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## **READING STRATEGIES AND STRATEGIC READING IN CONTENT AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATED LEARNING**

### ***Abstract***

*Reading is an extremely important language skill both in educational process and out of it. Unfortunately, in many foreign language classrooms, particularly in our country, the significance of this skill is not completely recognized and the most attention is still paid to grammar. Namely, reading is often seen as a mere capacity of decoding written language signs and the parallel processes of reading comprehension and interpretation are not sufficiently addressed. The paper deals with the several issues, such as significance of reading skills, the strategies needed for their development and the strategic role of the reading skill in the environment of content and language integrated learning (CLIL). Most of the contemporary research done in this field of the applied linguistics highlights the role of reading skills in facilitating an easier acquisition of the content matter, which is one of the focuses of the CLIL approach in general.*

**Key words:** *reading skill, development, strategies, content and language integrated learning*

### **Introduction**

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) distinguishes from other language teaching approaches in introducing a simultaneous learning of a foreign language and a content of another subject. The term was coined by David Marsh, and by the mid 1990s CLIL became popular educational approach at all levels of education in Europe (Mehisto, Marsh & Frigols, 2008). The ground for development of this approach was offered by some multilingual and immersion programs introduced in Canada in 1960s.

CLIL can be referred to as instruction that works on the development of foreign language proficiency in educational contexts where non-language content is scaffolded through the means of foreign language. Thus, foreign language teachers are encouraged to contextualize language teaching in topics familiar to learners, and in that way students' engagement in learning both foreign language and subject content is increased (Cenoz, 2013).

As defined by Coyle (2010), the main pillars of CLIL are *content, communication, cognition, and culture*. In order to successfully integrate them into a CLIL class, it is necessary to intensively work on all language skills. Productive skills (speaking and writing) are extremely significant for successful communication. On the other hand, receptive skills (reading and listening) enable learners to get deeper into the subject matter and they are essential for developing cognition and understanding the content. Since one is able to apply the knowledge of the content only after understanding it, it is necessary for students to have their receptive skills developed (Hemmi & Banegas, 2021).

This paper will focus on reading skill and its role in CLIL context. Reading is highly significant in CLIL because it helps students comprehend and learn the content while using the foreign language at the same time. Prior to discussing the significance of reading skill in CLIL context, it is necessary to refer to fundamental characteristics of reading.

## Theoretical background

In general, reading is one of the language skills which has often been neglected. However, these days, more and more researchers in the field of applied linguistics are pointing out the importance of developing reading skills for learning purposes, be it the learning of foreign language, subject matter, or both (Fischer, 2003; Banditvilai, 2020; Razi, 2021). Reading comprehension is equally important for skillful participation in various social and cultural activities. When we say that reading is often neglected, we mean that it is frequently seen as a mere decoding of written symbols into corresponding sounds, but it is much more than that. It involves integration and execution of various skills and processes, not only the physical ones but complex psychological processes as well. Accordingly, reading cannot be considered a set of mechanical skills a reader can learn once and for all, but it should rather be seen as a complex process of making meaning from the texts read for various purposes and in various contexts.

Even though there is an agreement among the linguists that reading is a key element which is necessary in foreign language learning, it is difficult to provide its universal definition. Generally speaking, it is the ability of a reader to make sense of what is written. According to Guntur and Gani (2021), reading requires a combination of attention, memory, perceptual and comprehension skills, which makes it a quite complex process. The complexity of reading is an issue which is quite often discussed among psycholinguists and linguists who are still trying to provide the exact formula to explain what mental processes are used in reading. Researchers also strive to find the ways in which those mental processes interact while facilitating the reader's comprehension.

As significance of reading skill has increased over the years, the approaches to teaching reading have changed as well. There are three main approaches to teaching reading and they are based on the mental processes behind reading. These approaches are influenced by language acquisition theories, such as behaviorism and cognitivism, which treat language skills differently. Thus, behaviourists see reading simply as a response to a stimulus and the emphasis is on recognition of the written text, rather than on understanding of it. Such view resulted in an approach to teaching reading known as *bottom-up approach*. It is applicable at lower levels of education when students are still learning how to recognize different language patterns. However, if one is able to decode the text, it does not necessarily mean that they are able to comprehend it, which does not make this reading approach suitable for students at higher levels of education. As Pradani (2021) notes, reading is not only a process of remembering, but also a mental work process involving aspects of critical and creative thinking. Consequently, a new approach emerged and it was based on cognitivist language learning theory. It became known as *top-down approach* and it was developed as a reaction against the idea that reading is only identification of letters, words and larger language units. Indeed, reading involves the interaction between thought and language, and in that respect it is considered a complicated information-processing skill which demands reader to be an active planner able to make decisions and coordinate a number of skills and strategies to boost understanding. Therefore, it is necessary for learners to be skillful in selecting the fewest, most productive cues needed to construct the meaning of what is read. This model of reading enables learners to discriminate between more and less useful available information. The key elements of top-down approach are learners' experience and prior knowledge of the topic. Top-down reading model relies on *schema theory*. According to this theory, readers use the units of their previous knowledge (schemata) to construct the meaning of a text (Susanto, 2020). Activating prior knowledge leads students to meaningful reading, which

is necessary for successful reading comprehension. However, top-down reading model focuses on general idea of meaning of the text, rather than on its linguistic features.

The third approach in teaching reading was established by David E. Rumelhart. It is known as *interactive approach* and it allows learners to use their knowledge of language structures and their background knowledge and experience simultaneously. Since Rumelhart's approach uses elements from both bottom-up and top-down reading models, it is also known as combination model. The main idea of this approach to reading is that all readers can use both bottom-up and top-down reading models at different times during reading. The use of those models mostly depends on moment-to-moment needs and difficulties.

The ultimate goal of using the aforementioned approaches to teaching reading is to assist learners in developing reading comprehension, which plays a pivotal role in CLIL. Reading comprehension enables learners to develop their critical thinking so that they can break up facts of the reading passage using their own opinions and points of view (Aaron & Joshi, 1992). Burns and Kidd (2010) state that reading comprehension takes place when students construct the meaning of written words while exchanging ideas between themselves and after understanding and applying information from the text. Apart from understanding language and content of a written text, other important factors that affect comprehension are students' motivation, their learning goals, and reading purposes (Susanto, 2020). Obviously, comprehension cannot be learned through rote instruction. It requires a series of strategies that learners can use for successful reading comprehension.

There are numerous studies investigating the effectiveness of the application of different strategies in reading process (Díaz & Laguado, 2013; Umar, 2016; Ramirez-Avila, 2021;). Researchers mostly agree that there are three basic strategies which can be used in the reading process: *skimming*, *scanning* and *close reading*. Namely, the studies prove that the implementation of the said strategies in teaching reading contributes significantly to enhancement of reading comprehension. Furthermore, the use of such strategies and students' motivation are interrelated in a way that students who are able to consciously apply knowledge about the strategies in order to clearly understand a text tend to have a high level of reading motivation. According to Garipova and Román (2016), the strategies allow readers to become more creative and flexible.

However, in order for reading strategies to be successfully applied in classrooms, most of the researchers agree that they should be introduced and instructed to both: language teachers and students. Language teachers should be exceptionally skillful in using the strategies themselves in order to be able to transfer their knowledge to learners. The first step in that direction is to teach students *skimming*, that is, how to get the gist of the text. In that respect, Basuki (2018) states that students should be taught and trained to guess and predict general ideas from the text (purpose, themes, arguments) as well as to understand its organization. According to Şen (2015), *skimming* is a top-down reading strategy, which means that the reader's prior knowledge or experiences need to be activated in order for *skimming* to be successfully implemented. Reading whole sentences is not necessary to get the gist of a text. Details, such as different examples and illustrations can be skipped. One of the many advantages of *skimming* is that it helps readers get through lots of materials quickly. In other words, it is time-saving strategy which reduces reading time due to a high speed of the process. According to Liao (2011), *skimming* is done at a speed three to four times faster than in normal reading. Since *skimming* is used for anticipating the main idea of a text, it is suitable for pre-reading activities in which readers use their prior knowledge in order to hypothesize what the given text is about. The choice of material plays an important role since

teacher is supposed to help students create positive attitude towards reading by choosing the topics they are interested in.

*Skimming* does not take place before the students are acquainted with the purpose of reading, that is, what they are expected to find in a text. Then, they can start looking for information relevant for their understanding of the main idea in the text. It is usually found in introductory paragraph, or in the first sentence of each paragraph. It is also possible to obtain significant information about the text through observing its organization and structure. An activity which can be done with students at all levels of education to practise *skimming* is matching headlines with corresponding paragraphs. However, language used at lower levels should be simplified and not too many details should be included.

In case students are expected to find a more specific information in the text, other strategies are introduced, one of them being *scanning*. Douglas H. Brown (2004) defines *scanning* as a strategy which requires rapid identification of relevant pieces of information from the text. Namely, scanning insists on knowing the exact piece of information that the students need to find. For example, a student can scan the text to find a certain year, number, name, definition, or any other specific information that is related to the reading goal. Basuki (2018) notes that this strategy also engages reader's motor and cognitive skills. While *scanning*, readers pay particular attention to emphasized parts of the text (words written in bold or italics), but also to charts, graphs and pictures.

Contrary to the reading strategies mentioned so far, *close reading* is used for a detailed reading and text analysis, particularly when reading poetry is concerned. It puts emphasis on all parts and details of the text, rather than on the general ideas or specific information. The attention in *close reading* is paid not only to text structure and its organization, but also to language. Namely, in *close reading* challenging text is first chunked into "manageable pieces" for reading (Saccomano, 2014: 146) and then offered for an in-depth study where the reader pays attention to individual words, syntax, order of the ideas and the way they unfold as the reading progresses. Furthermore, close reading allows a critical approach and observation of the text from different aspects, which depends on the type of text and its genre. Teachers are expected to continuously train their students in picking critical parts of the text to facilitate a closer look at the text. In order to encourage learners to think analitically, teacher insists on re-reading and peer discussions. Also, teacher usually asks questions related to the text and explains the material where necessary. Highlighting important information, circling unknown words, and jotting down the important observations are also the activities useful in *close reading*. In order for learners to become strategic readers, it is necessary to guide them to make connections between the new reading material and their prior knowledge, but also to make their own statements related to the topic they read. This is particularly important in CLIL and the next chapter deals with these issues in more detail.

### **Strategic reading in CLIL**

Learning to efficiently read texts related to content matter of any subject is very important in CLIL. It primarily helps students manage their time and, as such, relies on different reading techniques. There is no technique that will work for everyone. Each reading technique needs practicing and with time becomes easier and more natural to students. Strategic reading is particularly important in CLIL because students are not expected to roughly understand the meaning of the text but to deeply comprehend it and learn it as well. More precisely, a proper understanding of the text is required to access, construct and demonstrate their knowledge related to the subject matter. Therefore, reading activities in CLIL should be very efficient, they should

improve students' confidence in reading and guide them in their 'fight' for meaning, or *negotiation of meaning*, as literature usually designates it. Therefore, reading is not an isolated activity in a CLIL classroom but only one of its components. In other words, once the text is read students are encouraged to express their different understandings of the content given in the text. This is done either orally, through students' mutual communication, or in writing. On the other hand, the CLIL teacher is supposed to envisage and design the system of guidelines that would define which parts of text are the most important ones for learning the subject matter, which reading techniques will be used in the class, whether the students need to make notes or to discuss certain issues among themselves and what to do if students do not understand something. In such situations (lack of understanding) the teacher has to decide whether to move on and hope they will understand the content later, in a larger context, or to stop and address the problem immediately by consulting dictionaries and online sources related to the content matter (e.g. different articles, video material etc.).

There is another issue to be mentioned, quite specific for CLIL. Namely, the techniques discussed in the previous chapter, which are closely related to management of reading time (*skimming, scanning*) are useful only to a certain extent in a CLIL class, that is, they are usually applied only to enable students to participate in a subsequent discussion which will lead to student's acquisition of certain knowledge related to subject matter. However, it is of crucial importance to guide students in their endeavour to read and simultaneously connect their previous knowledge with the one offered in the particular text, or in any other scholarly text related to the content of the subject matter. In other words, the reading activity in CLIL should be accompanied by lots of reminiscences and associations. Thus, a kind of network related to the content should be provided in the classroom either by using various excerpts from different sources or through exploratory talk among the students. At the same time, an equally important network of language associations and reminiscences should be created as well, through a search for synonyms, antonyms, false friends etc. The CLIL praxis<sup>1</sup> has proven that multiple associations on the same issue 'support' each other, while facilitating the simultaneous acquisition of both – the content matter and foreign language. In fact, any knowledge supported from different perspectives is always settled in the memory more efficiently than the one which relies on one source or a word. Such type of content is closely related to literacy which is always dependant upon language, cognition and socio-cultural grounds, which are at the very core of CLIL and its four pillars (4Cs): Content, Communication, Culture and Cognition (Coyle, 2010).

Obviously, CLIL approach demands teacher's huge involvement, particularly in preparing material which is selected from either core or suggested readings. It demands a continuous cooperation between a language teacher and a subject matter teacher (mutual consultations about the concepts, ideas, goals and purposes to be achieved etc.). Selection of classroom material as well as its development should always be done "in ways which maximize the likelihood of intake" (Tomlinson, 1998: 2). This process involves several phases (*design, adaptation, implementation, evaluation*).

In a *design phase*, it should be ascertained that the material responds to specific particularities of the content that is being taught within CLIL. At the same time, the material should promote competences such as cultural awareness, ability for critical thinking, ability for a team work; to name only a few. One has to be very careful to incorporate activities that are neither

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<sup>1</sup> One of the authors has been dealing with content-based instruction at the technical faculties of the University of Zenica for quite a long time.

too easy nor too short. In fact, they have to be challenging enough for students to feel they have to make an effort to achieve the learning goals. As previously suggested, it is not advisable to overwhelm material with written text. Therefore, a good balance is needed among text, figures, charts and other items included in the material (Tomlinson, 2012). In fact, all of them contribute to the understanding of the text which is being dealt with. At the same time, such combination of different elements can address more learning styles. Generally speaking, the standard features in CLIL material development refer to the development of its reading material as well. In more specific sense, reading material should be designed to aid students to broaden their vocabulary, to reinforce the grammatical structures that they are acquainted with, and to make them more analytic in dealing with the content matter. As a result, reading activity can be quite challenging for students since it demands several thinking activities such as, for example, acquiring a range of terms and concepts, identifying general and specific ideas, discovering implicit messages, determining relationships, following instructions and so on. Therefore, in the very process of material development, more precisely - in its *adaptation phase*, teacher(s)<sup>2</sup> should also consider learners' previous knowledge, their capacities, needs and learning styles.

Once the material is prepared and adapted to a specific cohort of students, the *implementation* and *evaluation* takes place. Evaluation of material is usually done prior to and after the material is used in a CLIL classroom, that is - after the *implementation* phase which is, in fact, the phase we are primarily interested in. In this particular phase, special attention is paid to promotion of learners' cognitive and academic development, each being very significant for CLIL methodology. Everything that is being done in this phase should foster the students' reading comprehension through different strategies which are additional to scanning and skimming. Thus, implementation phase includes specific instruction and practice in reading strategies, such as, for example: using contextual clues, including non-verbal features (e.g. punctuation), interpreting graphical illustrations (e.g. schemes, tables, layouts and drawings), reading between the lines (inferencing), visualizing and summarizing main ideas (Coyle: 2005).

Such a practice calls for the famous definition of reading as a "psycho-linguistic guessing game" (Goodman, 1996: 166). Indeed, reading skill facilitates the improvement of many other skills, particularly the ones which Heini-Maria Jarvinen (2009) designates as *thinking skills*, which are so important in CLIL. Therefore, reading has to be addressed very seriously, that is, it has to have a strategic role. What does that mean? It means that in order to achieve the basic CLIL goals the teacher needs to engage in introducing different reading strategies/techniques in the class. In that process it is advisable to take into account the difference between the bottom-up and top-down model of reading. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the bottom-up model is characterized by a reader's constructing the meaning of the text from the smallest units, letters, to words, phrases and sentences. In its greatest part, this process is unconscious. Learners infer meaning automatically and the teacher has only a confined role. On the other hand, in the top-down model, readers give meaning to the text on the basis of their previous reading habits as well as their educational and cultural background. This is an intentional process which can be influenced and facilitated by a teacher, that is, by his introducing the reading strategies needed for construction of the proper meaning of the text, which is especially important in CLIL. As Brown (2001: 306) nicely asserts "reading comprehension is a matter of developing appropriate, efficient, comprehension strategies". By employing reading strategies, the students feel more

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<sup>2</sup> The plural form of the word *teacher* relates to cases when the material is being developed by both the language and the content teacher, which is often the case.

confident about their comprehension and become aware of their weaknesses and strengths (Oxford, 1990). Reading strategies are particularly important to low-achieving students who, once they realize the usefulness of each strategy, seem to take control of their own reading process. Obviously, inclusion of different reading strategies in a CLIL class is of a vast importance for its success. In this paper, we will address several key strategies, such as *predicting, connecting, inferring, self-questioning, and summarizing*.

In the course of *predicting* students normally use different clues which help them make predictions. They are encouraged to use information from the text, such as titles, headings, pictures, diagrams, graphic organizers, to anticipate the meaning of the text. On the basis of their prior knowledge, students envision what the text is about. Predicting encourages students *to actively* think ahead, to make necessary connections and to interact with the text. Making predictions encourages readers to use critical thinking and problem-solving skills which are quite significant in CLIL.

Another strategy is *making connections*. It is a critical reading comprehension strategy because most of the texts present plenty of information that may be interrelated. This strategy helps students use the knowledge they have and make connections to understand what they are reading. It also helps them retain the information better and engage more with the text itself.

This strategy allows students to make connections between: the text and themselves, the text and another text as well as between the text and the world around them. In the first case (*text-to-self*) students are encouraged to connect the text and their personal experience or knowledge (e.g. *"This experiment reminds me of the one we did last week in which I used water to dissolve ingredients."*). Students with a waste experience will often be able to make more insightful and complex connections as opposed to the ones with more limited experience who may struggle to make connections thus creating vague conclusions.

On the other hand, while making *text to text* connections, students connect the text in question to other texts that they have read before. A solid connection of this type occurs when students are able to apply what they have read from one text to another text (e.g. *"I've read another text about strength of materials where the author explained what stress and strain are. This text tells us about Hooke's Law which deals with the relation between the two."*). This strategy is particularly useful in CLIL classes where students are urged to use different sources related to the subject.

Finally, when making *text to the world* connections students connect the text with real events, that is, with the events from their social environment or from the one they learn about from TV, newspapers etc. Effective connections of this sort occur when students use what they have learned through these mediums in order to enhance their understanding of the text that they are reading (e.g. *"I was watching a broadcast on devastating consequences of pollution on human's health, and in this text, I am learning about the steel factories and their effects on environment."*)

The next strategy (inferring) implies identifying implicit messages in the texts. It again requires readers to use prior knowledge and the information stated in a text to draw conclusions but this time more between the lines. Although inferring can be difficult for students, it is often necessary. As with other reading comprehension strategies, students need explicit instruction in how to make inferences and when to apply the strategy. Teachers can support students with this skill through think-aloud discussions, T-charts (which link claims to evidence) and other activities that require drawing conclusions. Inferring can be seen as making an educated guess about something based on previously gathered information. In that respect, teachers should ascertain

that students have sufficient background knowledge on the concepts being addressed. Students lacking this background knowledge will struggle to make inferences, so it is important for teachers to take time to provide experience that build the necessary knowledge (e.g. teacher should allow time for students to share, discuss, and even debate their inferences). It is also important to ask students to explain the thinking processes which they used to achieve inferences, for instance: *How do you know that?* or *How does the text support your conclusion?* Such an approach helps students connect their claims with concrete evidence. In CLIL, students who see the parallels between the contents from different subjects will be more likely to successfully apply the knowledge gained in the process. While strategically asking questions, the teacher helps students to improve their processing of the text, which leads to better comprehension. This achievement is always reinforced by another strategy - *self-questioning*. Self-questioning is a process in which students ask and answer questions while and after reading. By using this strategy, readers increase their reading comprehension performance.

Once the text is read, there comes *summarizing*. This strategy allows the readers to keep a record of the most relevant aspects of the text. Summarizing can be described as a technique that aids students to identify and remember the main idea, key words and the essential information of the text. This strategy requires ignoring all irrelevant information from the text so that the reader can integrate the main ideas within a meaningful context. At the same time, students are enabled to monitor their comprehension and use their own words to summarize the texts.

Finally, it should be highlighted that strategic is of a vast significance in CLIL where students need to engage all their capacities to reach a final goal: to understand the text and subsequently construct its meaning through a foreign language medium.

## Conclusion

After exploring different perspectives on reading and its place in content and language integrated learning, it can be said that reading is a complex process shaped by many aspects that include the reader's previous knowledge and the conscious use of strategies. These strategies assist learners in developing skills necessary for successful reading comprehension, which includes development of thinking skills as an inevitable part of any CLIL program.

In addition to *skimming*, *scanning*, and *close reading*, which are some of the most frequently used reading strategies in general, there are other strategies that are normally used in a CLIL context, such as *predicting*, *connecting*, *inferring*, *self-questioning*, and *summarizing*.

The paper discusses how these strategies can be employed to support learner's deep understanding of the text that is a subject of content and language integrated learning. Therefore, there is no doubt that developing the reading skills in CLIL is quite significant since such skills enable students to simultaneously comprehend and learn the content of a subject matter as well as the foreign language. Such praxis is at the core of strategic reading which motivates students to learn how to become more autonomous in reading processes.

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## STRATEGIJE ČITANJA I STRATEŠKO ČITANJE U NASTAVI ISTOVREMENOG UČENJA JEZIKA I STRUKE

### *Sažetak*

*Čitanje je izuzetno važna jezička vještina kako u obrazovnom procesu tako i izvan njega. Nažalost, u mnogim učionicama u kojima se uči strani jezik, posebno u našoj zemlji, značaj ove vještine nije u potpunosti prepoznat, te se veći dio pažnje još uvijek posvećuje gramatici. Naime, čitanje se često vidi kao puka sposobnost dešifrovanja pisanih jezičkih znakova, pa se paralelni procesi razumijevanja čitanjem i interpretiranja nedovoljno prate. Rad se bavi sa nekoliko problema, kao što su značaj vještine čitanja, strategije potrebne za njen razvoj, te strateška uloga vještine čitanja u uvjetima istovremenog učenja jezika i struke (CLIL). Najveći dio savremenih istraživanja u ovoj oblasti primijenjene lingvistike naglašava ulogu vještine čitanja za olakšano usvajanje sadržaja obrađivane materije, što je općenito u fokusu CLIL pristupa.*

***Ključne riječi:*** vještina čitanja, razvoj, strategije, istovremeno učenje jezika i struke