Claudia Finkbeiner
Kassel

EFL and ESL Knowledgeable Reading

A critical element for viable membership in global communities

In diesem Artikel geht es um die Rolle des aktiven Lesens als Schlüsselqualifikation für lebenslanges Lernen in unserer globalen, mehr und mehr von Texten bestimmten Welt. Die Autorin betont zuerst die allgemeine Bedeutung des Lesens in Englisch als Zweit- und Fremdsprache und skizziert dann das Wechselspiel zwischen Strategien und Interessen beim fremdsprachlichen Lesen. Zwei empirische Studien - die erste aus den Jahren 1994 bis 1999, mit deutschen Schülerinnen und Schülern sowie amerikanischen und taiwanesischen Kontrollgruppen durchgeführt, die zweite zur Zeit in Deutschland laufend - belegen die eingangs formulierte These, dass kritisches Leseverständnis für den modernen Bürger und für ein demokratisches, selbstbestimmtes Leben unabdingbar ist. Daraus erwächst die Notwendigkeit, diese Kompetenz mit allen Mitteln im schulischen und außerschulischen Kontext zu fördern. Die Ergebnisse der beiden besprochenen Studien können dabei wertvolle Hinweise für die Umsetzung in die Praxis des Lesetrainings liefern.

Introduction

At present, we are passengers on a rapid and vertiginous roller-coaster ride involving the ups and downs of man-made scientific, societal, cultural, educational and economic transformations (Finkbeiner, 2006). Around each hair-pin curve there is a new surprise waiting. At first glance, the value of our knowledge and skills seems to be continually deteriorating and to decline faster than food stored in the kitchen closet. However, at second glance, it appears that our knowledge does not really decrease. In fact, depending on the situation and on the context, knowledge has to be unremittingly re-structured, re-built, re-cycled, transformed and expanded (Vygotski, 1978; Piaget / Inhelder, 1973).

It is the perspective that has to be changed. Things look different to the passenger who is sitting straight up in the roller coaster compared to the passenger who is strapped in his seat swirling upside down.

As a consequence, only individuals who have "learned to learn", that is to say, to critically and flexibly read and to evaluate perspective, context and situation of a specific learning scenario can be in charge of their own learning (Suchmann, 1987). Their learning biography will be constantly re-shaped and re-invented because of situated differences (Finkbeiner, 2006). It is thus our responsibility as educators to properly qualify young people or students for a world that is increasingly constructed through texts. We can teach learners not to fear an unpredictable text and/or reading task but learn to actively and reflectively deal with it. It is argued that learning strategies (Cohen / Marcaro, in press; Mandl / Friedrich, 2006) and interest are key to this qualification (Finkbeiner, 2005; Finkbeiner/Ludwig/ Wilden/Knierim, forthcoming).

English in Foreign or Second Language Reading

Along with the salient necessity for life-long learning comes an ever-increasing demand for a high literacy level, not only in the official classroom language (OECD, 2004a, 2004b), but also in the foreign or second language, particularly in English as the *lingua franca* (DESI Konsortium, 2006; Finkbeiner, 2005; International Reading Association, 2001). Reading flexibility and sophisticated thinking skills are required in order to be able to read, understand and evaluate a variety of different text types and text tasks academically.

First and second language literacy as pre-conditions for democracy

Literacy is a human right: According to Article 26 of the United Nations "everyone has the right to education" (General Assembly of the United Nations, 2006). Child and adult literacy as well as first and second language literacy are important pre-conditions for democracy. In present-day information societies illiteracy and democracy are becoming more and more incommensurable. For example, from now on in certain counties in the USA elections are conducted only by mail.[1] US citizens who receive their official ballots, need to read the instructions

carefully. Whereas it might not be easy for native speakers to read and understand the instructions, it will be all the harder for immigrants as second language readers. In this context one has to face the fact that by the year 2050 the percentage of children in the United States who arrive at school and do not speak English as their first language will reach 40% (Lindholm-Leary, 2000).

A similar phenomenon holds true for other countries, such as Germany, Switzerland and Belgium. The PISA study clearly illustrated that immigrant children in these countries have a performance disadvantage and quite a few belong to the risk group (OECD, 2006). Schooling has failed to integrate them; the same is true in Austria, Denmark, France, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden and the Russian Federation.

More than 25% of first-generation immigrant students do not reach the 'basic reading' level 2 in the classroom language. In addition, these basic skills are not sufficient to actively participate in society. Knowledgeable reading is a pre-requisite for access to a huge and differentiated knowledge store, the sources of which are often unknown. We need to be able to truly verify information. The more this information is conveyed via media the more differentiated and critical the reading strategies must be.

As bilingual and multilingual speakers outnumber monolingual speakers worldwide (Tucker, 1999), second language literacy is of global concern. If we do not succeed in creating second and foreign language reading programs not only will it affect all aspects of our children's lives but all global communities will be at risk.

Text types

Learners have to recognize and determine what a specific piece of writing is about and what its purpose is. There are a number of spectra of text types a) from narrative to expository, b) from continuous to non-continuous, c) from persuasive to informative, d) from instructive to descriptive. Sophisticated readers know that the text types are not always precisely defined. Depending on their viewpoint, they will change and adapt their reading stance (Rosenblatt, 2004). The Koran, the Bible or the Thora can be either read as expository or as narrative texts. Some readers even read these texts in order to a) find out the underlying facts (religious, historical etc.) or, b) metaphorically understand and interpret them or, c) simply enjoy them as aesthetic texts and world literature.

Complexity of reading tasks

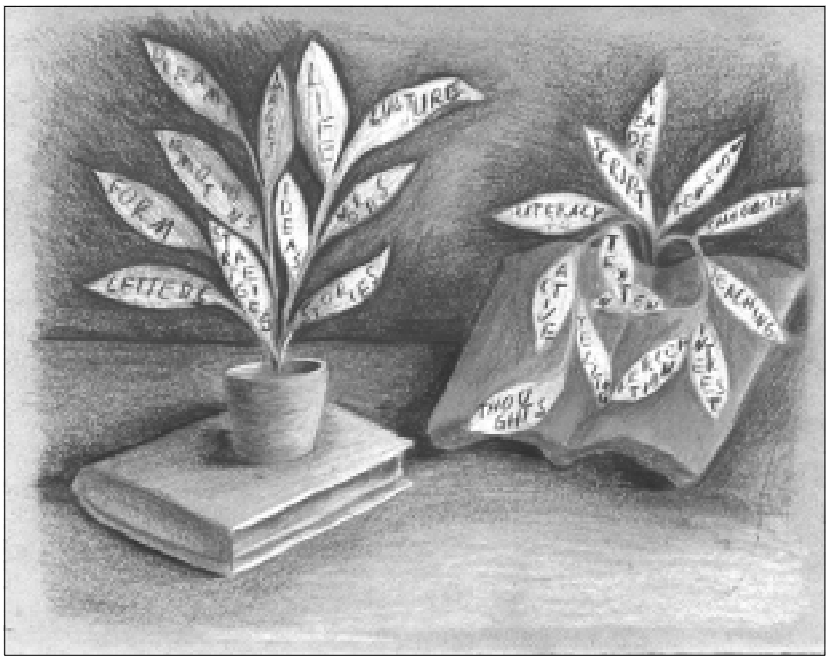
Very often we need to read and understand more than just one main text. As in the example of the new mandatory mail-in written ballot mentioned earlier, readers in everyday life are confronted with a multitude of texts and tasks interplaying with each other. They often not only have to read the original text but also instructions, tasks and other texts that go along with it. Furthermore, they need to know how these texts relate to each other, which one of them is the most important and which reading sequence is advisable. In the ballot example only readers who can read and understand the texts, the instructions and the intertextual play between the texts will be able to vote. Thus, the simple task of casting a vote becomes so complex that it may actually prevent voting.

Reading as an active and constructive process

Reading is an active process in which readers construct meaning by relating what they read to what they already know (Finkbeiner, 2005; Wolff, 2000). It starts in each reader's brain and usually is a holistic experience, including cognitive, affective and bodily reactions to the text. As we know, the reading process is two-directional: from the reader to the text (schema-driven*; top down*) and from the text to the reader (text-driven; *bottom up*). A reader who is an expert in a certain topic usually draws a lot more on his prior knowledge and activates a lot of top-down processes, whereas a novice in a certain topic ought to activate more bottom-up processes.

Reading embedded in a cultural context

Prior knowledge can be multi-faceted. It can exist as a) academic or everyday cultural knowledge, b) an acoustic schema or script as well as c) a visual, d) kinaesthetic or e) motor representation or even as f) a feeling of empathy, happiness, joy, enthusiasm, anxiety, fear etc. There is constant interplay between both top-down and bottom-up processes. If a novice activates too small a knowledge base he or she might misconstrue the meaning of the text. This is true when a) texts play with double meaning, such as in advertisements, or when b) texts refer to cultural and languistic phenomena which differ from one's own. Again referring to the example of the U.S. county ballot, people who want to give their vote to a certain candidate are required to connect the beginning and end of an arrow by drawing a line. A marked X, which is used for votes in Germany, marks an error in the particular elections quoted. It is likely that readers with a cultural background different from the USA will use their own prior knowledge in the meaning construction process by subconsciously ignoring what is written in the instruction. Only reading awareness programs can help avoid such mistakes. People would have to activate their existing text schemata, report on them and compare them with those of the target culture. They also would have to learn to monitor and evaluate their understanding.



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Reading: an individual as well as a social activity

Reading is an individual process and, thus, per se a lonely event. Despite this fact, reading can become a reciprocal act and a social event. Readers can help each other solve the reading task (see indications to the ADEQUA study below and recommendations by Schramm in this journal). According to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) proficient readers can support less proficient readers in their meaning construction process; the zone of proximal development is the optimal zone for developing reading competence:

> "It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers." (Vygotsky, 1978: 86; quoted in Finkbeiner, 2005: 84).

The ongoing reading project ADEQUA[2] has shown that in reading tasks where students work together in pairs of free choice there may be a distance in the proficiency level of both students. In these cases, sometimes, the more proficient students start modelling to the others within the zone of proximal development. Peer scaffolding in some cases happens naturally, without training.

Two Reading Research Studies

In the following, two studies will be portrayed which focus on the role of strategies and interest in EFL reading. Whereas ADEQUA follows the cooperative literacy events approach, which makes cooperation among the learners compulsory, the second study examined individual meaning construction.

The ADEQUA Study

ADEQUA (Finkbeiner, Ludwig et al., forthcoming*)* is funded by the *German Research Foundation (DFG;* FI 684/13-1) and collects quantitative (n= 352: 160 boys and 173 girls) and qualitative (n = 176: 83 boys and 93 girls) data. Eleven secondary schools in the state of Hesse, Germany, and 13 teachers participate in the project[3]. Fifteen classes representing all three major school tracks in Germany, four lower-track (*Hauptschule*), 5 middle-track (*Realschule*) and 6 higher-track (*Gymnasium*), are involved.

To be able to relate the ADEQUA results to the PISA and DESI results the target group was recruited from a comparable student population of grade level 9 (age 15). All teachers hold track-specific EFL teaching degrees and have attended three up to five year EFL teacher training programs at the university. They use the same track-adapted versions of the same textbook editions.

ADEQUA controls individual learner factors, such as cognitive ability, linguistic intelligence, EFL competence etc. and seeks to gain empirical evidence as to how autonomous learning in the EFL classroom can effectively be supported during text-based classroom activities by means of moderate teacher intervention and the creation of conducive learning environments. For this purpose, new task formats were developed which allow for independent work with texts in the foreign language (text comprehension) in a group-work setting that makes cooperation among the learners compulsory. This cooperative literacy events approach implies that a) tasks can only be solved in mutual cooperation, for example, students alternate in taking charge of each section of a text or exchange the information presented in their individual texts to solve the task, b) reading strategies are elicited without direct instruction and c) the elicitation of reading strategies is modelled, supported and scaffolded by the teacher.

The research is based on the following questions: (1) What learning strategies do students use under what

conditions? (2) Are these strategies adequate in the given learning setting? (3) What interventions do teachers identify as necessary to support the learners, and what interventions do they apply? (4) Are these teacher interventions effective?
In an experimental control-group design, the model will be tested on its effects on learning outcomes, situational subject-matter interest, and motivation. Moreover, the use of learning strategies will be analysed micro-analytically. The research project follows current efforts in education and foreign language teaching methodology to foster autonomous, student-active learning, and to support the development of learning competence.

The Study on Interests and Strategies in EFL/ESL reading

This study (Finkbeiner, 2005) was conducted between 1994 and 1999. 350 students of grade levels 9 and 10 of secondary middle (*Realschule*) and higher-track (*Gymnasium*) schools in the greater Stuttgart and Heilbronn area in Baden-Württemberg, Germany, participated.
The theoretical bases were the connections between interest (Krapp, 2001) and motivation (Schiefele, 1996), as well as between strategies (O'Malley / Chamot, 1990), reading comprehension (van Dijk / Kintsch, 1983) in foreign language learning and self-concept, defined as the image the EFL learner has about himself or herself being successful or not successful.
The study drew on classical works on reading theories (van Dijk / Kintsch, 1983) and on recent text theories. It also took account of schema and script theory, as well as of the role of declarative, procedural and situational knowledge (Garner, 1990). This means, related to the election example above: A voter would be able to name each single step of a written election (declarative knowledge). This does not imply that the voter can indeed implement the knowledge and successfully proceed in the voting process (procedural knowledge). Additionally, depending on the situation (e.g. elections for primaries in contrast to elections for the House or Senate) voters might have to adapt their strategies and procedures (situational knowledge).
Interest is defined in two dimensions: the personal interest (*trait*) and the stimulation of the learning environment (*state*)[4]; both play a role in the actualized interest of a learner. As we will see further below, it is of great significance that interest and motivation are intricately connected to learning strategies.
Following O'Malley / Chamot's (1990) taxonomy, this project focused on select cognitive, meta-cognitive, and social-affective language learning strategies in EFL reading. Cognitive strategies are used, for example, when readers a) highlight words, b) write down the most important words, c) look up words, or d) connect words or a passage to what they already know. Elaboration strategies play an important role in deep processing a text. In the case of the written election, a voter would be able to interlink a candidate's name with the party he or she stands for and the political program behind it.
Meta-cognitive strategies imply thinking about thinking, which means that different mental actions happen simultaneously. These strategies include planning and monitoring the reading process, as well as evaluating texts and the reading process. This calls for critical reflection on what is read. For example, voters would have to decide whether the candidates whose name they read really stand for the party's program or not.
Social-affective strategies are often called coping strategies. These include self-talk, cooperation, self-reinforcement etc. and support, assist and improve the learning process of an individual learner via cooperation with other learners, teachers and/or native speakers or self-suggestion. They also involve correction of a negative self-image.

Research Design and Most Important Results

The main research questions were: a) How do strategies and interest interact in reading? b) Which role does interest play for deep process reading? c) Which strategies are responsible for deep process reading? d) How far are these processes interconnected?
In order to see whether the theoretical strategy and interest constructs could be falsified empirically, factor analyses were performed on the data. The factor analyses on the reading strategy data yielded elaboration (alpha = .85), self-regulated learning (alpha = .81) and meta-cognition as the most reliable among six factors. Among the reading interest data, interest in expository texts (alpha = .94), interest in achievement (alpha = .91) and interest in regional studies (alpha = .91) as well as interest in literary texts (alpha = .90) turned out to be the most robust interest factors.
The major findings of the study are:

- Strategies vary according to text, themes, contents, context, emotional involvement.
- Strategies differ in their level of consciousness.
- Elaboration strategies, if used, are highly developed and automated.
- Procedural knowledge consists of mostly subconscious routines.
- There is a high correlation between the elaboration and interest scales.
- Interest differs between the different subgroups (gender, track).
- Students spend time on thinking about specific tasks and learning problems, but little time on conscious thought about their own thinking.
- Reading in school does not seem to be interesting, not meta-cognitively challenging, since schooling often

does not involve the learners' own thinking on his or her thinking, and thus, is neither autonomous nor authentic, but other-directed and controlled.
- Certain learners implement strategies in a very conscious manner, others approach reading in a more subconscious way.

The main results of the LISREL (*Linear Structural Relationship*) analyses are:
- Personal elaboration strategies function as a mediating variable between interest in EFL reading and deep-level text processing. Elaborations are connections between one's own knowledge (world knowledge, academic knowledge, naïve knowledge etc.) and the text. Personal experience (feelings, cognitions, etc.) and personal identification are indicators for personal elaboration. This is given, for example, when students can relate the text to their personal experience or identify with one of the characters or the narrator in the text. There is no direct causal effect of interest on deep processing. That is, personal elaboration is necessary for interest to take effect.
- A learner's ability to self-regulate his/her learning has a direct causal effect on deep-level text processing.
- Not the text type but the context and content determine the elicitation of specific reading strategies.
- The ability to self-regulate one's learning has a stronger effect on deep processing for Realschule/ middle-track students than for Gymnasium/high-track students.
- Conversely, personal elaboration strategies have a stronger effect on deep processing for Gymnasium/ high-track students than for Realschule/middle-track students.

A possible explanation for the two final results can be seen in the fact that self-regulated learning strategies are less dependent on a large knowledge store than personal elaboration strategies. These can be more easily activated if a student reads a lot, learns several languages and has a broad knowledge to toss an anchor at and connect the new knowledge to.
Self regulated learning relates to the learner type (anxiety, concentration, skill-related strategies). A study conducted in 1995 with about 300 students showed that the middle-track students were the ones to have the highest anxiety profiles in grade level 8 (Finkbeiner, 1995) due to closer final exams. The results imply that strategies that control anxiety and concentration problems might have a higher effect in middle-track students than in higher-track students.

Conclusion

Sophisticated and deep-level reading cannot simply be taught and provided to learners like a first aid kit. The study described above shows that it takes more than that. Readers need to be willing to be involved in the reading activity, to relate the text to what they know, to their feelings and antifeelings and to gain ownership over the text.
The goal is that the reader wins control over the text and not the other way round. Critical readers constantly a) reflect on what they read, b) connect the text to their different knowledge sources and c) evaluate the implicit messages conveyed by the text and the consequences connected to them. As our reality nowadays is constructed through texts, it must be an absolute necessity to make high order, academic reading the top priority in schooling. Intelligent readers will not feel like passive passengers on a roller coaster anymore. On the contrary, they will be in the driver's seat and navigate smoothly through the literacy world. This educational "investment in knowledge pays the best interest" (Benjamin Franklin, retrieved 2006).

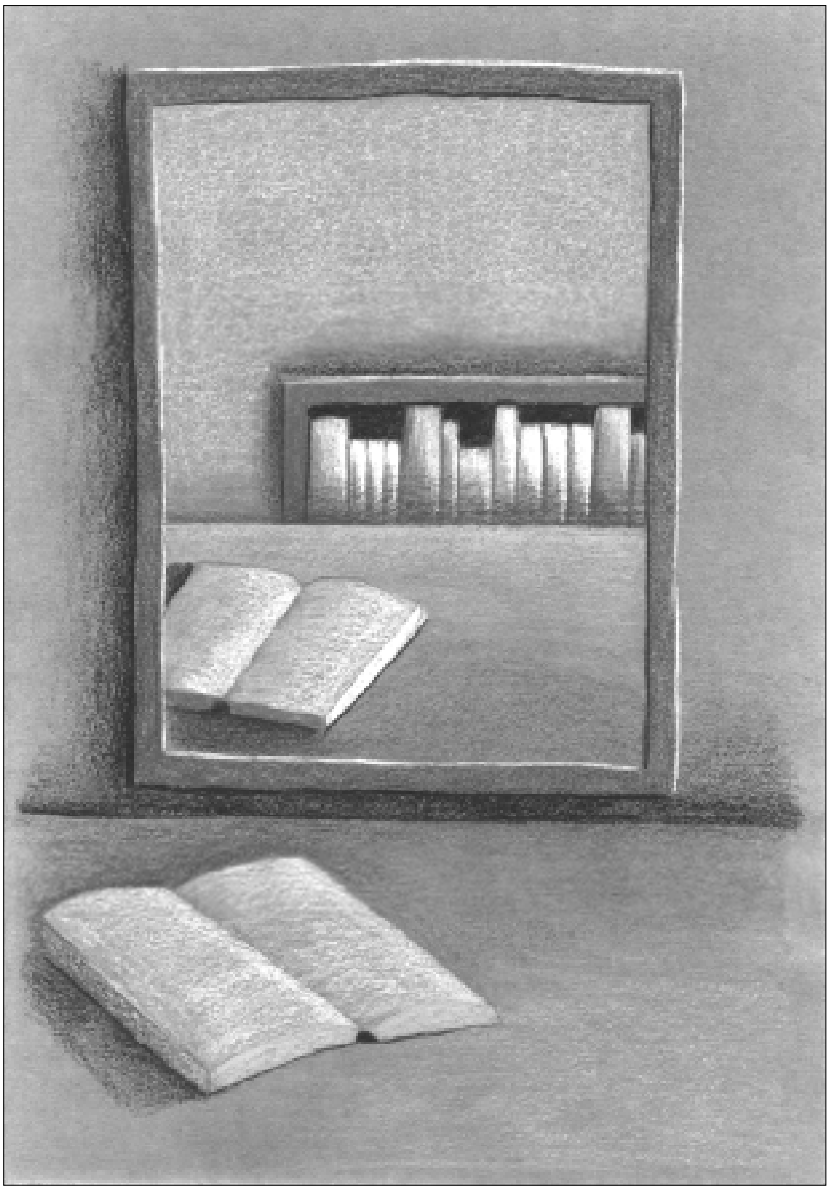
Footnotes

[1] For example, in 2005 Kitsap County, Washington, USA, became a vote-by-mail county for all elections.
[2] ADEQUA stands for autonomous, cooperative, textbased learning in ESL/EFL classrooms through the adequate use of learning strategies.
[3] This refers to the first phase; more teachers and students will be participating in the second phase.
[4] Personal interest (trait) is more stable than the stimulation of the learning environment (interestingness/state). It is mostly intrinsic, and comes from an inner drive. EFL learners with a high personal interest profile are willing to invest extra time for English (e.g. spend time in English libraries). Interestingness (state) of the learning environment usually is not created by the learner but by the teacher, textbook (design) etc. It can have a kick off effect, yet it also collapses easily if personal interest is not involved.

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Eva Oppermann, Book Mirror.

Claudia Finkbeiner
is the director of the English department, School of Modern Languages, at the University of Kassel, Germany and works as a professor in applied linguistics. She was elected president of the Association for Language Awareness (ALA) in July 2006. Her most recent book is on interest and strategies in EFL reading; it has added significantly to the field of EFL literacy learning.