Chapter 4.
Increasing Reading Opportunities for English Language Learners

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Misconceptions about second-language learners abound in the literacy research and practice arena. Many of these misconceptions are seated in the linguistic egocentrism that makes Americans incapable of recognizing the utility and applicability of any language other than English. This self-perception also feeds the xenophobia that characterizes much of the immigration reform argumentation as well as the English-Only movement. It has been reinforced, in addition, by several influential documents developed by literacy specialists. This chapter dedicates some thought to overviewing how major federal reports and publications in highly visible research journals portray learning to read in a second language. But, far more importantly, the chapter attempts to describe the process of second-language reading and learning to read in second languages in classrooms—a process that is often invisible to teachers—in order to meet the spirit of this volume, of ensuring that students get "the right stuff." The chapter focuses on three principles that need to be infused into classrooms that include children who take on the challenge of learning to read and reading to learn in a second language. First, teachers need to understand the influence and importance of first-language literacy and place their formative assessments against this backdrop when diagnosing individual children. Second, teachers need to acknowledge and account for the role of the language structure from which children come in order to figure it, too, into the assessment scheme as a source of potential support as well as possible interference. Third, teachers need to increase the volume of reading materials that contain content with which children might be familiar, namely

information text and understand that what children might *understand* about that content and what children can *say* about that content are two different things.

The Influence and Importance of First-Language Literacy in Learning to Read and Speak a Second Language

Pinpointing an exact instance in time when a field turns its attention to a particular educational flashpoint is difficult. Interestingly, though, the field of literacy was an early player in examining second-language reading for its insights into the reading process in general. Both Javal (1879) and Cattell (1885) commented on the differences between readers reading in a first and reading in a second language; Huey (1909), similarly. Some awareness of second-language reading was also extant during the early years of intelligence testing, but by and large a recognition of the unique process of second-language reading remained dormant for most of the twentieth century. Goodman (1968) helped to refocus attention on the concern of second-language reading when patterns of immigration made it clear that American classrooms would soon be populated by children, adolescents, and adults who were entering schooling with a home oral language that did not match the oral language in which literacy instruction would be rooted. Subsequently, the 1980s witnessed patterns of increased interest in second-language reading that were clearly identifiable across professional programs such as the International Reading Association, the National Reading Conference, and the National Council on the Teaching of English. A review of the nature of papers on these programs reveals a focus on cultural matters, arguing for inclusiveness and egalitarianism. Little instructional assistance was offered. Articles in professional journals as well as materials for the preparation of literacy teachers offered little in the way of specifics for differentiated instruction (Bernhardt, 1994).

The late 1990s witnessed a sea change in the attention of literacy educators on matters of second-language reading. An influential review article by Fitzgerald (1995) is important in this regard. Based on her review, restricted to work done with children learning to read in English, Fitzgerald (2000) argued ultimately that "there is little *evidence* (italics added) to support the need for a special vision of second-language reading instruction" (p. 520). Writings such as these led the field to ignore the concept of evidence and to create the comfortable philosophy that there was 'little need for a special vision of second-language reading instruction.' What Fitzgerald and others had actually focused on was a *lack of evidence* about child second-language readers as well as about the procedures of literacy instruction. True enough, at the procedural level little can be different when teaching second-language learners to read. Similar to the learning to read process of native English speakers, second language learners need to practice word recognition and fluency and have opportunities for practice; good and interesting materials need to be available; teachers need to spend one-on-one time with individuals as well as with small groups of readers; readers need to be given opportunities to write and to talk about what they read; and so on and so forth. Indeed, these are procedures one would expect to find at use in all classrooms. To argue that instruction within its broadest parameters would somehow appear to be different for second-language children is missing the point.

While there are similarities, there are also differences in the processes for students learning to read in English as native English speakers or as second language learners, as acknowledged by the National Literacy Panel report (August & Shanahan, 2006). The Panel concluded that "second language learners differ in some significant ways from first-language learners in literacy learning because they bring to this challenge an additional and different set of language resources and experiences" (p. 14). Indeed it is not the literacy procedures that are and

might be different but rather *the nature of the language resources and experiences* that render the process different for second-language readers. In other words, it is at the level of diagnosis and assessment where the differences are at work. Yet, ironically, the panel report falls into the same illogic as previous publications. It perpetuates the view that research findings (or lack thereof) describe a process rather than acknowledging that research findings merely portray answers to questions as asked. If questions are asked in univariate, isolated ways disregarding context, then univariate isolated answers are revealed. These answers might provide some insight, but they do not necessarily reveal the process itself and most certainly offer little to teachers who are focused on accommodating and assisting all children, each of whom comes to school with a unique set of *language resources and experiences.*

Restricting itself to analyzing studies almost exclusively involving pre-adult second-language readers, the panel drew a number of generalizations about second-language reading. It concluded, for example, that the most consistent finding is that English language learners "achieve adequate word reading" (Snow, p. 633). In her synthesis of the panel's findings, Snow (2006) is quick to add that in most studies children were not reading extended text and were rarely assessed in their fluency and comprehension. In studies that were examined on the topic of comprehension the hardly surprising conclusion drawn by the Panel was that "comprehension performance falls well below that of native-speaking peers" (p. 633). The panel also indicated that the "same social factors" (p. 634) for English language learners as for native English readers are at play in the literacy process such as poverty-level, parental involvement and educational level, and the like. The Panel found little if any evidence on what kind of instruction is effective and only "limited guidance" about how good instruction for second-language speakers might differ from that for first-language speakers (p. 638). In fact, only one accommodation seemed to

be of greatest assistance—developing English oral proficiency in the context of literacy instruction (p. 639). Nothing in the professional development of teachers seemed to be unique for English-language learners. Features of professional development such as hands-on, field-based experiences were found to be useful. The only area of the Panel's work that acknowledged the *language resources* of second-language learners in a serious manner is the section on cross-linguistic relationships. Snow acknowledges how important the notion of these relationships has been historically in the second-language acquisition literature. She does, however, by and large dismiss any findings from this arena as inconclusive because of the correlational nature of most of the studies. In other words, in spite of significant relationships between first- and second-languages found most language tasks, it is unclear whether being able to do a task in L1 actually *causes* the ability to conduct the task in L2.

Ultimately, Snow's synthesis points to the tautological nature of much of what was indicated in the report.

> Thus, it is not surprising that the individual skills that predict good reading for English-learning versus monolingual readers are so similar—they are the skills that help children solve the particular challenges of reading English. Nor is it surprising that features of instruction that work well for English monolingual children also work for English-learning children, who must learn the same skills because they are ultimately faced with the same task (p. 645)

In other words, when learning to read a given language, achievement is linked to procedures known to be effective for that particular language. There is hardly any wonder at how such an analysis leads educators to the conclusion that instructing English-language learners is an identical process for all children; there is even less

wonder at why teachers then become so frustrated with English-language learners who are often stymied in instruction.

Admittedly, the task of the National Literacy Panel was to review the research about all dimensions of pre-adult second-language reading even though an accepted subtext of all such work is to guide the improvement of practice. In fact, the mission of the improvement of practice in many educational areas is taken up by the Institute of Education Sciences practice guides. The intention behind the guides is to base advice for instruction both on research as well as on field-based expertise. The practice guide germane to this chapter is *Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades* (Gersten, 2007). The practice guide authors note:

> Our goal is to provide guidance for all English learners, whether they are taught to read in their home language, in English (by far the most prevalent method in the United States), or in both languages simultaneously. The recommendations are relevant for students regardless of their language of reading instruction (p. vii).

The attitude portrayed in this quotation is one of perceiving no difference between first and second-language readers. In fact, the five recommendations listed in the practice guide hold true to the concept of *all* children being English language learners, arguing that the same assessment mechanisms can be employed (Recommendation 1); and the same kinds of small group reading interventions (Recommendation 2) be implemented; and that the same focus on academic English (Recommendation 4) be at hand. Only two of the recommendations provide any special advice regarding English language learners. Recommendation 3, regarding vocabulary instruction, advises emphasizing "the acquisition of everyday words that native speakers know and that are not necessarily part of the academic curriculum" (p. 4). And Recommendation 5,

concerning leveled group-learning, acknowledges that "different English language proficiencies" (p.2) would be at play. Beyond these two recommendations, the concept of native and non-native is not extant in the practice guide's recommendations. These principles confuse through oversimplification. They emphasize the hyper-procedural level whereby literacy instruction across languages is more alike than different. Hyper-procedurally, there are books, and teachers, and classrooms, and things like group work, and assessment, and notions of academic vocabulary. Yet, how all of these features develop into a sustainable literacy program for children who do not come to school speaking English is an entirely different matter.

Focusing on research studies that fit the requirements set forth by Federally-funded panels seeking "scientifically-based" guidance is laudable. Yet, it is critically important to understand that reviewing and citing research without regard to the fundamental contextual factor in second-language reading, namely the dimension of *second* and all that *second* entails is potentially fatally flawed. While it might appear that every conclusion or guideline cited above reflects the general reading process, there are critical features that *distinguish* ELLs as they go through the learning-to-read process that must be at the forefront of all instruction. First, traditional instruction tends to suppress or ignore the first-language literacy of ELLs because either state policy discourages the recognition of languages other than English or teachers are unaware of languages other than English. Second, while admitting that ELLs come to school with different levels of oral language proficiency in English, the depth of the difference has to be understood. The levels are far more diverse and grammatically marked than that of their English-speaking counterparts. Third, the background knowledge that ELLs bring to school is more often than not invisible because it is housed in a language other than English. In other words, ELLs, like their English-speaking counterparts, might know a lot about their pets at

home, but unlike those counterparts are not able to articulate that knowledge in English. This scenario means that ELLs are in triple jeopardy: they have to learn to read; they have to learn the content from reading; and they have to learn the language fluently to express the content of their reading. While most children have to *learn to read and read to learn*, second-language children must *learn the language of learning to read* ***and*** they must *read from the social basis of any given text for learning.* Teachers charged with guiding learners through this complex and difficult terrain can find little assistance from large-scale research and applied syntheses that are superficial and fundamentally misguided.

What English Language Learners Know and What They Need to Learn: The Role of Language Structures

The second-language acquisition literature is fairly consistent in the finding that child and adult second-language learners proceed through similar developmental processes in their learning of second languages (Hawkins, 2001) even though adults are far more cognitively developed and metalinguistically 'aware.' This finding is particularly stark in the development of syntax. The classic example illustrating this research-driven insight is the development of questions across languages. Intonation while maintaining canonical word order is always the first question form; then verb inversion; next, the acquisition of question words (*who, where, why* and so forth); embedded questions (*do you know what time it is?*; and so forth. Adults may go through these stages more quickly than children, but the fact remains that the stages seem to be parallel. Adults often "know" a grammatical rule such as "In English, the verb comes first in a yes-no question." Yet, similar to children who may not have much metalinguistic awareness, adults in informal conversations pose a question such as **You coming to my party?* Studies that examine different morphosyntactic structures as well as some semantic features (*buy/sell,*

give/take and so forth) provide convincing evidence that the second-language process is indeed a *route* that any learner moves through, albeit at different *rates* (Ellis, 1994). Ironically, the literacy field with its very public syntheses about second-language reading seems to not take any of this literature into account. In fact, it deliberately ignores it by sidelining most of the research about adult readers of second languages. The argument is put forth in this chapter that ignoring what is known about second- language acquisition and about adult second-language reading is misguided. It buries insights and a significant knowledge base for teachers that can assist them in working with children who are English language learners *and* literacy learners *and* content learners all at the same time.

Every teacher, researcher, and theorist from behaviorist to cognitivist to Vygotskian knows that what the learner brings to the learning environment is absolutely critical. The learner context is arguably the most critical factor for teachers to comprehend and from which to launch their instruction. Whether this contextual principle is couched in the rhetorics *of background knowledge, prior knowledge, "known to the new", "new learning based on previous learning"* or *the more knowledgeable other* it focuses on what the learner already possesses internally as the soil in which new learning will root. Often times this soil is absolutely compatible with the learning that is to take root; but at other times it may well be like trying to plant corn in sand or a cactus in a bog. The task for teachers is to change the nature of the environment by making it more flexible, hospitable, or welcoming. Whatever the metaphor, the irony of the large literacy policy statements on second-language reading is that they seem to ignore this foundational concept.

The remaining pages of this chapter examine second-language reading within the context of what learners bring to the process and tries to provide teachers with some usable guidelines when assessing and assisting English language learners. The model in Figure 1 attempts to vivify the research data that we have within a convenient and helpful thumbnail conceptualization (Bernhardt, 2005). Broadly speaking, research indicates that learning to reading in a second language relies on these critical components: *first-language literacy knowledge* (represented by the light grey bottom arc) and captured in the middle, slightly greyer area *second language knowledge* meaning a knowledge of second-language forms (grammatical knowledge) and word knowledge. These two components—*literacy knowledge and language knowledge*—seem to interact against the backdrop of *world knowledge*. Effective second-language reading is dependent upon a reader using these three knowledge sources in a *compensatory* fashion. The model attempts to capture compensation in its three dimensional form. What does compensation mean? It means that at times a knowledge of how literacy works helps the reader compensate for a lack of word knowledge; some times grammatical ability can override a background knowledge deficit to help a reader decode a word; sometimes knowing the content arena of a text can help readers to both understand a word and to figure out its syntactic properties; and so forth. The following unpacks each of these concepts in more detail.

Literacy Knowledge

Using literacy knowledge means applying what a reader already knows about written language to understand other written language. Teachers of young children are, of course, hardly strangers to this concept, but a key feature for second-language children is this: how literacy is realized in their mother tongue may be on some levels quite different from the way it is realized in the English-speaking world. The first two examples in Spanish in Table 1 illustrate a literacy

perception that would be immediately transferable Spanish to English, English to Spanish. The example in the first row is easily recognizable as a paragraph. Familiarity with written language signals that this paragraph (whether one knows any Spanish) likely has a central idea, is not emotionally laden (witness the absence of exclamation points), and is about something in Latin America about anthropology. The material in the second row in Table 1 is an easily recognizable list. It contains key points that a reader should remember for future use. One could probably go on, listing assumptions about each text, perhaps even discovering that the second row in Table 1 contains the same text as in row 1. The point it to comprehend that features of literacy bring with them sets of assumptions about what is and is not signaled by the text.

The third row in Table 1 consists of a text in German. Whether one knows German or not, the text signals that language is missing or that the words might be in a random order given different fonts with lots of words capitalized. These assumptions, which are reasonable for English and Spanish literate readers, are inaccurate. All nouns in German are capitalized. And it is merely the typefaces and fonts and spacing that signal incoherence; the text itself, is a perfectly normal German sentence. In fact, had the reader seen the sentence in a normal configuration-- *Selbst in Hannover, wo er immerhin 40 Jahre lang gelebt hat, wissen die Meisten wenig mit Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz anzufangen*--an entirely different set of assumptions might have come into play.

The point of these illustrations is that whether one "knows" a particular language or not, a literate person comes to the reading process with a set of assumptions about what one might find in written language. Other examples in this regard are features like color, print size, and typography. The public outcry regarding the use of color photos in the *New York Times* is one example—that outcry was not based in the use of color *per se*, but rather in an equating the

quality of the texts with "McNews" even before any of the articles were read. In like manner, 'thick print' or sanserif (i.e., boxy) print signal non-serious or non-intellectual content (Bernhardt, 1991). While these examples might be a bit too sophisticated within a discussion of young children, we know that children are very early on deliberately sensitized to the print environment around them. That print environment sends significant messages to them regardless of the specifics of the language in print.

Beyond the specifics of print configuration and beliefs about content based on it, the knowledge of what words look like and "should" look like and should sound like are also at play. The expectations set up by sound/symbol correspondences as well as prosodic features of language play an important role. The early stages of literacy learning always involve understanding *concepts of oral language written down*. For second language learners, the issue will be that that *oral language they possess and the one that is written down is different*. Even though there is no match between the oral language they bring and the one they see in print, they will, nevertheless, impose those known oral language forms on the new written language. As an example, the German text above, if read out loud, will contain "**wo*" rather than "vo" or **volkswagen* rather than "folksvagen".

One could spend an infinite amount of time teasing out hundreds of these kinds of comparisons. The point remains that the reader, no matter how young, will bring a set of expectations based on prior literacy experiences that will not match the target literacy most of the time. In fact, research indicates that literacy knowledge tends to account for around 20% of comprehension performances among second language readers (Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995). Being able to account for this much of the process based on literacy knowledge alone is critical. A convenient image to use is that second-language readers have a leg up on the second-language

process. They are not blank slates; upwards of 20% of their slate is already colored in. Or another way of thinking about this is that on a 100 point test, a second-language reader might be able to answer upwards of twenty questions based in his or her knowledge of how literacy works. We will put this metaphor to the test in a few pages.

Language Knowledge

The next dimension illustrated in Figure 1 is language knowledge. In contrast to literacy knowledge, language knowledge appears to account for around 30% of the process of second-language reading. As noted above language knowledge entails grammatical form, vocabulary, cognates, and concepts of linguistic distance. Grammatical form refers to linguistic features such as morphology and syntax that entail inflections and endings, case markings, and features such as mood. Grammatical form itself presents text that is far less ambiguous, for example, in Spanish than it is in English because Spanish overspecifies, while English underspecifies. For example, regular present tense verbs in English inflect only for third person (I, you, we, they *sing;* he/she *sings*) while in Spanish separate inflections exist for all three persons and in singular and plural. In like manner, Spanish distinguishes between direct objects (*lo, la, los, las*) and indirect objects (*le, les*) while English does not (*him, her, it, you, them*) in both cases. The additional specifications on the part of Spanish offer the reader a grammatical signal about word relationships which helps to disambiguate sentences. English, in contrast, offers little grammatical signaling here. Generally speaking, it is only through word order than one can disambiguate in English. Another convenience that Spanish offers that English does not is the explicit signaling of mood—language that expresses attitudes or feelings such as a wish, or a doubt, uncertainly, advice or an emotion. For English to express attitude or feeling, additional words or expressions have to be added to the discourse. One has to read and process more words

to get the same effect. In other words, language users are conditioned by their native language to expect certain grammatical signals. This expectancy grammar is individual language based and in no way universal.

An illustration within the domain of syntax illustrates this point. The answer to the English language question *Shall I give you the information?* might have the response *Yes, I want you to give it to me* or *Yes, I want you to give me it.* That same question posed in Spanish *Te doy la informacion?* and its comparable response *Si, quiero que me la des* is far more restrictive syntactically and morphologically. The pronouns do not move around the way they can in English. Of course, in other situations the reverse may be true; i.e., in other configurations, English may be more restrictive than Spanish. Consider two Spanish sentences that exhibit a flexibility in word order that English simply does not have: *Se lo voy a escribir. Voy a escribírselo.* English does not permit either of the direct translations of these sentences: *To them I'm going to write it* or *I'm going to write to them it.* What do these linguistic phenomena mean for the reader? In learning fluency, one learns to anticipate what might come next in a text. In fact, miscue analysis is based precisely in this principle. For the second-language reader, this ability to accurately anticipate is suspended and must be re-learned. Critically, at least in the Spanish-English situation, there is indeed substantial anticipatory overlap. Yet substantial does not mean exclusive. It is precisely in those areas of non-overlap that teachers must become vigilant. Admittedly, even though there are very real differences in language forms for all readers, texts for younger children tend exhibit relatively simple syntax. In actuality, the challenges posed by syntax crosslingually actually become more demanding as texts become more demanding. Syntax becomes more confounding as second-language readers mature and tackle more demanding texts.

The model in Figure 1 indicates that a knowledge of vocabulary is a more substantial language knowledge component in second-language reading than morphosyntax (Brisbois, 1995). In this regard, the concept of *cognate* is absolutely critical both in teaching second-language readers and in helping them to achieve greater fluency. A cognate is a word related to another word through derivation or borrowing. Cognate literally means 'born in similarity,' most assuredly reflecting the notion of prior knowledge. Cognates are in some sense words that the learner already possesses.

Consider these examples of German words: *Computer, Museum, Video, Stereo, intelligent, Buch, alt, machen, Welt, Umwelt*. Since German and English are Germanic languages, the cognate overlap is significant. Within this group, cognates range from outright word adoptions such as C*omputer* and *Museum* (the only distinction being that all nouns are capitalized in German) to more distant cognates such as *alt* (old), *Welt* (world), and *Umwelt* (environment), the latter exemplifying that cognates are some times not very transparent.

Because of the historical roots of English with French and Latin, there is an overlap in cognates between Spanish and English as well. A minimal overlap of 30%, according to Nash (1997), indicates that Spanish speakers learning English are at a substantial advantage in their learning of content words in English. Transparency can at times be an issue on both the learner's side and the teacher's. If the teacher does not know Spanish, it may be difficult to perceive the areas of assistance for learners; if learners do not have the strategy that words are related to each other, they may not perceive the huge knowledge store that they already have at hand. Both teachers and learners need to heighten their metalinguistic knowledge in this regard. For example, knowing that regular word endings such as *–dad, -ión, ía, -or,- encia* that Spanish-speakers have minimally in their oral vocabulary (if not also in their literacy vocabulary) enables

a transition into English nouns ending in *–ty, -tion, -sion, -y, -er, -or, -ence, -ency.* Or knowing that words that can describe nouns, such as words ending in *–ico, -ica, oso, -osa, -ado, -ido* in Spanish become English language adjectives ending in *–ic,- ical, -fu, -ous, -ed,-ing* can significantly enhance active vocabulary knowledge. There are also regularities in spelling and sound that can be helpful to crosslingual readers such as the elimination in English of the initial e on many Spanish words (e.g., *escriba/scribe, escolar/scholastic)*.

Fundamentally, teachers need to understand these relationships for diagnostic purposes. And learners should be explicitly taught these relationships. We explain to monolingual children how to figure out words; we should do the same for English language learners; it is the content of the explanation that is different. *World Knowledge*

The third element in second-language reading that is intuitively critical is world knowledge. The concept intuitive is employed because it is far less concrete and far more expansive than the former two factors for which we have substantially greater evidence. We do indeed have evidence within adult second-language readers that a knowledge of topic can override grammatical deficiencies (Bernhardt, 1991). In other words, if a reader knows much about a topic, the topic knowledge can assist in decoding difficult, low-frequency, or technical vocabulary. In other words, adult readers reading within high-knowledge domains are able to use strategies to decide that 'this is a text about a coal mining disaster. Therefore, it probably has words in it such as *mine shaft, oxygen, life line, carbon monoxide, rescuer* and the like. Research also indicates that the converse may also be true: that background knowledge can mask or depress language knowledge. If one is familiar, for example, with the traditional conflict between environmentalists and golfers (dues to the high environmental costs of golf course maintenance), reading a headline about an environmentalist/golfer coalition might lead to the

reaction 'I must have misread that.' In other words, readers may use knowledge to overcompensate. Within second language contexts, in which readers are already insecure with their language knowledge but often feel more secure with their world knowledge, they are often ready to dismiss what the language 'has told them' in favor of a more 'reasonable' interpretation based on their version of the 'real world.' This is the instance where literacy knowledge, language knowledge, and world knowledge collide.

Cultural beliefs undoubtedly enter into the concept of world knowledge. The text in the fourth row of Table 1 is written in Urdu. Whether one can recognize the language or not, in applying general principles of literacy, one recognizes the text as a text, assumes that it contains a coherent message, assumes that it is not a story (witness the telephone numbers listed) and that it is perhaps an ad of some sort because of the three identical words across the top much like "attention attention attention" or 'closeout closeout closeout.' In reality, the three identical words are "good news good news good news." The back of the card appears alongside the front. It has a space for the listing of names, address, and a dollar amount. This configuration seems to be curious and one might respond with 'I have no idea of that this card is about. Somebody wants money for sure.' Yet, if one then instantiates a religious notion, the card can become suddenly an indulgence or prayer card. It is cultural or, better said, *subcultural* information that enables comprehension. In fact, the solicitation is for money to pay pilgrims to visit a shrine and to return with a souvenir, a relic of sorts. A person who has that subcultural knowledge can understand at some level *without* linguistic knowledge and a person without that subcultural knowledge who may have *linguistic* knowledge may fail to understand.

A key point is that world knowledge is often invisible. Figure 2 depicts an instance of invisible background knowledge and helps us to transition to the final portion of this chapter.

The teacher and her student each display very positive literacy instincts. The teacher has taken her students on a very interesting field trip to the Monterey Aquarium. She expects her pupils to then talk about their experience, share the facts that they learned, probably read more about those facts, and then write about them all of which are excellent examples of a balanced and diverse literacy program. Her pupil was engaged by the field trip. He is excited about the new information he learned about sharks. He is poised more than likely to read more about sharks since he already knew some facts and he learned some more details. The problem is not the procedures of literacy, or motivation, or interest. The problem is the inability of the pupil to communicate his excitement, knowledge, and readiness for more learning in a language the teacher understands. Second-language speakers may not be able to *articulate* their background knowledge. But being unable to articulate does not mean that a person does not have background knowledge. It means that he or she might not be able to display it comfortably and, therefore, keeps it hidden. Imagine the previous example of Urdu. Depending on the reader, there is probably more or less understanding of the content of the language in the two figures. Describing that content in a native language is one thing; describing it in the second may be tantamount to impossible. Monolinguals tend to be extremely insensitive to second-language speakers, believing that oral speech is somehow synonymous with understanding. If teachers believe that fluent oral speech is the primary and possibly only indicator of comprehension, they will never be able to perceive the genuine abilities of the children in their classrooms. In fact, research repeatedly indicates that readers able to display their comprehension in the stronger, i.e., native language, achieve much higher comprehension ratings than those forced to both understand and display understanding in a second language (Shohamy, 1982, 1984).

In summary, second-language readers must be viewed from an array of perspectives. First, it is imperative that teachers get a sense of the *literacy* abilities *in whatever language* that children bring with them to school. It is simply not good enough to accept that children come from 'low literacy, high poverty areas.' Most English language learners in the United States come from cultures that have a long literate tradition and they come from print environments. In large sectors of the United States, one sees signs written in languages other than English every day; one can walk into almost any bookstore and find a section devoted to languages other than English and virtually any ethnic or cultural event has print in languages other than English. To fail to perceive that many children come to school without a print awareness is to ignore a genuine strength. Further, teachers much be aware of how to access the *language knowledge* that children bring. Undoubtedly, children will use the knowledge of language that they have. If they believe that one does not need to mark the subject with anything but a verb ending, they will transfer that knowledge. This may cause difficulty in their learning of a language that requires a subject and that does signal grammatical relationships through lots of inflection. Teachers need to diagnose children's performances in terms of the linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge that children bring to the task. Finally, teachers need to empower children to use the world knowledge that they bring. They need to find ways of helping children to make their comprehension visible in ways not completely and exclusively reliant on a second language.

Increasing the Volume of Reading Informational Text

The challenge for children is this: they have to use what they know about literacy and they have to re-work what they know about language while they are learning new content material and how to express that content in English. This is a tall cognitive order. The challenge for teachers is this: to try to lessen the cognitive burden on these children, by enabling them to

be assessed on these varying dimensions separately and not conflating their performances across the dimensions. One of the most discussed notions about lessening cognitive burdens is within the framework of the materials that children are asked to read. Ironically, teachers often turn to stories, believing in their universality and engaging nature. There are several dimensions to *story* text that often make them more difficult than they would appear to be. First of all, stories are deliberately cultural. While it might be true that the genre of 'folk tale' is universal, the structure, the value system, the level of fantasy, and so forth are clearly not *universal;* that is what makes them reflections of culture. Most stores that would be recognized as "North American" for example, come from the German tradition of Grimm's fairy tales (often *Disney-fied* for the large screen) or from legends such as *Johnny Appleseed* or *Paul Bunyon* with *Babe the Blue Ox* --stories that reflect a North American tradition. Other folk tales such as those from South Asia or the Middle East are not set in similar geographic settings and use animal-like characters specific to the region. Folk tales in the American tradition have blue oxes and super human strength; those from the Middle East have flying carpets; and from Asia snakes that talk. None of these types of fantasy contain images that are part of the real world knowledge store. Using this type of text forces children to rely almost exclusively on linguistic knowledge for comprehension. Another characteristic of story text is that it is often intentionally ambiguous. The quality of a good story is found in its ability to sustain multiple interpretations. This makes stories intriguing; we can turn them around and find different, "secret" messages in them; the question *are things really what they appear to be?* is a foundational question in any analytic approach to stories. For second-language readers, this dimension of story is unnerving. Second-language readers tend to be happy if they know the foundational vocabulary; they are not engaged by having to maintain a flexibility of thought for which they have few if any cognitive

resources left over. Finally, stories often use extremely economical language. Good stories are often carefully structured demanding that the reader rely on *all* of the words that carry the story forward. While children's books tend to have pictures, the pictures illustrate something mentioned in the text and do not necessarily propel the story forward. They *illustrate* the language; they do not *add* to the content of the story. In this case, children are often forced into a word-based strategy.

All of these features can conflate to undermine the confidence of English language learners. If the story line does not match the knowledge store or fails to reflect the cultural value system the learner has been taught and further, is ambiguous, the second-language reader may be floundering in a sea of words and concepts that do not exist in any *real* world the second-language learner inhabits.

A resolution for teachers lies in the use of information text for English language learners. Information text can focus on a topic that might be in the knowledge store (such as what to feed puppies versus older dogs or how light affects plant growth or how sea animals propel themselves through water or how sharp the teeth of sharks really are). Information text potentially taps into the invisible—that information that the student in Figure 12 has, that the student cannot articulate and that the teacher cannot access. Knowing about a topic can lighten both the grammatical load and the content load of a second-language text, allowing the English language learner to actually read the text. Admittedly, the vocabulary load in such texts can appear to be more demanding than perhaps in story text. Yet, it is indeed often this low-frequency academic vocabulary that might be cognate in nature and further might be vocabulary for which readers already have concepts. In other words, they are already prepared to learn the words due to their knowledge store—a far more comfortable position to be in than trying to

understand words for which there is no immediate knowledge store. Information text is often redundant. The text often contains charts, figures, subheadings, and the like that repeats verbal information and provides additional signals of importance. The scaffolded nature of information text can be invaluable for second-language readers. They are not necessarily swimming in a sea of words.

Perhaps, most importantly using information text potentially equalizes learners in classrooms. English language learners could potentially have a greater knowledge store on particular topics that their native-English-speaking peers, allowing the English language learners to be more knowledgeable and to participate more confidently than their native English-speaking peers. Especially for learners who have felt unwelcome in schools or have been made to feel less intelligent because they are not fluent or use a grammatically marked or phonetically marked English, the possibility of being the achiever in a class, the child to whom others can turn as the expert is an opportunity that teachers should not miss.

Making sure that English language learners are getting the right stuff means that teachers diagnose them and assess them within their unique set of strengths. These strengths tend to be housed in their native language, not in English. While it might be extraordinarily difficult for teachers to cope with a language other than English, knowing how powerful and useful that second language and literacy knowledge is and can be will support teachers in the long run in making better assessments and in creating a more positive classroom experience for all learners.

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Table 1. Illustrations of Conventions and Content in Spanish, German, & Urdu

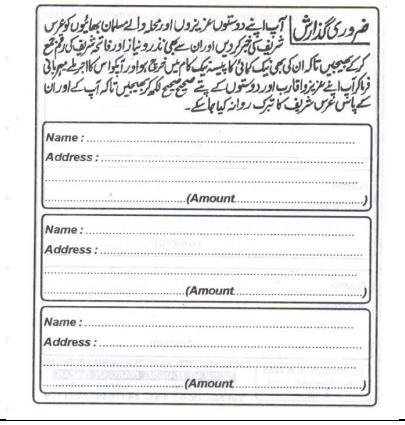
Example	Illustration
1	Así como el médico toma una radiografía para analizar internamente el organismo, los antropólogos,mediante el único laboratorio de prospección arqueológica de América Latina, analizarán en marzo un sitio preolmeca del año 3000 A C, ubicado en la costa del Pacifico. El objectivo es identificar con precisión asentimientos humanos utilizando imágenes satelitales y fotografías aéreas a color de alta resolución.
2	•Así como •el médico toma una radiografía para analizar internamente el •organismo, los •antropólogos,mediante el •único laboratorio de •prospección arqueológica de América •Latina, analizarán •en marzo un sitio preolmeca del año •3000 A C, ubicado en la costa del Pacifico
3	Selbst in Hannover, wo *er Immerhin* 40 Jahre land gelebt hat, **wissen die** Meisten wenig mit Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz **anzufangen.**
4	 

Figure 1. Model of the relationship between comprehension and language proficiency

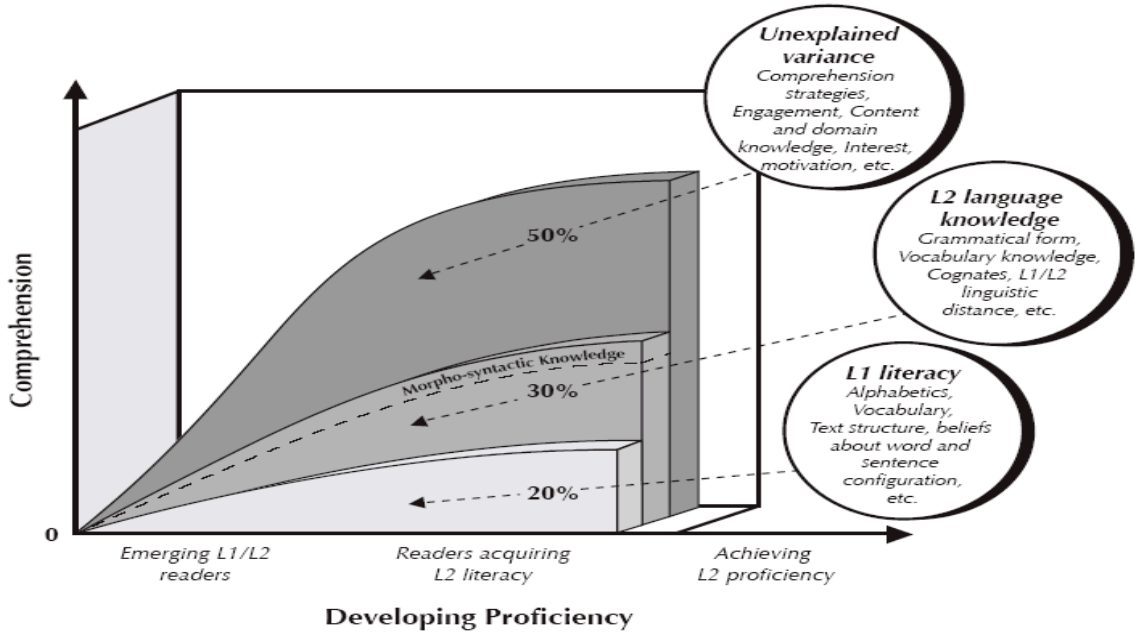


Figure 2. Interpretations and Misinterpretations in Classroom Talk