



LEARNING TO READ IN A NEW LANGUAGE

Eve Gregory



Learning to
Read in
a New
Language

Learning to Read in a New Language

Making Sense of
Words and Worlds
Second Edition

Eve Gregory



Los Angeles • London • New Delhi • Singapore

© Eve Gregory 2008

First published 2008

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted, in any form or by any means, only with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction, in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Inquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the publishers.

SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London
EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B1/I1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road
New Delhi 110 044

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd
33 Pekin Street #02-01
Far East Square
Singapore 048763

Library of Congress Control Number 2007935305

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4129-2856-4
ISBN 978-1-4129-2857-1 (pbk)

Typeset by Dorwyn, Wells, Somerset
Printed in India by Replika Press, Pvt
Printed on paper from sustainable resources

*To Elsie, George and Klara and to all the children,
past and present, who appear in this book*

Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Foreword by Dinab Volk</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xv</i>

1: Setting the scene 1

Key terms	1
The task ahead: new languages, literacies and scripts	7
Different countries, different contexts	10
What's in a word? Terms and terminology	13
A plan of the book	14

PART 1: LEARNING TO READ DIFFERENTLY 17

Introduction: cultures, codes and contexts	19
--	----

2: The social context: important practices 27

Key terms	27
Julializ and Bible reading in the United States <i>Dinab Volk</i>	30
Pia and letter-writing in France <i>Joan Bursch</i>	35
Dineo and performing in South Africa <i>Pippa Stein and Lynne Slonimsky</i>	40
Ah Si and nursery rhymes in Macao-Sar, China <i>Keang Vong</i>	45
Curtis and fishing games in Britain <i>Yu-chiao Chung</i>	50
Sanah and story-reading in Singapore <i>Mukblis Abu Bakar</i>	55
Elsey and popular culture in Australia <i>Allan Luke and Joan Kale</i>	59
Hasanat and Qur'ān reading in Britain <i>Mahera Ruby</i>	64
Making sense of reading	68
Suggestions for teaching and learning	69

3: Family and community contexts: important others 71

Key terms	71
Many ways of learning	73
Siblings as expert reading teachers	84
Grandparents as mediators of literacies	92
Friends as new language and literacy teachers	96
Suggestions for teaching and learning	101

4: The context of the mind: important knowledge	103
Key terms	103
Symbolization and new language learners	105
'Simple' versus 'complex' views of reading	108
Where do new language learners fit in?	113
Putting meaning in the middle	118
Suggestions for teaching and learning	120
5: Using the same clues differently	122
Key terms	122
Deciphering letters and sounds: grapho-phonetic, orthographic and phonological clues	123
Memorizing important words: lexical clues	129
'Chunking' useful sentences: syntactic clues	136
Matching experiences to texts: semantic clues	141
The world in a story: bibliographic clues	146
Suggestions for teaching and learning	151
PART 2: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE	153
Introduction: making sense of words and worlds	155
6: Starting with the word: the 'Inside-Out' approach in action	159
Key terms	159
What does an 'Inside-Out' approach to reading mean?	161
'Language-Experience' approaches across the world	162
The 'Inside-Out' approach in action	167
7: Starting with the world: the 'Outside-In' approach to reading	182
Key terms	182
What does an 'Outside-In' approach to reading mean?	184
The 'Outside-In' approach and structured story	188
The 'Outside-In' approach and collaborative reading	197
8: Linking the 'Inside-Out' and 'Outside-In' approaches: ideas for groups and classes	206
9: Epilogue	214
<i>Glossary</i>	220
<i>Bibliography</i>	225
<i>Index</i>	236

List of figures

Figure	5
1.1 An illustration from <i>The Elephant</i>	5
1.1 A famous poem learned at home by many young children whose family origins are from China	22
2.1 A primer from Puerto Rico	32
2.2 A primer from Puerto Rico continued	32
2.3 Winnie the Pooh	33
2.4 Winnie the Pooh continued	33
2.5 Pia's letter	37
2.6 Bitte lösen	37
2.7 Pia's school literacy	37
2.8 Pia's school literacy continued	37
2.9 Ah Si's dual-language flash cards	47
2.10 Twinkle, twinkle, little star	49
2.11 Curtis's fishing game	52
2.12 Curtis and his mum working together	53
2.13 Hasanat's early writing	67
3.1 A mother from Burma (Myanmar) teaching her baby to pray	76
3.2 Sahil reading a chora with his grandmother Razia and his two sisters	93
3.3 Sahil guides Razia's hand on the computer mouse	94
3.4 Learning with the computer with grandmother and a younger sibling	95
3.5 Amina practising the Chinese character meaning 'seven' based on Ming's instructions	100
4.1 Learning to read in a new language: An interactive approach	119
5.1 Chinese classes emphasize the importance of accuracy	125
5.3 Pictographs	126
5.4 Ideographs	126
5.4 Compound ideographs	126
5.5 The importance of lexical and visual clues	131
5.6 Clues for learning to read in a new language: A typical schema in young children's lives	136
5.7 The importance of illustrations, simplicity and context when reading in a new language	149
7.1 Story books are the key to development of different clues for learning to read	187
7.2 The inner layer of the 'Outside-In' approach is circular in nature	189

7.3	Community work on children's dual-language stories	193
7.4	Language and cultural exchanges between community, teachers and children	193
8.1	Plan for a series of lessons	206
8.2	The 'Good morning' song	208

Foreword

While the issues of literacy and culture continue to be the focus of attention – and matters of contention – for many teachers, education students, parents, researchers, interested citizens and politicians, there is currently limited understanding of the teaching and learning processes through which young children become literate in a new language. As a consequence, teachers around the world in this ‘post-monolingual’ age (Soto and Kharem, 2006) often struggle to teach reading and writing to the increasing numbers of children in their classrooms who are learning in a language new to them. Most use models that presuppose a ‘monolingual mind’ based on children learning to read in their home language. *Learning to Read in a New Language* synthesizes research, models and practice, and provides a way forward, that is, a way of working with new language learners that is responsive to a range of children, approaches, contexts and languages.

Gregory begins this important, useful book with a carefully detailed, theoretical analysis of new language learners, describing the complexity of what they *can* do as well as their learning needs, their expertise as creative and active learners and teachers, and the valuable but often ignored literacy experiences with a range of adult and child teachers that they bring with them from their homes and communities. Her analysis draws on the concept drawn from sociocultural theory of the integration of mind and culture and, thus, the synthesis of intra-personal, interpersonal and cultural processes of becoming literate. Interwoven throughout this discussion are excerpts from literacy interactions with real children from a variety of cultural and language backgrounds, bringing the concepts to life and adding children’s voices to the mix. Throughout, she argues that literacy tuition involves explicit teaching that takes full account of the sociocultural context within which children live and learn.

Building on this analysis, Gregory provides a critique of current approaches to literacy instruction and then shares her innovative and teacher-friendly inside-out/outside-in model which ‘puts meaning in the middle’, integrating decoding and meaning-making in personal interactions and attending to the specific language strengths and weaknesses of each child. This model of literacy as ‘making sense of words and worlds’ includes a clearly explained graphic organizer that synthesizes different kinds of literacy and language clues, a discussion of the unique ways that individual new language learners may use such clues, and detailed plans – including activities, materials and books – that build on that model.

This book is a terrific resource that stands as an example of the finely tuned teaching recommended for use with new language learners. It scaffolds the reader's developing understanding and moves the reader from theory to practice, from insights to implementation. Gregory has carefully designed this progress, building slowly with ideas and images, examples, questions and summaries used in combination with a well-developed argument. Her book makes an important contribution and challenges us to address this critical educational and social need with the tools she provides. It urges us to ask ourselves: with whom will we share this book and our new-found knowledge? Teachers? Colleagues? Teacher education students? Parents? A local politician? How will we use it in our courses and our classrooms? How will we change our understandings and our practice? How can we make sure that the insights, expertise and energy generated by this book are used to improve radically the literacy teaching of new language learners? How can we build on the remarkable strengths and abilities of children like Annie who at 7 years of age can speak Thai, is learning to read it and simultaneously is learning to both speak and read in English?

Soto, L.D. and Kharem, H. (2006) A post-monolingual education, *International Journal of Educational Policy, Research, and Practice*, 7: 21–34.

Dinah Volk
Early Childhood Program, College of Education
Cleveland State University

Preface

I concluded the Preface to *Making Sense of a New World: Learning to Read in a Second Language*, written in 1996, by saying: 'In Britain, it is still easy to feel "cocooned" within a monolingual world. Yet ... there is every reason to believe that the age of the emergent bilingual has scarcely yet begun'. Those words were written as the twentieth century drew to a close. Scarcely a decade later, that statement would have been impossible. Yet few could have predicted the speed with which this change would happen. In 2008, most large cities in the world are abuzz with different languages being spoken and different scripts being written or read. In many parts of London, monolingual children are exceptional and classrooms are able to draw on the wealth of numerous languages offered by families and their communities. Although a proportion of newcomers to cities are still, like their predecessors, fleeing persecution or economic poverty, important new factors have emerged that were not fully envisaged a decade ago. New technologies, and especially the Internet, have transformed people's ability to conduct their work anywhere in the world and informed their choice of residence. Students are spending time at institutions thousands of miles from home and often taking their children with them. Families are deciding to relocate to more pleasant climates and their children immediately switch languages in school. Additionally, the development of new technologies and resulting globalization have led to the dominance of certain languages which have become a lingua franca across the world. At present, English has attained this status. By the end, or perhaps even the middle, of the twenty-first century a different language may prevail. The status of English means that many young children across the world, not just in private but in state schools, are becoming bilingual and using two or more scripts. Of course, this has always happened in community contexts as the children in the first edition of this book revealed. However, it is now the norm as primary schools in many Asian and African countries show.

All this has led to a surge of interest in the field of language, culture and identity, and to a growing sophistication and change in the terminology used. Researchers and teachers are now distinguishing between the multilingualism and multiculturalism of communities and societies and the plurilingualism and pluriculturalism within individuals themselves. Others focus on the syncretism as young children blend cultures and languages to create new practices and forms. In recognition of the increasing scope and changing role of language learning in the lives of young children, I adopt the term 'new language learner' instead of 'emergent bilingual' in this book. The term recognizes the fact that, although many children

may go on to become fully bilingual, others will stop before that point and will step in and out of different languages at different ages or stages of their school career.

In contrast with the growing sophistication in work on languages, cultures and identities, studies in early literacy learning have not kept up with the burgeoning research in this field. This is ironic, since all children will need to learn to *read* in the new language they learn. However, although we have always had plurilingual children, studies into how children learn to read have generally assumed a *monolingual mind*. Instead of drawing upon the skills and knowledge (as well as recognizing the weaknesses) of children who are able simultaneously to deal with more than one, or even two, languages and scripts, we often try to squash them into a monolingual mould. The tragedy of this is that we are in danger of suppressing the creativity of young children as they play and experiment, not just with words, but with future worlds. It is this creativity which, in this book, I try to reveal.

Eve Gregory
London, November 2007

Acknowledgements

This book owes its existence to a number of people. First and foremost, I thank the families, teachers and community teachers who invited me into their classrooms and homes and gave their time generously. I should especially like to thank Alan, Dabir and Nicole, who spared me time in their busy lives now they are no longer children, and Joy and Paul Stanton, who searched out Alan and Dabir for me. I also thank the teachers of Canon Barnett School in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Military Road School, Northampton and Sir John Heron School in the London Borough of Newham and, particularly, Rani Karim who facilitated much of my recent school work. Early episodes owe much to the patience of Nasima Rashid who worked with me for some years visiting families and community classes and teaching the children in school. Episodes with siblings were collected and analysed by Ann Williams and Ali Asghar who worked with me on an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded project on Siblings as Mediators of Literacy in East London. Episodes with grandparents were collected by Mahera Ruby and Tahera Arju and analysed by Charmian Kenner and John Jessel, who worked with me on the project Intergenerational Learning between Grandparents and Young Children in East London, also funded by the ESRC and I am grateful to all these colleagues for their ongoing support. Episodes with peers were collected and analysed by Yangguang Chen and I should like to thank her for these. I also owe other examples of peer learning to Susi Long and her colleagues, Dinah Volk and Charmian Kenner. I should also like to thank Dinah Volk for contributing the Foreword to this book. I should especially like to thank my co-authors in Chapter 2; Dinah Volk, Joan Bursch, Pippa Stein, Lynne Slonimsky, Keang Vong, Yu-chiao Chung, Mukhlis Abu Bakar, Allan Luke, Joan Kale and Mahera Ruby who generously offered their work and, of course, the families who worked with them. I should like to thank Pashamon Prabpal and Annie Gregory for their contribution to Chapter 1, Roy Gregory for writing the music for the 'Good Morning' song and Yueping Zhang for the Chinese characters in Chapter 5. My past and present PhD students have always offered me inspiration as well as Margaret Meek and colleagues from both the cross-cultural intercollegiate group and members of the Multilingual Europe seminar series funded by the ESRC. Helen Fairlie, my editor at Sage, has given me support and encouragement throughout the writing of this book and I should like to thank her for that. Last, but by no means least, I should like to express my thanks to Karl Kimmig for his patience and helpful suggestions throughout this and with all my work.

Work leading to this book has been financially supported by Goldsmiths, University of

London, the ESRC, the Leverhulme Trust and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

I should also like to thank Editorial Panamericana, Inc. for the use of the cover and p. 4 of *Nuestra Cartilla Fonética*, Editorial Panamericana, Inc. (t. (787) 277 7988/f (787) 277 7240 (edpanamerican@yahoo.com)), Thai Airlines for the use of *Elephant*, *English Quarterly* (Canadian Council of Teachers of English Language Arts) for use of excerpts from grandparents (Vol. 36, No. 4), Routledge for use of excerpts from *Many Pathways to Literacy: Young Children Learning with Siblings, Grandparents, Peers and Communities*, (2004, eds E. Gregory, S. Long and D. Volk, p. 118) and David Fulton for use of Elsey, a fuller version of which appears in *One Child, Many Worlds* (1997, ed. E. Gregory). I should also like to thank colleagues at the University of Vic, Spain, for use of excerpts from 'Ventafocs'.

1

Setting the Scene

He who knows no other language does not truly know his own.
(Goethe, in Vygotsky, 1962: 110)

KEY TERMS

Mother tongue	A term subject to much debate and sometimes referred to as home/heritage/community or first language. Definitions include: the language learnt first; the language known best; the language used most; the language with which one identifies; the language one dreams/thinks/counts in; and so on; none of which are acceptable to all. It is generally recognized that a mother tongue may change, even several times during a lifetime.
New language learner	A child who is at an early stage or who still lacks fluency in a second or additional language but whose ultimate aim is to become as fluent as possible, that is, able to communicate easily with others in the language and able positively to identify with both (or all if more than two are being learned) language groups and cultures.
Emergent biliterate	A child who is learning to read and write in more than one language simultaneously.
Metalanguage	A term in linguistics for language used to talk about language. Research studies show that young bilinguals have an advanced metalinguistic awareness as they are able to realize the arbitrariness of language, see word boundaries, and so on at an earlier stage than monolinguals.
Grammar	A description of a language; an abstract system of rules in terms of which a child's knowledge of a language can be explained.
Orthography	The principles underlying a spelling or writing system.

Annie is 7 years old and beginning her second year of primary school in Thailand. From time to time she escapes the crowded city of Bangkok to stay with her extended family in the countryside. Eventually, she hopes to live in Britain where she has relatives. She has already learned to read simple texts in Thai, her mother tongue, and loves to practise these with her mother at home. Like many young children in schools across different continents, Annie is also beginning to learn to read and write in English, a language chosen by many countries as a necessary asset for the education of all young children as they start school. Other children across the world will be learning in different languages, often the one that is politically dominant in the country in which they live. Some will be the children of refugees, others of economic migrants, others from indigenous families whose mother tongue is not the official language of the school and yet others from multilingual countries where children will be expected to become literate simultaneously in more than one language. Like many children across the world, Annie will need to learn that the new language will have a different script and very different rules from her own. Gradually, through becoming a reader in English, Annie will learn to make sense not only of new words but of other worlds, with very different customs, traditions and stories from her own. The aim of this book is to show how young children undertake the task of learning to read in a new language at school or at home and to argue that children like Annie have distinct strengths and weaknesses not explained in monolingual perspectives on early literacy. Later chapters will introduce Julializ from the USA, Pia and Nicole from France, Ah Si from Macau-Sar, China, Elsey from Australia, Sanah from Singapore and Dineo from South Africa as well as children from Britain. Although they will all be learning in very different cultural contexts, I shall draw out common patterns that hold these children apart from their monolingual peers. The book thus suggests principles and practices for all those interested in observing the learning of young new language learners and for those engaged in initiating them into new words and worlds.

In this chapter, I begin to outline the nature of the task through the example of Annie reading in both Thai and English. Annie is lucky, since her mother has enjoyed telling and reading stories to her since she was very small. She is now trying to find dual language Thai/English stories for her to read and finds *Elephant*, a traditional Thai fable.

Annie first reads the story with her mother in Thai. Afterwards, she reads the story again in English with a native English speaker. Looking closely at Annie's reading in both languages, we begin to perceive some of the differences between reading in a first and a new language, as well as the complexity of tackling a text in a language one cannot fluently speak. Since this book is written for English rather than Thai speakers, we can only dissect her achievements in Thai through the English language. However, the grammatical structure and rules of Thai are very different from English, as we shall see later in the chapter.

The animal story – Elephant

นิทานสัตว์

ช้าง The Elephant

ช้างโขลงหนึ่งพากันเดินหาแหล่งน้ำ ในที่สุดพวกมันก็พบสระน้ำแห่งหนึ่ง

A herd of elephants wandered to search for a pond. Finally, they found one. (p. 1)

ฝูงช้างต่างพากันเหยียบย่ำไปบนพื้นดินรอบๆสระซึ่งเป็นที่อยู่ของพวกกระต่าย

ทำให้อะไรตายถูกเหยียบตายเป็นจำนวนมาก

The elephants stepped on the soil around the pond which was the rabbits' shelter. This killed many rabbits. (p. 2)

เมื่อเห็นเข้าดังนั้น กระต่ายที่รอดชีวิตต่างก็ปรึกษากันว่าจะแก้ปัญหานี้อย่างไร

กระต่ายตัวหนึ่งเอ่ยขึ้นว่า ‘ฉันมีความคิดจะไปบอกพวกช้าง

ว่าฉันเป็นกระต่ายที่มาจากพระจันทร์

และพระจันทร์ห้ามไม่ให้ผู้ใดดื่มน้ำจากสระนี้’

When many rabbits died, the rest of them discussed the problem. A rabbit said, ‘I have an idea. I will tell the elephants that I am the rabbit of the moon, and the moon forbids anyone to drink water from this pond.’ (p. 3)

เช้าวันต่อมา ฝูงช้างก็มาดื่มน้ำที่สระอีก

กระต่ายตัวที่ออกความคิดก็มารออยู่ก่อนแล้ว มันตะโกนว่า

The following morning, the herd of elephants came to drink water in the pond. The rabbit who had the idea arrived before the elephants. He shouted ... (p. 4)

‘เจ้าพวกช้างทั้งหลาย ฉันเป็นกระต่ายที่อยู่บนดวงจันทร์

นำคำสั่งจากพระจันทร์มาบอกพวกเจ้าว่า

ห้ามผู้ใดลงมาว่ายน้ำหรือดื่มน้ำจากสระนี้ ใครฝ่าฝืนจะโดนลงโทษ’

Continues over

'You elephants, I am the rabbit which is on the moon. I convey the moon's words to all of you. He forbids any animals to swim or drink water in this pond. Anyone who ignores his words will be killed.' (p. 5)

จำโขลงของช้างไม่ใช่ปัญญาไตรตรองจึงหลงเชื่อคำของกระต่าย

“ขอบพระคุณในความเมตตาของท่าน พวกเราทำผิดไปแล้ว

ได้โปรดอย่าให้พระจันทร์ลงโทษเราเลย” จำโขลงช้างอ้อนวอน

The elephant's leader which was very foolish believed the rabbit.

'Thank you very much for your kindness. We have made a mistake. We hope the moon will not punish us,' he pleaded with the rabbit. (p. 6)

‘แล้วตอนนี้พระจันทร์ท่านอยู่ไหน ? โปรดพาเราไปพบท่าน

เพื่อจะได้ขอภัยที่ได้ล่วงเกิน’

‘พระจันทร์กำลังว่ายน้ำอยู่ในสระ ฉันจะพาเจ้าไปพบท่านเดี๋ยวนี้แหละ’

กระต่ายตอบพลางนำทางช้างไป

'Where is the moon now? Please bring me to see him. I would like to apologise to him.'

'He is taking a bath in the pond. I will bring you to see him right now,' the rabbit replied and went ahead. (p. 7)

เมื่อมาถึงสระก็เป็นเวลาค่ำ มีเงาของพระจันทร์สะท้อนอยู่ในน้ำ

กระต่ายชี้ไปที่นั่นแล้วพูดว่า

‘ทำความเคารพท่านแล้วก็รีบไปจากที่นี่เสียโดยเร็ว’

When they arrived at the pond, it was at dusk. The shadow of the moon reflected in the water. The rabbit pointed at it and said, 'Pay respect to him then hastily go away.' (p. 8)

จำโขลงช้างยกวงงขึ้นจรดศีรษะเป็นการแสดงความเคารพต่อพระจันทร์

หลังจากนั้นฝูงช้างก็ไม่กลับไปสระน้ำนั้นอีกเลย

The elephants' leader gradually lifted his trunk to touch his head to pay respect to the moon. Then the elephants went away and never came again. (p. 9)

Continues opposite

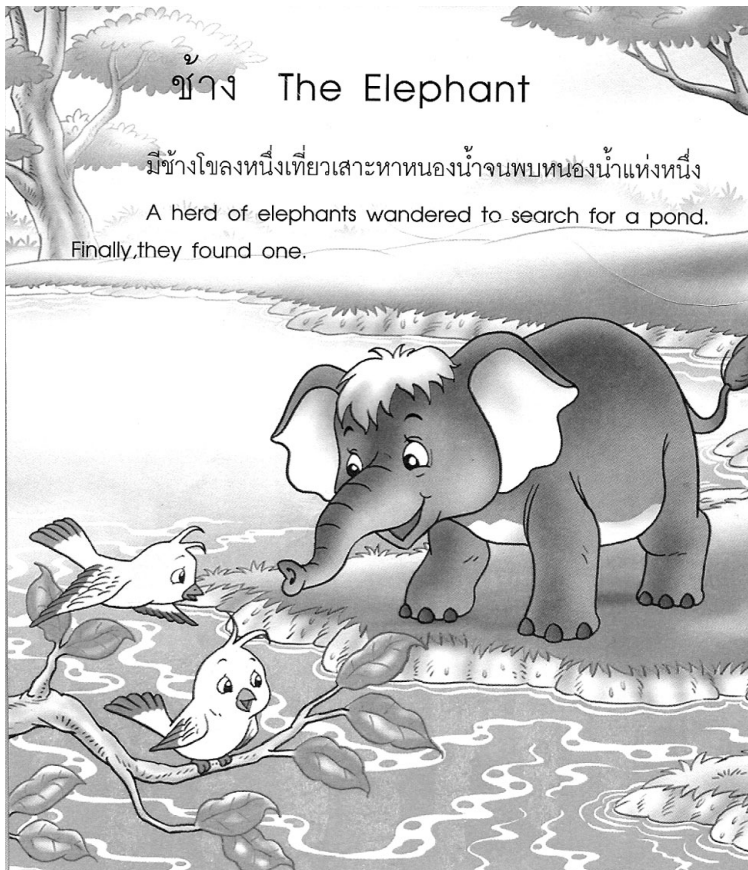


Figure 1.1 An illustration from *The Elephant*

Let us look first at what Annie can do in Thai after just a year of learning to read. Although both the story of *Elephant* and the book itself are new to Annie, she sets to reading confidently in Thai to her mother, holding the book herself and turning each page appropriately. As usual, her mother reads the first word on the page and Annie continues. Her reading appears fluent and effortless and she reads with obvious enjoyment. Her eyes search the illustrations for information and she comments on animals in the pictures as she goes along. But what is Annie actually able to do as she tackles the text? Through the dual-language version, we see that she successfully reads 19 different *nouns* (herd, elephants, rabbits, moon, pond, soil, shelter, problem, idea, water, morning, words, animals, leader, kindness, mistake, dusk, shadow, trunk), 30 different *verbs* (wandered, found, search, stepped, killed, died, discussed, said, have/had, tell, am, forbids, drink, came, arrived, shouted, convey, swim,

ignores, pleaded, bring, apologise, replied, went, reflected, pointed, pay respect to, lifted, touch), nine different *prepositions* (on, around, of, from, in, before, ahead, at, away from) as well as a limited number of *pronouns*, *adverbs* and *adjectives*. Had she been reading in English, she would have read 22 verbs in *the past tense*, seven in the *simple present* and one each in the *present continuous*, the *future* and *future passive* as well as *future conditional*, and the *present perfect tenses*, *infinitives* and the *imperative* form. She uses prepositions of place, time and motion. Additionally, Annie obviously understands the content of the story and she is able to empathize with the characters. When questioned, after reading, on what she likes about the story, she replies confidently: ‘the rabbits ... because they are clever’.

In fact, Thai is very different from English and there are, consequently, a number of language-specific grammatical and orthographic rules that Annie has already learned. Although the intention here is not to describe in detail the Thai language and script, a few aspects are important to understand the task Annie faces of becoming bilingual and biliterate in her first and her new language. First, we see that she is already becoming a competent user of the Thai script, an Indic alphabet originally designed to represent the sounds of Sanskrit but with new symbols created during the thirteenth century to represent the sounds of Thai (Hudak, in Comrie, 1987). The script is by no means an easy one to learn. Thai is a tonal language with five different tones (low, high, falling, rising and mid-tone) with several symbols for the same sound. There are 44 *consonants* divided into three groups (high, mid and low) to indicate the tone in spelling, a complication when learning to read, as well as 18 *vowel* sounds. As in other tonal languages, for example Mandarin and Cantonese, use of the correct tone is crucial since reading a word or sentence using the wrong tone will entirely change its meaning. There are other aspects that make both spoken and written Thai very difficult – the Thai themselves regard their language as complex and stratified, even for highly educated people. Central to this is the proliferation of titles, ranks and royal kin terminology that has affected various aspects of the language. The choice of pronouns, for example, is highly complex. In contrast to a simple ‘I’ and ‘you’ in English, Annie will need to choose according to the sex, age and social position of herself and the addressee as well as her attitude or emotion towards the person at the time of speaking. She will later need to begin to learn elaborate, often rhyming, expressions. However, other aspects might make both spoken and written Thai easier to contend with than English. There are no *articles* (‘a’, ‘an’, ‘the’, for example) to distinguish between and no *inflections* for case, gender or number of nouns – these are indicated by either affixes (prefixes or suffixes), compounding (‘parents’ = ‘father’ and ‘mother’), reduplicating (‘dek’ or ‘child’; ‘dekdek’ or ‘children’) or repeating a word with the same word one tone higher in pitch than the normal tone, an effect usually used by women. Verbs also have no inflection for tense or number which are shown either by the context, an added time expression or a preverb, often showing that the action begun

by the main verb has been completed. Finally, even a non-Thai reader may discern from the text above that, orthographically, there is no space between individual words; a space is used to denote the end of a sentence rather than a full stop. This very brief glance at the Thai language and script begins to highlight what Annie, like many young children, has achieved as she speaks and reads in her mother tongue by the end of her first year of school.

The task ahead: new languages, literacies and scripts

The child assimilates his/her native language unconsciously and unintentionally but acquires a foreign language with conscious realisation and intention ... the child acquiring a foreign language is already in command of a system of meaning in the native language which s/he transfers to the sphere of another language. (Vygotsky, 1935, in John-Steiner, 1986: 350)

Reading in English, a language Annie is learning formally in school and beginning to learn informally with her mother, is a very different matter. A text she manages confidently in Thai is clearly too difficult in English and Annie looks expectantly to the native English speaker (a relative she trusts, yet sees and speaks to very rarely) for help. Instead of holding the book herself, she hands over to the adult to take control and to turn the pages. Eavesdropping on Annie and the adult reading together begins to provide a window onto the strengths and weaknesses of a young child as she embarks on the task of learning to read in a new language:

Annie: *I can't read English. But I can read 'b', 'd', 'c' and '1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10'* (said very fast and in a sing-song voice).

Adult: *But you know the story in Thai, don't you, and that will help you. I'll read it to you first.*
(She reads the whole story in English to Annie, pointing carefully to each word as she does so)

Adult: *Now let's find one page. You see if you can find me one word you can read in English.*
(Annie turns over the pages to page 5 and scans the page, pointing along the lines with her finger and then picks out and reads from the first line 'You elephant')

Adult: *'Elephant!' You can read 'elephant'.* (Turns to page 3) *Where's the word that says 'rabbit'? Can you find it?*

(Annie runs her finger along the line until she finds 'rabbit' and reads it)

Adult: *That's great!* (Turns to page 4) *How about a word that says 'elephant'?*
(Annie finds the word)

Adult: *Yes! There's another one that says 'elephant' there. Can you find it?*
(Annie finds the word)

Adult: *Yes! Two words for 'elephant' on that page. Let's have a look at this page* (turns back to page 3). *What can you read on that page? Can you find the word for 'rabbit' again?*

(Annie points to the word and reads it)

Adult: *Yes! How many words say 'rabbit' on that page?*

(Annie runs her finger intently along the lines of print and counts 'one, two, three')

Adult: *Yes! Three words that say 'rabbit'. Any more?*

Annie: *No.*

Adult: *What about 'elephant'? Is there any word that says 'elephant' on that page?* (page 4)

(Annie runs her finger along the print. 'Yes' She points to the word)

Adult: *What about that word?* (turning the page (page 5), *she points to 'moon'*)

Annie: *Mmm ... 'Moon'*

Adult: *Yes. What about that one?* (points to 'pond')

Annie: *'Pond'*

Adult: *Yes! Very good.* (Turns two pages to page 7) *What about 'pond' again on that page? Can you find it?*

(Annie scans the line and finds the word, saying 'There')

Adult: *Yes. How about 'rabbit'?* (page 7)

(Annie points to the word and reads it)

Adult: (Turns two pages to page 9) *How about 'elephant'?*

(Annie points to 'elephant')

Adult: *You've read nearly all the words on that page. Aren't you clever?* (Turns back to page 8) *Where's the word that says 'pond' again?*

(Annie points to the word and reads it)

Adult: *How about 'rabbit'?*

(Annie points to 'rabbit' and reads it)

Adult: (Turns to page 9) *How about 'elephant'?*

(Annie points to the word)

Adult: *'Moon'?*

(Annie points to the word and reads it)

Adult: *So all those words you know how to read. You know 'rabbit' and you could write it too. You know 'elephant', you know 'moon', you know 'pond'. What else do you know? You know 'you'. What else do you know? You know 'the' ... You know how to read 'the' ... What else do you know?*

Annie: *I think I know 'be'.*

Adult: *Do you? Where's 'be'?*

(Annie scans the pages and finds 'he' on pages 4 and 5)

Adult: *So you know lots of the words! You can nearly read that book in Thai and in English.*

(Annie smiles shyly and shakes her head)

Adult: *Yes you can. Look!* (points to all the words recognized by Annie and reads them). *What about this one? This long stick?* (points to 'I')

(Annie reads 'I')

Adult: *There you are. You can read that one too!*

Upon a further shared reading of the text, Annie also reads 'head', 'go', 'in' and 'on'. She counts the rabbits and elephants, says 'rabbits die' (pointing to the illustration of the dead rabbits) and 'kill' (pointing to the elephant).

What is Annie actually able to do as she attempts to read? She starts off by stating clearly 'I can't read English', and, indeed, her achievements in English cannot be compared with those in Thai. However, what follows and is depicted above clearly differentiates her from a monolingual English beginner reader. Her lack of knowledge of the grammar of spoken English means she is unable to predict phrases and sentences from the context. For example, she cannot 'read' from an illustration and say 'elephants came to drink water in the pond' (page 4). However, she can memorize at first sight nouns important to the story (elephants, rabbits, pond, water, moon) as well as call upon other words she possibly already knows from different contexts (die, kill, he, I). Chapters 4 and 5 explain further why this might be the case and how teachers might call upon children's skill in using such words. Crucially, however, Annie is able to call upon her knowledge of literacy in her mother tongue to help her tackle reading in a new language. First, she knows that print carries meaning, that stories can be reproduced in written narrative and that reading can be enjoyable. Then, she realizes that both scripts and words themselves are arbitrary. In other words, 'rabbit' can be an entirely different word written in a different script in different languages, yet still mean the same thing. Written conventions are also arbitrary. Words in Thai are not separated by a space, as in English, and a space in Thai has the equivalent meaning of a full-stop in English. Her emergent biliteracy also gives her a heightened metalinguistic awareness and concepts as well as terms such as 'word', 'page', 'line' and so on are not new to her. Third, her early biliteracy has familiarized her with directionality (both Thai and English read from left to right and top to bottom), as well as in what way to turn pages and to look to the illustrations for help in understanding the text. Finally, through her knowledge of both the spoken and written story she is beginning to appreciate that certain cultural understandings are universal, for example the importance of a spiritual power (in this case the moon) in controlling things. She is also beginning to understand the struggle and conflict between different creatures (in this case the rabbits and the elephants) in sorting out their disagreements over the occupation of land and water in order to live peacefully together in the same territory. Through these understandings and skills, Annie moves way beyond the learning of new words to begin to make sense of new worlds central to her later life.

What might be the role of the adult in facilitating children like Annie's learning?