

STRATEGIC READING IN MULTIMODAL TEXTS: AN APPLICATION IN EFL

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to discuss strategic reading in multimodal texts, particularly in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms. The article attempts to present an application of reading strategies in multimodal texts, where the written-linguistic mode of meaning is linked with the visual mode to construct meaning. Although there is a bulk of research on reading strategies in EFL, strategic reading is mainly linked with mono-modal texts, where language is the only mode to provide information. However, nowadays students are exposed to an increasing dominance of multimodal texts - both print and digital, such as websites, video games, picture books, texts, magazines, advertisements, and graphic novels- even from an early age- that include a complex interplay of written text, visual images, graphics, and design elements. In this context, the specific paper points out the need for teachers to foster students' ability to retrieve information from these types of texts using reading strategies and taking advantage of all modes of communication available during the meaning-making process. Concomitantly, an example of applying reading strategies in multimodal texts is provided. The pedagogical implications that emerge from this study are further discussed, and the need for further empirical research is highlighted.

Keywords: EFL reading comprehension, reading strategies, strategy instruction, multimodal texts.

1 INTRODUCTION

The rather passive view of reading mainly emphasizing on decoding gave its place to a more modern one, according to which reading is an active interaction between the text and the reader. Foreign language (FL) reading, in particular, is contingent not only on the active participation of the reader in the reading process but on the reader's prior knowledge to construct comprehension ([1], [2]). In this context, comprehension emerges, when the reader develops a variety of reading strategies in language texts, extracts information from the text and combines it with background knowledge ([3]).

Although there is a bulk of English as a foreign language (EFL) studies on reading strategies, strategic reading has mainly been associated with texts, where language is the only mode to provide information. However, nowadays, students are exposed to a number of texts - both print and digital- that include visual and linguistic elements.

The present article intends to explore new ground and contribute to the reading research and multimodality area by highlighting the need to combine strategic reading in multimodal texts, where the linguistic elements are intertwined with the visual ones, to help students construct meaning ([4]). EFL students should be taught to combine the available linguistic and visual elements and, simultaneously, apply reading strategies to derive meaning.

In the following sections, the theoretical framework is set and some examples of strategic reading in multimodal texts are presented in order to help educators reconsider reading instruction and broaden strategic reading beyond texts that are solely consisted of linguistic elements.

2 STRATEGIC READING

In the early 1980s, FL reading research focused on the use of strategies and strategy instruction in order to facilitate learners' reading performance and render them independent readers ([5], [6]). Based on literature, reading strategies are deliberate and conscious actions that are characterized by intentions and selected goals ([7]). Skimming a text to get the main idea, scanning a text for specific information, making contextual guesses about the meanings of unfamiliar words, skipping unknown words, making predictions, rereading, summarizing or activating prior knowledge are some of the

reading strategies ([5]). Strategies can be explicitly taught to make students aware of what, how, when and why they are doing ([8]).

FL reading research has associated successful reading comprehension with the explicit instruction and use of reading strategies ([2]). Drawing on FL literature, proficient readers are active readers that have clear goals in mind for reading and use reading strategies in their attempt to achieve comprehension (e.g. [9], [10], [11]). Thus, strategic reading characterizes expert readers, as it is inextricably linked with 'reading for meaning' ([5]). In fact, Anderson ([9]) highlights that successful FL reading comprehension does not merely rely on the reader's knowledge of what strategy to use but also of how to use it and orchestrate it with other strategies. In this context, FL reading research has demonstrated that training in the use of strategies usually deployed by accomplished readers can help students, especially the weaker ones, improve reading comprehension (e.g. [12], [13]).

3 THE EMERGENCE OF MULTIMODAL TEXTS

Literacy pedagogy, which has been traditionally limited to teaching and learning to read and write in printed and official forms of the national language ([14]), has dominated in the so-called literate Western societies and, in particular, the field of education. In the traditional view, literacy pedagogy focuses on language texts, where language is the only mode of communicating and providing information.

Nonetheless, the technological development, the inauguration of the digital area, the globalization, the cultural and linguistic diversity in contemporary societies, which have brought about changes in people's working, public, and private lives, have all led to reconsider the limits of literacy ([14]). In view of these changes, as new learning needs have arisen, a small group of professional colleagues met in New Hampshire in 1994 to redefine the future of literacy and formulate a new theory, called Multiliteracies. The pedagogy of Multiliteracies focuses on the multifarious integration of the different modes of communication during the meaning-making process, when the written-linguistic mode of meaning is linked with the visual (images, page layouts, screen formats), the gestural (body language), the spatial (environmental and architectural spaces), or the audio mode (music sound effects), requiring a new, multimodal literacy ([15]). The multimodal mode, thus, represents the integration of the various modes of communication that individuals can use to derive meaning during interaction with texts, though one mode may prevail over the rest ([16], [14]).

As a result of the new information technologies and computer-mediated communications, contemporary communication has become highly multimodal moving, particularly, towards the extensive use of the image, while meaning is inevitably derived from ways that are multimodal ([15], [17]). Nowadays, almost all texts consist of visual elements, which in combination with language hold a prominent role in conveying the essential information ([4]). In this context, people, especially youths, are exposed to a variety of multimodal texts, such as video games, websites, picture books, school textbooks, magazine articles, advertisements, and graphic novels- that involve a complex interplay of written text, visual images, graphics, and design elements ([17], [4], [18]).

As a consequence of the above social changes, the field of education, in particular, the teaching and learning of languages has been influenced, as the traditional literacy pedagogy, which emphasizes language as a central means of meaning, has been challenged to expand beyond the skills of encoding and decoding texts ([19]). In this way, educators should draw on the Multiliteracies framework and reconsider their instructional approaches in order to familiarize students, especially, foreign language learners, with the multimodal approach by accentuating the interplay of language and image that are present in conventional and electronic texts ([18]).

4 MULTIMODALITY AND EFL CLASSROOMS

For many years FL classrooms have centered on the development of communicative competence paying, simultaneously, little attention to multimodality ([20], [21]). Some studies have explored the aspect of multimodality in terms of EFL text analysis based on Kress and Van Leeuwen's approach (e.g. [22], [23]), textbook analysis (e.g. [24], [25]), teachers' views (e.g. [26], [27]), and students' interpretations (e.g. [28], [29]); while few studies have investigated the effectiveness of strategic reading in multimodal texts on students' reading performance ([30]). Therefore, there is dearth of research on experimental studies that report training of EFL students in drawing on the combination of linguistic and the visual elements and applying reading strategies in multimodal texts to derive meaning.

Although there is considerable EFL research on reading strategies instruction (e.g. [12], [13]), strategic reading has been associated with texts, where language is deemed as the only way to construct meaning. In this sense, reading strategies instruction and use is mainly linked with language texts ignoring, at the same time, the contribution of the visual mode of communication to the meaning-making process.

5 AN APPLICATION OF STRATEGIC READING IN EFL MULTIMODAL TEXTS

In order to derive meaning from the various language texts, proficient readers develop reading strategies, conscious actions, which contribute to the achievement of goals during text interaction. However, when students deal with multimodal texts, the meaning-making process is different from the one used in language texts. It is more sophisticated or more complex, as the various modes of meaning require different skills on behalf of the readers. In order to construct meaning from multimodal texts, students should be able to take advantage of the combination of the linguistic and visual modes of communication usually available during the meaning-making process and, simultaneously, apply reading strategies, which have been so far linked with language texts. Below some examples of the application of reading strategies, in particular, skimming and scanning, are presented in different types of multimodal texts.

For example, getting the main idea (skimming) or locating specific information (scanning) in a text consisted of tables (see Appendix A) means that students in addition to the linguistic information should allow for the way the various information is organized in vertical columns and horizontal arrows, as tables depict the linguistic information in a visual and condensed way where grammar is usually restricted to bare nominal groups or nouns labelling the various vertical columns and horizontal arrows ([16]). In a similar way, applying skimming in multimodal texts that, besides language, consist of visual information, such as images or diagrams, requires that students should allow for all the available visual devices; concurrently, applying scanning in a diagram depicting the tallest buildings of the world in order to find the tallest building or the second tallest building in the world can be achieved either linguistically, by going through the metres written above each building, or visually, comparing the four buildings that are depicted in the diagram (see Appendix B).

Another typical example of multimodal texts that skimming and scanning can be used is maps, particularly floor maps of various museums (see Appendix C). In these kinds of texts, getting the main idea means that students, after having realised the type of text and having activated prior knowledge, should allow for legends, numbers, and colours that are usually important for the meaning-making process, as they all contribute to conveying information. In addition, locating specific information in a floor map requires that students should combine information from the legends, identify the corresponding number on the map, pay attention to the colours of the various departments of the museum (each department is often depicted by a different colour on the map and the legends); then, students should draw on all these pieces of information to construct meaning. For instance, in order to understand where the various exhibits of a museum are placed on a floor map, students should be able to spot the corresponding number on the map, pay attention to the different colours of each department, and combine the colour with information provided in the legends. In this particular case, the use of colour is critical for the meaning-making process, as it is used to make the different departments distinct, while, at the same time, it contributes to the unity and coherence of these departments ([31]).

All the above texts are some examples of the various types of multimodal texts, where students can take into account both linguistic and visual elements and develop skimming and scanning to construct meaning.

6 DISCUSSION

This paper constitutes an attempt to discuss strategic reading in EFL multimodal texts by presenting an application of reading strategies, such as skimming and scanning, in these types of texts, where the written-linguistic mode of meaning is linked with the visual mode to derive meaning ([4]). Though there is considerable research on the effectiveness of EFL strategies instruction on students' reading performance (e.g. [12], [13]), most of these studies are based on texts, where language is the only mode to communicate and provide information. Manoli and Papadopoulou ([30]) have indicated that teaching students how to use reading strategies in EFL multimodal texts has improved students' ability to derive information from these kinds of texts and their overall reading achievement. Thus, instructing

students to take advantage of both the linguistic and visual resources of contemporary texts and develop reading strategies can assist students, especially EFL students that may confront linguistic deficit ([3]), in comprehending written texts in a more efficient manner. At the same time, the need to broaden strategies instruction beyond language texts has resulted from the fact that children even from an early age receive information in a multimodal way through television, narratives, computers and/or video games. As a consequence of the technological achievement, the texts that students face are becoming increasingly multimodal, where meaning usually resides in the integration of two modes, the linguistic and visual, which may be equivalent or complimentary or even one mode may repeat information depicted in the other ([17]).

In this context, the semantic field of reading comprehension and reading strategy instruction should extend its limits beyond language texts to allow for multimodal texts. Therefore, educators should enhance students' ability to use reading strategies in multimodal texts, which have become part and parcel of our lives, in order to help them identify the main idea or spot specific information, boost their reading performance and render them independent readers.

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APPENDIX A

New7Wonders of the World

Wonder	Date of Construction	Location
Great Wall of China	5th century BCE – 16th century CE	China
Petra	c.100 BCE	Jordan
Christ the Redeemer	Opened 12 October 1931	Brazil
Machu Picchu	c.1450 CE	Peru
Chichen Itza	c.600 CE	Mexico
Colosseum	Completed 80 CE	Italy
Taj Mahal	Completed c.1648 CE	India
Great Pyramid of Giza	Completed c.2560 BCE	Egypt

The Seven Ancient Wonders

Wonder	Date of Construction	Builder	Date of Destruction	Cause of Destruction	Modern Location
Great Pyramid of Giza	2584–2561 BC	Egyptians	Still in existence	Still in existence	Giza Necropolis, Egypt
Hanging Gardens of Babylon	Around 600 BC	Babylonians	After 1st century BC	Earthquakes	Al Hillah, Babil Province, Iraq, or Kouyunjik, Nineveh Province, Iraq
Temple of Artemis at Ephesus	c. 550 BC	Lydians, Persians, Greeks	356 BC (by Herostratus) AD 262 (by the Goths)	Arson by Herostratus, Plundering	near Selçuk, Izmir Province, Turkey
Statue of Zeus at Olympia	466–456 BC (Temple) 435 BC (Statue)	Greeks	5th–6th centuries AD	Fire	Olympia, Greece
Mausoleum of Halicarnassus	351 BC	Carians, Persians, Greeks	AD 1494	The original structure was destroyed by flood.	Bodrum, Turkey
Colossus of Rhodes	292–280 BC	Greeks	226 BC	Earthquake	Rhodes, Greece
Lighthouse of Alexandria	c. 280 BC	Macedonian Empire, (Macedonians, Greeks)	AD 1303–1480	Earthquake	Alexandria, Egypt

APPENDIX B

WONDERS OF THE WORLD

SKYSCRAPER

Petronas Towers

Vital Statistics:

Location: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Completion Date: 1998

Cost: \$ 1.6 billion

Height: 1, 483 feet

Stories: 88

Materials: Concrete, Steel

Facing Materials: Aluminum, Stainless Steel

Engineer(s): Thornton-Tomasetti and Ranhill Bersekutu



Until 1998, the world's tallest skyscraper had always been in the United States. But that year, Malaysia's Petronas Towers laid claim to this distinction.



Squeaking past the Chicago Sears Tower by 33 feet, the spires atop the Petronas Towers peak at an impressive 1,483 feet. Yet there's a controversy. The highest occupied floor in the Sears Tower is actually 200 feet higher than the top floor of the Petronas Towers, and its antennae stretch higher still.

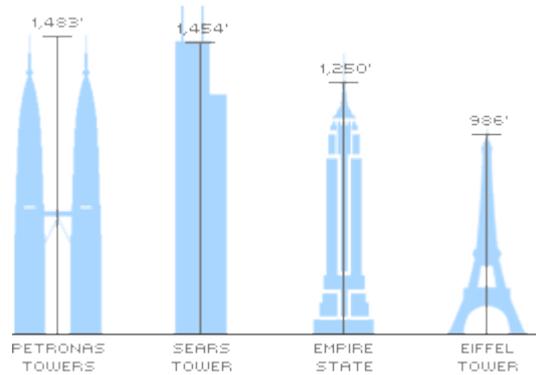
So why are the Petronas Towers considered the world's tallest buildings? According to the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, spires count, but antennae don't. Spires do not contain floors, but they are counted in the world's tallest building race for one architectural reason: they're nice to look at.

Built over a former racetrack, the Petronas Towers reflect a unique blend of religion and economic prosperity. The \$1.6 billion towers contain more than eight million square feet of shopping and entertainment facilities, underground parking for 4,500 cars, a petroleum museum, a symphony hall, a mosque, and a multimedia conference center.

Each tower's floor plan forms an eight-pointed star, a design inspired by traditional Malaysian Islamic patterns. The 88-story towers, joined by a flexible skybridge on the 42nd floor, have been described as two "cosmic pillars" spiraling endlessly towards the heavens.

Here's how this skyscraper stacks up against the biggest skyscrapers in the world.

(height, in feet)



Fast Facts:

- The Petronas Towers were featured in the blockbuster movie *Entrapment*, starring Sean Connery and Catherine Zeta-Jones.
- It took 36,910 tons of steel to build the Petronas Towers. That's heavier than 3,000 elephants!
- It takes 90 seconds to travel from the basement parking lot to the top of each tower.
- Together, the towers have 32,000 windows. It takes window washers an entire month to wash each tower just once!

APPENDIX C

Levels 0 (Tunnel Entrance) and 1 (Street Entrances)

Level 1 (Street Entrances)	
ASIA	Rooms
China	44, 47e
The U.T. Tsui Gallery	
Islamic Middle East	42
The Jameel Gallery	
Japan	45
The Toshiba Gallery	
Korea	47g
The Samsung Gallery	
Sculpture	17-20
The Robert H.N. Ho Family Foundation Gallery	
South Asia	41
The Nehru Gallery	
South-East Asia	47a-c
EUROPE	Rooms
Cast Courts	46a
Medieval & Renaissance	50a-50d
1350-1600	
Raphael	48a
Sculpture	16a, 26-27
1300-1600	
MATERIALS & TECHNIQUES	Rooms
Fashion	40
Reopens spring 2012	
Sculpture	21-24
The Dorothy and Michael Hintze Galleries	

EXHIBITIONS	
Postmodernism: Style and Subversion 1970-1990 (24 September 2011 - 15 January 2012)	The Porter Gallery
Power of Making (6 September 2011 - 2 January 2012)	The Porter Gallery

FACILITIES	
Bookshop	
Café	Morris, Gamble & Poynter Rooms
Cloakroom	
Exit to Cromwell Road	
Exit to Exhibition Road	
Garden	The John Madejski Garden
Garden Café	
Gift Shop	
Information	
Meeting Point	
Membership	
Tickets	
Toilets	

