

Szegedi Tudományegyetem
Nyelvtudományi Doktori Iskola
Program neve: Angol Alkalmazott Nyelvészet

Strategy Use and Reader Self-Perception in L2 English Academic Reading
(Tézisfüzet)

Doktori (PhD) Értekezés

Készítette:

Dr. Aradi Csenge

Témavezető:

Dr. Donald W. Peckham

Szeged

2024

1. Introduction

With the globalization of scientific research and the predominance of Anglo-American academic culture, being able to efficiently read and compose academic texts in English has become a widespread expectation in higher education. It is not uncommon for English-language study programs in different disciplines to offer courses in academic reading and writing. In international applied linguistic research, there has been a long tradition of studying L2 reading skills. The main areas of interest include the components of reading ability, the creation of systematic strategy taxonomies and the measuring of learner strategies through various instruments. Given the complex nature of reading skills, these areas are naturally interrelated as any investigation into reading as a cognitive-cultural phenomenon requires adopting a transdisciplinary perspective (see Grabe & Stoller, 2013; Grabe & Yamashita, 2022). Theoretical and experimental research on the nature of reading ability is therefore a prerequisite for conducting relevant and meaningful research in applied linguistics.

Being inseparable from the practice of EFL/L2 teaching, strategy research has become one of the most widely discussed topics in the field, which is evidenced by the myriad of studies published over the last roughly fifty years (Alderson, 2000; Grabe & Yamashita, 2022; Sementin & Maniam, 2015). Research in this subtopic ranges from single- and multivariable survey studies investigating the effect of cultural background, gender, study track and/or proficiency on L2 reading strategy use (e.g., Čeljo, Bećirović & Dubravac, 2021; Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002; Poole, 2005); to descriptive-interpretive verbal protocols enquiring into the in-depth mechanisms of strategy use (e.g., Block, 1986; Handayani & Widijantie, 2021; Li & Munby, 1996); and, occasionally, mixed-method studies employing both quantitative and qualitative instruments (e.g., Mónos, 2005). The overall findings of the field suggest some potentially generalizable patterns of learner behavior as well as touching upon pedagogically relevant implications of the results.

Despite the continuing popularity of L2 academic reading in international applied linguistic research, it has been given relatively little attention in Hungarian higher education. The data available (Mónos, 2005; Szűcs, 2017) suggests that students entering tertiary education do not generally tend to have a well-developed repertoire of strategies when it comes to reading in their L2. Adopting a comparative approach, some recent studies provide valuable information about students' strategy use and self-perception in both their L1 and L2 (Tary & Molnár, 2022;

Tary, 2023).

This rich and diverse context of reading research was the principal motivation for my research project, which aimed at fulfilling three major objectives. The first one, which constituted the core of the study, was to provide a detailed descriptive-interpretive account of L2 learner strategy use when reading academic texts in English in a tertiary education context. The second goal focused on how participants perceive themselves as L2 readers. The third and final goal of the research was to see how the two sets of data emerging from these two individual yet not independent objectives relate to each other in terms of consistency, and to compare the findings to a more quantifiable means of measurement, namely, the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS, 2001). These three objectives will be translated into four research questions presented below:

RQ (1): What reading strategies do participants employ in a controlled reading situation which, to the greatest extent possible, attempts to imitate an actual academic L2 reading situation?

RQ (2): How do participants perceive their own strategy use when reading in the L2?

RQ (3): How do findings in the follow-up interviews relate to the results of the verbal protocol in terms of consistency between observed strategy use and self-reports of strategy use?

RQ (4): To what extent are tendencies of strategy use and self-perception in the data are consistent with the SORS results in general?

The project was intended to contribute to and expand the existing body of Hungarian research and L2 reading research in general.

2. Overview of relevant literature

The area of (L2) reading studies has greatly benefited of general L2 strategy research (Rubin, 1987; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; 2016). However, the scientific investigation of such complex mental phenomena requires an interdisciplinary approach. In its quest to uncover the cognitive mechanisms beyond (L2) reading, contemporary scholarship has mostly relied on cognitive psychology, education sciences, and second language acquisition studies. Comprehensive overviews of the last fifty years of joint research efforts are presented in the recent works of Oxford (2016), Grabe & Stoller (2013) and Grabe & Yamashita (2022).

Of the diverse aspects of L2 reading studies, learner strategy use occupies a central place

in related applied linguistic research on the international scene. There appears to be substantial overlap between existing classification systems, which could be explained by the fact that general learning taxonomies are to a great extent applicable to skills-specific categorizations of strategies. In this respect, again, Rubin (1987), Chamot and O'Malley (1990) and Oxford (1990) are considered foundational. Taxonomies specific to reading were proposed by Block (1986), Grabe (1991), Alderson (2000), and Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002).

In terms of empirical research, survey studies are far more numerous by virtue of their easy applicability and the relative straightforwardness of the data analysis. The preference for surveys in measuring reading skills appears to be further supported by the existence of reliable measurement tools, in particular, the MARS (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002) and the SORS tests (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001), both designed to measure readers' metacognitive strategy use when reading for learning in the L1 and L2, respectively. These surveys count as popular instruments, as attested by the high number of studies opting for either of them (or an adapted version) in the data collection procedure (see, for example, Solak & Altay, 2014; Tary & Molnár, 2022; Zarei, 2018). On the other hand, verbal protocols, though more in-depth in their analytical potential when it comes to examining underlying mental processes, have so far been less widely used due to their laboriousness. This does not mean, however, that verbal protocols have been completely overlooked in reading strategy research as there are some representative examples of TAP-based or mixed-methods studies in the literature (Block, 1986; Hamada & Park, 2013; Handayani & Widijantie, 2021; Szűcs, 2017).

3. Methodology

The participants of the research were 12 first-year students enrolled in the BA and teacher training programs at the Institute of English and American Studies at the University of Szeged, Hungary. The data collection was preceded by a pilot study, which helped identify the potential weaknesses of the research design. Following the implementation of the modifications deemed necessary, the main data collection took place in the spring semester 2023.

The research instrument consisted of three parts: semi-retrospective think-aloud protocols (TAP), followed by a semi-structured interview enquiring into participants' reading habit and strategy use, and the completion of the SORS-test. The SORS test measures metacognitive strategy use along three main dimensions, these being global, problem-solving and support

strategies (see Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002). Previous research in L2 reading strategies has demonstrated the applicability of verbal protocols in exploring learner strategy use and studying potential correlations between variables, which justified the choice of research instrument, given the qualitative nature of the research project. The use of a semi-retrospective design guaranteed that the interference between reading and speaking would be minimized. The TAPs and the interviews were transcribed using MAXQDA, and the coding for strategies followed a mostly deductive process (Schreier, 2013).

4. Findings

The summary of findings will briefly discuss the answers to each of the research questions before formulating a general conclusion of the findings.

RQ (1): What reading strategies do participants employ in a controlled reading situation which attempts to imitate an actual academic reading situation to the extent possible?

There are two key findings with regard to strategy use in the twelve verbal protocols. The first one concerns the frequency of specific strategies across the subcorpus. Participants were observed to have used or demonstrated their awareness of 13 different strategies, of which four were classified cognitive and nine metacognitive. Strategies with the highest frequency of occurrence all belonged to this latter group and they were, in ascending order: guessing the meaning, re-reading and self-evaluation. The second discovery of the analysis is the reoccurring evidence for multiple or simultaneous strategy use.

RQ (2): How do participants perceive their own strategy use when reading in the L2?

The relevant interview questions concentrated on three areas of reading skills, namely, readers' global approach to familiarizing themselves with a text, their strategy choice(s) when encountering reading difficulties and their ways of remembering and recalling information in a text. The most noticeable finding is the high number of strategies evoked in the self-reports (27), with two-thirds of them (18) having a low-frequency occurrence in the data (1-3 mentions across the whole dataset). The three strategies with the highest number of mentions were using external resources, guessing the meaning and re-reading, which are typical problem-solving and support strategies.

RQ (3): How do findings in the follow-up interviews relate to the results of the verbal protocol in terms of consistency between observed strategy use and self-reports of strategy use?

Based on the comparison of the two major datasets, it can be concluded that there is a clear preference for metacognitive strategies across the whole of the data, and, while there were 13 strategies which occurred in both datasets (four of which are cognitive), the number of strategies mentioned in the follow-up interviews was more than twice as high as in the verbal protocols (27 to 13), which might be partially explained by the different data collection methods.

The main findings to research questions (1) – (3) suggest the existence of strategic awareness on the part of the participants. Their apparent knowledge of basic strategy types and ability to verbalize them are indicative of metacognitive knowledge, which tends to be an indicator of proficient readers.

RQ (4): To what extent are tendencies of strategy use and self-perception in the data are consistent with the SORS results in general?

Based on the group-level results of the SORS test, it can be concluded that the self-report survey appears to support the major findings of the verbal protocols and the follow-up interviews in that participants show a general preference for global and problem-solving strategies. Metacognitive strategies with the highest frequency in the TAPs and the follow-up interviews all belong to either of the two groups, with the notable exception of using external resources in the follow-up interviews, which is categorized as support strategies.

5. General conclusions of the findings

To summarize the findings, it can be generally concluded that participants extensively used metacognitive strategies during reading. The results of TAPs and the follow-up interviews combined, the three most frequently used strategies were guessing the meaning, re-reading and self-evaluation. Already in the think-aloud protocols there were instances of participants' engaging in self-reflection. Some of these acts of self-evaluation touched upon participants' general perceptions of themselves as readers, and their comments were not limited to their perceived performance on the task. This observation suggests that participants are capable of viewing themselves critically, pointing to increased metacognitive awareness in the reading process.

In spite of some notable differences in the individual subcorpora, the principal results of the analyses seem to show consistency, pointing to some potentially generalizable patterns of metacognitive strategy use across participants, while keeping in mind that it is not possible to generalize them to the whole of the L2 reader population, given the size of the sample.

6. Implications for further research

The continuation of the study can take multiple paths. The first one concerns the expansion of the study to a wider population and, possibly, over longer periods of time. A longitudinal examination of participants' L2 reading strategy use could give a reliable picture of how their reading skills develop. To complement the qualitative data obtained this way, recording strategy use through surveys at a given moment of time in a larger population would contribute to the generalizability of the findings. Another direction to take is more tightly connected to the pedagogical aspects of reading skills. Research findings can contribute to curriculum design in several ways. For example, they can help the instructor decide on what strategies the developmental block of the syllabus should concentrate on, and it can contribute to a more mindful selection of the course materials. These pedagogical choices could be further supported by the regular assessment of students' strategy repertoire through the SORS test.

On a final note, the author would like to express her professional opinion that adopting internationally renowned practices promoting the centrality of conscious strategy use in foreign language learning can greatly contribute to students' developing effective means of self-regulated skills development.

References

- Alderson, J. C. 2000. *Assessing Reading*. Cambridge University Press.
- Block, E. (1986). The Comprehension Strategies of Second Language Readers. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20(3), 463-494.
- Čeljo, B., Becirovic, S., & Dubravac, V. (2021). An Examination of Perceived Reading Strategy Use among University Level Students. *European Journal of Contemporary Education*, 10(3), 595-608. <https://doi.org/10.13187/ejced.2021.3.595>
- Grabe, W. & Stoller, F.L. (2013). *Teaching and Researching Reading*. Second Edition. Routledge.
- Grabe, W. & Yamashita, J. (2022). *Reading in a Second Language. Moving from Theory to Practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hamada, M., & Park, C. (2013). Research Forum: The Role of Think-Aloud and Metacognitive Strategies in L2 Meaning-Inference During Reading. *JALT journal: the research journal of the Japan Association for Language Teaching*, 35(1), 101-125.
- Handayani, W., & Widijantie, N. (2021). An Analysis of Previewing Reading Strategy in Business Texts: A Think Aloud Protocol Study. *International Journal of English and Cultural Studies*, 4(1), 30-38. <https://dx.doi.org/10.11114/ijecs.v4i1.5151>
- Mokhtari, K., & Reichard, C. A. (2002). Assessing students' metacognitive awareness of reading strategies. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94(2), 249–259. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.94.2.249>
- Mokhtari, K., & Sheorey, R. (2002). Measuring ESL students reading strategies. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 25(3), pp. 2-10.
- Mónos, K. 2005. A Study of the English Reading Strategies of Hungarian University Students with Implications for Reading Instruction in an Academic Context. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research, Inaugural Volume*, 1-23.
- Munby, J. (1978). *Communicative Syllabus Design*. Cambridge University Press.
- O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Oxford, R. (1990). *Language learning strategies. What every teacher should know*. Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Oxford, R. L. (2016). *Teaching and researching language learning strategies: Self-regulation in context*. Taylor & Francis.

Poole, A. (2005). Gender differences in reading strategy use among ESL college students. *Journal of college Reading and Learning*, 36(1), 7-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10790195.2005.10850177>

Rubin, J. (1987). Learner strategies: theoretical assumption, research history. In Wenden, A.L. & Rubin, J.(Eds.), *Learner Strategies in Language Learning* (pp.15-30). Prentice Hall.

Schreier, M. (2013). Qualitative Content Analysis. In. U. Flick (Ed.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (pp. 170-183). Sage.

Semtin, S. A. & Maniam, M. (2015). Reading strategies among ESL Malaysian secondary school students. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)* 4(2), 54-61. [10.11591/ijere.v4i2.44922](https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v4i2.44922)

Sheorey, R., & Mokhtari, K. (2001). Differences in the metacognitive awareness of reading strategies among native and non-native readers. *System*, 29(4), 431-449. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X\(01\)00039-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X(01)00039-2)

Solak, E., & Altay, F. (2014). The Reading Strategies Used by Prospective English Teachers in Turkish ELT Context. *Online Submission*, 1(3), 78-89.

Szűcs, Ágota. (2017). The Metacognitive Reading Strategy Awareness of First Year EFL BA Students: A Mixed-Methods Study. *Working Papers in Language Pedagogy*, 11, 60-79.

Tánczikné Varga, Sz. (2016). Az olvasásértés tapasztalatainak fejlesztése az angol nyelvórákon. *Gradus* 3(1), 127-133.

Tary, B. (2023). Hungarian teachers' reading strategy use in mother tongue and foreign language analysed by background variables, *Hungarian Educational Research Journal*, 13(1), 107-120. <https://doi.org/10.1556/063.2022.00126>

Tary, B., & Molnár, E. K. (2022). A MARSIR kérdőív magyar adaptációja – olvasási stratégiák vizsgálata anya- és idegen nyelven egyetemi hallgatók körében. *Iskolakultúra*, 32(5), 57–75. <https://doi.org/10.14232/ISKKULT.2022.5.57>

Zarei, A. A. (2018). On the relationship between metacognitive reading strategies, reading self-efficacy, and L2 reading comprehension. *Two Quarterly Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning University of Tabriz*, 10(22), 157-181.

ARADI Csenge's list of publications

Aradi, C. (2023). Strategy use and self-perception in L2 academic reading: Measuring English majors' reading strategy using the think-aloud protocol. *EDULINGUA*, 9(1), 27–51. <http://doi.org/10.14232/edulingua.2023.1.2>

Aradi, C. (2023). Les espaces mentaux et la reconstruction de l'identité dans la Confession d'un pécheur de François Rákóczi II: Les mémoires d'enfance. In *Jansenisms and Literature in Central Europe / Jansenismen und Literatur in Mitteleuropa / Jansénismes et littérature en Europe centrale* (pp. 351–372).

Aradi, C. (2023). Métaphores & métonymies de visage. In *Visage à voir, visage à lire* (pp. 133–140).

Aradi, C. (2022). Az anyanyelvi metaforikus kompetencia hatása az idegen nyelvi figuratív gondolkodásban: magyar-angol késői kétnyelvűek vizsgálata. In *Észlelés és előfordulások* (pp. 58–70).

Aradi, C. (2022). A gondolkodási folyamatok konceptualizációja a magyar nyelvben: az ész és az elme fogalmaink metaforizációja. In *Nyelvek, nyelvváltozatok, következmények II.* (Vol. 13/2, pp. 244–250).

Aradi, C. (2022). The Psychological Dilemmas of Death: Anxiety Rationalized. In *Negative Emotions in the Reception of Fictional Narratives* (pp. 63–83). http://doi.org/10.30965/9783969752661_005

Aradi, C. (2022). A halál pszichológiai dilemmái. *NCOGNITO: KOGNITÍV KULTÚRAELMÉLETI KÖZLEMÉNYEK*, 1(1), 64–81. <http://doi.org/10.14232/ncognito/2022.1.64-81>

Aradi, C. (2021). English L2 thematic vocabulary acquisition through graded readers: A single-participant study. *EDULINGUA*, 7(1), 25–45.

William, F., & Aradi, C. (2021). Az elbeszélőkről és a történethez való viszonyukról (részlet). *HELIKON, Költői igazságosság* (2021: 3), 382–392.

Aradi, C. (2021). EFL Teacher Trainees' Perceptions of the Effects of Extensive Reading on Their Academic Performance. In *Engaged - Spotlight on learning* (pp. 53–68).

Tüskés, G., Aradi, C., Gausz, I., Hámori, N. Z., Lengyel, R., Szebelédi, Z., Tóth, F., Tüskés, A. (2020). *François II Rákóczi: Confession d'un pécheur. Traduite du latin par Chrysostome Jourdain*. Paris: Honoré Champion.

Aradi, C. (2020). On the Translations of Ferenc Rákóczi II's Confessio Peccatoris and Memoires. In *Critica: Források az irodalom- és kultúratudományi szakkritika történetéhez 1986–2020. Sources for the History of Criticism of Literary and Cultural Studies 1986–2020* (pp. 239–242).

Aradi, C. (2020). Media and Literature in Multilingual Hungary (1770-1820). *IRODALOMTÖRTÉNETI KÖZLEMÉNYEK*, 124(1), 127–130.

Aradi, C. (2020). On the Translations of Ferenc Rákóczi II's *Confessio Peccatoris* and *Memoires*. *HUNGARIAN REVIEW*, 11(2), 65–68.

Aradi, C. E., Hámori Nagy, Z., & Tüskés, G. (2020). A *Confessio peccatoris* francia fordítás-kézirataihoz. In *Fideliter servanda* (pp. 9–30).

Aradi, C. (2019). *Diskurzusok emberről és Istenről*. Budapest: Ráció Kiadó.

Aradi, C. (2019). Cross-linguistic Influence of Conceptual Fluency in the L2: A Case Study for English and Hungarian. *JOURNAL OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES*, 8(12), 16–31.

Aradi, C. (2019). Ferenc Rákóczi II: *Confessio peccatoris*: Confession of a sinner; *Memoirs*: The Memoirs of Prince Ferenc Rákóczi concerning the war in Hungary 1703 to the end Translation by Bernard Adams (2019) Kritika. *IRODALOMTÖRTÉNETI KÖZLEMÉNYEK*, 123(4), 547–550.

Aradi, C. (2019). Gilles Barroux, *La médecine de l'Encyclopédie -- Entre tradition et modernité*. *STUDI FRANCESI*, 187(LXIII/1), 160–161.

Aradi, C. (2018). L'amour-propre et l'évolution en moraliste: l'égologie dans l'oeuvre de Francois de La Rochefoucauld. In *Littérature. Espaces: paysages - espaces mentaux - espaces de la ville* (pp. 9–19).

Aradi, C. E. (2018). *A fogalmi metafora diskurzusteremtő szerepe a janzenista hatású XVII. századi francia prózában*. Szegedi Tudományegyetem (SZTE). Doktori értekezés

Aradi, C. E. (2018). L'espace écologique dans l'oeuvre de Francois de La Rochefoucauld. *ACTA UNIVERSITATIS SZEGEDIENSIS DE ATTILA JOZSEF NOMINATAE ACTA ROMANICA*, 30, 75–85.

Aradi, C. (2017). Székesi Dóra: „Minden átalakul és elmúlik”. Emberkép Diderot természetfilozófiájában. *HELIKON IRODALOMTUDOMÁNYI SZEMLE*, 63(2), 321–324.

Aradi, C. (2017). La métaphore conceptuelle dans le discours moralisateur sur l'amour-propre au XVIIe siècle -- Pascal et La Rochefoucauld. In *Francontraste 3 : Structuration, langage, discours et au-delà* (pp. 11–22).

Aradi, C. (2017). A Diachronic Investigation of the Great Chain of Being Metaphor in Religious and Political Discourses of Early Modern and Enlightenment Philosophy. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 7(6), 214.

Aradi, C. (2017). A kognitív metafora diszkurzív szerepe a XVII. századi janzenista ihletettséggű francia prózában - Pascal és La Rochefoucauld munkáinak vizsgálatá. In *Programok és tanulmányok* (pp. 23–32).

Aradi, C. (2017). A kognitív metafora diskurzusteremtő ereje a 17. századi janzenista ihletettséű francia irodalomban, kitekintéssel Mikes Törökországi leveleire. *IRODALOMTÖRTÉNETI KÖZLEMÉNYEK*, 121(1), 99–113.

Aradi, C. (2015). La métaphore conceptuelle dans le discours pascalien: comment la métaphore du corps et du coeur humain établit-elle la cohérence textuelle et argumentative? In *Modeles et modélisation en linguistique, littérature, traductologie et didactique* (pp. 139–156).

Aradi, C. (2015). La métaphore cognitive dans l'oeuvre de Pascal - Analyse de discours dans les Pensées. *ACTA UNIVERSITATIS SZEGEDIENSIS DE ATTILA JOZSEF NOMINATAE ACTA ROMANICA*, 29, 13–22.

Aradi, C. (2015). William F. Edmiston. Sade: queer theorist. *HELIKON IRODALOMTUDOMÁNYI SZEMLE*, 61(1), 117–118.

Aradi, C. (2015). Qui Adheret Deo Unus Spiritus Est: The Discursive Role of the Body Metaphor in Pascal's Pensées – A Study. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5(4), 35–43.

Aradi, C. (2014). Diskurzusok a 17. századi nőről és házasságról – Molière és Wycherley vígjátékainak összehasonlító elemzése alapján. In *Tehetségek a tudomány horizontján* (pp. 78–92).

Aradi, C. (2014). Conceptual Metaphor in Discourses of Women and Marriage in Seventeenth-Century Comedy. *JOURNAL OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES*, 4(10), 19–27.