
Alan Crawford, Paata Papava

Second Language Acquisition and Reading Strategies on Primary Stage of language Acquisition

ABSTRACT

It is important that teachers in Georgian bilingual schools have access to the information and resources that are widely used in different programs around the world. This article provides information about communicative approaches and instructional strategies for teaching reading in a second language that prove to be successful in many countries.

First, we should go back to what research and practice tells about second language acquisition. We learn a second language in the same way as we learn our mother tongue. Children easily learn their mother tongue without learning grammar. They can also learn a second language without learning grammar. In the first stage of second language acquisition children go through a silent period. They listen, but they do not speak. They are learning during this period. They learn faster when they don't have to speak correctly at the beginning. Children will make mistakes in their second language, which should not be corrected. They make mistakes because their language is not mature. Children are learning when they are listening and understanding, not when they are talking.

The natural approach (Krashen and Terrell, 1983) is a very effective communicative approach for teaching a second language. Teachers do not need expensive materials and books. They can teach with real objects and illustrations they already have. The topics of lessons are themes, not grammatical elements. Teachers and children can choose themes of interest together.

The natural approach has three stages: First stage is comprehension or total physical response (TPR). In this stage, children listen to questions and commands. They show that they understand what the teacher says by pointing, touching, and other physical actions. They do not need to speak. The first stage continues for several weeks until children begin to respond with one-word answers.

Second stage is early production. In this stage, children begin to respond with *yes* or *no*. They give answers of one or two words. The second stage continues for many weeks. Then children will begin to answer with phrases and short sentences.

Third stage is the emergence of speech. In this stage, children begin to answer with short sentences. They leave out some words. They make many mistakes, but we can understand what they mean. We do not correct their mistakes. The mistakes will go away as the children learn more. There are several other effective TPR strategies that are easily applied to small groups or to an entire class. The TPR approach can reach high levels of language.

What are some basic do we know about literacy in a second language? We only learn to read once. First, we should learn to read and write in our mother tongue. We can also learn to speak and understand a second language. Then, we can learn to read and write in the second language very quickly.

Most reading skills in one language are the same in a second language. Reading skills transfer from one language to another. Many writing skills do, too. Children will transfer skills themselves. We need to help them understand what they read in the second language. Children can begin learning to read and write in the second language, too. The language experience approach is the best way to start. They will learn faster if they learn to read in the mother tongue first.

When second language learners have intermediate second language proficiency, they should have access to the basic curriculum through careful application of communicative approach strategies in sheltered second language instruction. The focus of this instruction should be on maintaining comprehension through the pacing of teacher input and through the extensive use of nonverbal language, illustrations and other visual aids. This instruction results in rapid increase in second language vocabulary.

At an appropriate time, second language learners should receive instruction in second language reading and writing through strategies that ensure continued comprehension and communication. When second language learners read in their second language, the lack of vocabulary knowledge is often an obstacle to comprehension. A constructivist view of reading instruction is very consistent with communicative approaches to second language acquisition. It focuses on the construction of meaning, proceeding from whole to part, it treats authentic, relevant, and functional language, and it is student centered.

In the early stages of literacy, teachers will find that the key-vocabulary and language experience approaches can provide second language learners with access to print that is consistent with their stage of production. When they are able to begin reading simple text, we should provide scaffolding through prereading activities that develop background knowledge and vocabulary. In addition, background knowledge they develop from the basic curriculum in the primary language provides a strong base for learning to read in the second language.