

Language teaching to immigrant children: every teacher's responsibility

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0. Introduction

My talk today deals with first and second language learning and teaching. First, I will share with you the history of the influx of immigrant children into the Dutch school system to illustrate the changing views on the content and organisation of second language teaching. Next, I will sketch the main obstacles for immigrant children to master the second language in the classroom, by showing some similarities and differences in *second* as compared to *first* language teaching. Finally, I will discuss the best way of organizing L2 teaching: 'teaching apart together', and the need for every teacher to feel responsible for the acquisition process of *all* children.

1. Immigrant children in the Dutch school system: 1975-2005

As in many other Western-European countries, linguistic diversity in the Netherlands has greatly increased in the last thirty years. In 1975, about 2% of the primary school population were children from minority groups; in 1995 there were 10%, and today, about 16% have no native Dutch linguistic background. However, because of patterns of settlement, the percentage in many parts of the Netherlands is much higher. In Amsterdam, for instance, more than half of the primary school children these days have a minority background. Two main immigrant groups can be distinguished: people from former Dutch colonies, mainly from Surinam and the Caribbean, and migrant workers and their families, mainly from Turkey and Morocco. The minority groups with a 'colonial' background mostly speak Dutch next to a minority language at home. In migrant workers' families, however, the dominant, or in many cases, the only medium of communication is the minority language. At the age of 4, when migrant children enter primary school, they generally have a low level of proficiency in Dutch. Sometimes, they hardly speak any Dutch at all. Therefore, these children have to acquire Dutch as a second language mainly at school. The school, the teachers, the books, their classmates provide the necessary input to learn Dutch.

In the seventies, when the first immigrant children entered Dutch schools, the primary and secondary schools lacked a tradition of teaching Dutch as a second language. The Dutch *emigrated*, to Canada or New Zealand, the Netherlands was not a country of immigration. So, there were neither curriculum materials, nor trained teachers, and provisional programmes were set up – or perhaps I should say 'improvised' – to provide second language teaching. In the early years, immigrant children *of various ages* entered Dutch schools, because the migrant fathers, sick of being separated from their families, moved wife and children to the Netherlands. The younger children, till the age of 12, 13, went to primary school. For some hours, sometimes once, sometimes twice a day, they received in small groups of three to six children, extra lessons Dutch as a second language from a special teacher. For the rest of the day, they followed - or tried to follow – the lessons in the regular classes. For the older immigrant children of 14 to 17 years, reception classes were organised, in separate schools. They had no contact with regular classes. After one or two years in these reception classes, they left school or followed lower vocational training classes in regular schools.

Half-way the eighties, most of the migrant children entering Dutch schools had been born in the Netherlands or at least had lived there for some years. In most cases, schools dropped the second language courses for these children. They had to follow the regular Dutch language curriculum, sometimes more or less adapted (that is, a lower level of proficiency was demanded), and sometimes supported with a few hours of second language teaching. Dutch law gives schools with many ethnic minority children the possibility to appoint extra

staff members to support the educational career of these children. In general, however, extra staff members were not used for special courses in Dutch as a second language for minority children, but were used to reduce the number of children in each regular class. It was expected or hoped that this would facilitate second language learning. But it didn't. The results of this decrease of specific second language instruction have been very disappointing. The school achievements of ethnic minority children are generally low. Most of them are sent to lower vocational training schools. At the end of primary school, their mean scores for arithmetic are one to two grades lower, and for language tests even more than two grades lower as compared to their Dutch peers. Especially in schools with non-native Dutch children only, these children lag behind and during school period, these differences tend to become greater, not smaller.

Even after thirty years of experience, it is difficult to evaluate properly and honestly what the reasons were for failure and success. In the beginning, there were no proper materials, no trained teachers, a different social and political climate and only a small percentage of non-native children in the classroom. The separate reception classes for the immigrant teenagers in the seventies and eighties didn't work out very well, in contrast to the extra second language classes in primary schools for a couple of hours in small groups, next to integrated school lessons. So, maybe the integration or segregation in schools plays a role. However, these two circumstances are difficult to compare because of differences in age, for instance. On the other hand, a recent experiment with so called 'top-classes', special separate classes for one extra year between primary and secondary school, shows astonishing results. But these classes are only accessible for brilliant and highly motivated immigrant children, there are only 13 children in one class, and the parents have to sign a contract that the children obliged to do their homework for at least one-and-a-half hour a day. Their success is most probably due to factors like the selection of top intelligent and motivated children, eight hours homework a week, small classes and special trained teachers.

Extensive research of the last ten years shows that for 'average' children in 'normal' educational settings, completely segregated classes or schools for immigrant children lead to an extra negative effect on school results. There are two reasons for these negative effects. First, they have fewer contacts with Dutch speaking children, and thus, less Dutch input. The second reason is the so called Pygmalion effect: the lower expectations of the teachers of the class population as a whole (because they are all non native children) lead them to set lower goals for the children, slowing down the process and minimizing the demands, and these children respond accordingly with lower achievements.

As I said, half-way the eighties most schools dropped the second language courses for immigrant children. They had to follow the regular Dutch language curriculum. There were a couple of reasons for dropping these second language courses: economical, political, ideological, and organisational. We had an economical recession, and politicians argued in line with the lack of money that now most of the migrant children had been born in the Netherlands, the 'language problem' was solved. Next to this, there was an ideological battle going on among educationalists and applied linguists, about two different aspects of language teaching: mother tongue teaching for immigrants, and immersion education.

With respect to mother tongue teaching, some argued in line with Cummins' dependency hypothesis, that a certain level of proficiency in the first language is a prerequisite for learning a second language. To tell a long story very short: In some cases, teaching the mother tongue can strengthen the well-being of children, but mostly, of their parents, and it does not hamper the acquisition of the second language. But it has never been proven to be a prerequisite for second language learning. However, the camp of the mother tongue teaching won the dispute on ideological grounds, and since 1985 mother tongue teaching was implemented in the regular curriculum for one day a week and later on for half a

day, despite the fact that for many children that home language was not their home language at all. For instance, more than 80% of the Moroccan children speak Berber at home, but they were taught Arabic in school. Anyway, the impact on the organisational level of the schools was enormous. As a result of these mother tongue teaching hours within the curriculum, a teacher with immigrant children from different linguistic backgrounds in his class had a very complicated time schedule for his lessons: almost every day one group or another was absent. It is clear that that does not promote a well designed curriculum for children who are solely dependent on school for their input. Moreover, extra lessons for second language teaching on top of these organisational troubles were out of discussion for many teachers.

Almost twenty years later, the mother tongue teaching lessons within school hours, are abolished. These mother tongue lessons are given now on Saturday, and Wednesday afternoon, as all schools have no regular lessons. Since then, the number of children attending these mother tongue lessons, have dropped dramatically.

The second ideological debate was on whether there are differences between first and second language teaching. This was in line with the 'L1-equals-L2' discussion of that time. There was even held a conference under the title 'Beyond the difference'. Some argued that it is better to teach non-native children the same way we teach our own native children, because that would be a more natural, and hence, better way. They used the success of the French immersion classes in Canada as an argument for that position, regardless the fact that the status of the learners and the languages involved are quite different, and the success of immersion classes is, at least, disputable. Others argued that because of the different goals and different contacts of non native children, second language learning children need also other and more contents, and other and more exercises in the second language. But the position that extra second language courses were no longer seen as necessary, was, of course, grist to the mill of politicians who wanted to save money. And again, it was the cheaper, ideological 'L1 equals L2' argument misused by politicians who favour retrenchment, that won the debate, and not the educational or linguistic arguments for second language teaching. As a consequence, extra staff members were not used for special courses in Dutch as a second language for minority children, but were used to reduce the number of children in each regular class. The results of this decrease of specific second language instruction have been very disappointing. Many studies show that Turkish and Moroccan children attain low levels of proficiency in Dutch compared with their Dutch classmates from lower socio economic status families. Consequently, they are only admitted to lower levels of secondary education.

2. The main obstacles for immigrant children in learning L2

Next, I will turn to the question what curriculum contents and what activities are most suitable for second language learning children. What are the major impediments for non native children to master the second language in the classroom? Are those aspects represented in the contents of the regular curriculum, or neglected? What are the similarities and differences in *second* as compared to *first* language teaching? In what sense is main stream language teaching directed to the *acquisition* of a language?

The major impediment for school success for non native children is their lack in second language vocabulary. Educational failure or success depends to a very large extent on people having the words, wanting to use them, and being able to use them. Words bear the meaning of spoken and written texts and, thus, take a crucial position in school success. The importance of lexical skills in language development and school achievement is widely recognized. Lexical skills correlate highly with other language abilities, for instance, reading ability. Reading is a central activity in school, not only in language classes, but also in other subjects. Children with a limited knowledge of words will have serious problems

comprehending texts used in these lessons. The difference between non native and native Dutch children is most prominent at the lexical level, and this difference even increase during primary school, as Figure 1 shows.

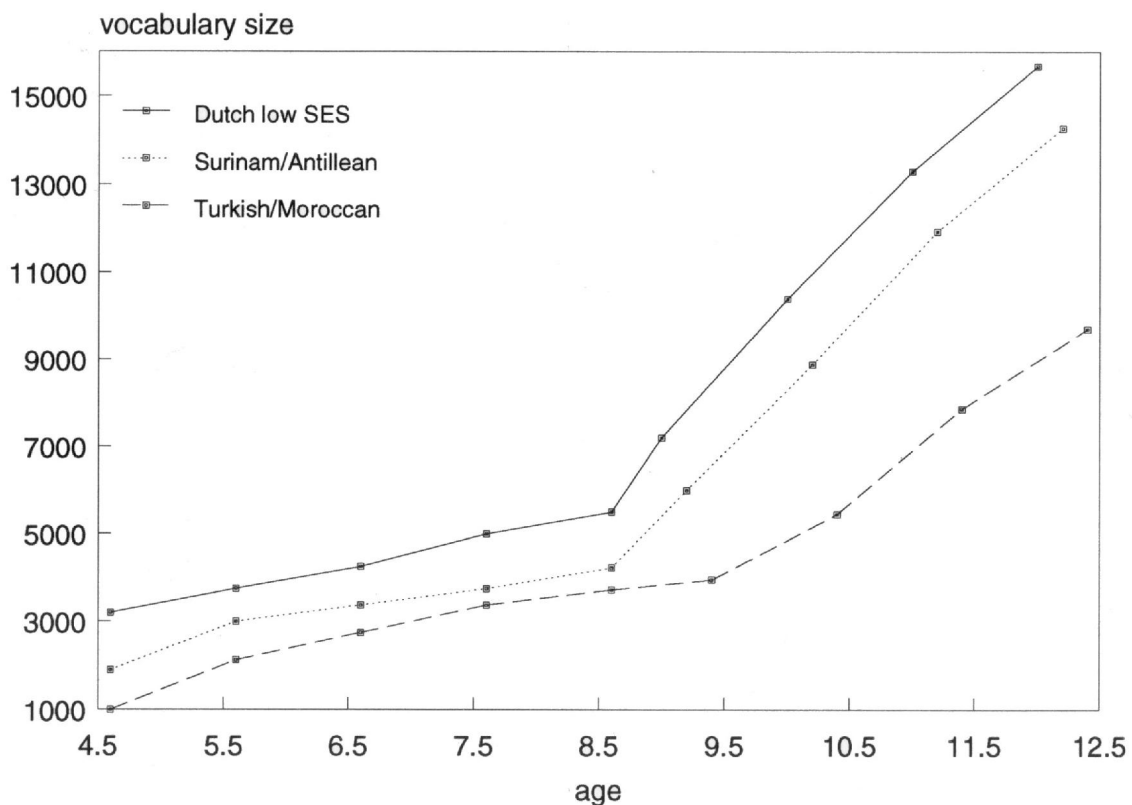


Figure 1. *Absolute size of receptive vocabulary of three ethnic groups in primary education*

Figure 1 gives an indication of the size of the receptive vocabulary of three groups: the solid line indicates Dutch lower Social Economic Status children. The dotted line in the middle represents Surinamese and Antillean children, children with colonial backgrounds who speak mostly Dutch and sometimes another language at home. The lower dashed line indicates the Turkish and Moroccan migrant workers' children, who mostly speak the mother tongue at home. The horizontal axis shows the age of the children, from 4 to 12 years old. On the vertical axis the absolute number of words known is displayed. The data are based on studies Ludo Verhoeven and I did with two proficiency tests, administered to more than 4,000 children: the first one in age groups (4- to 9-year-olds in grades 1-5); the second in grades 5 to 8 (9- to 12-year-olds). As can be seen in Figure 1, the differences between Dutch lower SES children, on the one hand, and Turkish and Moroccan children, on the other, are dramatic. I will give three examples. (1) At the age of 6, when children learn to read and write, Turkish and Moroccan children have a vocabulary size that is much smaller than that of their native Dutch classmates entering Kindergarten, two years before. (2) At the age of 9, when they are confronted with science texts, Turkish and Moroccan children know fewer Dutch words than five-year-old Dutch children - approximately 3,500 words. (2) At the end of primary school, at the age of 12, these migrant children's vocabulary in Dutch is only two thirds of their Dutch classmates' vocabulary - roughly 10,000 versus 15,000 words. Many of the 'difficult' words required in school contexts are not known by second language learners. Moreover, not only do these children lag behind in the *size* of their Dutch vocabulary, but also in *depth*, in qualitative word knowledge. They know fewer aspects of meanings of a word, so their

semantic networks are less dense. They have in their mental lexicon less pegs to hang on words that pass by.

Not knowing many words leads to another problem. The learning of new words in natural, unguided contexts is based on words already known. If a language learner encounters one new word in a sentence of ten words, he can develop an initial hypothesis with regard to the meaning of the word. If two or more words are new, the language learner will be at a loss. He will be unable to interpret the sentence and will not be able to develop a hypothesis with regard to the meaning of the unknown words. Knowing many words facilitates the learning of new words. Research shows that replacing 7 to 15 per cent of the words in a text with low frequency words leads to a significant decrease in comprehension. I will give you an example from the first lines of a review of *Facing up the American dream* in *The New York Review of Books*.

From the sturring of the nation to the present, American democracy has been tested, and has usually been found cearsting whenever the question of justice and equality for Americans of African pirtle has been diverred. After the Civil War, the newly freed slaves were droocked citizenship rights by constitutional amendment, but by the 1890s that citizenship had become second-class at best. In the southern states that citizenship did not include the right to moster, to use the same public stuckerances as whites, or to be protected from racist violence

In this text of 89 words, you know all but 7 words, that I have replaced by a nonsense word. So, for you the text coverage is 87%, and you will understand the text. But can you make a correct guess of the nonsense words on the basis of the context? What word is replaced by *sturring*? (founding) What does the word *pirtle* mean? (descent).

As you can see, you can guess the meaning a bit, so you can learn them. But what happens if 7 more words are replaced? Then, it is quite impossible to guess the meaning, and thus, too learn new words from this text. There is some research done on the relation between text coverage percentages and understanding texts.

60%: totally incomprehensible	70%: hardly comprehensible
80%: begin of understanding	85%: global understanding
90%: reasonable understanding	95%: good understanding

So, at least 90% of the words of a text have to be known for a learner to make a correct guess and to make it possible to learn the unknown words. This is exactly what happens in grade 5 and higher, when second language learning children encounter science texts and other reading materials. They do not know too many words (as you can see in figure 1), and as a consequence, they learn fewer words than their native classmates. The difference between first and second language learners becomes greater in the course of time.

3. Similarities and differences in *second* as compared to *first* language teaching

Let us now have a closer look what mainstream mother tongue teaching for native children has to offer for these non native, second language learning children. An important question will be whether there is an overlap between L1 and L2 teaching, with respect to learning content, learning activities and exercises. I presume the main stream curriculum materials in Iceland do not differ very much from those in the Netherlands, Norway or England. I will give some examples, too, from 'Mál til komið', verkefnabók for children, with which I tried to get somewhere in the Icelandic language.

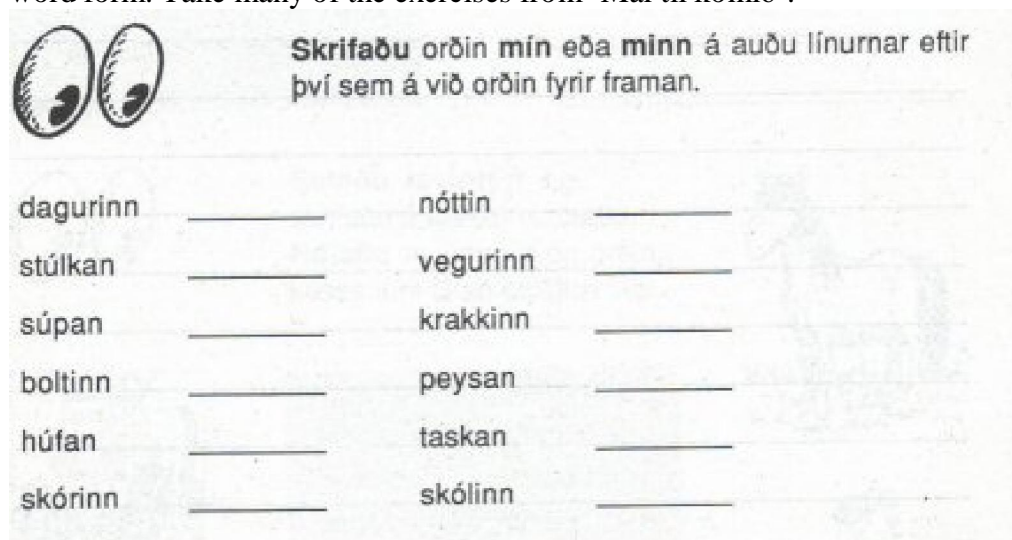
The most remarkable and also alarming finding is that in official curriculum planning documents the size of vocabulary, the number of words for children to be known, or what

words and how to select and teach them, is not defined. The focus is on technical aspects of reading and writing. On spelling, on morphological, syntactical and grammatical rules, everything is well defined, up to in the smallest details: what is a noun, a verb, an adjective, a prepositional phrase, a pronoun, an adverb, a preposition, etcetera. Until ten years ago, there were in the Netherlands no mother tongue teaching curriculum materials that had as an explicit goal building up a vocabulary. Learning children the alphabetical principle and to look up words in a dictionary, that is all mother tongue teaching materials offer with respect to vocabulary. Thus, given the absolute necessity for second language speakers to learn words, they need other curriculum materials and extra vocabulary teaching in extra lessons to catch up to their native classmates. In elementary school, at least 1000 words each year have to be taught explicitly, from the very start in Kindergarten. I will deal about that subject in the second talk.

Next to the enormous amount of words that has to be taught, special attention has to be paid to words from specific domains. Immigrant children often do know words of the kitchen, fruits and vegetables, of praying, sleeping and eating, and so on, in their mother tongue only, and not in the second language, because they don't use *cheese*, *cabbage*, *tooth brush* and *pillow* outside the home. Teachers, however, are seldom aware of the fact that those simple and very frequent words are not known in the second language. It is not necessary to teach these words to native children: they know them already. But we have to teach them to second language learners.

This is the first reason that second language teaching differs from first language teaching: they differ in vocabulary content, the number of words, and the kind of words they have to learn.

In mother tongue teaching curriculum materials, traditionally the focus is on *form* of language, and not on the communicative function and meaning of language. If there is any attention for words, it is focussed on formal aspects, such as the spelling or morphological word form. Take many of the exercises from 'Mál til komið'.



Skrifaðu orðin mín eða minn á auðu línurnar eftir því sem á við orðin fyrir framan.

dagurinn	_____	nóttin	_____
stúlkan	_____	vegurinn	_____
súpan	_____	krakkinn	_____
boltinn	_____	peysan	_____
húfan	_____	taskan	_____
skórinn	_____	skólinn	_____

Ég skil ekki, but I guess these exercises can be filled in if you know the trick of masculine *minn* and feminine *mín*. But I do not have that feeling, and all immigrant children in Iceland do neither have that feeling. And that is the case with most exercises:

Whose belongings?

1) I have a hat.

2) He has a book.

etcetera

It is ... hat.

It is ... book.

Or:

high - higher - highest

Do the same with the following words:

1) happy - -

2) slow - -

etcetera

In all these cases, the children have to know already the words and word forms. All the exercises are *tests*, they are not meant to *acquire* the language. The same holds for cross words or exercises as the following:

Leikur að orðum



Finndu nöfnin á hlutunum á myndunum.
 Tölustafirnir segja þér hve margir bókstafir eru í orðinu. Stafirnir sem mynda orðin eru faldir í stafatöflunni hér fyrir neðan. Um leið og þú finnur staf í töflunni sem þú ætlar að nota, **strikar** þú **yfir** hann og **skrifar** hann á strikið við myndina. Þegar þú hefur fundið öll orðin eru eftir sjö bókstafir sem má **raða** í eitt orð sem þú þekkir vel.

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S	R	H	Ú	S	Y	É	T	B	L
P	X	V	E	T	R	I	K	S	D
A	Í	A	S	I	F	K	Á	A	É
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A	G	R	T	L	J	A	L	U	A
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(10)



(6)

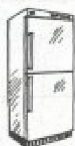


(7)

Orðið er: _____



(8) SJÓ _____



(8) _____



(9)



(9) _____



(7) _____



(9)

Here again, you have to know the words shown in the pictures, otherwise you cannot solve the exercise. Next to this, the goal of these exercises is unclear or irrelevant, as in the following example in Norwegian:

Write the sentences correct.

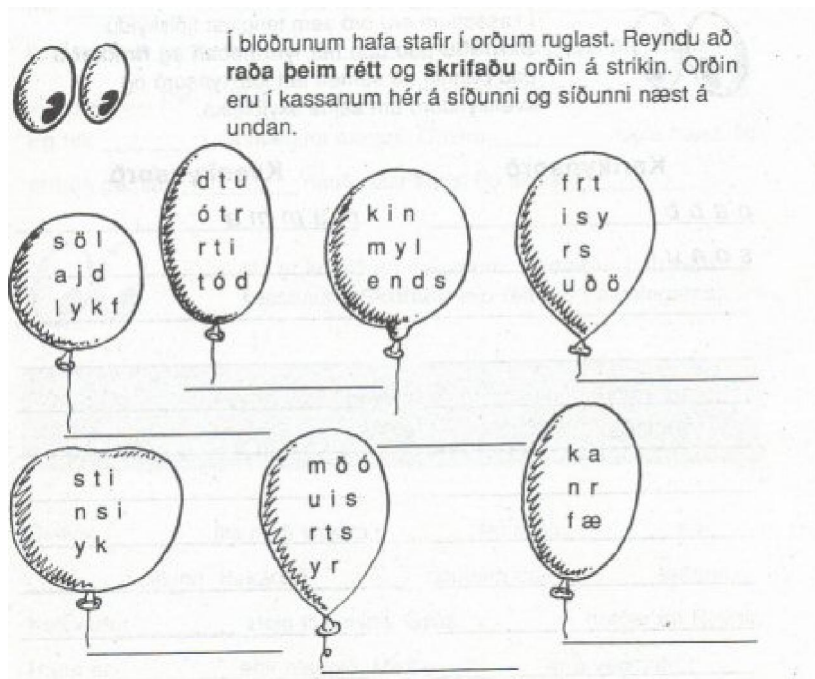
1) Detidligerevinnernemafaharderekonkurransedetiggerikkesalangtfor

or:

2) snart spise han kan og selv drikke

It is clear that spaces have to be placed somewhere, or that words have to be placed in the correct order. Without any problem, Norwegian children are capable to place the spaces or put the words in the correct order. But why such an exercise? What is the goal? What do they learn from it? Nothing, they knew already. They are quiet in the classroom for some time, that's all.

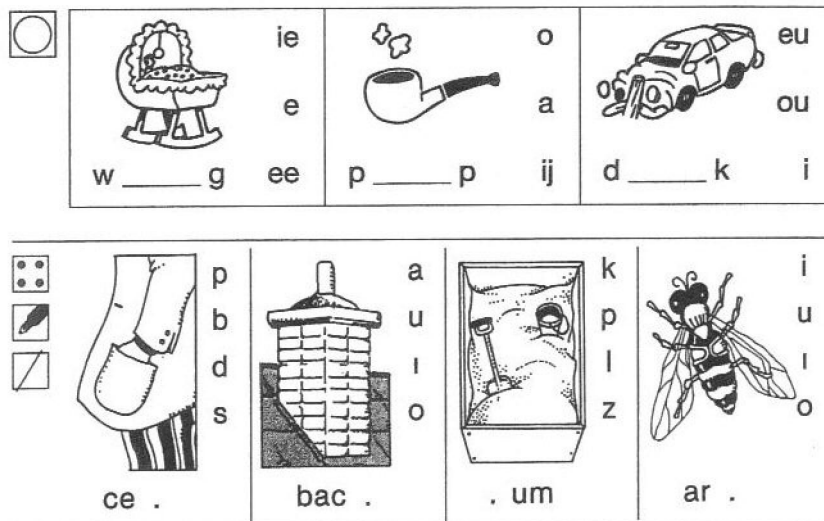
Finally, in order to do some of these exercises correctly, sometimes the children have to have native intuition, as in the masculine – feminine case of *minn* and *mín*. I think the following exercise is an example, too:



Especially for a morphological complex language as Icelandic, *focus on forms* exercises can be useful, but second language learning children first need input of meaningful contexts in which these word forms are used. This is the second reason that second language teaching differs from first language teaching: second language learners do not have native intuition, the curriculum has to provide them first the necessary, meaningful contexts in which these morphological forms are used.

Next to vocabulary and morphological forms, the various *sounds* in a language are a curriculum content that needs to be taught explicitly to second language learners, and *not* to native language learners. In many languages, the difference between the consonants p and b, for instance, does not result in a difference in meaning. In Arabic, for instance, whether you say *baba* or *papa*, there is no difference in meaning. It is subject to free variation. In Dutch, however, this difference between p and b leads to differences in meaning. *Papa* means 'daddy' and *baba* means 'shit'. Quite a difference. But, someone who is not aware of sound differences that lead to differences in meaning between b and p, that person can seldom *hear* that difference between p and b. So, he doesn't hear nor recognise the difference between Icelandic *bera* and *pera*. For many languages the same holds for differences between long and short vowels: as between i and ie: many Turkish learners of Icelandic do simply not *hear* nor recognise the difference between *minn* and *mín*.

In learning to read and write, a second language learner encounters the same hindrance. The curriculum materials take for granted that the children are aware of the sound differences that lead to differences in meaning. The children only have to learn the alphabetical principle: attach the right character to the corresponding sound. If native children make mistakes in the exercises, the correct diagnosis of a teacher will be that they do not yet master the correspondence between sound and character. But for second language learning children, this might be the wrong diagnosis. Maybe they do master the alphabetical principle, but do not hear the difference in sound. Or they make mistakes because they do not know the word. Take the following examples from a Dutch and a Turkish exercise :



For the first example, you have to know that a ‘cradle’ is in Dutch ‘wieg’, and not a ‘weeg’ or a ‘weg’. Not many immigrant children know a word like cradle, that belongs to the domain of the home environment. So, the teacher has to make sure that, first, the child knows the word. The same holds for the second row. I presume you all know the alphabetical principle very well, you know how to write down the p, b, d or s. Your problem is that you don’t know what a coat-pocket is in Turkish: *cep* or *ceb*. And maybe, you cannot hear the difference either.

So, here we have third reason that second language teaching differs from first language teaching: second language learners do not have native knowledge of all differences between sounds. Thus, in Kindergarten, at least before the children start learning to read and write, the curriculum has to offer to second language learners specific songs, rhymes, riddles and poems, to teach them explicitly to recognise, distinguish and pronounce the differences in sounds.

Apart from specific differences in learning contents for L1 and L2-learners, there are other reasons to organise separate lessons for second language learners. Related to differences in proficiency between first and second language children, is the degree of participation in classroom activities. Of course, a well trained teacher will differentiate between children, but most of the time all children will receive the same oral or written input, that for some is easy to follow, but for others too difficult. In particular low proficient learners participate less in the discussions. They take and receive less turns, and, by consequence, practise too little. Much of what is said they do not well understand because the children refer to home-related actions like hiking or religion or cooking and baking, about *kál*, *rofa* and *kartafla*, they know how garlic smells and tastes, but do not know the word *hvítlaukur*. Maybe they *understand*

quite well, but to tell their classmates about the wonderful family reunion last weekend, is another piece of cake, also in psychological sense: they know very well that their proficiency is limited. Second language learners have to practise these oral productive activities in smaller groups. The participation of the child, and the feedback, modelling and expansion of the teacher is in quantity and quality much better. Research shows that in separated groups of four or five children, each of the children receive ten to twenty times more individual feedback in the form of repetition, modelling or expansion of the teacher, as compared to classroom talks. See table 1.

Table 1. Mean number of utterances of teachers in 15 minutes, in response to a second language learner, in L2-classes and the regular class, respectively.

	approval	Expansion	repetition	correction	modelling
L2- classes	19.5	7.0	5.3	4.3	4.2
Regular class	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3

To summarize, there are differences in *second* as compared to *first* language teaching. Second language learning children need other and more contents, with respect to vocabulary: the number of words, and the kind of words they have to learn. And they need other contents with respect to sounds: second language learners do not have native knowledge of all differences between sounds, as native children do have. With respect to morphology and syntax: second language learners do not have native intuitions, so, the curriculum has to provide them first the necessary, meaningful contexts in which these morphological forms are used. In general, it would be much better for *all* children if language teaching was more directed to *meaning* and *acquisition* of the language, in stead of *forms* and *testing* only. Finally, some moments in time, separate second language teaching classes are necessary for second language learners, in order for them to practise the oral productive activities in smaller groups. In smaller groups the participation of the child, and the feedback, modelling and expansion of the teacher is in quantity and in quality much better. There they have a better chance to learn the language.

4. L2-learning and L2-teaching is every teachers' responsibility!

As I said in the beginning, research shows that completely segregated classes or schools for immigrant children lead to an extra negative effect on school results, due to fewer contacts with Dutch and Dutch speaking children, and due to lower expectations of teachers. On the other hand, there are differences in *second* as compared to *first* language teaching. Much of the content to be taught to second language learners, is irrelevant to native language learners. Differentiation in the classroom might be a solution, but the Dutch case shows that it often leads to nothing: the burden on the teachers' shoulders is too heavy. Take the examples above. Many L2-learners do not know the words in the exercises on learning to read or on morphological rules. If a teacher explains those specific words during the lesson, gives the meaning, perhaps writes down examples on the black board, too, it seems perfect. But it distracts from the course content in question, and the chance that the word will be repeated afterwards is small, so after all the child doesn't acquire the word at all. So the best organisational model seems to be that children follow second language lessons with a special teacher for some hours a week, in smaller groups of second language learners, next to main stream integrated lessons in the classroom, together with native children. In the first stages of acquisition more hours in the L2-classes, after some time fewer hours, depending on the child, his progress, and his age. The second language teacher can concentrate on vocabulary and the other L2-contents I discussed before. She or he can prepare together with the children science or other texts that are treated in the classroom afterwards with all children. Or afterwards, she can repeat texts that appeared to be too difficult for them in the classroom. Another advantage

of such an organisation is that she becomes a specialist: she can give the classroom teacher information on the progress and weaknesses of children, and provide tips and materials for differentiation.

Here is an important aspect of this organisation: a second language specialist in the school doesn't implicate that the classroom teacher can go on as before. Every teacher is responsible for the acquisition process of *all* children, second language learners included. That means that the classroom teacher is aware of the fact that they know fewer words, that in learning to read and write he has to check the child's word knowledge and auditory discrimination, that in discussions on family matters he does NOT give the floor to immigrant children. To finish my talk, I will give some simple but very effective tools.

In general, weak and disadvantaged children need more explicit instruction and explicit formulated goals than other, 'average' or 'above-average' children. Tell them what the goal is. Write the goal words next to the text in their text book. In the better language curriculum materials, this is done standard, as in the following example:

woordenschat **De tent**
zin in taal

de deken
de knijper
de knuffel
de koekenpan
het laken
de pollepel
de wekker

de ketel
de lucifers
het matje
de matras
de schort
de slaapzak
de zaklamp
de zeef

Woordenschatboekje A
eenheid 1

De tent
Boris en Mo willen in een tent wonen.
Wat hebben ze nodig?
Lees maar.
Mo: Boris, Boris, wakker worden.
Boris: Wie, wat, Mo?
Mo: Wakker worden Boris.
Er is storm om het huis.
Boris: Waar ben je, Mo?
Mo: In bed onder de dekens.
Ik zit onder de dekens.
Boris: Waarom roep je me?
Mo: Ik kan niet slapen.
Boris: Hoe komt dat?
Mo: De ramen kraken door de storm.
Boris: Kom bij mij in bed liggen.
Mo: Graag.
Boris: Lig je goed?
Mo: Ja.
Boris: Slaap lekker, Mo.

Before reading aloud in the classroom, let the children read for themselves, in silence, and ask the children to underscore (or write down) the words they think not to know. You can provide them the answers, or they can look them up in the dictionary. Let them write these words in their personal dictionary, on paper or on the computer. Let them take these lists to the second language teacher.

If you are reading aloud yourself a picture book, select beforehand the important words, and write these down on the blackboard or collect pictures and hang these on a clothes-line in the classroom as a reminder.

Very often, science texts in the higher grades are very difficult because of the many unknown words, so the weaker children cannot guess the correct meanings. Underline these words, and write down on the margin of the page, next to the line with that difficult word, a simpler synonym, as in the following example:

American democracy has usually been found wanting whenever the question of justice and equality for Americans of African descent has been raised.

*deficient
origin*

It is a simple action, you have to do this only once, and for many years the weaker children have much less difficulties to understand the meaning of the text. And every time you see those notes again in your book, you will remember “Oh yeah, that’s true, I am responsible for the acquisition process of those second language learning kids, too!”