"The Translanguaging Reader": Investigating Primary Education Students' Reading Strategies

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Abstract

Translanguaging has been placed at the center of the research and teaching activity over the last decade, while teachers seem to promote the use of all the linguistic resources of their students in classrooms with linguistic and cultural diversity. Among the best practices for promoting **translanguaging and the flexible use of the students' resources, reading multilingual texts is** proposed as an important activity for students who are daily bombarded with a great variety of diverse stimuli. To clarify it more, studen**d to come into contact with "texts" in every mode,** that are not only offered in their L1 but they usually include and are written in various linguistic codes known or not to them. However, limited research has focused on such issues of reading a text with multilingual wealth, thus this was a major factor and reason behind this research **initiative. This paper presents a study that aimed at investigating young learners' reading** strategies when approaching a multilingual text. More specifically, 27 primary education students of Greek origin were provided with two different types of multilingual texts and they were asked to complete a specifically designed record protocol reflecting on their reading behavior. At first, the students came across a text, which was given both in another language and in Greek while at a second phase, the students were encouraged to read a text in which different languages were used. Within this context, an attempt was made to identify the strategies of students prior to reading, while-reading and upon reading with the purpose to shed light into the multidimensional framework of reading a multilingual text. Following the processing of the data derived from the multidimensional research, it was revealed that students employed a great variety of reading strategies before they begin to read the text. Nevertheless, they did not seem to use while-and post-reading strategies to a great extent, when a multilingual text is given to them **inciting more interest in raising students' reading strateg**ies through implementing educational activities.

Keywords: multilingual texts, reading strategies, translanguaging, young learners.

1. Towards an understanding of translanguaging

"*Translanguaging*" as a term was a later creation developed as a continuation of the Welsh *trawsieithu*, coined by Cen Williams (1994, 1996) and then translated into English as "*translinguifing*". At initial stages, "translanguaging" referred to a pedagogical practice within a framework that students are encouraged to alternate languages for purposes of receptive and productive language use.

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The performance of "*translanguaging*" refers to the use of the entire linguistic repertoire of the speakers, without being restricted to social and political boundaries (Otheguy et al., 2015). More specifically, translanguaging use implies the free process of developing and utilizing the entire language potential of bilingual and monolingual speakers. Within such a framework, teachers allow and encourage students not only to maintain and use their previous language practices, "*but also to expand them and develop new ones, thinking and reflecting on both languages*" (Garcia, 2014: 66). Besides, in her own study, Papadopoulou (2018a) emphasizes the need for the coexistence and utilization of all the practices and strategies of expression of other-language students in a modern and creative language class.

Essentially, the promotion of translanguaging is an important priority as it is closely intertwined with the multiple language practices and strategies used by bilingual speakers in order to communicate and interact with their environment (Papadopoulos, 2020), to make meanings (Daniel & Pacheco, 2015), to share their personal experiences (Wei, 2013), to gain and maximize their knowledge and to gain a deeper understanding of the bilingual environment in which they operate (Garcia, 2009a; Papadopoulou, 2018b).

Applying the pedagogy of translanguaging in the teaching practice can help students develop their languages, which are used in a holistic and coherent way (Cahyani et al., 2018). After all, translanguaging is used in the teaching practice, emphasizing both the positions of teachers and their practices regarding the use and utilization of students' resources, so that they themselves can evaluate them in the context of their learning and interaction.

The promotion of translanguaging and the use of pedagogy of translanguaging have been shown to improve both the teaching and learning process (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). In this context, students have the opportunity to demonstrate what they know, while at the same time they can develop and activate ways of cultivating literacy (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011).

In such a context of promoting the use of students' languages in the classroom, the student brings and "presents" different aspects of his personal history, experiences and elements of his environment, his attitude, faith and ideology, his cognitive and physical ability through a coordinated and meaningful performance (Hua et al., 2015: 1223).

After all, in such a multivocal context, students are encouraged to show a willingness to understand their relationships and perceptions, promoting a greater openness to meaningful negotiation trends (Flores & Jonathan, 2015) which has been receiving an increased attention from research and teaching perspective within the multicultural and multilingual context of the society and the school.

2. Translanguaging and multilingual text reading

Multilingual texts have been proposed as effective tools for promoting translanguaging in the school classrooms (Garcia & Wei, 2017). Multilingual texts can be texts that have been written in more than one language internally while there are cases, in which texts written in a particular language, are given in another language as well to fac**ilitate students' comprehension.** This can serve beneficially for students as in this way, they are provided with various opportunities to strengthen all of their languages and develop their identities (Garcia, 2009).

Multilingual texts can be "*contact zones***" while their reading can be either comparative** or contrastive in nature (Coldiron, 2015). In particular, when readers first come across a multilingual text, this calls for a prompt acknowledgment of alterity while this can be a source for further development of critical and creative thinking of the readers (Papadopoulos, 2020). However, it is very important to state that reading a multilingual text is seen as a skill that requires

"education, experience, imagination and a willingness to engage with the familiar and unfamiliar (Jones & Richards, 2015).

According to Blomaert (2005), multilingual texts are like "*poetic constructions*" and within this context, languages are not seen as separate and discrete systems but as a "whole" that allows and further helps the reader to achieve a better understanding of the text and its creation and meaning made. In other words, when a reader deal with a multilingual text, he/she is led to **deal with the other people's imagination us and this situation encourages him/her to** see not behind the glosses of the people but through them (Geertz, 1983).

No matter how important reading a multilingual text is, research is quite limited in this field. According to Green (2002: **42), "***Reading is a sociocultural process, which is based on students' prior knowledge and it helps broadening students' experiences and knowledge developing a cultural identity and a personal sense of citizenship.***" Given that multilingual texts** can constitute a cross-road of languages (and cultures), it is worth mentioning that bringing students closer to multilingual texts, can facilitate the development of this multicultural citizenship, which has been proposed as a priority in the 21st century (Council of Europe, 2016).

Reading is a process in which a person/reader attempts to extract and construct meaning from a written text, which has been written for a particular purpose (Vellutino et al., **2004). Within this context, readers make use of certain mechanisms known as "***reading strategies***" in their attempt to de**lve into the text. Reading strategies constitute problem-oriented actions/techniques, which can be employed either consciously or unconsciously within the context of an interaction between the reader and the text (or/and the writer of it) (Maley & Chamot, 1990). There are various studies, which have been conducted to investigate reading strategies of students in one or another language; however, there is no study to investigate the reading strategies of **students when "approaching/dealing with" multilingual** texts.

Appreciating that, researching on reading strategies of students can have both short- and long-term effects on students, as following a carefully designed and systematic training on developing reading strategies awareness and repertoire of the speakers can allow them to read more effectively texts that are produced and offered within this linguistically and culturally diverse era.

3. The study

3.1 *Rationale and objectives*

Given that multilingual texts are regarded as important educational tools towards **promoting students' translanguaging use in parallel with the fact that no study has been conducted to investigate students' reading strategies employed for multilingual texts, this study was designed** to shed light into this context. More specifically, this study aimed at investigating the reading strategies that are employed by primary education students in Greece when coming into contact with multilingual texts. In particular, two research questions were posed in an attempt to clarify certain aspects of the field:

(1) *Which reading strategies do primary education students of Greece employ when reading multilingual text?*

This particular research question stemmed from the research interest in identifying strategies used by the students prior to the reading of the text, while reading the text and upon the completion of the reading process.

(2) *Is there any differentiation in the use of reading strategies used by students, on the basis of the type of the multilingual text?*

This particular research question was developed in an attempt to investigate the reading strategies of students with two different types of items: (a) a text, which was given first in English and then translated in Greek; and (b) a text in which different languages (known/unknown to students) were used within the same text.

Based on the above, the study aspired to offer important findings, which can be further used for potential educational programs development and implementation.

3.2 *The participants*

In order to investigate reading strategies for multilingual texts, 27 primary education students, 11 years old, were engaged in this study. The students were all of Greek origin and they had been learning English as a foreign language for 4 years.

Table 1. Students' profile

Gender	*Female Students – 60%*
	Male Students – 40%
Years of Age	*11 years old*
Country of Origin	*Greece*
Years of Learning English	*4 years*
Multilingual Activities	*Listening to foreign songs – 42%*
	Watching foreign movies – 40%
	Reading news in English – 32%
	Reading foreign books – 32%
	Communicating with foreign people – 28%
	Searching for information on school projects – 26%

4. Research instrument and procedures

As for the study implementation, the researcher made use of specifically designed **questionnaires that elicited information about the students' profile and their reading strategies** employed when reading multilingual texts.

In particular, the questionnaire was divided into four thematic strands. At first, the students had to complete certain pieces of information in relation to their personal profile, their gender, their age, their school year, their origin as well as multilingual activities that they are engaged in. As for the second thematic strand, the students were invited to select the strategies that they use before they start reading the text, then they had to complete the questionnaire reflecting on the strategies employed while reading the text and last, the strategies they used after they have read the multilingual text.

As for the first type of multilingual texts, the students were provided with a text written in English and then a translation version of the same text in Greek. The students were encouraged to read the first text and then the second one thinking about their actions. Therefore, the students had to complete a questionnaire on the pre-, while- and post- reading strategies within the context of having two texts with the same content but given in two different languages, a foreign language and their L1.

In the second stage, the students were provided with a text, which was internally **multilingual, that is, it was written in different languages apart from the students' L1. In this case,**

the students also had to complete the questionnaire thinking about the reading strategies they employed before, while and after they had read the multilingual text.

In this way, an attempt was made to identify reading strategies that have been used by students when coming into contact with multilingual texts in two different contexts of reading.

5. Findings

With regard to the first research question "*Which reading strategies do primary education students of Greece employ when reading multilingual text?***", th**e researcher attempted to record strategies used by the students prior to the reading of the text, while reading the text and upon the completion of the reading process. The following table (Table 2) presents the frequency of use of the reading strategies employed by learners before they start reading the texts. In particular, the students tend to read the title of the text and try to recognize the language it is written (always: 57%) while they also exploit the photos/pictures (always:45%) or the title of the text (33%) and they guess the content of the text (always: 45%).

Table 2. General pre-reading strategies for multilingual texts

Before I begin to read the text, ...	Always/Almost Always	Sometimes	Rarely/Never
I look at the photos/pictures and I guess the content of the text	45%	38%	17%
I read the title of the text to understand the context in which it was developed (who wrote it, why, etc...)	11%	33%	56%
I read the title of the text and I guess about the content of the text	33%	47%	20%
I try to recognise the text genre	21%	17%	62%
I read the title of the text and I try to recognise the language it is written	57%	31%	12%

With regard to specifically pre-reading strategies employed by students when coming into contact with multilingual texts, the following table (Table 3) provides information about their repertoire. More specifically, the students seemed to look for unknown words/keywords and underline them (always: 64%). In parallel, they tend to try to focus on important information (always: 51%) and look for connecting words to see the text organization (always: 48%).

Table 3. Specific pre-reading strategies for multilingual texts

Specific Pre-Reading Strategies	Always/Almost Always	Sometimes	Rarely/Never
I read quickly the text to see which languages are used and If I know them	38%	35%	27%
I read the text quickly to acquire a first awareness of the content	17%	18%	65%
I read quickly the whole text and then I look at the photos to understand its content	34%	42%	24%

I read firstly the text and then I see the photos to check if there are common words	22%	18%	60%
I set specific goals as for the way I will read the text	14%	15%	71%
I look for unknown words/keywords and I underline them	64%	22%	14%
I look for connecting words to see the text organisation	48%	44%	8%
I try to focus on important information	51%	37%	12%
I focus on information given in another language	47%	37%	16%
I try to find information about the purpose of the text	31%	30%	39%
I try to understand the context in which the text has been developed	13%	24%	63%

Concerning the while-reading strategies that students employ when reading a **multilingual text, the following table (Table 4) presents students' efforts to comprehend the** text. In particular, the students seemed to make use of various strategies when reading multilingual **texts such as "**_I circle the words given in other languages I don't know and ask for my classmates'_ _help_" **(always: 51%), "**_I circle the words given in other languages I don't know and ask for my_ _teacher's help_" **(always: 50%), "**_I re-read what I do not understand in another language_" **(always:** **58%), "**_I use my imagination and make pictures of what I read in the other languages_" **(always:** **44%), "**_I say something in my own words to better understand what I am reading in another_ _language_" **(always: 55%)**, **and "**_I try to connect the pieces / words / phrases of the text that are in_ _other languages with those that are in my own language_" **(always: 46%)**.

Table 4. Specific reading strategies for multilingual texts

In order to comprehend the text, **...**	Always/Almost Always	Sometimes	Rarely/Never
I group words/phrases of each language, and gradually search for them to understand the content of the text.	41%	38%	21%
I circle the words given in other languages I don't know and ask for my classmates' help.	51%	47%	2%
I circle the words given in other languages I don't know and ask for my teacher's help.	50%	45%	5%
I put headings in every paragraph in the Greek language	21%	35%	44%
I put headings in each paragraph in the language that dominates within the paragraph	31%	38%	31%
I re-read what I do not understand.	58%	31%	11%
I underline or circle key information / words-phrases in the text	52%	41%	7%
I put the information in an imaginary order, from the first to the last as shown in the text	18%	28%	54%

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I use my imagination and make pictures of what I read in another language.	44%	32%	24%
I use linguistic or other elements of the text (eg bold, typographic) to understand parts of the text	39%	41%	20%
I change the way I read the text when I can't understand the text	37%	38%	25%
I pay attention to the organization of the text (eg prologue, main part, epilogue, paragraph elements, sections in which the text is divided)	17%	19%	64%
I use frames (surrounding words and phrases) to understand points that make it difficult for me to speak other languages.	10%	7%	0,83%
I take notes while reading to understand what I am reading	49%	28%	23%
I say something in my own words to better understand what I am reading in other languages.	55%	31%	14%
I try to understand the unknown words that seem important by associating them with similar words from languages I know	27%	28%	45%
I say in my own words the information I read in other languages	32%	35%	33%
I try to connect the pieces / words / phrases of the text that are in other languages with those that are in my own language.	46%	38%	16%

6. Discussion

Through this study an attempt was made towards investigating the reading strategies which are employed by young language learners when approaching/reading a text given in more than one language. In particular, multilingual texts seem to be not only a tool of research but a literacy-input for students in this globalized environment. As a lot of studies have been conducted focusing on recording the reading strategies of L1 and L2 or FL learners in one-language text, this study has come to differentiate the research context, appreciating the important role of translanguaging in literacy, and particularly in reading.

As stated by Wenden (1987), reading strategies are considered to be specific, problem-oriented actions or techniques, which can be either conscious or unconscious and automatic. They also demonstrate the ways the students interact with what they read, comprehend it and the methods they apply to do so (Maley & Chamot, 1990). Especially in this study, it was revealed that the existence of multiple languages in a text encouraged the students to make use of various reading strategies, which is quite promising. According to Baker (2002) and Singhal (2001), the use of reading strategies and the knowledge that students bring to approach the text influence the reading process to a great extent, a fact which was also released in this study in which texts given in multiple languages had to be read, approached and comprehended by students.

What is worth mentioning is that the students made use of various techniques. Utilizing already acquired knowledge was the most preferable strategy. Moreover, students

utilized pictures and figures as well as the general context of the text. They seemed to read with a purpose in mind, they checked their understanding when confronting new information, and made notice of general information of the text. The students also attempted to find relations within ideas, underlined or circled information to remember/investigate further, asked questions to themselves, took notes and discussed their readings with others to check their understanding.

Taking all into consideration, students appeared to make use of strategies that solved problems of comprehension in their attempt to better understand what they read. Moreover, the findings of the present study showed that students employed strategies which focus on the words/phrases given in a language other than their L1. Given the above, it becomes clear that **strange and unknown elements can attract students' attention and thus becoming more** strategically-oriented learners. Indeed, this tendency can serve beneficially towards encouraging the employment of reading strategies of students with the purpose to facilitate their active engagement in and interaction with the text(s).

It becomes clear that reading is a dynamic process with a multidimensional character **which requires a continuous direct interaction between the reader and the "text" in parallel with a** continuous reflection on the purposes and the context it was written by a particular author. Towards that interaction and reflection, readers make use of certain mechanisms titled which facilitate this dual purpose.

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