Reading and Re-Reading
Study on Approaching Texts in a Non-Native Language[1]

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Abstract. The present paper approaches the problems of meaning constitution through reading in the context of bi- and multi-lingualism. We will point out the specific differences of meaning constitution depending on different readings that were achieved in the mother tongue. Starting from the idea that there are as many realizations and specific differences as individuals and gnosiological and glottological experiences, this study presents the different and specific ways of meaning constitution in the case of schools with Hungarian as the language of instruction, in the context of the study of and readings in Romanian.

Keywords: reading, asymmetrical bilingualism, Romanian language as non-native language, text comprehension

The Labyrinth of Reading

The act of reading represents an a-typical form of communication (Pamfil 84), an asymmetrical one (as the transmitter and the receiver are not present at the same time), it is a personal, holistic process with our "distant Other." It represents an

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initiation into the (re)reading of former experiences, suggestively described by Jorge Luis Borges: "I always reread rather than read" (42).

In interpreting the concept of *reading* we will take into account the Gadamerian perception of the term, through emphasizing certain similarities and differences between communication and reading. Similar to interpersonal communication, reading, according to Gadamer, in other words the I-text dialogue is based on heuristic inter-assistance, more precisely on the attempt to understand the Other as Alterity, in the context of which any meeting involves meaning constitution, constitution of possible worlds (universes). Critical and self-critical reflections, establishing consensus assures the understanding and acceptance of someone else or something else. Understanding, thus, presupposes in fact the ability to transposing oneself into the Other's world, a surrender (a deconstruction) of the Self in order to be transposed into the Other's mono-lingualism. This state of "mutual surrender" is defined by Gadamer as "the ability of listening to an Other" (48), while within this dialogue the metamorphosis of the Self remains a natural addition as neither of the participants remains what he/she was before the dialogue.

Despite the observed similarity between interpersonal and "inter-textual" communication, the written text appears to be the conservation and, implicitly, estrangement through the act of writing down Ideas. In the interpersonal exchange of ideas, thoughts, emotions, etc.—as specified in Gadamer's writings (73)—understanding is duplicated, maintained, and complemented by reply, by the Other's explanations, by communicative registers, by the pitch of the voice, by the intonation and rhythm of speech, all which allows for any misunderstanding—wanted or un-wanted—to be clarified. Thus the "live" dialogue (conversation) maintains its existence through itself. The written text, according to Gadamer, represents the textual product estranged through the act of writing, within the context of which reading offers new ways of meaning assignment and constitution. Reading, therefore, represents the framework of the recreation of certain possible worlds. The understanding of a text also involves its interpretation through which the message of any text is interiorized and personalized.

The understanding and interpretation of a text is influenced by linguistic registers, by "implicit theories" formulated in the context of different languages. We base our acts on the assumption that understanding is a complex, holistic process of meaning constitution that undergoes similar moments in the context of different languages, while the specific features of a language offer more efficient comprehension strategies to be applied. Thus, for example, Pléh's research shows that in the case of texts written in Hungarian the understanding of statements is oriented by the language's basic word order while in the case of simple sentences marking the case offers an advantage of orientation in the process of decoding. Surely, no matter which the language of decoding is, the nuance of the reading, of the constitution of meaning depends on the richness of the reader's vocabulary, but

also on the level of maturization of his/her concepts derived from reading, on comprehension, on processing and interpretation.

In the history of teaching reading the relation text-reader-language has had multiple interpretations (Pamfil 102). According to the traditionalist interpretation specific for the 20th century, text comprehension depends in particular on the richness of vocabulary and of grammar, while the literary text has been viewed as the absolute model. The crisis of this attitude surfaced in the 70s through the propagation of the communicative model. Within this context the premise of text comprehension has been redimensioned, and accordingly understanding a text depends on the reader's experiences and the quality of his/her meaning configuration techniques, besides his/her level of mastering the language and cognitive structure. Within the context of these emphasis shifts, the reader's personality must prevail as it is involved in the act of reading through cognitive and affective processes and structures that undergo continuous re-dimensioning (according to Giasson's model quoted in Pamfil 87). The processes involved in the act of reading materialize in micro-processes (centering of information); integration processes (establishing semantic links); macro-processes (centering on global meaning); elaboration processes (intertextual correlation); meta-cognitive processes. Cognitive and affective structures mean the reader's language knowledge, his/her knowledge about the text, about the world, as well as his/her general attitude towards the referent of the text.

Thus, the act of reading—in the Gadamerian sense—aims at a dialogue with the Self, a re-reading of the Self, reflected by the meanings constituted during reading, and represents the reflexive re-dimensioning of past experiences in the context of the constituted meanings.

Bilingual existence and the articulation of the world

The attempt to present the act of reading and rereading must be correlated with the interpretative framework of bi(multi)lingualism. In approaching this concept we refer to the holistic view on the bilingual, bicultural personality. This perspective differs from the traditional, widespread view phrased by Bloomfield according to which we talk about bilingualism in the case when the individual masters two linguistic registers at a level similar to that of the mother tongue (24). The "totalizing" reinterpretation of this concept is linked to the name of Grosjean (1982, 1998) (sustained, among others, by Navracsics's research 2000, 2007) that starts out from the perception of the Self as an autonomous, integral personality in whose case the qualitative and quantitative dimension of language acquisition depends on its functions originating from an efficient, insertive verbal behavior. According to this perspective, a bilingual person is not characterized by the adaptation of two monolingual "states," but by a "bilingual existence" (Grosjean,

Life 18), a transmitter-receiver able to activate and manifest him/herself in two (or more) different linguistic registers, adapting insertively to the communicative contexts. As a result, a bi(multi)lingual person cannot be assessed or examined with the same measurement instruments as a monolingual one, and neither through comparison to the performance of monolingual persons. The production of speech acts in the case of a bilingual person is realized differently than in the case of a monolingual one (Navracsics, *A kétnyelvű gyermek* 48). Research in this field has shown that in a bilingual person's "mental lexicon" (Navracsics, *A kétnyelvű mentális* 23) the elements of the two languages co-exist and they do not vanish in the case of choosing and activating one of the linguistic codes in a given communication situation. Within this interpretative framework, the phenomenon of bilingualism must be understood as one similar to biculturalism that does not result the "synthesis" of two persons with two different cultures, thus a "personalized" culture being instituted.

Within this interpretative context, acquiring a language does not represent a linguistic problem but an epistemological one (one of knowledge), more precisely it resides in *learning* and *self-knowledge*, terms used by Wittgenstein (95) to emphasize the idea that the assimilation of languages must be accompanied by the understanding of existential and cultural forms defining the Other. Accordingly, language assimilation—beyond the level of knowledge, skills, and communicative competence—also involves a level of communicative culture (Tódor, *Şcoala* 25) that consists in responsiveness towards the articulation of reality through the Other's linguistic templates. In other words, the cultural dimension implies a learning according to the logic of diversity, of multiculturalism, within which difference represents a natural element of existence and manifests in the intellectual effort to uncover the Other's monolingualism (Le monolinguisme de l'autre, a suggestive metaphor used by Derrida 6), parallel with the self-definition of one's own identity.

Presentation of the investigation process

"Pupils have difficulties in reading"; "they do not like reading"; "they do not read much"; "they do not understand what they read"; "the increase of internet usage leads to a superficial reader who prefers short texts"; etc. These are only a few "pathologies" generally brought up during discussions (either scientific, or mass-media or everyday conversation) about reading. At the same time, school—according to curriculum discourses—proposes the training of a competent reader, of a reader able to develop his/her own taste in reading, while the dominant types of readings through which this goal is to be achieved are: informative reading, entertaining reading, institutionalized reading (Sâmihăian 10).

Within this context we face the problem of the method through which the reading is to be realized in a language other than the mother tongue. What is the percentage of these types of readings? What reading strategies characterize the general education student population with reference to the languages chosen for reading?

Within the context of a pragmatic relativism that represents the common base of concepts contoured in the previous sections of this paper, the issue of differences and similarities within the context of readings in different linguistic frameworks arises. The final aim set for this paper consists in uncovering the specific differences that can be found in reading Romanian texts by Hungarian native language students. What are the dominant features characterizing the chosen subjects within the context of reading in a language other than their mother tongue?

The data proposed for the presentation is based on the mosaic of conclusions of two implemented research processes (in the years 2007-2008, and 2005) carried out with the aim to show the specificities of studying Romanian language in schools with Hungarian as the language of instruction. We present some aspects of the data gathered through these research processes that focused on the act of reading in Romanian. We have to mention that neither of the studies had as its fundamental topic the investigation of this particular issue which has been included as an aspect of bilingual existence. The conclusions of the two studies constituted the hypothetical premises of an in-depth study in this domain, financed by the Institute of Research Programs of the Sapientia Foundation, Cluj Napoca.

The first type of investigation was based on the study of reality through indirect inquiry, through the questionnaires filled in by students, and sampling from public educational institutions mainly in monolingual areas. The second type of investigation used the method of structured and participative observation, accomplished with the help of 74 students from Sapientia University, Miercurea Ciuc, specialization Romanian and English who assisted 1012 class-room hours within their pedagogical practice.

Within the present paper, after the schematic marking of distortions resulting from the heuristic act within the domain, we present certain data regarding the reading habits of the questioned subjects, while also marking certain specificities of the didactic dialogue that conducts the deciphering and meaning constitution process with a powerful impact upon extra-curricular, individual techniques of reading.

Uncontrolled variables within the research of the reading act

In the endeavor to integrate heuristically the specificity of the reading act, the researcher comes up against a series of difficulties and controversies that need to be taken into account as they may distort the conclusions and generalizations of the investigation.

- The first aspect to be mentioned consists of the dimension of the research paradigm, where the distortive character consists in the fact that a reality adapted to a predominantly naturalistic interpretative approach (that aims at the understating of interpretative schemes, prototypes) is re-formulated through an empiric paradigm (which quantifies reality as a countable entity with interdependent components).
- The formulation of generalities within this domain is made difficult also by inter-individual differences that personalize the act of meaning constitution.
- Reading competence depends on a series of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that involve different levels of maturization. This results in the fact that reading in the mother tongue and reading in a non-native language show differences depending on experiences and language knowledge which means that reading in the mother tongue, thus in concordance with the horizon of expectations, would also involve a comprehensive superiority, this, however, not constituting a unison rule. There exist a large number of examples that demonstrate that the reader in a non-native language has superior performances to one reading in his/her mother tongue.
- From the perspective of a holistic definition of multi- and bi-lingualism offered by Grosjean ("Studying" 133), the comparison of performances, even in the sphere of meaning constitution, represents an error of investigation as a bilingual person does not constitute an accumulation of two monolingual existences, but is rather the individual who is able to choose the appropriate linguistic register required by the communicative context.
- The difficulty in researching this domain is determined also by the fact that the act of meaning constitution depends on the experiences, on the language knowledge, on the culture and readings of the individual that confers upon the phenomenon an inter-individual variation.
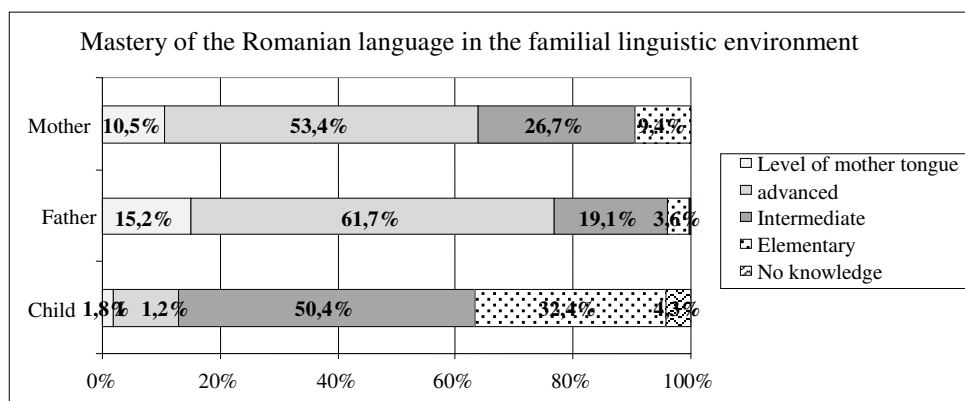
Linguistic socialization and reading habits

As the specifics of text comprehension depends on the level of language knowledge—as we specified in the first sections of the present paper—the first

aspect that we discuss in what follows is its qualitative level (data presented in Tódor, "Forma"). According to the respondents' self-evaluation, their majority believe that they master Romanian language at an intermediary level (50,4 %), but percentage of those who think that their knowledge is of elementary level is also significant (32,4 %). The percentage of those who have a thorough knowledge and those who have no Romanian language knowledge is low, but both extremes involve special attention in the choice of pedagogical intervention.

We have to mention that according to the respondents, the specificity of the appropriate linguistic background from the perspective of Romanian language knowledge is predominantly at an advanced and intermediate level which makes it possible for us to talk about a familial linguistic assistance in language learning, taking into account the level of subjectivism due to the students' evaluation. One can notice the superiority of the fathers' language knowledge which (from the perspective of the respondents) is characterized by a higher level of flexibility in linguistic acquisition as compared to the mothers, but has a less significant impact upon the orientation and motivation of the children's learning (presentation of these conclusions in Tódor, "Forma").

Chart nr.1.

In the context of this type of linguistic socialization, one has to raise the issue of the specificities of habits connected to favorite readings chosen by the respondents. To make data more suggestive, we present a comparison of preferences in reading in Romanian and in English.

Table nr. 1.

Usually I read...	in Romanian	in English
novels	19%	2%
Short fiction	28%	8%
newspapers	27%	3%
youth magazines	27%	5%
sports magazines	10%	2%
webpages	15%	31%

We can talk about options for extra-curricular reading and habits in reading certain texts oriented by institutional expectations. As a probable influence of school requirements, a significant percentage of the respondents mentions their habit of reading literary works, especially short ones in Romanian, this being complemented by the reading (in the case of 27% of the total of respondents) of newspapers and magazines. This type of reading remains in the background in the case of reading in English which represents first of all the language of read internet pages.

A representative percentage of the daily contacts are constituted by different forms of e-communication and short messages. Within the following item we have studied language usage within this type of communicative situations. One can observe the contextual activation of the different linguistic registers. In the case of language usage in short telephone messages use of the mother tongue is dominant (55%) as well as Romanian (32%), while decisions to use English surface to an extent of 5%. In the case of chats again the use of the mother tongue is dominant (59%), Romanian appears at a percentage of 13%, the same as English, while 14% use both languages. In the case of navigating on the internet, the predominant language of the searches is the mother tongue (40%) and English (35%), Romanian being the language of search only rarely (14%). This type of activating of the linguistic registers through relating to the functions of the language illustrates a manifestation of the principle of complementation sustained by Grosjean (*Life* 99), as the specificity of the communication situation, the functions of linguistic acts impose calling into action a certain type of linguistic framework.

Comprehension ("re-reading") of texts in the context of the didactic dialogue

The obtained panoramic view of the respondents' reading habits has allowed us to identify the preponderant text types preferred by the respondents. The types of texts in Romanian the students are involved with are short informative texts and institutionally requested readings. This longitudinal view must be complemented

with an in-depth view that focuses on the method of achieving comprehension in the case of these texts. As informative type texts and entertaining ones are processes in the context of different reading strategies and present inter-individual variations, we have considered only the category of texts prescribed by the school context. In what follows we are basing our analysis on data obtained through direct observation of school life's reality, in other words direct participation at Romanian language and literature classes, observing the psycho-pedagogic and linguistic specificities of the organized didactic dialogue.

Among the inventoried characteristics two dominant ones have been found significant that may be included in the category of specific differences of text comprehension from the perspective of bi(multi)lingual existence. The first refers to the linguistic specificity of appropriation and in depth study of texts, while the second refers to the dimension of the reading competence's subcomponents, an activity within the didactic dialogue.

The linguistic specificity of re-reading in a non-native language

In the case of approximately 44% of the total number of observed classes there surfaces the phenomenon of linguistic code shift, a phenomenon that we interpret as the shift from one linguistic register (in this case the Romanian language as a non-native language) to another register (in this case, Hungarian as mother tongue). This shift (Rod 115, Suzanne 74) may manifest within a sentence (at the level of words) but also among sentences (at the level of statements), spontaneously or willingly, intentionally, representing a natural feature of bi(multi)lingual existence.

The significant majority (65%) of linguistic code shift is linked to reading and text comprehension, while the phenomenon appears less in the case of didactic activities dedicated to text creation (composition classes 16%) or in the case of language classes (19%). The presence of this phenomenon refers to that specific difference characteristic to the bilingual reader in the case of whom re-reading cannot ignore the presence of a base language and in this case it has the function to sustain understanding, to mediate meaning constitution.

Depending on the function fulfilled by this phenomenon in text comprehension, texts may be categorized as follows:

Bilingual situations focusing on achieving understanding:

a.1. *didactic dialogue for the initiation (preparation) of understanding*: these moments focus especially on explanation of words, expressions, concepts.

Illustrative examples: lexical correspondences: *popas- pihenő (resting place)*

- What other expression do we use for *"felgyorsult"(accelerated)?*

- Have you heard of *"fehér rím"(white rhyme)*?

a.2. *explanations during "entering the inside of the text"* (term used by Judith Langer). Examples: What is the difference between *"a fost"* (*there was*) in these two sentences?

a.3. *didactic dialogue focused on the interpretation of the read text.* Example: What is the significance of the title *Enigma Otiliei* (*Otilia's Enigma*)? How could we translate it? Or reading translations of Ion Barbu's texts.

The common element of the communicative situations presented above consists in their finality, in other words their aim to sustain, mediate, assist understanding through translation or cultivating a contrastive perspective upon the studied phenomena.

According to their didactic functions, this type of situations predominantly have the following goals:

- Formation of linguistic knowledge based on a contrastive vision. Example: What is the Hungarian version of "*casting a spell over somebody*"?
- Translation-based explanations. Example: How do you say in Romanian "*most tanulok, tanulni fogok*" (*now I am studying, I am going to study*)?
- Verification, evaluation of acquiring linguistic information. Example: What does "*a moaşte*" mean? What does the word "*lot*" mean?
- Emphasizing affective involvement in learning. Example: Read it! Be attentive! What have you not understood?

Taking into account the intentions to switch linguistic codes that may be initiated either by the student or by the teacher, we may distinguish a conscious attitude in correlating and using the students' knowledge and previous experiences, as well as a spontaneous, unplanned one that may be observed in the case of examples, especially in the context of motivation and affective involvement of the receivers.

Directing reading through using the base language as assistance involves didactic situations that have at least double value. The assistance in comprehension derived from the mother tongue, especially in the case of texts that are above the average level of the students' language knowledge, represents without a doubt indispensible help. However, the mediation value of the mother tongue also represents a "hindrance" in the perception, access, and acceptance of the text as the Other in the process of that "mutual giving in" that represents the premise of consensus, in other words common meaning. Thus, in accessing texts in a non-native language the main phases of comprehension would be:

a. lexical understanding (entering the world of the text),
b. being inside and exploring the world of the text,

c. text comprehension, access of the Other (of the non-Self) through the mediation of the mother tongue,

d. self-definition, re-reading the Self through the relation to the Other (the non-Self).

We believe that one of the goals in the formation of an autonomous reader in the case of a bilingual individual must be the formation of the ability to approach a text, the read discourse as addressed to the Self within which the mediation through the mother tongue and native culture represents only one of the structural elements of re-reading that, however, cannot be ignored.

The analysis of the didactic discourse's specificity, on the basis of direct observation, allows us to derive a panoramic image of processing types within the framework of oriented, organized reading.

Chart nr. 2.
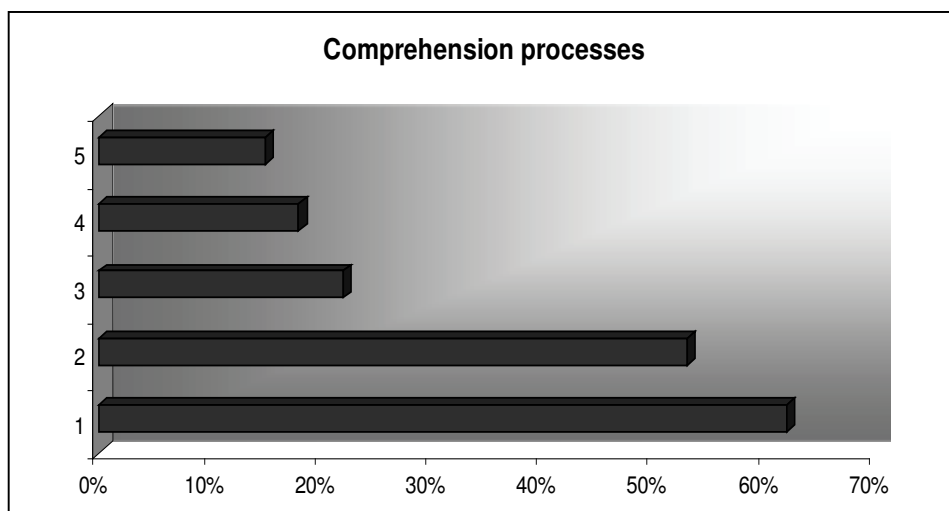
Key:
1-micro-processes
2-macro-processes
3-integration processes
4-elaboration percentages
5-metacognitive percentages

In the category of tasks, types of phrased questions in the context of the didactic dialogue of directing text comprehension, the most significant percentage

at this school level consists of those focused on the activation of micro-processes, in other words clarifying information contained by sentences and statements. These are complemented by tasks focused on micro-processes, namely comprehending the global sense of the text. At a smaller percentage there appear processes of establishing intra- and inter-textual connections and of the problematization of meta-cognition. The proportion of deductive discoveries, of stimulating critical thinking is more reduced. This structure allows us to talk about a reading strategy that is predominantly inductive, namely a strategy of "bottom-up processing" suggested by the specificity of the proposed direction. This type of heuristic initiation moves from the particular to the general, from lexical understanding to a discursive, contextual one. The image that we may deduce from this reality shows a directioning of text comprehension focused on lexical understanding, on comprehension at the level of language, while a comprehension beyond words motivated by learning about the Other remains in the background. Text comprehension presupposes more than just establishing and assimilating syntactic and semantic relations, it presupposes the knowledge of life styles, cultural formations, it involves accessing implicit theories about the world phrased within the context of the Other's monolingualism.

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