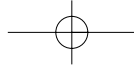


# 1 Setting the Scene

*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.

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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 ทำให้กระต่ายถูกเหยียบตายเป็นจำนวนมาก  
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  
และพระจันทร์ห้ามไม่ให้ผู้ใดต็มน้ำจากสระนี้’

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 ฝูงช้างก็มาต็มน้ำที่สระอีก

กระต่ายตัวที่ออกความคิดก็มารออยู่ก่อนแล้ว มันตะโกนว่า

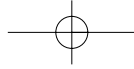
The following morning, the herd of elephants came to drink water in the pond. The rabbit who had the idea arrived before the elephants. He shouted ... (p. 4).

‘เจ้าพวกช้างทั้งหลาย ฉันเป็นกระต่ายที่อยู่บนดวงจันทร์

นำคำสั่งจากพระจันทร์มาบอกพวกเจ้าว่า

ห้ามผู้ใดลงมาว่ายน้ำหรือต็มน้ำจากสระนี้ 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)

จำโขลงของช้างไม่ใช่ปัญญาไตร่ตรองจึงหลงเชื่อคำของกระต่าย

“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 ฉันทจะพาเจ้าไปพบท่านเดี๋ยวนี้แหละ’

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,

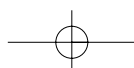
'Pay respect to him then hastily go away.' (p. 8)

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



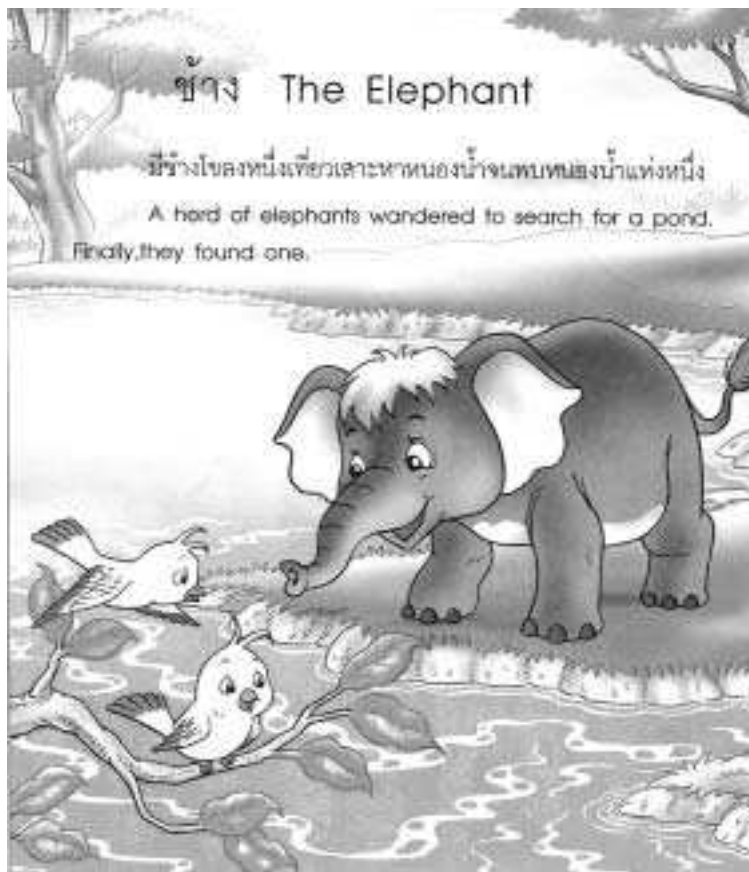
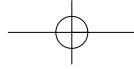


Figure 1.1 *An illustration from Elephant*

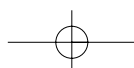
Let us look first at what Annie can do in Thai after just a year of learning to read. Although both the story of *Elephant* and the book itself are new to Annie, she sets to reading confidently in Thai to her mother, holding the book herself and turning each page appropriately. As usual, her mother reads 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,



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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 highly 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?*

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*(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 'be' 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')*

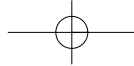
*(Annie reads 'I')*

*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?



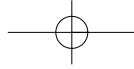
We see that the adult:

- provides a role model of a fluent reader and speaker of English by reading the story slowly and clearly to the child, pronouncing each word clearly, pointing as she reads
- emphasizes important key words, usually nouns 'rabbit, elephant, moon, pond, and so on' and verbs 'die, kill, and so on'
- wherever possible, links the word with the appropriate illustration, using mime, for example, for 'die' and 'kill' where necessary
- uses repetition by drawing the child's attention to key words in different contexts throughout the story
- provides a relaxed situation by showing the child that s/he is not expected to read the whole text, thus relieving her of any pressure to 'perform' in a difficult task
- understands that, as a new language learner, Annie can understand far more than she can say
- focuses on what the child *can* actually achieve rather than what she cannot do.

Through emphasizing and repeating the words that Annie *can* read in all sorts of contexts, the adult gives her confidence to see herself as a future bilingual and biliterate adult, able to function in both Thai and English worlds.

## Different countries, different contexts

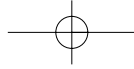
As they set about making sense of a new world, children like Annie will have very different experiences according to where they happen to live and go to school. In the twenty-first century, many schools across the world are receiving children who will be learning literacy in a language they cannot fluently speak. Some will be already able to read and write another language at home, at a community language class or at school in the same or in a different country. Others will speak another language, yet will be unable to read or write it. Yet others will be introduced to a new language and literacy at the same time as becoming literate in their mother tongue. We need to remember that a large majority of countries in the world are multilingual. Between 4,000 and 5,000 languages are spoken in fewer than 200 different states; in Nigeria over 500 languages are spoken natively, while India claims over 1,600 mother tongues. In some countries, literacies in several languages and scripts will stand side by side in different types of schools; Street (1984) explains how this takes place in Iran, and Wagner et al. (1986) describe parallel but totally different schools in Morocco where learning takes place in either French or modern or classical Arabic. In many multilingual countries there will be one lingua franca or common language for formal education which only the more affluent will use for



business or commerce in later life. In some former colonial countries all children may be faced with the task of making sense of literacy in an unknown language. In Zambia, for example, initial literacy teaching takes place in English, a language which many children have no means of practising outside the classroom. However unpromising the conditions, then, we know that children can and do learn to read for the first time in languages which they cannot yet speak and that this need not be regarded as something strange.

Circumstances in some parts of the world will be more favourable than those outlined above. Countries which have two or more official languages hold out more promise to strangers because they need to ensure early bilingual competence for all children through carefully planned immersion programmes. In Singapore, where there are four official languages, it is taken for granted that children will be able to learn to speak, read and write simultaneously in English and their home or heritage language (Mandarin, Malay or Tamil). Within Europe, some countries, such as Luxembourg and Switzerland also expect children to become biterate within a few years. Some linguistic regions such as Wales or Catalonia also hold out similar expectations for children. Although school language programmes are directed at developing bilingualism in two languages only (English/Welsh or Spanish/Catalan), children with minority languages (largely Arabic speakers in Catalonia and speakers of South Asian languages in Wales) will benefit from the focus placed on language through immersion programmes. Second-language teaching will also be high on the agenda of initial and in-service teacher education courses and an integral part of National Curriculum requirements.

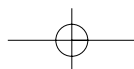
Even within officially monolingual countries, provision made for non-native speakers varies greatly. According to the US census of 2000, nearly one in five people, or over 47 million residents over the age of 5, speaks a language other than English at home, an increase of over 15 million since the 1990 census. An impressive figure, this number also excludes 'unofficial' or illegal residents in the country. Until 1998, children's schooling had been largely influenced by the US Supreme Court's crucial decision in the *Lau v. Nichols* case (1974) which stated that 'there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education'. A variety of different programmes were then created which combined immersion into the new language with mother-tongue maintenance. Some of these programmes also included monolingual children should this be the choice of their parents. However, in 1998, elections in California led the way to an English-only policy. In spite of being home to the largest number of non-native English-speaking residents in the USA (39 per cent), Proposition 227 'English for the Children' initiative won 61 per cent of votes, a victory that virtually dismantled California's 30-year-old system of bilingual education. Arizona quickly followed under Proposition 203. Finally, the Bilingual Education Act

**12 / LEARNING TO READ IN A NEW LANGUAGE**

(BEA) of 1968 was replaced in 2002 by Title III of No Child Left Behind, in which the sole emphasis was on the rapid acquisition of English. This preoccupation with providing only transitional support for learning English through mother-tongue teaching contrasts with bilingual education in both Australia and Canada which emphasize bilingualism as a personal and national resource rather than as an anti-poverty measure (Edwards, 2004).

During the twenty-first century provision of new language and literacy tuition has become a matter of urgency for Europe. Since 2004 and the expansion of the Economic Union to 25 member states, there has been considerable movement of families away from their country of origin to other European cities. Britain has added Eastern European languages to its already considerable diversity of languages in many cities. Germany has become host to many non-native speakers who may be guest-workers (largely from Europe and Turkey), ethnic Germans (largely from Russia) or political asylum seekers. Most wish to remain permanently in the country. Provision for the language and literacy education for newcomers is very different according to the country they enter and the policy at the time. In Britain, provision will be largely determined by the local education authority as well as the individual school attended. Children in areas with a high number of non-native speakers are likely (although not assured) of access to either an additional language teacher or language instructor in their class. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, mother-tongue teaching is not provided to young children and parents will need to make private provision if they wish this to take place. Families in the southern German region of Baden-Württemberg may expect their children to enter a full-time immersion class for up to one year where structured tuition following the normal curriculum will provide enough German to join the ordinary class as soon as possible. Children are spared from tests in German until considered fluent. Children belonging to one of the larger minorities should benefit from the provision of mother-tongue teaching by their consulate and it will be the duty of the school to ensure collaboration between the mother-tongue and class teacher for joint curriculum planning and assessment of each child. Turkish speakers (the largest minority group) in neighbouring Bavaria, enable children to participate in pilot projects promoting bilingual education (in Turkish and German) for all. In either Austria or Switzerland, sections of the national or local curricula will be devoted to ways of combining second language with subject-content teaching backed up by specialist initial and in-service education for their specialist teachers. Recognition of the mother tongue, however, disappears abruptly in France. Unless attending a private bilingual school such as that of Pia in Alsace, the emphasis is on teaching children to become French citizens with an excellent knowledge of the language and culture as quickly as possible. Equality here is interpreted as providing the same curriculum, which should be uniformly of a high quality, for everyone.

Later in this book, we meet children learning in a variety of different contexts across the world.

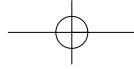


## What's in a word? Terms and terminology

Words used to describe children like Annie reflect current official educational policy in different countries. Were she to move to France, the term is simple and has not changed during recent years. Annie will be described as 'non-francophone' (non-French speaker). In Austria and Germany there is a subtle change to 'Schüler mit nichtdeutscher Muttersprache' or 'non-mother-tongue German speaker'. In Britain, we find that the 'immigrants' or 'non-English speakers' of the Plowden Report in 1967 become 'non-native speakers' or 'English second language learners' (ESL) in the Bullock Report of 1975, 'bilingual children' of the late 1970s and in the Cox Report of 1988, and 'children with English as an additional language' during the 1990s and into the twenty-first century.

Deciding upon a satisfactory term to describe the children in this book was not easy. Use of the term 'bilingual' in educational circles in Britain during the 1980s and 1990s to describe children like Annie signalled acceptance of a wider definition of the word to mean those at any stage of second language learning. Yet to refer to her as 'bilingual' contradicts both common understanding and dictionary definition which describes a bilingual as 'able to speak two languages, especially with fluency' (*Collins English Dictionary*, 1992). Clearly, children like Annie are not fluent (or anywhere near it) in their new language. If they were, there would be little point in writing a book about them. Indeed, there is a danger that use of the term 'bilingual' might deflect attention from the fact that the children need help as they go about learning in a new language. For this very reason, the term has been rejected in the USA (where 'English Language Learners' (ELL) has replaced 'Limited English Proficiency' (LEP), 'non-native speakers', 'English second language speakers', 'minority language speakers' or sometimes 'non mother tongue English speakers') and Australia (where the terms 'English second language' alongside 'children with languages other than English' (LOTE) are preferred). Yet 'bilingualism', or at least a reasonable fluency, will eventually be the aim of children like Annie and terms like 'second' or 'additional language learner' do not adequately reflect this. Nor are they 'foreign language learners' whose aim to communicate might be very limited in the new tongue. Really, the children are just beginning on the road to bilingualism. But 'beginner bilingual' implies that they need to be taught, step by step. This is obviously not the case. Luckily, children are also learning informally, from their classmates, the television and life generally. For this reason, I refer to both Annie and all the children in this book as 'new language learners'.

So how might we define 'new language learners'? I do not wish to imply that the learning of a new language 'just happens'. This may well occur over many years, but most children cannot afford such a luxury. Some may well have to achieve after a very short time the same



level of literacy as their monolingual peers. Rather, I want to emphasize a joint process of formal and informal learning *where the teacher and her teaching does matter*. New language learners are children who may be at an early stage of learning or simply lack fluency in the language they need to read and write. All the children in this book have recently started school and are learning to read in a new language. In some cases, this may be the official language of the school and a language they do not speak regularly at home. In others, it might be the heritage language, regarded as a mother tongue but which children might not be able to speak fluently. In other cases, it might be a new language yet taught alongside either the official language or mother-tongue literacy at school. The children in this book have come from very different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. However, they share in common an ultimate aim of becoming *bilingual or plurilingual* which I understand as: 'being able to function in two (or more) languages, either in monolingual or bilingual communities, in accordance with the sociocultural demands made on an individual's communicative and cognitive competence by these communities ...' (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1984: 90).

Young new language learners are largely absent from research into reading. Studies on the reading process, methods of teaching and materials tend to assume either oral fluency in the language in which tuition takes place or considerable literacy skills in the first language if the learner is an adult or older child. The example of Annie, opening this chapter, shows us clearly that learning to read in a new language is very different from learning in a language one can already speak.

Therefore, do young new language learners approach the task differently? If so, what special strengths and weaknesses might the children have? How do educators provide 'culturally responsive' teaching which considers the expectations and interpretations of both children and their families? If these children do use special strategies, what implications might be drawn for teaching approaches at home and at school? How might we learn from what takes place in homes and families, including interaction between siblings and grandparents with young children as they play and learn together?

## A plan of the book

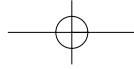
This book aims to provide a framework for observing and teaching young children learning to read in a new language. Examples from years of classroom observations, taped reading interactions, interviews with mainstream and community teachers, and work with families are seated within the findings from research on sociocultural theory, second-language learning and learning to read. The book assumes no specialist knowledge on the part of the reader. It is written for teachers, researchers, student teachers, bilingual instructors, parents and everyone

interested in young children learning to read in a new language at home or in school. There is no claim to provide simple solutions. Rather, the book illustrates the complexity of the dual task of learning a new skill in a new language and a new language through a new skill.

The argument put forward is that young learners have particular strengths as they step into reading in a new language at home or in school, strengths which are not accounted for in 'mainstream' studies on reading. Throughout the book, case studies and taped interactions are used to urge readers to observe, in detail, ways in which new language learners approach the reading task. The book aims to encourage readers to examine carefully their own strategies as they work with the children and makes practical suggestions for linking the teaching of English with beginning reading, listening to children read, assessing their English and working with families and community schools. Above all, the book aims to highlight the importance of an awareness of different strengths (and weaknesses) if we are to provide equal access to literacy to the new language learners in our classrooms.

The book attempts to link theory and practice throughout. Nevertheless, the focus is different in each section. Part 1 situates the child within the wider context of the family and the community. Learning to read is viewed on three levels: the sociocultural (the outer culture in which the family lives), the interpersonal (the child's relationship with other learners and 'teachers') and the intrapersonal (processes within the mind). It examines the scope of existing theories of beginning reading and studies on the reading process in explaining the task ahead for these new language learners. Chapter 2 focuses on the way young new language learners in different countries across the world learn to situate themselves in the social context of reading. It investigates the literacy practices in young children's lives and presents a cross-cultural perspective of the role of the caregiver in structuring learning and initiating children into reading in the home. Chapter 3 moves to the interpersonal level and examines the role of different mediators in children's learning. It unpicks different patterns of interaction between young children and their siblings, grandparents and peers. Chapters 4 and 5 investigate reading as a mental and linguistic activity. They draw upon both existing research and classroom examples to examine the strengths and weaknesses children have as they use different clues to make sense of the reading task in school.

Part 2 moves to practice and focuses on ways in which educators might use their knowledge of current research to inform teaching, both in classroom reading lessons and by children's families and community teachers. Using the findings from Part 1, Chapters 6 and 7 outline two different but complementary approaches for beginning reading in the classroom. Chapter 8 presents ideas for using the approaches in the classroom. Finally, I give a voice to young adults whom readers met in Part 1 of the book as they look back on learning to read in a new language. How do they remember learning to speak and read English? How has it



affected their adult lives today? What hints might they have for educators?

Throughout the book, readers are asked to question their own beliefs on what reading is and how it is learned. Cocooned within the membership of one culture and education system, it is easy to believe established theories and ideas to be 'natural' and unchangeable. Yet we do not have to travel far to realize that beliefs on how children learn to read are very different as borders are crossed. Countries throughout the world have considerable numbers of young new language learners in their schools and all have different approaches to introducing them to reading. Ultimately, educators will aim at a 'joint culture creation' (Bruner, 1986) within classrooms, yet to be authentic, this will need to be culturally responsive to all the children in the class. During the last years of the twentieth century, teachers and researchers were uncertain whether migration would continue to be an issue for very long. However, the first decade of the twenty-first century has shown worldwide migration taking place on a scale which will affect us all. It is a phenomenon we cannot afford to ignore as we make the promise of 'equal opportunity' to young children learning a second, third or even fifth language in school.

### Questions for reflection

- What are some important differences between learning to read in a new language and in the mother tongue?
- How might you read with a new language learner?
- What other terms are you familiar with to refer to 'new language learners' and what does each conjure up?

### Further reading

- Comrie, B. (ed.) (1987) *The World's Major Languages*. London: Routledge.
- Crystal, D. (1987) *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*. Cambridge: Guild.
- Edwards, V. (2004) *Multilingualism in the English-speaking World*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Kenner, C. (2004b) *Becoming Biliterate. Young Children Learning Different Writing Systems*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (1981) *Bilingualism or Not? The Education of Minorities*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.