



How Translation-Interpretation Students Process Cultural Texts: A Think-Aloud Protocol Analysis

Mütercim Tercümanlık Bölümü Öğrencilerinin Kültürel Metinleri İşleme Şekilleri: Sesli Düşünme Analizi

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Abstract

After the cultural turn in social sciences in the 80's, the translation paradigm shifted from form to culture. The present study focuses on revealing translation students' cultural text processing strategies. To achieve this task, a think-aloud protocol was administered to the volunteer participants and the transcriptions of the voice recordings were classified according to The Coding Scheme of Students' Statements in the Think Aloud Transcripts by Janssen, Braaksma and Rijlaarsdam (2006:40). The results revealed that translation, retelling and association making were the most commonly used strategies. Effect size calculations showed that German Translation-Interpretation students resorted to strategy use more often than English Translation-Interpretation students. Lastly, possible causes of the acquired results and the importance of cultural knowledge are dealt with in relation to the relevant literature.

Keywords: Translation, culture, think-aloud, strategy use, cultural text.

Öz

1980li yıllarda sosyal bilimlerde gerçekleşen kültürel dönüşümden sonra, çeviri alanı yapıdan kültüre doğru yön değiştirmiştir. Bu çalışma, mütercim tercümanlık bölümündeki öğrencilerin kültürel metinleri işleme stratejilerini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla, gönüllü katılımcılarla sesli düşünme protokolü uygulanmış ve de transkripsiyonlar Janssen, Braaksma ve Rijlaarsdam (2006:40) tarafından kullanılan kodlama yöntemine göre analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, çeviri, tekrar söyleme ve ilişkilendirmenin en çok kullanılan strateji olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Etki büyüklüğü hesaplamaları, Almanca Mütercim-Tercümanlık okuyan öğrencilerin, İngilizce Mütercim-Tercümanlıktaki öğrencilerden daha fazla strateji kullanımına başvurduklarını göstermiştir. Son olarak, elde edilen bulguların olası sebepleri ve kültürel bilginin önemi ilgili literatür göz önünde bulundurularak tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çeviri, kültür, sesli düşünme, strateji kullanımı, kültürel metin.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Culture, Translation and Translator

The significance of the cultural element of translation is a fact which had long been underestimated until Next, Nida and Taber (1969) defined translation as the act of recreating a text in the target language using “the closest natural equivalent” possible. Although the definition does not bear any straightforward remark regarding the position of culture in translation, one may consider the phrase, “the closest natural equivalents”, as paying the necessary importance to cultural features of language, and thus, those of translation.

After the cultural turn in social sciences in the 80’s, in 1990 to be more precise, there occurred a significant paradigm shift within translation studies. Bassnett and Lefevere (1990) articulated the term “cultural turn” within translation studies and pointed out that the focus of translation should not be the text or individual words, but culture itself. From that year on, the inseparability of culture and translation has started to be discussed explicitly.

According to Peck (1998), culture is how people of the same community behave systematically in their own affirmed ways. According to Mounin (1977) in Pérez (1995), every word is a verbalization of culture (95). Obviously, the members of any community need a language, which is formed by the aforementioned systematic behavioral patterns, in order to communicate. Thus, it would not be wrong to say that language and culture are components of each other mutually (Cruz, Bonissone & Baff, 1995; Lessard-Clouston, 1997; Kramsch, 1998). Therefore, the fact that translation is an act of language which involves at least two languages and cultures (Toury, 1995) inevitably takes us to the point of the relation between translation and culture.

To put this relation on a clearer basis, some definitions of translation after the cultural turn should be examined. According to Vermeer (1998), translation is a cultural process that is purpose-oriented and a comprehensive act in a target culture for a particular purpose and target reader group (56). In a similar fashion, Venuti (2000) defines translation as “a linguistic zone of contact between the foreign and translating cultures” (477). Likewise, Nord (1997) asserts that “translation means comparing cultures” (34). Furthermore, according to Snell-Hornby (2006), translation is an act which requires elaborate skills as well as cultural competence regarding both languages. As seen, culture serves as the most important part in scholarly definitions of translation.

Delisle and Woodsworth (1995) stated that translators were an important part of the development process of alphabets, languages, literatures and their advancement as well as of the conveyance of the values of different cultures. This refers to the interculturally communicative nature of translation.

On the translation side of this matter, Hatim and Mason (1997) commented that a translator was the one who transferred the message of a text, whose content had already been produced in a certain degree of clarity (20). According to Hietaranta (2000), in order to communicate a text’s meaning to the target readers, they should have some knowledge of the cultural content of the source-text (102).

Furthermore, Amman (1990) put forward on this matter that a translator reproduced a text in a particular situation, taking into account a particular purpose and during this reproduction process, target reader, who acted in accordance with his past experiences which was culture, was considered. All these make it compulsory to integrate cultural studies into translation studies in order to explicate the components of cultures, which would make a text possible to be translated (Venuti, 2000).

As a conclusion, the imminent facts that the text is a language product and language and culture cannot be separated make it obvious that some sort of a cultural transfer is unavoidable in the process of translation. As Torop (2002) suggests, the act of translation, working circumstantially with cultures, grants one access to the very core of different cultural mechanisms. All these considered, it becomes crucial to study how translation-interpretation students process and comprehend foreign cultural elements during reading.

1.2. How Reading Texts are Processed

Research showed that during reading, certain processes such as referring to past experiences, interpreting words, forming hypotheses and making use of multiple processes are employed. (Anderson, 1994; Garner, 1987). Rapp et al. (2007) suggested that coherence was one of the processes that took place during reading and they defined coherence as the capacity to link the reader’s background to the reading text. And when it comes to comprehension, utilizing circumstantial relations and one’s background as well as sufficient knowledge of metaphors and lexicon play their parts (Cain, Oakhill, & Elbro, 2003).

According to Tapiero (2007) in Wasserman (2012), coherence models underwent three periods mainly. The first

period, that paid significant importance to the role of memory, underscored the background knowledge of the reader while defining the mental representations of texts. The second period, Tapiero stated, was one that construed the relation of structural constituents to each other through schemata which Widdowson (1994) defines as “cognitive constructs which allow for the organization of information in long-term memory”. In this period, textual elements were accepted to enact hypotheses upon which different types of limitations were embodied by different types of relations. Therefore, Tapiero concluded within the frame of the second period that comprehension was a circular and an erratic process and different cycles led to different systems of connections.

In the third period, the persistent and active variation of activation patterns came up as the definition of reading comprehension. “The landscape model” in the same period by Van den Brock et al. (1996) in Wasserman (2012) suggested that each coherence loop depended on the reading text itself, the output as a result of the previous loop, “episodic representations in memory” and the background knowledge of the reader. The degree of activation was not linear and the fact that information aggregated while reading was a driving fact for the reader to direct attention to different aspects, Wasserman noted.

1.3. Using Think-Aloud Protocols to Identify Reading Comprehension Strategies

Tracking the processes that students go through while reading and understanding a text is quite a demanding task. However, according to Duke & Pearson (2002), through think-aloud tasks, students articulate what they think as well as what processes they are going through. In line with this, Ericsson & Simon in Branch (2000), Garner (1987), and Pressley & Afflerbach (1995) also wrote that a think-aloud protocol is a useful way to discover the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies by readers, since simultaneous applications disclosed the reader’s cognitive behavior which is stored in the short-term memory, thus more accurate when promptly dealt with.

According to Anderson (1991:460), “A verbal report or think aloud protocol is produced when a reader verbalizes his or her thought processes while completing a given task”. This process of revealing a reader’s own thoughts was referred to by Cohen (1996:13) as a “self-revelation” or a “stream-of-consciousness disclosure of thought processes while the information is being attended to”. In a similar fashion, Oster (2001) defined think-alouds as a technique in which the thoughts rising from reading a text are verbalized, a process which also reveals the strategies used by the reader to achieve comprehension. In that respect, Kucan and Beck (1997) claimed, think-aloud protocols served the purposes of research to define the cognitive processes taking place during reading, instruction and interaction.

On the same topic, Afflerbach (2000) stated that researchers and psychologists had used think-aloud protocols to check into the processes that occurred during thinking, problem-solving and reading comprehension. Similarly, Oster (2001) pointed out that teachers had been using think—aloud protocols more regularly to model reading comprehension strategies, thus as an instructional tool.

However, as Hank (1993) suggests, it should also be noted that during a think-aloud protocol, there might be certain limitations due to the ineffectual ability of a participant to express his thoughts, false associations, interruptions, inauthentic research environment and the impossibility of accessing the unconscious. Yet still, efforts made to improve the ways students use strategies have positive effects on reading comprehension (Pressley, El-Dinary, Wharton-McDonald & Brown, 1998).

Based on the relevant literature, it would not be wrong to say that one can obtain crucial information on how students comprehend texts -or reading comprehension strategies- and what their strengths and weaknesses are through Think-Aloud Protocols (Randall, Fairbanks and Kennedy, 1986). In that regard, the aim of this study is to explore the reading comprehension strategies used by Translation-Interpretation students while reading texts possessing cultural content.

2. Methodology

The present study is quantitative in nature. The participants were 10 random undergraduate students who all volunteered for the study. 70% (n=7) of the participants were English Translation-Interpretation students and 30% (n=3) of them were German Translation-Interpretation students. The gender ratio of the participants were 60% (n=6) against 40% (n=4) in favor of female students. The ages of the participants varied between 19 and 23.

As for data collection, a short and simple text about family life in England published by Barrow (2012) was used (Appendix). The text was selected since it depicted the life of a typical British family including every day duties and pastime activities. Since the study was intended to be an analysis of student think-aloud records taken during the reading of cultural elements, the parts of the text that were considered irrelevant by the researcher were taken out.

Afterwards, the modified text was divided into eight meaningful segments topic by topic in order to make sure the participants would focus on one cultural aspect at a time.

In the first segment of the text, the author explained how England, Great Britain and the UK differed from each other. The second segment contained information on the family structure of a typical British family and the third one depicted the beginning of a typical working day, including clothes and breakfast preferences. The fourth and the fifth segments were related to school life in England. In these segments, it was shown to the readers that uniforms might be obligatory in some schools in England and students played cricket or netball in physical education courses. The sixth and seventh segments of the text described a regular evening in England through the dinner time, meal preferences (i.e. “fish fingers with peas and chips”) along with popular soap operas (*EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*) in England. The last segment dealt with another cultural element, open markets where people could buy fruit, vegetables, clothes or toys. Through the selection of the aforementioned parts of the text, readers were provided with adequate opportunities to think about life in England.

After the text was photocopied for each student, the researcher himself explained the participants in detail about what is expected of them, and modeled short examples of the procedure and told them that they were free to say anything they wanted either in Turkish or English, in order to eliminate any potential linguistic barriers. Then the participants were let into the office of the researcher one by one to think-aloud over the text segment by segment, without time restrictions. Each session was voice recorded and transcribed afterwards. The duration of the sessions varied between 4 – 11 minutes.

For the analysis of the data collected through think-aloud protocols, the “coding scheme of students' statements in the think aloud transcripts” by Janssen, Braaksma and Rijlaarsdam (2006:40), who took Andringa’s (1995) study as a basis, was used with a single alteration: “translation” as a reading activity was added to the scheme on the basis that it was a common strategy used by the participants. The scheme is demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1

The Coding Scheme of Students' Statements in the Think Aloud Transcripts Janssen, Braaksma and Rijlaarsdam (2006:40)

Reading Activity	Description
RET Retelling	Paraphrasing or (almost literally) repeating the content of a story passage.
INFER Making Inferences	Stating information not explicitly given by the text, filling in gaps, drawing conclusions, making or explanatory inferences.
PROB Detecting problems	Detecting a problem to integrate information; pointing out a knowledge gap.
ASSO Making associations	Relating the story to personal experiences or knowledge of the world; giving associations or personal opinions; making intertextual links.
ANA Analyzing	Noticing aspects of form, structure, style or genre; connecting text parts.
EVA Evaluating	Providing positive or negative evaluative comments on (parts of) the story.
EMO Responding emotionally	Verbal and nonverbal emotional responses to (parts of) the story; exclamations.
META Responding metacognitively	Monitoring one’s own reading (e.g., by giving self-instructions) or reflecting on one’s own reading habits or preferences.
TRA Translation	Sight translation – part or whole sentences
OTH Other activity	Responses that cannot be placed into any of the previous categories.

Then the responses in the transcriptions of the student think-alouds were coded on the basis of the aforementioned scheme using abbreviations. The utterances made by the participants in the form of reading the segment aloud, or paraphrasing it were coded as ‘Retelling’. Elaborating on or analyzing the characters or situations in a segment (i.e. “I think he likes shopping...”) were coded as ‘Making Inferences’. Utterances of the participants in the form of pointing out that they did not have information about a particular part in the text (i.e. “I don’t know what this means...”) were coded ‘Detecting Problems’. ‘Making Associations’ was coded in the cases where a participant expressed a similar event from his/her own life on reading a segment (i.e. “I also woke up at 7 today...”). An utterance was coded as ‘Analyzing’ when it was not about the meaning, but about the form, structures or the genre of the text (i.e. “I can understand this since this is a common chunk...”). ‘Evaluating’ was preferred for utterances making comments about the whole or parts of the text (i.e. “That’s a nice family...”). When the participants expressed surprise, excitement, fondness or boredom, the utterance was coded as ‘Emotional Response’. ‘Responding Metacognitively’ was coded for the utterances which expressed the participants’ preferences or attempts to understand a segment (i.e. “I should divide this sentence into parts...”). Those sentences that were produced by the participants in an attempt to translate sentences or segments into Turkish were coded as ‘Translation’. The utterances which did not fit into any of these categories were coded as ‘Other Activities’. The coded data was analyzed according to frequencies, percentages, means and possible causal relations between the comprehension of a foreign culture in a reading text and activity use. Lastly, Mann Whitney U tests were administered to find out if there was any statistically significant difference of the results according to gender and department. Due to high standard deviation values in most cases where the Mann Whitney U tests did not reveal any statistically significant difference, effect sizes were calculated to estimate potential differences (Cohen, 1988).

3. Findings

The total number of responses given and the mean value according to the number of participants are displayed below in Table 2.

Table 2

Total number of responses, mean response value and standard deviation

Sum of Responses	M	SD
637	63,7	27,91

Table 2 shows that the sum of participant responses equaled 637 and each participant gave 63,7 responses on average with a standard deviation value of 27,91.

Then the mean values for the total number of responses according to genders were calculated (Table 3).

Table 3

Mean Values for the Total Number of Responses According to Genders

Gender	M	N	SD
Female	65,67	6	35,38
Male	60,75	4	15,22
Total	63,70	10	27,91

As tabulated in Table 3, female participants gave 65,67 responses and male participants gave 60,75 responses on average. Neither the Mann Whitney U test administered by the researcher nor the effect size calculation revealed any significant difference between the means provided.

Table 4

Mean Values for the Total Number of Responses According to Majors

Department	M	N	SD
English Translation-Interpretation	53	7	25,22
German Translation-Interpretation	88,67	3	16,17
Total	63,70	10	27,91

Table 4 reveals the total number of responses according to the majors of the participants. The results portray that English Translation-Interpretation students had a mean response value of 53 (SD=25,22) and German Translation-Interpretation students had a mean response value of 88,67 (SD=16,17).

Mann Whitney U test results to bore no statistically significant difference between majors. However, the effect size between majors was calculated to be -1,71, which indicated a large difference in favor of German Translation-Interpretation students.

Table 5

Frequencies and Percentages of the Activities Used by the Participants

Reading Activity	Total Frequency	Percentage
Retelling	134	21,04
Making Inferences	61	3,30
Detecting Problems	44	6,91
Making Associations	79	12,40
Analyzing	18	2,83
Evaluating	39	6,12
Responding emotionally	20	3,14
Responding metacognitively	4	0,63
Translation	232	36,42
Other activity	6	0,94
Total	637	100

Table 5 demonstrates the frequencies and percentages of participant responses according to activity classifications. A sum of 637 responses given by the participants throughout the think-aloud protocol were classified. Among the classified data, 'translation' responses were found to have covered the largest part by 36,42% (n=232). 'Retelling' responses followed translation responses by 21,04% (n=134) and the third most preferred reading activity was 'making associations' which had a percentage of 12,40 (n=79). The rest of the response types had percentages of 6,91 or lower.

In order to administer statistical analysis on the activity use of the participants, mean values of the use of reading activities for each major were calculated.

Table 6

Mean Values of Reading Activities Per Major

Reading Activity	English		German	
	Translation-Interpretation	Translation-Interpretation	Translation-Interpretation	Translation-Interpretation
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Retelling	8,00	6,76	26,00	15,62
Inference	5,00	3,42	8,67	6,66
Problem Detection	4,29	3,55	4,67	3,51
Association	8,57	7,41	6,33	3,79
Analysis	0,71	1,50	4,33	4,04
Evaluation	4,71	3,59	2,00	3,46
Emotional Response	1,14	1,21	4,00	6,08
Meta-Analysis	0,00	0,00	1,33	2,31
Translation	20,29	10,47	30,00	6,56
Other	0,29	0,49	1,33	1,15

Table 6 illustrates the means and standard deviation values of the use of reading activities for each reading activity. It is seen that English Translation-Interpretation students used translation ($M = 20,29$, $SD = 10,47$), association making ($M = 8,57$, $SD = 7,41$) and retelling ($M = 8,00$, $SD = 6,76$) activities most frequently. On the other hand, German Translation-Interpretation students most often resorted to translation ($M = 30,00$, $SD = 6,56$), retelling ($M = 26,00$, $SD = 15,62$) and making inferences ($M = 8,67$, $SD = 6,66$). The least frequently used activities in terms of mean values by English Translation-Interpretation students were meta-analysis ($M = 0,00$, $SD = 0,00$), other activities ($M = 0,29$, $SD = 0,49$) and analysis ($M = 0,71$, $SD = 1,50$). German Translation-Interpretation

students' least frequently used reading activities were meta-analysis ($M = 1,33$, $SD = 2,31$), other activities ($M = 1,33$, $SD = 1,15$) and evaluation ($M = 2,00$, $SD = 3,46$). Multiple Mann Whitney U tests were administered to reveal if there was any statistically significant difference between the mean values per reading activity for each major; however, no statistically significant difference was found. For that reason, the effect size of each reading activity was calculated to see if there was any difference according to majors.

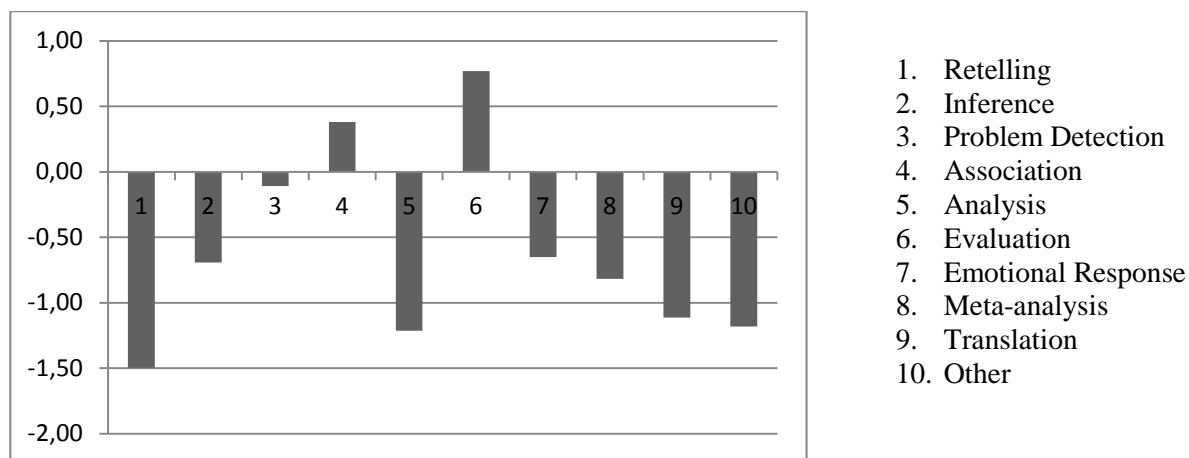


Figure 1 *Effect sizes of Reading Activities (means) Divided by Majors*

As shown in Figure 1, large differences were found between English and German Translation-Interpretation students' use of retelling (ES -1,50), analysis (ES -1,21), meta-analysis (ES -0,82), translation (ES -1,11) and other (ES -1,18) activities in terms of their effect sizes. These findings suggest that the mentioned strategies were more often used by German Translation-Interpretation students in comparison with English Translation-Interpretation students. In the activities inference (ES -0,69), evaluation (ES 0,77) and giving emotional responses (ES -0,65), differences of medium scale were discovered. This showed that German Translation-Interpretation students used the activities of making inferences and giving emotional responses relatively more frequently than English Translation-Interpretation students. Lastly, association-making (ES 0,38) activity revealed a small difference in favor of English Translation-Interpretation students. No difference was found in problem detection activity.

4. Discussions

The present study aimed to discover how translation-interpretation students processed reading texts that had a cultural content. According to the results, translation, retelling and association making were the most commonly used strategies by the students respectively. Metacognitive, analysis and unclassified strategies were the least common to have been used by the students to comprehend the reading text. It can be inferred from the results that, in order to understand a cultural text, students had to reconstruct a text as it was or in their own words. But more interestingly, it was seen in the data set that translation and association-making activities quite often occurred one after another. This revealed that the participants of the present study related most of the text to their own culture, to their native tongue by translation and to their lifestyle by association-making. This result could be interpreted as cross-cultural comparison being a common method of understanding a cultural text among the participants.

The comparison of response means according to departments revealed no statistically significant difference in Mann Whitney U tests; however, the effect size calculation demonstrated that German Translation-Interpretation students may have resorted to strategy use more often than English Translation-Interpretation students. Bearing in mind the fact that German Translation-Interpretation students learn English as their second foreign language, the reason for this may be the relatively low level of proficiency among German Translation-Interpretation students. Since English is not their major second language, they may not be feeling as comfortable while reading in English as they do in German and this may be why they feel the need to exploit reading comprehension strategies more often to understand a cultural text, in comparison with English Translation-Interpretation students.

When it came to the comparison of the use of each strategy according to majors through the effect sizes, German

Translation-Interpretation students were found out to have used retelling, analysis, meta-analysis, translation and unclassified strategies more often than English Translation-Interpretation students. As mentioned above, students with a lower level of proficiency make use of more strategies than those with a higher level of proficiency. The detailed analysis of differences per strategy is supportive of this suggestion. The only two strategies that English Translation-Interpretation students outweighed German Translation-Interpretation students were association-making and evaluation, the former of which had a small difference, and the latter of which had a medium scale difference between majors according to their effect sizes. This may give rise to the thought that, again owing to the higher proficiency level of English Translation-Interpretation students, a better understanding of the cultural text leads to a more comprehensive relation of the native culture with the target culture, as well as a more evaluative sort of reading comprehension.

The finding that the participants in general chose to be engaged in cross-cultural comparison (native vs. target culture) may connote that a better understanding of both native and target cultures would lead to a better understanding of reading texts. In order to ensure that translation-interpretation students experience few or no problems while reading texts that have a cultural content, curriculum developers of translation-interpretation departments should ascertain that the curriculum has an adequate amount of cultural content, which also includes the native culture of the students since in the present study they were found out to have utilized their native culture as well as the target culture.

As far as the results of the present study are concerned, one should keep in mind that the study is limited to a particular sample; therefore, a different type of sampling may yield different results. Moreover, the calculation of effect sizes may provide only an estimation of potential differences; a larger sample size is needed to reach findings that are more powerful statistically. Thus, generalizing the results of this study to a different population might be misleading.

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APPENDIX

Modified and Segmented Version of Family Life in England (Barrow, 2011)

1. Hi, my name is Craig. I am English because I was born in England, but I am also British because England is part of Great Britain and is in the UK.
2. I live in a typical English family. I have a father, mother and a sister and we all live together in a house in a town in the south east corner of England. At the back of our house we have our garden where I play with my sister.

3. The day starts at about 7 o'clock when dad and mum get up. My sister and I usually watch telly in our pajamas until breakfast. We have breakfast at 8 o'clock. I like to eat Rice Krispies (cereal) and jam on toast.
4. After breakfast, my sister and I put on our school uniform. I wear grey trousers, a white shirt and a blue sweat shirt.
5. My favorite subjects at school are science and history. My favorite topic in history is learning about the ancient Egyptians. I also enjoy PE (physical education) lessons – we play football, netball, cricket and sometimes we go cross-country running.
6. Dad usually gets home about 6 o'clock. We eat together at about 6:30. My favorite meal is a fish finger with peas and chips. I also like pizza which we have very often.
7. In the evenings, I usually do my homework before watching more telly. Mum helps me with my homework. My family likes to watch Eastenders, and Coronation Street (English soap operas).
8. Every Saturday, my family and I go into town to the open market. People sell vegetables, clothes, toys, posters, and nearly anything else out on the street. Mum buys her fruit and vegetables there. I enjoy just wandering looking at all the things for sale, hoping my parents will buy me something. Sometimes I am lucky. I love my family very much.