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Language Structure and Use

Ah, Language!

Verbal language is unique to human beings. It allows us to express our deepest feelings, our broadest concepts, our highest ideals. It takes us beyond the here and now, and even beyond the possible—by means of language, we might join the attackers at the siege of Troy or journey through the looking glass with Alice. Language can connect humans as children listen to stories before the fireplace on a cold winter night; or it can, together with culture, divide two peoples into bitter sectarian warfare. Language communicates the heights of joy and the depths of despair.

Language equalizes—preschoolers as well as professors can be considered native speakers of their first language. Alternatively, language reflects inequality—dialect distinctions often demarcate social class. Almost all aspects of a person's life are touched by language. Although language is universal, each language has evolved to meet the experiences, needs, and desires of a particular community.

Understanding language structure and use provides teachers with essential tools to help students learn. All languages share universal features, such as the ability to label objects and to describe actions and events. All languages are divided into various subsystems (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics). What is most amazing is that language users learn all these subsystems of their first language without realizing it—native speakers are not necessarily able to explain a sound pattern, a grammatical point, or the use of idiomatic expression. To them, that is "just the way it is." Language, then, is a system that works even without conscious awareness, an inborn competence that unfolds and matures when given adequate stimulation from others.

This chapter explores the various aspects of language and provides suggestions to help English-language development (ELD) teachers identify student needs and provide appropriate instruction. Knowledge about language structure and use also helps teachers recognize the richness and variety of students' skills in both first and second languages. Linguistic knowledge—not only about English but also

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about the possibilities inherent in other languages—helps teachers view the language world of the English learner with insight and empathy.

Language Universals

At last count, 6,912 languages are spoken in today's world (SIL International, 2000). Although not all of these have been intensely studied, linguists have carried out enough investigations over the centuries to posit some universal facts about language.

All Languages Have Structure

All human languages use a finite set of sounds (or gestures) that are combined to form meaningful elements or words, which themselves form an infinite set of possible sentences. Every spoken language also divides these discrete sound segments—phonemes—such as /t/, /m/, or /e/ into a class of vowels and a class of consonants.

All grammars contain rules for the formation of words, and sentences of definite types, kind, and similar grammatical categories (for example, nouns and verbs) are found in all languages. Every language has a way of referring to past time; the ability to negate; and ways to form questions, issue commands, and so on.

Although human languages are specific to their places of use and origin (for example, languages of seafaring cultures have more specific words for oceanic phenomena than do languages of desert tribes), semantic universals, such as "male" or "female," are found in every language in the world. No matter how exotic a language may appear to a native English speaker, all human languages in fact share the same features, most of which are lacking in the language of apes, dolphins, or birds.

Language Is Dynamic

Languages change over time. Pronunciation (phonology) changes—across 400 years, for example, Shakespeare's plays often feature scene-ending couplets whose words may have rhymed in his day but do not in modern translations. We recognize that pronunciation in English has altered over time, because the spelling of some words is archaic: We no longer pronounce the /k/ in *knight* or the /w/ in *write.* Semantics change over time, and words disappear, such as the archaic English words *bilbo, costermonger, fluey,* and *shew.* Words expand their meanings, as with *geek* and *mouse.* New words appear, such as *nannycam* and *freeware.* Some languages change more than others: Written Icelandic has changed relatively little since the thirteenth century, whereas writers for *Wired,* a New York–based technology magazine, coin an average of thirty new words in English with each month's edition.

Teachers who respect the dynamic nature of language can take delight in learners' approximations of English. When Chinese speakers fail to produce past-tense markers (*Yesterday I download a file),[1] they may be speaking the English of the future, when the past-

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[1]An asterisk (*) before a word or a sentence indicates that it is phonetically or grammatically incorrect.

tense morpheme (-*d, -ed, -t*) may be dropped, just as the second-person inflection (-*est,* as in "thou goest") has disappeared.

Language Is Complex

Without question, using language is one of the most complex of human activities, providing the human race with a psychological tool unmatched in power and flexibility. It is normal for humans no matter their native language to be able to communicate a wide range of concepts, both concrete and abstract. All languages are equally complex, capable of expressing a wide range of ideas and expandable to include new words for new concepts. Motu, one of 715 indigenous languages in Papua New Guinea, has a complex vocabulary for indigenous plants, whereas Icelandic has an elaborate system of kinship names that allows people to trace their ancestry for hundreds of years.

Language is arbitrary, meaning that we cannot guess the meaning of a word from its sound (except for a few words such as *buzz*)—there is no inherent reason to link the sound and meaning of a word. Because the meaning–symbol connection is arbitrary, language gains an abstracting power removed from direct ties to the here and now of objects or events. Moreover, language is open-ended—an infinite set of sentences can be produced in any language.

Even though language is complicated, every healthy child—regardless of racial, geographical, social, or economic heritage—is capable of learning any language to which he or she is exposed. By the age of five, most children have learned how to make well-formed sentences in their native language and are thus considered native speakers. Although some students may be shy or their language skills delayed in development, it is incorrect to say that a young child "doesn't have language."

─────────────── **DID YOU KNOW?** ───────────────

THE KOREAN LANGUAGE

Korean is the only language to have a true alphabet completely native to East Asia, with each character corresponding to a phoneme (10 vowels, 19 consonants, and vowel-like consonants called *glides*). Korean has no articles, word gender, or declensions. There are no adjectives; instead, verbs can be used as adjectives. There are also extensive variations of verb forms used to indicate tenses and honorifics.

Adapted from Herrera, Pérez, & Escamilla, 2010, pp. 94–95.

Phonology: The Sound Patterns of Language

Phonology is the study of the sound system of a language. Phonetics is the science of the production, reception, analysis, transcription, and classification of speech sounds, and also, "the relation of speech sounds to the total language process" (Heilman, 2002, p. 4).

─────────── **DID YOU KNOW** ───────────

IS IT ENGLISH?

These activities illustrate the characteristics of the English sound system:

- Which of the following are possible English words and which would be impossible because they do not fit the English sound system? *stgmonic, chetelogo, ndele, tassitic*

  (Answer: not *stgmonic* and *ndele*—they contain non-English-like consonant clusters)

- Products are often brought to the market with names that use phonemic enhancement: The gasoline company and product Esso was renamed Exxon in 1973 in part because test marketing showed that people responded more strongly to the look and sound of the double *X* than the double *S.*

Phonemes

Phonemes are the individual sounds in a language, the distinctive units that "make a difference" when sounds distinguish words. For example, in English the initial consonant sounds /p/ and /b/ are the only difference between the words *park* and *bark* and thus are phonemes. The number of phonemes in a language ranges between twenty and fifty; English has a high average count, from thirty-four to forty-five, depending on the dialect. Hawai'ian, in contrast, has one of the lowest phoneme counts, with eight consonants and ten vowels. Table 1.1 lists the phonemes in English (using the International Phonetic Alphabet) with example words.

If phonemic variations do not distinguish words, they are considered variations of one phoneme rather than completely different phonemes. For example, in English—at least in the Pittsburgh dialect—the name "Lynne" is pronounced with the tongue to the back of the roof of the mouth, whereas when pronouncing the name "Linda" the tongue is tipped farther forward. However, both are acceptable versions of the /l/ phoneme because this difference alone does not distinguish two word meanings, as does the difference between *pan* and *ban*.

──────────**DID YOU KNOW?**──────────

ENGLISH PHONEMES NOT FOUND IN OTHER LANGUAGES

Some phonemes in English do not exist in certain other languages. English learners from these backgrounds might experience difficulty in hearing and producing these sounds.

Not in Japanese: /dg/ /f/ /i/ /th/ /oo/ /v/ /schwa/

Not in Spanish: /dg/ /j/ /sh/ /th/ /z/

English learners' aural comprehension and pronunciation may be affected when English words contain phonemes that are unfamiliar to them. The schwa (the sound of the "e" in the phrase "the hat") is often difficult for Spanish speakers because Spanish vowels rarely alter their sound quality in unaccented syllables. A digraph—a pair of letters used to write one sound or a combination of sounds that does not correspond to the written letters combined—may confuse the English learner who attempts to separate the digraph into two separate phonemes. The concept of diphthong (defined as a vowel blend with two adjacent vowels, each of which is sounded) may transfer in principle from another

TABLE 1.1 Phonemes in English: Vowels and Consonants

Vowels	Examples	Consonants	Examples
/A/	w**a**ke, p**ai**n, tr**ay**	/b/	**b**et, ha**b**it, ru**b**
/a/	p**a**t	/k/	**c**ake, na**k**ed, la**ck**
/E/	b**e**, b**ea**t, fl**ee**	/d/	**d**o, sa**dd**er, we**d**
/e/	s**e**t	/f/	**f**ar, o**ff**er, hal**f**, **ph**ony
/I/	**I**, t**ie**, b**y**	/g/	**g**one, di**gg**er, be**g**
/i/	**i**f, t**i**n	/h/	**h**ead, be**h**old
/O/	n**o**, m**oa**t, st**o**ne	/j/	**j**am, tra**g**ic, sta**ge**, le**dge**
/o/	p**o**t	/l/	**l**ight, wi**ll**ow, we**ll**
/U/	f**u**tile, T**ue**sday	/m/	**m**ine, di**m**
/u/	c**u**p, d**u**mb	/n/	**n**one, fu**n**, Ly**nn**e
/OO/	t**o**, r**ue**, ch**ew**, b**oo**t	/p/	**p**ush, to**pp**le, ste**p**
/oo/	s**oo**t, p**u**t	/kw/	**qu**iet
/oi/	t**oi**l, b**oy**	/r/	**r**ope, La**rr**y, ba**r**
/ou/	p**ou**t, h**ow**, m**ou**se	/s/	**s**ip, hu**s**tle, mi**ss**
/aw/	s**aw**, c**a**ll, c**au**ght	/t/	**t**ip, af**t**er, ba**t**
/ar/	f**ar**	/v/	**v**et, ho**v**er, ga**v**e
		/w/	**w**ag, a**w**ay
		/ks/ or /gz/	so**x**, e**x**it
		/y/	**y**our, **y**et
		/z/	**z**ip, noi**s**y, bu**zz**
		/sh/	**sh**out, lo**ti**on, wa**sh**
		/hw/	**wh**at
		/ch/	**ch**op, pit**ch**
		/th/	**th**ing, sou**th**side, nor**th**
		/th/ or ∂	**th**at, mo**th**er, soo**the**
		/ng/	wi**ng**, runni**ng**
		/zh/	**g**enre, colli**si**on, plea**s**ure

language, although the diphthongs may differ from language to language. Mandarin has diphthongs (*shyueh*), as does Spanish (*hay*).

Phonemic sequences are the permissible ways in which phonemes can be combined in a language. Languages also have permissible places for these sequences: initial (at the beginning of a word), medial (between initial and final position), and final (at the end of a word), or in a combination of these positions. In English, /spr/ as in *spring,* /nd/ as in *handle,* and /kt/ as in *talked* are permissible phonemic sequences, but neither /nd/ nor /kt/ can be used initially (**ndaft* is not permissible). English allows /sp/ in all three positions—*speak, respect, grasp*—but

restricts /pt/ to only one—*apt* (the word *optic* splits the phonemes into two syllables; the word *pterodactyl* has a silent *p*).

Phonemes can be described in terms of their characteristic point of articulation (tip, front, or back of the tongue), the manner of articulation (the way the airstream is obstructed), and whether the vocal cords vibrate or not (voiced versus voiceless sounds). Not all languages distinguish between voiced and voiceless sounds. Arabic speakers may say "barking lot" instead of "parking lot" because to them /p/ and /b/ are not distinguishable.

Phonemic Awareness

As children learn language, they acquire phonological awareness in the process of separating the oral sound stream they encounter into syllables and words. Literacy development builds on this ability, helping young readers connect sounds to written symbols (Burns, Griffin, & Snow, 1999). *Phonemic awareness* is the ability to use the sound–symbol connection to separate sentences into words and words into syllables in order to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual phonemes within spoken words (Block & Israel, 2005). This is not an easy task, with ten to twenty phonemes articulated per second in normal speech. Phonemic awareness tasks help students hear and isolate individual phonemes. This is the basis of phonics instruction (see Chapter 7).

Stress

Besides phonemes, characteristics of language sounds include stress, pitch/tone, and intonation. Stress, the amount of volume a speaker gives to a particular sound, operates at two levels: word and sentence. Stress is a property of syllables—stressed syllables are longer and louder than unstressed syllables. Within words, specific syllables are stressed. In some languages, stress is predictable; in Czech, stress is usually on the first syllable of a word; in French, on the last syllable of a phrase. Stress is difficult to learn in English because there are "no consistent rules" (Dale & Poms, 2005, p. 84). Incorrect stress can alter the meanings of words. In the following examples, the stressed syllable is indicated by the accent mark ´:

désert	noun, "dry region"
dessért	noun, "sweet foods after the main meal"
ínvalid	noun, as in "person with long-term, debilitating illness"
inválid	adjective, as in "null, void" (Dale & Poms, 2005, p. 84)

Stress can further be used at the sentence level to vary emphasis. For example, the following sentences all carry different emphases:

Kimberly walked home. (It was Kimberly who walked home.)

Kimberly *walked* home. (She walked; she did not ride.)

She walked *home*. (She walked home, not to Grandma's house.)

In some cases, the wrong stress on a word completely undermines comprehension.

Students who learn a second language sometimes have difficulty altering the sounds of words in the context of whole sentences. Thus, teachers are better served by teaching words in context rather than in lists.

Classroom Glimpse

A MISPLACED WORD STRESS

Rashid sat down, shoulders slumped. "I'm beginning to get discouraged. People don't understand my speaking."

"Give me an example," I suggested.

Rashid continued, "At lunch my friend was eating something mashed. I said 'That looks like potty toe.' She gave me a strange look."

"Potty toe?" I asked. "What in the world do you mean? You'd better write down the word." (He wrote the word.)

"Oh!" I exclaimed, looking at the paper. "Potato!"

Pitch and Rhythm

Another sound quality is important in oral speech. Pitch at the word or sentence level is a phonological component of language that plays a key role in determining meaning. "Eva is going," as a statement, is said with a rise on the syllable "go," followed by "-ing" with a falling pitch; but said as a question, the pitch rises at the end. *Tone languages* use the pitch of individual syllables to contrast meanings (examples are Thai, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Zulu, Apache, Navajo, and Kiowa).

Pitch interacts with word stress to produce prosody, the underlying rhythm of the language. The way an individual word fits into a sentence may change the stress. For example, in the sentence "He's my uncle—Uncle Bob," the first use of "uncle" is heavily stressed on the first syllable because the syllable is placed in the first clause at the climax of the prosodic contour, just before the final pitch drop. During the second "uncle," neither syllable is stressed, because the name "Bob" carries the emphasis, hence the stress.

Because English words are pronounced with different stress depending on their locations in sentences, in contrast to Spanish, in which the vowels are more apt to maintain their sound values irrespective of placement, Spanish speakers may have difficulty achieving the prosody of the native speaker of English.

Typical problems in oral speech include the tendency to pronounce all words with equal emphasis, avoiding contractions (thus sounding stilted), and pausing incorrectly between words. To achieve proper prosody, words in phrases are blended together and functional words are reduced in emphasis ("How are you" sounds like "Howaru?"), and sounds are linked across words, so that "We've eaten" sounds like "We veaten." Smooth prosody is a combination of phrasing and pausing: "Please//do your chores//before you go out."

Intonation Patterns

The use of pitch to modify sentence meaning is called *intonation.* Each language has a distinctive sound flow across the sentence. The English pattern is characterized by accented and unaccented syllables, the same patterns found in English poetry. The *iamb* is a beat with one

unaccented syllable followed by an accented one, as in the phrase "too late to go." An *anapest* is a beat with two unaccented syllables followed by an accented one: "in the heat of the night." Most sentences in English combine accented and unaccented syllables in an undulating rhythm until just before the end of the sentence, at which time the pitch rises and then drops briefly.

In contrast, Cantonese, as a tonal language, has intonation variation that distinguishes words by tone, but an entire sentence does not have a rise-and-fall curve. Because English, for example, makes use of a questioning intonation to soften the demanding nature of a request ("Could you sit down over there?"), a Cantonese speaker may sound impolite to English ears ("Could! You! Go! Sit! Down! Over! There!"). Intonation matters a great deal when language fulfills social functions.

Contrastive analysis—paying careful attention to phonemic differences between languages and then spending more time teaching those phonemes that differ—has been found to be relatively nonproductive as a teaching methodology. There is little evidence that learners will find general phonemic differences between languages to be difficult. *Error analysis,* however, can guide teachers; making careful note of a learner's difficulties can provide evidence about the need for specific interventions. Empirical teaching—teaching guided by data—helps to focus phonological training directly on the learner's difficulties. Guidelines for teaching pronunciation are featured in Chapter 6.

Morphology: The Words of Language

Morphology is the study of the meaning units in a language. In some cases in English, individual words constitute these basic meaning units (e.g., *chase*). However, many words can be broken down into smaller segments—morphemes—that still retain meaning.

Morphemes

Morphemes, small units that cannot be further subdivided, are the basic building blocks of meaning. *Fundamentalists* is an English word composed of five morphemes: *funda* + *ment* + *al* + *ist* + *s* (root + noun-forming suffix + adjective-forming suffix + noun-forming suffix + plural marker). Morphemes can be represented by a single sound, such as /a/ (a morpheme with two meanings—a stand-alone, or free, morpheme meaning an indefinite article ["a girl"] or a bound morpheme meaning "without," as in *amoral* or *asexual*). Morphemes can be a single syllable, such as the noun-forming suffix -*ment* in *amendment,* or two or more syllables, such as in *lion* or *parsley.* Two different morphemes may have the same sound, such as the -*er* in danc*er* ("one who dances") and the -*er* in fanci*er* (the comparative form of *fancy*). A morpheme may also have alternate phonetic forms: The regular plural -*s* can be pronounced either /z/ (*bags*), /s/ (*cats*), or /iz/ (*bushes*).

Morphemes are of different types and serve different purposes. Free morphemes can stand alone (*envelope, the, through*), whereas bound morphemes occur only in conjunction with others (-*ing, dis-, -ceive),* either as *affixes* or as *bound roots.* Affixes at the beginnings of words are *prefixes* (*un-* in the word *unafraid*); those added at the ends are *suffixes* (-*able* in the word *believable*); and *infixes* are morphemes inserted between other morphemes (-*s-* in *mothers-in-law*).

Part of the power and flexibility of English is the ease with which longer English words are formed by adding prefixes and suffixes to root words (*cycle, cyclist; fix, fixation*). The predictability of meaning carried by standard affixes can make it easier for students to learn to infer words from context rather than relying on rote memorization.

Best Practice   MORPHEMES

To generate interest in science concepts, at the beginning of each general science unit Mrs. Silvestri selected several roots from a general list (*astro, bio, geo, hydr, luna, photo, phys, terr*). She then asked students to work in pairs to search their texts for words with those roots from the relevant chapter in the science text. Next she handed out a list of prefixes and affixes and asked each pair to generate five to ten new words, including definitions. Students wrote each new word and its definition on two index cards and played a memory matching game with their card decks.

Word-Formation Processes

English has historically been a language that has borrowed extensively from other languages or coined new words from extant terms. Studying how new words are formed—largely from existing morphemes—helps English learners understand morphemes. Table 1.2 displays new words that have been published in *Wired* magazine in recent years. Each is derived in part from an existing word in English.

TABLE 1.2   Neologisms (New Words and Phrases) from *Wired* Magazine (April 2006)

New Word or Phrase	Derivation	Meaning
@homer	@ = at + home + er	one who stays at home
funkatizing	funk + atize + ing	making something funky
geekonomics	geek + economics	finance for computer aficionados
geek-year	geek + year	like "dog year"; different timescale for nerds
middleware	middle + ware as in hardware ↔ software	hybrid form of hardware-software
office-chairy	office chair + like	adj. form of office chair
paraspam	para = almost + spam	something like spam
transgenic	trans = across + genic = life	hybrid species
trigger species	trigger = early tip-off	the first species to be affected, as by global warming
übergroovy	über = over the top + groovy	supercool
viral video	viral = contagious + video	video that is rapidly disseminated via the Internet

Clipping   Clipping is a process of shortening words, such as *prof* for *professor* or the slangy *teach* for *teacher.* If students learn both the original and the clipped versions, they gain the sense that they are mastering both colloquial and academic speech.

Acronyms   In English, acronyms are plentiful, and many are already familiar to students—USA, CNN, and NASA, for example. A list of acronyms helps students increase their vocabulary of both the words forming the acronyms and the acronyms themselves. Who can resist knowing that *laser* is light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation?

Blends   Words formed from parts of two words are called blends—for example, *chortle* from *chuckle + snort* and *travelogue* from *travel + monologue.* Students can become word detectives and discover new blends (*Spanglish, jazzercise, rockumentary*) or create their own blends (a hot dog in a hamburger bun can be a *hotburger*).

Using Morphemes in Teaching

Students can add to their enjoyment of learning English by finding new words and creating their own. Those who play video games can make up new names for characters using morphemes that evoke pieces of meaning. Advertising copywriters and magazine writers do this on a daily basis; the word *blog* is a combination of the free morphemes *web* and *log;* then came *vlog* (*video* added to *blog*). The prefixes *e-* and *i-* have combined to form many new words and concepts over recent decades (e.g., *e-pets* and *iTunes*). The study of morphology is fun and increases word power.

Depending on the student's first language, some morphemes are easier to acquire than others. For example, the prefix *en-*, meaning "to bring about, to make, or to put into," is more often used to make verbs from nouns or adjectives that derive from the Anglo-Saxon side of English—that is, words not directly related to cognates in Romance languages. For example, one can say "enjoy" but not "*enmuse." In contrast, words ending in the noun suffix *-ion* are relatively easy for Spanish speakers because they are usually words that have cognates in Spanish. Therefore, students may not as easily acquire the words in Table 1.3 as they might those in Table 1.4.

Attention to morphemes in the classroom can accelerate language acquisition if students are exposed to families of words across parts of speech—that is, if *courage* is taught alongside *courageous, discourage,* and *encourage* or *ice* is taught with *icy, ice cream, icicle, ice age,* and *iceberg.* Instead of defining new words, students

TABLE 1.3   Words with Morpheme *en-* as Prefix

enjoy	enact	enliven
enlarge	enclose	ensure
enrich	encourage	entrust
entrap	entangle	enroll
enable	encrust	enforce

TABLE 1.4   Words with Morpheme *-ion* as Suffix

transportation	division	translation
action	succession	comparison
examination	combination	validation
preparation	signification	respiration
certification	termination	separation

may enjoy separating new words into morphemes and finding other words that match these morphemes. This activity is consonant with a key principle of brain-based learning (see Chapter 2): The brain learns faster when engaged in pattern-matching or pattern-finding activities.

Best Practice   WORKING WITH MORPHEMES

The teacher can encourage awareness of comparatives and superlatives using the following game, called Speed Search.
    Students circulate around the room to see how many people they can find who fit the description on the slip of paper they have drawn from a box. After two minutes, they draw another slip for a second round of play. Students win if they have the <u>most</u> points after a designated number of rounds. Sample descriptions: Find a person who believes that dogs are <u>less</u> intelligent than cats. Find a person who has <u>more</u> than two brothers. Find a person who is the old<u>est</u> child in the family. (Kealey & Inness, 1997, pp. 24–25)

Syntax: The Sentence Patterns of Language

Syntax refers to the rules that govern the formation of phrases and sentences. The words in a language have semantic properties that entail their use in sentences in some ways and not in others. A well-formed sentence is more than the sum of the meanings of the words; in English the position of the word in a sentence is an important part of the overall meaning. Sentence A, "The teacher asked the students to sit down," has the same words as sentence B, "The students asked the teacher to sit down," but not the same meaning. Not every sequence of words is a sentence: Sentence C, "*Asked the the teacher to down students sit," violates syntactic rules in English and thus has no meaning.

Native speakers of a language have syntactic proficiency—they can distinguish syntactically correct from incorrect combinations of words, even though they may not be able to explain what syntactic rules have been violated. Even very young English-speaking children know that sentences A and B are meaningful but sentence C is not. Moreover, the mind is a strong organizing force, constantly striving to gain meaning, so speakers of a language can comprehend even imperfectly formed sentences.

Whereas syntax refers to the internally constructed rules that make sentences, grammar looks at whether a sentence conforms to some standard. An important distinction, therefore, is the one between standard and colloquial use. Many colloquial usages feature acceptable sentence patterns in English, even though their usage is not standard—for example, "I ain't got a pen" is acceptable English syntax but not standard usage. Teachers who are promoting the standard dialect need to be aware that students' developing competence will not always conform to that standard.

Besides grammaticality and word order, speakers' syntactic knowledge helps them understand three other sentence features. Double meaning, or *ambiguity,* occurs in sentences such as "She is a Korean karate expert" or the frequently seen "Please wait for the hostess to be seated." On the other hand, sentences can have different structures but mean the same thing:

"He is hard to please," "Pleasing him is hard," "It is hard to please him." Finally, speakers can understand and produce novel utterances, the creative aspect of language.

Explicit Teaching of Syntax

In the late twentieth century, it was widely believed that students could acquire a second language without explicit teaching of syntactic structures. However, because the mind seeks to acquire patterns, and syntax is a pattern, it is now thought that creative and systematic teaching of syntax can accelerate language learning. Grammar books that teach students to label the parts of speech and build up sentence structures from simple to complex are useful. Balancing this systematic instruction with grammar games and creative language engagement such as poetry—or even Mad Libs, the game that has students blindly providing nouns, adjectives, and verbs without knowing the story plot—helps students to learn the parts of speech.

Figure 1.1 presents a simple card for teaching sentence syntax. A pocket chart in a learning center can be used to teach sentence structure. Students can work in pairs to assemble meaningful sentences using packs of sentence components. Words in the same sentence should be on the same color of index card so that multiple sentences can be kept separated as students work.

FIGURE 1.1 A Quick-Check Method for Syntax Learning Center Activity

The following cards are given to students in random order:

The	quick	fox	ran	from	the	fire

Each card has a single letter on the back. If the cards are in the right order, the teacher can pick up each finished deck and quickly check to see if they spell a word or phrase, as shown:

F	O	X	F	I	R	E

A trick to checking students' work quickly is for each set of cards to spell out a word on the back of the cards if the cards are in the correct order.

Some students have more *metalinguistic knowledge* than others—that is, they have the vocabulary to talk about grammar because they learned the grammar of their native language. As with other kinds of learning, the wise teacher assesses students' prior knowledge to learn where to begin instruction.

Describing the characteristic differences between languages—contrastive analysis—is useful to some degree in predicting what kinds of syntax errors students make (see Box 1.1 for Mandarin and Box 1.2 for Spanish). However, direct instruction must also be balanced with rich, authentic exposure to English sentences, both spoken and written, and the learner must be allowed time for syntactic structures to be absorbed, consolidated, and deployed in many situations before a given structure can be said to be a stable feature of the learner's repertoire.

Semantics: The Meanings of Language

Semantics is the study of the meanings of individual words and of larger units such as phrases and sentences. Speakers of a language learn the "agreed-on" meanings of words and phrases in their language; these meanings must be shared, or communication becomes impossible.

Box 1.1 English Syntax Contrasted with Chinese (Mandarin)

English learners with Chinese as a mother tongue may need additional teacher assistance with the following aspects of English:

- Verb tense: *I see him yesterday.* In Chinese, the verb form is not changed to mark the time during which the action occurred—the adverb, not the verb, signals the time. Conjugating the verb form in English may prove to be difficult for the learner.
- Subject–verb agreement: *He see me.* In Chinese, verbs do not change form to create subject–verb agreement.
- Word order: *I at home ate.* In Chinese, prepositional phrases usually come before the verb—the rules governing adverb placement in English are difficult for many learners.
- Plurals: *They give me 3 dollar.* In Chinese, like English, the marker indicates number, but the noun form does not change to indicate plural; in English the noun form changes.
- Articles: *No one knows correct time.* Chinese uses demonstrative pronouns [*this one, that one*] but not definite or indefinite articles [*a, the*]. The rules for such use in English are complex.

However, English is a flexible language that is responsive to the needs of a dynamic culture, and new concepts emerge daily that require new words; English learners must acquire vocabulary continuously in order to keep up with semantic demands.

Some words carry a high degree of stability and conformity in the ways they are used (*slap* as a verb, for example, must involve the hand or some other flat object—"He slapped me with his ball" is not semantically meaningful). Other words carry multiple meanings (e.g.,

Box 1.2 English Syntax Contrasted with Spanish

English learners with Spanish as a mother tongue may need additional teacher assistance with the following aspects of English:

- Verb conjugation: Spanish has three groups of regular verbs, in contrast to one group in English (those that add -*ed* or -*d*), but English has more classes of irregular verbs (wildly irregular *go/went/gone* versus mildly irregular like *send/sent, break/ broke,* etc.).
- Subject–verb agreement: In Spanish, first-, second-, and third-person forms must be changed from the base form to create subject–verb agreement. It is sometimes hard to remember that in English only the third-person form is changed.
- Noun/adjective order: In Spanish, adjectives come sometimes before and sometimes after the noun (*un buen día, un día linda*). These alterations, however, obey regular rules.
- Articles: Spanish, like English, uses both definite and indefinite articles, but with different rules (for example, languages need the definite article, *el ingles*). Both definite and indefinite articles must match the noun to which they refer (*unos muchachos, las mujeres*).

Source: Spinelli (1994).

TABLE 1.5   Examples of English–Spanish Cognates

(Same meaning, same spelling; may be pronounced differently)

club	plural
director	radio
hotel	rural
hospital	salmon (Spanish salmón)
mineral	sofa (Spanish sofá)
postal	tenor
perfume	violin (Spanish violín)

scrap), ambiguous meanings (*bank,* as in "They're at the bank"), or debatable meanings (*marriage,* for example, for many people can refer only to heterosexual alliances, whereas others might apply it to nonheterosexual contexts).

Semantic Challenges

In second-language acquisition, there are three basic semantic challenges. First is the process of translating—finding words (lexical items) in the second language that correspond to those already known in the first. The second challenge is learning words for ideas and concepts that are new in the second language for which there is no first-language counterpart (for example, the Polish term *fúcha*—"to use company time and resources to one's private ends"—has no equivalent in English) (de Boinod, 2006). The third challenge involves similar words that are in both languages whose meanings differ in small or large ways. Table 1.5 lists words that are cognates in English and Spanish—their meaning is identical. Table 1.6 lists near cognates, and Table 1.7 lists false cognates—those in which the similar appearance is misleading.

Another challenge in English is the extraordinary wealth of synonyms. One estimate of English vocabulary places the number at over 3 million words; the *Oxford English Dictionary* contains some 290,000 entries with some 616,500 word forms. Fortunately, only about 200,000 words are in common use, and an educated person draws from a stock of about 20,000 to use about 2,000 in a week (Wilton, 2003). The challenge when learning this vast vocabulary is to distinguish denotations, connotations, and other shades of meaning.

Best Practice   NUANCES OF MEANING

- For adolescent learners, the teacher provides a list of a dozen common emotions (love, anger, fear, and fright are the big four; a few others are thankfulness, doubt, guilt, surprise, contempt, delight, hunger, nervousness).
- Students, working in pairs, make up situations that would engender the emotion.
- Rich discussion about nuances of meaning might result!

Acquiring Vocabulary

What does it mean to "know" a word? Recognizing a word involves matching stored meaning with meaning derived from context. In addition, knowing a word includes the ability to pronounce the word correctly, to use it grammatically in a sentence, and to know with which morphemes it is appropriately connected. This knowledge is acquired as the brain absorbs and

TABLE 1.6 Examples of English–Spanish Near Cognates

(Same meaning, slightly different spelling; may be pronounced differently)

English	Spanish	English	Spanish
February	febrero	tranquil	tranquilo
March	marzo	salt	sal
April	abril	violet	violeta
May	mayo	second	segundo
June	junio	intelligent	inteligente
July	julio	problem	problema
August	agosto	cream	crema
button	botón	check (bank)	cheque
much	mucho	deodorant	desodorante
office	oficina	garden	jardin
courtesy	cortesía	map	mapa
lamp	lámpara	paper	papel
medal	medalla	use	uso

interacts with the meaning in context, possibly due to the important role that context plays in forming episodic memory—memory that is tied to emotionally rich experience.

Nation (1990) lists the following as the types of word knowledge necessary for complete comprehension of a given word: its spoken form, written form, grammatical behavior,

TABLE 1.7 Examples of English–Spanish False Cognates

(Close in sound; slightly different spelling; different meaning)

Spanish	Meaning in Spanish	English False Cognate	Meaning in English
blando	soft	bland	soothing; not stimulating or irritating
blanco	white	blank	colorless; free of writing
campo	country	camp	place for tents or temporary shelter
codo	elbow	code	a system of signals
despertador	alarm clock	desperate	almost beyond hope
dirección	address	direction	the way to go; authoritative instruction
cola	tail	cola	drink
plata	silver	plate	sheet of metal, food dish

collocational behavior (what words are frequently found next to the word), frequency, stylistic register constraints (such as formal/informal contexts), conceptual meaning, and word associations (such as connotations).

Vocabulary knowledge can be *passive, controlled active,* or *free active* (Laufer & Paribakht, 1998). Passive knowledge involves understanding the most frequent meaning of a word (e.g., *break*—He breaks a pencil). Controlled active knowledge can be described as cued recall (e.g., The railway con_____ the city with its suburbs), and free active knowledge describes the ability to spontaneously use words. Each type of knowledge develops at a different rate, with passive understanding growing faster than active word use. Passive vocabulary is always larger than active vocabulary.

Academic Vocabulary

Acquiring the vocabulary used to educate is essential to school success; it is a large part of what Cummins (1979, 1980) called cognitive academic language proficiency. This vocabulary has been compiled by various researchers (c.f., Bromberg, Liebb, & Traiger, 2005; Huntley, 2006). Although no exhaustive list exists of academic terms by grade level, Table 1.8 presents academic terms by approximate grade level. Table 1.9 displays examples of academic vocabulary.

Vocabulary Teaching and Concept Development

Many methods have been used to teach vocabulary during second-language acquisition; rote memorization of lists or flash cards with words and meanings is probably the least effective, even when picture cues are provided. Rich experience of new words in the context of their use is the way words are usually acquired in the first language. Games such as Pictionary and Total Physical Response are useful when objects and actions are simple. More nuanced or complex knowledge requires careful work at all the levels described earlier by Nation (1990).

TABLE 1.8 Examples of Cognitive Academic Words by Approximate Grade Level

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
connect	measure	indent	define	summarize	minimum
check	width	proofread	method	evidence	initial
ruler	margin	paragraph	highlight	energy	estimate
period	dictionary	hyphen	environment	positive	factor
capital letter	schedule	topic	exhibit	gender	percent
grade	label	graph	layer	nuclear	simulate
mistake	draft	edit	region	source	transfer
chalk	chart	ignore	research	substitute	variable
file	margin	select	style	theme	volume

TABLE 1.9   Examples of Academic Vocabulary

access	available	component	element	sufficient
adjust	capacity	confirm	emphasis	supplement
alter	clarify	consistent	instance	survey
approach	comment	contrast	random	undergo
aspect	complex	core	specific	visible

Source: From Huntley (2006).

Best Practice   **KEY PRINCIPLES FOR TEACHING VOCABULARY**

- Vocabulary taught with collocations—words that co-appear commonly (for example, the verb *lose* is presented as "lose your way," "lose your temper," "lose your keys," etc.)
- Vocabulary taught within its grammatical environment (for example, verbs are always introduced with *to*—"to apply," "to return")
- Emphasis on register (teach where, when, with whom a word is used; in a formal or informal setting?)
- Emphasis on word form (does it include a prefix or suffix as a clue toward meaning?)
- Emphasis on connotation (nuances of meaning differentiating one word from another) (Daloğlu, 2005)

Semantic Shifts

Language users must become aware of the semantic requirements when writing. It may be understandable when a speaker overuses the colloquial "you know" when telling a story, but in written English, one must shift toward more formal expression. Learning to make this shift is an important part of cognitive academic language. Only in certain types of writing—such as literature when a colloquial dialect is expressed, or in gonzo journalism, a flamboyant, first-person genre—is the colloquial form acceptable.

Teachers can emphasize this semantic shift by, for example, using a chart that compares "talk written down" with "more thoughtful writing." Table 1.10 contrasts these two writing styles as semantic shifts.

Semantics is a domain in which growth must be sustained at every level of schooling and in every content domain. Teacher education, for example, has its own lexicon; prospective teachers are asked to master such terms as *assertive discipline, wait-time, manipulatives, mind mapping, retelling, writing genre, mini-lesson,* and so forth. Demonstrating proficiency in these and similar terms is a measure of professionalism.

TABLE 1.10 Semantic Shifts When Writing	
Informal Register	**Formal Register**
you know	it is evident
a lot of, a whole bunch of	multiple
getting (dark, warm)	becoming
a piece of	a component of
to take a chance	to attempt
to make an offer	to offer
to keep on doing	to continue

Language Functions

Language proficiency is not an end in itself; language is used for various purposes—to solve problems, communicate feelings, or keep records as people go about their daily routines. Halliday (1978) has distinguished seven different functions for language: *instrumental* (getting needs met), *regulatory* (controlling others' behavior), *informative* (communicating information), *interactional* (establishing social relationships), *personal* (expressing individuality), *heuristic* (investigating and acquiring knowledge), and *imaginative* (expressing fantasy or possibility).

A curriculum might encourage students to perform a wide variety of functions such as reporting, evaluating, questioning, and critiquing. Many other functions are not necessarily encouraged by schools but take place nonetheless: interrupting, shifting the blame, threatening, accusing, arguing, demanding, and making excuses. Learners must begin to understand how language functions to acquire written as well as spoken competence in the effort to match forms with functions.

Academic Language Functions

Academic language functions include explaining, informing, justifying, comparing, describing, proving, debating, and so forth. There is some overlap in the terminology of academic functions and of thinking skills. Academic English—also called cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP)—is designed for abstract, decontextualized performance across a variety of content domains, which requires a long period of successful schooling; exposure to academic language, feedback, and support in its use by students; and explicit instruction in vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and cognitive strategies (see Chapter 5). Table 1.11 aligns academic language functions with typical phrases that are used during that function.

Providing English learners with opportunities to engage in the various functions of language is critical for enabling them to develop a full range of proficiency in English. In school, however, rarely do teachers allow students to practice "out of school" social functions; the emphasis is usually on language functions necessary for the work of learning.

Functions and Classroom Routines

In every situation, participants are expected to use language to carry out specific routines. One of the important tasks of kindergarten and first-grade teachers is to teach children how to respond appropriately in the school setting. Confusion and a sense of alienation can arise for English learners who are used to the school routines in their own countries and face the unexpected in U.S. schools. A knowledgeable teacher recognizes that these students are acting according to the routines with which they are familiar. It may take time—and explicit language coaching—for students to learn the language functions appropriate for a U.S. school context.

TABLE 1.11   Phrases Associated with Academic Functions of Language

Function of Language	Sample Phrase(s)
Indicating cause and effect	Therefore, as a result, gradually
Providing example	For instance, that is, one sample, such as, in fact
Comparing	Like, likewise, similarly, in much the same way, equally
Emphasizing	Moreover, chiefly, above all
Indicating sequence	In the first place, starting with, consequently, finally
Summarizing	To conclude, in other words, thus

Best Practice   ACQUIRING LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

- *Instrumental:* Students practice a list of ways to request actions of others, including "Could you . . ." "Would you mind . . . ."
- *Regulatory:* Students take turns acting as timekeeper and taskmaster in cooperative groups.
- *Informative:* Students keep records of classroom pets, weather patterns, or commonly misspelled words on a bulletin board.
- *Interactional:* Students work together to plan field trips, social events, and classroom and school projects.
- *Personal:* Students use personal language in a journal and then share their thoughts and opinions on a voluntary basis.
- *Heuristic:* During projects, students brainstorm questions about which no one knows the answer.
- *Imaginative:* Students "play" with language—the sounds of words and the images they convey.

Source: Adapted from Pinnell (1985).

Discourse

Discourse is classified using various dimensions, such as *written versus spoken.* Other dimensions include *register* (formal versus informal) and *genre* (a combination of communicative purpose, audience, and format) as well as considerations of number—*monologic, dialogic,* or *multiparty* (how many are involved) (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2001). Many kinds of analysis have been used in examining discourse: studies of information structure, coherence, cohesion, turn-taking, and critical discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis can be defined as the study of language "beyond the sentence" (Tannen, 2001). Discourse might be characterized as "language associated with a particular activity, a particular kind of knowledge, a particular group of people or a particular institution"

(Peim, 1993). The study of discourse looks at language in its larger units, such as oral text (classroom talk, speeches, casual conversation) and written text (magazine articles, school assignments, signs, and posters). Discourse specialists have looked at such behavior as how people take turns, how speakers use contextual cues as they interact, and how people show others they are listening. These features are heavily influenced by culture.

In school, language is used differently than in the experiences of everyday life. As students acquire a second language—English—they are exposed to a distinct set of language functions that are specially adapted for school. This can work to the benefit of English learners if educators can affirm the voices that students bring to school and encourage them to build the second language on the knowledge they have gained in their first language, thus increasing their academic potential.

Academic Discourse

What does it mean to use language for academic purposes? An educated person lives in a world in which discourse is used for a wide range of purposes. For many, literacy at work has become highly computer dependent, with word processing, databases, telephone number files, e-mail, and Web-based activities, as well as paper dependent, with piles of various folders containing information, along with books, journals, and newsletters. At home, personal literacy may include cookbooks, hobby materials, newsmagazines, correspondence, and bill-paying. All these reading materials have their own place, time, and task orientation.

Classroom discourse patterns involve students as active language users.

Bob Daemmrich Photography

Literacy practices are activities that form discourses within the culture or society at large. By the time a student enters undergraduate education, the discourse demands are intense: reading course syllabi, textbooks, study guides, handouts, laboratory manuals, tests, online materials, and reference materials; listening to lectures and peer discussions; writing tests, research papers, and other notes; making formal oral presentations; and informally contributing orally in class or in group working sessions. English learners must prepare for these discourse registers and activities in elementary and secondary school programs.

Academic Competence: Psychological Factors   The demands of producing and understanding academic discourse depend not only on acquiring cognitive academic language proficiency, but also on developing qualities such as persistence, rapport with one's teachers, and attunement to the demands of the task, as well as the ability to seek, obtain, and benefit from help. These personality features help an individual accommodate the demands of a situation.

Academic Competence: Sociocultural Factors   Success in previous schooling makes present and future accommodations easier. The peer culture must sustain patterns of academic activity; the parental/cultural standards of achievement must also be appropriately demanding and supportive; and the school must enforce high educational standards, with expert management, well-certified staff, and adequate resources. In this way, the individual is situated within a social and cultural context that sustains academic activity.

Oral Discourse in the Classroom

Classroom discourse is a special type of conversation. Intonation, pausing, and phrasing determine when one person's turn to speak is over and the next person's turn begins. Markers signal the circulation of power. As Foucault (1979) noted, discursive practices in the modern world prepare the individual for power. Schooling can shape an average person into a "good" student using discourse.

Good language learners are able to gain access to a variety of conversations in their communities. The communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in which they participate—even peripherally—provide access to the utterances of others and the cultural practices they need to become engaged in community life. This means that the community of practice in a classroom does as much to create a good learner as the individual's cognition and striving.

Linguistic features are useful ways to examine classroom discourse. Turn markers governing who takes the floor signal speaking and listening. Some listeners nod frequently, and others offer eye contact or feedback such as "hmm," "uh huh," and "yeah." If a teacher is speaking, the type of listening that a learner signals is an important part of that learner's image in the mind of the teacher. If someone seems uninterested or uncomprehending (whether or not they truly are), the speaker tends to slow down, repeat, or overexplain, giving the impression of "talking down."

The Recitation Pattern: A Typical Learning Encounter   Classrooms in the United States often follow a model of instruction based on recitation (Mehan, 1979). Typically, the pattern has three parts, called the IRE sequence. First, the teacher initiates (I) an interaction by asking a question. A student responds (R), and the teacher follows up with evaluation (E). Alternatively, this may be called the IRF pattern, replacing the term *evaluation* with *feedback,* which consists

not only of praise or disguised evaluation but also of reformulation, repetition of the student's answer, and summarizing or delivering information.

The IRF pattern shares characteristics of other kinds of teacher talk. The teacher not only produces the most language but also takes the most turns. Questions asked in this way usually call for simple information recall, and the responses are limited to this type of thinking. The teacher tends to ask "known-answer" questions in which students' responses can be easily evaluated (Pridham, 2001). The IRF pattern is easy to identify, partially because of its prevalence.

*I*nvitation to respond:
> **Teacher:** Who knows why names are capitalized? (Some students are wildly waving their hands, begging to be chosen to respond; others are averting their eyes, hoping *not* to be called on) Alma?

*R*esponse:
> **Alma:** It's somebody's name.

*E*valuation or *F*eedback:
> **Teacher:** That's true. Good, Alma.

*I*nvitation to respond: (pattern repeats) . . .
> **Teacher:** But who can tell me what the term for that is?

The IRF is not the only discourse pattern in which the teacher dominates, but it is the most frequent. In *teacher-fronted* classrooms in general (Harel, 1992), the teacher takes the central role in controlling the flow of information, and students compete for attention and permission to speak. English learners are dependent on their ability to understand the teacher's explanations and directions.

Clearly the IRF pattern has positive instructional features—to activate students' prior knowledge about a topic, review material already covered, present new information, calm a noisy room, check on the general state of group knowledge on a topic, or evaluate the discipline and cooperation of individual students. This evaluation of the student seems to shape a teacher's academic expectations for that student. Many features of the recitation pattern work for the benefit of instruction, although the same features that benefit some students may create difficulties for English learners (see Table 1.12).

Recitation Pattern: Questioning Strategies   Through skilled questioning, teachers lead discussions and ascertain students' understanding. Questions should be framed to match students' proficiency levels and to evoke the level of critical or creative thinking sought in the response. Teachers who are sensitive to varying cultural styles are aware that in some cultures students are reluctant to display knowledge before a large group. The teacher must organize other means for students to demonstrate language and content knowledge, such as small-group discussions.

A hierarchy of question types can be matched to students' proficiency levels. Beginning English learners in the "silent period" may be asked a question requiring a nonverbal response—a head movement, pointing, or manipulating materials. Once students begin to speak, either/or questions allow them merely to choose the correct word or phrase to demonstrate understanding: "Is the water evaporating or condensing?"; "Did explorers come to the Americas from Europe or Asia?" Once students can produce language, *wh-* questions are

TABLE 1.12   Positive and Negative Features of the IRF for English Learners

Positive Features	Possible Negative Features for English Learners
Invitation to Bid	
Teacher waits for silence and imposes order on student behavior.	English learners may not appear as attentive as English speakers because they might have difficulty comprehending instruction.
Teacher controls the scope of the lesson by asking selected questions.	English learners may need more time than English speakers to understand questions and frame responses.
Teacher determines order and importance of information by posing questions.	Students with creative and individualistic thinking may wish to contribute related ideas outside the scope of the immediate topic.
Teacher controls the level of language displayed in class by choice of lexicon and complexity of sentence structure.	Instructional language, including vocabulary, may be too complex for English learners.
Teacher controls pace and rhythm of discourse.	Pace and rhythm of discourse may be different in students' native language, causing discomfort.
Response	
Teacher evaluates behavior of individuals by looking to see who is willing and ready to participate.	English learners may be reluctant to bring attention to themselves because they are insecure about their oral language, see such an action as incompatible with group cohesiveness and cultural norms, or are reluctant to display knowledge in front of others.
Teacher controls potential for reward by choosing respondent.	Students may lack experience in particular topics under discussion, although their background may be rich in topics that are not curriculum related.
By acting eager to answer, students can demonstrate responsivity to instruction, attention, and cooperation even if they do not really know the answer the teacher expects to hear.	Students from cultures in which children do not make direct eye contact with adults may not appear attentive during instruction.
Teacher controls behavior by calling on students who may not be attentive.	English learners may be reluctant to volunteer to answer if they are not 100 percent sure their idea is correct and their culture does not reward ambiguity.
Students can practice risk-taking by volunteering to answer.	
Students can show knowledge whether from prior instruction or experience.	
Evaluation (Feedback)	
Teacher is able to evaluate students' level of oral participation.	Students may need prior language development in oral participation, including turn-taking, listening, and speaking.
Teacher is able to use teacher approval as a reinforcer.	Students from certain cultures may not depend on teacher for approval.
Teacher is able to establish public recognition for those who answer correctly.	Individual public recognition may be taboo in some cultures.
Teacher may use the evaluation turn to correct sentence grammar.	

(continued)

TABLE 1.12   Continued

Positive Features	Possible Negative Features for English Learners
Evaluation (Feedback) *(Continued)*	
Teacher can withhold negative evaluation by partially accepting an incomplete answer.	Research shows that second-language grammar is not improved by public correction of grammar, but by gradual acquisition of forms during language input and output.
Teacher can avoid direct negative evaluation by asking one student to "help" another to improve an answer.	
Teacher may evaluate students' success in the recitation pattern as an indicator of facility with "display knowledge" cultural pattern.	Indirect negative evaluation may be confusing for some students, leaving them with unclear concept formation.
	Students who are unfamiliar with "display knowledge" cultural pattern may appear uncooperative.
Teacher can elaborate on answer and expand a concept by delivering direct instruction at this point.	Students who are not rewarded by encouragement of more complex questions and responses gradually receive fewer hours of attention and instruction.
Teacher can improve a poor answer by substituting more correct terminology or restating a sentence in more correct grammar.	
As teacher evaluates students' responses, he or she determines what question comes next.	

appropriate: "What is happening to the water?"; "Which countries sent explorers to the Americas?"; "What was the purpose of their exploration?"

If a teacher is seeking evaluative responses requiring critical thinking by means of questioning strategies, more wait-time is necessary for students to understand the question and frame a thoughtful response. Bias is avoided if all respondents are given equal feedback and support in increasing the cognitive complexity of the answer.

Teachers of English learners cannot avoid using teacher-fronted discourse patterns to some extent, because of the legacy of traditional teaching discourse. However, awareness of its strengths (in summary, ease of use, effectiveness for controlling attention and behavior, and diagnosis of a learner's responsiveness) and weaknesses (for example, lack of emphasis on learner oral production, limited peer interaction, and inequity of reinforcement) may encourage teachers to better focus the use of teacher-fronted discourse for English learners.

Cooperative Learning as a Discourse Alternative   The organization of discourse is important for second-language acquisition in content classes. Classrooms that feature flexible grouping patterns and cooperative learning permit students greater access to the flow of information as they talk and listen to peers, interact with the teacher or another adult in small groups, and use their home language for clarification purposes (Wells, 1981).

In cooperative-learning classrooms, the style of teacher talk often changes: Teachers assist students with the learning tasks, give fewer commands, and impose less disciplinary control (Harel, 1992). The teacher plans tasks so that students use language in academic ways. Students are placed in different groups for different activities. Teachers work with small groups to achieve specific instructional objectives (e.g., in literature response groups or instructional conversations, as discussed next).

The Instructional Conversation as a Discourse Alternative   An instructional discourse format called the *instructional conversation* is one alternative to a teacher-fronted classroom. With a group of six to eight students, the teacher acts as a discussion leader, following up a literature, social studies, or math lesson with a directed conversation that invites a deeper understanding of the issues raised (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). The focus is on assisted understanding of complex ideas, concepts, and texts, permitting a more satisfying intellectual relationship between teacher and students.

Learning to manage and appreciate the instructional conversation takes time, but many teachers find that the increased attention paid to students' assisted thinking reaps great benefits in increased understanding of students' thought processes as well as in students' sense of instructional co-ownership. It is difficult for most teachers to keep silent and let students think and volunteer their thoughts in good time, to move the conversation forward by building on students' ideas rather than the teacher's, to select topics that students find genuinely interesting and comprehensible, and to have patience with English learners' struggle to find the words for their thoughts. However, the rewards are great—a satisfying instructional conversation is the event for which, at heart, every good teacher yearns.

Discourse That Affirms Students' Voices

Throughout this book, the emphasis is on the co-participation of the learner in learning. It is imperative that teachers encourage the language that is needed and desired by the student, and if that desire does not exist, to evoke those emotions and motivations as an integral part of instruction. Instruction—particularly in a second language—that is not meaningful and motivating to the learner becomes empty.

What kind of participation enhances motivation and promotes acquisition? *Co-construction of meaning* permits the learner to plan, choose, and evaluate knowledge in relation to personal needs and goals. *Participatory genres* help the student to bridge the home–school divide. For example, the "talk-story" of Hawai'ian culture, when brought into the classroom, can open up the discourse around reading (Jordan, Tharp, & Baird-Vogt, 1992). By working in acknowledgment of, rather than at cross-purposes to, these community patterns of discourse, teachers can choose modifications to teacher-fronted discourse that will be successful for a particular group of learners.

In summary, using the tools of ethnography and community participation, teachers can learn how to help the learner participate in meaningful English-language instruction. Studying how the community uses discourse can help teachers pattern their classroom activities in ways that increase the likelihood that students' English proficiency will grow.

Pragmatics: The Influence of Context

Pragmatics is the study of communication in context. It includes three major communication skills. The first is the ability to use language for different functions—greeting, informing, demanding, promising, requesting, and so on. The second involves appropriately adapting or changing language according to the listener or situation—talking differently to a friend than to a principal or speaking differently in a classroom than on a playground. The third skill is the ability to follow rules for conversations and narrative, knowing how to tell a story, give a book report, or recount events of the day.

(Peim, 1993). The study of discourse looks at language in its larger units, such as oral text (classroom talk, speeches, casual conversation) and written text (magazine articles, school assignments, signs, and posters). Discourse specialists have looked at such behavior as how people take turns, how speakers use contextual cues as they interact, and how people show others they are listening. These features are heavily influenced by culture.

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Classroom discourse patterns involve students as active language users.

Teaching Oral Register Shifts   Registers may involve conventions of intonation, vocabulary, or topic that meet the needs of the people and the tasks to be performed in that situation. For example, car advertising commercials filmed locally often use "car commercial register," a kind of frenzied tone performed by a man speaking loudly and quickly, whereas airline pilots who use the public address system of the airplane adopt a folksy tone, a "captain register" that is reassuring and paternal. Kindergarten teachers who read fairy tales aloud use storytelling register, featuring a tone of wonder and suppressed excitement. Understanding *register shifts* enables a language user to adapt to these rules.

Formal oral presentations, for example, may resemble written language, with scholarly sounding words, passive voice, or use of the subjunctive, because many speakers write out a presentation in advance. Informal, casual speech often features contractions, slang, and incomplete sentences (Cipollone, Keiser, & Vasishth, 1998). Table 1.13 displays a variety of registers that students might master for use in a classroom.

Best Practice   **TRAINING STUDENTS IN ORAL REGISTER SHIFTS**

- Set up opportunities for situated practice, require oral presentations, stage dramatic events, and engage older students in storytelling to children.
- Offer repeated trials with feedback to help students improve the ability to shift registers.
- Let students take the initiative in creating settings and events for a variety of register usages that require leadership and talent in language use.
- Apply strategies for identifying and addressing difficulties English learners may encounter in comprehending regional dialects or other varieties of English.
- Create an instructional environment that respects English learners' home language and variety of English.

TABLE 1.13   Typical Oral Registers in the Classroom

Register	Description or Example
Student response register	A firm tone, spoken confidently, that reaches all other students in the room
Leadership register	The voice of roll call, the call to line up for lunch, or the call to be quiet and listen
Classroom presentation register	Involves eye contact with an audience, confident bearing, pleasing and varied tone of voice, and an inviting sense of two-way communication with listeners
Dramatic register	Spoken dialogue in a play, in the role of narrator or announcer; it is "larger than life," with exaggerated emotion and voice
Storytelling to children	Features simplification and a sense of warmth and intimacy, no matter what the size of the crowd
Cooperative work register	The "ten-inch voice"; able to be heard within one's group but not by the next group

Turn-Taking   A key aspect of learning to be appropriate is understanding how to take turns. Native speakers of a language have internalized guidelines for when to speak, when to remain silent, how long to speak, how long to remain silent, how to give up "the floor," how to enter into a conversation, and so on, including how to show respect when doing so. Linguistic devices such as intonation, pausing, and phrasing are used to signal an exchange of turns. In some cultures, people wait for a clear pause before beginning their turn to speak, whereas others start while the speaker is winding down.

In some cultures, overlapping a turn with the speaker is acceptable; in other cultures, this is considered rude and causes feelings of unease or hostility. Some children can interrupt instruction without receiving negative sanction, whereas others are chided for frequent interruption. Punishing some students while letting others take unwarranted turns is tantamount to linguistic discrimination. To avoid this, a skilled teacher instructs second-language students about how to get turns and monitors instruction to ensure fairness. (It is difficult to see one's own behavior in this; it is best for the teacher to ask a peer to observe.)

Nonverbal Communication

An important part of the pragmatic dimension of language is the complex nonverbal system that accompanies, complements, or takes the place of the verbal: "An elaborate and secret code that is written nowhere, known by none, and understood by all" (Sapir, quoted in Miller, 1985). This nonverbal system, estimated to account for up to 93 percent of communication (Mehrabian, 1969), involves sending and receiving messages through eye contact, facial expression, gesture, posture, and tone of voice.

Everyone is adept at sending and receiving these nonverbal messages, but, as in oral language, people are often unconscious of the information they are receiving. Because this nonverbal system accounts for a large part of the emotional message given and received, awareness of its various aspects helps teachers to recognize when students' nonverbal messages may not fit with expected school norms.

Body Language   The way one holds and positions oneself—one's body language—is a means of communication. Body language can convey power and confidence, or submission and timidity, merely by the tilt of the head, the position of the shoulders, or the grip of a handshake.

Gestures—expressive motions or actions made with hands, arms, head, or even the whole body—are ways to add meaning to verbal language or to substitute for words. Through the use of eyebrows, eyes, cheeks, nose, lips, tongue, and chin, people nonverbally signal any number of emotions, opinions, and moods.

Eye contact is another communication device that is highly variable. Many folk sayings express the idea that "the eyes are the windows of the soul," and it is important for some that the gaze be direct but not too bold. Eyes can reveal or hide emotions; not only the gaze but also the shape of the eye and even the size of the pupil convey emotions.

Conceptions of Space and Time   Physical distance between people, the invisible "bubble" that defines individual personal space, varies according to relationships. People usually stand closest to relatives, close to friends, and farther from strangers. Coming too close can be interpreted as aggressive behavior; conversely, staying too far away may be perceived as cold. Teachers with students of many cultures in their classes may have the opportunity to observe many spatial facets of communication.

Use of time, even daily rhythms, varies across cultures. Hall (1959) pointed out that for speakers of English, time is treated as a material object—a commodity—rather than an objective experience. English expressions include "saving time," "spending time," and "wasting time." Teachers often reprove students for idling and admonish students to "get busy." Standardized tests record higher scores for students who work quickly. In fact, teachers correlate rapid learning with intelligence.

With an awareness of mainstream U.S. conceptions of time, teachers become more understanding of students and families whose time values differ from their own. Some students may need more time to express themselves orally because the timing of oral discourse is slower in their culture. Parents who were raised in cultures with radically different concepts of time may not be punctual for parent conferences. One group of teachers allowed for this by designating blocks of three hours when they would be available for conferences, letting parents arrive when they could without fixed appointment times. Thus, teachers' accommodation to the intercultural pragmatics of the situation was key to an improved school climate.

Evaluating the Pragmatic Features of School Programs

Intercultural pragmatics often involves concepts, feelings, and attitudes that are difficult for teachers and school administrators to discuss. Some teachers, lacking a more nuanced vocabulary, focus on teaching students *manners,* a term that carries a variety of meanings, from interpersonal respect to reliance on traditional, hierarchical adult–child rituals. Seeing others' beliefs, values, and behaviors through the lens of one's own culture often means that others' culturally based behavior—that of students and their families—is viewed as wrong, maladapted, or rude. Teachers who avoid the trap of "right" versus "wrong" can set an open and accepting tone.

Making the pragmatic features of the school and other settings explicit for English learners helps students engage in oral and written discourse that is appropriate for a given context, purpose, and audience. One teacher wrote a Welcome Book for newcomers to the classroom that explained routines, procedures, expected behaviors, and shared values. A student's "buddy" would have the chance every day to go over sections of the manual with the newcomer, and a copy was sent home. This helped students and their families know what to expect.

Dialects and Language Variation

The language used in a certain context varies not only according to pragmatic factors of register shift (cultural and social norms, social and physical setting, goals, purpose, participants, audience, and subject matter) but also in long-term variations that influence the way people produce language. An oral dialect is evinced when people talk a certain way in order to feel appropriate within a given context. Teachers who take such variation into consideration communicate respect and understanding of contextual influences on English-language use.

Within the first few seconds of listening to the voice of a stranger, native speakers can usually identify not only whether the speaker's voice is familiar but also a host of other information about that person. As Wolfram (1991) noted, "It is surprising how little conversation it takes to draw conclusions about a speaker's 'background'—a sentence, a phrase, or even a word is adequate to trigger a regional, social, or ethnic classification" (p. 1). *Dialect* refers to "any

variety of language which is shared by a group of speakers" (p. 2). Dialect varies with region, social class, and ethnic origin.

Dialects and the Education of English Learners

Language educators cannot help being influenced by dialect considerations. Wolfram (1995) emphasized the importance of dialect issues for educators of English learners:

> The standard version of English provided in most ESL curricula aims unrealistically at a dialect-neutral variety of English. At the same time, the majority of ESL learners are surrounded by an array of dialects, including some well-established vernacular dialects for those who live in economically impoverished conditions. The socialization of many ESL learners into US culture may lead them to adopt the same uncharitable, biased opinion of vernaculars that is often found among native speakers of English. . . . It thus seems appropriate to incorporate dimensions of language variation into the ESL curriculum. (p. 1)

A student's dialect may affect teacher expectations. The ESL teacher may be tempted to oversimplify classroom language to match students' acquisition level. Finding the appropriate balance of language knowledge, pedagogical skill, dialect accommodation, and standard-language modeling is a challenge for teachers of English learners.

One important question is whether ESL teachers should model Standard English. In many urban schools, bilingual (Spanish–English) teachers are in demand in elementary schools, and personnel administrators do not seem to see Spanish-accented English as a negative in this context. However, some personnel administrators still seem to prefer to hire high school English teachers who are native speakers, or who speak English without a "foreign" accent.

A central issue, that of honoring the dialect of the learner, means finding the appropriate balance between respecting the home dialect of the student and modeling and teaching Standard English. Prejudice may be an issue in ESL contexts. Speakers of a regional dialect (for example, a Mexican-American dialect in Fresno) may not be accorded the same respect as speakers of Standard English. Yet within a specific community, a dialect may be the norm. Should English teachers enforce Standard English even if it is not the norm in the students' community? Thus, dialect issues are also issues of social power and status in society.

Students who speak nonstandard dialects are very aware when they have difficulty acquiring standard forms for academic writing and avoiding stereotyping and discrimination (Nero, 1997). But they are also aware that their very identity and deepest values are linked to their language, leading to potential conflicts in self-evaluation and acculturation—but also to possible positive biculturality (Bosher, 1997; LePage & Tabouret-Keller, 1985). The role of dialect is complex. This section examines dialect from a linguist's point of view: common features of dialects, how dialects reflect social and ethnic differences, what types of attitudes people have toward dialects, and how dialects affect style.

Common Features That Constitute Dialects

Why do languages have dialects? Language differences go hand-in-hand with social differentiation. People speak differently because they are physically separated (regional dialects) or because they are socially separated (by means of economic ecology and social stratification). A third explanation is based on linguistic differences between the dialects themselves.

Regional Dialects   Sometimes physical terrain keeps dialects isolated and intact. In the United States, the geographic isolation of some Southern communities has given rise to so-called Appalachian English (Wolfram, 1991). The overall dialect terrain of the United States is an example of regional dialects. The four distinct dialects that most Americans find recognizable in the United States today can be roughly characterized as (1) New York City, (2) New England, (3) the South, and (4) everyone else. The use of these dialects often has cultural implications.

Social-Stratification Dialects   Within social groups, language establishes and maintains social distinctions. If people want to be considered a part of a particular social group, they consciously or unconsciously adopt the vocabulary items, pronunciation, and grammatical patterns of that group. This is easy to see in the case of teenage slang. Even when people's language receives negative social evaluation from mainstream English speakers, they continue to use the language of their in-group. Features of the dialect may be associated with ethnic solidarity, whereas speaking in the mainstream style may cause loss of friends or weakening of family ties. It is not uncommon for speakers to try to live in two or more worlds.

Deeper Syntactic Causes for Dialects   The third explanation for the origin and persistence of dialects is based on linguistic analysis. Double negation within a sentence, as in the Southern U.S. dialect construction "The dog didn't like nobody," is also found in European languages. Deletion of the copula ("They late") is a feature of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) but also of Chinese and other languages. Lack of the *'s* in the possessive structure ("that man hat") in AAVE is true for other possessive structures in English ("her hat"); similarly, the lack of the noun plural ending ("four girl") in AAVE is common in many languages. Thus, dialects persist based on the ways in which languages are constructed.

How Dialects Exhibit Social and Ethnic Differences

Whether dialects have a regional, social, or linguistic explanation, speakers acquire a dialect of English based on the language used by others of their region, social class, and native language. The most obvious form of dialect usage is in the sound of the language—the *accent.* People use accent to make judgments on a range of personal qualities and capabilities, such as innate intelligence, morality, and employability (Wolfram, 1991). Just because someone speaks with an accent does not mean he or she is less competent in the language. In fact, as Lippi-Green asserts,

> [D]egree of accentedness, whether from L1 interference, or a socially or geographically marked language variety, cannot predict the level of an individual's competency in the target language. In fact . . . high degrees of competence are often attained by persons with especially strong L2 accents. (1997, p. 70)

Standard pronunciation (an accent known as General American or Midwestern) has become associated with high-status occupations, such as doctors, lawyers, professionals, and executives of large companies. Thus, language variation is associated with a person's economic activity. Economic discrimination based on language is enforced by means of informal, often invisible, social networks that intersect with social-class stratification.

Many people live in communities in which people are multidialectic, code-switching back and forth easily between multiple languages, each with its own repertoire of styles. To overcome the negative effects of social stratification, many people who are non-native speakers

of English seek to lose the accent that they feel hinders them from assimilating into the mainstream. On the other hand, in many cultures the dialect they speak *is* the mainstream, and to acquire any other accent risks social stigma. In some cultures, being bilingual is acceptable only to a limited degree.

Attitudes toward Dialects

People who are forbidden by law from discriminating against others on the basis of race or ethnicity may use accent as a means of social stigmatization or exclusion (Lippi-Green, 1997). Teachers may unwittingly communicate a negative social evaluation to a non-native-English-speaking student by speaking louder, using shorter sentences, slowing speech, restricting vocabulary and range of topics, or signaling a patronizing attitude (curiously enough, this is also done to the elderly). This puts the non-native speaker in a position of lower status.

Americans, consciously or unconsciously, view certain "foreign" languages as less prestigious than others. Because of racism, the French spoken by Haitians may not be evaluated as positively as French spoken by a Canadian. Status issues are prevalent in dialect differences among native speakers of English. In many parts of the world, the prestige form of British English is considered a preferable dialect to any form of American English.

Language is central to the identification of self and group. Teachers can damage the teacher–student relationship through prejudice or impair students' academic success through lower academic expectations. Student who are made to feel inferior for reasons of accent may internalize the shame associated with discrimination or maintain a negative attitude toward learning English. As Lippi-Green (1997) states, "When an individual cannot find any social acceptance for her language outside her own speech communities, she may come to denigrate her own language, even when she continues to use it."

Dialects and Style

A speaker's or writer's choice of language variation for a given discourse may be influenced by the context or setting of the discourse and by the speaker's age, gender, culture, level of education, social class, or vocation. Formal settings call for formal language; a student skilled in making this distinction may be chosen for public speaking at school assemblies.

Male–female differences have been shown in women's greater pitch changes to show emotion, higher overall pitch, and greater use of expressive adjectives and intensifiers (Brend, 1975). Characteristics of female speech are related more to powerlessness than gender, suggesting that women have learned to use these linguistic forms because they have traditionally been relegated to relatively powerless social positions (O'Barr & Atkins, 1980). English educators may find that male and female learners acquire different dialects of English, transferring to English the different roles and speech patterns in the native language. For example, female students may be more reticent to speak than male students, or vice versa. In these cases, a teacher might openly discuss the differences and find ways to equalize speaking opportunities.

Vernacular Dialects and Language Teaching

Because accent and intonation patterns are important in second-language acquisition, students need to understand four basic truths about dialect usage in English: (1) One's dialect,

if widely used by the surrounding racial, ethnic, or cultural community, is equally valid as a subset of English as any other dialect; (2) dialects are often used as a basis for discrimination, combining with underlying issues of power and race relations; (3) it is common for individuals all over the world to learn more than one dialect of English and to switch from one dialect to another depending on the context; and (4) such features of dialect as accent can be altered, if so desired, by specific, albeit time-intensive, drill.

Teaching Standard English: Whose Standard?   In a language as varied as English, there are naturally some who feel that it is important to establish a standard, or norm, against which usage is measured. Experts who publish grammar and usage books usually prescribe correct or standard language forms, but in English, no such standard in fact exists. Generally speaking, Standard American English is a composite of several subdialects spoken by the educated professional middle class. People seeking success in school and in the job market tend to adopt the language used by people in positions of power.

Many educators feel it is their right and privilege to enforce Standard English on their students. Teachers may subordinate the language of their students using a variety of messages, both overt and covert. Some teachers believe it is their right to correct students in public, to reprimand them for incorrect usage, or to refuse to communicate until a standard is reached ("You must answer in a complete sentence," "I can't understand you—say it again") (Lippi-Green, 1997).

Varieties of language are a result of normal social processes rather than inadequacies of individual speakers. The unique voice of the student is lost if educators insist on the use of Standard English exclusively in the classroom. Just as the worldview of the Native American is

Students speaking a nonstandard dialect of English are a rich source of language input to English learners in urban schools.

Will Hart/PhotoEdit

lost if the indigenous language dies away, so is the interlanguage of the student lost if no one listens. By balancing the need to teach Standard English with the zest and delight in each individual's vernacular, education can become a reservoir of English-language diversity.

In summary, language affords rich and dynamic expression. Familiarity with the structures and functions of language helps teachers to promote English-language development while supporting students' self-expression in their primary languages. Teachers with knowledge about the various subsystems of language can recognize the effort involved in developing English ability and incorporate students' language-development objectives into all facets of the daily program.

Language is accompanied by a nonverbal system that surrounds and supports grammatical competence. Knowledge about and skill in nonverbal communication enhances teachers' rapport with students. Understanding the basics of language helps to make language learning a meaningful, purposeful, and shared endeavor.

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