitor their comprehension and explore what reading strategies work to accomplish particular tasks. In addition, teachers should encourage the students to use texts of diverse genres and invite their active engagement in interaction. Such techniques will help readers become more reflective and critical writers and readers. With the promotion of conscious awareness, students are more likely to develop as strategic and self-regulated readers. The students reflected in their final remarks with me that:

I think we need to improve our education policy. Teachers should include the study skill curriculum in school since we are very young. We wanted to read well, but we didn't know how. English teachers must be aware of this, and change their teaching style.

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## APPENDIX

### Portion of the English Expository Text

#### Debts Repaid

#### PM marks freedom from IMF

#### *Economic laws to be Changed, tax rise off*

Prime Minister Thaksin Sinawatra yesterday declared Thailand free of International Monetary Fund debts worth about US\$12.29 billion, paid two years ahead of the deadline in 2005.

He also announced a government plan to amend laws drafted under IMF terms, and to maintain the value-added tax rate at 7% instead of raising it to 10% as suggested by the IMF.

Changes were planned for the state enterprise corporatisation law, the bankruptcy law, the civil case procedure law, the land, condominium and property laws.

On July 30, the Bank of Thailand made a final payment of \$1.6 billion to the IMF and other international creditors which lent Thailand money during an economic crisis caused by the devaluation of the Thai baht six years ago.

The prime minister said Thailand was now free of an IMF debt worth about 500 billion baht and would not be forced to enter such an IMF programme again. Thais had learned a lesson from the pain.

Thailand would not fall a victim to capitalism again, he said.

The way Thailand was able to clear its IMF debts before the deadline reflected its economic stability...

### Portion of the English Narrative Text

#### *The Pirates of Tarutao*

The series of screams that echoed in the darkness of the cave halted Cunningham and his small expedition party in their tracks. They raised their torches trying in vain to see at the source of the screams ahead of them. They

wanted to know what happened to the two prisoners who went in advance into a large cave they had discovered at the northern part of Tarutao.

After Hawkins and another expedition team had left to explore the Adang group of islands, Cunningham, with Khun Apipat's permission, left the TVTS compound with two guards and four prisoners. They were going to search for a suitable place to hide the loot that they had seized. From Taloh Wow Bay, they walked north along mountain ridges for about four miles when they spotted a large opening at the base of a mountain. They decided then to go in to have a look.

Cunningham sent two prisoners with torches into the cave as advance scouts while he and the rest of the party followed at some distance behind them. The cave became wider as they went deeper. It was covered from floor to walls to ceiling with limestone. Various sizes and shapes of limestone stalactites dropped from the ceiling of the cave with some of them almost touching the floor. From the floor columns of limestone stalagmites rose upward with some of them joining the stalactites. They were marveling at the natural wonders of the cave when they heard the screams.

They rushed in the direction of the terrifying sounds with their shotguns and knives ready to face any danger. They stood in shock at the gruesome sight in front of them ...

### **Sample interview questions**

The samples of the open-ended questions that I asked my participants are illustrated as follows:

- 1) Do you think you are a good reader? Why/why not?
- 2) Please describe the steps you go through when you try to understand the readings for the courses.
- 3) What would you do if you did not understand a text you were reading?
- 4) How did your teachers teach in your reading class in your country?
- 5) Tell me your organized way of doing your reading materials to make meaning from them.

A Comparative Analysis of Awareness in Reading L1 and L2 Texts

- 6) Tell me what you consider the most problematic reading strategies that you have.
- 7) Tell me the extent to which you perceive hard work and effort so as to achieve the reading tasks effectively.
- 8) In what ways, if any, do you have to adjust your reading strategies in your graduate study?
- 9) What are your strategies to try to understand the words/parts that you don't understand?
- 10) What are your strengths and weaknesses in reading?
- 11) When you read something new, what helps you understand what you have just read?/What are other strategies that help you understand when you read?
- 12) Please compare the reading strategies you are using now and before.
- 13) Do you think reading in L1 and L2 is the same?
- 14) What would you suggest to your friends or students to be a better reader?