

A Comparison of Different Reading Strategies While Reading Modern vs Shakespearian Poems

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Abstract. This research aims to find out what are the common similarities and differences between the reading strategies that the English as a second language readers used while reading poetries of different eras. The major instrument which is being used in this research is think-aloud protocol. This research can be a good guide for literature teachers to help students understand the literary texts more comprehensively.

Keywords: English poetry, think-aloud protocol, reading strategies.

1. Introduction

In light of the theories of language teaching and learning, theories of learner beliefs about language learning, and the relationship between learner beliefs and reading strategies, the researcher is interested in knowing Iranian university students' beliefs about understanding English poetry. Specifically, she is interested in their beliefs about reading English poetry and the strategies they use while reading English poetries of different eras.

Although there have been lots of studies on learner beliefs in EFL/ESL, only a few referred to the issue of student beliefs about reading poetry in a foreign/second language and strategies they use. Moreover, no study has focused on the relationship between Iranian learners' beliefs about reading poetry and their reading strategies.

This study aims at examining the thinking processes using “think-aloud” protocols complemented by other procedures such as interviews, tests, and a questionnaire. Up to the researcher’s knowledge, this is one of the first studies on using “think-aloud” for identifying the reading strategies of poetic texts. The significance of this study stems on the fact that research literature on readers’ metacognition is scarce since the literature that the researcher reviewed which covered a wide range of articles and theses, did not include any research that deals with reading comprehension and metacognition in English Universities where English is the first and native language of the environment. The researcher’s experience as an English teacher has shown that Persian-native speakers encounter many difficulties while reading English poetic texts. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the understanding of L2 reading and provide teachers and students with knowledge and insights in Iranian students’ thinking processes in order to control their reading and promote their understanding. Such information can have implications for foreign language teaching, literature teachers, and students.

1.1. Statement of the problem

Usually, in literature classes, the teachers face some challenges to teach poetry as they do not have enough knowledge about the strategies the students use and so they cannot choose the perfect strategies. In this research, the researcher seeks proper strategies that most learners apply in understanding a poem to recommend them to all literature teachers to apply them in their classes.

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1.2. Objective of the study

In this study, the researcher seeks the ways that students can comprehend poetry in English literature classes. To this aim, she will go through literature classes and she will collect data by asking the Iranian students to read a poem and use think-aloud protocol strategy, after that she will ask experienced literature teachers to know about their ideas about reading strategies in literature.

1.3. Research questions

- What perceptions do Iranian students hold about reading poetic texts in English literature as a foreign language?
- What strategies do these students employ while processing poetry in English?
- How different or similar are the strategies the Iranian postgraduate students use while reading English poetries of different eras?
- What is the relationship between Iranian learners' beliefs about poetry and their reading strategies?
- What are the challenges and difficulties of comprehending poetry from Iranian postgraduate students' perspectives?

1.4. Significance of the study

Due to the objective of the study, this study will be useful for several people, who can benefit from the results: first and the most important group is students to express their ideas, difficulties, and challenges about different reading strategies; second group which can benefit from the results is literature teachers to express their ideas about effective reading strategies; third group is administrators who can use the results of this study to provide a perfect curriculum.

Hopefully, this study will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on learner beliefs about language learning and reading poetry. Findings which will be generated from this investigation will also help Iranian English educators gain an understanding of Iranian students' beliefs about reading poetry and the relationship between learner beliefs and strategy use. It is also hoped that this knowledge will provide Iranian literature teachers with a better understanding of their students' expectations of, commitment to, success in, and satisfaction with their language classes (Horwitz, 1988). The knowledge may also help English instructors in Iran in incorporating in their teaching effective reading strategies in the frequent curriculum to help learners develop their procedural knowledge (Rubin, 1995). In this regard, the students will become more effective and proficient literature readers who are able to employ good reading strategies while processing English poetries.

2. Review of literature

"Reading is a very elaborative procedure" (Thorndike, 1917, p. 425) and it "involves looking for meaning" (Smith, 1978, p. 53). During this unique, complex, creative, and constructive process (Broek, Kremer, 2000; Grabe, 1991; Tierney, 1990), "the mind must select, repress, soften, emphasize, correlate and organize all under the influence of the right mental set or purpose or demand" (Thorndike, 1917, p. 431). What is actually involved in the process of reading? A good understanding of the theories of reading is important to both the instructor and the student (Nuttall, 1996).

In the past several decades, based on the studies of the underlying assumptions about the basic processes in reading, some scholars developed theories of reading and generated numerous models of reading. Among them are Holmes's "developmental model" (Singer & Ruddell, 1976), also termed the "psychometric model" (Samuels & Kamil, 1984), Ruddell's "communication model" (1969), Goodman's "reading as a psycholinguistic guessing game" or the "top-down" model (1967), Gough's "bottom-up" model (1972), LaBerge and Samuels's "automaticity of component processes model" (1974), and Rumelhart's "interactive" model (1977). Other scholars such as Smith (1971), Carver (1977), Stanovich (1980), Kintsch and van Dijk (1978), Just and Carpenter (1980), Tierney and Pearson (1983), and Nuttall (1996) also offered their theories or descriptions to address the nature of the reading process. Each theory describes a distinctive aspect of reading, and fits into one of the four general theoretical frameworks.

In summary, reading models have provided various theoretical bases and explanations for the reading processes and behaviours. Although the theories were originally proposed from the perspectives of reading in the first language, they certainly have a bearing on reading in a foreign/second language. The discussion of theories of reading will definitely shed light on the current study because I am convinced that the participants' beliefs and their use of reading strategies will fall into one of the four frameworks of reading.

3. Methodology

The study will first be supported by the quantitative data which will be collected from macro-evaluation of the poetry, from the questionnaires from a sample of students and then from the micro-evaluation (interviews' data). The quantitative data which will be collected by the macro-evaluation (questionnaire) will investigate participants' judgments and opinions regarding the content of the poetry. This study will primarily be quantitative, and will conduct with a total sample of 30 postgraduate students at the University Technology Malaysia (UTM), and a total number of 10 postgraduate students for interview section who are among those 30 students. The study will incorporate a mixed-methodology approach with a triangulation technique (Brown and Rodgers, 2002, p. 245): methodological triangulation (i.e. by using questionnaire and structured interviews), where multiple means and sources of information will be used to combine the macro-evaluation survey results with the micro-evaluation.

All the data gathered through questionnaires will be analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The quantitative part will be in the form of percentages, means, and the like which will be shown in different graphs and will be discussed in the related sections in order to make the different aspects of the evaluation clear for the readers. The qualitative part relates to some open-ended questions which seeks information about the evaluators' viewpoints on the major strengths and weaknesses or any other suggestions given by them. The related data to the structured interview will be presented and classified through different charts. The gathered data will be analyzed both descriptively and inferentially. About the data which will be collected by interview, the researcher will gather all ideas and after analyzing them, she will announce a general conclusion of the students' and the instructors' ideas about the poetry.

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