Language Awareness in the Teaching of Reading and Writing

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Introduction

Reading and writing are highly complex and multidimensional processes (Bernhardt, 2005; Finkbeiner, 2005). Due to their multifaceted nature, learners’ challenges can likewise be manifold. On the teachers’ part, diagnostic competencies are indispensable and need to be aligned with an adequate amount of awareness of the kinds and nature of the potential challenges as well as with knowledge of suitable support actions and ways to implement them (cf. Finkbeiner, Knierim, Smasal and Ludwig, 2012; Finkbeiner and Schluer, 2014, submitted).

While reading and writing clearly make differing demands on language users, the two constructs can be considered as two sides of the same coin, as both deal with written communication, albeit from different perspectives. Especially in the US-American context, they are merged into one construct, namely that of literacy. The International Literacy Association (ILA, 2016b) defines literacy as “the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, compute, and communicate using visual, audible, and digital materials across disciplines and in any context”. Through literacy, people are empowered to communicate and interact with each other and achieve personal and professional self-fulfillment. For this reason, Finkbeiner (2006: 5) considers literacy as “a human right” and an “important pre-conditio[n] for democracy”, both in one’s first language(s) and in additional language(s).

Literacy development also has to be seen in the framework of lifelong learning. It is highly situated (Finkbeiner, 2005), constantly changing (Rosenblatt, 2013) and important for private and professional life. In today’s age, young people do more reading and writing than ever before. Wireless network connections have provided people with internet access in previously non-accessible areas and digitalization has spread across the globe (cf. ILA, 2016a). This has made reading and writing more complex, social and dynamic, and puts new demands on the readers and writers. As Pennington (2003: 287) outlines, electronic media “chang[e] the way we interact with information and with each other”.

Just as the concepts of reading, writing and literacy are changing with sociocultural developments and exigencies, also the skills they demand change over time and call
for adjustments in instructional practices. In that respect, awareness can be seen as a catalyst for learners, teachers and researchers, as it helps them to continuously consider and potentially challenge existent practices and enhance learning (Svalberg, 2007: 295). Yet, true explorations of reading, writing and literacy from the perspective of language awareness are still rare. Therefore, the present approach will be a bottom-up one, starting with a review of different phases and models of the reading and writing process to identify the types of awareness that are relevant for each of them. On that basis, various suggestions for practical applications and for future studies will be provided.

Review of Prior Research

This section will discuss models of the reading and the writing process as well as the relationships between them. This will help pinpoint the types of awareness that are conducive for each of them. Special consideration will be paid to the particularities of bi- and multilingual readers and writers.

Models of the Reading Process

Reading comprehension is a highly complex interactive and constructive process (Finkbeiner, 2005: 262–263) that consists of unique interactions between reader, writer, text and context (cf. Rosenblatt, 2013). Accordingly, the interpretation of a text will never be the same due to the changing constellations of personal, situational, social, cultural and experiential variables (Rosenblatt, 2013). This dynamic and highly “situated” (Finkbeiner, 2005: 106, 471) nature of the reading process mandates a high degree of flexibility from the readers, including their “ability to vary reading styles and strategies and adjust them to the reading purpose and type of text” (Koryakovtseva, 2013: 584, with reference to the Common European Framework of Reference of the Council of Europe, 2001).

Through an interactive interplay of top-down and bottom-up processes, textual meaning is constructed against the readers’ prior linguistic and experiential background (cf. e.g. the review by Schluer, 2017). These two major knowledge stores of language and world knowledge can be accessed and utilized via a range of processing strategies and control mechanisms (cf. Birch, 2007: 3). Accordingly, Ruddell and Unrau’s (2013) reading model consists of the two major components of (a) prior knowledge and beliefs and (b) knowledge use and control. The various kinds of knowledge comprise, for example, personal, linguistic and world knowledge of the declarative, procedural and conditional type (see also Finkbeiner, 2005: 263). Processing strategies include, for instance, purpose-setting, planning, monitoring, inferencing and elaborating, and can be clustered into the three major types of cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective strategies (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990). This leads us to the affective side of reading. Here, the readers’ interests, goals, motivations and attitudes towards reading in general and concrete texts in particular are decisive, as well as their socioculturally shaped assumptions and beliefs about literacy (cf. Finkbeiner, 2005; Ruddell and Unrau, 2013).

Teachers adopt a critical role when engaging students cognitively and affectively in the reading process and helping them move from the literal and propositional to the situational level of meaning construction (Finkbeiner, 2005, referring to van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983). They make plans and decisions on what and how to instruct their students and possess a specific range of teaching strategies. In that regard, awareness
is key because teachers hold certain expectations regarding the reading outcomes and construct their own interpretation of the text based on their prior linguistic and life experience, which does not necessarily match those of the students (cf. Ruddell and Unrau, 2013: 1039–1047). While the driving force of reading is the quest for meaning (cf. Ruddell and Unrau, 2013: 1016), meaning construction is done from a different perspective in the writing process, as will be discussed next.

Models of the Writing Process

Just as with reading, writing is a complex process of meaning construction in which learners draw on their prior linguistic-experiential repertoire of social, cultural, personal and situational factors which together make up their past experience (cf. Rosenblatt, 2013: 930). Cognitively, a host of strategies needs to be concerted in an oftentimes arduous process. So, apart from cognitive conditions, affective factors need to be accounted for, such as the frustration, satisfaction and self-expression writers can experience, the perseverance they require in weaving together a textual end-product, the handling of feedback they might obtain on their texts, as well as the various possibilities of transmitting beliefs and convictions through texts. While the textual product often appears like a linear and hierarchically organized chain of words, sentences and paragraphs, it simultaneously constitutes “a complex textual web” below the visible surface (cf. Pogner, 2013: 778). It commonly results from a multi-staged writing process (Coffin et al., 2003: 34):

1. pre-writing: brainstorming, note-taking, idea generation and collection etc.
2. planning: organizing ideas through e.g. mind-mapping, clustering or listing and setting a focus
3. drafting: writing an initial draft by devising a particular structure and elaborating on ideas
4. reflection: leaving time to think about one’s writing
5. peer/tutor/teacher feedback: obtaining feedback from others
6. revision: integrating feedback by clarifying certain aspects or revising the structure of the text
7. final editing and proofreading: eliminating surface-level mistakes, checking consistency.

Based on the feedback one has obtained, additional research and idea generation might become necessary, which can cause another processing loop of planning, drafting, reflecting and revising. At virtually every stage of the writing process, prior stages may be revisited, so that the writing process is anything but linear. By raising awareness of the spiral-like nature of the writing process, teachers can help take the pressure from learners to produce a ‘perfect’ end-result at first try.

Furthermore, if teachers draw students’ attention to specific text conventions, learners can use them as an orientation while realizing that writing offers room for creative potential to unfold. Especially if writers have the opportunity to draw on their multilingual and multicultural resources, novel text products can result, which in turn can be explored from a language awareness and cultural awareness perspective. Likewise, critical awareness of genre expectations and institutional standards may help students discover and seize the niches to express their own identity in writing (cf. Schmidt and...
Finkbeiner, 2006; Finkbeiner and Lazar, 2015) and possibly stir further reflection on guidelines which may require revision or become obsolete (see Wallace’s chapter on critical literacy in this volume).

Adopting such a dynamic and constructive view of writing is important in view of recent technological advancements and societal developments which change the way we read and write. However, as Pogner (2013: 777) deplores, “socio-cultural, -political and interactional aspects” have not been considered thoroughly in research on L2 writing.

**Reading and Writing in Different Languages: Bi- and Multilingual Perspectives**

Different languages make different demands on the readers and writers. Across the many thousands of languages of the world, three major types of writing system can be distinguished, which are the logographic, syllabic and alphabetic system (e.g. Birch, 2007: 15–24). In the present chapter, the focus will be set on the alphabetic writing system and the L2 English, though it should be acknowledged that learners with extensive prior experience in a strikingly different writing system are likely to be confronted with additional challenges when learning a target language with an alphabetic writing system.

In general, L2 readers and writers are faced with the merits and perils of drawing on resources from other languages (cf. Grabe, 2003: 243). The manifold transfer possibilities can speed up the learning process if aspects of the target language and previously known languages are perceived as related and if learners can skillfully exploit this relationship, e.g. through cognate awareness on the one hand and awareness of false friends on the other hand (Schluer, 2017). These cross-linguistic similarities and differences can exist at virtually any level of linguistic analysis, such as phonology, orthography, morphology (e.g. affixes and to a lesser extent multi-word units), semantics (e.g. a word’s polysemy), syntax, pragmatics and discourse structure/text organization, but also at the level of concepts and conceptual structures (cf. the review by Jarvis and Pavlenko, 2008). Lexical concepts, for instance, refer to the images, schemata and scripts people connect to individual lexical items, whereas grammatical concepts pertain to e.g. number, tense, aspect or gender and the way they are expressed in a language (Paradis, 2000: 23–24). In that regard, cultural conflict can occur if learners draw on L1 concepts and schemata that differ from the ones in L2 (Finkbeiner, 2005; Finkbeiner and Schluer, 2014, submitted; Schluer, 2017).

Furthermore, transfer of strategies is possible, which can both impede or expedite the learning process (cf. Grabe and Stoller, 2011). For example, if two languages pose different constraints on the order of words in a sentence, both reading and writing can be adversely affected. The teachers’ task then is to transform potential hindrances into learning opportunities through raising the students’ awareness in linguistic, conceptual and strategic terms. In light of the power of learners’ prior knowledge, teachers therefore do not only need to bear characteristics of the target language in mind, but also to recognize the linguistic and non-linguistic resources learners bring to the L2 classroom (cf. Schluer, 2017).

In view of the growing multilingualism in today’s world, the diversifying classroom, and the growing digital learning experience, it no longer seems sufficient for language teachers to be competent in the target language, but rather to develop a critical awareness of the often-hidden multilingual nature of foreign language classrooms as well as of the intricate nature of media. In this respect, heightened sensitivity to and curiosity regarding the ways in which languages, language varieties and dialects on the one hand
as well as learners and learning situations on the other hand differ can be a useful starting point and catalyst for continuous teacher development.

To establish a sound basis for pedagogy and teacher education, research likewise needs to adopt a multilingual stance and thoroughly study L2, L3 and Ln perspectives on reading and writing (Finkbeiner and White, 2017). Yet, the particularities of both L2 reading and L2 writing have been neglected for a long time (see for example the review by Bernhardt, 2000: 796, as well as by Erler and Finkbeiner, 2007, on reading, and the review by Matsuda, 2003: 16, on writing). Instead, approaches and paradigms from L1 research have been applied to L2 contexts, and the unique characteristics of L2 reading and L2 writing have only been gradually recognized. In particular, “the role of cross-cultural expectations and assumptions for reading comprehension and writing performance” (Grabe, 2003: 252) needs to be studied further as well as the impact of the growing multilinguality and multiculturality on literacy processes and products. An important response to this claim can be seen in Blackledge’s (2009) research on discourse and power in a multilingual world. He investigates linguistic resources as linguistic capital, the roles of the social world and the state as well as the notions of citizenship and ideologies. These topics are crucial in super-diverse societies.

**Relationships Between Reading and Writing**

Grabe (2003: 243) highlights that usually the impact of reading on writing is studied rather than the effect of writing on reading. Overall, however, reading and writing can be seen as mutually supportive (Grabe, 2003: 249–250) since both draw on the learners’ linguistic and experiential repertoire and are shaped by numerous personal, social, cultural and situational factors (cf. Rosenblatt, 2013: 930). As they look at written communication from two different perspectives, the ability to change perspective becomes an important skill for both readers and writers. In order to adopt each other’s stance, awareness of the historical situatedness, cultural load, linguistic particularities and stylistic features of a text is crucial. Furthermore, awareness of the different purposes of reading and writing is helpful. For example, writing is not only a means to transmit information, but also to express one’s identity and find out about one’s own self in order to understand others, such as in the ABCs model of cultural understanding and communication (Schmidt and Finkbeiner, 2006; Finkbeiner and Lazar, 2015). Yet, writing is often severely constrained by institutional requirements regarding form, language, style and content. Consequently, writing is not just a matter of free choice, but the range of options is restricted by official standards and regulations as well as unstated paradigms of being comprehensible to others. Therefore, critical awareness of the choices and restrictions is crucial on the writers’ part, and critical awareness of the writers’ implicit messages is also critical on the readers’ side (cf. Grabe, 2003: 256). Likewise, readers need to realize that they adopt a selective stance when approaching a text, i.e. focus on certain aspects but neglect others (Rosenblatt, 2013: 931–932). Thus, texts could be understood and used differently when having a different goal in mind, or when reading the text at a different point in time or from another perspective. This is in line with the constructive and situated nature of comprehension (Finkbeiner, 2005).

While both readers and writers are involved in the meaning construction process, there is one crucial difference. Readers are faced with symbols on a page, whereas writers face a blank page (cf. Rosenblatt, 2013: 938). As compared to reading, writing
therefore seems to make additional demands on the learners and may require partially different types of awareness, as will be explained next.

**Types of Awareness Relevant for Reading**

The significance of changing perspective implies that awareness of the functions, processes and products of reading and writing can be beneficial for readers and writers alike. Based on prior reading research, three major kinds of competencies were identified that draw on the following knowledge sources (cf. e.g. Nagy, 1997; Nold and Rossa, 2007; Schluer, 2017):

1 linguistic knowledge,
2 world knowledge,
3 strategic knowledge.

Each of these competencies is multidimensional in nature. First, linguistic knowledge relates to various lexical, grammatical and co-textual elements. Second, world knowledge refers to extra-textual, non-linguistic knowledge pertaining to the topic of a text as well as more general background knowledge. Third, strategic (cognitive, metacognitive or socio-affective) knowledge is relevant at each step of the reading process. The various facets and knowledge sources interact with each other in concrete learning situations. Even on the level of single lexical items or constructions, all three of them become relevant. To illustrate this with an example from the ADEQUA study (Finkbeiner et al., 2012), linguistic (lexical) knowledge of the item *mobile home* requires compound awareness, world knowledge presupposes conceptual awareness in that it appears to be a typically US-American phenomenon, and strategic knowledge may involve looking up the word in a dictionary or corpus in order to detect its meaning and typical contexts of use (Finkbeiner and Schluer, 2014, submitted; Schluer, 2017). Simple one-to-one translations are not useful, as they will not convey the cultural load of the word. For instance, the German translation *Wohnwagen* does not evoke the image of trailer parks and permanent residence, but rather triggers associations of using a large vehicle for temporary living during travel and vacation (Finkbeiner and Schluer, 2014, submitted; Schluer, 2017). Even the term ‘large vehicle’ in the German context would not compare to what would be considered a ‘large vehicle’ in the US-American context. Here, we discern a close link between language and culture on the level of words and the importance of looking beyond the lexical surface of a text (Schluer, 2017). For in-depth comprehension, readers’ awareness of the conceptual depth of texts therefore needs to be sharpened (see for example van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983, for an early conceptualization of different levels of discourse processing; and see also the chapter by Malmkjær on translation in this volume).

From a schema-theoretic lens, a distinction between content, formal and linguistic schemata has frequently been made (e.g. Ketchum, 2006: 23). Schemata refer to abstract and dynamically evolving cognitive structures based on prior experience against which new input (such as through reading) is matched (cf. the review by Schluer, 2017). Linguistic schemata exist for various aspects of lexical and grammatical knowledge; content schemata refer to knowledge of the world, people, objects, situations etc.; and formal schemata pertain to the structure of texts across different text types. This
knowledge of genres and their typical organizational patterns might not only expedite the reading experience, but also the writing process.

**Types of Awareness Relevant for Writing**

As with reading, awareness of linguistic, conceptual and strategic aspects is crucial, paired with awareness of the writing process, its functions and products. Awareness of the readers’ perspective can be conducive to producing a text that is comprehensible to others. This includes a consideration of the readers’ lexical, grammatical and strategic resources and their topic-related knowledge. Of course, not all readers can be anticipated by writers. However, by orienting towards certain text conventions at the lexical, grammatical and discourse level, readers and writers may ease mutual communication. In L2 writing in particular, learners should be made aware of the fact that not only lexical and grammatical aspects will differ, but also conventions regarding form and style, and that the content knowledge of readers in another language might diverge, especially in cultural terms (see for example Finkbeiner, 2005).

Similar to the challenges translators face, it will be difficult to transport a ‘local’ topic to another context and language, as the required background knowledge might be missing among the new readership. Therefore, additional explanation may become necessary to achieve comprehension. Hence, in addition to language awareness, cultural awareness is indispensable because both reading and writing are culturally embedded and culturally coined (cf. for example Finkbeiner and Fehling, 2006). Culture has an impact on both the form and content of a text, even at the level of the individual words and grammatical structures (see the recent review by Schluer, 2017). Sensitivity to these aspects is not only essential when analyzing the products of writing, but also during the writing process itself. Besides, awareness of the different functions of writing can be beneficial. Writing can be a means of empowerment, argumentation and manipulation (Blackledge, 2009). Writers might signal their affiliation to particular social or cultural groups by purposefully selecting certain expressions or constructions. They may demonstrate their knowledge through texts or use writing as a means of thinking and structuring their thoughts. Likewise, writing can help people deal with their emotions, e.g. by writing down their joy and frustration. This way, happiness might be shared or anger might be alleviated, such as through blog entries. Furthermore, a diary entry or a personal letter could be written that will never be sent to any receiver or that will only be read decades later and posthumously, such as with the last will.

Writing can also be used as a means of self-expression, for which several strategies of creative writing might be employed and existing linguistic standards and non-linguistic conventions can be infringed. Through creative writing, linguistic innovations and new conventions might be induced, which illustrates the dynamics of language and the power writers have to re-invent writing itself. (See the chapter by Hall in this volume.) If writers are aware of the constraints and external demands on writing on the one hand and of the opportunities writing offers on the other hand, they may not only position themselves through writing but also influence others, as in political discourse or advertising. A most extreme example of writing for self-expression would be the invention of a new language which would only be shared by a few selected people or just be known by the inventor. This writing phenomenon is labelled as a psychosis according to Lacan language psychologists. The private language in such cases would be used to protect the private self (cf. Matussek, 1993).
To avoid abuse of power, awareness of ethical standards in reading and writing definitely need to be developed (cf. the power domain of language awareness; James and Garrett, 1992). This ethical dimension should be highlighted in the teaching of writing and constitutes a multidimensional endeavor. It refers to the selection of adequate sources and their appropriate use and entails awareness of the form and function of references as well as their correct implementation in order to avoid plagiarism (cf. Grabe, 2003: 257). It also includes awareness of which way of adducing sources might have the best impact regarding one’s writing goal. Moreover, it pertains to the gender-sensitive and non-discriminatory use of language and a balanced presentation of facts. If this is not entirely possible, writers should at least demonstrate awareness of the limitations of the account they have presented through writing.

While this survey might not be fully exhaustive due to the scarcity of prior research, it definitely underlines the importance of raising awareness of writing processes and the choices and decisions that need to be made throughout that process (Rosenblatt, 2013: 938).

Domains of Language Awareness and their Relevance for Reading and Writing

James and Garrett (1992) defined the scope of language awareness with the help of the five domains called cognitive, affective, social, power and performance (see also Garrett and Cots, 2013: 384, for explanations). Each dimension is relevant to reading and writing.

First, reading and writing as complex cognitive processes can be propelled through awareness of linguistic (lexical, grammatical), conceptual (topic, domain, world knowledge), and strategic aspects (when to use which strategy and for what purpose).

Second, the affective domain has to do with the emotional side of text as well as attention, interests and attitudes with respect to certain topics represented through texts (Finkbeiner, 2005; Pliska, 2016).

Third, from a social point of view, the growing multilingual and diversified society needs to be acknowledged, which offers huge potential for the production and reception of texts in numerous languages, but also modalities (Finkbeiner, 2011). In that regard, text production and reception in the braille alphabet and other ways of making content accessible (e.g. web content) need to be borne in mind. Moreover, so-called minority languages and other languages that are becoming increasingly important, particularly due to the on-going migration, need to be considered from a social and affective perspective. In view of these multilingual and multimodal options, intercomprehension strategies become crucial (cf. Doyé and Meißner, 2010; see also applications below).

Besides, there is a clear link to the power domain, as lacking knowledge of a language may render information inaccessible. Furthermore, readers and writers have to learn that language is a powerful device that can be discriminating and manipulative (cf. James and Garrett, 1992; Blackledge, 2009). Writers should therefore be sensitive to the impact that their texts can have on particular audiences and align their language and the text contents accordingly. Readers, in turn, need to develop critical awareness of the manipulative power of texts and of implicit messages hidden behind the textual surface (e.g. Blackledge, 2009; and see also the chapter by Bartlett et al. in this volume).

Finally, the performance domain is based on the assumption that heightened awareness of one’s linguistic resources improves mastery of them (cf. James and Garrett, 1992). As both reading and writing are multi-component processes, the resources are
manifold and stretch over a continuum of implicit to explicit knowledge regarding the processes and products of both reading and writing. However, we also face a competence-performance dilemma: Most proficiency schemes are defined according to concrete competence levels despite the fact that competence can only be inferred from the actual performance. Yet, learners’ competence can exceed their level of actual performance on the one hand, and on the other hand, learners can perform pretty well in a particular situation even though they cannot be considered as truly competent. This is a tremendous challenge for literacy assessment. Apart from that, most testing and assessment procedures adopt a deficit-oriented stance, which means that educators count mistakes and conclude from the superficial and countable to the depth and uncountable. While the language awareness movement has started to counteract this trend (Hawkins, 1996: 97), a change in the mindset of all language professionals will naturally take a lot more time, particularly in the context of high-stake testing boards and admission procedures. Research efforts and suggestions for viable alternatives to traditional testing and assessment are therefore necessary (Finkbeiner, 2012).

**Methods Used**

The processes of writing and especially of reading are largely invisible to the outside observer (cf. Finkbeiner, 2005: 422). To gain clues about them, diverse methods and methodologies have been employed by researchers and practitioners. They include case studies, content analysis, corpus research, discourse and document analysis, epistemological and historical studies, observation methods, survey research, questionnaires and tests, neuroimaging, experimental designs, video-based approaches, correlation analyses, meta-analyses, narrative approaches, verbal protocols, introspection methods like think-alouds and diaries, retrospection such as stimulated recall and interviews with individuals, pairs or focus groups, ethnographic research in general and virtual ethnography specific to digital contexts plus various mixed-method designs (see for example the edition by Duke and Mallette, 2011; see also Dillon, O’Brien and Heilman, 2013: 1113–1118, on reading methods, and Polio, 2003: 38–39, as well as Hyland, 2016: 117–121, on writing methods). This variety of approaches, perspectives and methods has turned out to be conducive to the study of the multifaceted phenomena of reading, writing and literacy (cf. Dillon et al., 2013; Hyland, 2016; Polio, 2003). Likewise, different instructional approaches might be fruitfully combined in teaching practice. For instance, Pogner (2013: 778) identified four major instructional approaches, which are expressive-creative, communicative-functional, cognitive and genre approaches to writing. This mirrors the different characterizations of and views on writing, which Hyland (2016: 122–123) summarizes as follows: Writing is a situated, cognitive, expressive, ideological and social activity.

A single method can be used for a variety of purposes. For example, corpora fulfill important functions in the study of written language. They can give insight into target-language use and learners’ challenges as well as ways of solving them. With regard to English, the two major corpora, the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), offer the opportunity for researchers, teachers and learners to study authentic texts and a host of linguistic phenomena. Furthermore, corpora of newspapers and online magazines, dictionaries, books and films can be useful resources for the study of situated written language. For instance, one may investigate the typical contexts in which particular words are used and
gain insight about register and genre variation. Moreover, a comparison of the two corpora and selected items helps explore different varieties of English and aspects of linguistic and cultural variation (cf. Schluer, 2017).

Apart from target-language corpora, learner corpora can provide valuable clues about L2 learners’ linguistic challenges and their given or lacking awareness regarding target-language features. They thus offer great potential for teacher education, as Finkbeiner and Schluer (2014, submitted) have shown. The two researchers re-implemented a video corpus on EFL reading in teacher education seminars at university to raise prospective teachers’ strategic, conceptual and lexical awareness with respect to L2 learners’ reading processes by means of collaborative peer video analysis. The data corpus stemmed from the ADEQUA project (see for example Finkbeiner et al., 2012), which investigated the Adequacy of learning strategy use and teacher support actions (full project title). To inquire into the usually silent process of reading comprehension (cf. Finkbeiner, 2005), collaborative strategic reading tasks and a complex stimulated recall design (Gass and Mackey, 2000) were employed, which incited the L2 learners to talk about their comprehension of authentic texts written in the target language English. In the original study, the focus was set on the identification and investigation of the adequacy of reading strategies and teachers’ support actions. In the first part of the project, ADEQUA I, it was found that students used many different strategies; however, the proportion of metacognitive strategies was relatively small, compared to the use of cognitive strategies. Similarly, in the second part, ADEQUA II, the researchers observed that “the use of metacognitive strategies on the students’ part [was] just as rare as the teachers’ elicitation or facilitation of metacognitive strategies” (Finkbeiner et al., 2012: 75). In total, only 6% of all teacher support actions were of the metacognitive type, i.e. involved metacognitive reflection to help raise readers’ awareness of how they approached their comprehension problems (Finkbeiner et al., 2012: 73). This low proportion of metacognitive strategies on the learners’ part and of metacognitive reflection on the teachers’ part points to the urgent need to raise awareness among teachers and students to enhance the learning outcome.

Practical Applications: Awareness-based Reading and Writing Approaches

Language awareness and cultural awareness play an important role in language learning contexts, which are becoming more and more complex due to diversity and other factors (Finkbeiner and White, 2017). Many teachers have to teach learner groups who often have a background that differs from their own (Schmidt and Finkbeiner, 2006). This calls for linguistically sensitive and culturally responsive learning and teaching methods.

One way to elicit readers’ awareness with respect to, for example, unequal linguistic power relations underlying texts is the Human GPS approach (Finkbeiner, 2009, 2011). Human GPS transfers the GPS functions from car and mobile technology to human learning and perception and adopts a multi-perspective approach. For a GPS device, at least three satellites are needed to feed into the system. Only then will it function and one will be able to locate a vehicle or a person. In analogy, Human GPS uses at least three different sources on the same topic (Finkbeiner, 2009, 2011). These sources have to be of the same quality and genre and can be multilingual. For example, if teachers
want their students to critically look at the hidden manipulative power of the media on a certain topic, such as the presidential elections in the USA, one would take at least three different newspapers of the same quality and from the same time and would encourage the students to compare them: Are any metaphors used and what is their function? How can the adjectives, adverbs, verbs and nouns be categorized on a continuum from neutral to emotional? Are pronouns used and are they inclusive or exclusive (we, us versus they, them)? The analyses will be based on the textual evidence and focus on the underlying effects.

From a writing perspective, this activity can be reversed. The learners would be divided into at least three groups. The three groups would be given three different instructions. Write a newspaper article in which (a) candidate A will be favoured and B will be negatively portrayed, (b) the two candidates A and B will equally and neutrally be portrayed, (c) candidate B will be favoured and A will be negatively portrayed. Depending on the learner group, the approach can be top-down or bottom-up: i.e. theory would either be provided at the beginning or yielded from the results at the end.

While the comparison of different perspectives is a central means to heighten awareness, also collaborative reading and writing tasks are useful as they can lead to metatalk and stimulate deeper reflection on language as well as on reading and writing processes. Modern technologies allow for an abundance of cooperative formats, such as cooperative web writing (cf. Dougherty and O'Donnell, 2015). Cooperative writing, as in the creation of wikis, “permit[s] constructive cross-fertilization of the reading and writing (and speech) processes” (Rosenblatt, 2013: 948). This can happen through teacher-student dialogue and student-student collaboration (Rosenblatt, 2013: 948). According to Rosenblatt (2013: 948–949), peer reading and peer discussion can foster metalinguistic skills and awareness. This is evidenced by the ADEQUA study (Finkbeiner et al., 2012) in which collaborative reading formats, such as Click and Clunk, were used (cf. e.g. Klingner and Vaughn, 1998). In this approach, students collaboratively solved reading obstacles and reflected on them. In addition, the stimulated recall which directly followed the collaborative task often led to enhanced metacognition.

Another method which aims at eliciting metacognitive strategy use is the Sponge Method (Finkbeiner, 2005). This method has been designed to foster effective reading and consists of the following steps. The first step is to reduce information. Texts are compared to sponges that are filled with water. Water in this case is a metaphor for text information. Learners first need to learn to reduce the water load by pressing out most of the water and only keeping the most important drops. This is done by chunking and so, readers need to learn how to filter out the most important keywords or core ideas.

When the Sponge Method was first developed (Finkbeiner, 2005), Miller’s (1956) formula of chunking (7 plus/minus 2: maximum 9 chunks, minimum 5 chunks) was applied. In the meanwhile, this has been further reduced because better effects will be yielded if the maximum of chunks is between 3 and 5 chunks only. After the reduction phase is completed, the students have to metaphorically drain the sponge in new water. They elaborate on the chunked information by relating the information to other sources, such as other texts or prior knowledge, for example.

The Sponge Method draws on evidence from several reading studies (Finkbeiner, 2005; Finkbeiner et al., 2012). The studies showed that elaboration strategies were rarely used by 9th-grade readers, but if used they were highly effective and led to deep-level
reading. This is why the Sponge Method (Finkbeiner, 2005) was developed as a method combining metacognition with cognitive strategy use with the goal of actively promoting the activation of elaboration strategies. It was also successfully implemented for the secondary school setting by Olson (2017) in her doctoral research on collaborative reading of homogeneous versus heterogeneous groups.

The reduction of information is one of several important reading strategies of which learners need to be made aware. Particularly at the beginning stages of learning to read, teachers and learners alike need to recognize that different brain processes are involved in the two different reading modes of reading out aloud versus reading silently. As reading out aloud requires more time, short-term memory effects come into play. This means that what was read at the beginning might not be remembered at the end, and so the construction of text cohesion can become very difficult. Moreover, reading out aloud requires motor actions to complement the cognitive activities and is thus more complex than silent reading. Especially beginning and insecure readers tend to strongly focus their attention on correctly pronouncing the words so that meaning might be neglected or even lost. This process can be further complicated, due to the various mappings between letters and sounds in different languages (see for example Grabe and Stoller, 2011: 288).

In that respect, phonics is a method that focuses on the analogy of typical letter-sound combinations. It aims at teaching learners to read and pronounce words by learning the sounds of letters, letter groups and syllables systematically. In English and German, for example, there is no one-to-one relationship between phonemes and graphemes. Yet while for the ‘standard’ language the phoneme-grapheme relation tends to be more regular and thus more reliable, the diversity of the phoneme-grapheme mappings is even greater if we consider the diversity of dialects. This is why children speaking dialect already go through a first natural bilingualism as they have to acquire two different phonemic systems of the same lexical item, for example. Another challenge lies in the fact that different languages, such as German and English, draw on different inventories of phonemes and graphemes altogether. While the English language draws on 44 phonemes and 26 letters (Tunmer and Bowey, 1984: 157), German has the additional letters <ä>, <ö>, <ü> and <ß> and draws on a partly different inventory of phonemes than English does. Furthermore, the mapping between graphemes and phonemes is a different one. Therefore, not only negative transfer from the dialect to the standard language may occur, but also from one standard language to another. Consequently, awareness of the different grapheme-phoneme mappings is crucial and can be fostered through different ways of teaching phonics: a) with an analytic phonics approach, teachers will start with the whole word, and parts of the word will be compared with respect to their letter-sound relations, syllables and rhymes; b) with a synthetic phonics approach, teachers will start with the letter-sound combinations and then proceed to larger units.

Yet, there are also positive transfer effects which can be exploited, such as through intercomprehension strategies (cf. Doyé and Meißner, 2010). Intercomprehension eases multilingual comprehension by taking advantage of the familiarity of related languages which belong to the same language family, such as the Romance languages or the Indo-European languages. If students learn how to apply reading strategies, they will be able to understand texts in a language they have never learned before if the languages show similarities. This is the case with Dutch, German and English, for example, or with French, Italian and Spanish, which share several cognate words, among other things.
To illustrate, *film* and *Film* are similar in form and meaning in English and German, just as *storm* and *Sturm* share certain commonalities (Finkbeiner et al., 2012; Schluer, 2017).

There are of course quite a few more interesting reading and writing practices which, however, cannot all be portrayed here, but they ought to be mentioned. Among them are the SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) method by Francis P. Robinson (see e.g. Thomas and Robinson, 1982), the Murder Scheme (Mood, Understand, Recall, Digest, Expand, Review) by Dansereau et al. (1979), Ketchum’s (2006) 3R model (Recognize, Research, Relate), and the Look and Say: Whole Word Method (see for example Ehri, 2005: 170).

**Directions for Future Research**

The present review of language awareness in reading and writing has shown multiple opportunities for further research, not only because a language awareness perspective on reading and writing has been rarely applied, but also because reading and writing are dynamic constructs that change with external demands and societal developments. In today’s multilingual and globalized societies, technology plays a central role, but its potential for practical applications in the classroom and its effects on the way we read and write have not been fully explored so far. Much remains to be done in this area, such as identifying the particularities of e-reading and e-writing as well as the implications they raise regarding ‘standards’ of reading and writing and recommendations for teaching. In that regard, a thorough understanding of “the nature of electronic […] media, the kinds of impacts these media have on students’ [reading and] writing, and the ways they can best be employed in the teaching of [reading and] writing” (Pennington, 2003: 287; additional remarks by the authors CF and JS) is indispensable for researchers and teachers alike (see also the chapter by Dooly in this volume). Technology has developed into an important means that helps to connect people across the globe, people from different languages, different cultures and different generations. Apart from technological skills, comprehension strategies as well as language and cultural awareness (in a broad sense) are therefore essential. Yet, their exact interplay still needs to be studied further so as to optimize communication among people as well as to avoid the pitfalls of miscommunication and stereotyping. In view of the complex interplay of manifold variables, a particular challenge lies in making the hidden processes of reading and writing visible. This could be achieved through a combination of introspective, retrospective and collaborative designs (cf. Finkbeiner et al., 2012). Innovative designs of research and pedagogical practice need to be developed to learn more about the ways in which different kinds of awareness may support learners during the various phases of the reading and writing processes, both in their L1 and in further languages as well as in multilingual and intercultural encounters.

Despite all technological innovations, we must ensure that our learners remain in control over their text perception as well as production. They need to be equipped with critical literacy strategies to be still able to judge who said what, when, where and why, and to find out whether the sources of their reading are reliable or not. This is a huge but necessary task as there is no democratic society without critical literacy (Finkbeiner, 2006).
The Teaching of Reading & Writing

Related Topics

Critical literacy; digital literacy; teacher language awareness

References


