

Researching Bangladeshi Pupils' Strategies for Learning to Read in (UK) Primary School Settings

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Abstract

Language learning strategy research has focused on the actions of the individual language learner and investigated the links between successful learning and the strategies that such learners use. At the same time researchers studying beginner bilingual pupils learning English and learning to read in English in UK schools have also been interested in the strategies that such pupils employ in order to be successful learners and readers in their new language. This article reports on some of the findings from a study of the experiences of a small group of bilingual Bangladeshi pupils that took as its initial focus the strategies that the pupils called on in order to engage with learning to read in English (their L2) in their classroom. What emerged during the course of the study was that the strategies the pupils were employing could not be considered separately from the contexts in which the children were learning, and that the strategies children used were not simply strategies for learning to read or to learn English but were bound up with issues of identity and assimilation. The data thus challenge research that focuses exclusively on the individual learner or that treats context as simply another variable. The paper argues for a socio-cultural approach to research and pedagogy in relation to language learning and for the use of ethnographic methods.

In the field of second language (L2) learning, language learning strategy research has focused on the actions of the individual language learner and investigated the links between successful learning and the strategies that such learners use in and outside the classroom in order to be successful language learners. Studies of beginner bilingual pupils learning English and learning to read in English in UK mainstream schools have also considered the strategies that such pupils employ in order to be successful learners and readers in their new language. In the light of this work, a study of the experiences of a small group of bilingual, Bangladeshi pupils, in relation to their achievement and success as learners in their mainstream English primary schools, was undertaken. The study took as its initial focus the strategies that the pupils called on in order to engage with reading in their classrooms and how these strategies helped or hindered the pupils in becoming successful, independent readers in English. However, the data collected soon revealed that the strategies the pupils were employing could not be considered separately from the contexts in which they were learning. It became clear that the classroom context was key in determining the learning opportunities of the pupils and that the strategies that the pupils employed were bound up with issues of identity (and with fitting in and being seen as 'good pupils' by their teachers) and were not simply strategies for learning to read or learning English. As such the data challenge research that focuses exclusively on the individual learner, or that treats context as simply another variable, and suggests that a socio-cultural approach to research pedagogy in relation to language learning is a fruitful way forward.

Strategies

Language Learning Strategy (LLS) research suggests that there is a link between successful learning and the strategies that learners use in and outside classrooms in

order to learn. Learners that employ particular strategies, or who have access to a wider range of strategies, learn more successfully than those who do not. A large amount of work exists which attempts to identify the strategies used by successful learners and those used by less successful learners (this is reviewed by the editors in their introduction). By language learning strategies, researchers in this field generally mean ‘the specific actions consciously employed by learners for the purpose of learning language’ (Griffiths, 2003:1) although Oxford has indicated that the actions may not be necessarily conscious (Oxford, 1994). Harris and Prescott express it in practitioner terms when they describe teaching language learning strategies to their pupils as making their own knowledge about how to successfully learn a language explicit in their teaching (Harris & Prescott, 2005).

At the same time, research into the learning experiences and school achievement of bilingual pupils attending mainstream schools in the UK, has considered what it is that successful bilingual learners, especially those that come from backgrounds that do not necessarily share in and prepare their children for the literacy and learning practices of English mainstream education, do in classrooms in order to succeed. For example, Gregory describes the manner in which Tajul, a five year old Bangladeshi boy, negotiates in interactions with his teacher in order to gain information from her about what counts as reading in his classroom and how he should take part in the classroom activity of reading to her (Gregory, 1994). Gregory shows how successful Tajul is in this despite coming from a home and community in which such interactions around reading, and what counts as reading, are very different. In other research papers, Gregory and her colleagues present data which, they claim, show how siblings support their younger brothers and sisters through bringing their knowledge of the learning practices of both their homes, communities and schools together in order to help their siblings learn to read successfully in their mainstream schools (Rashid & Gregory, 1997; Gregory, 1998; Gregory & Williams, 2001). Later studies support this understanding of the role that siblings, families and peers play in combining forms and strategies for learning into new forms of reading and learning practice that benefit bilingual pupils (Kelly, Gregory & Williams, 2001; Gregory, Long & Volk, 2004). This research thus suggests that bilingual pupils, and their siblings, also employ strategies that support them in becoming successful learners and readers in their mainstream classrooms.

Researching Bangladeshi pupils learning to read.

As a result of this research on bilingual pupils and learning in mainstream classrooms, the research reported on here was initially intended as an exploration of the strategies that a small group of Sylheti and Bengali-speaking Year Three pupils used in learning to read in English in their primary school classrooms. What kinds of strategies did the pupils use? Were they successful? Strategies were conceived of as what the children did as learners in the classroom, their ways of learning. The emphasis, as with the bilingual learners research cited above, being less on the inner workings of the children’s minds, or conscious, intentional behaviour (Griffiths, 2003:1; Stern 1992: 261; Richards and Platt 1992: 209) and more on the manner in which the children went about being readers and learners in the classroom and the practices that they adopted or brought with them into the classroom. In this way, although the use of the term strategy fell within the definition of learning strategies offered by O’Malley and Chamot (1990) namely, ‘the special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information’ it bent more towards the

actions that the pupils used to help them comprehend, learn and take part in the activity of learning, and in this case learning to read in their L2, rather than simply retain new information.

The research was undertaken over the period of one year in three Year Three classrooms in a cathedral city in England. The location was chosen because there was an interest in the learning experiences of bilingual Bangladeshi pupils in a mainly white, monolingual setting. The little research that had explored the educational experiences of bilingual Bangladeshi pupils had generally focused on children attending school in multi-ethnic, multilingual settings where they were learning alongside speakers of Sylheti and Bengali and were supported by access to a wide range of community resources and networks. Bangladeshi pupils were the focus of the study because of their perceived underachievement in English mainstream schools, revealed in numerous statistical studies and practitioner accounts. Previous research (Gregory: see above) and reports (Walters, 1998) suggested that literacy, particularly learning to read, were central to pupils' success as learners in their classrooms. Six Year Three bilingual Bangladeshi pupils were the focus of the study, attending three different primary schools. These six children were the total population of bilingual Bangladeshi pupils in the county at the time of the research.

Research Methods and Approach

In order to explore the educational experiences and learning-to-read strategies of the six Bengali and Sylheti-speaking pupils that were at the centre of the study, an ethnographic, case study approach was adopted. Most LLS research is conducted through the use of interviews and questionnaires (i.e. research participants are asked to self report on the strategies they use) (e.g. Purdie & Oliver, 1999; Lan & Oxford, 2003), classroom observation (e.g. Cohen, 1998; Naiman et al., 1978; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) or through the method of 'think aloud' (e.g. Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Chamot & El-Dinary, 1999; O'Malley et al., 1989; Gu, Hu & Zhang, 2005). The 'think aloud' method involves asking research participants to verbalise what they are thinking whilst performing a language learning task (Gu et al., 2005). 'Think aloud' would appear to be the best method for accessing the strategies that young children use in their language learning. This is because the use of questionnaires is not ideal as young children are not able to report fully on their actions, motives and thinking in the context of a schedule of questions and, according to Gu et al., classroom observation was felt to yield little information when it was used (Gu et al., 2005: 282). At the same time using 'think aloud' with young children is not without its problems. Finding appropriate ways of eliciting the information that the researcher wants from the children during a visit to a school to conduct a 'think aloud' session with a child can be difficult, the researcher is a stranger to the children and unused to the ways of the children's classrooms and their practices, the researcher also has to take care not to attempt to elicit the information they need in the short space of a 'think aloud' session by making suggestions to the child about what the child might be doing and thereby putting answers into the child's mouth. The researchers also face the difficulty of working with children's lack of experience in describing what they are doing or thinking and this can limit the research. Difficulties are introduced by the 'strangeness' of the researcher (to the children and to the classroom context) and the need for all the researchers to present themselves and the questions and tasks in the same way (consistently and systematically) across all of the research settings they are researching. There is also the problem of the researchers using formal

language, language that the research children are not familiar with (all of these issues are discussed by Gu et al, 2005: 288).

In the case of the research reported here, an ethnographic, case study approach was adopted because it overcame many of the problems outlined above and allowed access to the dynamic, subtle and complex practices of the children and their classrooms. Ethnographic research seeks to understand the practices of a group of people through the researcher becoming a member of the community being researched and taking part in the practices of that community in order to understand such practices and their meaning for the members of the community. Ethnographic research methods in educational settings thus involve the researcher as a participant observer, an observer who also plays a role in the normal activities of the educational environment being researched. Such research is conducted over a lengthy period of time so that researcher strangeness is minimised, the effects of the researchers' presence in the environment are negated and the researcher can allow the research participants' meanings, actions and language to determine the unfolding of the study. Time is given to explore the meanings that actors give to their actions and choices. Ethnographic research allows for more than an observation carried out during one visit or over a short period of time and allows for more than one interview or think aloud session. In this study my role in the three classrooms was that of a classroom assistant. There were other classroom assistants present in the classrooms and I helped the children with their work, heard children read and generally supported the classroom teachers in the same way as other classroom adults in the school. As the sole researcher in the study who saw the research pupils regularly over the course of a whole school year, communication problems due to research strangeness or formality or lack of knowledge of the children did not materialise. The children, and their peers and teachers in the classroom, came to know me very well and I them. As a participant observer I was part of their classroom world and the children and teachers became used to talking to me about what they were doing, and why, there was time to become aware of what was of interest and many occasions on which to observe, record, talk and engage in reading with the children. I was in a position to be able to always ask 'How did you do that?' and then use the child's own language for further probing and discussion. As the sole researcher, problems arising from the need to maintain consistency across a range of classroom settings did not emerge. In this manner many of the limitations and problems in eliciting strategies identified in other LLS research work were overcome.

The particular methods used to gather data in the study were:

- Year long participant observation in three Year 3 classrooms
- Semi-structured and unstructured interviews with children, teachers, parents and siblings over the course of the school year (using an interpreter for interviews with parents).
- Regular reading sessions with the research children and six other monolingual pupils¹ in each of the research classrooms over the course of the school year. These reading sessions were both one-to-one and group reading sessions.
- The use of a sequencing reading activity with all of the research children and their six monolingual peers in each classroom. This activity consisted of classroom storybook familiar to the children and made up of pictures with two or three sentences of print on each page (and at a level of difficulty well below the level of reading the children normally engaged with in their classroom and

at home). The first six pages of the story were photocopied, including the title page, and the order of the pages was rearranged. Each child was individually given the rearranged pages and asked to put the pages in the right order to tell the beginning of a/the story. When the child felt they had finished the task they were encouraged to talk about the story they had created, the choices they had made and so on. The task allowed me to observe and record what the children did in order to recreate a text, the strategies they brought to reading and creating a narrative (including how the children thought a narrative text worked and whether being able to comprehend the story was important)².

- Interviews and reading sessions were all audio-taped, as were some classroom sessions and group work sessions. Some classroom sessions and all of the sequencing reading activities were videoed.

In relation to reading, the central focus of the study, I heard the children read regularly and noted what they did and also asked them about what they were doing whilst hearing them read and after they had read. This became a normal part of our reading together. I also asked the children about how they went about reading in the many interviews I conducted with them during the research year and this topic was often initiated by the children themselves in the chats and conversations I had with them during the year. All our reading sessions were taped and some were videoed. I gave the children a variety of reading activities to do at these times, the most revealing being the sequencing activity based on books available in their classrooms and of a level well within the accepted ability of the pupil. I also observed the reading practices employed in the classroom and the children reading on their own and in groups with their teachers. I interviewed the children and their teachers and parents to find out about learning to read in school, at home and in the Mosque school the children attended. I visited the children in their homes and looked at the reading activities that they engaged with at home.

The data collected for the study focused on each of the six children and was organised, analysed and reported in the form of six case studies, one for each pupil. Data and portraits of the six children's siblings and classroom peers were also included in these case studies. In what follows it is not possible to report on all of the study's findings. What is discussed is the manner in which it became clear that an approach that focused on strategies in terms of individuals was not appropriate to understanding the learning experiences of the pupils. Such an approach ignored the fact that the strategies that the pupils chose to employ in order to be readers in their new language were not chosen and utilized simply in order to read but were chosen and utilized in order to fit in, please the teacher and gain a particular kind of identity in the classrooms. This will be revealed through a consideration of some of the research data in relation to two of the research children; Tumi and Attar and what was revealed in an interview with Salima³, Tumi's older sister.

Findings

The three children will be discussed in relation to the following:

- The strategies the pupils used
- Where the strategies came from
- The implications of the strategies used

The strategies the pupils used:

‘I think a lot of things I knew from memory at Greenhill.... I would choose books that were easy, lots of pictures and books the teachers had read in class and when I'd bring it home I'd get my brother to read it to me and I'd pick up words that I didn't know and just memorise it so that I could read the whole book although I would not know which words I was saying and at school I read it to the teacher and this was from memory and the teacher was very happy ‘Salima's really getting along’.

(Salima 29/3/02)

Salima, Tumi's sixteen year old sister, talked at length in our interview about her memories of learning to read in English during her primary school years. A key strategy for Tumi was using her memory to learn words she did not know in English by getting her brother to read her school story books to her at home and remembering what he said and how he said it. She also chose books that were ‘easy’ and had ‘lots of pictures’ in them and which she had heard her teacher read to the class. In this way she was able to hear and remember the appropriate way of reading out loud in her English classroom setting. She listened to and observed carefully what was considered to be the correct way of reading in her early years classroom and then memorised this and tried (it would seem successfully) to give back to her teacher this kind of reading. Thus the key strategies for Salima in learning to be a reader were using her memory to learn whole words⁴, using family resources such as her older brothers and making a ‘performance’ of reading. Salima's words above also reveal that a key motivation for Salima in using these strategies in order to read in her early years classroom was to please her teacher (‘and the teacher was very happy’) and make her teacher think that she was making good progress (‘Salima's really getting along’). Salima reveals that she knew she wasn't really reading (‘I would not know which words I was saying’) and mentions later in the interview that she knew she was ‘cheating’ herself but that what was important to her in her early years in school was pleasing her teacher, fitting in and appearing to be like the other children. As a bilingual, minority ethnic pupil Salima, like all children, wanted to be an accepted and fully participating member of her classroom community. Her other attempts to do this were also revealed through the interview. She spoke at length about how she copied the other children's work on the many occasions she was unable to do it (because of her limited knowledge of English) and how she would raise her hand when the teacher asked the class a question in order to be like the other children, even when she did not know the answer to the teacher's question.

Attar, one of the research children, was also motivated in his learning to read by a wish to please his teacher and appear a fully participating, high status member of his classroom. When he was reading, as well as using his knowledge of phonics and onset and rime to decode words accurately, Attar paid great attention to the punctuation in a text (the capital letters, full stops, speech marks, question and exclamation marks) in order to find the correct intonation for reading out loud. This was the reading practice that surrounded Attar in his English classroom; his teachers heard the children read, and assessed their ability as readers, by hearing the children read out loud, either in one-to-one situations or in groups. Attar, like Salima, also used his listening abilities and often chose books to read to classroom adults that had previously been read to the class by teachers. When Attar read he put a great deal of expression into his reading. He read with what one might call a ‘readerly voice’, emphasising the beginning of sentences and key words and presenting different voices for different characters. In

this he was responding to the directions given by his teacher who frequently spoke to the class about the importance of making their reading expressive and interesting by using different voices and not reading in a monotone. Attar was able to make his reading expressive through his ability to use his knowledge of phonics to decode the text accurately and through his attention to the punctuation and his memory of how his teachers had read the books out loud to the class. He also chose high status books to read, that is books chosen by his teachers to read to the class and books that the children in the class considered to be books that only 'good readers' could read on their own (e.g. Harry Potter). Attar was successful in his reading in that he gained his teacher's approval. His classroom teacher's earliest comments to me about Attar as a learner were, 'His reading is phenomenal...he can read Harry Potter brilliantly' (14/9/00). However, Attar's ability to present a flawless performance of reading out loud accurately and with expression hid the fact that the strategies he was using to read were only strategies that enabled him to decode text accurately. Other observations and conversations with Attar revealed that he was not able to take very much meaning from what he read and that he struggled with other classroom work that required reading for meaning (e.g. numeracy and science worksheets). This was not picked up by his teachers as Attar used his reading strategies to such good affect in leading his teachers to believe he was an excellent reader. He was able to keep his teachers from seeing what he could not do in order to maintain the high opinion they had of him and protect his status as a 'brilliant' reader.

Tumi, who attended a different school to Attar, had a different set of strategies for reading although the ways of reading to the teacher in the classroom were the same. Tumi, when reading to a classroom adult, would look for whole words on the page that she recognised/remembered and then used the pictures and the initial sounds of all the other words on the page to guess at the words she was reading. These guesses were not random in the sense that she used the words that she guessed at to weave her own story and meaning together as she read along. In order to hide the fact that she could not read the words on the page in the way intended, Tumi would read very quickly and quietly and leave her hearers with the impression that she could read very well and that she just rushed her reading because she was eager to read on or that she did not appreciate what was required in reading out loud to a teacher because she was used to reading on her own at home⁵. Tumi was also adept at distracting classroom adults' attention if they asked her any questions about the text she was reading, she was able to present herself in these contexts as a charming little girl who made teacher-like comments about the text she was reading (such as 'I do think this is an interesting story'). In one reading session with me, Tumi revealed how conscious she was of the strategies that she was using and the intended affect of these.

Sue: Are you going to read?

Tumi: (pause) No.

Sue: Why not?

Tumi: Cos I'm nervous.

Sue: Why do you feel nervous?

Tumi: Well sometimes I cheat.

Sue: Sometimes you cheat. What do you mean sometimes you cheat?

What do you do?

Tumi: First I read this bit (opening the book at the last page).

Sue: What the end?

Tumi: Yeah and then I read this bit and I read it all at one page. All one page by one page I just look at the pictures (she turns the pages quickly starting at the back of the book moving forward, stopping or slowing when she reaches a page with a picture).

Sue: Yeah.

Tumi: But I don't read it.

Sue: You don't.

Tumi: Yeah, but when there's some words like this I don't even read it I just.../

Sue: So how do you know what is happening?

Tumi: Well I look at the pictures and it looks like something is happening but sometimes I read the words too, easy words. Like 'the Queen of' and 'impress of loan island', 'the eye safe conduct to come and speak with you'.

Sue: That's very interesting.

(Tumi 27/3/01)

'Do you know why I read fast? It's because if you read fast, zoom, you can miss out bits zoom, zoom and you can miss out the bits you can't read, you don't know – and then no-one knows'.

(Tumi 29/3/01)

Tumi, like Attar was very keen to maintain her high status in the class as a 'good' reader. Interviews and conversations with other children revealed that as well as reading high status books they also considered a fellow pupil to be a good reader if they could read fast. Tumi was thus reinforcing her reputation as a good reader through her way of reading out loud to the teacher in a fast, rushed voice. Tumi, like Salima, also strove to fit in and belong to her classroom community. As well as please her teacher with her reading and her engagement with books she always took an active part in classroom interactions with her teachers, always eagerly raising her hand to answer questions even when she did not know the answers.

Where the strategies came from:

The children called on the strategies and behaviours that they saw and experienced as being involved in being a reader and being able to read in the different learning environments that they found themselves in. In addition to what Attar and Tumi had learnt about decoding and using phonics and onset and rime in their English schools, the children also all called on strategies they knew from their homes⁶. Both Salima and Attar called on a learning practice that they were familiar with in their community and home environments, that is learning through memorisation and through copying the intonation and vocal presentation of the teacher in order to 'read'. Both children had attended the local Mosque school to learn to read the Qur'an and these were the learning practices that they would have been very familiar with there. In the Mosque school the children begin to learn the Qur'an, and other Qur'anic teachings, through listening to the teacher as they follow the print with their finger and memorising the teacher's vocalisations of the text. The children in this learning environment 'read' to the teacher to show they have memorised the text and that they are orally pronouncing the text correctly. Talking to the children and interviewing them and their parents confirmed that these were indeed two ways in which the children learnt at home and in their Mosque school⁷. Tumi was also calling on learning and reading practices

from her home in that she read with her sister every evening and engaged in a lot of story making and fantasy activities at home under her guidance. Tumi brought to her classroom reading her story making and fantasy activities as well as her ability to interact with adults and impress them with her charm. (Tumi was the only child in her family and was surrounded by three grown up siblings as well as her mother and father).

The children also called on their previous learning and reading experiences in school, particularly the practice of reading one-to-one with the teacher since they started school and on what their teachers told them they expected to hear when they read. The children were very aware of what counted as reading in their learning environments through observing what was expected and then by providing that kind of reading with their teachers in their educational settings.

The implications of the strategies used:

A good deal of the study's findings are concerned with the implications of the way the children used the particular strategies that they did and how these strategies, designed to make them appear to be good readers and fully participating members of their classrooms, affected their teachers' assessments of them and the resources that were thus made available to them as learners (see Walters 2003; 2004; 2007). In short, the manner in which the three children reported here used strategies in order to be perceived as good readers kept their teachers from seeing the difficulties that the children had with reading and as a consequence these pupils did not receive any reading or language support from their schools or LEA services even though they were in need of such support.

Discussion

The data, some of which has been presented above, led me to see the classroom context (classroom spaces and practices) as key in determining the language and learning opportunities of the research pupils and how the strategies the pupils were employing could not be separated out from the context. The strategies that the pupils employed were about being part of a classroom community and presenting themselves as particular kinds of pupils and learners. They were bound up with issues of identity and assimilation and not simply learning to read or learning English⁸.

The research findings that emerged from the data placed the classroom context, as well as the social relationships and interactions between the learners and between the learners and their teachers, at the centre of the study (in contrast to much LLS research which tends to see context as simply a variable or a modifier of the learner's 'internal activity' Norton and Toohey, 2001: 308). In this way the findings supported a socio-cultural understanding of learners and learning environments, that is a view of learning as something that is essentially social and which occurs in the contact and interactions between people as they participate with each other in a range of activities in a particular environment or community. This approach can be found in the research studies of Toohey (2000), Norton & Toohey (2001), Day (2002), Lave & Wenger (1991) and Hawkins (2004). This is in contrast to the approach adopted in much LLS research that focuses on individual cognition and action (Norton & Toohey, 2001). The research findings here bring to the fore issues of identity and the identity work that learners do and offer us opportunities to understand the complexity of learners' actions and choices in the spaces in which they find themselves learning⁹.

As well as directing my research focus towards seeing how the three children called on a range of strategies in order to assimilate and to please their teachers, the data also revealed that the strategies that the children called on in order to learn to read and to become independent readers were often strategies that they knew from other learning settings (their homes and the Mosque school). The children appeared to assess the learning and reading practices that they were expected to engage with in their English classrooms and to then call on a range of strategies or practices that they were familiar with in order to engage in the ways expected. It was as if they were choosing tools from a toolkit of strategies or practices that they carried with them from one learning context to another. However, what the data also revealed was that because the expectation that pupils were to read for meaning in their English primary classrooms was not made explicit and the reading practices that the children engaged in with their teachers did not require them to read for meaning, these three children did not call on or develop these necessary strategies or practices.

This leads us to reflect on what the implications of this are for LLS and strategy training. LLS and strategy training have always focused on learning behaviours, things that learners do, whilst the study presented here suggests that it is more productive to focus not on behaviours but on practices, knowledges and the positions and opportunities that learners are offered in which to engage with language (Norton & Toohey, 2001, Toohey, 2000, Day, 2002) and which they need to take up in order to engage with a particular task (or resist if they do not wish to be so engaged). In addition to a focus on strategies or things learners do, it suggests a focus on things that learners need know, and the practices that they need to be socialised or encultured into, to be successful language learners and readers.

Conclusion

A socio-cultural perspective can add to our research knowledge about language learning in ways that are complementary to LLS work. Research that uses ethnographic methods, and which is thus able to pay attention to classroom contexts and the behaviours and meanings of actors in those contexts, can show:

- the ways in which strategies are used are not simply for learning but are bound up in identity work for learners and have implications for how learners are seen and assessed and the subsequent resources that come their way. It is also not simply a question of what learners do as individuals but what opportunities are available to individuals in order to show who they are and what they know, it is a question of what the context/practices allows them to do. Norton and Toohey have eloquently challenged the current SLA focus on the individual ‘good language learner’ by asking us to think of language learners in terms of the conversations they are allowed to be part of and of who is allowed to speak and when (Norton & Toohey, 2001).
- the manner in which learners call on a range of strategies from other (learning) settings in order to take part and learn in their classrooms – and the implications of this.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the ESRC who provided the studentship that allowed me to complete the research study reported on here.

¹ Although the focus of the research was on bilingual pupils learning to read in their L2 whilst learning English at the same time, I included reading sessions with six monolingual pupils in each classroom as a way of exposing myself to a range of monolingual readers so that I did not jump to any conclusions about what the bilingual pupils were doing as readers as necessarily being different or unusual. The data used in this paper is only that which pertains to the bilingual pupils and the strategies that they used, however, the argument that the classroom context is key in determining learning opportunities and that strategies cannot be separated out from context holds for all learners, bilingual or monolingual.

² Gu et al.'s (2005) reading activity assumed that the children already knew that they should comprehend a story when reading it.

³ All names have been anonymised.

⁴ In another section of the interview Salima revealed that later in the school year that she was describing to me, she learnt some phonic strategies and onset and rime strategies from watching Sesame Street at home but she never really caught up with the reading level of her classmates and was thus always behind at school.

⁵ This is what Tumi's teachers thought yet this was not the case. Tumi read to her older sister regularly at home but her teachers did not know this.

⁶ In this way, the three children referred to in this paper had a 'strategy', or practice, which they could call on in order to present themselves as good readers, and hide their reading difficulties, that their monolingual peers did not have.

⁷ Similar accounts of learning in community settings are provided in Rashid & Gregory, 1997.

⁸ Norton Peirce (1995) has also argued for the importance of identity in SLA research.

⁹ For example, Macaro's pilot study on learner strategies conducted in four UK secondary schools in 1996, found that 'girls, almost across the board, were claiming to use strategies more than boys' (Macaro, 2005: 1). A focus on identity and identity work may direct us to consider whether the boys' failure to claim that they used strategies arose from more than simply not knowing or using strategies but as a resistance to an identity position they did not wish to occupy. Perhaps their claim to use fewer strategies than girls was a refusal to be seen as a certain kind of feminised pupil? If the strategies listed and claimed by the girls were how successful girls behaved in the classroom then the boys may well have wanted to distance themselves from such behaviours/strategies.

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