The use of reading comprehension strategies and individual differences: a case study of two Italian university students

by

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the reading strategies used by university students studying Italian as a foreign language. It aims to investigate the use of reading strategies and the extent to which individual characteristics affect strategy use. A think-aloud protocol approach was used to examine the reading strategies of two students, an advanced learner and a beginning student. Data was gathered through a questionnaire, Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, a think-aloud, and a follow-up interview. The students' language learning experience and level was considered in relation to their reading level and the strategies that they employed during the think-aloud. This study finds that good language learners use a combination of strategies to suit themselves and the task, and also examines how individual differences play a part in strategy choice. This study calls for further detailed studies to be conducted in how language learning strategies relate to individual learner differences as well as studies that capture strategy use at different stages of the learner's development.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background

The recognition of the importance of the use of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) has played an important part in the teaching and learning of another language since the mid-1970s when Rubin examined the characteristics of the good language learner (Rubin, 1975). Since then, the strategies used by language learners have been recognised as an integral part of language learning. Strategies are central to language learning and trying to find out about how 'good language learners' use strategies enables us to help less effective learners become 'better language learners'.

LLS is about understanding the processes language learners use while learning a language. Research on LLS enables language teachers to use this information to inform pedagogical decisions, including adapting their teaching to cater for individual differences such as age, cultural background, learning abilities and prior experiences. In addition, it gives teachers insights into the way in which students should be taught to learn and taught about LLS. To study learning strategies is to find out how learners use strategies within a specific skill, such as reading, and in relation to a particular task. It is also necessary to determine the type of knowledge the learner is using, declarative or procedural, and the type of strategies they are employing, metacognitive, cognitive, social or affective and at what level of language learning are they using. The use of LLS is a crucial part of language learning because they take the student from dependence to autonomy and, ultimately, being an independent learner (Macaro, 2001, p. 3).

There have been many different methods of teaching languages over the past 40 years: from the traditional grammar-translation method, which involved translating each word from the target language into the native language, to the audiolingual method, which focused on oral fluency and relied on repeating set phrases and words, ignoring some skills such as reading. Reading, like listening, was considered to be a passive skill in language acquisition. Over time, reading has gained its place as an active language skill.

The setting in which a language is studied is also important. A *foreign language* is studied in an environment in which the language is not used for daily interaction. A *second language* is a language that is studied in an environment in which the language being studied is used for daily interactions. Both situations require the learner to utilise LLS as language learning is psychological. It is not an easy task and requires a great deal of stamina, resilience, determination and persistence on the part of the learner.

The concept of a good language learner is quite complex, and the learner needs to be able to draw from many different capabilities. According to Cohen (2011), a good language learner needs a robust repertoire of strategies and need to ensure that they have strategies for, 1). learning, practicing and using the new language, 2). for monitoring language learning use, 3). for remembering vocabulary. In addition, they also need to have good self-identity as a language learner which in turn will assist with motivation (p.3). By examining the LLS

used by learners we gain an insight into the metacognitive, cognitive, social and affective processes when learning a second language. By understanding these processes, we can better direct pedagogies to provide learners with more opportunity to succeed. This knowledge can also be used to support less successful learners to learn more strategies which in turn will assist them with success.

1.2 Rationale

Much of the research undertaken in the field of second language reading has focussed on students studying English as another language. Limited studies have been conducted with native English speakers studying another language in a university context. Furthermore, much of the recent research into LLS has been conducted with ESL students in the Middle East or Asia. The notion of the effect that individual differences have on strategy use has been identified by researchers (such as Anderson 1991, Stern 1983, Sarig 1987, Skehan 1989, Geisler-Brenstein, Schmeck and Hetherington 1996, Chamot 2005). Recently, Oxford and Amerstorfer (2018) have highlighted the use of LLS and individual learner characteristics; however, the research is not specific to any one of the four macro-skills. Further research into how individual characteristics impact strategy use can have an impact on language instruction and the explicit teaching of LLS.

1.3 Research focus

This study focuses only on second language reading strategies in Italian at university level and is based on qualitative research. It will present two case studies of two university students studying Italian through Flinders University. The results will be based on a background questionnaire, Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), a reading task using think-aloud protocols, which will assist in gaining access to the participants internal reading processes. It will also include a follow-up interview of each participant to clarify and enrich the data from the think-aloud. The data collected will be assessed against Oxford's taxonomy of reading strategies and the notion of a successful language learner as outlined by Hosenfeld (1984).

Chapter One provides an overview of the literature on second language reading research and LLS with a focus on reading strategies. Chapter Two outlines the method and procedure of the study and are presented together with a rationale for using the think-aloud protocol. Chapter Three will examine the data from the think-aloud and the follow up interview and look at the two participants in the form of a case study on each participant. Chapter Three will also discuss the use of strategies that each participant used and how individual characteristics and language learning level may have affected their strategy choice. Chapter 4 will draw conclusions from the data collection and look at further ideas for future study and implications for pedagogy.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Second Language Reading Research

Learning strategies have been in use for thousands of years, but it is only recently that they have been studied and their importance recognised in relation to improving learning outcomes. The use of LLS by language learners has been seen as a pivotal factor in the success of students studying another language. LLS have been difficult to define and it is important to establish a definition of LLS. It is also important to examine the different classifications used in LLS and how the conscious use of strategies changes as the learner becomes more proficient. Furthermore, it is essential to consider the background of the learners and the individual learner differences that affect LLS use.

2.1 Definition of language learning strategy

The concept of LLS began in the 1970s with Rubin (1975), Stern (1975), Hosenfeld (1976), and Naiman, Fröhlich and Todesco (1978). It continued in the 1980s with Chamot and Kupper (1989), O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper and Russo (1985), Rubin (1981), Rubin and Wenden (1987) and also into the 1990s with Wenden (1991), Cohen (1998) O'Malley & Chamot (1990), Oxford (1990). There is still a great amount of interest in the 2000s with Macaro (2001, 2006), Cohen and Macaro (2007), Griffiths (2008, 2013), Oxford (2011). As the years have passed the definitions and understanding of language learning strategies have become more complex and more profound, and scholars are continually rethinking the definition and use of LLS.

The definition of a LLS has been discussed at length by scholars and there have been many attempts to define LLS. Rubin began by defining strategies as "techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge" (Rubin 1975, p. 43). She constructed a model of the strategies used by successful language learners. According to Rubin a successful language learner was someone who was a willing and accurate guesser, had a willingness to communicate, and a willingness to make mistakes. He/she looks for patterns in language, practices and monitors performance, and takes into consideration the context of speech and not just the meaning (Rubin, 1975, pp. 45-48). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) defined learning strategies as "the special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information" (p. 1). Nunan (1999) defines LLS as "the mental and communication procedures learners use in order to learn and use language" (p. 55). Furthermore, Cohen (2014) defines LLS as:

> Thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalised by language learners, to assist them in carrying out multiplicity of tasks from the very onset of learning to the most advanced levels of target-language performance.

Strategies have also been classified as "tactics", "learning behaviours" (Griffiths, 2008), "a sequence of procedures for accomplishing learning" (Schmeck 1988, p. 5). Learning strategies have most recently been defined as self-regulation, which is even more complex and multi-dimensional than learning strategies (Dörnyei, 2005, pp. 190-193). This relates to not what strategies students use, but that they do use them and have the willingness to use

them and the capacity to use them (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 190). This means that the learner has self-direction, is autonomous or self-regulated (See Oxford, 2011, p. 7). According to Dörnyei, self-regulation is more intricate than strategies and includes cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, behavioural, and environmental processes that a learner can use (2005, p. 191). Oxford has developed the Strategic Self-Regulation Model (S^2R), which, as stated by Dörnyei involves the whole learner not just the cognitive processes.

Oxford (1990) claims that language learning strategies are important because they are "tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence" (p. 1). She adds that, "appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence" (p. 1). This claim is supported by Wong and Nunan who believe that strategies help students learn-how-to-learn and that the focus on the use of strategies creates more effective learners and facilitates the activation of a learner-centered philosophy (2011, p. 144). The goal for all teachers, especially language teachers, is to enable students to be independent learners and, therefore, learning strategies are extremely important. But even more important in the case of language learning is for learners to develop communicative competence. The underlying principal of language learning is to develop communicative competence which can be attained through the use of learning strategies. Bialystock (in O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 10) refers to language learning strategies as "optimal means for exploiting available information to improve competence in a second language".

Strategies, however, are not a quick remedy and require persistence by both the teacher and the student. They do not remove the hard work of learning and teaching a language, but they do make learning deeper, more productive and more lasting (Oxford 2011, p. 13).

2.2 Classification

As the definition of LLS has evolved over time, so has the classification of LLS. Strategies have been classified in numerous ways and the categories keep expanding. Rubin (1975) and Stern's (1975) seminal works in strategy use formed the basis of what was to follow with research on the categorisation of language strategies. In 1981 Rubin defined strategies as direct (related to the language itself, e.g. memory, cognitive, compensation) and indirect (related to the general management of learning, e.g. metacognitive, affective, social) (see also Oxford, 1990, p. 16). Researchers continued in the classification of strategies by categorising strategies and sub-categories (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 46; Oxford 1990, p. 17). In addition, as previously mentioned, Oxford has developed the S^2R Model which goes beyond strategies, encompassing meta-strategies to activate deeper strategies associated with cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies which provide for long-term retention (Trangant *et al*, 2013, p. 97).

There are three distinct categories of LLS. The first is *metacognitive*, the planning of language learning, thinking about the learning process and monitoring of learning while learning. The second is *cognitive*, which is directly related to learning a language. The third is *social/affective*. This third category of strategies relate to cooperation with others such as peer interaction, asking questions and increasing motivation as a result of self-perception

and thinking about your emotional temperature (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 8). Sarig (1987) in a study on reading also identified four strategy categories used by learners: 1. Technical-aid (skimming, scanning, marking, skipping, using a glossary), 2. Clarification and simplification (paraphrasing, inferencing), 3. Coherence-detecting (using schemata, context of the text), 4. Monitoring (planning, leaving unknown words, self-evaluation, varying pace) (p. 111-112).

However, the categorisation of strategies is not so black and white. Many strategies overlap and Oxford also admits that an overlap between the strategies and their classification exists. The strategy of *guessing*, for example, can be classified as a compensation strategy but can also be considered as a cognitive strategy (Oxford, 1990, p. 16, 22; Cohen 1996, p. 7). In Sarig's four strategy areas *skimming* and *scanning* could also be placed in the *monitoring* cluster which would equate to *metacognitive* strategies. Furthermore, according to Zhang, the strategies of underlining, taking notes and going backwards and forwards over the text also demonstrate the use of *metacognitive* strategies in reading (Zhang, 2018, p. 53). However, Oxford refers to highlighting as a *cognitive* strategy (Oxford, p. 69, 89-90, 1990).

Despite a vast amount of research on LLS Liu (2004) states that "researchers have yet to identify which combinations are really critically important, effective and/or utilised", (p. 40).

The table below outlines Oxford's strategy classification for reading.

Strategy Group	**Strategy Set**	**Strategy**
Memory	Creating mental linkages	Grouping
		Associating/elaborating
		Placing new words into context
	Applying images and sounds	Using imagery
		Semantic mapping
		Using keywords
		Representing sound in memory
	Reviewing well	Structured reviewing
	Employing action	Using physical response or sensation
		Using mechanical techniques
Cognitive	Practicing	Repeating
		Recognising and using formulas and patterns
		Practicing naturalistically
	Receiving and sending messages	Getting the idea quickly
		Using resources for receiving and sending messages
		Reasoning deductively

	Analysing and reasoning	Analysing expressions
		Analysing contrastively (across languages)
		Translating
		Transferring
	Creating structure for input and output	Taking notes
		Summarising
		Highlighting
Compensation	Guessing intelligently	Using linguistic clues
		Using other clues
Metacognitive	Centering your learning	Overviewing and linking with already known material
		Paying attention
	Arranging and planning your learning	Finding out about language learning
		Organising
		Setting goals and objectives
		Identifying the purpose of a language task
		Planning for a language task
		Seeking practice opportunities
	Evaluating your learning	Self-monitoring
		Self-evaluating
Affective	Lowering your anxiety	Using progressive relaxation, deep breathing or meditation
		Using music
		Using laughter
	Encouraging yourself	Making positive statements
		Taking risks wisely
		Rewarding yourself
	Taking your emotional temperature	Listening to your body
		Using a checklist
		Writing a language learning diary
		Discussing your feelings with someone else
Social	Asking question	Ask for clarification and verification
	Cooperating with others	Cooperating with peers
		Cooperating with proficient users of the new language

	Empathising with others	Developing cultural understanding
		Becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings

Table 2.1: Oxford (1990) p. 321–324

Even though there are many grey areas in the classification of strategies and although it can seem very narrow and limiting, Oxford's classification is the most comprehensive and, in the researcher's view, the easiest classification to use to date.

2.3 Learners strategy use: Conscious vs unconscious

Learning strategies assist the learner to process, analyse and organise new information. They are initially intentional and deliberate and as the learner develops proficiency they become automated (Alexander, Graham & Harris, 1998, p. 131; Oxford, 2011, p. 12). During the beginning phase of learning another language, strategy use is conscious, and as the learner develops proficiency, they become automated. Strategies also help with the acquisition, storage and retrieval of information (Oxford & Crookall, 1989, p. 1).

The use of language learning strategies is also seen as being a conscious choice by the learner. Oxford and Schramm (2007) propose that a language learning strategy is

> a specific plan, action, behaviour, step, or techniques that individual learners use, with some degree of consciousness, to improve their progress in developing their skills in a second or foreign language (in Cohen & Macaro, 2007, pp. 47- 48).

Chamot (2005) also claims that strategies are conscious and as a learning strategy becomes familiar it maybe be used with automaticity, but the strategy may be brought to conscious awareness (p. 112). Griffiths (2008) argues that learning strategies are "activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning" (p. 87). This is supported by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) who believe that LLS are intentional on the part of the learner (p. 43), and that learners may use strategies consciously for more demanding parts of a task, and for the less demanding parts they may use learning strategies sub-consciously (p. 87). According to Cohen (2014, p. 7) there is still currently a debate about whether a strategy must be conscious for it to be considered a strategy and not a process. If the learner can identify what they have just done or thought, then they are considered to be strategies. If the learner is not able to identify their behaviour, then it is considered to be a process and not a strategy (Cohen, 1996, p. 6, Cohen 2007, pp.11-12).

2.4 Proficient and non-proficient learners

Since the late 1970s there has been great interest in LLS and what types of strategies language learners use and how frequently they are used. Research has found that strategies are used by both proficient and weaker learners (Chamot, 2005, p. 115). Weaker learners use strategies but may use them incorrectly or not vary them and good learners are more

aware of their strategy use and can adjust strategies to suit the task type (Block, 1986, p. 465). In a study of students studying English at a New Zealand English language school, Griffiths used the English Language Learning Strategy Inventory (ELLSI) to determine the use of LLS by students. The study found that more proficient students used language learning strategies more often than less-proficient students and the more proficient students used up to three times more strategies than less-proficient students (Griffiths, 2008, p. 89). Vann and Abraham (1990) found that less-proficient learners did in fact use LLS, but they quite often did not use strategies appropriate to the task and lacked necessary higher-order processes, such as metacognitive strategies (p. 191). O'Malley *et al* claims that "students without metacognitive approaches are essentially leaners without direction" (1985). Liu (2004) found that the range of LLS used by a learner is related to their proficiency level. Chamot and Rubin (1994 in Cohen 2011) argued that the use of a particular strategy is not what leads to a more proficient student, what does, in fact, is a repertoire of strategies used by the learner.

In 1981 Reiss conducted a study on university students studying Spanish and German. The study found that students who had received an A grade for their studies in the previous semester used a variety of techniques and were specific in their descriptions about their strategy use. Whereas the students who received a C or D grade were very vague and less specific than the A grade students (p. 125). Strategies are essential to academic achievement (Alexander et al, p. 131) regardless of whether they are general or domain specific (p. 133). Sarig (1987) also found that strategy use is determined by the learner regardless of whether they are a good or poor reader (p. 118).

Porte (1988) also describes the transfer of LLS of poor language learners across learning environments. Instead of adapting, developing or using new strategies, less-proficient learners may use strategies that they used in their homeland which may not be relevant to the learning context. Porte's study of unsuccessful language learners found that less proficient language learners used strategies but not with the same efficiency and suitability (1988, p. 168). More successful learners are better at matching strategies with the task therefore using their metacognitive knowledge to determine which strategies to use (Chamot, 2005, p. 115). In two studies conducted by Griffiths (2008, 2013) it was found that more proficient students used a wider range of strategies and more frequently than non-proficient students (in Griffiths 2015). It has also been found that successful learners use strategies in an "orchestrated fashion" (Oxford 1994, p. 2) and that a repertoire of strategies is necessary if students are to succeed (Alexander et al, p. 133).

2.5 Individual characteristics

The success of the learner or the learning outcomes of a student can be determined by many factors. Firstly, their social context: sociocultural, sociolinguistic and socioeconomic factors. Learner characteristics, such as age, cognitive, affective and personality

characteristics will also have an effect on outcomes, as will learning conditions (Stern, 1983, p. 338). Gender also plays a role as to which or how many strategies are used. It is reported that females have a greater overall strategy use than males (Oxford, 1994, p. 2).

Chamot (2005) claims that "learning strategies are sensitive to the learning context and to the learner's preferences" (p. 113). Strategy selection will depend on the task to be completed and the student's understanding of their own learning process. This includes the student's cultural context and which strategies are seen as appropriate in their culture, as well as using their prior knowledge or schemata. For example, memorisation strategies and rote learning is more common among learners from Asian cultures (Oxford, 1994, p.2, see also Kong, 2006, p. 32).

Students also have their own unique combination of strategies that characterises them as individuals, whether they are successful or not (Sarig 1987, p. 116). Strategy use must also be considered within the learning styles of the learner, for example, introvert/extrovert, reflectiveness/impulsiveness, and other factors that have an influence on the learner such as social, age, culture, demographics and personality traits, which, according to Schmeck (1996), will dictate a student's learning styles and strategies (p. 74). Oxford (1994) claims if a student has the potential to be a successful language learner, but has a naturally shy personality, it may affect their learning potential. A successful learner will overcome this inhibition by finding strategies such as positive self-talk, practicing in private and finding opportunities to use their communicative skills (p. 1). Cohen (1996) argues that these are lacking in many of the studies on strategy use (p. 10). Furthermore, Cohen claims that the effectiveness of a strategy will depend on the characteristics of the learner and the context (Cohen, 1996, p. 10).

Strategies should make learning easier and faster and the level of strategies used will vary according to the level of the text and the cognitive demands of the task. Effective strategy use leads to learning success which transfers into increased motivation. There are many factors that determine the use of strategies. According to Magno (2010) younger and less-proficient students do not use many strategies and use them less effectively (p. 40) than older and more proficient learners. Another factor the affect that the learner's L1 has on strategy use. Block (1986) also found that language background did not affect strategy use of students. For example, native speakers of Chinese did not use different strategies from native speakers of Spanish (Block, 1986, p. 484). She also found that the ESL participants in the study used reading strategies that were similar to native speakers of English which, she says, demonstrates that strategy use across languages is stable (p. 485). Three of the participants were native English speakers who were classified as non-proficient in English. The remaining six were either Chinese or Spanish (p. 467). She concluded that all of the participants in the study used strategies. However, the more successful readers were able to plan and control their learning, whereas the less-successful readers applied strategies sporadically and unsystematically (p. 487).

2.6 Schema

An important part of language learning is the use of schema. Schema is the "interaction of new information with old knowledge that we mean when we use the term comprehension" (Anderson & Pearson, 1988, p. 37). Schema is also seen as important to all aspects of language learning, but especially to reading comprehension. Comprehension is "relating aspects of the world around us to the knowledge, intentions, and expectations we already have in our head" (Smith, 2012, p. 13). Furthermore, in order to understand new things, we must be able to relate them to what we already know to increase comprehension (Smith, 2012, p. 13).

Schema is mental framework which is created to organise pre-existing knowledge. It forms a basis for understanding, learning and remembering ideas. According to Anderson (2004), schema has six functions: 1. To provide ideational scaffolding for assimilating text information; 2. facilitate selective allocation of attention; 3. enable inferential elaboration; 4. allow orderly searches of memory; 5. facilitate editing and summarising; 6. permits inferential reconstruction (pp. 598-599). The reader's prior experiences play an important role in comprehension and these experiences are different for each individual, which means that several interpretations of a text are actually possible. That is to say that age, gender, race, religion, nationality and occupation all make up the individual's schema (Anderson, 2004, p. 597). According to Carrell and Eisterhold (1988), background knowledge plays a vital role in reading (p. 73). Reading builds relationships between the text and what we know. There are two types of schema. The first is formal schema, for example, text structure: newspaper article, fairy tale or report. The other is content schema which is background knowledge in a specific domain such as in science, political situations or commerce.

2.7 Development of the field of reading research

Reading is a very complex process, involves many processes and, according to a number of researchers, conducting research on reading poses many challenges because of its intimate nature (Block, 1986; Koda, 2012, p. 158, Grabe & Stoller, 2011, p. 3). Due to the internal nature of the process of reading the main challenge for any study is that reading is not able to be defined. According to Erler and Finkbeiner a complete model of reading has yet to be devised (2007, p.187).

In the 1970s the audiolingual method focus was on listening and speaking, and not reading and writing in a second language. Originally, reading was considered to be a passive skill. The skill of reading was seen simply as decoding meaning through letter recognition, to word recognition, then understanding phrases and clauses (Carrell, 1988, p. 2). However, thanks to research, reading is now considered to be "an active, purposeful and creative mental process" (Eskey, 2005, p. 564).

Reading, like listening, is a receptive skill. With reading the writer encodes and at the other end the reader decodes what is on the page. Reading is an act that we do every day which has many purposes: to inform, we read for pleasure or for work, it can be social and for entertainment. Reading can also be formal or informal and we read a variety of texts and at different levels. How we comprehend a text will also differ in relation to the purpose for

reading (Grabe, 2009, p. 11). Each purpose for reading will require the reader to use different cognitive processes in different combinations. Those who have expertise in a certain type of reading will read in different ways to those who are learning new information while reading (Grabe, 2009, p. 11). Studies have shown that readers who do not have strong background knowledge of the subject matter will closely read the text. Whereas, readers who already have knowledge will read more selectively from the text (Grabe, 2009, p. 11). The comprehension process occurs over many levels of language such as word level, sentence level and text level which contribute to form a mental model of the text. As one reads, one analyses the text and simultaneously develops hypothesis about what the text may mean (Anderson, 2004, p. 598). Reading is a psycholinguistic process and is an interaction between language and thought (Goodman, 1988, p. 12).

Early research of the 1970s focused on reading as word recognition including sound systems of a particular language and if this effected fluency. These studies focused on the sentence and word level of reading and did not take into account the deeper understanding of the text as a whole text. This was known as the bottom-up approach. In this case the reader decodes from smaller units such as letters to words, and then from words into larger grammatical chunks to create the meaning (Eskey, 2005, p. 564). Bottom-up processing is decoding language: phonemes, graphemes, words and building the meaning of the text from the smaller units to the larger units (grammatical information and word meaning to clause level), then modifying background knowledge based on what is in the text (Carrell, 1988, p. 100). Word recognition is one of the most important aspects of comprehension.

To be successful, readers need to draw on a variety of skills, such as inferencing, comprehension monitoring, text structure, not just word recognition and sentence level comprehension. The top-down approach focuses on the meaning of the text by the reader inferring and predicting. The reader does not decode in the same systematic way as in the bottom-up approach. “Clauses or sentences will trigger ideas about the world in the reader’s head which in turn will give rise to expectations of ideas that are likely to come next” (Macaro, 2003, p. 120). The reader takes into account the discourse and grammatical features which trigger predictions and build a picture for the reader (Macaro, 2003, p. 120). Much of what the reader hypothesises and predicts, is considered to be new knowledge. This is combined with pre-existing knowledge to create comprehensive meaning of the new text. Goodman (1967) called the top-down model of reading “a psycholinguistic guessing game” (p. 127) which,

> involves an interaction between thought and language. Efficient reading does not result from precise perception and identification of all elements, but from skill in selecting the fewest, most productive cues necessary to produce guesses which are right the first time. The ability to anticipate what has not yet been seen, of course, is vital in reading (Goodman, 1967, p. 127)

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the two processes, bottom-up and top-down, were considered to be used to together in an interaction of the two models. The top-down and bottom-up processes work simultaneously and interact with each other, but not all processes interact all the time (Grabe, 2009, p. 21; McDonough, 1995, p. 36). The interactive

model is the pairing of the writer's text and the reader's interpretation, it is the combination of top-down and bottom-up strategies that interact. The reader elaborates "on the meaning of the text, inferring meaning but also at times stopping to pause and ponder over individual words and syntactic patterns and their relationships with other words and interpretation" (Macaro, 2003, p. 121). Top-down processing is making predictions about a text based on prior experiences and background knowledge. Both strategies are valued equally and, therefore, top-down processing should not replace bottom-up, they should work together interactively and should occur at all levels simultaneously (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1988, p. 77). Eskey claimed that top-down reading required higher-level skills to predict meaning at the expense of lower-level skills such as rapid decoding and identifying grammatical and lexical forms (Eskey,1988, p. 93). However, the interactive model of reading does not view the top-down process as superior to bottom-up, but rather that the two processes work together. Eskey (1988) states that "good readers are both good decoders and good interpreters of texts" (p. 94), that is the combining higher-level strategies such as schemata and other background knowledge with good decoding skills.

By the 1990s, reading was seen as a complex interaction involving the text, setting, reader, reader background, reading strategies, L1 and L2, as well as decisions made by the reader (Erler & Finkbeiner, 2007, p. 188). Cognitive processing and knowledge are integrated to enable comprehension, which forms part of working memory (Grabe, 2009, p. 22). The aim of reading is to develop fluency and accuracy which are the traits of good readers. Good readers are "more reliant on context for fluency and poor readers more reliant on content for accuracy" (Allington quoted in Eskey, 1988, p. 95). According to Grabe (1988), poor readers recognise isolated words and do so too slowly (p. 60). They will also compensate for slow decoding skills by using context dependent guessing. Whereas, good readers are able to decode letters and words rapidly (Grabe, 1988, p. 60). Good reading is only possible from constant interaction between fluency and accuracy (Eskey, 1988, p. 95).

2.8 Reading strategies

In studies on successful and unsuccessful readers, Hosenfeld (1984) found that successful students have determination, motivation, better skills, use metacognitive, cognitive, compensation and affective strategies (*Table 2.2*). In her study she examined the reading strategies of ninth graders who were learning French to determine the cognitive skills they used to process a written text. The study showed that successful readers keep the meaning of the passage in mind, skip unimportant words and has a positive self-concept as a reader (p. 120). Hosenfeld (1984) also found disparities with students "interrupted" reading, that is when the student arrives at an unfamiliar word. The successful reader replaced the unknown word with a filler word then attempted to decode it by using the other words in the sentence to decode the unknown word, used the context of the passage to help decode it, or decided that the word is not needed to understand the passage (p. 120). The difference between successful and non-successful readers is their prioritising of strategy use (Hosenfeld, 1984, p. 121). A non-successful reader will begin by looking up words in a dictionary. For a successful reader this strategy would be used after having examined the text for meaning, not as the first thing they do. Less proficient students do not lack the use

of strategy use in L2, but they are less aware of strategy use, use less strategies than more proficient learners and lack the depth of strategy use.

Successful readers	**Unsuccessful readers**
Keep the meaning of the passage in mind	Loose the meaning of sentences as soon as they decode them
Read in broad phrases	Read word-by-word or in short phrases
Skip inessential words	Rarely skip words
Guess from context meaning of unknown words	Turn to the glossary for the meaning of new words
Have a good self-concept as a reader	Have a poor self-concept as a reader
Identify the grammatical category of words	
Demonstrate sensitivity to a different word order in the foreign language	
Examine illustrations	
Read the title and make inferences from it	
Use orthographic information i.e. capitalisation	
Refer to the side gloss	
Use the glossary as a last resort	
Look up words correctly	
Continue if unsuccessful at decoding a word or phrase	
Recognise cognates	
Use knowledge of the world	
Follow through with a proposed solution to a problem	
Evaluate their guesses	

Table 2.2: Hosenfeld, Case studies of ninth grade readers, p. 233, in Aldersen and Urquhart (1984)

2.9 Transfer of Strategies from L1 to L2

There are differing views on the transfer of LLS from the L1 to the L2, especially in reading research. In a study on Hebrew ESL students Sarig (1987) came to the conclusion that strategy use transfers from L1 to L2. In her study Carrell (1989) found that reading strategies did not transfer from L1 to L2 (pp. 127-128). This was echoed in Parry's 1993 study in which she claims that there is uncertainty if reading skills are transferred, although they may transfer when a high level of proficiency is reached. Kong (2006) found that learners may need to develop a certain level of proficiency in the L2 for the strategies to transfer from the L1 to the L2 (p. 36). However, some researchers see LLS training as futile. Kellerman (1991) claims that strategy training is irrelevant as learners have already become competent in strategy use in their L1 and can transfer that knowledge to the L2 (in Macaro, 2006, p. 322). Swan (2008), who is quite critical of the teaching of LLS, argued that reading strategies are

transferable from L1 to L2 and therefore, makes it pointless to teach learning strategies (pp. 266-268).

Conclusion

There have been many attempts to define LLS and to classify LLS and to predict what strategy combinations are the most useful to learners. From the research, however, it seems that there is no one way to classify LLS and some researchers argue if LLS should be taught at all. In fact, much of the research in LLS is not conclusive and also contradictory. This study looks to better explain some of the grey areas in relation to reading and the use of LLS. The next chapter looks at the investigation into the frequency of strategy use by students at different levels of proficiency. Two questions are considered in this study. The first relates to the learner's individual differences and strategy use: Do individual differences affect the reading strategies used by learners? The second question pertains to the level of language learning in relation to the strategies used: Do the reading strategies used by learners vary according to the level of the language learner?

Chapter THREE

Methodology research design

3.1 Overview

The focus of this study is to examine the how individual differences have an impact on the reading strategies used by Italian students at two different levels. The study uses a range of techniques to collect data such as a questionnaire, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, a think-aloud protocol task and a follow-up interview. The data collected from the participants will then be looked at against Hosenfeld's notion of a successful and unsuccessful language learner.

The study is based on the investigation of reading strategies of beginning and continuing students studying Italian enrolled at Flinders University. The aim is to examine the language strategies they use in relation to reading comprehension in Italian. Students were recruited through an email asking them to participate in the study and also by personal visits by the researcher to classes to inform students about the study. Participation in the study was voluntary and the respondents had the opportunity to withdraw at any time as per Ethics Committee guidelines. Students study Italian through Flinders University, but on two campuses, one being the Flinders University and the other The University of Adelaide (which has an agreement with Flinders to deliver Italian on its campus. This created logistical issues in terms of administering the think-aloud and the retrospective interview.

Students who participated in the study were asked to complete 1). a background questionnaire, 2). Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), and 3). a reading comprehension exercise in Italian using think-aloud protocols which was recorded by the researcher, 4). and take part in a follow-up/retrospective interview in order to gain an insight into the students' strategy use during the think-aloud.

3.2 Data collection procedures

The background questionnaire and the SILL were completed prior to the reading comprehension and were accessed online by the participants using the online survey generator, *SurveyPlanet*. This is a fast and reliable way for students to access the questionnaires and return them in confidence and in all confidentially. This study follows the Ethics guidelines of Flinders University. Participants were made aware of the project by the researcher during a visit to their class and they were also sent an email introducing the researcher with information about the study, and what was involved. Furthermore, the participants were emailed the consent form and links to the online questionnaire and survey, as per Ethics requirements.

The reading comprehension used the think-aloud technique during the reading of a text in Italian. The process was explained to participants stressing that they needed to verbalise what they were thinking as they read the text in Italian. The think-aloud was recorded, transcribed and coded by the researcher.

The text used for the think-aloud component was taken from the website http://www.scudit.net. This website is for learners of the Italian language and offers graded texts. The text used *Credendo alla Befana*, which is 366 words. The difficulty was to select a text that was accessible to the participants, but at the same time it had to be challenging enough for the reader to use reading strategies. However, the text could not be too difficult for the participant that it inhibited the use of reading strategies. If a text is too easy, the participant would not use conscious strategies and, therefore, would not be able to identify the strategies they used sub-consciously. If the text is too difficult, students lose motivation and become bogged down and do not use strategies as they cannot make sense of the text. The text was looked at by an Italian lecturer at Flinders and deemed to be suitable for these year levels.

3.3 Problems and limitations

It is important at this point of the discussions to highlight the problems experienced during the data collection phase as they have impacted on the volume and quality of the data that will be presented in this chapter.

The research project collects data from university students who are asked to participate in the study. Students are not offered anything in return for taking-part in the study and are volunteering. Voluntary participation caused problems for data collection as students were not compelled to volunteer. Originally five students interested in participating in the study contacted the researcher, but only two students ended up taking part. Another problem is that because a small number of students volunteered to take-part in the study, they are not representative of the type of learners the study is seeking to compare, that is, higher achieving students and lower achieving students. In the words of Brown (2001, p. 85, in Dörnyei, 2010, p. 64) these participants can be put down to "eager beavers" or the "gung-ho" types in the population but who are not really representative of the population. Data collection took place in the third week of Semester 1. It was anticipated that this would allow time for students to have settled in to University routines and, that at this time in the semester, their workload will not be too demanding to prevent them from taking part.

It was hoped that data collection would take place at a suitable time in Semester 2 of the previous year, however, the granting of University Ethics had to be taken in to consideration and therefore, data collection was delayed until the following year in Semester 1. The timing of presenting the study to the students was crucial. As the study took place in the first Semester, students had just returned from a long summer break and they needed to settle into university life again. The study was presented to the student in Weeks 3- 4, which gave them enough time to have settled into their study routines as well as refamiliarise themselves with the Italian language. The researcher also wanted to ensure that it was a time in the semester when the work load would not be over-whelming for students and, therefore, there would be a higher chance that they would participate in the study.

A total of 42 students enrolled to study Italian through Flinders University in 2018. In the second-year intermediate class 29 were enrolled, 15 were enrolled to complete a degree through Flinders University and 14 were enrolled to complete a degree at the University of

Adelaide. In the third-year intermediate class 13 students were enrolled, 4 completing a degree through Flinders University and 9 completing a degree through the University of Adelaide. The University of Adelaide does not have an Italian department; however, offers the language as part of its languages programme taught by Flinders University staff at the University of Adelaide. Therefore, the study was conducted over the two campuses so that a wider number of participants could be targeted.

The main difficulty of the study, and one that contributed to the lack of valid results, was logistical. This makes it hard to contact students, especially those at Adelaide University who have not redirected their Flinders University email address. Therefore, students studying at the University of Adelaide are not accessing the information sent to them about the study, despite visits from the researcher and information having been handed out to the students.

With the study being conducted over the two campuses, there was the issue of finding a location at the University of Adelaide to conduct the think-aloud protocol. The researcher is a student of Flinders University and cannot book rooms for study purposes at the University of Adelaide. The students who did volunteer to participate were asked if they were able to go to Flinders University to conduct the think-aloud where the researcher had access to study rooms in the library. To find a room to use with one of the participants at the University of Adelaide took many emails to organise and much co-ordination. The Italian staff kindly offered their office for the researcher to use, however, the think-aloud had to be planned not only at a time to suit the participant and researcher, but at a time when the staff were on campus.

3.4 Data survey instruments

Two questionnaires were given to the students prior to completing the think-aloud. The first questionnaire was a general background questionnaire that the students completed prior to undergoing the think-aloud protocol. The information provided through this questionnaire gives data about the participant's level of language proficiency as well as provide information about the students' perceived knowledge of language learning strategies. It also gives information about the age and gender which helped to inform the participant's data context.

Although the information provided by the participant gives the researcher an idea about the participant, it is important to note that the quality of the data collected depends on how well the participant completes the questionnaire. Indeed, they may not answer the questionnaire with great detail or be willing to share information as they do not necessarily see the importance of the questions and may not elaborate or give the information the researcher needs.

3.5 Oxford's SILL

Version 5.1 of the SILL was used in the study. This version is used for students learning a language other than English and assesses the frequency of strategy use. It is, in the researcher's view, the best strategy survey that will capture the use of LLS in the context of this study. Most other self-directed surveys available are for learners of English.

The SILL is divided into 6 parts: part A: memory strategies, part B: cognitive strategies, part C: compensation strategies, part D: metacognitive strategies, part E: affective strategies, part F: social strategies, with 80 statements to which the learner needs to respond.

According to Russell (2010) the SILL is being used as a standard tool to assess the use of strategies by learners, as well as a tool to understand language learning (p. 3). Questionnaires can be used to determine how strategy use varies among different groups. However, the SILL is impersonal in its design and its questions are not set up to examine individual differences such as sex, age, level of language learning, ethnic or cultural background, and social group as it does not specifically target them. These factors are important to determine if they have an effect on the types of strategies used and the frequency (Cohen & Macaro, 2007, p. 51). Furthermore, the SILL also does not look at factors that contribute to avoidance or motivation. In this study it is used to examine specific language learning strategies used by the learner and to see if they correlate with what students have used in the think-aloud exercise. The use of the two tools together allow for more in depth and accurate data.

In addition, self-report questionnaires do have their confines. According to White, Schramm and Chamot (in Cohen & Macaro 2007), self-report questionnaires have three limitations: participants may not interpret or understand the strategy described in each question, they may claim to use strategies that they do not use, and they may not remember strategies that they have used in the past (p. 95).

The information provided through this survey provides direct information about the frequency of the student's use of language learning strategies as well as providing an overall picture of the student's typical strategy use (Oxford, 2011, p. 59). The SILL distinguishes between the learner's use of direct strategies (memory, cognitive, compensation) which directly engage the learner with the language, and indirect strategies (metacognitive, social and affective) which indirectly contribute to language learning. The self-rating survey such as the SILL requires the participants to rate their own abilities which can give an insight into how the participant views themselves, even if they are not completely accurate.

The SILL uses a five-point Likert scale, which is a standard response option of 'never' or 'almost never true of me',' generally true of me', 'somewhat true of me', 'always', 'almost true of me', which examine the frequency of strategy use. Macaro (2001) points out that these descriptors work well with some statements, but with others it is difficult to quantify a response (p. 47). According to Dörnyei (2010), variations such as these usually work well, but that care needs to be taken when aggregating scores. However, in relation to the SILL, he argues, that it is not conducive to the Likert scale in a psychometric sense (p. 29). The SILL examines the frequency of the use of strategies and sums up the items that correlate with the number of strategies a person uses. However, in the case of strategies, it is the quality of the strategies used not the quantity. A person can be very competent and may only use one or a few strategies that suit them and their learning style and ability (Dörnyei, 2010, p. 29). Or someone can use a number of different strategies, but that does not mean that they use them effectively. However, for this study using the SILL gives us an indication of what types of strategies the participant uses and what they are aware of. Beyond this

study, it also exposes participants to the different types of strategies that may be used in language learning. Furthermore, Dörnyei (2010) claims that the SILL gives the quantity of the strategies used which is contradictory to strategy theory. Instead it should define the use of strategies in relation to quality (p. 182).

Russell (2010) also claims that there are shortcomings with the SILL. Despite the SILL attempting to paint a holistic view of the learner through the learning strategies they use, it is unclear if this refers to the learner's state, for example their stage of language learning, their perceptions of language learning, or life situation. In this regard the usefulness of the SILL is questionable as it could be seen as "a simple presentation of a student's perceptions of what they might do" (p. 48) and the findings are not stable (p. 50). Russell claims that this would need to be validated by longitudinal studies that track students as they learn a language (p. 48).

The SILL, like any other questionnaire in language learning strategy use, has its flaws. However, it is a widely used questionnaire that can be used to collect data easily and efficiently from a large number of students and can be used to give an indication of a student's strategy use. Despite the above-mentioned limitations, it provides invaluable insight into language learners' strategy use.

3.6 Think Aloud Protocol

A number of research methods have been used to collect data on reading, in first and second language learning, including miscue analysis and cloze procedures as well as eye tracking. Another descriptive method used in reading research is the think-aloud protocol. It focuses on the process of reading and not the product, from which the researcher can identify patterns of reading behaviour and individual strategic behaviour. The think-aloud protocol produces verbal data on the reader's conscious engagement with the text.

Due to the psychological nature of reading, it is one of the most difficult skills to research (Olson, Duffy, Mack, p. 253). According to Cohen (2011, p. 79), the cognitive process of reading cannot be seen, therefore, observation is not sufficient. Cohen also (2011) believes that there are limitations when using observation in language learning strategy behaviour. Much of language learning strategy behaviour is unobservable (p. 79). L1 research into reading and writing paved the way for L2 researchers using verbal protocols as a way to gain data (Cohen, 2011, p. 81).

According to Cohen (2011) there are three general types of verbal reports.

1. Self-revelation or think-aloud: thought processes are disclosed while a task is being carried out. It reflects the learners' cognitive processes.
2. Self-observation: can be either retrospectively or introspectively and look at specific language behaviour
3. Self-report: generalised statements of what learners do. They are retrospective.

The think-aloud and introspective protocols give a more direct view of what the learner is doing as they are doing it (Cohen, 2011, p. 80). It brings to light the reader's thoughts which could include their thoughts on the text, using their prior knowledge, making inferences or

predictions (Oster,2001, p. 64). According to Oster (2001) the verbalisation of the reader's thoughts "reveals readers' weaknesses as well as their strengths as comprehenders and allows the teacher to assess their needs in order to plan more effective instruction" (p. 64). It also connects with the authenticity of the experience at the time since as time passes, learners memories fade and the processes they took become distant and skewed (Grenfell & Harris, 1999, p.53). Retrospective reports can be used in conjunction with data gained during the task and can then be used to clarify data collected during introspective tasks (Cohen, 2011, p. 81).

Block (1986) advocates the use of think-aloud protocols in understanding reading (p. 464). Due to the nature of reading and its internal nature, reading is best studied through oral interactions. During a think-aloud the participant is given a language task to complete and then describes their thoughts and the process that they took to complete the task. Participants report their behaviour at the time they are doing it and they should report without theorising about their behaviour. Considering that it is what they are thinking at the time of completing the task, the think-aloud provides authentic data (p. 464).

During the think-aloud the researcher may ask a variety of open-ended questions to prompt the participant, if the participant stops describing their thoughts. However, the use of such a method to collect data can be problematic. The participant may not accurately relay their feelings and the strategies they used, that is vocalise what they did use or may fail to report what they did not use. Furthermore, learners may want to please the researcher and give answers they believe are correct. It might also be possible that the researcher by using prompt questions, may change the thoughts of the learners. Carrell (1989) presents another issue with think-aloud protocols: how well are learners able to articulate their thoughts about their strategy use? Cohen (1987) claims that "we are taxing the learner's capacity to remember a stage of performance once that stage is passed (…) Memory of mental events is problematic for the learner, and could lead to faulty reporting" (p. 89). Oxford (2011) adds that learners are being asked to do two things at once: orally report strategies and do a language task, which can make the task awkward or artificial, especially for non-proficient students (p. 150). Olson *et al* (1984) also claim that it places "limits on what is available to be reported upon, what can be remembered, and on the human ability to offer explanations or justifications for one's own behaviour should be respected" (p. 254). However, this is the case with any attempt to retrieve information about an internalised action. According to Chamot (2005), think-aloud protocols provide rich insights into language learning strategies. She says that the think-aloud protocol "reveal online processing, rather than metacognitive aspects of planning or evaluating" (p. 115). Grenfell and Harris also see the benefits of the method, "It is not easy to get inside the 'black box' of the human brain and find what is going on in there. We work with what we can get, which, despite the limitations, provides food for thought" (1999, p. 54).

Macaro (2001) claims that the type of task will have an effect on the strategies used. The strategies used will depend on how familiar students are with the language presented in the task (p. 65). He states that anxiety will also be a factor in interviews, especially for adolescents. The way in which the researcher demonstrates the think aloud process to

students may also bias students' responses as they may have preconceptions as to which strategies they should use. Also, thinking aloud may be a strange concept for some students (p. 65).

The think-aloud protocol has been used by many researchers to elicit information on the reading process. Hosenfeld (1977, 1984) used the think-aloud technique to study the reading strategies of successful and unsuccessful readers. She also promoted the use of the think-aloud technique in classrooms as a means to improve the reading habits of non-successful readers (p. 122). Hosenfeld was also one of the first researchers to examine the traits of unsuccessful readers. Block (1986) used think-aloud protocols to study ESL students who were deemed non-proficient as readers of English. In 1987 Sarig used the think-aloud protocol in her study on 10 female high school students studying English as a foreign language whose first language was Hebrew. More recently Özkan-Gürses and Bouvet (2017) used the think-aloud protocol to study how Turkish students of French monitor their understanding and their strategic use when reading a literary text. The study examined the frequency of strategy use of proficient and non-proficient readers.

3.7 Successful/unsuccessful reader

In conjunction with the questionnaire, the think-aloud and the follow-up interview, Hosenfeld's (1977) idea of a successful/unsuccessful foreign language reader will be used to ascertain if the participants are successful or unsuccessful foreign language readers. Hosenfeld's study is being used as her data is based on two foreign language learners and not students studying English. More importantly, Hosenfeld's framework is not based on a general concept of a good language learner, such as outlined by Rubin (1975), but is specific to reading. In addition, Hosenfeld examines what unsuccessful readers do, and not just the traits of a successful reader.

The data presented in the next chapter will be analysed by looking at Oxford's strategies for reading. Each participant's think-aloud will be looked at as a case study in terms of the strategies that they used while reading. Information gained from the follow-up interview will also be used to further enhance the data from the think-aloud protocol and will be considered according to Hosenfeld's notion of a successful and unsuccessful readers. The use of a number of data collection techniques will add depth to the study. Firstly, the SILL enables us to gain an understanding of the participants' general strategy use. Although the use of the think-aloud is an isolated experience, it is seen by the researcher as the best method to gain an insight into the participants' reading habits. When used in combination, the SILL and the think-aloud constitute a more powerful research tool, as they investigate reading strategies from two angles using two different techniques. In addition, the questionnaire and the follow-up interview provide information that cannot be gained from the SILL and the think-aloud. Furthermore, Hosenfeld's successful/unsuccessful framework puts the participants strategy use into perspective.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis of Data

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine and interpret the results of the questionnaire, the SILL and the think-aloud task. It will begin by looking at each participant focussing on the strategies they used during the think-aloud task, as well as incorporating data from the questionnaire, SILL and the follow-up interview. Following on, the data from the SILL will be used to gain an understanding of how the participants perceive their LLS use. The discussion will also look at the similar and different strategies the participants used during the think-aloud and how they compare to the SILL. Additional information will also be taken from the follow-up interview. Subsequently, Hosenfeld's notion of a successful/unsuccessful reader will be used to determine if indeed the participants are successful or unsuccessful readers. The participants will then be examined in relation to individual differences: level of language learning, age and gender.

The participants were two university students studying Italian through Flinders University. Both students were volunteers and were not known to the researcher and, therefore, their proficiency in Italian was unknown to the researcher at the beginning of the study. Both participants completed the questionnaire and the SILL through the online survey generator *Planetsurvey*. They were then contacted to complete the reading task think-aloud with the researcher and subsequently, a follow-up interview to discuss items that arose during the think-aloud as well as their general strategy use while reading. The think-aloud and the follow-up interview were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Both of the participants are at different stages in their learning. Tom is a second-year beginner student and Emma a first-year advanced student.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the text chosen was based on the Italian tradition of *La Befana*, a witch who brings gifts to children on the epiphany. It was chosen due to its level of language and also due to the content, which should be familiar to students studying Italian as another language.

4.2 Case study 1: Tom

Tom (pseudonym) is 66 years old. He is a retired teacher of Chemistry and Science and he has life experience. He is studying Italian as a single topic and is in his second year of the beginner course. The questionnaire provided general information about Tom's background, his aspirations for language learning, his language learning experiences and how he views himself as a language learner. His motivation is to be able to speak to his wife's family the next time they go to Italy. He studied German at school for four years until Year 11 and also some Latin. He did not continue with studying a language at school due to having to take other subjects. When learning a language, he finds learning about culture and food the easiest and learning grammar and pronunciation the hardest. He describes his experiences of reading in Italian as both good and bad, but also frustrating. When he reads in Italian he claims that he slowly evaluates the words. He has found learning a language much more

enjoyable at University than at school. He believes that his proficiency in Italian is fair compared with other members of his class, but poor in comparison to native speakers.

Tom had a very calm demeanour, and this was demonstrated during the think-aloud. He was very methodical and did not need to be prompted at all throughout the think-aloud. He scanned, looked for key words, guessed, looked for cognates, used the dictionary, translated, paraphrased, summarised and used schema. Tom used key words to build understanding and was able to look up words correctly. He continued to read, even if it did not make sense and was able to use what he understood to create meaning of what he did not know

> *So it gives me a bit of an idea, maybe that first paragraph is about, um, at Christmas time Father Christmas is supposed to come on a journey, um, possibly pulling a slay, bringing stuff for all the families, but it hasn't happened for a while. Umm let's try the second one*.

Tom persisted with reading even though he could not make out a word. He was also able to recognise cognates (*So a couple of words there. I recognize, mangiare, um, bicchirino da vino, so drinking a bit of the wine, um, I'm not sure what word that is. That might make him more generosa, I assume that's similar to the English*) and used the cognitive strategy of identifying grammatical categories. For example, *i regali* is a plural (…i regali… *must be… so that's plural*, di regala). Another cognitive strategy he used was looking up words in the dictionary but did not rely on it. He only used it only when a word, which was pivotal to comprehension came up a number of times (*so regali has appeared many times so let's have a look at that; …there's regali again, … yeah, gift…*). By using these strategies Tom was able to identify the key words that would give him understanding of the passage and he was able to keep the meaning of the passage in his mind.

Tom began the think-aloud by scanning the first paragraph to find words that he recognised (*Well, the first thing I'm looking at is the first paragraph which is three lines and I'm trying to recognize words that I'm familiar with*). The first paragraph took 3'42'' for Tom to read and gain an understanding. The first paragraph is only three sentences, which he identified. He recognised *Natale* (Christmas) and *tutti* (all) and he used them to try to piece together an understanding of the first paragraph (*so I understand Natale, I understand tutti, so at Christmas, um, something together, um, we travel*). He then came across a series of words *slitta tirata delle renne*, none of which he recognised. He said that he was looking for a key word to get him going. He identified *tirata* as a verb and searched for it in the dictionary (*ok, so, tirata, I suspect is a verb, so tir, so I'm looking for tir…, I'm not having any luck here,…tyranny, tyrant… tirare, here we go, to pull, ok, so to pull, so we're on some sort of journey)*. He concluded that the text was about a journey and that "we pulled [*tirata*] something". When he became stuck on the next sentence he decided to skip that and continue on (*we might just skip that bit, so we'll go on to the next bit tutti la famiglia so to all the families, good tradition, but nothing was bought, succeeded for six generations [word is gennaio], ok so Christmas*). This demonstrates that he does not get bogged down when he reads and keeps going until he can find words that he knows. Eventually, he was able to get an idea of what the first paragraph was about by using the keys words he knew. He then

went back to the beginning and gave a summary of the first paragraph. Tom did this quite successfully and summarised the first three lines of the text (*So it gives me a bit of an idea, maybe that first paragraph is about, um at Christmas time Father Christmas is supposed to come on a journey, um possibly pulling a slay, bringing stuff for all the families, but it hasn't happened for a while*). He continued to summarise as he read the passage (*so that paragraph is suggesting that if you were good for the year you would get lots of presents, so this is a, I won't say fairy tale, but close to it*).

It was evident during the think-aloud that the text was a little difficult for Tom and, consequently, he was not able to understand every word in the text, but he persisted

> *Now when the children, the babies, [mumbles], stupid and don't believe in befana, befana, their mums and dads …[looks up] put the gifts near the letto, letto, [looks up], letto, bed, ok so, …children are going to sleep… and they communicate that they don't believe in befana,um, the parents put the gifts near the bed. Questa la gente vede…. Parents… good and generous necessarily…good and generous, some, strange words…because the children…questa verità…again just look up a couple of words here I can't work out. S, f ….[looks in dic] sfat…explode, or to destroy a myth, ok so it's to destroy, verità, tell the truth*.

Tom used both bottom-up and top-down strategies to gain meaning of the text. Not only did he search for keywords (*planning*), but he underlined them and wrote down the meanings of some words too (*highlighting*). He claimed, "For me this is like a jigsaw puzzle, so I'm looking for keywords." When looking at the second paragraph, Tom referred back to the first paragraph. He had seen the word *La Befana*, and he commented, "that's in the introduction, so it's obviously important", which implies the use of top-down strategies.

In the follow-up interview, Tom was asked about the first thing he does when he gets a text. He said that he looks for as many words as he knows, which he did when he began the think-aloud (*Well, the first thing I'm looking at is the first paragraph which is three lines and I'm trying to recognize words that I'm familiar with, so I understand Natale, I understand tutti, so at Christmas, uhm, something together, um, we travel, now some of these words here, slitta tirata delle renne [pron], none of those ring a bell, so if I had access to the dictionary I would look up the tirata to see if I could get a key word to get me going with the rest, so I'll do that*). He claimed that the text in the think-aloud was challenging because of the vocabulary. In the follow-up interview he identified his lack of vocabulary as one of his weak areas in language learning, and that it makes it difficult to understand texts. Because he is aware of the problem, he has strategies in place to improve his vocabulary such as learning new words as he comes across them, creating flash cards and categorising new words.

Tom is a motivated student who is determined to learn Italian and will persist even if the text is trying. Considering that he found the text demanding, he was asked that if he had started to read this text of his own accord, would he have kept going. He said that he would have, but that he probably would have used Google translate to help him. Tom will either

use a dictionary in class or Google translate when at home, to assist him when reading texts. Tom will look up a phrase when using Google translate, but says that he refrains from looking up a whole sentence. He said, “Once I’ve got a phrase and I think that if those five words mean this, then this is what the rest of it must mean”.

Tom is also beginning to get a grasp on the structure of the language and uses the strategy of categorising words. He said that he is now in the habit of looking at the endings of words for suffixes and the parts of the sentence, “I’m starting to get the idea of where the verb goes, where the adjective goes, etc., etc., and how they are related, so I’m trying to look for a relationship”. He is also conscious of words that appear regularly in the text and if he does not know what they mean he will find out because he sees them as critical to his understanding of the text.

Although Tom studied a language at school he has found it difficult to grasp the terminology of language learning. For example, he commented, “…even in the classroom they talk about different types of verbs, but I have never thought of the English language in that way. I mean my background is in chemistry, so you’re not interested in verbs as such, so you know the past passive and all this stuff, I’ve never thought of that…”. Tom has found learning Italian 50 years after he studied German and Latin quite a different experience. His previous language learning experience was based very much on rote learning rather than using the language. He mentioned that at school they did not read, and they did not translate or try to write in another language, but it is something that he has had to come to grips with while learning Italian now. Because of his limited vocabulary he finds it a struggle to write 50-100 words in Italian on what he did on the weekend. However, he understands that if he were to go back to Italy, that is what he needs to be able to do.

4.3 Case Study 2: Emma

Emma is a first-year advanced student and is 19 years old. She studied Italian to Year 12 and is currently studying Italian through Flinders University. She has been studying Italian for six years in total. She is also studying history and psychology which has meant that she has participated in many research studies. Emma would like to be a high-school teacher and might teach Italian. Her family is also of Italian origin. Her motivation for studying Italian is to be able to converse with her grand-parents and she also sees learning a language as valuable in many aspects of her life, especially for helping gain a better knowledge of the workings of the English language. During the think-aloud she was very confident. She has a strong personality and she did not need to be prompted throughout the think-aloud.

Emma said in the questionnaire that, of the four language skills, she finds reading in Italian the easiest, but speaking without preparation difficult. She feels confident when she reads in Italian but claims that she reads slowly. She believes that her level of Italian is fair compared to those in her class, but in contrast to native speakers she claims that she is of a low-level.

During the think-aloud Emma categorised language, substituted, translated, and used affective strategies especially self-talk. She was self-conscious of the approach that she took as she knew that she was being observed. She began the think-aloud by looking at the

dictionary and stating, “I apologise in advance, but I might need this a lot”. She claimed that the way she reads a text is dependent on the situation. If she had stumbled on the text herself, she said that she would have just read it and not worried about understanding every word and still would have been able to say what the text was about. Whereas in the think-aloud, she was quite conscious of translating most of the words and this could have ramifications on data. If she came across a word she did not know she would work around it to find out what it meant

> *Che attraversa il cielo volando, the sky, che well travels the sky volando, volare, ok, ok travels the sky while flying on a horse, della sua scopa, scop… scopa…scopa volando that’s the, that tense like she was flying, so she was flying on a horse, sua scopa, I am so embarrassed so far…sulla sco.. (looking in dictionary) on her what, on her…got scopo, scopa…broom…wow that’s really dumb. ok ... I know I have never used that word for broom before, I think whatever I have learnt is like dialect or something. Che attraver… ok, so going back…she’s quite witty, whatever, and she travels the sky while flying, maybe it’s not horse, a cavallo, …I thought cavallo was horse ,… the sky while flying… I mean ok, well she’s got a broom…oh, ok no a cavallo, no …she flies in the sky while, no, she travels the sky while flying at the like, like riding a cavallo like riding her broom*.

If she could not work out its meaning from other words in the text, she looked it up in the dictionary. Emma commented that she was trying to be accurate during the think-aloud. The text was not easy for Emma, but it was not overly difficult for her either.

When reading a text for the first time Emma says that she will skip to the end to get an idea of the main points. For her, this gives the text context as the main points are summed up at the end of the text. She will also read the title, as she did with the text of the think-aloud to establish what might be in the text. When beginning the text for the think-aloud, Emma said that she did not really pay much attention to the title of the text other than that it had the word *Befana* in it. She immediately thought that the text had something to do with Christmas which framed the text for her. She already knew who *Befana* was and that “it had something to do with the Epiphany and the sixth and that she was ugly”. This assisted Emma while she was reading through the description of *Befana*

> *La befana is a vecchiaccia, we were doing this this week,- accia is like she is a really old, ugly, e malvestita, vestita dress, I’m guessing, not that I use this word but malvestita is like ugly dress I know she wears something kinda, I don’t know, dodgy looking, con un catteraccio, ok the accio again, so it’s like she got bad character, bad personality, con un catteraccio, terribile, ok, bad characteristics*.

This demonstrates the use of schema and top-down strategies.

Emma also finds that the memory strategy of visualisation helps while reading. According to Emma, visualising what *Befana* looks like made the text easier to read and “you just kind of flow through and things just fall in to place”. The text talks about *Befana* putting presents in

a stocking at the end of the children's bed. However, Emma had trouble understanding the word for stocking, *la calza*

> *ok this is getting too much, calza, I need to know, it's like the fourth time I 've seen it and I haven't figured it out yet. I'm going to go with chimney, I'm feeling strongly about chimney they find it in the chimney surely. Calza What am I thinking of cassetta, but that's like draw or something, calza... come on be chimney...calza, calzetta ankle sock that's…oh and the sock, the stocking, sock stocking, I'm assuming that's chimney but that would make sense why it was near the bed before. In their stocking, I forgot that people use stockings, maybe because I don't use stockings. That makes more sense*.

Eventually she resorted to using the dictionary to find the word, but she claimed in the follow-up interview that because she could not visualise it, it impeded her understanding of the text.

Emma becomes worried if she substitutes a word that is incorrect, it might reframe the rest of what she is reading. She rarely uses a dictionary and tends to use online devices such as *WordReference* for looking up single words and Google Translate for phrases. However, during tests in class, students only have access to dictionaries. This, according to Emma takes much more time. In a test not long after the think-aloud, Emma commented that, because it was taking too much time to find the words she was looking for in the dictionary, she just kept going and said to herself, "I'll come back to that later". But she did not because she had worked out what the word meant by reading on.

Emma used affective strategies, particularly self-talk, during the think-aloud. When asked about it in the follow-up interview, she claimed that she did not really think about it too much. It would seem that it is a personality trait and that she is like that, not just when she reads in Italian, but in English too. Much of the self-talk was positive and reinforcing "Yeah!", "Got ya!", "That makes more sense", "I am getting the gist, there's some words that I haven't seen…it kinda helps I do know who *befana* is.". Although she used a lot of positive self-talk in the think-aloud, Emma also use negative phrases. She claims that when she is reading in Italian and it is really difficult, she starts to think of things such as, "I don't understand", "I'm not even good at it". However, during the think-aloud she also used negative phrases such as, "I'm so embarrassed", "Wow, that's so dumb". Her comments could be because she was being observed and that felt she had to perform well.

Emma was asked in the follow-up interview about when she usually reads in Italian, how she goes about understanding the text. Emma said that she did not think about the way she read too much but would generally try to read from start to finish. If she gets stuck on a word she said that she might stay there for a long time unless she tells herself not to. She would then skip to the end and go back and try to figure out what the text is saying.

When asked in the follow-up interview if she employs any particular strategies, Emma was not aware of what strategies were and had to be prompted to bring things to mind that she may do while reading. She came up with jumping to conclusions and *skimming* but said that

she would not call it “an explicit strategy, that when I see something I sit down and go, ‘ok let me just skim it first and then I’ll go back and read it’”. Emma has been studying Italian for a number of years and is probably at the point in her language learning journey that she has a repertoire of LLS that she uses, but they have become automatic.

4.4 Discussion

The SILL was given to the participants to gain an understanding of how they perceived themselves as users of LLS throughout all aspects of language learning, not just reading. It is also a reflective tool for the individual. In the overall average Emma performed slightly better (see *Table 4.1*). In most of the strategy areas Emma seems to use more strategies than Tom, except in cognitive and metacognitive strategy use. However, Tom used only slightly more strategies in these areas. A number of studies have found that non-proficient learners use significantly less strategies than proficient learners (Griffiths 2008, Liu 2004, Chamot & Rubin, 1985) with proficient learners using up-to three times more strategies than non-proficient learners (Griffiths 2008). In light of the research, the data from the SILL does not suggest that either of the participants is less-proficient than the other. Abraham (1990) also found that less proficient learners use strategies and that they often do not use metacognitive strategies. Both of the participants in this study recorded in the SILL that they use metacognitive strategies, also signifying that they are proficient learners.

The results of the SILL do not necessarily mean that just because the participant thinks they use a particular strategy, that they actually do. On the other hand, Grenfell and Harris (1999) make the point that “there is tension between what remains implicit and what can be made explicit” (p. 53). Also just because a learner does not mention a strategy, it does not mean that they are not using it. As already mentioned in the literature review, as learners become more proficient, they are less conscious of the strategies that they use (Oxford, 2011, p. 12; Alexander, Graham, Harris, 1998, p. 131, Cohen 2007, pp. 11-12).

The results of the SILL are presented in *Table 4.1*. In her language learning, Emma claims to use more strategies than Tom, overall and in most categories. However, Tom claims to use more cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies than Emma. These differences may be due to individual differences such as gender or language level. The use of strategies will be discussed together with the data from the think-aloud. The data analysis will also highlight how the classification of LLS is conflicting due to the overlapping of strategies.

	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social	Overall Average
Tom	2.6	3.12	3	3.6	1.7	2.44	2.92
Emma	3.2	3.08	4.25	3.4	1.8	3	3.17

Table 4.1: Participant results of Oxford’s SILL

Below is a table of the strategies used by Emma and Tom during the think-aloud. The main categories of strategies are from Oxford (1990).

Strategy	Tom	Example	Emma	Example
Cognitive strategies				
Recognised formulas and patterns/grouping	Verb = tirata, plural = i regali	*tirata*, I suspect is a verb; *i regali*… must be… so that's plural	Volando = ing, -accio suffix; past reflexive	volando that's the, that tense like she was flying; ok past tense, cos you've got reflexive; - then mente is usually the ly on the end like we saw it before somewhere
Getting the idea quickly	Realised text was about Christmas	So, I understand *Natale*, I understand *tutti*, so at Christmas, uhm, something together	Realised text was about Christmas	a Natale, so Christmas, something at Christmas; Babbo Natale, ah that's useful, Santa Claus
Analyse contrastively	Looked for English in words	I can't actually see any English in that, [used dictionary] *sostanzialmente*, here we are, substantial and essential, ok, so substantial, ...so… one is substantially normal, or you've been good or bad	Looked for English in words	but also with a big sense of… *umorismo*, …with a big sense of, I don't know, humour?,
Translating	Continuous	Now when the children, the babies, [mumbles], stupid and don't believe in *befano*, *befana*, their mums and dads …[looks up] put the gifts near the l*etto*, *letto*, [looks up], *letto*, bed, ok so, …children are go to sleep… and	Continuous	Se una persona, if a person during the year *si e comportata*, *si* ok like, one… ok past tense, cos you've got reflexive, if there were *comportare*, if they *comportata bene facilemente*,… if a person during the year, …I'm guessing it has to do with like

		they communicate that they don't believe in *befana*, um, the parents put the gifts near the bed		is good, *comportare*, that might be one to come back to…I think I get it though. if the person was, I'm guessing, was good bene *facilmente* easily in the morning *facilemente*, yeah I'm going to go with good
Summarising	Summarised a paragraph to gain meaning; after first reading summarised what reading meant	So, it gives me a bit of an idea, maybe that first paragraph is about; so that paragraph is suggesting that if you were good for the year you would get lots of presents	No data	
Highlighting	Circle/ noticed important words	*la befana* [underlines], that's in the introduction, so it's obviously important	Underlined and wrote meanings of key words	Circled *slitta tirata*, *a che*, *scopa*, *sfatarla*; *over comportata* wrote *comportare*, over *crescono* wrote grow; underlined *allegra* and wrote lively
Resourcing	Used dictionary	So if I had access to the dictionary I would look up the *tirata* to see if I could get a key word to get me going with the rest	Used dictionary	ah let's do *italiano* [going to Italian section of dictionary], *slitta*…sleigh, *slitta* like if I know *slitta* then I'll be able to and *renne…slitta…slitta*… I'm going to die if it's not here…sl… *slitta* sleigh
Analysed expressions	No data		Tried to break up the expression to	*ma niente a che vedere*, but no one, *a che*, has seen him, *ma niente a che vedere*, I haven't

			understand it	seen that before but, *ma niente a che vedere con quello che succede il sei*, I mean like I understand what this means like this sentence like, you know, no one sees him on the sixth of January, I'm guessing but, I don't know *a che* kind of threw me
Compensation				
Guess intelligently using linguistic clues	Used words to understand words not known	*tirare*, here we go, to pull, ok, so to pull, so we're on some sort of journey, and we pulled something	Used grammar knowledge –ando (ing), -accio (suffix)	- accia is like she is a really old, ugly
Metacognitive				
Overview and link with known grammatical material and some schema	Made connection with Epiphany	So this is obviously a tradition after Christmas, um happens on the sixth January	Made connection with Christmas	Babbo Natale, ah that's useful, Santa Claus; it kinda helps I do know who befana is
Planning	Knew he had to find key words to understand	I'm trying to recognize words that I'm familiar with	No data	
Self-monitoring	Knew when he was having trouble understanding	Again, I'm trying to find a key word that maybe makes some of the others drop into place; we might just skip that bit, so we'll go on to the next bit; For me this is like a jigsaw puzzle, so	Knew when she needed to look up an unknown word	I'm feeling that's *slitta*, sleigh pulled by reindeer, I'm sorry I have to look this up already; I should probably have used this more [dictionary] I am getting the gist, there's some words that I haven't seen

		I'm looking for key words		
Affective				
Self-talk	No data		Made positive statements	got ya, I know that; also apologetic = sorry I'm going so slow, I'm so embarrassed

Table 4.2: Reading strategies used by Emma and Tom in the think-aloud taken from Oxford (1990)

As seen in the table above, both participants used a variety of strategies including cognitive, compensation, metacognitive and affective strategies throughout the think-aloud. It must be kept in mind that the think-aloud is only a snap shot of the strategies that the participants may use. For example, neither participant commented that they used the memory strategy of grouping during the think-aloud, but they both reported using memory strategies in the SILL. Emma claims to use more memory strategies than Tom. She reported in the follow-up interview that she uses imagery to gain an understanding of the text and that she groups words into categories, for example, suffixes. Whereas Tom mentioned in the follow-up interview that he conducts structured reviewing by using flashcards and groups words into categories, such as verbs. However, these were not obvious in the think-aloud. Furthermore, the think-aloud was only conducted with one type of text in one particular situation. The use of different text types and different situations may give rise to the use of a different set of strategies (Macaro, 2001, p.65).

Metacognitive strategies

Metacognitive strategies are classified as indirect strategies. Oxford's SILL categorises them as being related to the whole language learning experience, not to a task. For example, *monitoring one's learning* signifies the evaluation of learning over a period of time. However, in the context of the think-aloud both of the participants used metacognitive strategies that were related to the task at hand. Tom knew he had to find key words to make sense of the text and he did this from the outset. Emma and Tom were both able to monitor their comprehension of the text and when they were not able to understand they resorted to using a dictionary. In the follow-up interview both of the participants claimed that they begin reading by looking at a text to determine what it might be about and the structure of the text, therefore they are using the strategy of *planning*. However, it was difficult to ascertain if the participants used metacognitive strategies in the think-aloud due to the nature of such strategies. According to Oxford (1990) language students use metacognitive strategies inconsistently, without really understanding their value (p. 138), and therefore, during the think-aloud the participants did not verbalise them. However, they revealed their use more in the follow-up interview when questioned about how they read a text.

Compensation strategies

Both participants used compensation strategies. They used the strategy of *guessing intelligently*. According to the data from the SILL, Emma claims to use *compensation* strategies more than Tom. Due to her level of language she used *linguistic clues* to recognise the use of the suffix -*accio* to denote bad, for example, when *Befana* was described in the text. She also linked it with what she was studying in class demonstrating an activation of prior knowledge. Tom on the other hand used *non-linguistic clues* such as knowledge of the context, which could also be classed as schema (*epiphany, ah, okay, so that's epiphany,…, do I believe in the epiphany [refers to title],ok so this is obviously a religious connotation. So who is the epiphany?)* The participants' use of schema is discussed further in subsequent paragraphs.

Cognitive strategies

During the think-aloud Tom would go back over the text, refer to the title and what was in the previous paragraph and used the strategy of *summarising* to gain an understanding of the text (*So it gives me a bit of an idea, maybe that first paragraph is about, um, at Christmas time Father Christmas is supposed to come on a journey, um, possibly pulling a slay, bringing stuff for all the families, but it hasn't happened for a while*). Emma rarely went back over the text and did not summarise the text, but rather translated as she went. Emma analysed expressions more than Tom, which is probably due more to her having a higher level of understanding of the text. However, they both *underlined*, *circled* and *annotated* their text. They underlined key words or phrases, either because they understood them, and they could use them to assist with comprehension, or because they did not understand them, but knew that they were crucial to their understanding of the text.

Schema/ getting the idea quickly

In the *cognitive strategies* category Oxford places the sub-strategy *getting the idea quickly*. This is equivalent to activating schema. The activation of the participants' schema about Christmas in Italy was revealed more in the follow-up interview. Throughout the think-aloud the participants did not express that they were using schema. This is a situation in which the participants are doing something in a think-aloud and are not reporting it. It did not seem that either participant read the title, *Credendo alla Befana*, which was chosen specifically so that the participants would need to use schema. *Befana* is based on a legend. She is a witch who gives out presents to children on the Epiphany, and, children who have been naughty only receive lumps of coal from her. Given the background of both participants I would have assumed that they would be familiar with the story of *La Befana*. In fact, both mentioned after the think-aloud that they knew who *La Befana* was, but neither really spoke about her during the think-aloud, except Emma who said that it helped that she knew who *Befana* was but gave no more detail. I was also expecting the participants to make more of a reference to *Befana* or to elaborate on what was going through their minds. Carrell (1989) and Cohen (1987) both talk about the taxing of the students' minds during a think-aloud, which may have been the case for Tom who was grappling with vocabulary and was a little out of his league. This could also be said of Emma who was conscious of doing well.

However, the think-aloud data does suggest to some degree that both participants activated their content schema on Christmas. Emma did so more overtly than Tom. She found *Babbo Natale* (Father Christmas) (*ah, that's useful, Santa* Clause) and then guessed at words that she believed to be associated with Christmas such as *renne* (reindeer), *slitta* (sleigh) (sulla sua bella*, ok on his beautiful* slitta*, sleigh, I'm guessing that's sleigh,* slitta tir*… oh, I' don't know,* dalle renne*, reindeer, I'm feeling that's* slitta*, sleigh pulled by reindeer)*. Tom recognised the word *Natale* but did not make any more explicit connections during the think-aloud. Although it is evident that he used his schema to work out the words *slitta tirata dalle renne*. As previously mentioned, Tom looked up the word *tirata* and skipped over the other words. In his summary of the paragraph, it is evident that he is using schema of Christmas and the verb *pulled* to make sense of those words.

Top-down and bottom-up strategies

Both of the participants used bottom-up and top-down reading strategies to understand the text. Emma and Tom used the context to guess the meaning of words and predict what the text might be about. Tom uses top-down strategies such as *scanning* for words he knows to give him an idea of what the text might be about. He claims that when he reads a text for the first time he tries to get a gist of the text then hopefully he can build on that, which suggest that he uses metacognitive strategies. In the reading of the text in the think-aloud, Tom said that when he first saw the text he saw the word Christmas, so knew that the text would have something to do with Christmas. He also looked at the structure of the text, how it was broken up into paragraphs and that there was a conclusion. As he was going through the text, he said that he was desperately trying to remember the story about *la befana*, to help him understand the text. In the 1980s he had spent Christmas in Italy and knew of the tradition of *la befana*. Although he was going through the text word by word, at the same time he was using his schema to help him make sense of the story.

Both Emma and Tom seemed to understand the different word order in Italian to English. Emma did not comment on the word order, but Tom did in his follow-up interview. He said that he is becoming more aware of the difference in word order and he did not trip on it during the think-aloud. They also used schema which activated word associations and when they did not understand they used bottom-up strategies. This fits in with Eskey's (1988) argument that good readers simultaneously decode and interpret the text (p. 94).

Overall, Tom and Emma used the same amount of strategies. Both used 11 of the total 13 strategies. They took the same amount of time to complete the think-aloud, Tom 23'05'' and Emma 24'15'', but Emma spoke more than Tom. A better indication of how much each participant spoke is the transcription of the think-aloud. Tom's transcript is 1, 239 words and Emma's is 2, 412. This may be due to Tom being new to language learning and, more likely, differences in personality. Also, his Italian vocabulary is not as extensive as Emma's and consequently he did not speak as much. Emma showed greater comprehension of the text than Tom, which could be attributed to language level proficiency.

4.6 Successful/unsuccessful reader

The notion of a successful/ unsuccessful language learner from Hosenfeld's 1984 study enables us to clearly identify if a leaner is a successful reader or not despite their proficiency level and the number of strategies used. If we apply the framework to the data from Tom and Emma we find that they both fit into the successful reader category.

Successful readers	**Unsuccessful readers**
Keep the meaning of the passage in mind	Loose the meaning of sentences as soon as they decode them
Read in broad phrases	Read word-by-word or in short phrases
Skip inessential words	Rarely skip words
Guess from context meaning of unknown words	Turn to the glossary for the meaning of new words
Have a good self-concept as a reader	Have a poor self-concept as a reader
Identify the grammatical category of words	
Demonstrate sensitivity to a different word order in the foreign language	
Examine illustrations	
Read the title and make inferences from it	
Use orthographic information i.e. capitalisation	
Refer to the side gloss	
Use the glossary as a last resort	
Look up words correctly	
Continue if unsuccessful at decoding a word or phrase	
Recognise cognates	
Use knowledge of the world	
Follow through with a proposed solution to a problem	
Evaluate their guesses	

Table 4.3: Hosenfeld, Case studies of ninth grade readers, p. 233, in Aldersen and Urquhart

Both participants looked for key words to help them understand the text. They also both used the dictionary, but only when they were not able to guess the meaning of a key word from other words. Both participants used the title to activate schema about the text. Both participants also persevered with the task and Tom, especially, kept going if he could not understand a word. In fact, there were many times when he did not even read out the Italian, but still made sense of the paragraph. However, Emma was determined to be as precise as possible most probably because she wanted to make a good impression. Otherwise, Emma said in the follow-up interview that she would generally read through without bothering too much about words she did not understand. Both were able to follow through with a proposed solution to a problem and evaluate their guesses. Emma, especially, was able to work her way through a problem by substituting different words until the sentence made sense.

In addition, both participants had a good self-concept as a reader. They were both confident in their own way. Emma was more outgoing than Tom, but that may have to do with personality. They read chunks of the text at a time to work out what it meant and kept the meaning in their head and referred back to it as they went on. This is evident with Tom's comment about *la Befana*, "*la befana* [underlines], that's in the introduction, so it's obviously important". Hosenfeld's study is also consistent with more current research such as Macaro (2001). Macaro (2001) uses the Lingua project as an example of the characteristics of unsuccessful learners in which 16 students were given a think-aloud. The students made wild guesses, did not change their guesses even if there was conflicting information, did not use general knowledge, they did not turn their attention to the words that they already knew, they overused cognates, focused more on nouns and neglected verbs, they were not aware of the text or writing conventions and they gave up easily and lost confidence (p. 85). Macaro goes on to say that the unsuccessful leaners did not combine top-down and bottom-up strategies. Neither of the participants in this study were like those in Macaro's study, and therefore, do not fit into the unsuccessful category of readers. Low-level readers also tend to read at a word-level. Neither of the participants did this and both were able to understand the text at a holistic level.

Individual differences

Two individual differences of the participants stood out, age and gender. There also seemed to be differences in personality and life experience, which may contribute to strategy choice. However, there are many individual learner factors that could also contribute to strategy choice such as level of interest, motivation, learning style and background (Anderson, 1991, p. 470). Variables such as these are hard to measure, especially in this study where they participants are small in number.

4.7 Age

Age is another difference between the two participants and it is considered to be an important factor in language learning with the Critical Period occurring between the age of 10-12 (Scovel, 1998, p. 22). Tom, has passed this critical period, having begun his study of another language in his mid-60s. Whereas, Emma began studying Italian at approximately the age of 12. The research is inconclusive about age and language learning. In fact, Ellis (2008) claims that there are differences in opinions among researchers as to the onset of a Critical Period for language learning (p. 31). Ellis also states that the research indicates that language learning is not subject to age, even though it is suggested that the ability to learn a language declines with age. Ellis (2008) has summarised age-related effects on language learning and most of the points refer to native-like proficiency, not other areas of language learning. Furthermore, Ellis does in fact make the point that that the critical period will depend on the area of language learning (pp. 31-32). Tom has implemented strategies to assist with his language learning, has demonstrated his motivation in language learning and also brings life experience to his studies. Considering these factors, we can dismiss age as an individual difference in this study. Further study, however, would be needed to evaluate if age and reading strategies are related.

4.8 Gender

In terms of strategy use, it is believed that gender can play a role. In a study on how individual characteristics affect strategy use in children, Psaltou-Joycey and Gavriilidou (2018) found that females used more strategies than males (pp. 179-180). Also, according to Ellis (2008, p. 713) women are better at using strategies than men. Lee (2012, p. 316) found that females used more meta-cognitive and social-affective strategies while males used memory, compensation and cognitive strategies more often. The results of the SILL show Emma to use more memory and compensation strategies than Tom, but Tom uses more cognitive strategies. Furthermore, Zenyali (2012, p. 1617) found that women use social/affective strategies more than men, which was evident in the SILL and the think-aloud. In a study by Zhang (2018), it was found that males used metacognitive strategies more than females (p. 141). According to Zhang this is consistent with Phakiti (2003) and Young and Oxford's (1997) studies. However, a number of studies have found that in fact there is no difference between in the overall performance of men and women, and if so, women only have a slight advantage. According to Poole's study of academic reading (2005), there is no difference in the strategy use of males and females (p. 13). These studies demonstrate the contradictory nature of strategy research. The results of the SILL and the think-aloud in this study between Emma and Tom demonstrate that Emma uses more slightly more strategies than Tom, but it is not the number of strategies used, but if they are used effectively (Dörnyei, 2010, p. 29). Furthermore, it comes down to individual differences.

The strategies that both participants used in the think-aloud can be attributed to individual differences and individual learner variables. Their choice of strategies was not overly different and was not specific to either level of learning. However, the way in which each participant used the strategies and the depth to which they used them varied. Emma's strategies may be more sub-conscious now that she has been learning a language for a number of years. While Tom, who is relatively new to language learning, may not have yet reached that point and his strategy use may still be conscious. Tom was less successful at understanding every word in the text, but he has only been formally studying Italian for 18 months. However, he was able to implement strategies to help him understand what the text was about. Tom has recognised that he needs to improve his vocabulary in order to understand a text. Therefore, the strategies he uses are predominately *finding key words*, *skimming*, *paraphrasing/summarising*. He has put in place learning strategies to assist him with learning vocabulary. Although his proficiency is not the same as Emma's he has, in his own right, the traits of a successful language learner. Emma, on the other hand, has a larger vocabulary to draw on. She is able to translate, get a better understanding of the text faster because she is more proficient in reading.

Despite the claims from some researchers that it is not the amount of LLS used, but how well they are used, the data from this study has demonstrated that proficient language learners use a variety of LLS. Each participant in the think-aloud used 11 different reading strategies and across a number of strategy areas, but the combinations of those strategies were individualised. This could be attributed to age and gender. With the numbers in this

study being small, more research is needed to determine if specific strategies are favoured more by proficient learners and non-proficient learners and to what extent individual differences, such as age and gender, can in fact influence strategy use.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 Conclusion

The initial question for this study was: *Which reading strategies are used by proficient and non-proficient learners of Italian at university?* However, the study depended greatly on the students who volunteered. The two students who did volunteer were both proficient students and the study question really relied on a mix of proficient and non-proficient students. However, even though the two participants are proficient learners, they are at different stages in their language learning. This changed the focus of the study to: *what strategies do students use at different stages in their learning and how do individual differences affect strategy use?* Furthermore, only two students volunteered to be part of the study which did not give enough data to have conclusive results and the results of the study are only suggestive.

The reason for the lack of student participation in this study could be attributed to it being seen as too onerous by students as there are three parts to it. Care was taken to ensure that students did not have to give up too much time, but also to not compromise the research. The questionnaire and the SILL were both placed online through a computer-generated survey maker in order to make access easier for the participants. The timing of presenting the research to students was also considered. It was decided to visit classes in week three and four of semester one. This was deemed enough time for students to have settled into study after the summer break, but at the same time not to be inundated with assignments. A further factor that may have contributed to the lack of participation is that the researcher was unknown to the students. Students may not have felt a connection with the researcher never having seen the research before, and therefore, they did not feel any need to participate. The study could not be changed from a volunteer basis to a forced participation due to the ethics policy of the university. These participants are not really representative of the population.

The data collected for this study was based predominately on a think-aloud and a follow-up interview, together with a background questionnaire and the SILL. With a greater amount of time, this study could be enhanced by using other methods of data collection such as a range of readings, comprehension passages using multiple choice. Furthermore, more focussed passages that are chosen to elicit a particular reading skill such as understanding the main idea or drawing inferences from a passage would also provide deeper more complex data which would also give the data more validity. The data collected during the think-aloud and the follow-up interview demonstrated that the participants, despite being at different levels, used a number of similar strategies: *recognising formulas and patterns/groupings*, *getting the idea quickly*, *translating*, *highlighting*, *guessing intelligently using linguistic clues*, *overviewing and linking with known grammatical material and some schema*, *self-monitoring*. In addition, Tom used *analysing contrastively*, *summarising* and *planning*, while Emma used *analysing expressions* and *self-talk*. These differences may be due to individual differences of each of the participants and, furthermore, they may relate to their level of language learning. For example, only Emma analysed expressions. This may

be due to her having a deeper knowledge of grammatical structures and she felt that she needed to analyse them in order to complete her understanding. Tom, however, did not refer to any expressions in the text, most likely because they were too complex for him to understand at this point in his learning. This supports Sarig (1987) who claims that there is individuality in the reading process and that readers use a combination of strategies that suit themselves (pp.116-118). This combination of strategies is personalised and may not create success for other learners.

As a teacher, it is necessary to offer a wide range of strategies to learners to account for different learner styles and abilities. Using an array of strategies does not necessarily mean that they are used effectively. It is not that all of the strategies presented to the learner need to be learnt, but students must have options available to them. Students are not always conscious that they are using strategies or the effectiveness of those strategies. It is therefore, important that teachers implement the explicit teaching of language learning strategies into their pedagogy. Anderson (1991) claims that, "simply knowing what strategy to use is not sufficient and thus an investigation into the orchestration of strategies should be closely examined" (p. 471). Students must be taught how to evaluate their strategy use as well as be offered other options if they deem a strategy is not working. Furthermore, students need to be taught how to monitor their strategy use to ensure that they are successful.

Further studies of language learning strategies need to take into account the personality of the learners and view LLS holistically rather than analysing strategies as separate entities. As Griffiths (2018) states, "every learner is the sum of all possible variables, the permutations of which are more or less infinite" (p. 70). Larger studies need to be conducted that reduced the number of variables between participants. For example, participants need to be at the same stage of learning, the same age and the same gender, to name a few variables. In addition, longitudinal studies would offer a better insight into the strategic preferences of students. Such a study would suit age and language learning, as the experience of each learner differs in accordance with each person's position in their lifespan. Such a study would suit someone like Tom. Also, it would be valuable to conduct another study with Tom at the completion of his studies next year, and then again after he has spent an extended time in Italy. This would give a better insight into his strategy use. Although he has the criteria of a successful language learner and is a successful language learner at this point, he is determined, he knows his weaknesses and is implementing strategies to improve his language learning, it would be of interest to see if fossilisation occurs and at what stage. In terms of the study of age in second language acquisition, it would also be beneficial to study other older students, who have the motivation to attend university to learn a language and examine the strategies they use.

It is also necessary to conduct studies in schools with adolescents. Boys and girls learn in different ways, much of which relates to brain development. The question is then, in a school context is it necessary to teach particular strategies that are suited to the way in which boys and girls learn? Also, there needs to be further study on gender throughout

language learning, that ranges from schooling until university, and the different strategies favoured by males and females also needs to be pursued.

It is not possible to find a universal set of good language learning strategies as all learners will have their own variables. Ellis (2008) affirms that, “the general picture that emerges is that different populations of learners employ strategies in different ways, suggesting that we cannot expect to find a set of universal good language learning strategies” (p. 713). Strategy use is multidimensional and is not easy to conceptualise or categorise. This study highlights the need for all language teachers, at all levels to have a good understanding of their students’ needs in order to provide them with a range of LLS that suit the learner as an individual.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

Number:

Please respond to the following questions.

1. Are you male, female, other?
2. How old are you?
3. Where were you born?
4. Do you speak a language other than English fluently? If so, where did you learn that language?
5. Which language(s) are you currently studying at university?
6. Why did you choose that/those language(s)?
7. Have you previously studied a language(s)?
8. Which language(s)?
9. Where have you studied another language? Include both primary and secondary schooling.
10. To what level did you study that/those language(s)?
11. For how long in total did you study that/those languages?
12. Why did you stop studying that/those language(s)?
13. What are your reasons for currently studying a language at university?

14. What do you find the easiest when learning a language?

15. What do you find the hardest when learning a language?

16. When you read a text in another language how do you feel? Why?

17. When you have to read in another language what process do you take?

18. How would you describe your language learning experiences both at school and/or at university?

Appendix B

SILL Survey: Version for English Speakers Learning a New Language

Version 5.1

The STRATEGY INVENTORY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING is designed to gather information about how you, as a student, of a foreign or second language, go about learning that language. On the following pages you will find statements related to learning a new language. Please read each statement. On the separate answer sheet, mark the response (1,2,3,4 or 5) that tells how true the statement is in terms of what you actually do when you are learning the new language.

This is not a test and there is no right or wrong way to answer the statements.

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Generally not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Generally true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

Never or almost never true of me means that the statement is very rarely true of you; that is, you do the behaviour which is described in the statement only in very rare instances.

Generally not true of me means the statement is true of you about half the time; that is, you do the behaviour which is described in the statement less than half the time, but more than in very rare instances.

Somewhat true of me means that the statement is true of you about half the time; that is, sometimes you do the behaviour which is described in the statement more than half the time.

Generally true of me means that the statement is usually true of you; that is, you do the behaviour which is described in the statement more than half the time.

Almost or always true of me means that the statement is true of you in almost all circumstances; that is, you almost always do the behaviour which is described in the statement.

PART A

When learning a new word…

1. I create associations between new material and what I already know.
2. I put the new word in a sentence so I can remember it.
3. I place the new word in a group with other words that are similar in some way (for example, words related to clothing, or feminine nouns)
4. I associate the sound of the new word with the sound of a familiar word.
5. I use rhyming to remember it.

6. I remember the word by making a clear mental image of it or by drawing a picture.
7. I visualise the spelling of the new word in my mind.
8. I use a combination of sounds and images to remember the new word.
9. I list all the other words I know that are related to the new word and draw lines to show relationships.
10. I remember where the new word is located on the page, or where I first saw or heard it.
11. I use flashcards with the new word on one side and the definition or other information on the other.
12. I physically act out the new word.

When learning new material…

13. I review often.
14. I schedule my reviewing so that the review sessions are initially close together in time and gradually become more widely spread apart.
15. I go back to refresh my memory of things I learned much earlier.

PART B

16. I say or write new expressions repeatedly to practice them.
17. I imitate the way native speakers talk.
18. I read a story or dialogue several times until I can understand it.
19. I revise what I write in the new language to improve my writing.
20. I practice the sounds or alphabet of the new language.
21. I use idioms or other routines in the new language.
22. I use familiar words in different combinations to make new sentences.
23. I initiate conversations in the new language.
24. I watch TV shows or movies or listen to the radio in the new language.
25. I try to think in the new language.
26. I attend and participate in out-of-class events where the new language is spoken.
27. I read for pleasure in the new language.
28. I write personal notes, messages, letters, or reports in the new language.
29. I skim the reading passage first to get the main idea, then I go back and read it more carefully.
30. I seek specific details in what I hear or read.
31. I use reference materials such as glossaries or dictionaries to help me use the new language.
32. I take notes in class in the new language.
33. I make summaries of new language material.
34. I apply general rules to new situations when using the language.
35. I find the meaning of a word by dividing the word into parts which I understand.
36. I look for similarities and contrasts between the new language and my own.
37. I try to understand what I have heard or read without translating it word-for-word into my own language.
38. I am cautious about transferring words or concepts directly from my language to the new language.
39. I look for patterns in the new language.

40. I develop my own understanding of how the language works, even if sometimes I have to revise my understanding based on new information.

PART C

41. When I do not understand all the words I read or hear, I guess the general meaning by using any clue I can find, for example, clues from the context or situation.
42. I read without looking up every unfamiliar word.
43. In a conversation I anticipate what the other person is going to say based on what has been said so far.
44. If I am speaking and cannot think of the right expression, I use gestures or switch back to my own language momentarily.
45. I ask the other person to tell me the right word if I cannot think of it in a conversation.
46. When I cannot think of the correct expression to say or write, I find a different way to express the idea, for example, I use a synonym or describe the idea.
47. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones.
48. I direct the conversation to a topic for which I know the words.

PART D

49. I preview the language lesson to get a general idea of what it is about, how it is organised, and how it relates to what I already know.
50. When someone is speaking the new language, I try to concentrate on what the person is saying and put unrelated topics out of my mind.
51. I decide in advance to pay special attention to specific language aspects, for example, I focus the way native speakers pronounce certain sounds.
52. I try to find out all I can about how to be a better language learner by reading books or articles, or by talking with others about how to learn.
53. I arrange my schedule to study and practice the new language consistently, not just when there is the pressure of a test.
54. I arrange my physical environment to promote learning, for instance, I find a quiet, comfortable place to review.
55. I organise my language notebook to record important language information.
56. I plan my goals for language learning, for instance, how proficient I want to become or how I might want to use the language in the long run.
57. I plan what I am going to accomplish in language learning each day or each week.
58. I prepare for an upcoming language task (such as giving a talk in the new language) by considering the nature of the task, what I have to know, and my current language skills.
59. I clearly identify the purpose of the language activity, for instance, in a listening task I might need to listen for the general idea or for specific facts.
60. I take responsibility for finding opportunities to practice the new language.
61. I actively look for people with whom I can speak the new language.
62. I try to notice my language errors and find out the reasons for them.
63. I learn from my mistakes in using the new language.
64. I evaluate the general progress I have made in learning the language.

PART E

65. I try to relax whenever I feel anxious about using the new language.
66. I make encouraging statements to myself so that I will continue to try hard and do my best in language learning.
67. I actively encourage myself to take wise risks in language learning, such as guessing meanings or trying to speak, even though I might make some mistakes.
68. I give myself a tangible reward when I have dome something well in my language learning.
69. I pay attention to physical signs of stress that might affect my language learning.
70. I keep a private diary or journal where I write my feelings about language learning.
71. I talk to someone I trust about my attitudes and feelings concerning the language learning process.

PART F

72. If I do not understand, I ask the speaker to slow down, repeat, or clarify what was said.
73. I ask other people to verify that I have understood or said something correctly.
74. I ask other people to correct my pronunciation.
75. I work with other language learners to practice, review, or share information.
76. I have a regular language learning partner.
77. When I am talking with a native speaker, I try to let him or her know when I need help.
78. In conversation with others in the new language, I ask questions in order to be as involved as possible and show I am interested.
79. I try to learn about the culture of the place where the new language is spoken.
80. I pay close attention to the thoughts and feelings of other people with whom I interact in the new language.

https://s.surveyplanet.com/Hkc3HQSUG

Appendix C

Materiale: n. 95 - **Data**: 22.12.2002 - **Livello**: elementare 2 (A2) - **autore:** Roberto Tartaglione

CREDENDO ALLA BEFANA

Che succede il 6 gennaio: lettura con nota linguistica sull'uso del gerundio

Link: Da dove arriva la Befana; L'Epifania dei pittori

A Natale, come tutti sanno, Babbo Natale (Santa Claus, San Nicola) - dopo aver viaggiato sulla sua bella slitta tirata dalle renne - lascia i regali sotto l'albero in tutte le famiglie. Bella tradizione, certamente, ma niente a che vedere con quello che succede il 6 gennaio.

La notte fra il 5 e il 6 gennaio infatti arriva la Befana.
Chi è la Befana? La Befana è una vecchiaccia brutta e malvestita, con un caratteraccio terribile (ma anche con un grande senso dell'umorismo) che attraversa il cielo volando a cavallo della sua scopa. Anche lei, come Babbo Natale, passa nelle case per lasciare i regali, ma c'è un ma!
Se una persona durante l'anno si è comportata bene facilmente la mattina, svegliandosi, troverà accanto al letto (nella calza che ha lasciato lì vicino pronta per essere riempita) qualche regalo bello e desiderato.
Ma se uno si è comportato male... eh eh, la Befana mette nella calza solo qualche pezzo di carbone!

E se uno è sostanzialmente normale, un po' buono e un po' cattivo? Be', in questo caso troverà nella calza prima di tutto un bel pezzo di carbone (*mamma mia, tutto carbone in questa calza o c'è anche qualcosa di buono?*) e poi, scavando a fondo, fra qualche noce, due mandarini, caramelle e cioccolatini, troverà anche un pacchetto con un regalo vero.
Ma la Befana è anche molto, molto umana: e perciò è un po' corruttibile. Per questo la sera del 5 gennaio la cosa migliore da fare è andare a letto lasciando in cucina un piatto di pasta e un fiasco di vino: la Befana, trovando qualcosa da mangiare e un bicchierino di vino da bere diventa sicuramente più allegra e probabilmente anche un po' più generosa.

Quando i bambini crescono, purtroppo, diventano quasi sempre un po' più stupidi e ingenui e cominciano a "non credere" più alla Befana (qualcuno va raccontando in giro che sono mamma e papà a mettere i regali vicino al letto!). Questa leggenda, inventata probabilmente proprio dai genitori che vogliono sembrare buoni e generosi, è necessario sfatarla, perché ai bambini bisogna dire sempre la verità. Quindi diciamola questa verità!

Babbo Natale non esiste, è vero. Ma la Befana sì!

http://www.scudit.net/mdbefana.htm, accessed 26/1/18