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"Alla mysiga var de bumbibjörnarna"

Some Early Swedish Learners' Reading Strategies in English

Engelska

C-uppsats

Abstract

Titel: ”Alla mysiga var de bumbibjörnarna”. Some Early Swedish Learners' Reading Strategies in English.

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Abstract: Being a skilled reader makes it easier to learn a new language. It is important to teach students how the knowledge and use of reading strategies can facilitate learning. This study was made in a Swedish fourth grade class with eighteen participant pupils. They were asked to translate two texts from English into Swedish: one was a poem with nonsense words, and the other a prose text. The texts were taken from *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll and *The Garbage King* by Elizabeth Laird. After this an interview was made with all of the pupils in pairs, where they were asked about their reading strategies normally and in this situation. The results found were that the reading strategies used were: *likeness with their native language, previous vocabulary knowledge of the L2, syntactic knowledge,* and *guessing the meaning through the context.* The result confirms previous research in that the pupils who liked reading and did so in their spare time, did better when it came to making syntactically correct translations.

Nyckelord: Reading strategies, learning strategies, young L2 learners, vocabulary, Jabberwocky, the Garbage King.

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1. Introduction

We live in a textual world which requires decoding and interpretation. Written language is everywhere, and children encounter it in school as well as outside school. Therefore it is important to be able to read. Nevertheless, alarming studies show that reading abilities are decreasing amongst youngsters in Sweden (Fröjd 2005). The reasons for this development are too complex to go into here. But, as a consequence, it is increasingly important to teach children reading, both in their native language and in foreign languages. In the Swedish school the first foreign language children encounter is English. Accordingly, it is important for pupils in Swedish schools to be able to read, and to understand what they read in English. Learning a language is in many ways like breaking a code.

To maximise students' ability to achieve access to this code is an educational challenge for teachers and requires effective methods. This study will focus on reading and on how reading helps students develop vocabulary and understand the meaning of texts in English through gradual code-breaking. In particular, it aims to map out what strategies of decoding Swedish fourth-grade pupils use to understand word function and word meaning when they encounter unknown texts.

1.1 Aim

The aim of this essay is to contribute to reading research by exploring the strategies that develop early in children's second language acquisition. I have carried out an investigation amongst a group of young learners of English, who are 10-11 years old. I have investigated their strategies for decoding when reading a nonsense text and a meaningful text. The texts I have used are the poem called "Jabberwocky" from Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* (1972, first published in 1871) and the first paragraph from a book for young people called *The Garbage King* by Elizabeth Laird (2003). In this paper I am exploring what reading strategies these young learners of English are able to use, and if their possible success has to do with extensive reading outside of school.

More specifically, my research questions are:

   • What reading strategies do young learners of English use?
   • Is there a correlation with their reading in their first language(s)?

• Is there a correlation between early developed reading strategies and reading habits?

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Reading as a teaching method

Lightbown & Spada (2006) comment on reading as a teaching method by saying that reading improves the students' vocabulary more than speaking, since students encounter more unknown words when reading, compared to speaking. A study made by Marlise Horst in 2005 shows that "substantial vocabulary growth through reading is possible, but that students must read a great deal (more than just one or two books per semester) to realize those benefits" (Lightbown & Spada 2006:146). This shows that reading is very important when learning a foreign language.

Christopher Green (2005) describes a reading scheme that is used in Hong Kong, called "the Hong Kong Extensive Reading Scheme". The idea is that students read quite a great amount of books during their English classes and encounter books of different levels in terms of increasing difficulty. The students can move up, or down, these levels through reading the books and making tests of their capacity as they go along. But there is a discrepancy between ideal and reality in Hong Kong, according to Green: "Perhaps nowhere in the world do the glowing aims of the scheme stand in starker contrast to the grim mechanics of its implementation than in Hong Kong" (Green 2005:307). The scheme has failed, according to Green, because the teachers function merely as guards, without participating in the students' reading, and the schools have scheduled too little time for the reading, which makes the ambitious reading scheme work poorly. Green's suggestion on how to make the scheme work as planned is to include the reading scheme into the task-based curriculum, and to have locally adapted reading schemes where students can, not only read, but also discuss what they have read, and discuss both content and lexical issues. In order to achieve results, reading has to become an interactive activity (Green 2005:310-311).

What happens in our brain when we read, and what happens in our brain when we understand what we read, as opposed to when we do not understand it are questions as difficult to answer as the question "what happens in our brain when we think?" Reading is almost like translating: translation of letters into words, words into sentences and the sentences into

meaning. In addition, reading is an activity which is very difficult to measure. One cannot see the process of reading, and there is no product to observe (Brown 2004:186). Therefore we try to assess reading in various ways. When assessing reading we have to think of ways to enter the brain to the extent possible, or in other words ask the right questions in order to find out how much the reader has comprehended from the text. Assessing reading has to do with how to find out how much the pupils comprehend from our teaching. And it is a way to discover if they understand what they have read or not.

2.2 Reading strategies

When encountering new and difficult vocabulary and in order to break the reading code, the learner has to use some sort of reading strategy. One difference between fluent and non-fluent readers is that the fluent readers are able to use a strategy. Unfortunately, in many cases pupils who read fluently in Swedish do not use the same strategies when reading in a second language (Malmberg et al. 2000:152). To improve their reading skill, the students therefore should practise their ability to skim a text the way they do when reading in Swedish. Projekt STRIMS: Strategier vid Inlärning av Moderna Språk (Project STRIMS: Strategies in learning modern languages) (Malmberg et al. 2000), has used a so-called "think-aloud" method to find out what strategies Swedish pupils use when they encounter a text that they do not fully understand. This required the teachers to be present when the students tried to read texts with new and difficult vocabulary in them. The students in the STRIMS-project used so called think-aloud protocols: They were "thinking loud" – telling their teachers how they reasoned while solving a problem – and that way the teachers were able to follow the students' thought processes while they were reading.

To describe what happens when we read, two models are common in the field of study of reading: the bottom-up approach and the top-down approach. The bottom-up approach refers to the way we decode letters into words, and words into phrases, whereas the top-down approach refers to the ability to comprehend the meaning in a wider perspective. These two levels of reading are necessary for any reader to master in order to make meaning of a text (Brown 2004:185, Tornberg 1997:77). The conclusions we make when we read a text are in this field of study often called inferences. An inference is made when we use our previous experience to understand (or misunderstand) and interpret the information given to us (Tornberg 1997:78).

To be able to understand reading strategies, we have to look into what the term "strategy" actually stands for in pedagogical research. In *Språkdidaktik* Ulrika Tornberg gives an overview of how the term has been used in research. She says that it could stand for an over-all tendency which the reader uses to work with language tasks, or for techniques and deliberate actions to facilitate learning both in the bottom-up and the top-down perspectives. A learning strategy could also refer to the strategies which contribute to improving the language system of the learner. There are strategies which apparently show in the behaviour of the learner, and others that do not show and have to be studied through introspection (Tornberg 1997:20).

2.2.1 Cognitive, meta-cognitive and socio-affective strategies

Cognitive strategies are the strategies that we use when solving problems analytically. Examples of cognitive strategies are: Repetition, translation, grouping, note-taking, deduction and formulating and testing problems. Meta-cognitive strategies are, on the other hand, strategies that the learner uses when consciously trying to learn, as well as to structure the work he or she has to do, in a more self-reflecting way. Examples of meta-cognitive strategies are: to concentrate on the task given, to know what way is best to solve a problem and to do it that way, self-corrections, listening to learn instead of speaking one's mind, judging one's own work regarding a certain task. Socio-affective strategies could be the following: to work together, to ask for help, and to give peer response (Tornberg 1997:21).

2.2.2 Linguistic and non-lingustic pre-knowledge

Tornberg (1997) also mentions two different surveys from the eighties (Hosenfeld 1984 and Block 1986) which both show that non-proficient pupils maintain their bottom-up strategy regarding reading in a second language; they decode it word by word, and their only strategy apart from that is the likeness between words in the first and the second language. The more proficient readers, on the other hand, are able to use the following strategies (according to Hosenfeld's investigation):

-   Using their knowledge about their world
-   Guessing the meaning of the word from the context
-   Reading globally without getting stuck on particular words
-   Using images
-   Using syntactic knowledge
-   Evaluating their guesses to see if they are reasonable

(referred to in Tornberg 1997:80)

This shows that it is helpful to use strategies, and important to explain to pupils how to use different strategies, and to use the knowledge they already have. Prior knowledge has a lot to do with the ability to form a strategy. There is linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge that is important for the second language learner, according to Tornberg. Examples of linguistic knowledge are:

- Knowledge of the target language
- Knowledge of other languages, for instance the mother tongue
- Knowledge of word formation
- Syntactic knowledge

Examples of non-linguistic knowledge useful to the second language learner are:

- Knowledge about the subject
- Knowledge about text types
- Understanding of the context
- Knowledge about logical connections
- Ability to interpret figures and pictures

(Tornberg 1997:78)

2.3 "Good" and "poor" readers

In a survey similar to mine, titled *The age factor and L2 reading strategies*, Renata Ŝamo examined both whether good readers among pupils aged 13-14 were using reading strategies more frequently than poor readers, and whether the number of years learning the L2 (which in this case was English) affected their use of these reading strategies. The results were that the number of years learning the L2 was not influencing the proficiency of the readers: those who had learned English for a longer period were not more fluent readers than those who had learned it for a shorter period. This was explained by external factors both within and outside the school: many different teachers, family trouble etc. Nevertheless, good readers were using more strategies, and more often used strategies which had to do with self-supervision. The conclusion was that:

> ...we found out that the learners identified as good L2 readers used a wider range of L2 reading strategies and they did so more frequently than poor L2 readers. These findings support the claim that good readers are more verbal, make better use of their limited working memory and verbalise more effeciently the things

they do in a think-aloud task. Also, they identify and remember important information, monitor their reading and evalute their reading. (Ŝamo 2009:130)

As we can see, reading strategies are used more often by fluent, "good" readers. However, this does not show which came first, the strategy or the fluency. I will look more into this in my discussion.

3. Method and material

3.1 Presenting the method and the material

The methods I have used in my study is a translation task and an interview. The pupils participating were all but one from the same class in fourth grade, ten or eleven years old. The interviews were performed in pairs, partly due to lack of time, partly so that the pupils would feel more comfortable and speak more freely. Prior to the day for the task and the interviews, permission had been given by their parents to participate in this study. All students but one in the class wanted to participate, but on the other hand one pupil who was not a regular member of the class took part – with parental permission – so the final number was still eighteen. The pupils were given two different texts to translate, one with partial use of nonsense English – the first verse of the poem "Jabberwocky" from *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll (first published in 1871) (see Appendix 1), and the other text was the first paragraph from a fiction youth novel called *The Garbage King* by Elizabeth Laird (2003) (Appendix 2). The nonsense text was chosen for the opportunity provided for the students to use their imagination in addition to recognizing word and sentence patterns. Consequently, it should be possible to track the guesses from the children – what is their association to a specific word? The other text was chosen because it was considered to be above the level of fourth-graders, but not completely impossible to decipher.

The pupils were given the instruction to translate the texts line by line. They had no prior knowledge of the texts. When given the texts, they were told that the first one was a poem and the second a prose text. However, many of the pupils perceived the latter as a non-coherent text, consisting of different poems, which probably blurred their understanding of the context. On the other hand, one third (12 out of 18) have seemingly interpreted the text as one unit which might show that they are good readers and are able to create coherence from a text which is not obviously coherent.

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As mentioned before, eighteen pupils did the task. They were in a normal classroom situation when doing the translation, and the interviews were performed afterwards in a room next to the classroom. Before starting the translation, they were instructed to guess as far as possible and if there was absolutely no chance of guessing, they were told to skip that word and go on to the next one. When they were doing the task, I tried to restrain some of them from helping each other. Some of them might have talked to each other about the translation anyhow, but most of them worked concentratedly on their own. When they asked questions I tried to answer as clearly as possible without giving away the "right" answer. Their teacher was present when they translated, but not in the interview room. After most of the class had finished translating, the interviews started. As mentioned before, the interviews were done in pairs. One disadvantage with this method is the fact that they might influence each other with their answers. When one of the pupils was more dominating than the other, I simply asked the less dominating pupil specifically for her/his point of view, and that method worked well. The reason I interviewed all of the pupils was because I did not know beforehand which pupils would be able to translate both texts. This way, I covered both skilled and less skilled readers, and was able to ask all of them how they perceived the task. The pairs were teamed up by the closeness to each other on the class list, in alphabetical order. The interviews took about five to ten minutes to perform. The interview questions – which were performed in Swedish – are included as Appendix 3.

3.2 Children's cognitive development

In order to understand where these children are in their cognitive development – generally speaking – here is a short description of what cognitive theory says about how the mind works at this age. According to Piaget's theory of children's cognitive development, the stage between seven and eleven, which is the age the pupils in my survey are at, is called the *concrete operational period*. Children are developing their logical abilities during this period, and are, for instance, able to take into account several aspects of a problem in order to solve it. They are also able to coordinate ideas into a system – they are able to do an operation. But the operation has to be concrete since abstractions are still too difficult to understand at this age (Evenshaug & Hallén 2001:127-129).

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4. Analysis and results

The two texts the pupils read were quite different in form as the first was a poem and the second a fictional prose text. They also differed in the respect that the poem consisted mostly of nonsense words. Therefore I will first analyse them separately and give an overview later. Before each analysis I will present the actual text (for the worksheet the pupils used, see Appendices 1 and 2).To be able to analyse the texts, I divided them into lexical items, which in many cases correspond to words and sometimes to short phrases.

4.1 The nonsense poem

This is the poem the children were asked to translate into Swedish:

Jabberwocky

Twas brillig and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe.
All mimsy were the borogoves
And the mome raths outgrabe. (Carroll 1971:134)

Table 1 shows the most common translations of the words in "Jabberwocky". One pupil offered translations of every item, whereas one pupil only translated the word *and.* Four pupils translated only *and*, *in* and the nouns into 'den', while the remaining produced 5 to 13 translations out of a possible 14. Apart from *and*, *in* and *the*, the most commonly translated item was *were*. The least commonly translated items were *brillig*, *slithy*, *the borogoves* and *outgrabe* (see also Appendix 4).

Table 1. The pupils' most common translations of "Jabberwocky". The numerals before the words represent the numbers of pupils giving the answer. Where no numeral is indicated the answer is unique.

Lexical items	Pupils' answers			
Twas	3 Det var	2 Var	Trasslig	De var
Brillig	Fantastisk	Gryning	Billig	Bra
And	18 Och			
The toves	2 Tovor	Tofflorna	Skjortor	Tuvorna
Slithy	2 Slitna	Slitiga	Fräsiga	
Did gyre and gimble	9 Och	2 Gjorde	Jag hyrde och stickade	Gryde och grode
In	9 I	2 in		
The wabe	5 Den	3 Nät	Det	Den vebben
All mimsy	9 Alla	Alla vimsiga	Allt mumsit	Helt vimsit
Were	11 Var			
The borogoves	5 Den	2 Det	De bumbibjörnarna	Det där ohyran/skalbaggarna
And	17 Och			
The mome raths	5 Den	3 Råttor	2 Det	Mamman ryter
Outgrabe	Utom räckhåll	Härjade	Utgraberade	Uthål

First a few comments on the words that are not obviously nonsense words. As we can see, *twas* has been interpreted as the beginning of a story – that is, an elliptical 'it was' by only four pupils (or three, depending on how we understand 'de var') – the rest have skipped it, or written something else, like 'trasslig', which shares some sounds with the original word, but is not syntactically logical. The function word *and* has not caused any problems. *In* has been correctly translated by many of the pupils as well; the pupils seem to have a good sense of how to use function words like these, as well as the auxiliary *were*. The many translations of nouns to only 'det' or 'den' is probably partly a wish to signal that they know the function of the definite article, partly an inability to see the difference between determiner and pronoun.

4.2 Linguistic reading strategies

We will now look into how these young learners use reading strategies when translating the words. The categories are freely adapted from Tornberg's *Språkdidaktik*. I am using the categories *likeness with native language*, *knowledge of the target language*, and *syntactic knowledge*.

4.2.1 Likeness with native language

The strategy of trying to find a likeness with the native language is very common, and is used for the word *brillig*, which has been translated into 'billig' which sounds like *brillig*. *The toves* was translated into 'tovor', 'tofflorna', and 'tuvor'. *Mimsy* sounds similar to 'vimsiga', or 'mumsit'. Most pupils translated *all* into 'alla': 'alla mysiga var de bumbibjörnarna' (pupil no. 3), which indicates that they have not understood *all* when used as an adverb yet. The translation of *borogoves* into 'borrmaskiner' (see Appendix 2) is probably a guess based upon its likeness with the Swedish word.

4.2.2 Knowledge of the target language

All the pupils have succeeded in the translation of the word *and* and many in the translation of *in*, *the* and to some extent the meaning of the word *all*. Furthermore, many of them know for example that if a word ends with a –*y* it is likely to be an adjective of some sort (as in *slithy* and *mimsy*). The translation of *raths* into 'råttor' (rats) shows that many of the pupils go for similarity. They see that a word looks almost like another word they already know (in some cases perhaps they do not know the exact spelling and therefore think it is the same word), and therefore go for the easiest explanation – that similarity means synonymity. This goes

also for *the wabe*, which is translated into 'nät' or 'vebb'. Another association is seen with the translation of *brillig* into 'fantastisk', which goes via 'brilliant' (the pupil told me). It is to be noted that the two pupils who made the most correct guesses – and therefore are probably skilled language learners and readers – have not presumed that similarity equals synonymity. This indicates that on a certain level of learning, this is a strategy, but once they have advanced beyond this level, the similarity=synonymity formula seems unreliable and is therefore not used as a strategy.

4.2.3 Syntactic knowledge

Morphological pre-knowledge can guide the pupil in the direction of what grammatical function a word has in the sentence. The typical derivational adjective ending *-y* in *mimsy* and *slithy* suggests that these words are adjectives, and are accordingly translated into: 'vimsiga', 'vimsit', 'mumsit', 'mysiga', 'förvirrade' (see Appendix 4). *Slithy* becomes 'fräsiga', 'slitiga', or 'slitna'. Nouns seem to be easy to detect as well, since most have perceived those correctly – they seem to have an internal rule which tells them that if they see a definite article, the word next to it is probably a noun. *The mome raths* is possible to translate either as a noun in the plural, or a noun in the singular followed by a verb in the present tense, which one pupil did. He translated the sentence *The mome raths outgrabe* into 'Mamman ryter utom räckhåll' which is all fine according to the syntactic pattern. The only indication that this is not correct is that the rest of the poem is written in the past tense. There are only four verbs in the poem, but they seem difficult to translate. Verbs are carriers of context to a very large extent, and perhaps therefore difficult to decipher. Most of the pupils who tried, translated *wer*e and *did* correctly. The verb *outgrabe* caused confusion, but a few of the children have seen the morpheme *out-* and translated it accordingly and tried to make sense of the morpheme *-grabe* ('utom räckhåll', 'utgraberade', 'uthål').

4.3 The prose text

The prose text presented runs as follows:

There was no light in the shack, none at all, except when the moon was shining. Mamo could see chinks of it then, through the gaps in the corrugated-iron roof. But the moon wasn't out tonight. Mamo shivered, pulled the ragged blanket over his head and huddled against Tiggist's[1] warm body. (Laird 2003:1)

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[1] In the book it says "his sister's" but I changed that to see how the pupils would understand the name.

Table 2 shows the most common translations of *The Garbage King*. Two pupils offered translations of every item, whereas one pupil translated only three words (*no, the* and *out*). Apart from *and* and *the*, the most commonly translated items were *there was, no light, when the moon, but the moon*, and *over his head*. The least commonly translated items were *chinks of it, then, the gaps, shivered, ragged, huddled against, Tiggist's*. (See also Appendix 4).

Table 2. The pupils' most common translations of the excerpt from *The Garbage King*. The numerals before the words represent the numbers of pupils giving the answer. Where no numeral is indicated the answer is unique.

Lexical items	Pupils' answers			
There was	11 Det var	2 Där var	Det fanns	Den var
No light	13 Inget ljus	2 Nej	Ljus	Inte ett ljus
In the shack	5 I	2 I Shacket	Den	I shack
None at all	8 Inget alls	Ingen efter allt	Ingen av all	Det är all
Except	7 Förutom	Acceptera	Accepterade	Utan
When the moon	9 När månen	Den måne	Månen	Den
Was shining	7 Lyste	3 Var	Var skinande	Skinande
Mamo	4 Mamo	Mamos		
Could see	5 Kunde se	2 Se	Skulle se	Kläder
Chinks of it	Av den	Något av dem	Kycklingvingar som flög	Blinkar av det
Then	3 Då			
Through	4 Genom	Det var	Tungt	Igenom
The gaps	Hål	De Andas	Gapet	Öppningen
In	7 I	Av	In	
The corrugated-iron roof	Stentaket	Metall tak	Påbörjand järn taket	Corrautedge järn voff
But the moon	10 Men månen	3 Men den månen	Men	Fast den månen
Wasn't out tonight	8 Var inte ute inatt	2 Var ute	Var tuff ikväll eller hur	Var inte ute
Mamo	5 Mamo			
Shivered	Delade	Sherverade	Suckade	Vikte ut
Pulled	2 Drog	Puttade	Pillade	Knuffade
The blanket	2 Det	2 Filten	2 Den	Blanketen
Ragged	2 Den trasiga/slitna	Och raggade	En raggarbil	
Over his head	12 Över hans huvud	Över huvet	Över huvud sen	Över honnon huvud
And	11 Och	Fanns		
Huddled against	2 Mot	Bakhuvud mot	Huddled mot	Tryckte sig tätt intill
Tiggist's	3 Tiggists	Dens	Tiggest	Tiggist
Warm body	9 Varma kropp	4 Varm kropp		

4.3.1 Knowledge of the target language

In the excerpt from *The Garbage King*, there are no nonsense words, and more words and phrases that the pupils are able to recognize than in the poem. There are expressions like *There was*, which is a common beginning of a story, and 15 of the pupils actually knew this

phrase (this also has to do with context, see below). *No light*, *when the moon*, *but the moon*, *wasn't out tonight*, *over his head* or *warm body*, are phrases often correctly translated as they contain words that are part of children's familiar experience such as night and day (*light*, *moon*) and words of body parts (*head*, *body*).

4.3.2 Likeness with native language

The shack has by many been translated as 'hacket', 'schack', 'shaktet' etc., guesses based on how the word sounds in English, which is the bottom-up approach, and known as a common strategy among not so skilled readers (Tornberg 1997:74). *Except* sounds very similar to 'acceptera', which two pupils offered as a translation. *Chinks of it* has rendered creative guesses, such as 'kycklingvingar som flög', 'blinkar av det' and 'bebisar av det' (see Appendix 4). In the case of 'bebisar', the pupil explained to me how he had been thinking: *chinks* sounds a little like 'chicks', which in English is a nice looking girl, or 'baby', which in Swedish is 'bebis'. The translations of *gaps* into 'gapet' (which is not so far from the truth) or 'gäsp', *ragged* into 'raggarbil' or 'raggade' are other examples. The adjective *warm* is almost the same in Swedish, and has been correctly translated by 15 pupils.

4.3.3 Syntactic knowledge

The pupils have been able to detect nouns and verbs in this text as well. Most pupils who have done translations have written it in the past tense. There are only three adjectives in the text, *corrugated*, *ragged* and *warm*. None of the adjectives have typical endings as in the nonsense text wich has words with –*y* at the end, and the words in this text are therefore somewhat more difficult. *Warm* is a word the pupils know, as mentioned before, but *corrugated* and *ragged* are more difficult.

4.4 Results from the interviews

The interview part also revealed reading strategies. I asked the pupils what they did when encountering difficult words. Their answers were very similar. The questions were asked and answered in Swedish (see Appendix 3).[2]

When asked if they liked to read, and if they read a lot of books, most of the pupils answered "yes". The answer "yes" is probably given because this is what they believe to be the

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[2] I have only included three of the interview questions with answers, otherwise the material would have been too extensive.

expected answer in the school context that they are in, which in most of the cases is true, and should not be held against them. Moreover, the question is subjectively answered (which is true of all answers in the interview situation) and only reflects the respondent's subjective experience. I did not go into how many books they have read; but it seems that most of the pupils have the feeling that they read a lot of books – mainly in Swedish. When asked if they liked to read English texts, more answered "so and so". Seven of the eighteen answered that they did not like to read English texts. Those who did not like it seemed to think that it was the risk of not understanding, which made in boring. "So and so, I might not understand what it is" (pupil no.4). Pupil no. 17 responded frankly: "No, because I'm no good at English".

4.4.1 General strategies

When asked about strategies for understanding difficult words, most of the pupils answered "guessing", "asking my teacher" or "looking it up in a dictionary" (see also Table 3). Answers such as "try to figure it out" (Table 3, pupil no. 1) and "sit and figure it out" (pupil no.13) might show an effort to find associations, while "... it is possible to guess through the context" (pupil no. 7), "I understand from the other words" (pupil no.8), or "continue reading, to get meaning from context" (pupil no. 10) suggest attempts to get meaning from context. Pupil no. 9 answered "put a word there to see if it fits", which could indicate either syntactic knowledge, or a context-finding strategy. "Ask for help" (pupil no. 3 and others), is a socio-affective strategy. The pupil who answered: "I don't guess. If you guess wrong, it will be wrong" (pupil no.15), has perhaps some kind of negative experience of guessing before. His reluctance to guess could also be a wish to always be "right" which might not be advantageous in a learning situation.

Table 3. **Students responses to the question "what do you do when you come across words you don't understand?"[3]**

Pupil no.

1   I look it up in a dictionary. Try to figure it out.

2   Skip it. Continue reading. I consider what might be suitable.

3   I ask for help, skip it, or look it up in a dictionary.

4   I skip it or ask for help.

5   I guess.

6   I ask for help. Sometimes I guess.

7   Look it up in a dictionary. If one is reading, it is possible to guess through the context.

8   I don't bother, I understand from the other words.

9   I ask my teacher, use a dictionary. Put a word there to see if it fits.

10   Think again, guess, sometimes you can work it out. Continue reading, to get meaning from context.

11   Ask the teacher or dictionary. Skip it.

12   I call for my teacher. I read in English and translate into Swedish.

13   Dictionary, or sit and think a little while on my own.In this test I guessed.

14   Dictionary.

15   Dictionary. I don't guess. If you guess wrong, it will be wrong

16   I ask the teacher.

17   I ask the teacher, or skip it.

18   I ask the teacher.

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[3] My translations.

4.4.2 "Jabberwocky" strategies

I will refrain from presenting the answers to question no. 4 "What makes it fun or boring to read?", since it proved to be irrelevant for this particular survey (although it is without a doubt an interesting question). When I asked the pupils what they thought about the poem, it seems that they were all a bit confused but did not question if these words really were English words. Many answered that they "didn't understand anything at all" (pupil no. 1), and that it did not feel like a poem because it was strange and difficult to see the context. A common strategy mentioned is that of guessing, which they had been explicitly encouraged to do.

Table 4. Pupils' answers to the question "how did you figure out what the words meant (in Jabberwocky)?" [4]

Pupil no.	
1	I read it a few times. Tried to understand.
2	I guessed a little.
3	I guessed. Thought "Brillig" meant "brilliant". "Toves" meant "tofflor". "slithy" I made up the meaning for.
4	Wrote the words I knew.
5	I think. Figured it out when I understood what it meant.
6	Knew the words I wrote, like two.
7	Tried to guess, to hear what it sounded like.
8	Just guessed.
9	I've heard them before.
10	I guessed.
11	I knew "and" and "the". The rest I guessed. I recognized "twas" a little.
12	I knew some of them.
13	Took the words I already knew. Guessed.
14	Same as pupil no. 13.
15	Knew them.
16	Heard them before.
17	Thought deep inside my head.
18	Some I knew already.

"Thought deep inside my head" (pupil no. 17) might indicate an effort to find associations to words already known, or a meaningful word for the context. "Figured it out when I understood what it meant" (pupil no. 5) shows the strategy to gain meaning from context, and "to hear what it sounded like" (pupil no. 7) might also show an effort to find associations. Not all pupils translated more than the function words or 'det' or 'den' in "Jabberwocky", but about half of them did try to translate the lexical words as well.

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[4] My translations.

4.4.3 The Garbage King strategies

Most of the children seem to have found the prose text easier to understand than the poem except for two of them, one who thought they were equally difficult and one who thought the poem was easier. Regarding the prose text, one commonly used strategy was to read it through and then write the translation down. "I read the whole text first. If you see the overall picture, it's easier to see" (pupil no. 7). Two pupils answered that they had been thinking about the word *Mamo,* and decided it was a name (pupils no. 3 and no. 7).

Table 5. Pupils' answers to the question "how did you figure out what the words meant? (The Garbage King) " [5]

Pupil no.	
1	I read it a few times, before I went to the next.
2	Not really, many words lacking.
3	Understood it a little. "Mamo" was a name.
4	-
5	-
6	Guessed.
7	I read the whole text first. If you see the overall picture, it's easier to see. I wondered if Mamo was a name, and then I thought it was.
8	Only guessed on a couple of words.
9	Heard the words before.
10	Guessed.
11	Knew and guessed.
12	I knew the words I wrote.
13	I know some through TV.
14	I've heard quite a lot.
15	You can guess sometimes if you know a lot of words.
16	Just took a chance, knew some words, could guess what they meant.
17	Thought and figured it out. Guessed one.
18	Some words I knew. Guessed some.

4.5 Individual results

Table 6 below shows the individual results regarding "Jabberwocky". Each pupil got one point per syntactically adequate translation into Swedish, and the results are shown in this table. (See also Appendix 4). Table 7 shows the same thing for *The Garbage King*, and Table 8 shows the total results.

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[5] My translations.

Table 6. Points given to the pupils whenever they translated the lexical items in "Jabberwocky" into syntactically adequate lexical items in Swedish. For the complete table, see appendix 2.

Pupil no.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Sum	9	9	13	3	12	2	15	6	5	3	10	3	9	3	5	7	3	7
%	60	60	87	20	80	13	100	40	33	20	67	20	60	20	33	47	20	47

The pupils who managed well in the translation of "Jabberwocky" (that is, those who made syntactically adequate guesses in more than half of the cases) were pupils no. 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 11 and 13.

Table 7. Points given to the pupils whenever they translated the lexical items in *The Garbage King* into syntactically adequate lexical items in Swedish. For the complete table, see appendix 2.

Pupil no.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Sum	14	20	24	6	23	3	31	9	9	16	31	0	6	10	17	14	4	14
%	45	65	77	19	74	10	100	29	29	52	100	0	19	32	55	45	13	45

Those who managed well (more than 50 %) in the translation of *The Garbage King*, were pupils no. 2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 11, and 15.

Table 8. Points given to the pupils whenever they translated the lexical items in "Jabberwocky" or *The garbage king* into syntactically adequate lexical items in Swedish.

Pupil no.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Total sum	23	29	37	9	35	5	46	15	14	19	41	3	15	13	22	21	7	21
Total sum %	50	63	80	29	76	11	100	33	45	41	89	6	33	28	47	46	15	46

As we can see from table 6, one third of the children – six out of eighteen – managed to translate half or more of the lexical items into the right words or word classes, i.e. pupils no. 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, and 11. These pupils were all very interested in reading and writing in English and in Swedish. The pupils who did not translate the words into the right words or word classes (or did not attempt to translate them at all), were pupils 4, 6, 12, 14 and 17. These accomplished less than thirty percent, and while some of them did not read a lot, some of them liked reading. Hence, there is little correlation between results in table 6 and reading strategies mentioned in the interviews, partly due to the fact that those who did translate "Jabberwocky" got a much higher score than those who did not.

Let us look at pupils no. 3, no. 7 and no. 11. They were the ones with the far best results in translating, both regarding translation frequency and how correct their translations were. Their strategies, however, were quite different. Pupil no. 3 mentioned "I ask for help, skip it,

or look it up in a dictionary" (Table 3), pupil no. 7 had explicit strategies which amounted to keeping reading and understanding through the context, e.g. "if you see the overall picture, it's easier to see" (Table 5), but pupil no. 11 was briefer, and answered "knew and guessed" (Table 5) or "ask the teacher or dictionary, skip it" (Table 3). However, although pupil no. 11 might have been briefer and unable to describe what he was doing when understanding English so well, his reading habits were extensive. "I read a lot, even in English: *The Werewolf*, *Phantom of the opera*." Pupil no. 7 said: "I love to read". Both pupils 7 and 11 were keen on writing their own stories: "Can be fun. Funnier to write." (pupil no. 11). "I understand a lot. I write my own sometimes". Even though pupil no. 3 claimed that he did not like reading, he was a good and intelligent guesser. He dared to guess, and drew adequate conclusions when translating: "I guessed. Thought *brillig* meant 'brilliant'. *Toves* meant 'tofflor'. *Slithy* I made up the meaning for" (Table 3).

5. Discussion

Which comes first, reading skills or extensive reading? My study does not answer this question. In all likelihood the two aspects probably develop simultaneously in reciprocal stimulation and interaction. Is it possible to force someone to read even if they do not like it? I do not think so. But I think that what teachers have to do is to take care of the reading interest that already exists, and tell the pupils how to develop their language learning through the use of reading strategies. Not so skilled and modestly interested pupils can benefit from learning about learning and reading strategies as well as more gifted pupils, although they do not need to be taught strategies since they already use them. I think that they need to be made aware of the advantages of using guessing as a reading strategy. In fact, reading has in some cases been described as a "psycholinguistic guessing game". It is like a correlation between the text, the reader and the reader's previous experience (Hedge 2000:188). Knowing this would perhaps help many students to break the reading code. I mentioned earlier that these children are in the psychological developmental stage which Piaget calls "the concrete operational period" (Evenshaug & Hallén 2001:127-129). According to this theory, they have difficulties with abstract thinking, and probably this is – at least partly – a reason why they cannot really explain how they were thinking when performing a task. On the other hand, some of them, like pupils no.5 and no.7 did not have any problems in explaining their thoughts.

6. Conclusion

For my investigation I tested eighteen fourth-graders in a Swedish municipal school to see how they translated two previously unknown texts from English into Swedish. I also did a short interview with all of the eighteen pupils to hear what they said about reading strategies in general and on this specific occasion. In conclusion, the research done in this paper shows that the reading strategies many of these young learners of English use are:

- The strategy of *likeness with their native language* (mostly concerning vocabulary),

- Their *previous vocabulary knowledge of the L2*,

- Their *syntactic knowledge* – both of the L2 and the native language. They are actually very good at seeing the syntactic patterns even if they have not learned or even heard about the grammar rules.

- The fourth strategy, which emerged through the interviews, is *guessing the meaning through the context*.

It is difficult to draw any conclusions from a small investigation like this, but it seems that there is a correlation between the reading habits and the reading strategies which children develop at an early age. Those pupils who achieved the best results in the translations liked reading and learning a new language, although not all of the pupils who like reading managed to translate these two texts accurately. However, it is not easy to detect if the reading habits have affected their use of reading strategies. What I noted were in short two things. Firstly, early learners of English (aged 10-11) primarily use the strategy of likeness with their own language when translating English. Secondly, when the learners develop a bit further, this strategy is no longer used. Many of the pupils mentioned during the interviews that they often try to get meaning from the context when encountering difficult words, which indicates that they are skilled.

For future research it would be interesting to examine and compare the reading strategies applied to deciphering a nonsense text and a meaningful text by pupils of different ages, or to investigate in depth pupils' reading habits in both L1 and L2 through interviews with teachers and students, or follow a number of students for a longer period monitoring their reading habits and the development of reading strategies.

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Appendix 1

1. Läs dikten nedanför.

Twas brillig, and the slithy toves

_____

Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;

_____

All mimsy were the borogoves,

_____

And the mome raths outgrabe.

_____

2. Översätt dikten till svenska. Skriv på raden under. Om du inte vet vad orden betyder, gissa!

3. Försök att komma ihåg hur du kom fram till vad dikten betydde. Vi ska prata om det om en stund.

Appendix 2

1. Läs texten nedanför.

There was no light in the shack, none at all, except when the moon

_____

was shining. Mamo could see chinks of it then,

_____

through the gaps in the corrugated-iron roof.

_____

But the moon wasn't out tonight.

_____

Mamo shivered, pulled the ragged blanket

_____

over his head and huddled against Tiggist's warm body.

_____

2. Översätt texten till svenska. Skriv på raden under. Om du inte vet vad orden betyder, gissa!

3. Försök att komma ihåg hur du kom fram till vad texten betydde. Vi ska prata om det om en stund.

Namn: ……………………

Appendix 3

Intervjufrågor

1. Gillar du att läsa och i så fall, brukar du läsa mycket, i skolan och/eller hemma.

2. Tycker du om att läsa texter på engelska?

3. Vad gör du om du stöter på ord som du inte förstår?

4. Vad gör det roligt/tråkigt att läsa?

Om texterna:

1. Vad tänkte du om dikten, när du läste den?

2. Hur kom du fram till vad orden betydde?

3. Vad tänkte du om den andra texten, när du läste den?

4. Hur kom du fram till vad den betydde?

5. Tyckte du att någon av texterna var svårare än den andra? Varför?

Namn:....................................

Appendix 4

"Jabberwocky"

Lexical items	Pupils' answers				
Twas	2 Det var	2 Var	Trasslig	De var	
Brillig	Fantastisk	Gryning	Billig	Bra	
And	18 Och				
The toves	2 Tovor	Tofflorna	Skjortor	Tuvorna	Tofflan
Slithy	2 Slitna	Slitiga	Fräsiga		
Did gyre and gimble	9 Och	2 Gjorde	Jag hyrde och stickade	Gryde och grode	Det gryde och månen
In	9 I	2 in			
The wabe	5 Den	3 Nät	Det	Den vebben	Är på himmlen
All mimsy	9 Alla	Alla vimsiga	Allt mumsit	Helt vimsit	Allt
Were	11 Var				
The borogoves	5 Den	2 Det	De bumbibjörnarna	Det där ohyran/skalbaggarna	Borrmaskiner
And	17 Och				
The mome raths	5 Den	3 Råttor	2 Det	Mamman ryter	Dom stora råttorna
Outgrabe	Utom räckhåll	Härjade	Utgraberade	Uthål	

The garbage king

Lexical items	Pupils' answers				
There was	11 Det var	2 Där var	Det fanns	Den var	Der var
No light	13 Inget ljus	2 Nej	Ljus	Inte ett ljus	Inte
In the schack	5 I	2 I Shacket	Den	I shack	I den
None at all	8 Inget alls	Ingen efter allt	Ingen av all	Det är all	Alla
Except	7 Förutom	Acceptera	Accepterade	Utan	Expriment
When the moon	9 När månen	Den måne	Månen	Den	Det
Was shining	7 Lyste	3 Var	Var skinande	Skinande	Vad skiner
Mamo	4 Mamo	Mamos			
Could see	5 Kunde se	2 Se	Skulle se	Kläder	
Chinks of it	Av den	Något av dem	Kycklingvingar som flög	Blinkar av det	Är inte alls som vanligt
Then	3 Då				
Trough	4 Genom	Det var	Tungt	Igenom	Mellan
The gaps	Hål	De Andas	Gapet	Öppningen	Den
In	7 I	Av	In		
The corrugated iron-roof	Stentaket	Metall tak	Påbörjand järn taket	Corrautedge järn voff	Det steniga taket
But the moon	10 Men månen	3 Men den månen	Men	Fast den månen	Det är sent
Wasn't out tonight	8 Var inte ute inatt	2 Var ute	Var tuff ikväll eller hur	Var inte ute	På ont natt
Mamo	5 Mamo				
Shivered	Delade	Sherverade	Suckade	Vikte ut	
Pulled	2 Drog	Puttade	Pillade	Knuffade	
The blanket	2 Det	2 Filten	2 Den	Blanketen	Blanket
Ragged	2 Den trasiga/slitna	Och raggade	En raggarbil		
Over his head	12 Över hans huvud	Över huvet	Över huvud sen	Över honnon huvud	Över sitt huvud
And	11 Och	Fanns			
Huddled against	2 Mot	Bakhuvud mot	Huddled mot	Tryckte sig tätt intill	Armled
Tiggist's	3 Tiggists	Dens	Tiggest	Tiggist	
Warm body	9 Varma kropp	4 Varm kropp			

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Appendix 5

Målsmans medgivande beträffande elevernas ifyllande av frågeformulär och deltagande i intervjuer.

Hej!

Jag heter Elin Bolin, och utbildar mig just nu till lärare på Karlstads universitet. För tillfället håller jag på med en kombinerad engelsk C-uppsats och examensarbete, och för att få stoff till min undersökning behöver jag utföra ett enkelt läsförståelseprov, och göra en kort intervju med eleverna i klassen. Detta kommer att ske under en engelsklektion, och barnens lärare Barbro kommer också att vara närvarande. Materialet kommer sedan att analyseras av mig, och eventuellt också ses av min handledare Elisabeth Wennö på Karlstads universitet. När jag så småningom presenterar resultaten i min uppsats, kommer givetvis inga namn att nämnas; eleverna kommer att vara fullständigt anonyma. Efter avslutat arbete kommer min uppsats att arkiveras på Karlstads universitet, där den går att låna på biblioteket, om Ni är intresserade av att läsa om vad jag kommit fram till med hjälp av Era barn. Jag är oerhört tacksam för de elever som frivilligt ställer upp i denna undersökning, och hoppas att Ni som målsmän vill ge Ert medgivande i de fall era ungdomar ställer upp. Det är naturligtvis min förhoppning att de också ska tycka att det är roligt att delta i detta projekt!

Om Ni har frågor är Ni välkomna att höra av Er till mig på telefon: 070-xxx xx xx

Tack på förhand!

Elin Bolin, lärarstuderande.

Jag, som målsman för _____, intygar härmed att mitt barn får deltaga i undersökningen i klassen.

_____
(namn)