

# THE APPLICATION OF READING STRATEGIES IN PERSIAN AND ENGLISH (A COMPARATIVE STUDY)

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## Abstract

The fact that some aspects of reading ability are readily transferred from one language to another has been supported by a number of studies. The present study aimed to investigate the degree of relationship between the reading strategies adopted in the first language and in the foreign language. The study was conducted as follows. First 57 Iranian students studying at Allame Tabatabai University took the Nelson Language Test (1976), version 450 A. The subjects were all undergraduate seniors majoring in English. Based on the result obtained, the researcher selected 38 subjects who were at an advanced level of language proficiency. In the second phase, a Persian cloze test and a Persian reading strategy questionnaire were administered respectively. In the third phase of the study, an English cloze test and an English reading strategy questionnaire were administered. Finally, in the last phase of the study, the data were statistically analysed. The results showed that out of 17 strategies classified as positive reading strategies, 6 were used frequently in Persian and English and 10 were used moderately in both languages. However, out of 8 negative strategies, 6 were used moderately in both languages and two other strategies were used relatively infrequently in both languages. The correlation coefficient between the two cloze tests was 0.60 which was significant at  $p < 0.01$ . Hence the null hypothesis could be rejected. The results supported the view that reading strategies, among other aspects of reading ability, can be transferred from one language to another.

## Introduction

The extent to which reading strategies are used in the first and foreign language reading comprehension processes has been a question of enduring interest to second/foreign language researchers.

Research into this area generally concerns the reading ability of the learners in the first and in the

foreign language.

Concerning the reading ability in a foreign language, some researchers have argued that it depends crucially upon the reading ability in one's first language rather than upon the students' level of ability in the foreign language. Carrell (1991) stated that in this view students who read poorly in

a second/foreign language do so either because they do not possess good reading skills and strategies in their L1, or because they fail to transfer them. According to Carrell, similar arguments are advanced by experts in bilingual education who maintain that reading or learning to read is accomplished only once, and once learners have matured in their ability to read in the first language, the awareness of the reading process transfers to the second language and does not need to be relearned.

In contrast, other groups of researchers have argued that reading ability in a foreign language is a function of proficiency in that language. Carrell quoted Macnamara (1972) that "reading ability in a second/foreign language appears to be largely a function of proficiency in that language, or that at least some minimal threshold of proficiency needs to be attained in that language before good readers' first language reading strategies can be transferred to reading in the foreign language" (p. 160).

However, Carrell (1991) hypothesized that foreign language reading ability equals first language reading ability and foreign language proficiency. She investigated the first and foreign language reading comprehension of adult native speakers of Spanish and English who were foreign or second/foreign language learners of the other language at different proficiency levels. She demonstrated that both L1 reading ability and L2 language proficiency would each play a significant role in L2 reading ability.

During the past decade scholars in the field of second and foreign language teaching have directed an increasing amount of attention to the role of strategies and the extent they are used in reading comprehension process.

On a general level, strategies implicate an executive processing mechanism guided in some way by purposes for reading, goals set while reading, and the evolving situation and text models (Grabe, 1997). According to Brown (1994), strategies can be defined as specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, and planned designs for controlling

and manipulating information.

Nolan (1991) also states that teaching students to become more strategic when they read increases their understanding of important textual information, as well as their motivation.

Regarding reading strategy use, Chastain (1988) found the following:

Students do not need to know all the vocabulary and grammar to comprehend a major portion of the text to recreate the author's meaning. They can learn to read at a much higher level of proficiency than in the past when the preoccupation with grammar deprived them of the opportunity to read for meaning. They can learn reading strategies that enable them to read much higher levels of proficiency. (p. 224)

The role of reading strategies in reading comprehension is well recognized, and strategic efficiency in reading distinguishes good readers from poor readers (Brown, 1994). According to Grabe (1997), reading strategies may be applicable at many levels of comprehension processing and the idea that fluent readers are strategic readers is well established.

Based on many studies and researches conducted on learning a foreign language, it can be claimed that most of the learners experience a lot of difficulty in reading and comprehending texts in a foreign language. However, strategy research suggests that less competent learners may improve their skills through training in strategies used by more successful learners (Carrell, et al, 1989). There are a set of well-established reading strategies used by second/foreign language learners which help them to process a text actively, to monitor their comprehension, and to connect what they are reading to their own knowledge and other parts of the text. What is missing is sufficient information on the types of reading strategies used by EFL students in the first language in comparison to those they adopt when reading in a foreign language. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the reading strategies used by Iranian

EFL students when reading in English as a foreign language in comparison with the strategies they adopt when reading in their native language.

Based on the above-mentioned problem, the following question arised: Is there any statistically significant relationship between the reading strategies used by Iranian EFL students when reading English as a foreign language in comparison with the strategies they adopt when reading persian materials?

To achieve the purpose of the study, the following null hypothesis was formulated: There is no significant relationship between the reading strategies used by Iranian EFL students when reading English texts in comparison with the strategies they use when reading persian materials.

## Research Design

### Subjects and Measures

57 students, male and female, majoring in English at Allameh Tabatabai University were selected to take part in this study. They were undergraduate seniors. They had all passed their English and Persian reading courses. To have a homogeneous number of subjects, the subjects were given a language proficiency test (Nelson 450 A). Then the researcher computed the mean and standard deviation of the obtained scores. The subjects who had scores one standard deviation above or below the mean were left out. This reduced the number of subjects to 38.

The researcher had to use two more measures for data collection, i. e. , a reading test and two reading strategy questionnaires in Persian and English.

Preparing a Persian reading test required several steps to be followed. The first step was to decide on the type of the reading test . To find a reliable and interesting format to determine the reading comprehension ability of the subjects, the Persian language professors at Allameh Tabatabai University were consulted. There was a preference among the professors to use the cloze format as a measure of reading comprehension ability, since it is easy to construct and requires less time to be

administered. Fotos (1991) also referred to the cloze procedure as a good measure of language skills from basic to advanced levels, as it correlates highly with reading comprehension, dictation, and composition.

To select an appropriate cloze passage, a number of steps were taken. The criteria for passage selection as suggested by the Persian language professors were set to be appropriacy in terms of length and difficulty level. To meet the criteria, a number of passages were carefully selected, and the Persian language professors were consulted several times. Their suggestions were carefully taken into consideration. Finally, a passage of approximately 270 words and appropriate level of difficulty was selected. Then a cloze passage with every 7th word deletion was developed.

A pilot study was conducted to determine the reliability of the Persian cloze passage. Thirty students took part in the pilot study. The analysis of the data indicated that the test had an acceptable degree of reliability. Then the researcher had to construct an English cloze passage. The first step was to determine the readability of the textbooks students usually studied in their reading courses. Three different passages were randomly selected and their readability levels were calculated using Fry's readability formula. The next step was to select a passage with the same readability index based on which the cloze test could be constructed. To do this, several passages were examined and a passage with an appropriate difficulty level was selected. Then a passage with every 7th word deleted was developed. Both the Persian and English reading tests had approximately the same length.

A pilot study was also conducted to determine the reliability of the English cloze test.

### The Reading Strategies Questionnaires

The Persian and English reading strategy questionnaires consisted of 24 items, using 1-3 Likert Scale (1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=always). The items on the questionnaires included 17 positive reading strategies (strategies which facilitate

comprehension) and 7 negative strategies (strategies which hinder or delay comprehension). These strategies were categorized as follows: 1) six strategies pertaining to subjects' abilities in reading a foreign language to determine their confidence as readers in that language 2) four items pertaining to what readers do when they do not understand something, i. e. , to provide a measure of their awareness of repair strategies 3) seven statements about what they do in order to read more effectively and about reading behaviors of a good reader, to tap their perception of effective and efficient strategies and finally 4) seven statements about what may make reading in a foreign language difficult for them. Within the last two categories, individual items focussed on various types of reading strategies a) pronunciation or sound-letter association b) world-level aspects of meaning c) sentence syntactic decoding d) details of text content e) global aspects of textual meaning, or text-gist f) background knowledge g) textual organization. All these strategies have been suggested in literature as reading strategies related to comprehension (Hosenfeld, Blöck, Cohen, Barnett quoted in sedighi, 1998, p. 35) .

### Procedure

The different phases of the study can be clearly outlined as follows:

- I. 57 students from Allameh Tabatabai University were selected. They took the Nelson English Language Test (1976) version 450 A. Out of 57 students 38 possessed the required qualifications to participate in the succeeding phases of the study. The scores of these 38 subjects were one standard deviation above or below the mean.
- II. One week after the administration of the Nelson Test, the Persian reading strategy questionnaire was administered. The subjects were given 20 minutes to answer the cloze test. Next, the researcher decided to administer the Persian language reading tasks before the foreign language reading tasks. Therefore, subjects were tested in two separate sessions, i.e., their first language

tasks presented in session 1, and the foreign language reading tasks presented in session 2.

- III. At this stage, the English cloze test and the English reading strategy questionnaire were administered after an interval of six weeks. The subjects were given 30 minutes to answer the English cloze test. Then the strategy questionnaire was administered. The cloze tests were scored using the exact word method.
- IV. Having collected all the data needed, the researcher used several statistical procedures to determine the degree of relationship between the reading strategies adopted by Iranian EFL learners in their first language (Persian) and English.

### Analysis

In order to find an answer for the research question, the students' scores on the English proficiency test and Persian and English cloze tests were first tabulated and then the mean, variance and standard deviation of the data were computed. The results appear in the following tables:

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for the English proficiency test scores

$\bar{X}$	SD	S <sup>2</sup>
23.34	3.26	10.62

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics for the Persian cloze test scores

$\bar{X}$	SD	S <sup>2</sup>
21.21	3.6	12.96

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics for the English cloze test scores

$\bar{X}$	SD	S <sup>2</sup>
17.81	3.9	15.12

All the subjects were also given the English and Persian reading strategy questionnaires. The researcher intended to identify the frequency of strategies used by Persian learners (readers) in both Persian and English. The results appear in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Frequencies of strategies used by Persian learners in Persian and English

Persian				English			
Items	Value	Frequency	Percent	Items	Value	Frequency	Percent
F <sub>1</sub>	0	0	0	E <sub>1</sub>	0	0	0
	1	30	78.9		1	36	94.7
	2	8	21.2		2	2	5.3
F <sub>2</sub>	0	1	2.6	E <sub>2</sub>	0	2	5.3
	1	20	52.6		1	20	52.6
	2	17	44.7		2	16	42.1
F <sub>3</sub>	0	2	5.3	E <sub>3</sub>	0	3	7.9
	1	10	26.3		1	17	44.7
	2	26	68.4		2	18	47.4
F <sub>4</sub>	0	2	5.3	E <sub>4</sub>	0	1	2.6
	1	26	68.4		1	32	84.2
	2	10	26.3		2	5	13.2
F <sub>5</sub>	0	0	0	E <sub>5</sub>	0	1	2.6
	1	11	28.9		1	12	31.6
	2	27	71.1		2	25	65.8
F <sub>6</sub>	0	0	0	E <sub>6</sub>	0	6	15.8
	1	13	34.2		1	17	44.7
	2	25	65.8		2	15	39.5
F <sub>7</sub>	0	10	26.3	E <sub>7</sub>	0	5	13.2
	1	15	39.5		1	20	52.6
	2	13	34.2		2	13	34.2
F <sub>8</sub>	0	1	2.6	E <sub>8</sub>	0	2	5.3
	1	15	39.5		1	16	42.1
	2	22	57.9		2	20	52.6
F <sub>9</sub>	0	1	2.6	E <sub>9</sub>	0	0	0
	1	14	36.8		1	36	94.7
	2	23	60.5		2	2	5.3
F <sub>10</sub>	0	22	57.9	E <sub>10</sub>	0	2	5.3
	1	14	36.8		1	20	52.6
	2	2	5.3		2	16	42.1
F <sub>11</sub>	0	18	47.4	E <sub>11</sub>	0	3	7.9
	1	18	47.4		1	17	44.7
	2	2	5.3		2	18	47.4
F <sub>12</sub>	0	1	2.6	E <sub>12</sub>	0	1	2.6
	1	3	7.9		1	32	84.2
	2	34	89.5		2	5	13.2
F <sub>13</sub>	0	14	36.8	E <sub>13</sub>	0	1	2.6
	1	22	57.9		1	12	31.6
	2	2	5.3		2	25	65.8
F <sub>14</sub>	0	12	31.6	E <sub>14</sub>	0	6	15.8
	1	18	47.4		1	17	44.7
	2	8	21.2		2	15	39.5

Persian				English			
Items	Value	Frequency	Percent	Items	Value	Frequency	Percent
F <sub>15</sub>	0	0	0	E <sub>15</sub>	0	5	13.2
	1	14	36.8		1	20	52.6
	2	24	63.2		2	13	34.2
F <sub>16</sub>	0	4	10.5	E <sub>16</sub>	0	2	5.3
	1	27	71.1		1	16	42.1
	2	7	18.4		2	20	52.6
F <sub>17</sub>	0	9	23.7	E <sub>17</sub>	0	7	18.4
	1	20	52.6		1	23	60.5
	2	9	23.7		2	8	21.1
F <sub>18</sub>	0	23	60.5	E <sub>18</sub>	0	22	57.9
	1	15	39.5		1	13	34.2
	2	0	0		2	3	7.9
F <sub>19</sub>	0	26	68.4	E <sub>19</sub>	0	23	60.5
	1	11	28.9		1	12	31.6
	2	1	2.6		2	3	7.9
F <sub>20</sub>	0	9	23.7	E <sub>20</sub>	0	10	26.3
	1	27	71.1		1	25	63.8
	2	2	5.3		2	3	7.9
F <sub>21</sub>	0	14	36.8	E <sub>21</sub>	0	8	21.1
	1	22	57.9		1	28	73.7
	2	2	5.3		2	2	5.3
F <sub>22</sub>	0	10	26.3	E <sub>22</sub>	0	13	34.2
	1	18	47.4		1	17	44.4
	2	10	26.3		2	8	21.1
F <sub>23</sub>	0	5	13.2	E <sub>23</sub>	0	13	34.2
	1	26	68.4		1	17	44.7
	2	7	18.4		2	8	21.1
F <sub>24</sub>	0	8	21.1	E <sub>24</sub>	0	4	10.5
	1	22	57.9		1	27	71.1
	2	8	21.1		2	7	18.4

Note: F=Persian; E=English; 0=never; 1=sometimes; 2=always

The comparison indicated that 6 of 24 strategies were used relatively frequently in both languages. Although there was not a significant variation of strategy use in the two languages (regarding the above mentioned strategies), there was a higher percentage of strategy use in first language than in the foreign language. However, 3 strategies were used relatively infrequently in Persian and English. 16 strategies were classified as being moderately used in Persian and English.

As illustrated in Table 4, out of 17 strategies,

which were classified as positive reading strategies, 6 were used relatively frequently in Persian and English and 10 were used moderately in both languages. Only one strategy was used relatively infrequently in both languages.

### Discussion and Implications

Reading strategies are specified actions or techniques that students use often intentionally, in accomplishing reading tasks. Reading strategies indicate how readers conceive a task, what textual

cues they attend to, how they make sense of what they read, what they do when they do not understand. Strategies therefore reveal a reader's resource for understanding (Langer, 1992). The number of factors influencing reading ability increases geometrically when considering reading in a foreign language. Questions of the influence of the readers' first language as well as their foreign language proficiency complicate investigations of foreign language reading. Some researchers assert that some reading strategies developed in a first language can be transferred to a foreign language.

The present study pointed out that there is some connection between strategy adoption in the first and foreign language.

The findings of this study can definitely have some implications for the classroom teacher and those who are specifically involved in teaching reading courses. We have no doubt that reading strategies play a crucial role in reading comprehension and also in improving the reading skills of the learners. The results of the study supported the view that some reading strategies developed in the first language can be transferred to a foreign language setting. Accordingly, it seems quite reasonable to put emphasis on the strategies our students use unconsciously in their first language. Students should be made aware of the key importance of active use of reading strategies involving naturalistic practice, especially in situations where the opportunities for such practice are widely available. Goodman (1967) calls fluent reading a psycholinguistic guessing game, which requires skill in selecting the fewest, most productive cues necessary to produce guesses that are right the first time. Helping the learners to understand or become aware of the reading strategies in their first language can increase their ability to read better in a foreign language. The ability can be developed to such a degree that the strategies operate almost automatically. At the same time, the researcher believes that students should be made aware of the broad range of reading strategy options available to them.

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### Appendix A

When reading silently in English:

- 1- I am able to anticipate what will come next in the text.
- 2- I am able to recognize the difference between main points and supporting details.
- 3- I am able to relate information which comes next in the text to previous information.
- 4- I am able to question the significance or truthfulness of what the author says.
- 5- I am able to use my prior knowledge and experience to understand the content of the text I'm reading.
- 6- I have a good sense of reading when I understand something and when I do not.

When reading silently in English, if I do not understand something,

- 7- I keep on reading.
- 8- I reread the problematic part.
- 9- I go back to a point before the problematic part and reread from there.
- 10- I give up and stop reading.

When reading silently in English, the things I do to read effectively are to focus on,

- 11- understanding the meaning of each word.
- 12- getting the overall meaning of the text.
- 13- being able to pronounce each whole word.
- 14- the grammatical structures.
- 15- relating the text to what I already know about the topic.
- 16- the details of the content.
- 17- the organization of the text.

When reading silently in English, things that make the reading a difficult one are,

- 18- the sounds of the individual words.

Never	Sometimes	Always
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- 19- pronunciation of the words.
- 20- the grammatical structures.
- 21- relating the text to what I already know about the topic.
- 22- getting the overall meaning of the text.
- 23- guessing the meaning of the words.
- 24- integrating the information that exist in the text.

Never	Sometimes	Always
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**Appendix B**

Fill in the blanks with appropriate words.

Your Dreams Don't Lie

Modern dream theorists have suggested that we can understand and use our dreams because for the most part they are extensions of the situations we face when awake. Our dreams are not hiding from (1) ..... : they are there for us to (2) ..... and use in solving our problems.

(3) ..... is no doubt that we have (4) ..... power to think while we are (5) ..... . What we need is the power (6) ..... make our sleeping thoughts work for (7) ..... in solving problems. Nearly everyone can (8) ..... this, but with varying degrees of (9) ..... .

Most people do not realize, during (10) ..... actual dreams that they are dreaming. (11) ..... are totally at the mercy of (12) ..... unconscious thoughts, and they are unable (13) ..... stop or change the course of (14) ..... dreams. There are a few people (15) ..... who can manipulate their dreams. These (16) ..... people have a creative and psychological (17) ..... . Some people can even extend their (18) ..... . They can force their unconscious mind (19) ..... work on a problem until it (20) ..... solved or to prolong a happy (21) ..... further into the night.

The content (22) ..... our dreams is significant because it (23) ..... all kinds of personal elements. If (24) ..... learn to remember more and more (25) ..... our dreams, perhaps we can also (26) ..... to distinguish between those that are (27) ..... -because they are connected in some (28) ..... with our conscious lives and those (29) .....

are simply flights of fancy.

Dreams are pictures of (30) ..... unconscious minds. We can analyze them (31) ..... probe our thoughts and emotions, we (32) ..... use them creatively for artistic expression (33) ..... solving problems, or we can simply (34) ..... them as provocative adventures. In any case, they should be seen, heard, and welcomed into our conscious world.

**Appendix C**

لطفاً متن زیر را مطالعه کرده و به جای کلمات حذف شده بهترین گزینه‌های پیشنهادی خود را قرار دهید.

**سر نمک**

در حکایت آورده‌اند که روزی سلطان محمود نشسته بود به بارگاه. مردی بیامد و طبقی نمک بر ۱ ..... نهاده؛ در میان حلقه بارگاه محمود ۲ ..... و بانگ می‌زد که: «نمک که ۳ .....؟» محمود، هرگز آن ندیده بود. بفرمود ۴ ..... او را بگیرتند. چون به خلوت ۵ ..... ، او را بیاورد و گفت: «این، ۶ ..... گستاخی بود که تو کردی؟ و ۷ ..... محمود، چه جای منادی نمک فروشی کردن ۸ .....؟» گفت: «ای جوانمرد! مرا با ایاز ۹ ..... نمک بهانه بود.» گفت: «ای گدا! ۱۰ ..... که باشی که با محمود، دست ۱۱ ..... یک کاسه کنی؟ مرا که هفتصد ۱۲ ..... بود و جهانی ملک و ولایت؛ ۱۳ ..... ترا یک شبه نان نبود!» گفت: «۱۴ ..... دراز نکن! این همه که تو ۱۵ ..... و بردادی، ساز و صالست، نه ساز ۱۶ ..... ساز عشق دلیست بریان؛ و آن ۱۷ ..... را به کمال است، و به ۱۸ ..... کارست. لابل، یا محمود! دل ما ۱۹ ..... از آن که درو هفتصد پیل ۲۰ ..... جایگاه بود. و حساب و تدبیر ۲۱ ..... ولایت به کار نیست. ما را ۲۲ ..... خالی سوخته ایاز، یا محمود! سر ۲۳ ..... نمک دانی چیست؟ آن که در ۲۴ ..... عشق تو، نمک تجرید و ذلت ۲۵ ..... می‌باید که بس جباری، و این ۲۶ ..... عشق نیست. «یا محمود! این هفتصد ۲۷ ..... و این همه ولایت سند و هند، ۲۸ ..... ایاز، هیچ ارزد یا به جای ۲۹ ..... موی از زلف او قیام کند؟» ۳۰ ..... «نه!» گفت: باز و در گلخنی ۳۱ ..... در خانه تاریک، بهشت عدن بود؟ ۳۲ ..... «بود.» گفت: «و وصال به کمال ۳۳ .....؟» گفت: «بود!» پس این همه ۳۴ ..... تو بردادی، ساز وصال هم نیست. چون عاشق را ساز وصال نتواند بود. و این آیات حسن است.»

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