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A Multilingual Perspective on Reading—Investigating Strategies of Irish Students Learning French

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Abstract

Our aim here is to investigate reading in a foreign language from a multilingual perspective. Much research has focused on first- and second-language reading, especially the important role played by strategy deployment in helping readers to make meaning from texts in different languages. Less emphasis has been placed, however, on how bilinguals approach reading in a new language and how they harness their bilingual experience when reading in this new language. We thus investigate strategy deployment by pupils from English- and Irish-medium schools in Ireland who learn French. We compare patterns of strategy deployment in reading in Irish and French and put forward examples where experience with reading in Irish potentially benefits foreign language reading. Findings point towards the need to foster use of previous language experience through strategy instruction as part of a move towards greater recognition of the role of multilingual language experience at different levels of education.

***Keywords**:* multilingualism, second language reading, third language reading, reading strategies, Ireland, Irish, French

Research in the area of language acquisition has moved from a monolingual bias (Cook, 1992, 1997) where the focus was on monolingual language norms in teaching and learning second and foreign languages, towards a multilingual perspective (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011, 2015) where emphasis is placed on how language users harness previous language experience and create links between their multiple contacts with languages. Recent studies have thus taken multilingualism as their framework (see Aronin, 2019 for an overview) in attempting to understand both language acquisition in general and the specific strategies that users elaborate and deploy across languages.

In the study of reading, initial focus on understanding the specific processes involved in constructing meaning from texts in an individual's first or second language (see Erler & Finkbeiner, 2007 for an overview) has been accompanied by investigation of how bilinguals read in both their languages and transfer strategies between reading in each language (see García & Godina, 2017 for an overview). While recent research has examined declared strategy usage and deployment of decoding strategies by bilinguals when reading in a new language (e.g.,

Cummins, 2016; Garcia & Lin, 2016), few studies have focused on how multilingual language users construct meaning and potentially deploy strategies acquired during previous language contact.

Our research takes place within the context of education in Ireland. Most students in primary and secondary schools naturally come into contact with English and Irish from a young age, both outside education and as school subjects from the start of primary school. Moreover, while most schools use English as the medium of instruction, a minority (around 5%) use Irish as a medium of instruction (Ó Laoire, 2017). Students in Ireland thus develop bilingual competency in Irish and English to varying degrees—we focus here on how these students approach reading during subsequent language learning and the manner in which their bilingual experience potentially influences the way they construct meaning when faced with reading a text in French.

The participants in our study came from three Irish-medium and two English-medium secondary schools. Students firstly completed language background questionnaires and undertook reading tests in English. This was followed by retrospective interviews where students were invited to explain the manner in which they went about constructing meaning from different texts in Irish and French. Findings enable us to identify strategies put in place and highlight obstacles identified by students in each school, leading us to foreground pedagogical issues and discuss implications for the implementation of integrated language-learning curricula in Ireland and beyond.

A Multilingual Perspective on Strategy Usage

Adopting a monolingual perspective on second language acquisition involves viewing learners of a second language through the lens of first language usage—the second language is thus seen as being added on to the first, with the learner's proficiency measured against that of the sole language of a monolingual (Franceschini, 2009, 2011). Research conducted from this perspective thus attempts to understand the second-language learner's supposed lack of success in acquiring this language to a level similar to that of a monolingual user (Auer & Wei, 2007). Moving to a bilingual perspective, second-language users are seen as individuals who use two or more languages that form their language system—the yardstick used to measure competency in the second language is not the monolingual native speaker, but rather how the second and subsequent languages connect in the mind of the user and how language users communicate in multilingual communities (see Cook, 2016 for an overview).

This shift in perspective encouraged researchers to consider bilinguals in terms of their total language repertoires, taking into account the domains of use and functions of their different languages (Francis, 2012). For Gajo (2001, 2014), bilingual competence designates a network of regularities between the first language, which is traditionally considered to be stable and the second language, which is being elaborated; it enables users to create links between and call upon resources in the two languages. Subsequent research, especially in the 1990s and early 2000s, focused on the emerging area of trilingualism (see Aronin, 2005 for an overview). Hoffmann (2001) explained that trilingual language competence not only involves the linguistic aspects from three language systems but also sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic

competences related to the three languages, as well as the ability to create links and harness interactions between each language.

Cenoz and Gorter (2019) highlight the wealth of resources that multilinguals develop through their contact with languages and their ability to subsequently call upon these resources. Jessner (2014) explained that the multilingual learner develops skills and abilities that create a catalytic effect in further language learning. This M(ultilingualism) factor (Herdina & Jessner, 2002), based to a large extent on the development of metalinguistic awareness, which we can define as the ability to focus on linguistic form and switch focus between form and meaning (Jessner, 2008), involves utilizing skills and abilities developed via previous linguistic experience through harnessing interaction between language systems and subsequently deploying resources when learning and using new languages (see Roehr-Brackin, 2018; Vogel & García, 2017 for overviews).

Another important aspect of this process is the elaboration of language strategies. Research looking at the role played by strategies in language learning has its origins in studies on the so-called Good Language Learner that aimed to understand what language learners considered to be successful were doing that their peers deemed to be less successful were not (e.g., Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975). Attempting to identify the characteristics of the Good Language Learner led to the development of models and categorizations of strategy usage (Rose, 2015). Here we understand strategies as mental processes and actions, in both learning and using a language, deployed below and above consciousness, in order to comprehend and make inferences from the content and context of a given message, taking into account context-specific variables and individual user choices (see Oxford, 2018 for an overview).

In what follows, we focus on the interplay between cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The important work of O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classified strategies as cognitive—interaction between the learner and the material via physical and mental manipulation of content; metacognitive—reflecting upon the learning process and upon one's learning; and socio-affective[1]—interaction with others, notably other language learners, in order to facilitate learning and manage emotions and affective elements of the learning process. Studies have indeed found that while learners deemed to be more proficient often use the same amount of cognitive strategies as those deemed to be less proficient, they use a greater number of metacognitive strategies, demonstrate greater metacognitive knowledge of the task and are better able to adapt their strategies when necessary (e.g., Chamot, 2001; Pressley et al., 1987; Veenman, 2016).

With specific regard to language acquisition, numerous studies (e.g., Aronin, 2005; Cenoz & Gorter, 2015; Jessner, 2008; McLaughlin & Nayak, 1989; Missler, 2000; Müller-Lancé, 2003; Thomas, 1992; Török & Jessner, 2017) have highlighted that multilinguals adopt and deploy a greater number and variety of strategies during subsequent language learning than equivalent monolinguals, while also displaying greater ability to harness prior linguistic experience. Kemp (2007) particularly noted a threshold effect in the move from bilingualism to trilingualism, involving the diversification and augmentation of strategy usage by multilingual users when learning and using a third language, echoing the findings on the catalytic effect of the

[1] We do not specifically consider the role of socio-affective strategies in reading in this article—the reader can find a detailed account of this topic in Fandiño Parra (2010).

development of metalinguistic awareness. The importance of strategy usage and metalinguistic awareness in bi- and multilingual reading will be explored in the following sections.

Use of Strategies by Bilingual Readers

We begin by focusing on first- and second-language reading among bilingual students. The act of reading involves dynamic interactions between the reader, author, text and context in the construction of meaning that are inter-related and multi-faceted and often vary according to whether we are dealing with reading in the first or second language of an individual (see Bialystok, 2007; Bialystok et al., 2005; de Houwer, 2009 for overviews). Numerous factors come into play, including decoding and treating visual stimuli (Alderson, 2000), the textual and meta-textual environments (McVee et al., 2005), the context (Barnett, 1988; Reynolds, 2017), background knowledge (Swaffar, 1988; van der Broek et al., 2016), along with the reader's intentions and emotions (Jalongo & Hirsh, 2010).

In what follows, we adopt a mixed approach (Urquhart & Weir, 1998) in understanding how readers make meaning from texts. Reading here involves interactive and iterative use of so-called higher-level processes, such as inferences and use of background knowledge, in understanding the text as a whole, along with so-called lower-level processes, such as phonological awareness and use of vocabulary knowledge, in order to recognize words and analyze sentences (Carrell, 1988). Different studies (e.g., Mathes et al., 2007; Barbosa et al., 2017) put forward that more proficient second-language readers adopt such a mixed approach through actively monitoring their reading and combining lower-level and higher-level processes when faced with comprehension difficulties.

Of particular relevance to our study is the question of reading outcomes when the second language of students is used as the medium of instruction. Studies in the United States (see Bialystok, 2018 for an overview) and Canada (see Dicks & Genesee, 2017 for an overview) have shown that outcomes for reading in English are equivalent to those for pupils in mainstream English-medium education (assuming appropriate comparison groups are used and students are assessed after a sufficient amount of time), whereas outcomes in the language of instruction are better than those for equivalent second language learners in English-medium education. Slavin et al. (2011) showed that over the course of 5 years in transitional bilingual education or structured English immersion,[2] differences in reading in English and Spanish diminish after 2 to 3 years, with no significant differences after 4 years on English reading measures

Research on the specific reading strategies of Latino/a students in the USA (see García & Godina, 2017; López-Velásquez & García, 2017 for overviews) highlighted that these students display a large number and variety of strategies when faced with texts in both English and Spanish, as well as deploying specific meaning-making strategies that allow them to decipher unknown words and expressions. In Canada, however, research by Bourgoin and Dicks (2013) and Bourgoin (2014) on French-immersion programs highlighted that less proficient readers demonstrate limited knowledge of reading strategies and when to use them, while also tending to

[2] Immersion is understood here as use of a language other than the first language of a student to teach both linguistic and non-linguistic content in education (see Ó Duibhir, 2018 for an overview).

deploy strategies separately from each other, whereas more proficient readers adopt a wider base of strategies, adapt these strategies to specific texts and use them together to decipher unknown elements in reading.

It would thus appear that students in second-language immersion obtain similar outcomes in first-language reading and better outcomes in second language reading than equivalent students in non-immersive contexts, while also deploying a large number and variety of reading strategies and demonstrating ability to combine these strategies. Issues have nonetheless been highlighted in such immersive contexts regarding how less proficient readers approach texts and deploy strategies. In the next section, we will present an overview of studies looking at how bilingual students of varying second-language proficiency approach reading in a new language.

Use of Strategies by Multilingual Readers

An early study by Gajo (1996) compared monolinguals and bilinguals when reading a newspaper article in a new language. The monolinguals put in place a 'bottom-up' approach, placing emphasis on lexical elements and paying little attention to the overall meaning of the text; the bilinguals, however, deployed strategies allowing them to maintain minimal access to meaning and directed attention to difficulties met when reading. Later studies by Castellotti and Moore (Castellotti & Moore, 2005; Moore & Castellotti, 2001) found that while some bilingual children tactically utilized both their first language and their second language, they often did not use strategies that were significantly different to those of monolingual children. The researchers note that when the school context favors a metalinguistic culture constructed through only one language, tools are not always sufficiently adapted to allow heuristic transfers, hindering ability to transfer latent knowledge about languages.

Schwartz et al. (2007) examined the influence of bi-literate (literacy skills in two languages) bilingualism and mono-literate (literacy skills in one language and spoken knowledge of the other) bilingualism on the development of literary skills in English as a third language. Findings showed that bi-literate bilinguals obtained better scores than mono-literate bilinguals and monolinguals on tests of basic literacy measures (such as phoneme deletion and analysis, pseudoword decoding and spelling) in English. Rauch et al. (2012) found that fully biliterate students outperformed monolingual and partially biliterate students in learning a third language on both measures of reading ability and metalinguistic awareness, concluding that both first language reading proficiency and second language reading proficiency are needed for biliteracy to have beneficial effects on third language reading ability and metalinguistic awareness.

Talebi (2013) examined the effects of reading strategy instruction on strategy usage and proficiency. Reading strategy instruction in the first language led to improvements in reading strategy awareness and use in first language reading and second language reading, while such instruction in the second language improved reading strategy awareness and use in the second language and third language, suggesting that strategy instruction in any one language led to greater use and awareness of strategies in reading in the others. Haukås (2015) studied reported strategy use in reading among learners of English as a second language and learners of German as a third language from Norwegian secondary schools. Here, it was found that learners of

German as a third language used fewer strategies and applied them less often than learners of English as a second language. Haukås explained that third language learners may not be fully aware of how to transfer knowledge from previous language-learning and that lower use of strategies by third-language learners may be due to lower motivation to learn the third language (German) than to learn the second language (English).

Finally, Ruiz de Zarobe and Zenotz (2018) presented an intervention study where young Spanish-Basque bilinguals were given strategy instruction over a 7-week period and results were compared to those of similar students from a control group who did not benefit from this instruction. Findings show that the experimental group displayed significant gains in both strategy awareness and use and that these gains were maintained over a 2-year period. However, while this group also displayed greater metacognitive awareness, they did not differ from the control group in terms of number or type of strategies used. Spinelli (2017) reported on an Intensive Elementary Italian course offered to students with knowledge of one other Romance Language or previous exposure to Italian. The multilingual pedagogy adopted during this course favored transfers across languages, as well as the development of reading and writing in Italian.

In summary, while evidence exists that bilinguals are able to transfer strategies to reading in a new language, obstacles have been identified in promoting such transfer, including metalinguistic culture fostered through only one language, lack of awareness of strategies and low motivation for learning the new language. Such issues have indeed been highlighted in research in Ireland, notably with regard to reading in Irish and general strategy usage in subsequent language learning.

Irish Context

Languages and language learning in education

Ireland is a bilingual country—the first official language is Irish, the second is English. While the promotion of bilingualism has been a key priority for successive governments since the introduction of the Free State in 1922, different factors have hindered the spread of the language, including limited intergenerational transmission in English-speaking areas and reduced usage of the language in Irish-speaking regions (see Ó Duibhir, 2018 for an overview). The education system has thus been an important vector in spreading the language. Before 1922, Irish was taught at only a quarter of primary schools (Coady, 2001)—teaching of the language was thus reinforced from that point at primary level and was introduced as a compulsory subject at all levels of secondary school from 1934.

Generally positive attitudes exist amongst the Irish population when the language is expressed as a part of Irish identity and culture (Crowley, 2016; Ó Riagáin, 1997, 2001), with much support for official measures promoting bilingualism in society and teaching of Irish at school (Atkinson & Kelly-Holmes, 2016; Darmody & Daly, 2015). Usage of the language, however, is relatively low. According to the 2016 census figures (Central Statistics Office, 2017), 1.76 million people (39.8% of the population) claim to be able to speak the language. However, 23.8% of these people state that they never actually speak the language, 33.3% speak it less often than weekly

and 31.7% state that they only use the language in education. In Irish-speaking areas, known collectively as the Gaeltacht, of the 96,090 inhabitants, 66.3% state they can speak Irish and 21.4% claim to use the language daily outside education (compared with 4.2% of the general population).[3]

The importance of the school system in promoting the language is thus clear—almost one third of those who claim to speak Irish in the country as a whole do so within education. Irish and English are generally studied for the entire duration of primary and secondary education (most students start school at 4, with a primary cycle of 8 years and a secondary cycle of 5 or 6 years). Most students learn Irish in English-medium schools for approximately 1 hour per day at primary school and 40 minutes per day at secondary school.[4] Almost 5 % of students are educated in Irish-medium schools, with all classes given through Irish (except for English).

Concerning Irish-medium education, at the creation of the Free State in 1922, most schools in the Gaeltacht used Irish as the medium of instruction. The government at the time thus promoted the dual aim of maintaining Irish in the Gaeltacht and renewing Irish beyond these areas (see Coady & Ó Laoire, 2002 for an overview). Outside the Gaeltacht, Irish became a compulsory subject in schools where English was the medium of instruction, while some of these schools also used Irish as the language of instruction for a limited number of school subjects. Today, Irish-medium education generally[5] involves a form of quasi-total early immersion—instruction in all subjects, except for English, is given through Irish, while Irish is generally the sole language used to communicate inside the school (see Cammarata & Ó Ceallaigh, 2018 for an overview).

Currently, we can find crèches (naíonraí), primary schools (gaelscoileanna) and secondary schools (gaelcholaistí) that teach through Irish and recent figures show that 5% of schools now teach through the medium of Irish outside the Gaeltacht (Ó Laoire, 2017). The aim is thus to create an Irish-speaking environment in schools while encouraging students and parents to use the language at home and in daily life (Ó Duibhir, 2011, 2018). Specific curricula have been designed to meet the needs of students in the acquisition of the Irish language, with oral language, reading and writing objectives for Irish as the primary language (language 1) in Irish-medium schools at both primary[6] and secondary[7] levels, objectives which differ from those designed for teaching and learning Irish as a second language (language 2) in English-medium schools.

Research has shown that pupils in Irish-medium schools generally acquire greater mastery of Irish than those in English-medium schools, as well as displaying more positive attitudes and greater motivation towards the language (Devitt et al., 2018; Murtagh, 2007) and using the

[3] It should also be noted that, as of 2016, 612,018 Irish residents spoke a language other than Irish or English—the main languages were Polish, French, Romanian and Lithuanian.

[4] The reader can find an overview of education in Ireland, as well as specific information related to teaching Irish, at: https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/

[5] A limited number of English-medium schools are beginning to teach certain school subjects through Irish, on a pilot project basis (Ó Ceallaigh et al., 2017).

[6] Full details can be found at: https://curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Primary-Language/?lang=en-ie

[7] Full details can be found at: https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0035_2018.pdf

language more frequently outside school (Strickland & Hickey, 2016). Challenges nonetheless remain for Irish-medium schools outside the Gaeltacht, including low proficiency in Irish among parents and family members (Kavanagh, 2014; Kavanagh & Hickey, 2013) and difficulties in elaborating appropriate academic content through Irish (Cammarata & Ó Ceallaigh, 2018; Hinton, 2011; Ní Thuairisg, 2018). Inside the Gaeltacht, schools face difficulties accommodating pupils from both English-language and Irish-language backgrounds (Ó Ceallaigh & Ní Dhonnabháin, 2015).

Concerning English-medium schools, researchers have pointed to low levels of proficiency in and engagement with the Irish language—national language assessments up until the early 2000s (see Harris et al., 2006 for an overview) highlighted low levels of oral comprehension and production, while more recent government reports note considerable variation and disappointing outcomes with regard to the quality of teaching the language (e.g., Department of Education and Skills, 2007, 2013). Research has highlighted issues such as low proficiency levels amongst teachers (Hickey & Stenson, 2016) and disengagement with the language among students due to low usage of Irish outside school, creating negative attitudes and low motivation towards the language (Devitt et al., 2018).

Second-language reading and subsequent language learning

Learning to read in Irish can be challenging for young students, with many features of the language (the alphabet, initial word mutations, vowel lengthening) differing from English. Hickey and Stenson (2017) explained that decoding skills for Irish orthography are taught less systematically than for English, while a lack of Irish phonological awareness hinders fluidity in reading in Irish. Teachers in English-medium schools interviewed by Hickey and Stenson (2016) expressed dissatisfaction with their own proficiency in Irish, tending to rely on course textbooks and spending less time on reading than on other language skills.

Hickey (2007) noted difficulties among lower proficiency young readers in English-medium schools in decoding some of the most frequent Irish words, with miscue analysis showing that they were partially analyzing the words, overly relying on initial or salient letters and lacking knowledge of regular grapheme-phoneme relationships. Parsons and Lyddy (2009) found that students from English-medium schools obtained much lower scores than Irish-medium ones on an oral reading error task, while also making more non-word errors on the Irish task than on the English task. Parsons and Lyddy (2016) subsequently found that Irish-medium primary students obtained higher scores than English-medium students on vocabulary measures and Irish word and non-word reading tasks.

At secondary level, Markey (2020) investigated strategy usage by English-medium and Irish-medium secondary school students when reading in Irish. English-medium students relied on ‘bottom-up’, textual-level processes, focused on specific items of vocabulary and emphasized understanding individual sentences, while failing to monitor for overall coherence in the explanations they provided. They thus adopted a linear, word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence approach, eventually leading to misunderstandings and contradictions. Students in Irish-medium schools varied in their use of metacognitive strategies, such as monitoring or use of contextual information. Those who did not use such strategies provided explanations that were lacking in

coherence and not in keeping with the overall meaning of the texts, echoing findings from Bourgoin and Dicks (2013) and Bourgoin (2014).

Research in the Irish context thus points to similar levels of proficiency in English, and higher levels of proficiency in Irish, for students from Irish-medium schools—issues have nonetheless been highlighted regarding use of metacognitive strategies when reading in Irish in both school types. Given this greater proficiency in reading in Irish for students from Irish-medium education, we can ask whether these students display differing patterns of strategy deployment to English-medium students when reading in French.

Research Questions

Our review of the scientific literature on reading in second and foreign languages has highlighted general trends and allowed us to identify specific gaps in knowledge in the Irish context. It is, however, important to question the nature of the data obtained in these studies in order to contextualize their findings. This will allow us to better understand this body of knowledge and situate our work within this vast collection of research, thus allowing the reader to better appreciate the findings put forward in this paper and their place in the scientific literature.

As we have seen, numerous approaches have been adopted in examining bilingual and multilingual reading. Certain studies measured reading ability through test scores (Schwartz et al., 2007; Rauch et al., 2012), others adopted a pretest/posttest design, focusing on the effects of a specific reading intervention program (Talebi, 2013; Ruiz de Zarobe and Zenotz, 2018). While Haukås (2015) measured reported strategy usage, Bourgoin and Dicks (2013) used standardized reading aptitude tests, post-task interviews and think aloud protocols. In the Irish context, Hickey (2007) used miscue analysis, while Parsons and Lyddy (2009, 2016) deployed tests of reading comprehension, contrary to Markey (2020) who used retrospection as the main data collection technique.

Interpreting the results of individual studies thus requires proper understanding of the nature of the data collected. Our aim is not to build on research that compares measures of reading ability based on testing as our focus is on the processes involved in reading in different languages. We are also specifically interested in how students combine processes and strategies when reading in different languages, rather than general reports on how they use reading strategies or the effects of specific intervention programs on reading outcomes. With regard to the existing literature, we wish to contribute to a better understanding of how reading processes and strategies are (re)deployed in different languages, while expanding research in the Irish context to look at strategy usage in Irish and foreign languages.

Based on these specific aims, our focus naturally turned to introspection. For Gass & Mackey (2000), the general assumptions underlying introspection were that "it is possible to observe internal processes in much the same way as one can observe external real-world events" and that "humans have access to their internal thought processes at some level and can verbalize those processes" (p. 1). Use of introspection can thus generate verbal reports that provide a rich dataset on internal processes that would be otherwise out of reach for the researcher. Verbal reports in

introspection require participants to verbalize thought processes during and after undertaking a particular task and seek to shed light on the reasoning behind the processes and strategies deployed by learners during language production (see Liao, 2021 for an overview).

Bowles (2019) explained that verbal reports have been extensively used since the 1980s in both first- and second-language research in order to obtain data regarding the cognitive processes and processing of learners that would otherwise be inaccessible. Such verbal reports can be obtained while the learner is undertaking a task (concurrent or think-aloud) or afterwards (retrospective) and aim to provide insights into the reasoning behind learners' written or spoken behaviors during language production. The choice of solicitation technique and data analysis procedure depend on both the nature, context and aims of a given study—we will return to how these points were taken into account as part of our study in the next section (Study design).

It is important to note that there has been controversy regarding the validity of the use of verbal reports. The main issues here center on whether the act of verbalizing changes the nature of the thoughts under study (reactivity) and whether verbalization can be seen as a true reflection of an individual's thoughts (veridicality) (see Smith et al., 2020 for an overview). Thus, if recall is to reflect processes rather than theories about processes, studies using introspective techniques need to implement appropriate safeguards (Bowles, 2019). They need to be carefully designed in order to take into account issues related to validity and reliability of the data, thus ensuring that meaningful interpretations can be made and that their analysis uses systematic procedures. The specific safeguards used as part of our study will be outlined in the next section.

Despite these challenges and the need to proceed with caution when using verbal reports, data collection using this particular method was deemed most appropriate given our aim of understanding the processes and strategies deployed when reading in different languages. The following research questions were thus drawn up to guide our research:

1. What strategies do students from English-medium and Irish-medium schools deploy when faced with reading texts in Irish and in French?
2. What individual variations in strategy usage can we note across school types and how can we explain these variations?
3. What role does previous language experience play in the nature of strategy deployment when reading in French?

Study Design

Context and participants

The pupils who participated in this study came from five second-year[8] secondary classes and were between 13 and 15 years of age. In each English-medium school, participants came from two French classes; in each Irish-medium school, pupils came from one French class. Our total population was thus made up of 124 pupils (66 boys and 48 girls)—25 and 27 from the first and second English-medium schools (henceforth EM1 and EM2), 17 and 27 from two Irish-medium

[8] This would approximately correspond to 8th grade in the American education system.

schools outside the Gaeltacht (henceforth IM1 and IM2) and 18 from the Irish medium school in the Gaeltacht (henceforth IMG). EM1 and IM1 are located in Dublin; EM2 and IM2 are located in the south of Ireland, while IMG is located in the south-west of the country. Schools were chosen to ensure relative demographic homogeneity (same age, same divide between city and semi-urban areas, same socio-economic backgrounds as measured via parental occupation), with an exception made for the school in the Gaeltacht as it was naturally located in a more rural area.

English was the mother tongue of all of the participants, with some pupils from IMG having Irish as a second mother tongue. While all of the pupils had studied English and Irish from the start of primary school, pupils from the Irish-medium secondary schools had attended Irish-medium primary schools, whereas pupils from the English-medium schools had attended English-medium primary schools. The vast majority of the pupils had been studying French for 2 years and had very little contact with the language outside of school. Information on language usage, attitudes and motivation were gathered using language background questionnaires.

It was essential to place ethics (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005; Anderson, 2017) at the heart of the data collection process—our dual aim was thus to avoid harming participants in any way and minimize intrusion (De Costa, 2016). As such, before the data collection started, meetings were arranged with principals and relevant language teachers in each school in order to explain the nature of our research, request contact time with the classes and discuss carrying out individual interviews with pupils. A consent form was subsequently sent to parents and guardians explaining the purpose of our research, requesting permission for their child/children to take part and informing them that the results would be presented for publication. They were specifically informed that no pupil would be individually identified and no school would be named in publications. Contact details were also provided for parents to pose follow-up questions and raise potential issues.

Our first contact with pupils involved presenting the nature of our research to each class as a whole. We explained that the pupils who agreed to be part of the study would be research subjects and that the research undertaken may form part of future publications but that the study was designed to ensure anonymity and that findings related to individual pupils would not be communicated to third parties and that no pupil would be individually identified at any time. Students were also informed that their participation was voluntary, that it could be withdrawn at any time and that any issues could be raised with the researcher through group questions or private communication.

Pupils whose parents had given their consent were asked to fill in a language background questionnaire focusing on their linguistic biography—they were asked to provide an auto-evaluation of their proficiency in Irish and French, reflect upon their attitudes and motivation towards learning and using French and Irish and report upon their language usage outside school. They were then asked to undertake an English-language reading test to verify their ability to read an extended text on a topic with which they were familiar and provide explanations of the overall meaning, thus ensuring that difficulties met during assessment of reading in the second and foreign languages were not due to underlying issues with reading in general.

Questionnaire data allowed us to group students in each class-based attitudes and motivation towards Irish and French, as well as declared language proficiency and usage of these languages. Pupils were also asked to provide the professions of their parent(s) and guardian(s) in order to group their households into socio-economic categories. The English-language tests allowed us to identify pupils who demonstrated the ability to present a written overview of the meaning of the text, explain the content and provide supporting details. Using these two data sources, we were able to identify 30 students (6 per school) with whom we carried out the retrospective interviews.

Data collection and analysis

As previously explained, we chose to collect introspective data from our participants. Such data aim to shed light on processes whose inherent structures and rules are not known beforehand by asking participants to think about their thoughts and objectives (Bowles, 2018). Given that our aim was to examine how meaning was constructed from content in different texts and different languages, while also engaging with participants to seek clarification and elaboration, such data seemed the most appropriate for our study.

With regard to the choice between concurrent and retrospective verbal reports, we chose here to solicit retrospective ones. Concurrent verbal reports would not have allowed for explanations regarding how the information was processed and the specific strategies used. While many studies have indeed combined concurrent and retrospective verbal reports when studying reading (see Smith et al., 2020 for an overview), here it was not deemed feasible to do so. Participants were already taking time out of regular schooling to participate in a complex research project involving separate questionnaires and interviews[9]—adding in the required training to help students concurrently verbalize their thoughts while reading, and doing so with texts in different languages, was deemed too onerous here.

Retrospective verbalization can provide much explanatory information about what participants were attending to during a task, how they processed information, and the strategies they deployed. It also does not interfere with participants' thought processes during the task as they are able to undertake it in their own way and in their own time, thus potentially reducing stress and anxiety from the study situation that may cause them to undertake the task in an unnatural manner. As such, retrospective verbal reports, given that they are ‘off-line’ in nature, reduce potential for reactivity as they interfere less with the normal processes of reading than online think-aloud verbal reporting does. Moreover, given that retrospection began here directly after reading the text, the potential for memory decay was limited, thus minimizing the risk of non-veridicality.

Despite these advantages, care must be taken when soliciting retrospective verbal reports. Firstly, instructions for reporting must be written and tested beforehand in order to ensure that they are clear and explicit for all participants. Moreover, they must specify the language in which participants are expected to verbalize—verbal reports may be incomplete if participants are not able to fully express their thoughts due to language proficiency issues. Finally, individual differences in the ability to verbalize must be taken into account—some participants do indeed

[9] See Markey (2022) for a detailed overview of this part of the study.

have a greater ability to verbalize than others, sometimes irrespective of their ability to complete the specific task that is part of a given study.

Participants were thus asked to fully read the texts they were given and to indicate when they had finished, thus affording them the opportunity to read under relatively natural conditions, despite the nature of the interaction with the researcher. After reading, carefully formulated instructions were uniformly provided to all participants to ensure that they were encouraged to state what they were thinking at the time they completed the reading activity rather than what they were thinking at the time of reporting. Prior to the implementation of this study, a pilot project had been undertaken with a different group of students in order to test the use of retrospective verbal reports and instructions, allowing for modifications to be made to instructions where necessary.

Participants here were free to verbalize in either English or Irish—it was essential that they felt at ease to use the language(s) in which they felt the most comfortable. All the students from the English-medium school reported in English, using Irish and French at times to discuss words and expressions from the texts. All the students from the Irish-medium schools were free to use English or Irish—it was important here to give students the choice so that they were not hampered by linguistic barriers. While the very nature of this study required students to move between languages, which is indeed cognitively taxing, the same conditions were implemented in each school type in order to allow for meaningful comparisons.

Finally, with regard to individual differences in reporting ability, it was beyond the scope of this work to deploy the necessary tests to measure capacity for verbal reporting among all participants. We do indeed highlight in our findings students who demonstrated a particularly developed ability to explain the processes and strategies they put in place when faced with reading texts in Irish and in French. The reader should keep in mind that this may in part be due to greater ability to verbally report than for other students, meaning that it is potentially unsound to compare these students to the rest of the participants. We thus, in presenting our findings, limit our analysis to highlighting trends and exploring specific examples, without attempting to measure or compare proficiency levels.

In terms of implementation, students were asked to read texts in Irish and French and reflect upon the manner in which they went about understanding these texts. In order to avoid an ordering effect (differences in performance due to the order in which the text in each language is presented), a counterbalanced design was adopted whereby half of the students undertook the assessment in Irish first and the other half undertook assessment in French first (Bachman, 1990). Students were presented with the relevant text, asked to read it carefully and to indicate when they had finished reading. They were then asked what they had understood from the text and contextual prompts were used in order to encourage them to develop their responses. Students were made aware that they could report in their preferred language (English or Irish) and that they were free to move between languages.

We chose text-types that had been met in class previously and subjects with which the pupils were familiar, taken from revision guides that were approved by teachers at the schools beforehand. The texts were no longer than 200 words, in order to avoid over-loading and saturating memory. The difficulty of each text was determined through analysis of curricula and

manuals, along with discussion with teachers, in order to identify the appropriate level with reference to The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001).[10] A B2-level text in Irish was chosen for Irish-medium schools—this involves the ability to understand the main ideas of complex texts on both concrete and abstract topics. For the English-medium schools, a B1-level in Irish was chosen—this involves understanding the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school or leisure. The text in French was of A2-level—this involves understanding sentences and commonly used expressions linked to topics of immediate relevance.[11]

Verbal reports were transcribed without modification based on audio recordings, including incomplete sections and grammatical errors. Paralinguistic elements were introduced,[12] while use of different languages was highlighted and phonetic transcription used where necessary. We looked at the overall meaning attributed to the text, justifications given to support what was said and the manner in which elements were used to explain meaning. We then looked at student discourse about reading—textual elements used to describe the approach, the order of the steps, and how the textual elements were put together to construct meaning. In order to study the strategies deployed, we identified different items that we thought would require pupils to use a strategy in the text, focusing on these points in order to examine comprehension difficulties (what knowledge was deployed, what elements of the text were harnessed and what languages were called upon).

Finally, while we do provide general comparisons of our findings related to assessment of reading in Irish and French for each school type, limited space in this article has led us to focus on and present illustrated examples of reading in French. Our aim is thus to highlight differences in reading across the two languages and illustrate the general approaches to reading by presenting extracts from the retrospective interviews after students read the text in French. We have also decided to focus on the same short extract of text in this language when illustrating strategy usage by students in each school-type for reasons of clarity and coherence (this text can be found in the Appendix). We compare patterns of strategy deployment, before highlighting potential for harnessing previous language experience when reading in a new language. More detailed analysis of approaches and strategies deployed when reading in Irish by English-medium and Irish-medium secondary school students, as well as illustrated examples, can be found in Markey (2020).

[10] For an overview of the levels of the CEFR, the reader can consult the following website: https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/table-1-cefr-3.3-common-reference-levels-global-scale.

[11] The particular extract in French on which we base our illustrations of strategy usage by students is provided in the Appendix.

[12] We used '/' to mark a short pause (maximum 2 seconds), '//' for a long pause (maximum 4 seconds) and '///' for an extremely long pause (longer than 4 seconds).

Findings

English-medium schools—Illustrating strategy deployment

Of the twelve students from the two English-medium schools who took part in the assessment of their reading, six deployed a bottom-up approach to reading in Irish and French, putting in place mainly cognitive strategies in understanding the content of each text, while four students put in place a mixed approach when reading in the two languages, combining bottom-up and top-down processes with use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Finally, two students showed variation in the approaches they adopted between Irish and French. We will illustrate below the nature of each approach for reading in French and provide potential explanations for the variation noted among the final two students.

When adopting a bottom-up approach to the text in French, students here mainly used words and sentences in order to construct meaning, neither attempting to validate the coherence of their explanations nor link them to the overall meaning of the text. This results in contradictions and incoherencies in their understanding of the passage. They begin with the words of the first sentence, translating them to English, before moving on to the next sentence. This continues until the end of the text, with students failing to link the different elements they evoke with the overall meaning of the text. Such an approach is illustrated in the following extract:

> *CH EM 1: (...) It would be in the past tense /*
> *(...) CH EM 1 2: We would eat in the evening / in / we would eat a lot in the evening /*
> *(...) CH EM 1 3: And during the week /*
> *(...) CH EM 1 4:// It's asking you do you / eh / exercise a lot / or exercise regularly /*
> *(...) CH EM 1 5: // I think that's do you leave the house a lot /*
> *(...) CH EM 1 6: Do you leave the house to do stuff / to exercise /*
> *(... CH EM 1 7: /// And after that do you play with /// em / next sentence / do you go to the gym / with other people / and exercise*
> *(...) CH EM 1 8: Do you have a trainer? // are you fit / there are particular courses on fitness management / massage / yeah / massage*
> *(...) CH EM 1 9: // It's asking you do you enjoy doing it / that's the last sentence*

We can see here that the student states that he moves from sentence to sentence ("next sentence"), finishing by saying that he has arrived at the final sentence. When asked about the overall meaning of the text, he proposes a summary based on the individual elements he had just cited, explaining that he mainly used verbs and key words like 'fitness' and 'diet' to understand the text.

Students who put in place a mixed approach begin with a brief summary, before citing different elements in order to support the ideas put forward. Throughout their explanations, they add different details and ideas previously evoked, thus using textual information to justify their understanding of the texts. These pupils go beyond a focus on individual words in order to present ideas that use different levels of the passage (words, sentences, context) and meaning-making strategies. Finally, when faced with an unknown, their strategies go beyond those of lexical retrieval and direct translations. This is illustrated in the following extract:

> *LMA EM 1 1: Is it about a gym fitness place (...) and it has stuff about your diet and what did you eat last weekend / and em / it has fitness / and it says you don't need y'know someone to teach you / to help you in the gym / you can kinda do it by yourself /*
> *(...)*
> *LMA EM 1 3: And eh / about half way through the diet / you need to work out / and watch your activities / and make sure you do some exercise*

The student states straight away that it is about a place dedicated to fitness. He justifies this statement by citing elements from the text. It is interesting to note that the pupil links the notion of 'diet', given at the end of the text, with that of 'exercise', given at the start of the text. He firstly looked for the words that he understood in order to link them to words that he did not. He thus compares these unknown words with others in the text. At the end, the pupil uses different words—gym, fitness, diet—to understand the overall meaning ("pieced it together"):

> *LMA EM 1 6: Em / I kinda went over it to pick up all the words I understand / and / I kinda looked at it / to see if everything I get/ with the ones I didn't get / about / y'know in English / what they sounded like / and I pieced it together just from gym and fitness and eh diet and stuff / so I got that*

Finally, two students adopted a bottom-up, linear approach to the text in Irish but a mixed approach to the one in French. These students used individual words to construct meaning and put in place few strategies to overcome unknown items in the text in Irish; however, when reading in French, they began with a thematic summary of the text, read it once to isolate the words they understood then came back to the text once they had read it fully in order to better understand the ideas. We can link this variety in approaches to the perceived difficulty of learning and using Irish for the students. It is interesting to note that they declare that they make little effort to understand unknown words in Irish:

> *Interviewer 38: Is there any way you might try and understand the words?*
> *HE EM 2 39: Em // not really / I wouldn't make as much as an effort with Irish as I would for French*
> *Interviewer 39: Why not?*
> *HE EM 2 40: Cause I prefer French (laughs) / yeah / it's just that Irish is much more difficult than French / saying that they are both difficult subjects // yeah //*

Irish-medium schools

The assessment of reading in Irish showed that while the majority were able to give the main ideas of the text, a number of students provided a list of ideas that were often disjointed and did not attempt to verify that their explanations were coherent. They were indeed able to cite the main ideas but went through the text sentence by sentence, presenting ideas in a haphazard manner, neither attempting to link them to the overall meaning nor testing their coherence in context. They put forward explanations that not only did not make sense but also contradicted each other or the overall meaning. They also emphasized deciphering words rather than use of more global strategies when faced with an unknown.

Taking this as our basis, we can note here four distinct strategy deployment patterns. Firstly, of the nine students who provided coherent explanations for the text in Irish, four put in place a mixed approach to the text in French while the other five students put in place a bottom-up approach. Second, of the nine students whose explanations in Irish were lacking in coherence, seven put in place a bottom-up approach to the text in French while two put in place a mixed approach. We will illustrate here the nature of the mixed and bottom-up approaches adopted by the students, before focusing specifically on the variations in approaches across the two languages.

The students who adopted a bottom-up approach, like those in the English-medium schools, cited the main ideas but went through the text sentence by sentence, presenting ideas in a haphazard manner, neither attempting to link them to the overall meaning nor testing their coherence in context. They put forward explanations that did not make sense, contradicted each other or the overall meaning. They also emphasized deciphering words not use of strategies when faced with an unknown. This can be seen in the approach adopted by MM IM1:

> **MM IM1: Tà sé faoi fhograí gym (halla gleacaíochta)**[13]//
> (It's an Ad for a gym (…) ah / with fitness /// no /)
> (…)MM IM1*: Eh / I don't understand the rest of it /*
> (…)MM IM1*: I just picked up bits in it ///*
> *Interviewer: How did you go about understanding the text?*
> MM IM1*: Em / well I tried to remember all the wo-/ like / there were some that I knew / and then I just / took them / and tried to construct the sentence that I thought was there /*

The student begins by saying that it is an advertisement for a gym, then adds the word fitness, before stating that he does not understand the text. He states that he understood parts of the text and then tried to remember words to construct the meaning of the sentences that he thought were there.

Those who put in place a mixed approach linked elements from the text to the overall meaning, while also focusing on the context and overall meaning of the passage. When faced with the text in French, JM IM1 begins by giving a summary of the text, before evoking the different details given. Instead of listing isolated elements, she presents the context by evoking ideas such as '**sláinte**' (health) and fitness:

> JM IM1: **Tá daoine ag labhairt / em / dul go dtí gym (halla gleacaíochta) agus is féidir leat / em / massage (suathaireacht) a fháil / tá sé go maith i gcóir fitness (aclaíochta) agus sláinte / bíonn (inaudible)**
> (Someone is speaking / em / go to the gym and you can / em / get a massage / it's good for fitness and health / there are (inaudible)
> (…)JM IM1: **An / tá siad ag labhairt mar gheall ar / would you like to do something about your fitness (ar mhaith leat rud éigin a dhéanamh faoi do chorpacmhainn) / ceapaim** (…)

[13] Text in bold is in Irish. All translations are from the author.

> (The / they're talking about / do you want to do something to improve your fitness / I think)
> JM IM1: *Do you eat loads of food during the week? / cause mangé is eat / and semaine is week / and the vous avez / is do you*
> (…)JM IM1: **Faigheann siad like attention really / cad a itheann daoine le linn na seachtaine / do y'know / people are like / oh yeah / ithim a lán bia**
> (They like get the attention really/ what do people eat during the week / do y'know / people are like / ah yeah / I eat a lot of food).

Regarding the students who were able to present a coherent summary of the text in Irish but adopted bottom-up approaches to the text in French, they stated from the start that the text in French was difficult for them, explained that they did not understand the content and declared that they found it difficult to put the different elements of the text together. When speaking about learning French, they had previously highlighted that they felt that it is academic in nature, emphasizing the complexity of the rules, irregular verbs and exceptions. These difficulties may potentially affect their motivation when faced with reading—while they indeed displayed the ability to adopt a mixed approach to reading in Irish, they did not demonstrate this ability when faced with the text in French.

With regard to the two students who gave incoherent explanations when faced with the text in Irish but nonetheless adopted a mixed approach to the text in French, we wish to focus here on one particular student. She firstly noted that she liked learning French but did not feel very good at reading in both Irish and French. Moreover, she was the only student from the Irish-medium schools to display negative attitudes towards Irish and emphasize the complexity of Irish grammar. Her negative self-evaluation in Irish may thus have impacted her ability to read in the language, while her more positive attitudes towards French may have led her to approach the text differently in this language, possibly explaining her mixed approach.

Harnessing previous experience when deploying strategies

We have noted so far patterns of strategy deployment across school-types, along with variations in these patterns and potential explanations for these variations. We now identify ways in which experience with Irish can influence strategy deployment when reading in French. We specifically focus on two students—while the examples given here do not apply to all, they do demonstrate ways in which a previous strategy deployed can be harnessed during reading in a new language.

The most striking element in the discourse of these two students is their awareness of strategy usage when reading in Irish. They speak of using the context and creating a 'picture' from the text. They also highlight that it is not necessary to understand every item in the text straight away and explain that they use various textual elements, such as titles and images, to come up with hypotheses that can be subsequently tested through further reading. Student LMA EM1 for example explains his way of approaching a text in a new language has been influenced by his experience with Irish:

> LMA EM1 95: Yeah / I had a bit of a sense of knowing how to learn / em / understand a language

> (…) LMA EM1 110: Eh / it meant I was kinda used to looking at things like that / that I didn't understand / and kinda thinking I'll get it eventually / I won't understand it straight away / but I'll get it in a while / that I'll get it eventually

He then goes on to describe what his experience with Irish has taught him when reading:

> LMA EM 1 35: I'd know which way it [the word] is being used / and what they're talking about / if they're using it to describe something / I'd see what they use to describe / I'd look at the stuff around it that you do understand / and if you can't pick up anything / you try to / move on and hope to find something that helps you go back to it /
> (…) LMA EM 1 36: I'd go back to it when I'm do / the whole thing / and see / since I understand something after it / I'd go back and see if it helps understand it

Similarly, student RNP IM2 identifies a number of difficulties that she faced in learning French, subsequently explaining strategies that she deploys to counter these difficulties, utilizing her experience with Irish. When confronted with a text in French, the student states that she uses the context and tries to make 'a picture' of the text, while also using the context to make meaning from items she did not understand:

> RNP IM2: **Em / ní féidir i gcónaí é a dhéanamh / ach tá mé in ann sort of context (saghas comhthéacs)/ don fhocal / ach é / muna dtuigim an focal / cuirim ceist ar an múinteoir / nó leanaim ar aghaidh / táim ag freastal ar scoil Gaeilge gach lá ó bhí mé cúig nó sé / ceapaim mar / thuig mé an sliocht / mar cúpla uair / léim é / is féidir é a thuiscint / ní bhíonn tú i gcónaí cinnte ach má dhéanann tú pictiúr / is féidir é a thuiscint / ach tá sé i bhfad níos éasca i nGaeilge nó i bhFraincis**
> (Em / I can't always do it / but I can make a kind of context / from the word / but / if / I don't understand the word / I ask the teacher / or I continue / I've been going to a Gaelscoil since I was 5 or 6 / so I think that / I understand the texts / because a few times / I read it / I can understand it / you're not always sure but you can make a picture from it / you can understand / but it's much easier in Irish than in French)

We thus see here that a limited number of students are aware of the strategies they deploy when learning and using Irish and are able to use them again when faced with a text in French. Such sophisticated metadiscourse on strategy usage, while present, is limited—potential nonetheless exists to promote its use among other students, a point we will develop in the final part of this article.

Discussion

Our findings have allowed us to examine strategy deployment during reading in a foreign language and compare patterns of strategy usage when reading in Irish and in French. We were able to observe generally similar approaches and deployment of similar strategies when reading in each language. It should be noted, however, that we limit findings here to signposting similarities—we do not claim that using particular strategies or approaches to reading in one language automatically leads to similar approaches and strategy usage in another, given that such

correlational analysis is beyond the scope of this work. Interesting variations in approaches and strategy deployment have also been highlighted across languages and potential explanations provided based on data related to language attitudes and motivation. We indeed saw that motivation to learn Irish and French may hinder successful engagement with texts, echoing findings presented in Haukås (2015).

Previous assessment of reading in Irish highlighted issues with strategy deployment, especially use of metacognitive strategies. While we do not know if such issues identified in reading in Irish transferred to reading in French, given that our data do not allow us to make such claims, patterns of strategy deployment do show that students who put in place a bottom-up approach and mainly used cognitive strategies when engaging with the text in Irish were likely to put in place a similar approach and deploy similar strategies when reading in French. This may indicate that difficulties in second-language reading could potentially lead to similar difficulties in subsequent foreign language reading, echoing findings from Schwartz et al. (2007) and Rauch et al. (2012), though such a finding is tentative and requires further investigation.

Evidence for the potential positive influence of previous language experience on strategy deployment during reading in a new language was also put forward, even though this phenomenon was only clearly identifiable among two students in our corpus. This does not mean, however, that such a phenomenon is limited to these two students, nor that other students could not tap into such potential. Different studies have put forward the benefits of multilingual classroom practices (Spinelli, 2017) and strategy instruction (Talebi, 2013) with regard to transfer of reading strategies, two approaches that would allow students here to become aware of strategy usage (Ruiz de Zarobe & Zenotz, 2018) and potentially benefit from the catalytic effect of the move from second to third and subsequent language acquisition (Kemp, 2007; Jessner, 2014).

It should be remembered that the study reported upon here involves a limited number of students from each school, making it difficult to generalize findings beyond these specific participants. We also do not focus on reading strategies in the first language, knowledge of which would allow us to obtain a more complete picture of reading strategy usage among students. Moreover, as explained in the previous section (Study design), caution is necessary when interpreting introspective data. These data only provide a limited perspective on the actual complex processes involved in reading, given that they are based on what students were willing and able to verbalize. Use of prompts may also have led them to focus on elements that they may not have otherwise noted if they had been reading in another situation. Our findings have nonetheless allowed us to explore issues related to foreign language reading through the prism of multilingual language experience, providing a basis to propose practical applications and areas for future research, as detailed in the final section.

Conclusion

We have attempted to show here how adopting a focus-on-multilingualism (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011, 2015) approach to languages in education allows us to investigate how contact with multiple languages can be used as a resource during future language usage. We have thus framed

reading in a foreign language within such a multilingual framework, looking at how students deploy strategies when reading in different languages and harness previous language experience when reading in a new language. As noted in the literature review, while bilingual students appear to deploy a large number and variety of strategies during reading in their second and subsequent languages, issues have been highlighted with regard to awareness of strategies, deployment of metacognitive strategies, levels of literacy in the second language, use of multilingual teaching practices at school and motivation during future language learning and usage

Our findings indicate similar approaches to reading in French among the bilingual students who made up our population, with little difference noted between students in Irish-medium and English-medium schools. The main discrepancy, however, appeared to relate to the manner in which students, irrespective of which school they came from, approached texts and deployed strategies in both languages, especially metacognitive strategies. We were also able to highlight difficulties in engaging with texts and propose potential explanations for such difficulties based on data related to language attitudes and motivation, while evidence was provided that signposts ways in which previous language experience could be used during subsequent foreign language reading and the importance of enabling students to harness resources acquired through previous language contact.

In order to gain a more complete picture of strategy deployment by students, future research could focus on strategies deployed during first language reading and compare them with those identified during reading in subsequent languages. Given the importance of reading in Irish, especially as it is used as a medium of instruction for other subjects in Irish-medium schools, further investigation of reading difficulties is important as these difficulties may hinder not only acquisition of the language but also learning in other subjects; such investigation could also help us better understand potential links highlighted with reading in other languages. Finally, participants here had only been learning French for 2 years—studies looking at students learning the language for longer would allow us better understand how strategy deployment in reading in a foreign language evolves over time and the role of previous language experience in cases of greater exposure to reading in the language.

Beyond our specific focus on reading, a broader move towards a languages-in-education (Beacco, 2017) policy in Ireland (Kirwan, 2020) has led to the recognition of the importance of links that students create during their experiences with language throughout primary, secondary and university education (Bruen, 2019). Incorporating strategy instruction as part of this shift, along with the use of language learning portfolios (Little, 2012, 2016) as reflexive tools, could make students more aware of the strategies they already deploy and help them create links between the languages they encounter. Such a move could enable them to unlock the catalytic effect of bilingual experience, benefit their reading in English, Irish and French and empower them to harness their full potential as multiple language users well beyond their time in education.

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Appendix

The illustrated extracts of strategy usage when reading in French provided in the Results section are based on the text:

Faire de la gym à domicile

Vous avez trop mangé la semaine dernière ? Vous n'avez pas consacré assez de temps au fitness jusqu'à présent ? Vous n'avez pas le temps de vous déplacer en ville ? Vous aimerez perdre du poids avant cet été ? Si vous n'allez pas à votre prof de gym, c'est votre prof qui viendra à vous…Même au bureau ! Cours particuliers, fitness, massage…Et plein de conseils d'entraînement et de diététique

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