

## **A right fit for strategy choice: Comments on Kuzborska (2011)**

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It was interesting to read the Kuzborska's (2011) study on teachers' beliefs. The most remarkable part was the disconnect between practice and theory. It seems, as I tangentially observe attitudes of professors in various disciplines, something similar still generally happens in university settings. Professors will say the "right" things, that they use the latest pedagogical techniques in teaching, or they believe in group or pair work in the classroom, yet most of their classes are teacher-centered and they often do not allow the students the chance or provide them the resources to develop interactive skills. Only a few years ago a younger colleague in another discipline asked me: "When do you have lecture?" This seemed to be an antiquated way of asking if I taught a class. I was kind of surprised because I had not heard that way of describing teaching except in watching old movies or in reading texts from the early 1900s. Yet traditional pedagogy at least for my colleague and others I have observed and heard about in other university settings still seems to be alive and well. Kuzborska is correct in commenting that there is a need to raise teachers' consciousness of their own practices. We as teachers, it seems, are a most insecure lot.

It was also interesting to note how the teachers went to conferences yet their teaching did not reflect current pedagogy because the conferences were mostly focused on general English teaching. I think this is probably one major weakness that Kuzborska has discovered and which we as second language (L2) teachers have suspected: teachers and researchers may sometimes perceive each other as belonging to two different worlds, and consequently there is not enough dialogue between them. Further, quite often the pedagogical implications in studies are not explicit enough for the teacher to gain the vision of what the research means, and, consequently implement the theory in the study.

To be sure, I cannot blame the teachers in Kuzborska's study too much for focusing on the language rather than on meaning because of the importance of linguistic and syntactic items in reading comprehension (e.g., Eskey, 1988). In the past, my colleagues and I have found an overall effect size of .63 for the effects of L1 glosses on reading comprehension (Stevens & Taylor, 2009), which is slightly higher than another study we conducted on reading strategy training (which included metacognitive strategies), which had an overall effect size of .54 (Taylor, Stevens, & Asher, 2006). Thus, linguistic knowledge can be very effective for certain L2 readers depending on their level of competency. However, the difference between these overall effect sizes mentioned above is not large, and I would caution that it may even be counterproductive to juxtapose reading strategy training against glossing when discussing pedagogy. Very likely, both need to be taught and emphasized to learners at different stages in

their L2 reading development. It seems that the teachers in Kuzborska's study simply recognized the importance of bottom-up strategies and overemphasized them especially for the advanced learners who probably were approaching (if they hadn't already surpassed) the reading threshold at which first language (L1) skills were transferable to L2 reading (Laufer, 1996). Just as in glossing, in which there is a fit between the selected reading comprehension help and the competency level of the learner (Taylor, 2002, 2006, 2010), so it seems this would apply to reading strategies.

Much in any reading study depends on the level of the learner, it determines whether the treatment will positively influence their behavior or not. Joyce's (1997) study is a case in point in which the intent was to help learners comprehend a French text. However, the help turned out to have a positive effect on beginning learners and a more negative effect on intermediate readers. If the L2 readers are advanced such as those in Kuzborska's study, perhaps the lexical and syntactic help through activities such as translation may be distracting for reading comprehension. L2 readers may also use at least several strategies simultaneously although it seems advanced learners use more top-down strategies since studies show that bottom-up helps such as L1 glosses can distract the advanced L2 reader (e.g., Taylor, 2006; Taylor, 2010).

Of course, mentioning our research above misses a key point: Strategies not only affect reading comprehension on many levels, they also provide the L2 reader with a more optimistic outlook on the reading process and his or her ability to be successful at reading comprehension. Attitudes are important because they can provide motivation for the L2 reader to read accurately and more extensively (Abu-Rabia, 1996; Yamashita, 2004). One key question is whether the focus on the language in some way dampens the enthusiasm of the L2 readers: Does it continue to enable them to understand the text better or does it slow their processing down and actually impede fluent L2 reading comprehension? These are questions that merit further study.

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