

## TESL and Reading...

# *Oral-Aural Proficiency Required*

by Kenyon L. Moss

Language has been defined as a system of arbitrary sound symbols by which human beings react to each other. Writing is the graphic representation of those sound symbols and reading is recognizing and understanding the writing. Learning to speak and understand a language means learning the language, but reading and writing imply that the language is known and we are learning a graphic description of it. Reading involves two different skills - recognizing and getting the meaning of a word. To read is to grasp language patterns from their written forms. In a second language, reading is usually taught to students who are already literate in the native tongue.

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Reading in a second language is part of the learning of that language and should naturally follow listening and speaking in that language, as it does in the native language. The student learned to listen, understand, and speak his own language before he learned to read, understand and write it.

Learning to read English is not just learning a new vocabulary. The most difficult part is mastering the new sounds and structures of English and the best predictor of successful reading is oral language proficiency. It is only after students can say the material well enough that they should be allowed to see it. Reading is done faster if the sounds of the language are known because many students tend to make the sounds in the throat when reading. Learning to read before oral and aural proficiency have been attained can only lead to the reading which is similar to decoding. In order to read with ease and

enjoyment, students must know the sounds, structure, and vocabulary of the new language and be familiar with some of the culture of English speakers so that they may understand the situation and appreciate it better.

What has been learned previously about reading in the native language of the student must also be taken into consideration. Most students of English as a second language have the following before learning to read English:

1. A knowledge of the sound and structure patterns of the native language.
2. An awareness of the mechanics of reading.
3. An ability to recognize printed symbols.
4. Experience with a limited number of basic patterns of English sounds and structure.
5. Some knowledge of the culture of speakers of English.

If these are found lacking in the students, the teacher should take time to introduce them before starting the reading program. In the beginning, the reading

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should be largely oral and imitative, using pictures, the blackboard, flash cards, etc. striving for recognition of the symbols and getting meaning from them. Recognition begins to develop in this stage.

The next step should be book reading. The material found in reading books may be classified in three areas:

1. Material which has already been produced orally; both structure and vocabulary. This should cause no trouble and will probably be familiar to the students.

2. Material which has not been produced orally but which occurs throughout the reader.

3. Material needed for one selection only.

The reading may be accompanied by a tape recorded lesson of the material or by the teacher. The teacher may want to read aloud so that the students do not reinforce incorrect sounds in their silent speech and so they will comprehend words which they have heard spoken but have not seen.

As teachers, we need to understand certain things about reading:

1. The ability to read will increase much faster than the ability of expression. (True in relationship of listening comprehension and speaking, also.)

2. Children vary in their levels of maturity and growth; this affects the ability to learn.

3. The desire to learn to read depends on the interest the student has in the content of the reading material. The teacher should be careful to select material of interest to the students and which will benefit them in learning new vocabulary, patterns, etc.

Teachers need not postpone reading until complete mastery of the language has been achieved. They may teach the reading of a pattern immediately after it has been mastered orally, thus starting reading comprehension with the first lessons.

The major job of the teacher is to provide experiences in the second language before beginning intensive reading in that language. A second language teacher may have to substitute realistic situations for real life experiences and limit the selection of experiences to basic matters. If motivated properly, the students will try to read new material.

## Bibliography

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