

Deaf Learners Reading in English as a Foreign Language: Investigating the Possibilities of Development

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1 Introduction

The poster presents partial results of a doctoral research which studies reading of Deaf university students in English as their foreign language (EFL).

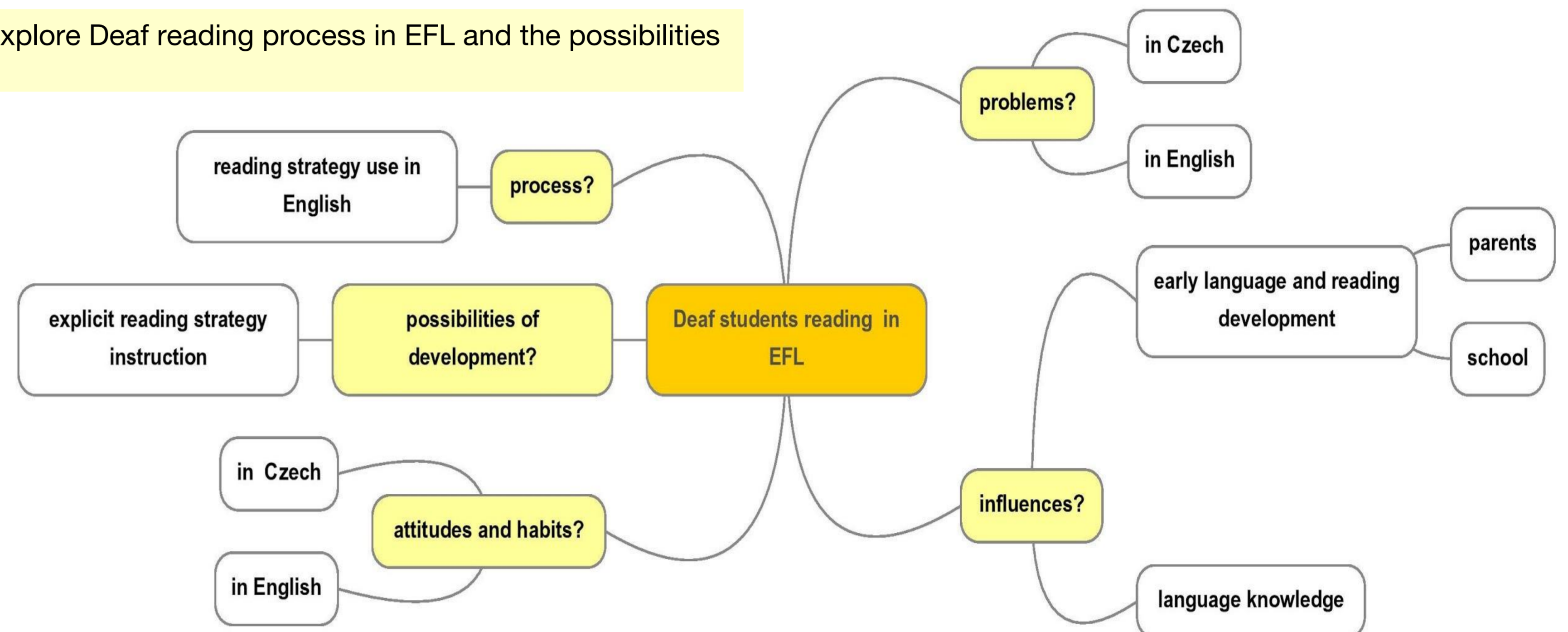
The results concern one case out of a multiple case study.

Compared to previous research on Deaf reading, my research focuses on:

- Young adult readers.
- Academically successful (i.e. university students).
- Reading in a foreign language.

2 Research objectives

The objective is to explore Deaf reading process in EFL and the possibilities of its development.



3 Background

Reading comprehension and print literacy constitute a long-term and critical challenge of deaf education (Spencer & Marschark, 2010).

Mother tongue, first / second / foreign language of Deaf learners: mother tongue can be either the spoken language of the country or the sign language. The preferred language is usually the sign language. However first reading experience comes in the spoken language of the country. For Czech students English is a foreign language.

Lack of solid first language (L1) base presents a significant hindrance in foreign language learning of Deaf learners both in relation to linguistic knowledge and to skills.

Different modalities of sign and spoken languages prevent straightforward application of L2 language theories (Mayer & Wells, 1996).

Particularly in cases where L1 readers are unsuccessful or at-risk, the instruction of reading in a foreign language **cannot rely on a positive transfer of reading skills** from L1 and therefore should involve practices that support the establishment and development of such skills (Ganschow et al., 1998).

Reading strategies are techniques for processing, decoding, and understanding text, which contribute to reaching the aim of reading. Compared to reading skills, strategies are more conscious or can be made conscious under certain circumstances (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008).

Reading strategy instruction may have a positive effect on reading comprehension both in hearing and Deaf learners (see, e.g., Block, 1986; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Pressley, 2006; Schirmer & Williams., 2003; Thumann 2006).

4 Methodology

Participant "ZAN"

Prelingually Deaf university student;
MA programme in languages and education;
Hearing family; prefers not to use voice.

Self-reported information:

Mother tongue: Czech.
Preferred language: Czech Sign Language.
Czech language level: matura exam; no problems in everyday usage of its written form.
CSL level: natural, no problems in usage.
English: B2 level according to CEFR; B1 level scored in the use of English test.

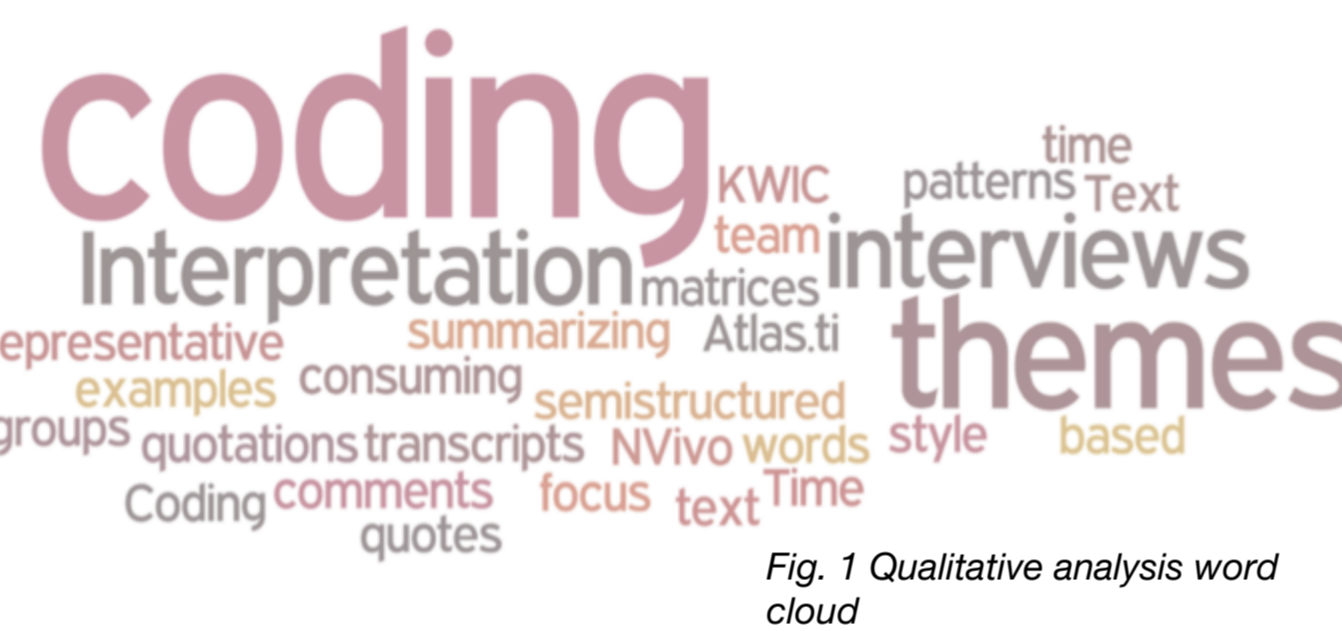


Fig. 1 Qualitative analysis word cloud

Researcher's role

Participant longterm observation.
Teacher - student relationship.
Insider as a teacher - outsider as a hearing person.

Data

Semi structured interview (biography).
Introspective written verbalization ("think aloud").
Retrospective interview.
Use of English test.

Reading strategy training during one semester.

teacher's field notes

Introspective written verbalization ("think aloud").
Retrospective interview.
Semistructured interview (evaluation).
Use of English test.

transcription into MAXQDA software

open coding

categorizing

emerging themes

Fig. 2 Steps of analysis

5 Selected results

Emerging Themes	Description
Hearing family	Lack of age-appropriate communication in an language; lack of comprehensible language input; lack of proficient adult sign language models; little or none common reading; lack of positive early reading experiences; lack of tools for common reading.
English as a second foreign language	Czech sign language (CSL) may not be first but is natural and preferred language; Czech language does not form a solid base for language learning; reading skills and strategies acquired in Czech; EFL instruction through Czech; reading in English through Czech rather than CSL.
Strategy use	Wide range of strategies used; strategy use comparable to hearing readers; some strategies used inefficiently (e.g. re-reading, connecting to self); use of ineffective strategies (making associations based on visual or semantic similarity of words).
Reading strategy instruction	No previous experience with reading strategy instruction; strategy instruction evaluated positively as something that could be helpful if done over longer term; accepted passively.
Vocabulary as the main problem	Vocabulary labelled as the main issue complicating reading comprehension both in Czech and EFL; no long term strategy for vocabulary development.
Reading for general idea	Reading as source of information; resigning to general understanding; not looking for underlying meanings or connections; reading for general understanding applied ineffectively to various texts and reading aims.

6 Discussion

The main features related to the case of ZAN's reading in EFL seem to be **hard work**, **some inefficiency**, and **reading to get general understanding**.

Working hard has helped in overcoming the unfavourable early language and reading development conditions. Re-reading parts of text and the whole texts, willingness to engage with the reading strategy instruction also show readiness to work hard. However, some of the work is inefficient. Reading strategies like re-reading or connecting information from text to self or background knowledge are used inefficiently and do not result in improved comprehension. Inefficiency characterizes also dealing with vocabulary knowledge. ZAN believes weak vocabulary knowledge to be the main cause of reading comprehension problems, however has not been using effective steps for long-term vocabulary development. ZAN views explicit reading strategy as interesting during the lessons, however has not been able to transfer the strategy use into reading outside of the lesson. This may be mainly due to the insufficient time of the instruction but also because of passive acceptance of information rather than active engagement with it. ZAN's reading aim seems to be understanding the main idea of the text. Whereas this is fine for some text and some reading purposes it is very limiting in other cases.

References

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I don't remember my parents sitting with me and reading together. But I remember well that I read aloud some parts of a book, probably under the pressure of my grandpa.

Fig.3 Quote (Hearing family)

Why deficiencies [in reading]? Reasons are simple, because I'm deaf, Eng is my third language and in addition I have reduction of vocabulary.

Fig.4 Quote (English as 3rd language, Vocabulary as main problem)

... reading strategies, which I didn't know and do before ... to tell the truth I remember since basic school until now, I read some text and after look for answers to questions ...

Fig.6 Quote (Reading strategy instruction)

Always I read in Eng => translate into Czech - because text is similar, so I understand at least a little...

Fig.5 Quote (English as 3rd language)

But is important to read and understand text content, not to read word by word, then I don't get oriented in the text any longer.

Fig.7 Quote (Reading for general idea)