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Difficulties in learning a second language and ways to overcome in pupils with dyslexia

Maia Shashviashvili

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State
University, Georgia

Email: maia.shashviashvili@tsu.ge

Manana Melikishvili

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State
University, Georgia

Email: manana.melikishvil@tsu.ge

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Maia Shashviashvili, Manana Melikishvili

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia

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ABSTRACT

Ability to read in an L2 is complicated because it involves not only the ability to read but also the knowledge of and the ability to use the second or foreign language” (Rolf & Glenn, 2016.). This difficulty is even more acute in our country, since there is no high awareness of dyslexia, and so far reading difficulties can be considered as laziness on the part of teachers or parents. Taking everything into account, it can be assumed that students with dyslexia remain in conditions of even less support in learning a second language - on the one hand, their difficulty is not assessed appropriately, and on the other hand, they are not properly supported in the learning process.

Reading is a dynamic and complex process. In the process of reading, an adult is aware only of the content of what has been read, and the psychophysiological operations preceding it are carried out unconsciously, by themselves, automatically. (Learner, 1997). Reading skills develop with age and experience. At the very beginning we learn to read, and only afterwards we learn by reading. Therefore, reading is of great importance for the development of a person, and the lack of this skill automatically causes difficulties on the path of personal success. Delay, impairment in reading are synonymous and, according to ICD-10 (International Classification of Diseases) - F81.0 are identified as a specific reading disorder (dyslexia). (Gagoshidze, 2007)

Dyslexia, regardless of the language we learn to read, is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge (IDA, 2002). Research shows that these difficulties vary by age, language characteristics, and learning strategies, but they still apply to second language learning. Moreover, it creates even greater difficulties.

The goal of the article is to explore the main difficulties of learning a second language for students with dyslexia and ways to overcome them. In general,

students with dyslexia, compared to typically developing students, read and write less when acquiring an L2, and their learning process is statistically slower in acquiring vocabulary and developing spelling. (Helland & Morken, 2016). Learning a second language can be especially challenging for primary school students with dyslexia, as they also have difficulty with phonological analysis, reading, and writing while learning their first language. On this issue a number of studies have been carried out abroad, although we do not have a similar study in Georgia on the difficulties of learning Georgian as a second language. Accordingly, the information given in the article is based only on international research.

As part of the desk research, the processing of secondary information allowed us to familiarize ourselves with the research and experience of international organizations. I analyzed them and presented the main results of the research in an article on the problems of mastering reading in a second language and strategies to overcome them.

Teachers can help students with dyslexia reach their language potential with the evidence-based strategies outlined in this article. It introduces the benefits of multilingualism and gives them the opportunity for future development. Creating such a positive and inclusive learning environment is essential for students with dyslexia to feel comfortable with the learning process, which in turn will increase self-confidence and motivation to learn.

Recognizing these challenges is critical for teachers and education policymakers to help students with reading difficulties to learn Georgian language as a second language.

Keywords: *reading, dyslexia, difficulties in learning-teaching a second language, strategies for learning a second language.*

Learning to read at school is carried out as a result of purposeful learning. This process involves the development of the ability to recognize letters characteristic of the language (graphemes), associate them with phonemes, combine phonemes into sounds, and smooth out sounds into words. Finally, in order to consider the process of reading a word complete, it is necessary to recognize the word and understand its meaning/content. When reading a sentence, it is necessary to keep the words read in memory and access the contents of the entire sentence. If at an early stage of training the emphasis is on teaching reading and the goal is to develop reading comprehension skills, then at a later stage reading skills are used for teaching and the emphasis is already on reading comprehension. If there is a problem in this process, it can be identified as dyslexia.

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language. (IDA-International Development Association). Characteristic features of dyslexia are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed (BDA-British Dyslexia Association). Phonology is the study of sound structure of spoken words. Phonological awareness includes recognizing rhymes, counting words in a sentence, and clapping to separate syllables in words. Phonemic awareness means the learner knows that words are divided into sounds called phonemes. A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a given language that can be recognized as being distinct from other sounds in the language (IDA-International Development Association). For example, the word "GZA" has three phonemes (G-Z-A).

Neither identification of students with learning disabilities is not carried out systematically, nor preventive measures are not taken for the early detection of dyslexia in our country, therefore, students with this difficulty are not included in special education as necessary and finally, in the context of cultural diversity and multilingual education, appropriate conditions and learning strategies for students with dyslexia are not created. The latter has a significant impact on the quality of life of people with these problems, both in childhood, as well as in adolescence and adulthood. The problem is that, unfortunately, we (in Georgia) do not have statistical data on the number of students with dyslexia, however, if we are guided by the examples of developed countries, the percentage can be pretty high. According to the „Dyslexia-Reading-Well“ (Dyslexia-Reading-Well.com.), about 15% of people are dyslexic. Among them, over 30 million adults suffer from it in the US, about 6 million in the UK and 3 million in Canada. Most people even do not know that they have dyslexia.

It must be mentioned, that in our country, the assessment of dyslexia in bilingual children is practically not carried out due to the complexity of this process itself, although this does not solve the problem - students with dyslexia, compared to typically developing students, read and write less when acquiring an L2, and their learning process is statistically slower in acquiring vocabulary and developing spelling. (Helland & Morken, 2016). Every dyslexic has varied strengths and weaknesses but it can generally be said that dyslexics have problems with learning a FL because of two main reasons: the nature of the disability and the manner in which FL are commonly taught in schools (Shnaider. 2009; Knudsen, 2012).

Unfortunately it has been found that most foreign language teachers receive very little education within the field of special needs. They are, in other words, not equipped to help their dyslexic students since the methods they commonly use will often hinder the dyslexic child more than help them succeed within FL learning (Schneider 2009, 298). On the example of our country, this is added by the lack of tools that would allow the teacher to identify the characteristics of dyslexia at an early stage, after which early and correct planning of intervention should follow. Thus, both the teacher and the student require help.

This is the purpose of this article. In the framework of the desk research, based on the materials of the resources created on the basis of the processing of secondary literature, to show us the difficulties of teaching a student with dyslexia when learning a second language and introduce strategies for overcoming them. Unfortunately, we do not have such studies in Georgia, therefore, in the framework of the study, we used examples from developed countries.

For adequate support of students with dyslexia, it is necessary to take into account the peculiarities of the second language. It is important to note that in terms of the connection between pronunciation and spelling, one can distinguish between transparent orthographic languages, which unambiguously and carefully link phonemes and graphemes, and orthographic languages, which are characterized by an even more complex relationship between oral and written forms. Italian, Spanish, German and Greek belong to the first category, while French and English belong to the second group.

Children living in English-speaking countries, in the process of learning their native language, experience difficulties in mastering the correspondence between letters and sounds when deciphering / decoding individual words. On the contrary, students learn to read more easily when learning languages, where the correspondence between speech sounds and their graphic representation is much simpler. (IDA- International Dyslexia Association).

The issue of phonological awareness may not be a problem for those who speak a transparent language such as Spanish while it (issue of phonological awareness) is one of the most common problems in less transparent languages such as English. Dyslexics speaking these languages may, however, still have word retrieval difficulties, motor-skills problems or difficulties with their short-term memory. (Lina Knudsen, 2012).

The Georgian alphabet consists of 33 letters, which correspond to 33 sounds and no more, as, for example, in English or German languages. We read aloud what we see on paper. The

Georgian language does not have such a combination of letters that form other phonemes, so it can be said that learning to read in Georgian is easier than in less transparent languages.

For this reason and in general, often the dyslexic student struggles with anxiety and demotivation that should not be seen as causes of dyslexia but rather are linked to school failure; an inadequate teaching can have negative consequences on the emotional, mnemonic and linguistic aspect (Cappelli, 2021).

Following are some aspects of the FL that have been found to be particularly challenging for the dyslexic student:

- the learning of phonemes, graphemes and digraphs that are different from their native language and understanding the connection between them
- comprehending a new syntax (learning past/present/future tense, ordering of words in a sentence etc.)
- remembering vocabulary words and being able to quickly retrieve them from their long term memory
- spelling new words that may not follow the rules they have learned in their native language
- being able to hear the differences between similar phonemes
- intonation and use of accents that vary from their native language
- comprehension of a written text since most effort is placed on reading each individual word (Knudsen, 2012).

With good readers, the word recognition process proceeds effortlessly and rapidly. This finding means vocabulary knowledge is essential for good reading comprehension. The students who have developed literacy in their L1 will tend to make stronger progress in acquiring literacy in their second language (Brevik, Olsen & Hellekjær, 2016).

Dyslexia also causes socio-affective problems, such as emotional insecurity and low self-confidence that could lead to anxiety, generally when there are challenging tests and tasks. It is very important for dyslexic student to reach serenity in learning new things, making the studying of the foreign language a pleasant and fun activity and not as a duty related to school success. The student must learn methods, techniques and approaches suited to his/her difficulties. Anxiety can be either of a character type, which is independent from the different situations, or a situational type, in other words linked to specific situations. According to some

researchers, however, there is also a sort of “linguistic anxiety” which has a situational nature and it occurs especially in some cases of linguistic task such as:

- reading out in front of the whole class;
- reading out and simultaneously translating and answering questions;
- learning by heart and repeating in front of an audience;
- memorizing lists of words;
- answer questions quickly;
- improvising dialogues on the spot.

This state of anxiety can also cause a loss of communication and distraction tendencies as well as deep psychological damage; in addition, dyslexic learners tend to have a very high level of linguistic anxiety in all their activities. As a result, it is possible to say that this state of anxiety represents the consequence of a school failure for a dyslexic student, whereas, in the case of a student without any disorder, it is the anxiety that causes school failure.

When a non-dyslexic student learns a new language, he/she starts by studying the morpho-syntactic rules, such as word formation, tenses and verbal modes, etc. For a dyslexic student, the process takes place in a different way. Verbal language is often combined with gestures and expressions that helps to understand the language

Text comprehension is a cognitive process that everyone has to carry out to understand a concept. Therefore, dyslexia does not prevent the student from reaching a good level of understanding, but can make the path more difficult by testing his/her patience and willing. In relation to levels of understanding, the dyslexic student and the student who does not have this disorder should not be put on the same level. Both of them start from a global level, pass through every other level and, finally, arrive in a deep understanding one. The only difference is that one of the two will take longer to reach the last level; it is only a matter of time and not of skills. In accordance with the theories introduced by the functional and pragmatic linguistics, language skills develop in communicative situations and are used for precise pragmatic purposes, acquiring a socio-pragmatic character. We can say that a person is fully competent in a language only when he/she is able to integrate verbal language with the use of body and objects and has proper behavior. In case of dyslexia, we could use this indicator to determine language skills.

As already mentioned, students with dyslexia experience difficulties mainly in phonological consciousness (synthesis and analysis). This prevents them from associating sounds with the corresponding letters, which in turn makes it difficult to recognize words.

Finally, the main obstacle appears in reading comprehension, which causes the student's frustration. This also applies to written tasks, as well as memorization and restoration of lexical units and grammatical rules. They are characterized by a slow processing speed, which is also a difficult task, especially where a quick response is essential.

It turns out that the student evaluates the input of the teacher according to the following criteria:

- novelty: differences between the teacher's input and its own expectations;
- intrinsic pleasure: evaluation of the sense of pleasure or displeasure caused by the input, a positive evaluation helps the subject to get closer to the language to learn;
- relevance in comparison to its needs and goals: input assessment based on the obstacles or facilitation related to their social, cultural or training goals;
- psycho-social security: determine the situation according whether it can strengthen its social image or whether it harms it.

If it turns out that aspects of language learning are in harmony with the student's socio-emotional state, then learning a second language proceeds faster (Cappelli. 2021).

In this article, I'll take a closer look at some of the common methods used to help dyslexic students overcome their second language learning difficulties.

Let's start with the fact that in the process of literacy development in students with dyslexia and typical development (both when learning the native language (L1) and when learning the second language (L2)), during the study of neurocognitive development, it was revealed that early identification and training are essential in both cases. This helps the student avoid academic failure. In this research, it was revealed that visual-spatial memory and RAN could be suitable early markers in transparent orthographies like Norwegian. Since the Georgian language can also belong to the group of transparent languages, this recommendation can also be taken into account for us in the process of learning to read (Helland, & Morken, 2016).

Some scientist believe that dyslexic student work best by combining language studies with physical movement, music or art. Others feel that by using a "whole language" approach with dyslexic students works better, meanwhile, they are not given the needed instruction explaining the phonetics and grammar. Since, there are studies on language acquisition where it is believed that, "an ambitious grammar based syllabus may actually impede acquisition" (Arries, 1999). However, there are opposing views as well.

One of the best approaches among the strategies is multi-sensory learning (MSL). (Knudsen, 2012). The MSL approach is based on the early work of Orton who believed that the way to aid dyslexic students with their language processing difficulties is by, “systematic[ally] building up of associations between speech sounds and their representations in writing” and a teacher must find the, “smallest possible unit the child can handle and being a gradual reconstruction of the sequences or series of the smallest units”.

It was, however, not until Orton`s assistant Gillingham collaborated with Stillman to create the Gillingham Stillman Approach which is the basis for most MSL approaches. MSL is one of the most well-known methods used when working with dyslexic students in their native language but has also been shown affective when teaching dyslexic students a FL. MSL is based on the idea that dyslexic students have a greater chance of accessing the curriculum when they are taught using all senses simultaneously. This allows for the student to process the information using his/her strongest senses and at the same time strengthening his/her weaknesses.

Specific MSL strategies may include: breaking words into distinct graphemes that the students will first see, then write and say simultaneously, feeling where the tongue is placed in the mouth in order to pronounce a particular phoneme, break words into syllables by tapping their pencil for each, color coding each vowel in order to see the distinction, color coding conjugation changes, using flash cards to practice sound letter relationships, placing vocabulary words into a context by including pictures and images, using metacognitive teaching by explaining similarities and differences between native and foreign languages, acting out vocabulary and commonly used phrases using movement, listening to audio CDs during reading assignments.

Although the MSL approach has been found beneficial for many dyslexic students it is important to point out that students may need added support.

Jonathan F. Arries outlines in his article “Learning Disabilities and Foreign Languages: some of these strategies can be, for example: They may need, for example, to be given more explicit instructions especially when it is given to them in written form, be it in their native language or the FL. Longer assignments may need to be divided up into smaller steps in order to help the student organize his/her time as well as to plan efficiently. Reading assignments should be given a day before the other students so that the dyslexic student will have adequate time to read and comprehend the text. This is especially important if the student must read aloud

in class since the dyslexic students will need more time to prepare for what may be a very difficult task for him/her.

Test and quizzes should have a similar structure throughout the year since this lessens the dyslexic student's anxiety since they know what to expect. Knowing what to expect on a test will also make it easier to study. The tests should include examples for the students so that they can see how they are supposed to answer the questions. This may seem like one is giving the student the answers but this can be of great help to the dyslexic student who may have difficulties understanding the instructions. It might also be a good idea to give the dyslexic student more time on a test since it usually takes them a longer time to process the information. Tests can also be taken separate from the class as to not be distracted by others as well as to lessen the anxiety they may feel (Arries , 1999.).

Finally, recommendations could be as follows: introduce teaching methods that include visual aids, auditory exercises, and kinesthetic activities. Instructions should be structured and consistent. Divide your language lessons into small steps. Repeat often and practice regularly, and afterwards, encourage their participation. Use assistive technologies, readers, and fonts that are suitable for people with dyslexia.

Create individual learning plans that allow students to progress at their own pace based on their strengths and learning style. A positive and inclusive learning environment should be created in the classroom, where the student with dyslexia will feel comfortable and will be able to ask questions, where their motivation and self-confidence will increase. Such a holistic approach will enable the student to gain and experience the benefits of multilingualism.

In conclusion, we can say that students with dyslexia face different difficulties in learning a second language, and it is important for teachers to take this into account. In addition, with these valuable insights in mind, educators, educational policy makers and researchers can develop effective interventions and create an inclusive second language learning environment that meets the specific needs of students with dyslexia.

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