

EDUCATION REFERENCE GUIDE

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LANGUAGE LEARNING  
& DEVELOPMENT

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## Introduction

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A student's delayed or deficient language skills can have far-reaching consequences on his or her future academic success. While there are a number of factors that influence language development in children, there are just as many teaching methods and approaches that educators can employ to optimize their students' language acquisition and verbal skills.

The *Education Reference Guide* series is designed to provide a solid foundation for the research of various educational topics. This volume offers an introduction to the factors and methods that facilitate language development for young students, English language learners, and those who experience language difficulties. The essays examine the research on language acquisition, the factors that impact language development, and the number of teaching methods that target language learning curricula.

The opening essay on language development explores the factors that can affect a child's ability to learn his or her first language. As the article stresses, it's imperative that children have strong and healthy relationships with their parents and caregivers, and it's equally critical that their school environment promotes social interaction and conversation to advance the language learning process. In her essay on psycholinguistics, Edith Arrington details the skills and processes that comprise language competency. Noelle Vance explores communicative competence as a way to assess a student's ability to effectively convey meaning in a given context by looking at the individual components of this ability. Vance then reviews the four main skills that are necessary to acquire full mastery of a language, and she emphasizes the need for variety when teaching language in order to encourage the development of all four skills. Vance examines the affective variable, explores the ways emotions and attitudes influence language learning in individuals, and suggests ways that teachers can help their students, primarily by increasing their motivation.

Rana Suh Kannan then introduces "suggestopedia," a teaching method that believes an educator's suggestion and desuggestion can accelerate the language learning process by bringing a student's latent assets and capabilities to the forefront and by removing stressors and other barriers to learning. The following essay suggests a number of available tools that can help with the teaching of reading and writing skills and can encourage educators to integrate language projects across the curriculum. Carolyn Sprague reviews phonics instruction and explains how it helps "beginning readers to identify and build an internal database of known words," but does not help with overall comprehension. Therefore, she argues, reading education must be more balanced and phonics instruction should be considered as only one piece of the puzzle. Katherine Crothers provides an overview of foreign languages curricula in the U.S. public school systems, and she recommends "the development of long-term, sequential, and continuous foreign language instruction from kindergarten through grade 12 and beyond." This approach to curriculum would encourage American students to develop higher levels of language proficiency as well as increased cultural competence. The audiolingual method of teaching foreign language that was popular in the 1950s and 1960s has since fallen out of favor with educators. The lexical approach, on the other hand, is a concept that has been gaining influence, and it emphasizes words and word combinations over grammatical structure as the most effective way to increase foreign language proficiency. The impact of the lexical approach can be credited in part to the study of corpus linguistics, which examines and collects samples of naturally occurring patterns in language use. The speech collected from "children or students at various points in their development discloses essential details of the language learning process" that, in turn, improves pedagogical approaches to teaching foreign languages. Sandra Billings provides an overview of ESL programs in public education and the complexities of sociolinguistics, which emphasizes teaching "effective and culturally appropriate

speech” instead of solely focusing on grammar and structure rules. Finally, the last article of the collection discusses the highly controversial method of using Ebonics to facilitate the learning of Standard American English in some public high schools.

Together, these essays will provide researchers with a comprehensive review of important theories and methods regarding language acquisition and development. Complete bibliographic entries, a list of suggested readings, and relevant terms and concepts finish the essay.

# Language Development

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## **Abstract**

A variety of factors can influence language development in children. The relationships parents and caregivers have with a child in the early years of his or her life play a significant role. In addition to these influences on a child's language patterns, the school environment also has an impact. One way teachers can foster language development is by creating an environment in which children are allowed to interact socially and engage in conversations with each other. They can avail themselves of a wide array of children's literature that can serve as a language model for

children to promote classroom conversations and reading comprehension. A number of strategies can be used to work with students experiencing language and speech difficulties, as well as students who are learning English as a second language.

## **Overview**

The ability to acquire and develop language skills is a capacity that separates humans from the rest of the animal kingdom. Language enables us to understand our emotions, to exchange ideas, to study the past as well as contemplate the future (Caulfield, 2002).

There are three basic components to language: phonological, semantic, and syntactic. The phonological component refers to the rules for combining sounds. The semantic is comprised of rules for combining the smallest sounds, or morphemes, into words and sentences. The syntactic are the rules that enable children to further combine words into sentences that express meaning. These components are normally developed and used together in social situations (Pullen, 2003).

### **Language Development in Infants Innate Abilities**

The development of oral language comes to us naturally and, according to Caulfield (2002) it is apparent that we are born to speak. While children do not normally begin to form their first words until they reach 10 or 12 months, studies have shown that humans are designed to speak even before birth. It appears that language recognition begins before a child's birth. By the 6th or 7th month of gestation, the fetus is able to respond to sounds; a mother's voice can be heard and the fetus can detect slight differences in sound patterns (Caulfield, 2002).

Once they are born, children begin to acquire language skills through their interactions with parents and care givers. These very ordinary situations afford children the time to develop and practice their language skills. Further, these interactions enable children to begin making social connections and to make sense of their world. Before they are even able to speak, however, young children usually communicate with gestures in the first 9 to 12 months of life. Initially children begin to point to objects in their environment. Gestures allow children to communicate since they

have not begun to form and develop words. As they begin to do so, children combine gestures with words and this further allows them to develop two-word combinations. Essentially, gesturing enables a child to develop words (Iverson, 2005).

### **Social & Environmental Factors**

Although they do not actually teach their children how to talk, the involvement of adults and the general environment and culture in which a child is raised does affect a child's ability to learn and develop language skills. Further, this development usually occurs in a sequence of events that is common to most children. Therefore, it can be said that language development occurs because of a combination of nature and nurture. By the time a child is born, he or she has already begun to recognize language and is quickly able to listen to the voices of parents and caregivers. This can be seen by the fact that newborns look at faces of caregivers when they speak. Moreover, newborns quickly learn to get attention from their caregivers by crying. Crying, however, is not merely a way for newborns to convey that they need attention, that is, feeding or changing, crying is also the beginning of a child's ability to acquire and develop language (Caulfield, 2002).

While parents may be able to eventually determine what their infants are trying to communicate through crying, it is more important that these initial interactions provide parents and caregivers with an opportunity to assist children with acquiring language skills. This is because children tend to use words and phrases that parents and caregivers use in these situations. However, this does not mean that children merely learn to speak by imitating adults. Further, children normally do not begin to use meaningful words until they reach their 11th or 12th month. As they do acquire basic vocabulary, a child's interactions with caregivers provide an opportunity for practicing word usage.

Not only do children begin to develop language skills by interacting with adults, children also begin to develop an ability to interact socially. This is important because a child's ability to develop language and social skills during this time will manifest itself at school age. Therefore, the early development of language skills can affect a child's academic progress. The environment in which a child is raised is related to his or her ability to develop language skills in a number of ways. For example, an adult's ability to use language will influence a child's language development and speaking skills. Adults who have strong oral communication skills will have a positive impact on a child's ability to develop language skills. Moreover, as children begin to utter words, parents and caregivers can assist a child's development by repeating what the child says. These interactions are also called "recasts" (Dockrell, 2004).

In these instances, not only can an adult reply to a child by copying his or her words, parents and caregivers can also provide more information and word phrases that the child will begin to repeat. By making baby talk, parents enable a child to develop language skills. By repeating what a child says, adults also are

telling the child that he or she is being listened to, that their words have meaning, and that what they are saying is important to the parent. The benefit here is that the child will be encouraged to continue using words and interacting with adults. This, in turn, will give them confidence in developing their emotional skills as well as their social skills. If a child is raised in an environment that is more orally stimulating, the ability to develop language skills is enhanced. At the same time, a less stimulating environment can adversely affect language development. In addition, in homes where a foreign language is primarily used, a child's ability to develop English language skills will affect his or her social and emotional development.

### **Physiological & Psychological Factors**

In addition to the environment in which a child is raised, there are also other factors that can influence the development of language skills. For example, children can experience difficulties acquiring and developing language skills as a result of physiological or psychological problems. Some children might experience delays in developing language skills, and these at times might be the result of a problem with the child's hearing. Other children may experience speech problems such as stuttering or an inability to articulate words properly. Whatever the causes of such problems, children who experience difficulties with language skills at an early age can also experience other learning difficulties once they reach school age. Differences in the environments in which children are raised, and other issues affecting the development of language skills will ultimately affect a child's capacity to further develop language skills and to acquire literacy, emotional and social skills as they are exposed to other social environments.

## **Applications**

A child's ability to develop oral language skills will affect his or her ability to learn upon entering more formal education environments such as a day care, pre-school, kindergarten and primary school. In particular, developing language skills is related to developing other literacy, communication and social skills. This includes the ability to listen, speak, read and write. Teachers are faced with the challenge of teaching children who have been raised in a number of different environments and cultures. Since the language abilities of children vary, teachers are required to not only address the needs of individual children, but also to develop teaching methods that will benefit the class and foster the development of all of the children's language skills (Kirkland, 2005).

### **Language & the Classroom**

By the time children enter educational environments, their ability to acquire and develop language skills has already gone through a natural progression of stages. When they reach the age of five or six, children should be able to engage in conversations. While some children may be more conversant than others and some are not as articulate or may have trouble with pronunciation, the classroom environment should provide children with an oppor-



tunity to correct language difficulties that are not the result of a physiological problem as well as for children to further develop language skills acquired in the home.

### **Pre-School**

Children in pre-school, for instance, use words to better comprehend their environment. At this point, children also begin to learn to interact with each other. During this process, they learn what will get them attention, and how to make others laugh. Some methods that are used in developing language skills in pre-schoolers include using props to act out roles, practicing tongue twisters, and singing children's songs that contain repetitive lyrics. When children reach kindergarten they use a variety of language styles to express themselves. At this stage in their development, children's language skills and vocabularies are related to their overall social and emotional development as well. This is because they are moving further away from the culture and environment in which they were raised and into new social situations presented in the classroom (Miller, 2003).

### **Primary School**

By the time children reach primary school, they have been exposed to other social and environmental influences besides the environment in which they were raised. However, the environment and culture in which a child is raised will continue to influence his or her language development. Moreover, the diversity of environments in which children are raised is also a challenge for primary school teachers, since it is now their responsibility to further develop their students' language skills. In order to be successful in this development, teachers should be empowered to make decisions about classroom practices that will foster the development of language skills (Kirkland, 2005).

One way teachers can accomplish this is by creating an environment in which children are allowed to interact socially and engage in conversations with each other. In addition to developing conversational skills, children also need to be able to acquire and develop written communication skills. To achieve this, children should be allowed to write their own words, and be encouraged to attach vocabulary to objects in the classroom. One way to accomplish this is by creating labels for objects in the classroom, such as desks, books, boards, chairs, closets and then asking the children to attach the labels to the appropriate objects. Another method is to have daily rituals and routines that allow children to talk about the day and what they accomplished. In particular, ending the day with a ritual song or poem enables a child to repeat the language they are learning. The purpose of these activities is to enable children to see how language works and also to create an environment where they feel safe to express themselves (Kirkland, 2005).

In addition to developing oral language skills, school-age children also begin to develop reading and writing skills, and their capacity in this regard is closely linked to how far they have advanced with oral language skills. In fact, the vocabulary a

child has acquired by the age of six is a good indicator of what his or her reading comprehension will be when they reach sixteen (Dockrell, 2004).

The primary responsibility for fostering this development belongs to the teacher. In this regard, teachers can avail themselves of a wide array of children's literature that can serve as a language model for children. This literature should be readily understood by children and also encourage them to read aloud in the classroom. Children should also be allowed to discuss the stories and books with each other in the classroom. In so doing, their language skills will continue to develop. By exchanging ideas with each other, children have the opportunity to enhance their social and emotional development. By having group discussions, children begin to learn the rules of conversation; in particular they learn when it is appropriate to speak, and when they should allow others to do so.

In order for these circumstances to arise, teachers should use different types of stories and books that are appropriate for the class. There are different techniques that teachers can employ to create an environment that encourages children to read aloud. One way to do this is by using stories and books that have rhymes. Children are naturally drawn to rhyming stories, and such stories enable a child to remember words and phrases. Not only does rhyming expand children's vocabulary, rhyming is fun for children. Creating an environment that is fun, and that makes them comfortable allows them to feel safe, and this in turn fosters their social and emotional development (Kirkland, 2005).

In addition to selecting books and stories that use rhymes, teachers can also rely on books that relate to the environment of the children. In so doing, children will be able to make sense of their world and this can give them confidence to read other stories that will develop their literacy skills. In the end, oral language skills are closely linked to a child's literacy development. If a child is better equipped to use oral language at an early age, their ability to read and eventually to write will be enhanced.

### **Speech & Language Difficulties & ESL**

While the development of oral language skills comes naturally to children, there are instances when some children do not follow what should be a natural progression of language development.

Some children experience difficulties with speech and language. These difficulties are usually evidenced by slow language development, or problems with articulation that stem from an inability to master the basic components of language. Since the ability to read stems from oral language skills, children who have speech difficulties also experience problems with literacy (Lindsay, 2003).

In addition to children with language and speech difficulties, the number of children who need instruction in English as a second language (ESL) continues to grow. Because these children come

from different cultural backgrounds, and because English is not their primary language, they are often assessed to have learning disabilities. However, the techniques for teaching ESL students can enable children to develop oral language skills. Studies have shown that there are similarities between ESL students and students who experience language development problems. Some of these include problems with pronunciation, syntax and semantics, that is, the basic components of language briefly addressed earlier in this article.

There are a number of ways to overcome these problems. Teachers can speak more slowly, pronouncing words more slowly and giving clear instructions on assignments. In addition, teachers can incorporate ESL students' cultural backgrounds into the classroom environment. This will provide a degree of comfort to ESL students and encourage interaction with their English-speaking peers.

## Viewpoints

While oral language development is a natural progression that begins early in life, by the time children enter the school system, they should have the basics for conducting conversations and for interacting socially. As they progress through the school years, oral language development should continue with the aim being to foster other literacy skills as well as a child's emotional and social skills. However, recent changes in classroom practices because of governmental regulations and school board initiatives are presenting new challenges.

### Effects of No Child Left Behind

For example, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), has placed an emphasis on using standardized testing as a means for not only assessing students' progress but also for making schools accountable for that progress. This in turn has apparently "fragmented the curriculum... while the development of oral language which ultimately impacts all aspects of the curriculum has been relegated to a more incidental by-product of many classrooms." (Kirkland, 2005).

What this means is that teachers may be spending more time preparing children for standardized tests rather than creating environments where children are encouraged to develop their oral language skills by using their own language, conversing with each other, reading aloud and engaging in discussions about books and their daily experiences in the classroom environment. It is not clear what the long-term result of this will be, but it is possible that children will ultimately not be given an opportunity to develop their social and emotional skills in the schools. At the same time, as our society continues to change, there are alternatives to classroom environments. Today many children are involved with a variety of extra curricular activities that might provide alternative means for children to interact and therefore enable them to develop socially and emotionally.

## Mainstreaming

Another issue that has been raised is the mainstreaming of students with speech and language difficulties in their primary years. In these situations, teachers who are not specialists in special education may not have the skills necessary to properly foster the development of these children's oral language skills (Lindsay, 2003). In these cases, additional pressure will be placed on the schools to develop extra curricular programs for these students. While mainstreaming is now a widely accepted practice, this could run counter to the goals of the NCLB.

These problems can be overcome if there is enhanced interaction and cooperation between families and the schools. Although the schools are primarily responsible for the oral language and literacy development of school age children, parents can greatly assist this development if they are attentive to their children's needs in their early years.

## Terms & Concepts

**Emotional Skills:** The ability to access, perceive and regulate emotions.

**English as a Second Language (ESL):** English taught in schools to students whose primary language is not English.

**Gesturing:** A movement of a part of the body intended to communicate feelings or intentions.

**Language:** A systematic means of communicating by the use of sounds or conventional symbols.

**Language Skills:** Mastery of the rules governing the sequence of words into sentences and the forms of words.

**Literacy Skills:** Mastery of reading and writing skills that can also include other cognitive skills such as math skills and problem solving.

**Morphemes:** The smallest units of sound that are eventually combined to form words.

**No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB):** Federal law aimed at creating standards to measure students' progress in schools as well as to hold schools accountable for that progress.

**Oral Language:** The reception and expression of the pragmatic, semantic, syntactical and phonological aspects of language and this includes speaking and listening.

**Phonological:** One of the three basic components of language that are essentially rules for combining sounds.

**Recast:** The repetition and expansion by a parent or caregiver of the utterances and words of small children.

**Semantic:** One of the three basic components of language for combining morphemes into words and sentences.

**Social Skills:** Behavior in a particular situation that can predict social outcomes.

**Syntactic:** One of the basic components of language for forming sentences that have meaning.

**Vocabulary:** The words of a language or units of language that are used to develop sentences.

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# Psycholinguistics

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## Abstract

Psycholinguistics focuses on the skills and processes involved in the perception and expression of language. This article first describes levels of language representation, for example, semantics and grammar. It then delves into various language competencies, such as reading and speech that comprise language acquisition and production. Applications of psycholinguistics are also reviewed in the current article along with topics of interest in the field of psycholinguistics such as bilingualism.

## Overview

Psycholinguistics is more than just the psychology of language. More specifically, it has been defined as "the study of human language processing, involving a range of abilities, from cognition to sensorimotor activity, that are recruited to the service of a complex set of communicative functions" (Garman, 2000, p. 361). Psycholinguistics is concerned with how individuals communicate through symbols, or semiotics, via a number of language skills.

In detailing the components and processes involved in learning a language, Widdowson (2000) asserted that individuals must first gain an awareness of the various meanings within a language and then learn how to enact these meanings when using the language. Language can be spoken and written and involves production and reception. Therefore, language skills, or competencies, include speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Language ability entails how individuals put language skills to use.

Psycholinguistics deals with the reception, storage or representation, and production of words (Baker, Croot, McLeod, & Paul, 2001). How individuals receive, or perceive, words and then produce them is a type of language process. The perception of words is initiated when individuals encounter an input signal. The words produced are output signals. Psycholinguistics attends to the processes that take place in the period between input and output signals. Understanding psycholinguistics requires investigation of the multiple components and psychological aspects of the various language processes that comprise language development, including language reception, or acquisition, and language production.

### Components of Language Development

In their work, Baker et. al (2001) discussed the important construct of underlying representations or how words exist, or are represented, in an individual's mind. Representations are stored in input and output lexicons. Gernsbacher and Kaschak (2003) detailed "sub-word-level processing, word processing, sentence-level processing, discourse processing, and issues of...neural architecture..." (p. 93) as processes and components related to language representations and skills.

Sub-word-level and word processing appear to be the building blocks of language and its development. Grammar is a pertinent construct in language development because it is through knowledge of grammar that individuals are able to construct and understand language through sentences. Clifton (2000) defined grammar as including syntax, morphology, and phonology. According to Clifton, syntax is the relationship between various components of a sentence; morphology refers to how words are composed and relate to other words and phrases; and phonology is the configuration of sounds that comprise a language. Phonemes are the most basic units of sound and can be combined to form phonetic units (Kuhl, 2004). Representation at the phonetic, phonemic, lexical-phonological, and semantic levels influences recognition and comprehension of words (Martin, 2003).

Semantics, or the meaning conveyed by language processes at the word (or lexical), sentence, and discourse levels (Sanford, 2000), is another integral construct in language development. Miller (1999) emphasized the import of knowing what a word means and the contexts in which the word will be used in his discussion of semantics. Aspects of semantics reviewed by Miller include logical, linguistic, sentential, and lexical semantics. Logical semantics refers to a theory on the arrangements of meanings found in a language. Linguistic semantics is the description of meanings for a language while sentential semantics focuses on what statements mean. Lexical semantics refers to the manner in which words that have individual meanings combine within a sentence to create another meaning. Finally, discourse, as defined by Singer (2000), is the logical arrangement of sentences in written or spoken format.

In regard to the neural architectural aspect of language development, Gernsbacher and Kaschak (2003) provided an overview of research on neuroimaging, including positron emissions tomography (PET) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), and language processing. In these studies, individuals were monitored while completing tasks or responding to stimuli, such as semantic judgments and word generation, so that areas of the brain involved with the tasks and stimuli could be ascertained. Once words began to be processed, orthographic, or symbolic, representations of words were found to give way to phonological level processing. Pertinent results from Gernsbacher and Kaschak's review are included in the language acquisition and language production sections below.

### **Language Acquisition**

Processing word representations in the input lexicon is part of language acquisition, or reception. With regard to lexicons, Miller (1999) asserted that closed-class and open-class words comprise the English lexicon. How the format and meaning of words interrelate create the framework for a lexicon. For closed-class words, such as pronouns and conjunctions, the functional role is in grammar. Open-class words are more numerous than closed-class words with meaning created by their relationships with other open-class words. Incorporated in language

acquisition then are the language competencies of listening, or comprehension, and reading of words in a lexicon.

Bates, Devescovi, and Wulfeck (2001), review an investigation of language acquisition for children across multiple nations that addressed the genesis of word-level processing for language. Results indicated that children begin to understand words at between 8 to 10 months and start producing words between 11 to 13 months. By two years of age, children may be able to produce upwards of 500 words. The rate at which words are produced between initial word production and two years of age varies greatly across language. Grammar development also differs across languages and has been posited to be connected to vocabulary growth as well.

According to Ziegler and Goswami (2000), reading involves comprehension of written speech to ascertain meaning. Reading incorporates connecting visual symbols to sound. Phonological recoding takes words at the lexical level and maps them onto the sound levels. This process requires phonological awareness. Discrepancies in phonological awareness may lead to a language disorder such as dyslexia.

Brown (2005) investigated how children learn words and grammar. Of interest to Brown was children's engagement with the social environment as an influence of children's word and grammar learning. Dale (2004) explored the role of negative feedback children receive in regard to word learning and early grammar usage. Both word learning and early grammar usage relate to word-and sentence-level language processing. Dale stated that overextension occurs when children use one word for several others, such as apple for other fruit such as orange and pear. Social responses to overextension are a form of feedback that lends to the word learning process for youth with caregiver responses to children's language also shaping grammar development.

In a similar vein, Bates et al. (2001) investigated psycholinguistic concepts such as cue costs and cue validity from a cross-linguistic perspective. Cue costs are how much processing is required to use various formats of language while cue validity is the information garnered from different aspects of language. Cue costs and cue validity may differ in relevancy and reliability based on language. For example, in English cue validity is often ascertained by the context in which words are situated. As individuals use concepts such as cue costs and receive feedback from others to refine their language acquisition and comprehension, language competencies develop and are enacted through language production.

### **Language Production**

Language production entails language competencies such as speech and writing. As Martin (2003) reviews, language production models usually begin at a nonlinguistic level of representation. Lexical-semantic levels of representation follow and involve words in relation to one another, an example being noun and verb association. Syntactic representation is the next level

and entails how words relate to one another in order to convey various functions. Lexical-phonological representation leads to phonetic representation of words. Throughout the process individuals maintain words in their working memory.

One manifestation of language production is writing. Negro and Chanquoy (2005) define the process of writing as requiring the ability to plan, translate, and revise words across various levels of representation. Another aspect of language production is speech production. Speech production incorporates information at phonological, semantic, grammatical, orthographic (or spelling), and motoric levels (Baker et. al, 2001). Chang, Dell, and Bock (2006) explored the role of syntax in the process by which individuals acquire and produce speech. Syntax is composed of categories, functions and rules. For individuals to produce speech, Chang et al. suggest that they predict words based on what has been presented so far syntactically.

Diehl, Lotto, and Holt (2004) also address theories about speech perception. Speech perception research has addressed the relationship between acoustic signals and aspects of language processing. At its base level, speech perception is the way in which individuals interpret sounds as part of language. Speech perception emphasizes articulatory, along with acoustic or auditory, events. Articulatory events are gestures or vocal tract utterances that individuals perceive in the environment that provide information as to their surroundings.

### Neural Architecture of Psycholinguistics

Neuroimaging studies provide insight about the relationship between brain functioning and language development. In terms of language acquisition, according to Gernsbacher and Kaschak's (2003) review, initiation of speech processing occurred in both left and right regions of the temporal lobe, specifically in the superior temporal gyrus. Additionally, word processing intersected at the auditory and visual level in many instances.

A central role of activity does exist in the frontal regions of the brain for several levels of representation in the language production process (Martin, 2003). Gernsbacher and Kaschak also note that the left frontal regions of the brain are related to phonological and semantic processing and likely the retrieval and production of word formation. Semantic processing also occurs in other areas of the frontal region of the brain (e.g., middle and anterior frontal regions) and temporal regions. Temporal regions of the brain are also involved in word retrieval and production and limited phonological processing. Sentence processing takes place in Wernicke's and Broca's areas and temporal and frontal regions of the brain. Discourse processing appears centered in the right hemisphere.

## Applications

Psycholinguistics has been applied to areas as diverse as forensics and education. In regard to educational applications of psycholinguistics, Baker et. al (2001) stated that some strands

of psycholinguistic research address "the way in which children process speech and language at a cognitive or psychological level and thus aim to formulate hypotheses about the psychological processes or components that may be impaired." (p. 686) For example, Mackie and Dockrell (2004) focused on students with and without a language learning disorder (LLD) in order to understand how writing competencies may vary in expression due to impairments in language skills. Students with an LLD in the oral language arena had difficulty in some aspects of written language expression.

Other educational applications of psycholinguistics include Hall's (1995) description of a game, a modification of "Hangman," that integrated components of psycholinguistics, such as semantic, syntactic, and graphophonic cues, in the development of reading skills and abilities. Additionally, Widdowson (2000) described task-based learning as a method of teaching language within a psycholinguistic framework so that individuals develop and refine language abilities and ultimately, communicate more effectively.

## Issues

### Language Disorders

Relevant contemporary issues of interest in psycholinguistics include language disorders and bilingualism. Language disorders can be conceptualized as developmental language disorders or acquired language disorders (Garman, 2000). Acquired language disorders often arise from brain injuries. Other language disorders can be attributed to learning disabilities or specific language impairments (SLIs). Tijms, Hoeks, Paulussen-Hoogbeem, and Smolenaars (2003) defined developmental dyslexia as a disorder involving phonological processing that impacts reading and spelling. Specifically, individuals with dyslexia find it difficult to represent words phonologically in their mental lexicon.

Conti-Ramsden, Botting, and Faragher (2001) delineated the relationship between shortcomings with verbal memory, language processing, and specific language impairments (SLIs). Nonword repetition and sentence recall were psycholinguistic markers most accurate in identifying youth with SLIs. Martin (2003) detailed how damages to Broca's and Wernicke's areas of the brain impact language. In terms of damage to Broca's area, language production was impaired whereas the ability to understand language was affected by damage to Wernicke's area.

### Bilingualism

Bilingualism refers to an individual's aptitude in use of at least two languages (Baker, 2000). Second-language acquisition (SLA) is a term that refers to an individual's progression towards becoming bilingual (Hakuta, 2000). SLA may occur during childhood or adulthood. Regardless of the timing of its occurrence, SLA, or becoming bilingual, involves the use of similar language processes as those that occur during first, or native, language learning. Research has indicated that individuals may

have disparate level of skill across the various competencies that comprise language acquisition and production in their first- (L1) and second-languages (L2) (Sandoval & Durán, 1998). Another phenomenon of interest in regard to bilingual individuals is code-switching. In code-switching, a bilingual person improves with language skills and competencies in their L1 and L2 languages by using both languages while communicating with others (Hakuta, 2000). Psycholinguistics is interested in the meaning code-switching has in the communication process for bilingual individuals.

## Conclusions

Psycholinguistics is an area of study that aims to explicate the varied ways in which individuals comprehend and use language. Language acquisition and production occur across multiple levels of representation-from word-level to discourse processing. Neuroimaging provides insight into how regions of the brain relate to competencies used and expressed in language development. Psycholinguistics has been applied in educational arenas and in other areas such as forensics. Language disorders and bilingualism are issues of interest in psycholinguistics and illustrate how language competencies may be expressed and experienced based on language impairment or knowledge of more than one language. Psycholinguistics offers a viable and valuable perspective by which to understand human communication and development through language.

## Terms & Concepts

**Discourse:** Discourse is the spoken or written combination of sentences such that there is a logical representation of meaning.

**Grammar:** Grammar includes syntax, morphology, and phonology and is the mechanism by which sentences are constructed.

**Language Acquisition:** Language acquisition is the process by which individuals perceive and receive language. Language skills comprising language acquisition are listening and reading.

**Language Production:** Language production is the process by which individuals put language into use. Language skills comprising language production are speech and writing.

**Language Skills:** Language skills are competencies that reflect various language processes. Language skills are used in the acquisition and production of language and can be written or spoken. Language skills include reading, writing, listening, and speech.

**Morphology:** Morphology is the nature of the composition of words and their relationship to other words in a sentence.

**Phonology:** Phonology is the nature of the sound of words; it includes phonemes, the smallest units of sounds, and larger phonetic units.

**Psycholinguistics:** Psycholinguistics is the study of language processes and skills used by individuals to produce and acquire language.

**Semantics:** Semantics refers to the meaning conveyed at the word, sentence, or discourse level of language processing.

**Syntax:** Syntax is the aspect of grammar that refers to the characteristics, functions, and relationships of words within a sentence.

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# Communicative Competence

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## Abstract

Communicative competence is a theory that seeks to understand an individual's ability to effectively convey meaning within given contexts. The most widely-accepted components of this ability include grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. While the theory of communicative competence has been greatly influential in changing the nature of classroom instruction, some controversy exists over how much students learn from implicit and direct methods of instruction, and over how to best assess communicative competence. Current trends indicate that com-

municative competence will continue to be an important theory in language classrooms, though the direct instruction of language forms may become more prevalent in the near future.

## Overview

When people use language, they use much more than just words. A successful conversation requires speakers to choose language forms that make sense and are appropriate to a particular context. To be appropriate, speakers must consider the social expectations that govern a context such as taboos and the level of formality. They must use their grammatical knowledge to accurately structure their ideas in understandable phrases and sentences. They must use intonations and stresses that support the intended meaning of their words, and they must constantly interpret verbal and non-verbal feedback in order to choose their next set of utterances.

To negotiate such a sophisticated interaction requires participants to have communicative competence. Communicative competence describes one's ability effectively communicate meaning to a variety of people across a variety of contexts. (Hymes, 1972). According to the widely-cited framework produced by Canale & Swain (1980) there are four components of communicative competence. These are grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence.

Grammatical competence includes knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation, sound-letter relationships, and the rules of word and sentence formation. This category of communicative competence has been traditionally associated with language learning.

Sociolinguistic competence describes an individual's ability to produce and understand appropriate utterances within a given context. Included in this domain is the use of speech acts, which are formulaic utterances, used in specific situations to achieve actions like thanking, greeting, requesting, responding, etc. This category also includes an individual's understanding of etiquette in a variety of social situations.

Discourse competence refers to an individual's ability to combine grammatical forms and meanings to create a unified text

in different genres. Genres may be written (i.e. a narrative, or argument) or spoken (i.e. the distinctive speech styles found in regional, age, gender, and class groups) (Sato, 1990). Investigations within this domain have found that miscommunication can occur when individuals have differing discourse styles (Sato, 1990).

The last component, strategic competence, refers to an individual's ability to compensate for a lack of linguistic knowledge. For example, a speaker who doesn't know the word "triangle" may describe the shape by saying "it's a shape with three straight sides" so that the listener can understand the speaker's intended meaning and supply the correct word.

While these four components seem to be widely accepted in the literature, a few adaptations to the basic framework have been proposed. One change is to add a socio-cultural competence component, which describes an individual's ability to understand how culture affects communication (University of Minnesota(b), 2007). Another redesign of the framework is the creation of five categories including discourse (the core competency), linguistic, actional, socio-cultural and strategic (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, & Thurrell, 1997).

## History

### Linguistic Theory: Chomsky & Hymes

The communicative competence concept began developing in the early 1970s, when Hymes (1972) rejected Chomsky's (1965) theory concerning a distinction between linguistic competence and linguistic performance. According to Chomsky, linguistic theory was mainly concerned with the study of an ideal listener or speaker, who, in an ideal homogenized speech community, unaffected by interferences such as memory loss, distractions, and other random limitations, would produce a perfect grammar. Chomsky called the idealized capacity for language production a speaker's *competence* and the actual language produced the speaker's *performance*. Performance, according to Chomsky, rarely realizes the idealized possibilities of which a speaker is capable.

Hymes rejected several aspects of Chomsky's theory on the grounds that it did not account for socio-cultural factors that affect performance. Instead of viewing language performances that strayed from a perfect, idealized usage as mistakes, Hymes argued that these performances actually demonstrated another type of competence: the ability to apply social rules to language.

Hymes broadened the definition of competence, arguing that there are several components of communicative competence, only one of which is grammatical knowledge. He suggested four questions that an integrated theory of linguistics, communication, and culture (aka communicative competence) must be concerned with. These were:

- Whether, and to what degree, something is formally *possible*
- Whether, and to what degree, something is *feasible* in virtue of the means of implementation
- Whether, and to what degree, something is *appropriate* (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to the context in which it is used and evaluated
- Whether, and to what degree, something is in fact *done*, or performed, and what its doing entails (Hymes, 1972, p. 281).

### Speech Act Theory

Following Hyme's introduction of the term, the field of research on communicative competence quickly expanded. In the field of pragmatics, speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1975), which classifies language according to communicative functions, became a prominent means for analyzing communicative competence. According to the theory, communicative functions are realized through the performance of speech acts – minimal units of discourse – such as thanking, greeting, requesting, apologizing, etc. Through the study of speech acts, linguists have developed a more specific understanding of what kind of language is deemed communicatively competent in specific contexts.

### Language Acquisition

Language acquisition researchers sought to understand when and how communicative competence is learned. Studies on the language of children suggest that by the age of three or four, children are already varying their register – defined as systematic language patterns used in specific types of situations – to meet the demands of context (Anderson, 1990). In the second language acquisition field, researchers compared the development of communicative competence in native speakers to language learners in order to identify and understand existing differences. A major question linguists asked in this field was how an individual's knowledge of first language rules for communicative competence affected his or her ability to competently communicate in his or her second language.

### Strategic Competence

In the 1970s, Savignon added to the definition of communicative competence by using the term to describe second language learners' ability to communicate with other speakers in a classroom. She identified coping strategies such as asking for information, seeking clarification, and using referential strategies to negotiate for meaning as practices, which, when employed, could enhance a learner's overall ability to communicate. Additionally, she found that when learners had the chance to practice these coping strategies, they not only improved their communicative competence, but they also performed no worse on tests of discrete grammatical knowledge than students who did not get this practice. These findings were important for future applications of the theory in the classroom. Canale & Swain (1980) dubbed these coping strategies "strategic competence", and they became

part of the oft-cited framework for communicative competence discussed above (Savignon, 2002).

## Applications

### Communicative Language Teaching

In the classroom, the language teaching method that seems to have been most impacted by theories of communicative competence is communicative language teaching (CLT). Though the theory and approach share the term communicative, it is not the case that CLT is a direct product of the theory. Rather, CLT is based on several multidisciplinary theories related to communication and language, though communicative competence is one prominent theory (Savignon, 2002). The guiding principles behind CLT are that communication is the conveyance of meaning and that teaching should focus on the learner. In the classroom, a learner's performance may vary as part of a natural pattern of development and competence is always viewed as being relative. No prescribed methodology exists for CLT, but teachers are expected to choose methods that engage students in using language for a variety of authentic purposes. Culture and diversity are viewed as integral to a student's language experience and to the shaping of communicative competence (Burns, 1990 as cited in Savignon, 2002).

### Negotiation of Meaning

In programs that emphasize communicative competence, negotiation of meaning plays a central role. The concept of negotiating for meaning is derived from Long's interaction hypothesis which states that interacting and negotiating for meaning encourages language acquisition by making language input more comprehensible for learners, helping learners to notice where their language is deficient, and forcing learners to modify output to be understood (Keck, Iberri-Shea, Tracy-Ventura, & Wa-Mbaleka, 2006).

For instance, learners may be given a task which requires them to interact with one another in the second language. When students encounter language they do not understand, they must negotiate with one another to arrive at a meaning by using strategies like asking questions or using descriptive references. Tasks that encourage negotiation and that are frequently used in the classroom include peer interviews, problem-solving conversations relevant to student issues (e.g., negotiating rent), journal dialogues, and debates (Majhanovich & Hu, 1995).

## Viewpoints

### Assessment

Several controversial issues surround the theory of communicative competence, though these issues have more to do with how communicative approaches to teaching should be implemented rather than with the concept itself. One significant issue that arises is how communicative competence should be assessed.

Traditionally, language assessments measured a learners' grammatical knowledge by having them answer discrete test-items. However, these kinds of tests were later deemed inappropriate for assessing communicative competence because competence has since come to be understood as relative to and dependent on context. Thus, more holistic, authentic assessments, such as having students write essays or participate in conversations, must be used (Savignon, 2002).

Yet when such assessments are used, the determination of a learner's errors becomes more difficult. For instance, in assessing grammatical competence, raters must not only identify grammatical errors, but must also determine the severity of the error. Typically, errors that interfere with intelligibility or that may cause a listener or reader to negatively judge the language producer would be considered more severe than minor errors that do not impede comprehension. The University of Minnesota provides a good example of the complicated nature of these judgments in its Virtual Assessment Center.

The University divides grammatical errors into two categories: those of form, and those of style. For example, a speaker may make a formal error by misusing the present perfect tense in saying "We have had a great time at your house last night." On the other hand, a stylistic error may be made in saying "the CD is lost," since a passive verb form is used when a native speaker would probably chose the active form "I lost the CD." (University of Minnesota (a), Test Construction, 2007, p. 1).

The first mistake, misusing the verb tense, would be a minor error, since the speakers' meaning is preserved. However if the meaning was garbled, it would be a major error. The severity of stylistic errors depends how well they transmit meaning, too. Major stylistic errors, while grammatically correct, may unintentionally annoy the listener or strike him or her as rude (University of Minnesota (a), 2007).

As can be inferred from the example above, there is a general lack of precision in assessing communicative competence. There is no universal scale for assessment, and correctness depends heavily on context and the speaker's purpose. This has been a source of frustration for some teachers and administrators, yet it has also led to new innovations in testing techniques and the development of new scales for rating language proficiency. Two examples of such projects include a large scale project in Europe to develop language proficiency scales and the redesign of the Test of English to Speakers of Other Languages to conform to communicative principles (Hudson, 1996; North, 2000 )

### Direct vs. Implicit Instruction

A second complication in implementation of the communicative concept in CLT classrooms is related to the issue of direct vs. implicit instruction of language forms. In the absence of well-developed descriptions of communicative competence, multiple approaches to CLT developed in which the only common trait appeared to be a focus on preparing learners for

real-life communication rather than on form. Celce-Murcia et. al. (1997) write that this was especially true in the 1970s and 1980s when both CLT and communicative competence were first being articulated. Implicit instructional methods, which engaged students in life-like activities (e.g., role-plays, problem-solving, etc.) and which allowed students to discover language principles on their own, were the norm. Although CLT does not prevent teachers from focusing on form (e.g., syntax, grammar, morphology, etc.), its emphasis on meaning over form has been interpreted by some as a directive to abandon form-focused instruction.

The implicit approach has been unsatisfactory to some teachers and students who feel that some attention to form is beneficial for acquisition. Majhanovich & Hu (1995) point out that while only 20% of the program in Savignon's seminal experiment was actually devoted to communicative competence, the term has often come to mean the abandonment of linguistic instruction. They cite Higgs and Clifford (1982) and Higgs (1985) who note that this is a problem since, when students learn language in an environment that does not provide adequate instruction on form, students' language proficiency tends to plateau at a lower level of proficiency and their grammatical mistakes tend to become fossilized. Higgs and Clifford take issue with Savignon's definition of strategic competence because they say that it fails to take into account what the students can communicate and how well they can communicate it. As Majhanovich & Hu summarize the issue, "It is one thing to be able to communicate basic survival needs and quite another to negotiate, for example, an economic treaty" (p. 69). For many who voice similar concerns such as these, communicative approaches are most beneficial when instruction is balanced with attention to form.

In the 1990s, research in cognitive psychology and linguistics began to confirm the benefits of form-focused approaches. Schmidt (1990) articulated the noticing hypothesis which states that, in order to acquire new linguistic forms, language learners must first notice the forms. For the use of the language to become automatic, the learner must first pay attention to a learning objective and be given sufficient practice with the learning objective. Other researchers cited evidence that language acquisition is improved when form-focused instruction and corrective feedback are provided within a communicative situation (Russell & Spada, 2006).

Celce-Murcia et. al. (1997) suggest that in light of the extensive research that is now available on the components of communicative competence, a new evolution of CLT is occurring which will include more direct teaching of form within communicative settings. They refer to Dornyei & Thurrell's earlier work that suggests three ways teachers can add this component to their CLT classrooms:

- Adding specific language input (formulaic language in particular) to communicative tasks

- Raising learners' awareness of the organizational principles of language use within and beyond the sentence level
- Sequencing communicative tasks more systematically in accordance with a theory of discourse level grammar. (Celce-Murcia et. al, 1997, p. 148).

Today, the controversy surrounding form-focused instruction continues as teachers, researchers, and administrators try to determine which approaches work best within particular groups of students.

## Terms & Concepts

**Communicative Language Teaching:** An approach to teaching languages that emphasizes the definition of communication as the conveyance of meaning. The approach draws on several theories of language, but communicative competence is one of the primary theories behind the approach.

**Discourse Competence:** The component of communicative competence that describes an individual's ability to combine grammatical forms and meanings to create a unified text in different genres. Genres may be written or spoken.

**Form-Focused Instruction:** Typically refers to direct instruction of grammatical points at the sentence level. However, it can also be used to include direct instruction of larger, discourse-level forms such as paragraph or essay structure.

**Grammatical Competence:** The component of communicative competence that includes knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation, sound-letter relationships, and the rules of word and sentence formation.

**Negotiation of Meaning:** The process that individuals go through when they must use language with others to construct an understanding of the language.

**Register:** The systematic language patterns utilized in specific types of situations (e.g., formal school register vs. informal home register).

**Sociocultural Competence:** The component of communicative competence that is complementary to sociolinguistic competence. It describes an individual's ability to consider how culture influences language in context.

**Sociolinguistic Competence:** The component of communicative competence that describes an individual's ability to choose appropriate language for a particular context. This domain includes knowledge of speech acts and etiquette.

**Speech Act Theory:** A pragmatic theory that classifies language according to its communicative functions. Through speech act

studies, linguists have developed a more specific understanding of how language is used to achieve purpose.

**Strategic Competence:** The component of communicative competence that describes an individual's ability to compensate when linguistic knowledge fails. Asking questions, seeking clarification and using referential strategies fall into this domain.

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# The Four Language Skills

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## **Overview**

In the field of English as a second language, language is frequently discussed in terms of its four component skills:

- Reading,
- Speaking,
- Listening and
- Writing.

To have complete mastery of the language, individuals must be competent in these four skills. Yet the four skills do not exist as separate entities within the language; to the contrary, all of the skills are interrelated. When students are in a conversation, they are not just speaking, but also listening. When students listen to a lecture in class, they may also take notes. At the same time, it is possible for students to be more competent in one skill than another. Students from some language backgrounds may have no trouble reading and writing in English, but find the sounds of the language more difficult to produce. On the other hand, students from orally-based cultures may find it easier to speak than to write. Some students can speak a lot, but cannot understand much of what they hear. The task for the language teacher is to provide instruction that facilitates the development of all four skills.

While the four skills are inseparable in terms of their use, research on the teaching of the four skills typically focuses on one component skill with the aim of better understanding the processes involved in the acquisition of that specific skill. The research draws upon developments in the fields of psychology, linguistics, psycholinguistics, and cognitive science. In the sections that follow, the research and theories related to each of the four skills are presented.

## **Listening**

Of the four skills, listening would appear to be the most basic to language learning for in most instances, learners use this skill first. Typically, learners hear spoken language before they speak it; many learners exhibit a silent period in their language development when they can comprehend more language than they can produce (Brown, 2001). The importance of listening as a source of input is widely recognized, yet listening as a discrete skill

## **Abstract**

To have full mastery of a language, individuals need to be competent in reading, speaking, listening and writing. These four skills, as they are referred to, are interrelated because using a language generally requires using more than one skill at a time. However, learners can be more competent in one skill than another. Language teachers must teach students in a way that encourages mastery of all four skills. The research on the skills draws from linguistics, psycholinguistics, psychology and cognitive science.

with its own set of strategies has not always been emphasized in the classroom. In the 1950s and 1960s, students spent many hours in language labs and the classroom completing listening/speaking drills, but the purpose was for students to repeat sounds accurately, not necessarily to improve listening comprehension. In the 1980s, listening became more important with the advent of Krashen's (1995) concept of comprehensible input, which said that learners need to be exposed to massive amounts of comprehensible language in order to acquire it. Today, with a greater emphasis on the importance of all four skills, listening receives attention in its own right, and the focus in the classroom is on learning how to listen through the application of listening skills and strategies.

Four primary goals for listening instruction are:

- To improve learner's comprehension of spoken language;
- To increase the quality of learners' uptake (i.e., the words actually retained) from spoken input;
- To develop learners' strategies for understanding spoken discourse;
- To encourage learner participation in face-to-face communication (Rost, 2006.)

One of the reasons that listening in a second language is difficult is that spoken language often varies greatly from the grammatically correct written language presented in the classroom. People, for instance, often speak in incomplete sentences or use colloquial language and slang. They reduce language as in *You wanna go?* instead of *Do you want to go?* In speech, there may frequently be false starts such as *"I went to the hospital yesterday... you know, I went to the hospital because I was feeling pain in my chest..."* Along with these, listeners may have difficulty deciphering intonation, stress and rhythm, or understanding speech that has few pauses (Brown, 2001; Mendelsohn, 2006).

To foster better listening skills, teachers need to provide input that is relevant, authentic and not too difficult. Relevancy is important because research shows that for learners to turn input into uptake, they must find the language to be personally significant. White (2006) suggests that students should be allowed to choose what they listen to, and design their own listening texts and tasks. Authenticity refers to whether the language in the listening task is language the student would actually hear in a similar real-world situation. Texts should include examples of pauses, false starts, redundancy, etc. Level of difficulty refers to the overall comprehensibility given many variables such as length, rate of speech, text organization, etc (Rost, 2006).

Teachers should also encourage students to use both top-down and bottom-up processing strategies. Top-down processing occurs when students utilize their prior knowledge to help them understand a speaker. For example, a student may infer what a speaker intended to say given the learner's understanding of the topic. Bottom-up processing occurs when listeners focus on the

sounds, words, patterns, etc. of the language. Rost (2006) identifies two important phonological processes that help listeners identify words in a stream of speech: feature detection and metrical segmentation. Feature detectors are phonological processing networks in the brain that respond to specific sounds. Although children are born with the ability to hear all sound combinations, adults only hear the sounds for their native language(s). This means that adult listeners will experience perceptual difficulties when decoding streams of L2 speech. Metrical segmentation refers to a listener's use of stress, intonation, timing rules, etc. to turn speech into words. This kind of processing can be improved through training.

With greater access to technology, more options for listening activities are available. Students are listening to podcasts, online lectures, and video clips while completing activities involving the other four skills. Research indicates that students enjoy this kind of learning and find multimodal forms of learning, which involve the use of more than one skill, beneficial for language retention (Patten & Craig, 2007; Smidt & Hegelheimer, 2004).

### Speaking

Speaking and listening are closely related skills, for one rarely occurs without the other. In the classroom, speaking has frequently received more attention, for it is the primary skill learners want when learning a language.

### Communicative Competence

The speaking skill is often discussed within the context of a theory of communicative competence. Communicative competence describes a language learner's ability to communicate appropriately within a given situation. Canale & Swain (1980) outlined four components of communicative competence. These are:

- Discourse competence,
- Grammatical competence,
- Sociolinguistic competence and
- Strategic competence.

In terms of speaking, learners demonstrate communicative competence when they choose the correct words/phrases to convey their meaning while showing an understanding of the particular sociocultural or sociolinguistic context in which they speak (e.g., choosing language to be polite or formal based on the situation). Speakers also show communicative competence when they can compensate for language deficiencies such as using other words to describe a concept for which the speaker has no word (Martinez-Flor, Usó-Juan & Soler, 2006).

An important area of research that has influenced speaking instruction is the discovery that much language use is formulaic. For example, when greeting someone in English, it is likely you say, *"Hi. How are you?"* and the hearer responds, *"Fine, thank you."* Speech Act research has identified multiple situa-

tions where language is formulaic such as in greetings, thanking, requesting, apologizing and complimenting (University of Minnesota, 2007). These formulas, in their appropriate context, can be directly taught to L2 learners to quickly increase their proficiency.

Bottom-up processes related to speaking include the ability to pronounce the sounds of the language, to recognize how words are segmented and to use rhythm, stress and intonation correctly. While pronunciation is taught as a speaking skill and pronunciation can improve through practice, it is also recognized that adult second language learners rarely achieve native-like pronunciation due to their inability to perceive all of the phonetic features of the L2 (See above).

### Teaching Speaking Skills

To teach speaking, programs that use an indirect communicative language teaching approach often engage students in life-like situations such as role-plays or problem-solving tasks. In these situations, students must negotiate for meaning with their classmates, thereby creating chances for incidental speech learning and production. Programs that use a direct approach teach the microskills of speaking (e.g., speech acts, politeness strategies, turn-taking) and then provide opportunities for the students to use the skills. (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1997). Most programs try to ensure that students speak for a variety of purposes. Some of the commonly recognized purposes for speaking include:

- Interpersonal dialogues, conducted to maintain social relationships;
- Transactional conversations, meant to convey or exchange information;
- Intensive speech, designed to focus on particular forms; and
- Extensive monologues, extended speech used for oral reports, summaries or speeches (Brown, 2001).

### Reading

Unlike speaking and listening, reading and writing are not natural processes. The symbols of any written language are entirely based on conventions. There is generally little rhyme or reason to why certain combinations of lines and dots have been chosen to represent spoken sounds. Thus, learning to read does not occur in the same way that learning to speak does. Reading must be explicitly taught (Grabe, 2006).

At one time, reading was viewed as a passive process where learners merely absorbed the input off the written page. Today, this view has changed, and it is now believed that reading is an active process. The reader purposefully engages with the text in order to create meaning. Within reading studies, there are two generally broad ways to view how readers get meaning from text. The first is a product-oriented view, in which the meaning is contained in the text and the reader's goal is to decipher

the symbols and structures to understand the writer's ideas. The second is a process-oriented perspective. In this view, the reader brings to the text thoughts and experiences that shape how the reader interprets the text (Ajideh, 2003). While these two general perspectives influence the direction of reading research, most professionals do not believe that reading involves processes related to only one of these views. Rather, most people believe that reading is a complex process that involves the use of multiple processes, skills and strategies employed in different combinations depending on the reader's purpose and the nature of the text being read.

### Reading Strategies

In order to understand how readers employ skills and strategies, one body of research has focused on the good reader and what he or she does while reading. The most important finding is that good readers read differently depending on the text and their purpose in reading it. For example, when reading a newspaper, good readers may quickly skim the headlines to decide if there is anything worth reading. If reading a book for pleasure, the reader may read rapidly to get the main ideas. But if doing research for a project, the reader may slow down to focus on details and statistics or may take notes and reread portions of the text to ensure accurate understanding. Each of these ways of reading involve strategic decision-making by the reader who adjusts reading strategies to achieve a reading purpose (Ediger, 2006; Grabe, 2006).

Good readers are in command of multiple reading skills and strategies. Some of these strategies include

- Previewing text,
- Activating prior knowledge about the topic or the nature of the text,
- Creating mental images,
- Asking and answering questions related to the reading,
- Producing graphic organizers and
- Summarizing portions of the text (Ediger, 2006; Grabe, 2006).

For ESL instructors, good reading instruction must give attention to teaching reading strategies along with how and when to use them (Carrell, Gajdusek, & Wise, 1998).

### Vocabulary Acquisition

An important area of instruction relates to vocabulary acquisition and reading fluency. As might be expected, the more words one knows, the easier it is to comprehend written text. The connection between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension has been proven in multiple studies (Grabe, 2006). Studies have shown that readers should know 95% of the words in a text for adequate comprehension and in order to accurately guess the meaning of unknown words. The rate is even higher, 97-98%, for pleasure reading because anything below this makes the reader

struggle and the reading becomes unpleasurable. Translated into numbers of words or more accurately word families (a base word plus all of its derivatives: active, activation, actively, etc.) students may need to know between 2,000-5,000 word families to comprehend certain kinds of unsimplified texts (Hirsh & Nation, 1992; Hsueh-Chao & Nation, 2000).

To gain the word knowledge needed to read fluently, teachers must focus on vocabulary acquisition. Controversy exists over whether teachers should pre-teach vocabulary or allow students to learn new vocabulary in context. Many researchers and programs promote extensive reading where students select texts of high interest out of various graded readers and simply read for enjoyment, as a way to provide incidental vocabulary acquisition (Waring & Nation, 2004). The theory behind extensive reading is based on Krashen's (1995) view that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to large volumes of comprehensible input. By reading many books at or below their reading level, students, theoretically, will be exposed to much comprehensible input and be able to guess and learn the meanings of any unknown words. While some studies support this view, others have shown that intentional learning is more efficient and effective (Waring & Nation, 2004; Williams, 2006).

### Schema Theory

While vocabulary knowledge is important to reading comprehension, some students say that even though they know the words and structures of a text, they have difficulty interpreting the text. For this kind of reading problem, researchers point to Schema Theory and the importance of activating background knowledge in order to create an understanding of the text (Ajideh, 2003). Schema Theory is a theory that presents a hypothetical model of how information is stored in memory. In the model, schemata represent packets of information that are stored in the mind and become activated in one of two ways. Either new information from the outside world gets into the brain and becomes connected to related schema, thereby allowing an individual to assimilate new knowledge with existing knowledge, or new schemata are created to represent ideas not already present.

In terms of learning and reading, teachers can help students to integrate new knowledge by helping them connect knowledge with old. For example, asking students to share their experiences related to the reading topic before they read will activate appropriate schemata. Similarly, using graphic organizers such as concept webs can help students recognize their semantic associations. Instructors can also encourage students to read widely in one content area to build up a foundation of knowledge of the subject (Ajideh, 2003; Kasper, 1995).

### Writing

Writing shares some features with speaking in that both skills involve the learner in the production of language. Both writing and speaking are social processes which involve consideration of purpose, audience and context before language is produced (Martínez-Flor et al., 2006; Johns, 2006). But writing is distinct

from speaking in that writers have more opportunities for revising their final product before declaring it complete.

### Writing as a Process

The concept of writing as a process is the predominant theory of writing in today's ESL classrooms. In the past, emphasis on the product led teachers to teach grammatical forms and discourse structures without regard to how students got from blank page to final composition. Today, investigations into the processes of good writers have shown that writing is a recursive activity involving multiple steps. In the classroom, teachers apply this theory by encouraging students to develop their ideas through brainstorming and freewriting before producing a rough draft. Peer editing and teacher feedback show students ways to revise their ideas, and students may write several drafts before choosing a final one to edit for publication (Brown, 2001).

While most classes have shifted to a process approach to writing, focus on the form of the final product has not been forgotten. Cumming (2006) states that students have three important areas to improve upon as they learn to write:

- Features of the texts they write;
- Their processes of composing;
- Their interactions appropriate to literate social contexts (p. 474).

While the second has already been discussed, Cumming (2006) elaborates on the first by saying that improving the features of the text can include such items as increasing fluency in text production, gaining experience using a range of rhetorical structures or genres, choosing specific vocabulary, developing syntactical complexity and grammatical accuracy. Improving interactions appropriate to literate contexts refers to the personal and social power students gain as they learn how to correctly negotiate and interact within various discourse communities through their writing.

In teaching writing, teachers often serve as facilitators, helping students to become aware of and control their writing processes. Teachers encourage students to understand why they are writing and for whom. In genre approaches to writing, teachers may expose students to different styles of writing (e.g., compare/contrast, persuasive, informal vs. formal). In read-to-write approaches, students may read one or more texts and summarize, respond to or synthesize the information from the text. Some teachers ask students to write more personally about a topic, a type of writing Kroll (2006) calls student-to-world.

In conclusion, listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four important skills that one should master in order to be fully competent in a language. Research on the four skills provides insight into the subskills and strategy uses that make a learner competent in each skill. While teachers should use the research to guide their teaching, in real life, the four skills are always interrelated, and instruction should integrate the four skills as much as possible.

## Terms & Concepts

**Bottom-up Processing:** Bottom-up processing refers to a learner's use of the words/wordforms, grammatical structures, phonological cues, etc. to understand spoken or written texts.

**Communicative Competence:** Communicative Competence refers to an individual's ability to appropriately use language to convey meaning within a given context.

**Comprehensible Input:** Comprehensible input is a term developed by Krashen to describe the kind of language that learners must be exposed to in order to acquire a language.

**Extensive Reading:** Extensive Reading refers to programs that encourage students to read from a wide variety of graded readers in order to increase exposure to comprehensible input and thereby increase incidental vocabulary acquisition.

**Multimodal:** Multimodal is a term that describes environments that utilize or activate more than one form or mode of learning.

**Silent Period:** A silent period refers to a time in many language learners' development when language can be more easily comprehended than it can be produced.

**Schema Theory:** Schema Theory is a theory that presents a model of how information is stored in our brain. The theory suggests that information is stored together in packets. These packets are activated when new knowledge is taken in, allowing new information to be assimilated with old.

**Speech Act:** A speech act is a minimal unit of discourse.

**Top-down Processing:** Top-down processing refers to a learner's use of prior knowledge, experience in order to comprehend spoken or written texts.

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## Essay by Noelle Vance, M.A.

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# The Affective Variable

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## Abstract

The Affective Variable is a learning motivation aspect which is part of the affective domain. Affect refers to the emotions, attitudes, feelings and beliefs that condition behavior. In language learning, the affective variable refers to how emotions, attitudes, etc. impact learners' second language acquisition. A primary affective variable is motivation. Research has found that when students are motivated, they are more likely to be successful. Motivation has been conceptualized many ways, and several theories have been posited to explain what motivates students. Other affective factors have also been identified. There are many

ways teachers can use their knowledge of the affective variable to help students in the classroom.

## Overview

Language learning is a complex process that is influenced by multiple factors. One of the most important factors is the affective variable. Affect refers to the emotions, attitudes, feelings and beliefs that can condition behaviors (Arnold & Brown, 1999).

Affect and cognition are closely-integrated in the learning process. Some argue that affect precedes and motivates both cognition and behavior (Cuddy, Fiske & Glicke, 2007). That is, one's emotions, feelings and attitudes influence one's perceptions of an event; thereby determining what one thinks about and does before, during and after the event. Neurobiologists have shown that affect has an important impact on memory. Strong emotions can interfere with one's working memory, thereby interfering with the learning process. At the same time, affect can reshape long-term memory (Stevick, 1999).

### Affect & Motivation

Due to its importance in learning, much research has been done to uncover the exact nature of affect and how it can be used to promote achievement. One of the most researched affective factors is motivation. Studies have consistently shown that motivated students are likely to be more successful in learning a second language (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). In general, this is because students in a classroom that stimulates positive emotions are likely to enjoy the learning experience and will gain the attitude that learning in the context is desirable. Thus, they will be motivated to try hard and gain greater achievement. On the other hand, students in an environment that stimulates negative emotions will dislike the experience and gain the attitude that learning is undesirable. They will lack motivation, put little effort into their work, and have lower achievement.

But what causes motivation? Why are some students more motivated than others? Are there different types of motivation?

### Integrative & Instrumental Orientations

Motivation has been conceptualized in various ways. Dörnyei (2003) provides a historical overview of motivation research in

second language acquisition, and his timeline is generally followed here. He begins with the work of Lambert and Gardner (1972), who identified two types of attitudes that contribute to one's motivation to learn a second language (L2). These are integrative and instrumental:

- An integrative orientation refers to an individual's desire to associate with members of the culture who speak the target language. This theory states that learners who want to be more like the people who speak the target language are going to be more willing to adopt the behaviors and language style of the new culture. Therefore, they will quickly learn the language.
- Instrumental orientation refers to the practical reasons that an individual learns a language, such as to get a better job.

Dörnyei points out that Lambert and Gardner were working in the multicultural Canadian context composed of two distinct language communities comprised respectively of French and English speakers. In this context, they found integrativeness to be a "primary" (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 5) force for aiding or interfering with intercultural communication. However, not all L2 situations involve two communities coming into contact. In fact, many students learn a language as a foreign language in their own language environments (e.g., Chinese students learning English in China). Dörnyei highlights other researchers who suggest that the concept of integrativeness might not have to refer to an actual integration of an individual into a community, but could generally refer to an individual's developing self-concept. In this instance, the term would refer to an ideal-self with attributes of the L2 (Dörnyei & Csizer, 2002 as cited in Dörnyei, 2003).

### Self-Determination & Motivation

While Lambert and Gardner worked from a social psychology perspective, subsequent advances in cognitive psychology greatly influenced motivation studies. One of the most important cognitive theories dealing with affect is Deci and Ryan's (1995) Self-determination Theory (SDT). SDT categorizes an individual's motivation according to whether and to what extent the individual freely chooses the goal to be accomplished. In this theory, there are two general types of motivation: extrinsic and intrinsic.

- Extrinsic motivation is that which is inspired by factors that exist outside of the individual such as rewards and punishments.
- Intrinsic motivation refers to an individual's internal desires and needs to do well and to accomplish one's goals.

Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation represent opposite poles along a continuum of self-determination. Several sub-types of motivation are identified along the continuum, particularly related to extrinsic motivating factors. In these subtypes, it is recognized that even if motivation is extrinsic, an individual can agree with the goal. The greater the degree of agreement and acceptance

of the motivating factor, the greater self-determination the individual will feel. For instance, studying English in order to gain a promotion is considered an extrinsic motivation. If the individual is forced to apply for the promotion, he or she is not likely to perceive the move to study English as one that is freely chosen. However, if the individual believes that the promotion is going to benefit him or her and is one that is desirable, then studying English is likely to lead to a greater sense of freedom and self-determination (Noels, 2003).

Noels, Pelletier, Clément & Vallerand (2003) have been instrumental in applying SDT to L2 acquisition. In their research, they have found that when students perceive greater freedom of choice in the classroom and hold perceptions of themselves as competent, they are more likely to report more self-determined forms of motivation. Students who report higher levels of internalized motivation also report being more comfortable and persevering in their L2 learning. On the other hand, when students feel less freedom of choice and/or low levels of competence, they are less intrinsically motivated. These researchers suggest that this and similar research could mean that autonomy-supportive environments encourage intrinsic motivation and thus should result in higher levels of achievement.

However, some researchers have questioned the validity of SDT in cultural contexts where collectivism and conformity is valued over independence and individuality. In particular, some have posited that SDT may be less relevant to students from Asian cultures (Vansteenkiste, Zhou, Lens, & Soenens 2005). To test whether this is the case, a number of studies have been done on autonomous motivation, which is defined as a combination of intrinsic motivation and an internalized kind of extrinsic motivation in which the learner believes that the behavior needed to achieve a goal is personally valuable. Though more research is likely to be done on this question, in two studies investigating the relationship between autonomous motivation and Chinese students, both studies found that autonomous study motivation positively predicts adaptable learning attitudes, academic success and personal well-being. In contrast, controlled motivation, or motivation that is regulated by external factors or ones that are only partially-internalized, was associated with higher drop-out rates, maladaptive learning attitudes and ill-being. Moreover, parents who used autonomy supportive styles had children with more adaptive learning styles and higher well-being (Vansteenkiste, et al., 2005).

### Goal-Related Theory

Goal-related Theory is an important cognitive theory stating that the kinds of goals that learners set for themselves impact motivation. Challenging and specific goals are more likely to lead to high levels of motivation as are goals that are set by the learners rather than by an external source. Goals affect attitudes and motivation by

- Focusing the learner's attention on activities and behavior which are goal-relevant;



- Assisting the learner in evaluating the success of effort;
- Assisting the learner in gauging the intensity of effort needed;
- Encouraging persistent effort;
- Encouraging learners to draw up short term and long-term plans in a more systematic way in order
- To achieve the goal (Macaro, 2003, p. 94).
- The language attitudes of the learner,
- The learner's peer group,
- The school,
- The neighborhood and
- Society at large.

### Attribution Theory

A third cognitive theory that has been used in motivation studies is Attribution Theory. Weiner (1992) argues that the reasons to which an individual attributes past successes and failures influence one's current and future motivation. If one believes failure has been due to lack of ability, then one is less likely to pursue similar activities in the future. On the other hand, if failure is attributed to an inappropriate use of learning strategies or lack of effort, then one may be more likely to try again (Arnold & Brown, 1999; Dörnyei, 2003). Attribution Theory is related to the Expectations and Values-related Theory. This theory holds that our perceptions of our expectations for success and the value we place on the tasks we attempt to accomplish influences motivation. Within this theory, expectations for success are developed based on a learner's attributions of past successes, their feelings of self-efficacy (or sense of what they think they can realistically do) and their self-worth (Macaro, 2003).

### Neurobiological Research

Two final areas of motivation studies come from neurobiological research and what Dörnyei (2003) calls the "situated conception" of motivation. Schumann (1999) describes a stimulus-appraisal-response system where an individual's brain evaluates a stimulus based on five dimensions. These evaluations then form the basis of individual motivation. The "situated conception" refers to studies that examine the impact of the classroom context on motivation. Researchers working within this paradigm examine how the course design, the teacher and the classroom group dynamics influence student motivation.

### Other Affective Factors

While motivation is well-researched, it is but one of many affective factors. Other affective factors that are frequently said to influence learning are:

- Anxiety,
- Inhibitions,
- Extroverted vs. Introverted Personalities,
- Self-Esteem, and
- Learning Styles (Arnold & Brown, 1999).

In Walqui's (2000) list of contextual factors that influence achievement in the classroom, some of those related to affect include:

Examples of attitudes that might have an affective impact include whether L2 acquisition is viewed as an act that replaces a first language or as the acquisition of an additional language; whether different dialects are acceptable in the classroom and whether the language and the culture of those who share it have status in the society. Additionally, Walqui lists individual and classroom factors that include peer pressure (e.g., is it perceived to be acceptable to learn the language?), presence of role models, level of home support, diverse needs and goals, learning styles, and the nature of classroom interactions.

Each of the above factors has been discussed in the literature and is generally assumed to have an impact on language learning. However, the exact impact of any individual factor is difficult to assess. This is because it is not easy to isolate many of these factors from larger social and/or educational contexts, and from other related factors. Therefore, while from a common sense perspective, one might be able to easily articulate why someone who is anxious about his or her ability to learn a language or who has low self-esteem would find it more difficult to achieve in the classroom, the research is less definite about their actual impact. For instance, in a study of 88 first-year-university French students that attempted to determine the role of personality variables in second language acquisition (SLA) and to integrate these variables into Gardner's socioeducational model, Lalonde & Gardner (1984) found a general lack of relationship between personality variables and French achievement or language aptitude, even though the study found that some personality variables did correlate with motivation, which has been generally shown to directly affect achievement.

Interestingly, some research suggests that increased language achievement can sometimes become a negative affective factor. In a study that examined the relationship between immigrants' linguistic acculturation, socioeconomic status, perceived discrimination, social support networks, general health and psychological well-being, Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind (2007) found that linguistic acculturation was directly and negatively related to psychological well-being. That is, as immigrants gained a better control of the language, they were less happy. The reasons for this are unclear. The authors suggest that as immigrants become acculturated they may lose contact with their first language primary support groups, or their language abilities allow them to better perceive discrimination against them and begin to internalize negative attitudes and stereotypes. Whatever the reason, the negative relationship between linguistic acculturation and well-being raises interesting questions about the reciprocal relationship between affect and achievement.

## Applications

### Increasing Motivation in the Classroom

In the classroom, teachers concerned with the affective variable want to know how to create a positive learning environment that encourages intrinsic motivation. They also want to know how to overcome the effects of negative factors that exist within and outside the classroom. Both teachers and researchers have offered guidelines for increasing motivation. Macaro (2003) cites two studies that resulted in lists of advice for teachers who want to increase motivation. The first list from a study by Dörnyei and Csizer resulted from a survey of 200 practicing teachers. They are:

- Set a personal example with your own behavior,
- Create a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom,
- Present the tasks properly,
- Develop a good relationship with the learners,
- Increase the learner's linguistic self-confidence,
- Make the language classes interesting,
- Promote learner autonomy,
- Personalize the learning process,
- Increase the learners' goal-orientedness,
- Familiarize the learners with the target language culture (cited in Macaro, 2003, p. 113).

The second list springs from a study by Williams & Burden:

- Recognize the complexity of motivation,
- Be aware of both initiating and sustaining motivation,
- Discuss with learners why they are carrying out activities,
- Involve learners in making decisions related to learning the language,
- Involve learners in setting language-learning goals,
- Recognize people as individuals,
- Build up individual's beliefs in themselves,
- Develop internal beliefs,
- Help move towards a mastery-oriented style,
- Enhance intrinsic motivation,
- Build up a supportive learning environment,
- Give feedback that is informational (cited in Macaro, 2003, p. 113).

While these suggestions sound good in light of some of the theories of motivation that have been discussed above, Macaro

(2003) expresses concern that there is nothing language specific about these procedures.

There is nothing on the issue of use of the target language or the exclusion of the L1. There is nothing on progression with respect to the difficulty of the content itself. There is very little mention of the relationship between the individual's cultural identity and the culture of the target country or countries. There is no mention of the dominance of English as an international language and the effects of this on both learners of English as an L2 and on English (L1) learners of languages other than English (p. 114).

### Learning Strategies

In light of this dearth, he cautions that the answer for teachers who want to spur language learning motivation cannot only be found in generic motivations for motivating learners. He points to the teaching of learning strategies as one potentially effective way that teachers can encourage and sustain student motivation. Learning strategies are the actions that students can use to learn new information. There are multiple learning strategies. Some of these are specific to reading, listening, speaking and writing. For instance, in reading, students may learn strategies to help them discover the meaning of words in contexts such as looking for synonyms and definitions in the sentences near the unknown word. Macaro (2003) hypothesizes that research will find that when students effectively use strategies, they experience success in language learning and this success will in turn lead them to be more motivated to pursue their studies.

Although he says there are few studies to test this hypothesis, he points to Goal Theory and theories of self-determination as a basis for his ideas. He says that evidence shows that one of the reasons for students' poor attitudes toward language learning is that they find it difficult. Since Goal Theory suggests that non-challenging goals are not motivating, he states that instead of making classes easier, teachers should provide challenging goals and teach students the strategies they can use to achieve them. In terms of self-efficacy, he says that teaching students to use strategies promotes independence and learner autonomy. When students choose from a selection of strategies and evaluate them for effectiveness, they feel empowered and in control of their language learning processes, which thereby increases motivation (Macaro, 2003).

### Affective Filter Hypothesis

In addition to advice to generally spur motivation, teachers also have access to a few specific language methodologies that have affect as a primary component of the method. Krashen & Terrell's (1983) Natural Approach is formulated around five hypotheses, one of which is the Affective Filter Hypothesis. This states that a learner's emotional state can act as a filter that impedes or blocks input of language acquisition. Community Language Learning is a method that aims to relieve the anxiety that students feel when they learn a new language by using counseling techniques (Kerper, 2002).

In conclusion, the affective variable encompasses a broad range of factors related to emotions, attitudes, beliefs and feelings. It is an important variable because the impact of affective factors on student achievement is believed to be substantial. Thus, teachers should give ample consideration to affect when planning their classroom activities.

## Terms & Concepts

**Affective Filter Hypothesis:** States that emotions can act as a filter that blocks language acquisition.

**Attribution Theory:** States that the reasons learners attribute for their past successes and failures influences their future motivation and behavior.

**Autonomous Motivation:** Describes a highly internalized and intrinsic motivation.

**Community Language Learning:** A method of L2 teaching that uses counseling techniques to reduce learner anxiety.

**Expectations and Values-Related Theory:** States that the degree of success an individual expects to have and the value that he or she places on one's activities influences motivation.

**Extrinsic Motivation:** Refers to motivation that is inspired by factors external to the learner such as getting a reward or avoiding a punishment.

**Goal-Related Theory:** States that learners are more motivated when they freely choose goals that are challenging and that are close to being accomplished.

**Instrumental Orientations:** Refer to learner attitudes that language learning is done for practical reasons such as getting a better job.

**Integrative Attitude:** Refers to an individual's desire to associate with, and become more like, members of the culture who speak the target language.

**Intrinsic Motivation:** is motivation that is caused by a learner's internal desire to do well.

**Learning Strategies:** Are actions that a learner takes to improve learning. There are many learning strategies specific to many learning activities such as reading or listening.

**Self-Determination Theory:** States that learners are more motivated when they are able to freely choose the goals that they set out to accomplish.

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# Suggestopedia

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## **Abstract**

Suggestopedia, developed in the 1970s by Georgi Lozanov, is a method for learning languages. Lozanov, a Bulgarian psychotherapist and educator, developed the method based on suggestology principles of desuggestion and suggestion, claiming that the method could accelerate language learning to unparalleled levels for adults. Suggestopedia has been connected to other language

teaching methods such as superlearning and accelerated learning. Suggestopedia has met criticism because results have not been replicated in other studies.

## **Overview**

Suggestopedia, developed in the 1970s, is a method of learning languages. Developed by Georgi Lozanov, a Bulgarian psychotherapist and educator, suggestopedia was cultivated as a learning tool to augment an individual's ability to learn foreign languages, specifically in adulthood (Brown, 1994). Suggestopedia makes use of suggestion and desuggestion techniques, removing barriers to learning, and using these techniques to convey to the learner that learning is easy and natural.

Georgi Lozanov was born in 1926 in Sofia, Bulgaria. He attended the University of Sofia, where he studied medicine and worked as a psychotherapist and psychiatrist. In 1966, he published his doctoral thesis, "Suggestology," which many designate as the founding of the suggestopedia methodology. In his research, Lozanov claimed to have developed a method for learning languages in which extensive brain capacity was used, leading to greater learning in a shorter period of time. In 1981 the suggestopedic manual was published and translated into English by 1998 (Baur, 2000).

The profession of teaching a language has only emerged in the last century, in the early 1900s (Rodgers, 2001). Until recently, languages were taught using the 'Classical Method,' which consisted of learning to translate texts, vocabulary memorization, and exercises in writing (Brown, 1994). During the 1960s, the motivation for learning a new language changed; teaching began to emphasize being able to communicate with others effectively (Rodgers, 2001). Furthermore, since the 1970s, language teaching methodologies have emphasized the importance of cooperative learning and the importance of self esteem. Since the emergence of language teaching specialization, there have surfaced a multitude of perspectives on the best way to teach a language, and many teaching methods have risen and died out in popularity. About every twenty-five years, a new method emerges which combines new aspects of teaching with some prior ones (Brown, 1994).

## Language Teaching Methods & Approaches

Language teachers recognize two types of teaching: the "method" and the "approach." Methods are defined as predetermined teaching structures that stipulate particular techniques. Approaches are more philosophical - they are schools of thought that can be interpreted in various ways, and applied through different activities in a classroom. The 1950s to the 1980s saw an increase in the search for methods, and this perspective prevailed throughout much of the 20th century (Rodgers, 2001). The 1970s especially saw an era in which research and exploration in second language acquisition led to a large number of original and research-based methods for learning languages. This era labeled the cognitive process as increasingly important in learning a second language (Brown, 1994). Suggestopedia came out of this time period as a popular method, based upon the idea that language learning should be largely interactive (Rodgers, 2001). Other popular methods included community language learning, the natural approach, and the silent way (Brown, 1994).

### The Learning Hypothesis

Suggestopedia is largely based on the Acquisition or Learning hypothesis. The learning hypothesis states that adults can progress their language proficiency for two reasons: using the language to communicate with others and understanding and integrating the language (Krashen & Terrel, 1983). This is a departure from other schools of thought in which the analysis of language is key. Suggestopedia also draws heavily from ideas regarding how consciousness and the subconscious affect individuals and their ability to process information.

While suggestopedia is often used to refer to other teaching methods such as accelerated learning approaches, Lozanov's method is specific and requires several unique elements throughout the approach. The teaching environment, the range of methods used, and the behavior and personality of the instructor and students are critical to the success of the students.

## Further Insights

### The Critical Period Hypothesis

Central to any second language learning method is the idea of the critical period. Psychologists and other researchers have long puzzled over how children learn a first language so quickly, in the first few years of life, and why learning a second language becomes so much more difficult to learn as we grow older. The critical period hypothesis claims that there is a biological basis to why language acquisition occurs so naturally in these first few years - that there is a critical window where achieving language fluency is possible. Researchers who study second language acquisition have expanded this argument to include a window for acquiring proficiency in a second language, with the window closing around the time puberty hits. However, other researchers contest this argument (Brown, 1994).

Suggestopedia challenges this assumption, and uses principles of suggestology throughout the learning method. Central to understanding this method is research on the brain and its functions.

### The Brain in Suggestopedia

Research on the brain and its functions has contributed heavily to the literature on language acquisition and second language learning. Many scientists have studied how the brain functions as an individual learns his or her first language. There is evidence that as the human brain matures, it organizes itself and "assigns" certain functions and capabilities to the left hemisphere or right hemisphere of the brain. Scientists call this procedure lateralization, and many researchers believe that understanding this process is key to understanding how languages are learned. The left hemisphere controls functions that are logical and analytical, while the right hemisphere is the emotional center of the brain. Researchers who study second language acquisition are concerned mostly about when lateralization occurs and how it affects the way that individuals learn a language. Many researchers believe that lateralization begins to occur around the age of two, and is completed by puberty. Some speculate that once the brain is organized in this way, it becomes difficult for individuals to acquire fluency in another language because the flexibility and plasticity of the brain is diminished (Brown, 1994).

Research on brain development and learning languages has also focused on right brain activity, and the role of the right hemisphere. For example, studies on post-pubescent students found heavier right brain activity in the earlier phases of learning a second language, which could suggest that adults and older children may benefit in right brain based activities in learning a second language (Brown, 1994).

The suggestopedia method asserts that the human brain is capable of enormous feats, and Lozanov (1982) claims that teaching methods often hinder the brain from reaching these capabilities. Specifically, the brain is responsible not only for learning and storing information, but also controls emotive responses and motivation. When learning occurs, activity in the brain is not only storing information, but having an emotional response to it. However, teaching methods often only address the facts and figures - ignoring the emotional and motivational aspects of learning, and failing to engage and address all parts of the brain. Too often, learning occurs through exercises that are disconnected, tiring for the individual, and mistakes that are rarely corrected through the learning process.

Lozanov (1982) additionally argues that in teaching languages, individuals are often taught so that elements are independent from each other, isolated from the whole. Often this "unnatural" way of learning leads to inhibitions, a loss in confidence, and a fear of learning. Suggestopedia combats these ideas through a methodology that enables the individual in a variety of ways: by removing barriers that society teaches individuals that are present - that their aptitude for learning is limited, and releasing the individual's dormant capabilities.

## Suggestology

The term suggestology encompasses the science of suggestion - the ability to bring out an individual's dormant capacities that lie in the mind and the body. Lozanov (1982) defines suggestion as "a communicative factor which is expressed in proposing that the personality should make its choice, should choose both rationally and intuitively, and according to its structure and disposition from among a wide range of possibilities among complex stimuli" (pp. 146).

Suggestology proposes that when suggestion is applied in a positive manner, and is systematic in its approach, the method can bring out assets and capabilities that have been lying dormant in the individual's personality, and that bringing these capacities to the surface through desuggestion and suggestion can increase an individual's ability to learn, and encourage the creative process (Lozanov, 1982).

The first step in suggestology is desuggestion - removing the barriers and emancipating the learner so that he or she may overcome the barriers that prevent the learner from tapping into reserve capabilities. These capabilities are closely tied to personality; suggestology allows the individual to revert back to two personality characteristics - infantilization and pseudopassivity. Infantilization is characterized by extreme plasticity - the ability to adapt and change as well as amplified awareness and insight; pseudopassivity is characterized by a relaxed state in which stressors are lacking, and the mind and body are free of extraneous thought or action. Suggestology purports that when an individual can harness these two characteristics, they are able to use these underlying skills to increase their learning (Lozanov, 1982).

Suggestopedia is largely guided by the facets and beliefs that underlie suggestology. While the conditions that will bring out these types of dormant abilities may happen naturally, they can also be created in a learning situation. Furthermore, suggestology purports that learning is an incredibly complex process that involves the conscious and paraconscious, and that the harmonization of these two realms of the mind is critical for learning. The paraconscious is defined as all things that are happening in the brain and the mind that occur outside of consciousness, including making links, coding information, and analyzing symbols and symbolic meanings. The paraconscious also triggers the individual's long-term memory (Lozanov, 1982).

### Major Characteristics of Suggestopedia

There are several features that are characteristic of suggestopedia that form the basis for the teaching method. They include:

- Use of suggestion and desuggestion,
- A nurturing and dynamic teacher, and
- The complexity of the teachers' and peers' suggestions to the learning student (Schuster, 1979).

The critical component of suggestopedia is to release students from the social norms that obstruct their capabilities, freeing individuals from the idea that their capabilities for learning are limited, and uniting the conscious and paraconscious functions of the brain to increase learning capacity (Lozanov, 1982).

In addition to suggestion and desuggestion, a successful suggestopedic approach also relies on certain personality characteristics and capabilities of the teacher, and the atmosphere created by that teacher and the individual's peers. It is also important to note that suggestopedia is supposed to be an easy process for the learner. Learning is not forced; it is a positive, satisfying, and creative experience. Furthermore, it is important that the individuals learning the language are not exhausted, as learning cannot occur at the individual's maximum capacity when they are feeling drained of energy (Lozanov, 1982).

## Applications

### The Suggestopedia Method

The atmosphere and classroom in which the suggestopedia method takes place is a central facet of the method. Suggestopedia makes heavy use of classical music, and students are seated in comfortable seats, as relaxed and comfortable as possible. These elements set the stage for the possibility of desuggestion and suggestion to occur, and even make it probable (Brown, 1994).

### The Three Phases

Suggestopedia, as it was used and taught by Lozanov, has three distinct phases:

- Pre-session,
- Session, and
- Post-session.

The first phase lasts about fifteen to twenty minutes. The pre-session is marked by introduction to the new material, and the teacher suggesting through their behavior and language to the students that learning the language will be pleasant and easy. The first stage is about bringing the class to the correct state of mind. Learning a language using the suggestopedia method requires individuals to be in an "optimal" state - one in which they are relaxed but focused, and confident in their abilities (Lozanov, 1982).

During the session, lasting about forty-five minutes, the text for the class is read twice - once by the teacher with students following along, and the second time by only the teacher. During the first read-through, students listen to classical or early romantic music, while the second read through is accompanied by pre-classical music. Suggestopedia heavily employs the use of music to relax and focus individuals. Throughout the session, it is extremely important that the instructor continue to convey

to the students that the material they are learning and hearing is very easy to learn, and that they are capable of mastery (Lozanov, 1982).

During the postsession, the teacher and the class elaborate on the material presented in the session. Students and teacher may re-read or translate the text, play games, sing songs, role play, or converse about the themes of the text. It is important that activities in the postsession are spontaneous and do not tire out the students. Following the postsession, there is no additional work given, although students may choose to continue exploring what they have learned post-classroom session (Lozanov, 1982).

### Textbooks

The textbook is an important component of suggestopedia, and should complement the suggestopedic process. The textbook should hold light and pleasant stories that introduce between 600 and 850 new words and a significant portion of the language's grammar. In this way, students are exposed to a great diversity of the language from the very beginning, and are unlimited from the start. Any illustrations in the textbook should connect to the lesson's subjects. While the elements of the suggestopedic process are well defined, there is no particular order of instruction in terms of how the language is presented or learned. An enormous amount of information is offered in these lessons, and the object is not to limit a student's capabilities (Lozanov, 1982).

The major principles of suggestopedia can clearly be related to the major principles of suggestology. Teachers attempt to create an atmosphere where intellectual activity is unfettered and creativity is encouraged, without causing exhaustion. The teachers' role in this method is a difficult one - to bring about in each individual calmness and confidence in one's abilities, and absolute trust that they will learn the language. The process and the relationships that are established within the process can be likened to those that emerge within group therapy sessions - safe spaces, unwavering trust, and a lack of fear (Lozanov, 1982). The relationship between the teacher and learners is critical and complex. The teacher takes on a role most equated with an authority figure or hypnotist; the learner is a believer in the teachers' methods (Rodgers, 2001). The student yields to the teacher, becoming like a child, and as a result, extremely suggestible to the teacher's methodology and to learning and absorbing the information being presented (Brown, 1994).

### Viewpoints

The suggestopedia method has made way for many other approaches and methods to learning languages, including superlearning and accelerated learning. The superlearning approach has similar phases - the pre-session, active, concert, passive concert, and post-session - throughout which many of the same elements are used as in suggestopedia. Language textbooks, music, and "play" activities such as singing or skits are liberally employed throughout the various segments (Baur, 2000).

Lozanov (1982) has claimed that when the suggestopedic method is carried out properly (over the course of twenty-five days, for four hours per day, with no additional outside work required), students of the method see far better results and increased retention than with traditional methods. They also experience a lack of fear of speaking the language and a desire to further their study of it. Other research has found that classes that used suggestopedia as a method covered twice as much material as a control group at the same university. Education researchers in the 1970s in the United States found that there were three critical elements to successfully employing the method:

- The classroom atmosphere,
- A dynamic and motivational teacher, and
- Relaxed and alert students (Bancroft, 1995).

However, many of Lozanov's claims have been unable to be replicated elsewhere. As a result, many researchers question the validity of the experiments and the method. The method has also been criticized as being based upon pseudo-scientific principles (Bauer, 2000).

When new teaching methods surface, the developers strive to prove that they work. It is important to point out that many methods do work remarkably well in experimental conditions in which the teachers are well qualified and brilliant, the students are tractable and receptive to learning new information, and the classes are small and intimate. Transferring the methodology to classrooms with less than ideal situations can certainly lead to failure; the context is of utmost importance (Decoo, 2001).

Brown (1994) reminds us that while suggestopedia is not necessarily an empirically supported method of language learning, certain aspects of the method may certainly prove fruitful in language classroom practices, and are employed in various classrooms throughout the United States and around the world. Role playing, games, and relaxation techniques may be beneficial for many students who are learning languages.

Another interesting question brought to light by suggestopedia is how an individual perceives learning, and how emotions affect the learning process. Brown (1994) states "at the heart of all thought and meaning and action is emotion...It is only logical, then, to look at the affective (emotional) domain for some of the most significant answers to the problems of contrasting the differences between first and second language acquisition" (p. 61). The affective domain includes all facets of human emotion: empathy, anxiety, self-esteem, and attitude. Research regarding the affective domain has increased in recent years because researchers believe that these factors may be connected in some way or another to learning another language besides an individual's native tongue.

For example, Guiora et al (1972, as cited by Brown, 1994) coined the term *language ego* to suggest that individuals not only gain



words and sounds and grammar when learning a language, but also an identity that is tied to that language. Researchers hypothesize that children are still developing this ego, and as a result do not feel threatened when new languages are introduced; rather they can make this language acquisition part of their identity. Adolescents and adults on the other hand have formed their identity, and changing that identity represents a far greater hurdle.

The concept of identity and challenging one's identity can certainly be applied to other learning situations. It has been proposed that many children, by the time they hit puberty, believe that they are or are not successful at school, and this perception can be difficult to overcome. Certainly, elements of the suggestopedia method address this concern - that adults or adolescents may need to overcome greater internal barriers than pronunciation or grammar rules in order to learn a new language. These challenges may also be mirrored in other educational settings and subjects.

Suggestopedia has little empirical backing. However, Lozanov's method is related to other teaching methods, and several of the tactics that he used in suggestopedia may be beneficial to the learner, in learning languages or in other subject areas.

## Terms & Concepts

**Accelerated Learning:** Accelerated learning is based on suggestopedia. The term now refers to various educational methods that increase learning, often using elements of music or drama.

**Approach:** Approaches are philosophical schools of thought that can be interpreted in various ways, and applied through different activities in a classroom.

**Critical Period Hypothesis:** The critical period hypothesis claims there is a critical window where achieving language fluency is possible.

**Language Ego:** Language ego is the hypothesis that individuals not only learn vocabulary, sounds, and grammar when learning a language, but also an identity that is tied to that language.

**Learning Hypothesis:** The learning hypothesis states that adults can gain language proficiency by using the language to communicate with others, and understanding and integrating the language.

**Lozanov, Georgi:** Georgi Lozanov, a Bulgarian psychotherapist and psychiatrist, was the founder of suggestopedia in the 1970s.

**Method:** Methods are predetermined teaching structures that stipulate particular techniques in teaching a subject matter.

**Superlearning:** Superlearning is another method to language learning influenced by suggestopedia. The method has four similar phases, throughout which music and other activities are used liberally to induce the learning process.

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## Essay by Rana Suh, M.Ed.

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# Teaching Reading & Writing

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tions, self-assessments, and journal writing. Many instructional approaches advocate integrating reading and writing across the curriculum as a way to further develop students' abilities.

## Overview

A student's inability to read and write creates a ripple effect that has far-ranging repercussions on his or her future prospects that demand proficient literacy. Given how much faster and technologically-dense everyday American life has become, anyone remaining illiterate after completing the educational process is deprived of basic academic tools and lacks necessary survival skills for future success, including, but not exclusive to, gainful employment as an adult. According to a 1993 United States Office of Technology Assessment, 25 percent of the adult population lacks the basic literacy skills required for a typical job. As of the spring of 2013, approximately thirty-two million Americans could not read. There are numerous reasons for the low literacy rate in the United States. A December 2004 paper released by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) cites an American School Board Journal story stating that less time was being spent on teaching writing because educators are focusing more on meeting the parameters set by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The NWREL paper also mentions that a 2003 study by the National Commission on Writing found limited focus was being given to educating preservice teachers in how to teach writing (NWREL, 2004).

The NCLB is federal legislation defined by the theory of standards-based education reform in which high educational goals are set for states and school districts in which students are expected to meet or exceed these expectations. Federal requirements are measured via roughly 45 million annual standardized tests created at the state level and first administered in the third grade (Scherer, 2006). The demands of NCLB have shifted the focus in classrooms towards test-taking because school districts whose results don't meet or exceed pre-determined test levels risk losing federal funding. According to Guilfoyle (2006), this redirection of focus prevents teachers from providing the kind of rich and varied curriculum needed for an environment more conducive to teaching reading and writing. In 2012 and 2013 President Barack Obama began issuing waivers that released states from the restrictions of NCLB if they continued working toward rigorous educa-

## Abstract

A student's inability to read and write creates a ripple effect that has far-ranging repercussions on his or her future prospects that demand proficient literacy. The implementation of effective reading and writing curricula is particularly crucial during the first few years of primary education when learning is more effectively conveyed during the early developmental stages of childhood. Teachers can use a variety of tools to teach reading and writing, some of which are entrance and exit slips, written conversa-

tional goals and meeting requirements. Thirty-four states and the District of Columbia have waivers that will expire—but can be renewed—at the end of the 2013–2014 school year.

Therefore, the implementation of effective reading and writing curricula becomes all the more crucial, particularly during the first few years of primary education when learning is more effectively conveyed during the early developmental stages of childhood. Effective reading instruction is the initial springboard for ensuring that children achieve maximum literacy via a number of techniques incorporating phonemic awareness instruction, an emphasis on decoding and comprehending sight words along with teaching the relationship of this vocabulary within the context of written and verbal communication. To this end, exercises that hinge on frequent prose writing further complement the educational process and are at the heart of programs such as Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), Language and Learning Across the Curriculum (LALAC) and Electronic Communications Across the Curriculum (ECAC).

The grander scope of WAC is that rather than have writing be its own discipline, it is instead used as a tool that can enhance the learning of various subjects like science and math while enriching a child's overall proficiency in communicating both within and outside the educational spectrum. LALAC and ECAC are related movements. LALAC proposes that writing well goes far beyond merely putting words down and that it is one component of learning and communication that should include fostering other components of language-speaking, reading and listening. ECAC has more of a technological bent. This program puts an emphasis on how technologies like the Internet and digital communication are not only changing the way that writers write, but that access to the Web is providing new outlets in which students can communicate, acquire and organize new data. Therefore it is imperative that students are familiarized with the kinds of Web-based documents they'll be using along with utilizing sound, images and links in a way that will make the communicative process far more interactive. This use of technology for purposes other than its original use is referred to as envisionment by Donald Leu and his collaborators in a 2004 paper written for the International Reading Association (cited in Yancey, 2004).

## Applications

Some applications of writing exercises used as part of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and approaches used to increase reading competency in elementary through high school levels are:

- Entrance and Exit Slips
- Written Conversations
- Self-Assessments
- Journal Writing
- Improving Reading

### Entrance & Exit Slips

In this exercise, entrance slips are assigned at the start of class and students either compose questions or write a few sentences about any knowledge they may have of the day's upcoming topic. These anonymously penned blurbs are collected and read aloud as a means of jumpstarting the day's learning. Exit slips are written at the end of class, where students write brief descriptions of what was covered in the day's lesson along with any techniques they may have used to absorb this new knowledge. Elementary school students should be encouraged to write freely without concern for punctuation or spelling, so the intuitive flow of expression and language structures is not impeded. Proper grammar and spelling are stressed more in the middle and secondary levels as the student's writing abilities become more sophisticated. Throughout, these particular methodologies are mutually beneficial as a teacher can use them to determine how well the class may know a topic while the students can absorb new ideas, review old ones and potentially trigger their long-term memory.

### Written Conversations

These five-minute exercises consist of having students write as much as they can about the day's topic, either by themselves or collaboratively with a partner. Subsequently, the pupil will have had a chance to organize his or her thoughts before being asked to participate in a discussion which works equally well when the process is tailored towards a collaborative response. Writers in elementary school would begin with more basic topics. Middle and secondary level instructors can eventually guide their students towards writing about non-literary topics such as the processes behind a science project or the steps taken to solve a mathematical problem. The benefit of written conversations is that students become more familiar and proficient with the pre-writing process, enabling them to more effectively group thoughts about similar topics into a working outline when starting a paper.

### Self-Assessments

Students are asked to write brief assessments of a project they are either still working on or are on the brink of submitting. Questions that should be addressed can range from what knowledge they may be accruing through this assignment and what the most difficult aspect of it is to delineating the most gratifying part of it. Teachers can obviously monitor how well their charges are grasping a given topic and also help the student oversee how well they are learning the given subject matter. The approach for these self-assessments is similar throughout elementary, middle and secondary levels due to the simplistic nature of this exercise.

### Journal Writing

Students should be consistently encouraged to write, and among the most effective techniques to stimulate the writing process is journal writing. In addition to getting students acclimated to writing, this daily exercise also enriches fluency, encourages reflection and helps students become familiar with the creative thought process.

The mental muscles involved in writing are much like the physical ones that are firmed up at a gym. Using these writing muscles consistently will build up a student's literacy skills and give the student more confidence in tackling future writing assignments. The important approach to take towards having novice scribes compose journals is to allow them to write without concern for proper punctuation and spelling. In this way, they can develop a more intuitive style of writing that's intended to effectively communicate an idea. Children of elementary school age in particular should be engaged in briefer writing exercises to help maintain enthusiasm for the assignment. On all levels, journal writing should be a daily exercise with entries dated to chart a student's progress. As writers enter middle and secondary levels, instructors can more heavily weigh having these entries earn points towards a grade. Also, teachers can suggest topics and solicit student responses which can then be turned in as a creative writing assignment (Wanket, 2005).

### Improving Reading

Evaluation is a crucial first step towards determining what kind of help a student may or may not need to improve reading skills. Testing of reading comprehension can be accomplished by giving students 150-200 word passages photocopied from books, then read in class, followed by a handful of questions pertaining to the reading material. Teachers should then take students who performed poorly on this test and have the pupils read brief passages from the books, followed up by answering five content questions. If this proves to be too difficult, the teacher should then read a passage back to the student and ask questions pertaining to the passage. A student's inability to perform well may mean an inability to isolate a main idea within context or a lack of concentration (Shuman, 1975).

Effective study techniques are best conveyed by how a teacher instructs his or her students on how to approach a particular homework assignment. Rather than merely assigning material to read, instructors should have these assignments continue the thread of learning that was covered in class and provoke students into approaching the reading so they will dissect various aspects of the subject matter, instead of just absorbing facts minus any cognition. This can be achieved by having students consider points of view to be aware of, key words that may be problematic or contrasts that may come up. In taking this approach, higher levels of competency and cognition are possible and subsequently, the ease of understanding what was read enhances the potential for students to approach the subject with more confidence and enthusiasm (Shuman, 1975).

Shuman goes on to say that providing an enriched reading environment is pivotal in promulgating the idea that literacy is crucial as well as a communal experience that benefits from a high level of participation. Reports should be posted in an accessible area where students can read, compare and contrast what's been written. A portion of the classroom could be sectioned off as a special quiet area filled with books and reading material.

Use of a rug will lend an inviting aura to this area where students are encouraged to visit and read anything of their choosing once their schoolwork has been completed. And lastly, instructors themselves should be reading on their own, particularly within the subject area they teach. Nothing inspires students more than a teacher brimming with enthusiasm over something that may have been read about the evening before. And even if this desire to convey this recently learned knowledge slightly deviates from the day's lesson plan, this contagious zeal has the potential to trigger a student into realizing that academic topics have the ability to be intellectually stimulating. Likewise, teachers should be ready to encourage independent exploration of a subject matter and be willing to help students in their quest.

## Further Insights

This section addresses different approaches towards teaching writing and reading that may be of use to educators working with students at the primary level. It also draws on schools of thought for teaching writing based on Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). These techniques include:

- Language and Learning Across the Curriculum (LALAC)
- Electronic Communications Across the Curriculum (ECAC)
- Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)
- Writing in the Disciplines (WID)
- Writing to Learn (WTL)
- Basic reading lesson elements
- Significant reading and writing events
- Successful reading acquisition
- Rich classroom environments
- Proficient reading programs
- School community involvement

### Language & Learning across the Curriculum (LALAC)

Adherents of Language and Learning Across the Curriculum (LALAC) argue that all aspects of language-speaking, listening, reading and writing-are crucial elements towards achieving more effective communicating and learning.

### Electronic Communications across the Curriculum (ECAC)

With advancements in technology, educators are incorporating tools such as the Internet, e-mail, online social networks, and blogs as a means of enticing otherwise reluctant students to have a greater interest in improving their writing skills and in many cases, prompting them to excel in a subject. With so many students becoming computer literate at an early age, these newer

technologies serve as enticements for younger, would-be writers while allowing them to use varying approaches that include visual, digital and print processes to capture their ideas.

According to Kathleen Blake Yancey (2004), teachers should be sure to encourage their pupils to become proficient with using various digital tools and software, which will help them adapt more quickly to changing technology. There are different ways this can be applied. The use of slide presentations to provide a visual outline of a research paper encouraged students to more seriously undertake drawing up drafts in a more timely manner. The fact that they were forced to present their projects to a real audience as a group resulted in it being a more enjoyable way of handling this assignment. Having pupils utilize a presentation software package further along in the creative process also gives students a unique way to express themselves by changing font styles or incorporating different colors and special effects that give students a greater and more intriguing manner with which to approach their writing (Yancey, 2004).

### **Writing across the Curriculum (WAC)**

Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) is based on the theory that writing should be held to the highest standards regardless of the discipline to which it may be applied. Students are expected to be at the same writing level whether the subject they are learning is English, science or math. Critics of WAC maintain that the high level of oversight needed to effectively implement this program in non-literary disciplines effectively cuts into a teacher's time allotted for focusing on the fundamentals and more granular aspects of a topic like math in which effective writing is less of a paramount concern.

Writing in the Disciplines (WID) maintains that the thinking, learning and writing skills in a discipline are maximized when participants work within the parameters specific to it. In this case, a history professor could assign students to interview war veterans or a business professor may have them create a marketing plan or sales pitch.

Writing to Learn (WTL) is based on the concept that writing should be a means for students to increase their knowledge of different topics rather than merely being a tool to regurgitate what is already known. Adherents of WTL feel that by having students utilize previously learned knowledge to make connections to newer topics, their metacognitive skills will be strengthened as they unearth newer ideas while they write. WTL is most effective when the exercise coincides with the learning objectives of a particular topic, while keeping in mind a student's skill level and how they will be critiqued.

### **Basic Reading Elements**

There are a number of components that go into efficiently teaching children how to read, ranging from programs that encourage a home environment that develops good reading habits and monitoring homework to school policies driven by the goal of

improving reading achievement. Educators in both the classroom and administrative offices strive to understand the success and failure of literacy approaches via analysis and assessment, the setting of goals and the incorporation of effective techniques. There are also more direct applications available towards increasing a student's ability to successfully learn how to read.

Significant reading and writing events are best executed at the kindergarten and first-grade levels. Letter-name knowledge (the knowledge of letter names) and phonemic awareness (the conscious awareness of how a sequence of sounds forms a spoken word) are the most effective approaches used. Instruction of phonemic awareness is based on a mix of sounds that are mixed and blended within activities that include oral recitation of poems and songs, and composition of written communication and journals.

Successful reading acquisition hinges on the teaching of systematic word recognition, in which children are taught about common, consistent letter-sound relationships, high-frequency words (how and we) and sight words (of and was) which are regular and irregular words that may not follow the established phonetic rules of English spelling but are frequently used. Strategies encouraging children to summarize, infer and predict outcomes to enhance and maintain reading accuracy. Conversations about the subjects in reading matter, reading aloud exercises accompanied by feedback and frequent revisiting of reading material are invaluable in fostering comprehension and word recognition.

Rich classroom environments hinge on daily reading and writing assignments that allow for continual student assessment and encourage readers to utilize facets of what they've learned. Daily expectations include both instructors and pupils reading books aloud and engaging in follow-up discussions, writing stories, daily journals being maintained and children reading independently.

Proficient reading programs starting in the third grade provide ample opportunity for students to read, promoting the learning of new vocabulary and knowledge. Students are also apprised of how writers utilize different techniques (poetry vs. prose) to convey concepts and the importance and methodology of comprehending these ideas that goes beyond simply reading text.

School community involvement revolves around having students accomplish higher reading achievement that's encouraged by all those associated with the educational process either at the school level or at home. High expectations are defined, goals are set and the teaching tools with which to reach them are provided with a constant monitoring process in place to ensure success. The focus is on reading and writing with programs based on community involvement ranging from encouraging parental involvement with the children's reading and homework to establishing volunteer tutoring projects.

## Terms & Concepts

### **Electronic Communications across the Curriculum (ECAC):**

The way in which new technologies like the Internet and e-mail are changing how writing is done.

**Envisionment:** The ability to use technology for purposes other than its original use.

**High-Frequency Words:** Phonetically regular words, such as "in" or "not", that consistently show up in reading.

**Journal:** An editorial log usually maintained on a daily basis in which the writer can recapitulate the day's lessons, note questions that need further study or generate dialogue with teachers and fellow students.

**Language and Learning Across the Curriculum (LALAC):** The theory that all aspects of language up to and including speaking, listening, reading and writing are crucial elements towards achieving more effective communicating and learning.

**Letter-Name Knowledge:** The ability to recognize letter names.

**Metacognitive Skills:** Understanding one's thought processes in a manner that allows use of prior knowledge as a means of comprehending new situations.

**No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB):** This federally mandated program is based on standards-based education reform in which standardized testing results determine whether federal education funding is forthcoming to states based on whether their students meet or exceed pre-determined educational goals.

**Phonemic Awareness:** The ability to identify the combined speech sounds that make up a word.

**Sight Words:** These are high frequency regular (it, on) and irregular words (of, was) readers learn to recognize automatically.

**Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC):** An approach driven by the theory that writing should be done with the highest standards of execution regardless of the discipline to which it is being applied.

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## **Essay by Karen A. Kallio, M.Ed.**

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# Phonics

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## **Abstract**

Phonics instruction has been a component in teaching beginning readers for more than 150 years. The long history that phonics has in reading education has made phonics the subject of much research and discussion. Phonics has long been thought of as a teaching strategy; today it is seen more as "content" within an overall teaching strategy. Phonics is concerned with teaching letter-sound relationships as they relate to literacy and as such, is a valuable means for helping beginning readers to identify and build an internal database of known words. Phonics however, doesn't help beginning readers with overall comprehension and meaning and therefore must only be thought of as a piece of the puzzle that also includes: Reading, writing and spelling. This essay discusses the history of phonics and its role in read-

ing education programs. The phonics vs. whole-language debate has raged in the U.S and other English speaking countries for a number of years. The phonics vs. whole-language debate has given way to a more "balanced" approach to reading education. The role of phonics as part of an overall phonological awareness strategy is introduced. The impact of phonics education on teachers and teacher education is pervasive and wide-ranging. This article highlights the current impact that phonics has in many of today's classrooms. Lastly, this author investigates new approaches to developing phonics-centric curriculum for teachers in training.

## **Overview**

Phonics is one component of the instructional method for teaching beginning reading to children. "Reading is the process of constructing meaning from written texts. Phonics is concerned with teaching letter-sound relationships as they relate to learning to read" (Jones, n.d., ¶2).

Phonics is often referred to as "cracking the code" or decoding, but actually refers to the ability of a beginning reader to master automatic word recognition, which involves more than just phonics. Proficiency at decoding words involves being able to identify words quickly and accurately. Decoding involves converting the printed word to spoken language and can be achieved through several different means. A beginning reader may use a number of methods to decode the words in a sentence. These include looking for context clues, analyzing the structure of a sentence, recognizing a known word, or sounding out the word (phonics). Phonics is the relationship between sounds and their spellings (Blevins, 1999).

In discussing beginning to read, cracking the code refers to learning letter-sound relationships via the ability to apply phonics. When a child has learned to associate all specific printed letters with specific speech sounds, the code has been mastered, or cracked. The child then can arrive at an approximation for the pronunciation of most printed word symbols. "Phonics-first," "intensive phonics," "systematic phonics," "decoding," or "code emphasis" refer to reading programs that emphasize use of phonics at the inception of reading instruction and throughout the first 1-3 years of reading instruction (Jones, n.d.).

While this essay focuses on the Learning Theory of Phonics, the topic would be incomplete without mention of Whole Language reading theory. Whole-language may also be referred to as Look-and-say, whole-word, sight-reading, linguistic, or psycholinguistic and refers to an approach to reading instruction advocated by major players in the education field such as William S. Gray during the first third of the twentieth century (Jones, n.d.). Whole language teaches children to read by emphasizing the use and understanding of words in their everyday contexts, rather than by using phonics and decoding.

Whole language proponents cite Kenneth Goodman's 1967 paper "Reading: A Psycholinguistic Guessing Game" as being responsible for starting the whole-language revolution in reading instruction. Goodman's premise is that "good readers used context clues and background knowledge to predict, confirm and guess at the identification of new words" (Kim, 2008). In addition, reading books can help children to develop literate voices, and thinking and responses from children after reading books show the importance of different ways children approach literary texts (Galda, 2013).

Since the middle of the 19th Century in the U.S., there has been a back and forth debate about which method of reading instruction is best. The debate surrounding phonics vs. Whole Language could be compared to a pendulum swinging back and forth through successive decades.

### **Timeline of Reading Instruction in the United States: 1850-Present**

#### **1850**

By the middle of the 19th century, there were a number of factors that brought the topic of reading education into the mainstream consciousness and initiated a dialog on reading education in the U.S. Support of whole education from the masses was becoming a national movement. At the same time, published works were becoming more widely available, and Whole Language was advocated rather than phonics as the best means to create a population of eager and engaged readers.

#### **1920-1950**

Gray termed phonics instruction as "heartless drudgery" and called for an adoption of the look-say (sight or whole word) approach to reading instruction. Whole word was seen as a "top-down" approach to reading where students began with prior experiences and knowledge that helped them to read and comprehend whole words. Phonics was to be considered a last-resort method of reading instruction.

#### **1955**

Rudolph Flesch's seminal work, "Why Johnny Can't Read," was published. The tables were now turned and the look-say method of instruction was blamed for decreasing reading skills. Flesch and others called for the return to the "sensitivity" of phonics. This work and the ensuing controversy surrounding the phonics vs. Whole Language debate are thought to be responsible for

polarizing reading educators around these opposing instructional methods.

#### **1967**

Jeanne Chall's "Learning to Read: The Great Debate" lent support to phonics as a valuable tool for teaching early reading skills. Chall's work reported on well-documented research illustrating that the early introduction of phonics education "was more beneficial than incidental reading."

#### **1985- Present**

As with most other debates on education and instructional theory, the publication of several high-profile works ignited a further discussion around reading instruction in the mid-1980s. "Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading and Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print" brought the attention of researchers and educators back to the table to discuss how to best teach children to read. These works highlighted the importance of phonics as one of the "essential early ingredients for early learning instruction." Instead of phonics vs Whole Language, many educators began to advocate for a balanced and comprehensive approach to reading instruction. This new view didn't advocate for a top-down (Whole Language) or bottom up (phonics) approach but rather an interactive approach to early reading instruction that considered the following skill levels for beginning readers (Blevins, 1999):

- Prior knowledge (background experience);
- Knowledge of sound spelling;
- Sentence structure;
- Word meanings.

### **The Continued Debate**

One might assume that the debate surrounding the role of phonics in early reading instruction has been exhausted, but that is not the case. Even today there remain educators, researchers, politicians and parents who are polarized around the early reading methods and curriculum and what methods are best for literacy education. "Even distinguished scholars are unable to agree on the scientific consensus about best practices in beginning reading instruction" (Kim, 2008, p.372). No elementary school curriculum gets more attention than reading, the undisputed foundation of all learning. There is however, considerable disagreement about how reading should be taught. The controversy surrounding reading has manifested itself in heated debates and opposing reading instruction viewpoints which have been dubbed the "reading wars" (Bryan, Tunnell, & Jacobs, 2007).

In "Learning to Read: The Great Debate," Chall captured the essence of the reading wars. She noted that the many controversies about reading instruction in first grade boiled down to one question: "Do children learn better with a beginning method that stresses meaning or with one that stresses learning the code?" In her synthesis of experimental studies conducted during the 20th

century, Chall found that an early code emphasis produced better outcomes in word recognition in the early grades and helped children read with better comprehension up to fourth grade than did instructional practices in which children were taught to read whole words and whole sentences (Kim, 2008, p.372).

The topic of phonics is complex and controversial and remains a divisive topic in education today. Phonics instruction is widely accepted in early education curriculum around the world, and research continues on this subject. Phonics curriculum is time-intensive and often requires several hours of instruction per day. Teacher education training does not adequately address the subject of phonics instruction, as is illustrated in a current research study from Australia. Many teachers have begun to rely on scripted curricula that help with phonics instruction, but there is criticism that these "scripts" are squelching creativity in the teaching profession. This essay discusses current trends in phonics education, including the relationship between phonics and standardized testing. The necessity of including more intensive phonics teaching or beginning teachers (teach the teachers) is discussed as well as the topic of phonometric awareness.

## Applications

For at least the last 150 years, the U.S. has been grappling with the best way to teach children to read. Much of the discussion and supporting research has centered around an "either or" option which pitted phonics vs. Whole Language instruction. It has only been very recently that educators and researchers have conceded that there is really no black and white answer when it comes to literacy education. As cited by Kim (2008): "Virtually every major synthesis on reading rejected the simple dualism between phonics and Whole Language and encouraged instruction that focused on helping children master the alphabetic principle and acquire meaning from text."

Leading researcher and educator Chall was really instrumental in opening the dialog to discussing a more balanced approach to reading instruction. "Chall argued that neither phonics nor sight-word approaches were sufficient to help children become skilled readers. Instead, she reminded educators and the general public that an inflexible approach may fail with a child if in the long run it plays down either of these aspects of learning to read. What is important is a proper balance between them" (Kim, 2008, p.373).

Reading instruction is continually being reevaluated because each year in the U.S. and worldwide, a significant number of children fail to reach the "benchmark" of basic literacy levels. "The Nation's Report Card" states that by grade four, students "should demonstrate an understanding of the overall meaning of what they read" (Bryan, Tunnell, & Jacobs, 2007). New approaches and programs are forever being introduced as the magic bullet that will enable all children to become skilled readers. It is not just children who are affected by conflicting ideas, methods and approaches: Teachers must also master new

approaches to teaching reading skills as well as to help their students meet benchmarks that are set by standardized testing.

### No Child Left Behind & Governmental Requirements

"The findings of the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) report directly influenced the goals of the 'Reading First' portion of the No Child Left Behind Act, which requires eligible Title I schools to adopt scientifically based research practices in five areas of reading instruction: Phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The five pillars of good reading instruction have encouraged practitioners to focus on a broad set of instructional strategies and reading outcomes. As Peggy McCardle and Vinita Chhabra noted in their 2005 'Kappan' article, the five pillars of scientifically based reading instruction should replace the 'artificial dichotomy' between phonics and Whole Language" (Kim, 2008, p.373).

The NCLB (No Child Left Behind) has placed an emphasis on standardized testing and scientifically based reading instruction which, in turn, has led to the adoption of standardized curricula. The so-called scripted curricula are failing to meet their objective of increasing literacy because though it teaches phonics and other reading practices, it largely ignores the needs of individual children (according to many critics). Scripted curricula are supported by the National Reading Panel (NRP), which supports explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics as the "most effective means of reading instruction" (Milosovic, 2007). Results can be objectively measured and will show an increase in literacy rates, but many experts say that the effectiveness of such reading programs levels off after second grade. There is no shortage of critics of scientifically based curricula and its components such as phonics instruction. According to some teachers, the scripted curriculum "overwhelms" the school day, taking up to 3 hours of each day for implementation and leaving little time for the individual attention that many believe is so critical for young students to achieve success. In 2012, the administration of President Barack Obama distributed waivers to the act, which exempted states from certain aspects of the educational standards (Klein, 2013).

Research regarding the success of scripted reading is unreliable because it doesn't take into account the varying abilities of students. There's a myth that learning to read is an identical process for each child and that once a child masters basic reading skills, the student is literate. The real wildcard for successful literacy education is, according to teachers, individual teacher instruction. Teaching is improvisational and the flexibility and creativity are stifled by scripted learning (Milosovic, 2007). More important, phonics doesn't address the vocabulary building that is so critical in developing advanced levels of reading and comprehension and increasing fluency. Vocabulary development is time-intensive and requires individual attention between the teacher and the student. "Students who must decipher the meaning of a word are unable to concentrate on comprehension." As a result, they not only have a minimal understanding of what they read; they find reading laborious and unsatisfactory" (Milosovic,

2007). Not all words can be decoded using phonics; many of the high frequency words used in everyday vocabulary must be learned rather than decoded. Many educators ask rhetorically if the objective of a scripted curriculum is to meet standardized testing requirements or to teach children to read.

The debate over phonics is not relegated to the United States; in the United Kingdom, the UK Secretary of State for Education requested an independent review of best practices in reading instruction as well as the role of synthetic phonics. The review, undertaken in 2005, was led by the former Deputy Chief Inspector of Schools Jim Rose. The review looked at the role and place of phonics teaching within the context of early reading, with emphasis on the development of the birth to five frameworks and the renewal of the literacy framework (Clark, 2006).

Upon its release in early 2006, the Rose Report (aka "Phonics Final Report") touched off a heated debate that was reminiscent of much of the discussion that has historically surrounded the phonics discussion. Many educators reacted to the emphasis on the implementation of "synthetic phonics" as a "one size fits all" solution to literacy education (Clark, 2006). Others stated that the "impression has been given that an injection of synthetic phonics, first, fast and only as soon as children enter school, will solve all reading problems" (Clark, 2006).

## Issues

Phonics has been a component of literacy education and early reading programs for as long as the public education system has been in existence. There's no question that the role of phonics and phonetic awareness is still being debated in many classrooms around the world. The importance of phonics in early reading instruction is undisputed at this time; there is ample evidence that early use of phonics helps children develop reading skills up to grade 2, and perhaps until grade 4. A team of researchers in Australia has begun to study how well teachers are prepared to teach phonics in the classroom. While language and speech pathologists receive intensive training in phonics, elementary education teachers don't receive an adequate or commensurate level of education to support phonics instruction. A 2008 study titled: "Phonological literacy: Preparing primary teachers for the challenge of a balanced approach to literacy education" discussed the shortcomings of phonics in teacher education curriculum. The report also discusses ways that phonics and phonometric awareness can be integrated into teacher education curriculum.

### Training Primary Teachers: A New Approach to Teaching Phonics

The role of phonics in literacy learning has been a controversial political issue for many years. The strategic use of phonics is determined by official approval of the "balanced approach" to literacy learning. A 2005 National Inquiry into Teaching Literacy (NITL) made the following statements (Buckland & Fraser, 2008, p.59):

- "The direct systematic instruction in phonics during the early years of schooling is an essential foundation for teaching children to read."
- "A repertoire of teaching skills (phonics) is a challenge for teacher education institutions."

According to Buckland and Fraser, neither phonics nor whole-language instruction is given adequate time and attention in current teacher education curriculum. The authors state that they find the topic of reading to be more of an adjunct to existing course materials than a central theme. Because phonics is a required component of literacy education, the authors of the study suggest that it is time to re-integrate phonics into a balanced approach to literacy. According to educators, researchers and curriculum developers, discussions must move beyond the "phonics vs Whole Language" dichotomy for literacy education to be effective. Phonics must be acknowledged as just one of several components in the development of literacy skills (Buckland & Fraser, 2008).

In a 2005 submission article to the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy, author Valerie Rule reports the following. "Primary teacher education students themselves frequently express concern over their lack of confidence in their phonics knowledge and their frustration at having to rely on abstract chapters in textbooks that are usually quite difficult to understand. Now the issue is no longer whether or not phonics should be taught in schools, but how to ensure that teacher education students have sufficient mastery of the subject (deep knowledge) to enable them to teach well" (Yule, 2005).

The study of phonetics is of great value to the teacher of phonics. Teacher education students are not "receiving sufficient explicit and systematic knowledge of how the spelling system works in relation to phonological knowledge" (Buckland & Fraser, 2008, p.61). Equally as important may be instilling upon teachers an understanding regarding the perspective of the child (Buckland & Fraser, 2008). Most adults, including teachers, have long forgotten how difficult it really is to learn to read.

According to Buckland and Fraser, teacher education students don't have the expertise or confidence needed to teach phonics; these grads don't exhibit the "knowledge of the building blocks of language necessary for the big picture of effective literacy teaching" (Buckland & Fraser, 2008, p.62). Teachers need to develop a 'fluency' in phonometric awareness (Buckland & Fraser, 2008). Another author acknowledges the difficult nature of teaching phonics in the following quote: "Understanding phonemes and phonetic transcription is hard," and an admission of the difficult nature of this subject is required and will provide a means to overcome the problem of properly preparing teachers. Admittedly, experience has shown that "what is taught as phonics and how it is taught will make a difference" (Orton, n.d).

Because the teaching of phonics is so difficult and requires a deep understanding of both the subject matter and its application,

it is necessary to examine how well teacher training texts and materials cover this challenging subject. A number of textbooks-widely used in teacher training courses were reviewed as a part of the "Phonological literacy" study. A number of shortcomings were noted with regard to phonics and phonological knowledge coverage in the popular teaching texts. Areas of concern within the texts include:

- Absence of content and information devoted to phonics.
- Condensed content that was more theoretical than applicable.
- Presentation of some material as obvious (such as phonemes), when in fact the subject matter was highly abstract.

As a result of the findings regarding available teacher training textbooks, an electronic teaching module is under development. The module, titled, "Teaching Foundation Literacy" was designed as a comprehensive guide to essential phonological knowledge (Buckland & Fraser, 2008). The module was created in an electronic format that appeals to internet and web-savvy students and allows for integration of graphics and sound as part of the instructional delivery method. The module stresses the traditional, core concepts of literacy which are reading, writing, spelling and phonics. The sequence of content introduction includes a deliberate sequence of steps that start with the student's prior knowledge and personal experience, moves to content knowledge and then covers the application of literacy teaching. The steps in the module mirror the steps that are optimal in helping a child learn to read-this approach reinforces the teacher's experience in the learning process (what it is like to be a child learning to read).

The topics of the module include (Buckland & Fraser, 2008):

- Literacy and Spelling: Emphasizing the importance of spelling in writing- encoding.
- Phonometric Awareness: Reinforces the steps of the learning process and reminds teachers of the difficulties associated with learning to read.
- Toward Phonics: Covers the stages that children go through on their way to achieving phonological awareness.
- Phonics and Beyond: Emphasizes the importance of meaning and how words are used in context.

## Conclusion

Phonics is widely accepted as content for teaching children to read. Phonics is not a teaching strategy, but rather one component of an overall approach to phonological awareness. Teacher training and curriculum do not do an adequate job of training new teachers to teach this difficult material. Because teachers are ill-prepared to teach phonics, there has been an adoption of scripted

curriculum for presenting phonics material to students. Critics of phonics education state that teachers are "teaching to the test" or placing too much emphasis on the metrics of standardized testing. Phonics has been recognized as a valuable component, along with reading, writing and spelling in the development of phonological awareness and literacy education. Researchers are now focusing on a balanced approach to literacy education. The balanced approach to literacy education requires that teachers understand the challenging concepts and methodologies related to phonics and phonological instruction. Revamping teacher training curriculum for reading instruction is underway and the next decade will prove to be an enlightening one as researchers look back to see how phonological awareness has impacted early reading programs.

## Terms & Concepts

**Incidental Instruction:** An approach to reading instruction in which "the teacher does not follow a planned sequence of phonics elements to guide instruction, but highlights particular elements opportunistically when they appear in text" (Ellis, 2007, p.62).

**Look-Say:** Students are taught to memorize the appearance of words, or learn to identify words by looking at the first and last letter. Students taught to read by the "look-say" method are not taught to pronounce new words.

**Literacy:** Generally refers to the ability to read and write. The definition would likely also assume that there is comprehension of what is read or written.

**National Reading Panel:** A (US) national panel to analyze the effectiveness of various approaches used to teach children to read; formed by representatives of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) at the National Institutes of Health, in consultation with the Secretary of Education.

**No Child Left Behind:** The 2001 law which encompasses a number of re-designed federal programs that are aimed at improving the performance of primary and secondary schools and students. Standardized testing to measure reading progress is administered annually in grades 3-8.

**Phonics:** The system of associating letter symbols with speech sounds.

**Phonological Awareness:** Emphasizes that language is composed of sounds; the understanding of the relationship these sounds have with each other to create meaning (words in sentences, syllables, and rhyming).

**Scripted Curriculum:** Scripted curriculum is mainly concerned with teaching facts and preparing for major test; the curriculum offers generic formulas for success that treat all learners alike (NCTE).

**Synthetic Phonics:** An approach to teaching reading in which students are taught create words by first linking an individual letter or letter combination with its specific sound then blending the sounds together.

**Syntactic:** The arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences.

**Semantic:** The meaning of a word, phrase or sentence.

**Whole Language:** A way to teach children to read by emphasizing the use and understanding of words in both their usual everyday contexts as well as in books other than textbooks. Whole Language is based on teaching strategies and skills that are determined by the needs of the child, a belief that learning is a collaborative experience based upon the interests and engagement of children as individuals (Costello, 2012).

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## Essay by Carolyn Sprague, MLS

Carolyn Sprague holds a BA degree from the University of New Hampshire and a Masters Degree in Library Science from Simmons College. Carolyn gained valuable business experience as owner of her own restaurant, which she operated for 10 years. Since earning her graduate degree, Carolyn has worked in numerous library/information settings within the academic, corporate and consulting worlds. Her operational experience as a manager at a global high tech firm and more recent work as a web content researcher have afforded Carolyn insights into many aspects of today's challenging and fast-changing business climate.



# Teaching Foreign Languages in U.S. Public Schools

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through grade 12 and beyond. Such instruction would enable American children to develop higher levels of linguistic proficiency as well as cultural competency in target languages. Recently, special attention has been called to the need for foreign language proficiencies, especially in less commonly taught languages that are deemed critical for national security. The ACTFL National Standards for Foreign Language Instruction provide a framework for what such programs should do within the K-12 context and beyond. Available national resources are discussed as well as the current state of K-12 national foreign language programs.

## Overview

There are approximately 6912 spoken languages in the world (Gordon, 2005) and the United States has 311 languages. However in the United States, learning a language other than English and developing the cultural competencies that are part of foreign language learning, has not been high priority in public education (Sigsbee, 2002).

English has become the language of international business, science, politics, and the Internet. While the world understands us, we do not understand the world. People all over the world have access to our literature, intelligence, technical manuals, academic journals and our culture. But we lack the ability to do the same in other languages (National Virtual Translation Center, 2007a, par. 2).

## Linguistic & Cultural Isolation

This one-way linguistic and cultural isolation from the world community has significant implications for the future opportunities of American K-12 students as they exit school. According to the statement put forth by the Committee for Economic Development (2006), a non-partisan, non-political, non-profit independent research organization, U.S. students lack the linguistic and cultural skills of their peers in other nations. This lack of knowledge has a negative impact not only on our national security, but on our nation's ability to progress economically in

## Abstract

In the United States the provision of foreign language instruction at the K-12 level varies. Recent policy and national standard recommendations call for the development of long-term, sequential, and continuous foreign language instruction from kindergarten

the global marketplace (Committee for Economic Development, 2006; United States Department of Education, 2006). From small businesses to multi-nationals, the ability to effectively communicate in the languages and cultures of international consumers, business partners, and employees is crucial (CED, 2006).

The Center for Applied Linguistics Stated in 2006 that 24% of American public elementary schools offer foreign language instruction and that of those, a majority of the programs do not focus on foreign language proficiency. By 2013, however, that number had dropped, especially in rural school districts. Instead, the programs seek merely to expose children to foreign language and culture. Among American high schools, students who study a foreign language take Spanish, French, German, or Latin. The need for proficient speakers of Less Commonly Taught Languages, or LCTL's, (ED, 2006, CED, 2005) is urgent. Critical or Less Commonly Taught Languages are defined in the U.S. as those languages other than French, Spanish, and German (Center for Advanced Research in Second Language Acquisition, n.d.).

Only a small minority American high school students are learning Chinese, Korean, Farsi, Arabic, Russian, Urdu, or Japanese. By 2011, however, the number of students studying Chinese had begun increasing, tripling between 2005 and 2008 and continuing to grow.

Rather than addressing national economic and security needs that require a multi-lingual and culturally competent citizenry, many schools are actually narrowing their available programs of study because of the educational reform movement. For example, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which holds schools accountable in the reading, mathematics and science achievement of all students, encourages schools to devote more time and resources to those subjects. While those subjects are critical, many students remain ill prepared as global citizens as they are not offered the opportunity to learn other languages and cultures (CED, 2006).

### **A Critical Need**

In terms of national security, diplomats and federal employees need to be able to communicate effectively, with cultural understanding and awareness with other nations (CED, 2006). Bremer reports (as cited in CED, 2006) that in 2004, three years after 9/11, the United States Foreign Service had eight Arabic speakers at the highest proficiency level and only 27 at the next highest level of proficiency.

In view of the inadequate numbers of American citizens prepared to function in a multi-linguistic and culturally diverse global society, 300 leaders from business and industry, national, federal, state, and local government agencies, foreign nations, academia, and foreign language interest groups came together in 2004 to address the issue (NLC, 2005). They identified trends, best practices and the foreign language and culture needs at various levels of both the private and government sectors. From their work, they determined that a national foreign language strategy

was needed to engage the American public and made several recommendations.

One of those recommendations was that federal, state, and local government agencies should allocate resources and establish foreign language requirements from kindergarten through advanced degrees. They further recommended that standards-based policies be applied and implemented throughout the educational pipeline and that educational systems at the primary and secondary levels (as well as beyond) ensure continuous language and cultural instruction that would lead to advanced linguistic and cultural proficiency (CED, 2005).

## **Further Insights**

### **An Optional National Agenda**

While a national agenda may exist in teaching foreign languages, it is optional. It is up to each state government to decide what students must study in order to earn a high school diploma. The state responsibility is met through the local school systems. If the state does not require a continuous foreign language program or even limited foreign language instruction, local districts can and do decide, contrary to national economic and security needs, not to offer such programs. In many districts and in many states, foreign languages are simply not part of the core curriculum (Sigsbee, 2002).

For those districts and those states who value foreign language education for all students, there are resources available. In addition to the plethora of diverse state foreign language guidelines, standards, and assessments, there are national foreign language standards, national foreign language proficiency guidelines, and a growing number of federally funded (ED, 2007) national resources in second language teaching research, best practices, instructional tools and technology that can be used in the K-12 setting (Marcos, n.d.).

The first national standards in K-12 foreign language instruction were published in 1996 by the ACTFL and called the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century*. These standards were to address the definition and function of U.S. foreign language instruction in the K-12 setting and were created based on a consensus of language educators, business, government, and other stakeholders (Marcos, n.d.). They do not describe the current state of U.S. K-12 foreign language instruction, rather they describe best practices in the field and specify content standards, or what students should be able to know and do, in foreign languages (ACTFL, 1996). The second edition of the standards was published in 1999 and added information about how to apply the standards in specific languages (Marcos, n.d.). The specific languages included in the national standards are: Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Classical languages, French, Spanish, German, Italian, and Portuguese (Scebold & Wallinger, 2000). The third edition, published in 2006 added Arabic specific-guidelines (ACTFL, 2006).

The ACTFL national standards support the ideal that second language instruction should begin at the elementary level and continue sequentially through the middle school and high school levels as well as beyond (ACTFL, 1996). It does not specify a curriculum or sequence of instruction but describes the learning experiences needed to achieve the standards. It is based on five goals areas critical to linguistic and cultural learning:

- Communication,
- Cultures,
- Connections,
- Comparisons and
- Communities.

The most fundamental aspect of which is communication (ACTFL, 1996).

### **Second Language Proficiency & Cultural Competence**

Language learning is much more than the development of linguistic facility in the writing, speaking, reading, and aural comprehension of a given language. Second language proficiency means that one can effectively use the second language to communicate within specific contexts and function appropriately according to the often hidden rules of the second language community.

For example, yes does not always mean yes. Take for example, someone from a culture that is used to straightforward, even if unpleasant, responses in the business context. Imagine that she or he needs to confirm arrival of a multi-million dollar shipment by a specific time from a colleague or partner in another part of the world. When the question is asked, "Will the parts be here by such and such a date?" The answer may very well be, "Yes." Unbeknown to the requester who assumes a uniform worldview (that of his or her own culture) the person sending the parts knows that there is some doubt as to whether the shipment will be able to go out on time. However, in her or his culture it would not be appropriate to displease or offend the requester. Lack of cultural competencies in today's global economy can be expensive to those who are linguistically and culturally handicapped.

### **The 5 Goals of ACTFL**

Without cultural competency, there can be no true communication in the target language. Second language learners need to have an awareness and understanding of both the culture of "self" and the culture of "other" to successfully negotiate communication in the context of "we." What is said or written is not always indicative of what is meant. The first and second goals of communication and culture of the ACTFL Standards recognize the interdependence of culture and language (ACTFL, 1996).

The third goal, connections, permits the second language learner to access bodies of knowledge that are not available to a monolingual (ACTFL, 1996). With a second language, one can access

current events, history, or recent works and discoveries in any discipline that are unknown by non-users of the second language. These connections could be to literature, art, sports, medicine, and a multitude of other areas of knowledge. For those limited to monolingual status, information and ideas are restricted.

The fourth goal of the ACTFL Standards, comparison, speaks to the necessity of second language learners to compare and contrast their own language and cultures with that of the target language and culture. These comparisons allow second language learners to better understand themselves as well as others. They enlighten the learner to the existence of a multiplicity of world-views (ACTFL, 1996).

The fifth goal of the ACTFL National Foreign Language Standards is communities. Learners cannot develop linguistic and cultural competencies in isolation of the people who regularly use the language. Through interaction within local and global multilingual communities, second language learners can develop the ability to interact appropriately with speakers of the target language and culture (ACTFL, 1996).

Within the broad goals of communication, culture, comparisons, connections and communities, there are specific standards. Provided for the standards are general progress indicators that describe what second language learning students should be able to know and do at the 4th, 8th and 12th grade levels relative to a given standard within each goal (ACTFL, 1996). ACTFL (as cited in Kelly-Hall, 2001) designed its National Foreign Language Standards to reflect second language abilities that result from continued, sequential second language instruction from kindergarten through 12th grade. In the United States, few such programs exist (Kelly-Hall, 2001).

### **Proficiency Guidelines**

It is not just basic proficiency, but advanced foreign language and cultural proficiency that is necessary for the economic and national security of the United States (CED, 2005, NVTC, 2007b). What then is proficiency and what do we know about how long it takes to develop in a second language or culture?

In the United States there are two national foreign language proficiency guidelines. The first is the U.S. Government Interagency Language Roundtable (IRL) which measures second language skills in speaking, writing, reading, listening, and translation (NCVT, 2007c). The second set of guidelines, upon which the national foreign language standards for are based, were introduced by ACTFL in 1986 (Kelly-Hall, 2001).

The ACTFL foreign language proficiency guidelines address the skill areas of reading, writing, speaking and listening. In ACTFL guidelines, proficiency was divided into four levels: novice, intermediate, advanced, and superior (Kelly-Hall, 2001). Within each of the three first levels (novice, intermediate, and advanced) each level was further broken down into low, mid, and high (Language Testing International, 2004). When describing

foreign language proficiency, usually, learners will have different proficiency levels across the four skill areas and each skill must be assessed individually (NCVT, 2007c).

### Teaching Resources

For students in the K-12 system to develop higher levels of second language proficiency, second language instruction must begin in the early levels of K-12 education and continue sequentially through each following grade (NLC, 2005; Malone, Rifkin, Christian, and Johnson, 2005). K12 schools that offer foreign language programs have a variety of national tools at their disposal. For example, K-8 foreign language educators can use Ñandutí. This is a web-based resource center for K-8 foreign language practitioners originally funded by the federal government and run by the Center for Applied Linguistics. It offers a wealth of instructional materials, collaborative opportunities through its listserv, program development information, and methodology overviews (Ñandutí, 2006). The National K-12 Foreign Language Resource Center is a federally funded national resource as well that is developing a national Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES), K-5 Chinese program that will be available for districts nationwide (National K-12 Foreign Language Resource Center, 2003). Under the National Security Language Initiative, the federal government will be providing millions to local districts and states to develop K-16 program LCTL foreign language models that would provide sequential, continuous learning opportunities in languages identified as critical to national security. In addition, it proposes an e-based clearinghouse that would serve as a central access point for the public to the materials and web-based instructional programs in NCTL's identified as critical that have been created by already existing national resource centers (ED, 2007).

In addition to nationally funded resources, K-12 foreign language programs have many technology tools to use in providing language learning opportunities that are meaningful and motivating to technologically savvy language learners. Video and audio conferencing tools, instant messaging, web-based communities, and engaging software programs are just some of the tools for children in districts who can afford these options (LeLoup & Ponterio, 2000).

The major programs used at the elementary level are FLEX, FLES, and Immersion programs (National Council of State Supervisors of Languages, 2007). Foreign Language Experience programs (FLEX) do not have proficiency in a second language as a goal. Their purpose is to expose children to one or more foreign languages and motivate them to learn one in the future (Morrison, n.d.). FLES, or Foreign Language in the Elementary School programs do have second language proficiency as a goal. They are sequential foreign language programs that offer instruction in the four skill areas of a second language (NCSSL, 2007) and sometimes use the second language to teach regular school curriculum (Morrison, n.d.) In immersion programs, all or much of the core academic curriculum is delivered using the foreign language as the medium of instruction (NCSSL, 2007). Curtain

and Pesola (as cited by Morrison, n.d.) explain that immersion programs result in grade level English language arts proficiency, cross-cultural understanding, and functional second language proficiency. There are a variety of second language immersion program models that exist. Some begin at the elementary level and permit K-12 students to continue a sequence of foreign language study through graduation.

## Issues

### Inconsistent Nationwide Access to Foreign Language Instruction for K-12 Students

There is great diversity in how states are meeting the foreign language and cultural competencies of their children and nation. The state of Washington, for example, as late as 2005, had no secondary education standards for world languages. It then adopted the ACTFL national foreign language standards for its children. By adopting standards common to other states, Washington enabled its educational stakeholders and practitioners to make use of the vast materials already available at the national level and to collaborate with other states in providing foreign language instruction (Washington Association of Foreign Languages, 2006, April).

Minnesota, in contrast, has no state standards in world languages. Districts are to develop their own foreign language standards, if they so choose, and decide which foreign language and cultural competencies are important. Minnesota provides a state-developed booklet based on the ACTFL standards to assist individual districts. (Minnesota Department of Education, 2007).

Other states have had world language standards for much longer. New York, for example has state standards in modern languages, Native American languages, Latin and American sign language since 1996 and has continued to revise and improve upon them. Since 1998, foreign language at the elementary level has been a New York State requirement with second language proficiency tests given to its children in 4th, 8th, and 12th grades in which they must demonstrate second language communicative skills and basic second language literacy (University of the State of New York Board of Regents, 1996). In 2011 New York dropped its Regents exams in Italian, Spanish, and French.

### Shortage of Foreign Language Teachers

While this is especially true of teachers that are proficient in LCTL's (ED, 2006) it is true for teachers of more commonly taught languages (Suhay, 1999). Each state has its own licensure standards for foreign language teachers in the public K-12 system so the requirements to practice in a given state vary. Generally, in addition to advanced proficiency in a second language as well as English, teachers must have solid foundations in the theories of second language acquisition, second language pedagogy, and educational psychology. In addition, they need expertise in the unique physiological, psychological, emotional, and cognitive learner characteristics of the specific age groups they are licensed to teach.

They must complete supervised, unpaid internships. Lastly, they need to be technologically literate so that they avail their students of the vast array of resources for meaningful, communicative second learning experiences in the second language classroom.

For foreign language teachers at the K-12 level, there is limited interstate professional mobility due to a lack of uniform licensure standards and reciprocity agreements. As a result, foreign language teachers must be willing, in many cases, to restrict their residence to one state only, to states that share licensure reciprocity agreements.

If U.S. geographical mobility is desired, foreign language teachers must be willing to invest in additional state-specific coursework and/or licensure requirements that will permit them continued practice in their field.

For teachers of French or Spanish who wish to teach those languages to students of early adolescence through young adulthood, National Board Certification is an option (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2007a). The cost, approximately \$2,500, is in addition to original state-specific licensing fees and state-specific academic preparation (NBPTS, 2007c). Upon fulfilling the requirements for National Board Certification, French and/or Spanish teachers are not guaranteed that it will allow professional mobility across the U.S. (NBPTS, 2007b). Additionally, there are no National Board Certificates available for teachers of foreign languages other than French or Spanish at any grade level (NBPTS, 2007a) that might ease geographical mobility for practitioners.

### Cost

States that have included foreign language in their core curriculums have done so at their own initiative and, unless they were able to receive grants from the private or federal sectors, at their own expense. When the federal government legislates education policy, it does not always legislate a supply of funds adequate for states and local districts to implement the policies. Likewise, when the states legislate education policies they do not always legislate a supply of funds adequate for the local districts to implement state mandates.

The fragmentation of K-12 foreign language learning standards and curriculums could result in multiple districts within multiple states having to invest substantial amounts of manpower and tax dollars in program development and maintenance. For states that have collaborated on foreign language standards or adopted the national ones, the burdens could be shared and efforts need not be duplicated. For states that either have no standards or have elected to work independently of national or multi-state standards and aligned materials and assessments, the costs would be greater.

Many individual districts, already struggle to fund the curriculum development and instructional costs of courses other than foreign languages, whose importance has been previously mandated either by the state or national government. In addition,

in many subject areas, including foreign language, there is vast national redundancy of work hours and financial expenditures done with education monies at the state and local levels. When states work alone and create their own standards, curriculums, and/or assessments, districts may or may not be able to use already existing national resources or the programs already developed by other states. Depending on how the states structure their educational systems, each district may already be funding its own curriculum specialists for each required area of study and be creating standards and programs independent of existing programs across the street in another district.

Implementing a comprehensive, sequential foreign language program from the early grade levels through high school will require additional instructional time each day, as well as staff. Absent consistent nation-wide collaboration between local, state, and national governments in the foreign language education of K-12 students, it is doubtful that the best practices proposed by the ACTFL standards will become a uniform reality for K-12 students in U.S. schools.

## Terms & Concepts

**ACTFL National K-12 Foreign Language Standards:** Outlines the goals and standards that should be addressed in foreign language instruction that begins at the elementary level and follows sequentially through grade 12 and beyond.

**Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES):** Aims for some degree of second language proficiency.

**Foreign Language Proficiency:** Can describe a person's writing, speaking, listening comprehension or reading abilities in a given language.

**Immersion:** A general model of second language and core curriculum instruction that uses the second language as the medium of instruction. Multiple variations of immersion programs exist.

**Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTL):** From the American perspective, foreign languages other than French, Spanish and German.

**Performance Guidelines:** ACTFL general descriptions of communicative performance in a foreign language based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and National K-12 Foreign Language Standards.

**Proficiency Guidelines:** National foreign language guidelines established by ACTFL that describe reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of learners at the novice, intermediate, advanced and superior levels of foreign language proficiencies.

**World Languages:** There are 6912 living languages, including 114 sign languages.

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# The Audio-Lingual Method

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was partly based on the then-prevalent belief that language learning was a behavioral skill. According to this belief, the learning process involved cultivating habits by reinforcing correct language uses. Students learned language through a series of drills involving imitation, repetition and practice (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). For instance, a typical lesson might include the introduction of a model dialogue read aloud by the teacher; choral repetition of the dialogue with frequent teacher correction of pronunciation; memorization, practice and adaptation of the dialogue; drill practice of grammatical structures; and reading and writing activities related to the vocabulary and forms presented that day (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In the classroom, the target language was the only language spoken by the students, and students were expected to gain an understanding of grammatical forms inductively rather than deductively as was common in traditionally-used methods of the time (Kerper, 1999; Smith, 1970).

## **Further Insights**

### **Behaviorism**

The foundational beliefs underlying the audiolingual or functional skills approach were based on a learning theory called behaviorism and a linguistic theory called structuralism. Behaviorism, developed by American psychologist B. F. Skinner, is a theory that views learning as a process of reinforcing behaviors. According to this theory, when individuals receive positive reinforcement for their behavior, they are likely to repeat those behaviors. When individuals receive negative reinforcement, they are likely to stop producing those behaviors. Thus, in terms of language learning, a behaviorist approach would reward students for correct responses. This idea was incorporated into many of the methods that comprised the audiolingual approach. For instance, one of the principle methods of the approach involved the memorization of dialogues representing situations the student could encounter. It was believed that if students memorized the correct responses of the dialogue and were given positive feedback for their responses, then when students encountered the situation in real life, they would automatically recall the appropriate language for the context (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

### **Structuralism**

The second theory, Structuralism, was a linguistic theory that highly valued the grammar or structure of the language as its

## **Abstract**

This article presents information on the Audiolingual Method of teaching foreign languages, including English as a second language. The Audiolingual Method was a popular method used to teach foreign languages in the 1950s and 1960s. The foundations of the method rested on two important theories: the linguistic theory of Structuralism and the educational theory of Behaviorism. Key concepts of the method included a focus on language as speech and an emphasis on imitation, memorization and drill practice. The theoretical underpinnings of Audiolingualism, its historical rise to popularity and the reasons for its decline are examined.

## **Overview**

The Audiolingual Method was a method for teaching foreign languages that enjoyed its heyday in the mid-1960s. The approach

starting point. Structuralists believed in paying particular attention to the pronunciation and basic sentence patterns of the language. Because speech is naturally learned first, they believed that language was speech and that writing was a secondary form of language. In their study of language, structuralists began at the phonetic level and moved upward to investigate words and sentences. In this way, they followed the footsteps of Henry Sweet, an influential voice in the late 19th century who contributed greatly to the establishment of linguistics as a science. Sweet believed that the science of language was rooted in phonetics, or the sounds of the language. "Phonetics is to the science of language generally what mathematics is to astronomy and the physical sciences" (cited in Matsuda, 2001, p. 87).

The structuralists with the most impact on the development of audiolingualism were Charles Fries and Leonard Bloomfield. Separately and concurrently these individuals developed techniques of teaching foreign languages that were incorporated into the audiolingual approach. Fries was responsible for the development of the oral approach also known as the aural-oral approach or structural approach. Under the oral approach, students learned grammatical patterns through a series of drills involving imitation and pattern practice (e.g., This is a pen. That is a pencil. That is a book. This is a desk. What is that?) Fries emphasized the differences in patterns that occurred between languages, believing that these were the root of errors in a second language. The oral approach was initially used at the University of Michigan, the site of the first "Intensive English Language Institute" in the country. The goal of the ELI was to help international students develop a mastery of the English sound system and the structure of the spoken system. Students were taught using a limited vocabulary and were expected to be proficient in less than three months (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Bloomfield, like Fries, developed techniques for learning the spoken system of language. In his textbook and pamphlets on language teaching, he developed the principles of mimicry and memorization and introduced the term habit in relation to language learning (Castagnaro, 2006; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

### A Bottom-Up System

Based on these structuralist ideas, the audiolingual method was designed around a progressive exposure to the language beginning with the spoken system and then moving to the written system. First, students listened in order to learn the sounds of the system. Then students learned to speak by repeating what they had heard. Finally, students read and wrote the same language that they had already used orally. Because the system was designed to move from the bottom-up, students were expected to form their own understanding of the grammar through the processes of making analogies, generalizing and discriminating. This was in direct contrast to the traditional method of the time known as grammar-translation which presented grammatical rules first and followed the rules with practice. Unlike traditional teachers, teachers operating within the audiolingual paradigm did not give explanations of language principles until students were believed to have their own perceptions of how the language worked (Smith, 1970).

Nelson Brooks, originator of the term audiolingual, summarized the practices of an audiolingual teacher as follows:

- The modeling of all content by the teacher.
- The subordination of the mother tongue to the second language by rendering English inactive while the new language is being learned.
- The early and continued training of the ear and tongue without recourse to graphic symbols.
- The learning of structure through the practice of patterns of sound, order, and form, rather than by explanation.
- The gradual substitution of graphic symbols for sounds after sounds are thoroughly known.
- The summarizing of the main principles of structure for the student's use when the structures are already familiar, especially when they differ from those of the mother tongue...
- The shortening of the time span between a performance and the pronouncement of its rightness or wrongness, without interrupting the response. This enhances the factor of reinforcement in learning.
- The minimizing of vocabulary until all common structures have been learned.
- The study of vocabulary only in context.
- Sustained practice in the use of the language only in the molecular form of speaker-hearer-situation.
- Practice in translation only as a literary exercise at an advanced level (Brooks, 1964 as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

### The Army Method

Though audiolingual methods were most popular in the 1960s, the birth of some of the approach's principles grew out of the needs that arose during World War II. During the 1930s, foreign language training in the U.S. followed a reading-based approach. Because most students studying language at that time never expected to use the language in real life, and because few teachers were fluent in the languages they taught, oral skills were deemed to be irrelevant. Instead, students learned by reading text and translating sentences (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Smith, 1970). World War II changed foreign language teaching because it created a need for individuals who could actually speak German, Italian, Japanese and other languages.

In response to this need, the government asked universities to develop new methods that could quickly train military personnel to be conversationally proficient in a second language. The result was the development of the Army Specialized Training Program, also known as the army method. This program was modeled after linguistic programs that were then being used by linguists and anthropologists to learn languages for which there were no textbooks. In this informant method, developed by Bloomfield, a native speaker and a linguist would work together with the learner in an intense environment. The native speaker would pro-

vide phrases and sentences to be imitated; the linguist would help elicit the language for imitation. Students studied "10 hours a day, six days a week. There were generally 15 hours of drill with native speakers and 20 to 30 hours of private study spread over two to three 6-week sessions" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 51). The army adopted this intense method with successful results.

As a result of its success, many colleges and high schools attempted to create courses based on the army method's principles. However, the programs were largely unsuccessful because colleges and universities could not recreate the intensity of the military programs. Nevertheless, the army method had a lasting effect on foreign language teaching in that many linguists came to appreciate the value of oral language training (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Furthermore, one of the goals of the army method was later adopted by the audiolingual method. This was the goal of near-native-like perfection. That is, to be considered proficient, students had to accurately reproduce the sounds and grammatical forms of a native language speaker. Today, it is recognized that there is no perfect native speaker because there are multiple dialects and native speakers do not always speak with grammatical perfection (Bolton, 2006). It is also recognized that native-like pronunciation is frequently impossible for older language learners to achieve (Long, 2007). However, at the time, it was believed that students could achieve native-like speech if they listened to and imitated native speakers. Thus, one of the instructional tools that blossomed with audiolingualism was the language lab. In the language lab, students could listen to and repeat dialogues, complete drill practice and work without being disturbed by other students. It was recommended that students spend 15-20 minutes a day in language lab exercises. Although no grammatical explanation was recommended following the drills, many teachers felt that grammar explanations enhanced the language lab experience and added them to their programs (Smith, 1970).

While World War II brought an emphasis on oral skills to foreign language teaching, the audiolingual method did not develop as a specific program until the late 1950s. At that time, the launching of the first Russian satellite raised fears that the U.S. would fall behind other countries in making scientific advancements. Therefore, the National Defense Education Act of 1958 expanded funds for the study of languages and how to teach them. As part of these efforts, language specialists combined the linguistic theory of structuralism, the educational theory of behaviorism, and the techniques developed by Fries and Bloomfield into what we now call the audiolingual method (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

## Viewpoints

### New Theories

Audiolingualism remained popular in the 1950s and 1960s, but in the mid-1960s, new ideas in linguistic and educational theory challenged the approach. The most influential criticism came

from within the field of linguistics. Linguist Noam Chomsky rejected the structuralist and behaviorist foundations of audiolingualism. He argued that language learning cannot be a habit because it involves considerable innovations. In other words, individuals regularly create new sentences and language patterns that go beyond the language input that they have received. Given this innovation, Chomsky reasoned that there must be something innate within the mind that allows an individual to acquire and organize linguistic principles. He dubbed this language acquisition device "universal grammar" and proposed that while much of one's language knowledge is already present at birth, abstract mental processes must be engaged in order to facilitate learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; White, 2007).

Cognitive theorists in psychology and education also rejected aspects of the audiolingual method. David Ausubel's work in educational psychology highlighted the importance of deductive methods for successful academic achievement. His work with advance organizers demonstrated how presenting a general overview of a principle before giving students task-based practice enhanced learning. It was, and still is, believed that advance organizers help the student to integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge and mental structures (Kearsley, 2007). This notion was in direct contrast to the inductive method of audiolingualism. Furthermore, cognitive scientists rejected the rote learning of phrases during drills and the use of natural-native speaking speeds with beginning level students. They argued that language learning can be aided by the use of the student's native language, and they rejected the audiolingualist's insistence on using only the target language in the classroom (Smith, 1970).

### An Ineffective Method

Along with new theoretical perspectives came evidence that audiolingual methods were quantitatively ineffective. One of the earliest studies to raise doubts about the popular oral methods of training was conducted in the late 1940s. Agard & Dunkel (1948) found that in aural-oral programs, students were not becoming "spontaneously fluent" in the amount of time allotted and their reading skills were weak compared to students in traditional groups (as cited in Smith, 1970).

Concern about whether audiolingual programs were measuring up to expectations led the state of Pennsylvania and the U.S. Office of Education to establish a longitudinal project comparing three teaching methodologies. The project compared grammar-translation, audiolingual, (which they called functional skills), and functional skills plus grammar programs. The project encompassed 58 secondary schools and 104 teachers its first year with 61 classes continuing through the first two years. Additional funding allowed the project to continue for four years though student samples were smaller as fewer students progressed through the advanced levels of foreign language study. Students taking French and German were assessed on their listening comprehension, speaking fluency, reading and writing skills. Though the investigators admitted to an initial expectation that audiolingual programs would outperform traditional ones, this did not occur.

Instead, the results of the study were devastating for audiolingualism. At the end of each year of study, students in the traditional grammar-translation classes performed significantly better on reading comprehension tests. At the end of the second year, there were no significant differences among the three strategies on measures of listening, speaking and writing, but this changed by year three when students in traditional programs also outperformed the others in listening. Along with these blows to audiolingualism, the study found that language labs did not have a significant positive impact on student achievement (Smith, 1970). Thus, with research challenging the effectiveness of audiolingual methods and educational and linguistic theorists moving to new paradigms, audiolingualism was soon replaced in the U.S. by new methods (Smith, 1970).

Remnants of audiolingualism can still be found in the classroom. Textbooks are still produced with dialogues that can be practiced; tapes and CDs offer students the chance to listen to native voices at natural speeds; and in some classes, there are still grammar drills. But for the most part, these methods are used not as a program unto themselves, but as part of an eclectic classroom that uses a variety of methods to meet differing student needs. In the few instances where research can still be found comparing audiolingualism to other methods of instruction, audiolingualism continues to underperform its counterparts (Kiany, Ali Salimi & Afshari, 2004).

## Terms & Concepts

**Army Method:** An intensive foreign language learning system that involved team teaching between a native speaker and a trained linguist and intense contact with the language – up to 10 hours a day for several weeks.

**Behaviorism:** A learning theory developed by American psychologist B.F. Skinner. In this theory, all learning is described as a behavior and desired behaviors can be cultivated by using positive and negative reinforcement.

**Dialogue:** A conversation consisting of two or three people speaking in a natural situation was the principle teaching tool of the Audiolingual Method. Students were expected to study the language by imitating, practicing, memorizing and adapting the dialogue.

**Grammar-Translation:** A method of language learning derived from the traditional ways of teaching Latin. In this method, students are given general rules of grammar and then practice using those rules by translating sentences.

**Informant Method:** A language learning method in which a native speaker and a trained linguist work together to teach the spoken language. The native speaker provides words and phrases for students to imitate; the linguist elicits the forms from the speaker.

**Language Lab:** A popular tool used by teachers in the 1960s and 1970s. In language labs, students had the chance to listen to native speakers speaking at their natural rates and to complete drill exercises focusing on grammatical patterns.

**Negative Reinforcement:** Within the theory of behaviorism, negative reinforcement is anything that is done to prevent an undesirable behavior from reoccurring. For example, denying a student candy for an incorrect response in a game would be considered negative reinforcement.

**Oral Approach:** A method of foreign language teaching developed by Charles Fries. The approach is based in structuralism and is closely associated with contrastive analysis.

**Phonetics:** The sound system of a language.

**Positive Reinforcement:** Within the theory of behaviorism, positive reinforcement is anything that is done to encourage the repetition of a desired behavior. For example, giving a student candy for a correct response in a game would be considered positive reinforcement.

**Structuralism:** A linguistic theory that pays particular attention to the phonetic system of a language and to the grammatical patterns of the language. The audiolingual method was based on many of the principles of structuralism.

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# The Lexical Approach

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## Abstract

The lexical approach is an approach to teaching language that sees words and word combinations as the foundation of language. The lexical approach is in contrast to structuralist approaches because it views lexis as having more creative potential than grammar. Proponents of the approach also believe that much of language is not novel, but instead consists of prefabricated or memorized chunks. The lexical approach is gaining more influence due to the field of corpus linguistics which is making real language data more widely available.

## Overview

The lexical approach is an approach to teaching language that sees words and word combinations as the basic foundation of language. From this perspective, the language that we use consists of many multi-word "chunks," or groups of words that frequently appear together. Language teaching under this approach attempts to build vocabulary and raise students' awareness of language patterns.

The lexical approach is different from structural approaches because it places vocabulary before grammar. In structural approaches, grammar is viewed as the primary factor that allows for the creation of novel sentences while words are seen as static entities that merely fit into the slots that grammar provides. In contrast, the lexical approach views words as holding the most creative potential. Lewis (1993) writes that "language consists of grammaticalized lexis not lexicalized grammar" (p. vi).

### The Word Continuum

Lewis (1993), in one of the most comprehensive descriptions of the lexical approach, describes the generative power of words as existing on a continuum. At one end are "semantically strong" words whose meaning is contained in the word itself. These words have limited "collocational range" for they do not frequently combine with other words to create new meanings. Such words are highly specialized such as "pneumonia" or "electromagnetic". At the other end of the continuum are words that have little or no meaning in and of themselves. These words, such as "this", "of" and "the," get their meaning from the words with which they combine. They collocate widely and have traditionally been viewed as part of English structure. While these are the extremes, most words fall somewhere in the middle.

Given the central position of words and word combinations to the lexical approach, those interested in its tenets generally examine how words create meaning. The first important principle is that words do not have a one-to-one correspondence with real life (Lewis, 1993). While words such as house and dog represent things that exist, it is not true that these words represent one and only one particular house or kind of dog. Rather, these general terms represent a category that can be understood when a hearer or reader applies background knowledge to the word. Perhaps

you, as reader, for instance, have a picture of a kind of house or dog that comes to mind when you hear these words. Probably, your meaning is created partially by understanding what each word is not. A dog is not a cat nor is it a house; thus, you define the word by excluding what it cannot be. The meaning of a word can be refined through the addition of words that modify it. A large red house, for example, or a cute fluffy dog should convey a more specific meaning than the general terms house or dog. However, the exact nature of large, or cute, or fluffy is still an abstract concept without a direct correspondence to one and only one match in real life.

### Words, Meaning & Context

Within a word, meaning is created by the base meaning of the word and by the derivations of the word created by changing letters or adding affixes (e.g. prefixes and suffixes). Adding -s to house gives us more than one house. Adding -ed to a word like jump changes the time in which the action occurs (Today I jump; yesterday, I jumped). Outside the word, meaning is created by the context in which it occurs. Context can refer to the situation in which the word is produced (e.g. a discussion between two friends or within a formal academic paper). It can also refer to the language that surrounds the word in a sentence or longer text. Both types of context influence the meaning conveyed by a word. Between two friends talking about a problem that has been previously discussed, for instance, knowledge of the ongoing situational context may be all that is needed to understand the word problem in the following conversation:

S1: "How'd your meeting go?"

S2: "Well, the problem has been taken care of"

Within a sentence level context, the surrounding words can provide clues as to what an unknown word may mean. For example, in the sentence, "The problem with my boss is that he always wants me to work late when I already have plans," the words surrounding 'problem' indicate that the problem is a conflict between what the boss and speaker want.

Writers and speakers use words within contexts to convey a particular meaning, but an additional factor in whether the meaning is understood is the hearer or reader. This person brings to the situation an understanding of the writer's/speaker's purpose, knowledge of the context and of the language. All of this knowledge shapes the outcome of the interaction. Because of the hearer/reader's knowledge, he or she can provide help to the speaker/writer by guessing the speaker's intention, providing unknown words, or ignoring or correcting errors. The result of the interaction between the two parties is a negotiated meaning that is unique to the particular participants (Lewis, 1993).

### Lexical Phrases

The lexical approach takes into account all of these different ways of creating meaning. The approach emphasizes that students should be exposed to words in real contexts and that

learners should become familiar with how context affects meaning. An effort is made to encourage students to negotiate for meaning, and of course, as the name implies, the greatest attention is given to the nature of lexical items themselves and their regularly occurring patterns within text.

One of the central principles of the lexical approach is that much of the language we use exists in our minds as prefabricated or memorized chunks. These chunks have been called by various names including: lexical phrases, formulaic sentences, and ready-made utterances. It is believed that the chunks are probably stored together in the brain in order to increase the brain's processing efficiency. Through the manipulation of thousands of chunks, individuals create new utterances (Boers, Eyckmans & Stengers, 2006).

Because chunking is so important, the lexical approach makes the teaching of lexical phrases a primary component of the approach. The main reasons for this include:

- Being able to use lexical phrases makes the student sound more native-like. Also, because the phrases are unpredictable from grammar rules or the vocabulary of which they are comprised, the only way to learn them is to learn or acquire them in much the same way that irregular spelling is learned.
- Because lexical phrases are thought to be retrieved from memory holistically, knowing more of them is thought to increase fluency in real-life situations.
- The use of these phrases creates a comfort zone for students. If they can use multiword units without error, they will feel more confident about their language use (Boers et al., 2006).

The teaching of lexical units begins with an understanding of what a lexical item is. According to Pawley and Syder, a lexical item is a minimal unit of text whose meaning is not totally predictable from form and which is socially sanctioned (i.e. people are known to use it)(as cited in Lewis, 1993). Lexical items can be words or they can be multi-word units. Though the categorization and labeling of multi-word units is still an active area of research some commonly recognized categories are

- Polywords
- Collocations
- Idiomatic expressions

### Polywords

Polywords are generally short groupings of two or three words that occur together. They include several types of functions. For instance, phrasal verbs are one type of polyword which consists of a verb and a preposition or adverb and which have a special meaning (e.g., come in, fill out, cheer up). Other polywords include: fillers (e.g., excuse me, sort of), near-compounds (e.g.,



cover-up, the weather forecast), and short pragmatic phrases such as of course, by the way, and on the other hand (Boers et al., 2006; Lewis, 1993).

### Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions are fixed collocations - meaning the words in the expression always occur in the same order and different words cannot be substituted for those in the expression. Idiomatic expressions have both a literal and a figurative meaning, but the literal meaning is not used. For instance, "I ran into her the other day" does not mean that the speaker literally bumped into someone while running, but that she saw someone unexpectedly.

At one time, idiomatic expressions were thought to be somewhat superfluous knowledge that one didn't really need to learn to speak a second language. Corpus linguistics has shown that to the contrary, idiomatic expressions are widespread. A productive area of research investigates where idiomatic expressions come from and how they can best be taught. One theory in this area states that idioms are not completely random but are often motivated by metaphors that exist in the culture to conceptualize certain concepts. One example of this is the metaphor, "Anger is heat." From this metaphor seems to be derived the idiomatic expressions: makes my blood boil, get into a heated argument, Don't lose your cool (Kövecses, 1986). A related theory is that idiomatic expressions are phonologically motivated. This means that certain expressions have been standardized because of the way they sound. For instance, the idioms "publish or perish" and "beat around the bush" use alliteration which makes them catchy and easy to remember. The possibility that idiomatic expressions are motivated suggests ways to teach them more effectively. By encouraging students to question why an idiom might have become standardized, teachers can encourage deeper-level mental processing which is likely to lead to greater retention (Boers et al., 2006).

### Collocations

Collocations are words that frequently co-occur in a text. The continuum of occurrence ranges from fixed collocations such as idiomatic expressions to free collocations that are novel and have less predictability and a greater potential for variety in meaning. Examples of collocates for the words do and make, for example, include: do: homework, dishes, laundry, my hair and make: bed, decision, friends, sure that, love. By teaching a set of collocates, teachers are thought to be able to improve usage by reducing mismatched words such as make homework or do decisions (Lewis, 1993).

## Applications

### Using Authentic Data

In the classroom, a lexical approach draws attention to the patterns of language use as exhibited above. Students are exposed to and taught a wide range of vocabulary as it occurs in context. Students are also encouraged to notice patterns themselves

through the use of authentic data. One source of such data is a corpus or a large body of collected texts such as the COBUILD Bank of English Corpus, The Cambridge International Corpus or the British National Corpus (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). These corpora, which include millions of words collected from real spoken and written texts can be queried using a concordancer, a special kind of software program that looks for specific words or patterns. A concordancer typically produces lines of text (see below) that highlights the queried word as found within the corpus. Students, through reading the concordance lines, develop their own definitions for the word and notice what kinds of prepositions or other words are usually used with it.

A sample of concordance lines for the word "would" that was queried in the Collins Wordbank Online concordancer follows:

- To what some of the less well-informed media would have you believe, these young people mostly
- So i can have it done privately. How much would it cost, and can i have it done without my
- Of cindy from la or judy from morden, who would you plump for? York member [p] the vintage
- A skeleton. It never occurred to me that people would see it that way. I'd been doing it in my live
- Mr kinnock emphasised that a labour government would not be able to achieve all its objectives in
- It seems unlikely now that either man would object to being put on the same role of
- The extent. The greatest possible deterrent would be the near certainty of being caught, but in
- In here to make a pitch as unprepared as you, i would have thrown him out in the first five

In teaching vocabulary, a lexical approach emphasizes teaching words and phrases that are going to be most common and most useful. Thus, words which have high frequency - the greatest number of uses in the language - are taught. Similarly, words that have wide range and coverage, meaning respectively that they occur in many situations or have meanings that easily substitute for more specific words (e.g. things), are given attention.

From corpora, many wordlists have been developed of important words for students. Ming-Tzu & Nation (2004) cite four levels of vocabulary lists:

- The list of 2000 high frequency words found in general service vocabulary;
- the Academic Word List comprised of 570 word families that are frequent and wide ranging in academic texts;
- Technical vocabulary word lists that are associated with a particular subject area;
- Low frequency word lists.

Harwood (2002) stresses the value of using corpus data because it has been shown that intuition often fails when it comes to identifying language that is frequent or wide-ranging.

### Intensive Reading & Listening

In line with theories of second language acquisition, those who espouse the lexical approach state that noticing language chunks is important for language learning but in and of itself noticing is not enough to ensure acquisition. Rather, they say students must hear and read the words in several contexts so that they begin to make their own generalizations about how the words function in the language. To encourage this, teachers should provide extensive and intensive reading and listening practice, and help students notice similarities, differences, restrictions and examples between words. They can teach collocates together and encourage students to guess the meaning of words in context. Additionally, repetition and recycling or reviewing words over time is valued (Lewis, 1993). Nation states that teachers should recycle lexical items 10-12 times for higher level learners and that teaching without recycling is a "wasted effort" (as cited in Harwood, 2002, p. 142).

### The Role of Grammar

Although the lexical approach views lexis as the basis of language and deemphasizes grammar, grammar still has an important role in the lexically-based classroom. Lewis (1993) provides a comprehensive overview of what grammar is and should not be. He suggests that full mastery of a language involves competent use of grammatical patterns, but that grammar has been overemphasized and incorrectly understood in the past. He offers twelve areas of grammatical instruction that should be included:

- Morphology and word formation,
- Manipulation of auxiliary words,
- Negation,
- Supra-sentential linking (e.g. Using words such as such as at the beginning of a sentence),
- Oppositions,
- Adjuncts (e.g., adverbs at beginning of sentences),
- Word order,
- Functional patterns,
- De-lexicalized words (e.g., verbs and function words),
- Word grammar,
- Stress patterns and groups, and
- Grammatical holophrases.

### Issues

The lexical approach is still a fairly new approach in the English as a Second Language arena. Consequently, teachers are just beginning to learn how to incorporate these ideas into their

classrooms. Some of the potential problems of implementation discussed by Harwood (2002) include deciding how to select and manipulate data, presenting data in a way that is interesting to students, grappling with the question of what "real" English is when data shows non-standard or culturally inappropriate uses, and learning how to recycle words when textbooks do not.

In answer to these possible problems, Harwood suggests that different corpora may need to be consulted for different purposes and different groups of students. He believes that frequency should not be the only criteria for vocabulary selection, citing the use of highly technical words that are infrequent. Unlike Lewis (2003) who believes that unusual samples should be a source of inquiry, Harwood believes that data should be edited to remove nontypical and inappropriate uses. This is because he says that learners can only acquire so much new information in one setting, and spending time on nontypical data causes learner overload.

To ensure that students enjoy working with corpus data, Harwood says that materials designers should strive to create a feeling of student involvement with the materials. Finally, teachers and students need to seriously question whether "real" English is something that should be taught or learned. In the face of evidence that learners often do not want to sound like native speakers and considering the fact that there are now multiple English varieties around the world, this question is likely to receive greater attention in the future.

In conclusion, the lexical approach is an approach that is based on the belief that words and word combinations are the foundations of language. Because the approach views much of language as existing as pre-fabricated chunks, attention in the classroom is given to noticing, learning and reviewing these lexical forms. Although the approach is still fairly new in the ESL field, advances in corpus linguistics are making more data available and this is sure to increase interest in the approach in the future.

### Terms & Concepts

**Collocations:** Collocations are words that frequently occur together in text.

**Concordancer:** A concordancer is a software program used to search a corpus for language data.

**Corpus:** A corpus is a collection of texts that can be analyzed in order to learn about word use and language patterns. Most large corpora are now computerized.

**Corpus Linguistics:** Corpus linguistics is the field of linguistics that studies large bodies of texts in order to identify how language is used.

**Coverage:** Coverage refers to the ability of a word, because of its general meaning, to substitute for more specific terms.

**Idiomatic Expressions:** Idiomatic expressions are a type of fixed collocation. It is fixed because the words in the expression must occur in the same order for the meaning of the expression to be understood.

**Lexical Item:** A lexical item is a minimal unit of text whose meaning is not totally predictable from form and which is socially sanctioned (i.e. people are known to use it).

**Negotiated Meaning:** A negotiated meaning is the meaning that is co-created between a speaker and listener or a reader and writer through the process of interacting through language.

**Polywords:** Polywords are short one and two word phrases that co-occur in text.

**Range:** Range refers to the number of different types of texts in which a word is found.

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# Corpus Linguistics

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of written and/or spoken text, to discern naturally occurring patterns and features of language use. Corpus based research is particularly useful in the study of language acquisition, as corpora derived from the speech of children or students at various points in their development discloses essential details of the language learning processes. Corpus linguistics as practiced today, with the aid of automation and with the availability of large, comprehensive corpora, is a booming field that researchers predict will continue to dominate research on language in the decades to come. Language pedagogy has been and will continue to be profoundly affected by any developments in corpus linguistics, as empirical observations of language use are critical to formulating theories of language learning and teaching.

## **Overview**

### **Introduction to Corpus Linguistics**

Corpus linguistics refers to the empirical study of language as it occurs naturally in various contexts and under specific conditions. Corpus linguistics uses corpora, or empirical collections of written and/or spoken text, to discern naturally occurring patterns and features of language use. Corpus based research is particularly useful in the study of language acquisition, as corpora derived from the speech of children or students at various points in their development discloses essential details of the language learning processes.

A corpus is a large collection of text representative of a language or of a subset or genre of a language. Corpora are assembled by teams of researchers who select, categorize, and annotate text. This data is then sorted, parsed, and analyzed with the aid of computer programs-typically concordance programs and statistical packages. Concordances are lists of the occurrences of particular words or phrases in the corpus. Through concordance analysis, researchers can determine in which contexts a word, concept, or phrase is most prevalent, can compare the frequency and use of synonyms or similar ideas, and, with the help of statistical software, can characterize patterns of use.

Text in a corpus may be divided into any number of registers, or categories. Possible registers include texts written by various groups, texts of a specific genre, texts derived from speech, and so on (Biber et al, 1998). Through the use of registers, researchers

## **Abstract**

Corpus linguistics is the empirical study of language as it occurs naturally, and not as is prescribed by theoretical rules and structures. Corpus linguistics uses corpora, or empirical collections

can find and describe language patterns under various conditions and constraints. For example, differences in language use in news reporting, novels, and poems can be explored, vocabularies of natural language speakers and of second language learners can be compared, and so on.

Corpus based analyses have been used to develop dictionaries, to parse out and describe features of language, to derive new theories of grammar, and to forge teaching material that addresses language use, not only linguistic theory.

### **Corpus Linguistics in Context**

Though the term 'corpus linguistics' has been coined only recently, in the second half of the twentieth century, all language studies before modern, Chomskyan linguistics were corpus based. As far back as the middle ages, monks created large tables and indices of phrases and passages from sacred texts to be used for further analysis (McEnery & Wilson, 2001). The study of lexicography—the study of the meaning and use of words—also took root during this period (Biber et al, 1998). Lexicography relied on measurements of the frequency of words and of the relation between words in various texts, or, on early linguistic corpus research.

During the eighteenth century, empirical language studies were used in understanding language acquisition and in creating language reference and learning materials. For example, in 1775, a corpus was used to provide samples of language use for dictionary words, and in the nineteenth century, a large compendium of texts was used to create the Oxford English Dictionary (Biber et al, 1998).

From about 1876 through 1926, corpus diary studies were the prominent methodology of gathering corpus data aimed at understanding language acquisition. Parents participating in studies kept detailed accounts of their children's utterances. These were later analyzed for patterns of normative behavior, and these diary studies corpora are still used at present as "sources of normative data" (McEnery & Wilson, 2001, p. 3).

In the early twentieth century, the empirical study of language took on a more formal shape with the birth of field linguistics and of the structuralism movement (McEnery & Wilson, 2001). Researchers in these traditions collected records of spoken language and later analyzed this corpora material in a 'bottom-up', procedural manner. The most commonly used study designs employed by field and structural linguists were large sample and longitudinal studies. Large sample studies, prevalent from around 1927 through 1957, drew from many students and language samples to determine and describe average language knowledge and usage. In longitudinal studies, popular since the early 1960s, researchers collect corpus data from the same participants over a period of time, and use this to describe changes in language acquisition and learning behaviors (McEnery & Wilson, 2001).

### **Chomsky & Rationalist Linguistics**

Corpus based language studies were interrupted in the late 1950s by the research of Noam Chomsky (1928 - ), a computer scientist and linguist who ushered in a new wave of rationalistic linguistics and refuted the validity of using corpora to adequately represent language (1957). Chomsky argued that all empirical collections of language samples—all corpora—are skewed and incomplete. They are skewed in that they favor particular uses of language at the expense of others; for example, impolite, false, and obvious statements do not often find themselves in corpus collections (Biber et al, 1998). Further, corpora are incomplete because the number of sentences in a language is infinite; no finite collection of text could ever fully represent all possible configurations of words (McEnery & Wilson, 2001).

Corpus analysis thus lost its popularity during the 1950s and 60s, but resurfaced in the 1970s with the advent of powerful computing capabilities. The arguments leveled by Chomsky against corpus linguistics were addressed during this period, and by the early 1980s, large-scale corpus-building projects were undertaken by many universities and academic partnerships.

Corpus language research, after a dramatic struggle with rationalist theories, overcame Chomsky's challenges and transformed the newly forming field of linguistics. Supporters of corpus linguistics argued that natural language corpora provide key insights into language acquisition processes that cannot simply be theorized. They recognized corpora did not provide complete accounts of language use, but found corpus linguistics invaluable in research on language acquisition and on language pedagogies. Further, corpus research began to provide empirical evidence against purely structuralist, rationalist grammars. These grammars conceived of language use as a 'fill-in-the-slot' process in which appropriate words are fitted into preconceived, theoretically 'correct' sentence structures. Research found that on the contrary, language users rely on schemata and learned language collocations, or commonly used phrases, when engaging in authentic natural speech (Sinclair, 1991).

The successful resurfacing of corpus language research was enabled in the early 1970s by the introduction of the computer into the laboratory. Automated processing allowed for never before imagined storage and analysis capabilities. Researchers were now able to analyze the frequency with which words appeared across registers, the associations between words and common phrases, and the multiple meanings behind individual words (Biber et al, 1998).

### **Modern Corpus Research & Compiled Corpora**

Researchers undertaking linguistic corpus research are able to investigate any feature of language, such as grammar, semantics, and pragmatics (McEnery & Wilson, 2001). However, the comprehensive study of any of these fields requires large, representative data sets from which empirical laws can be derived (Myles, 2005). Therefore, attempts at compiling large, com-

prehensive corpora have been underway since the inception of corpus linguistics. However, the compilation corpora are most often conducted alongside other research aims. Some of these include:

- Understanding descriptive grammars,
- Discourse analysis,
- Pragmatics, and
- Language acquisition.

Descriptive grammar is a new approach to studying grammar based on corpus research. Traditional, rationalist grammars are prescriptive-or, they dictate the ways in which words should be used. Descriptive grammars examine corpora of text derived from naturally occurring speech and detect grammatical rules used. The corpus approach to grammar was pioneered by Charles C. Fries (1887-1967), who compiled the first large corpus of spoken English by transcribing and annotating large numbers of taped phone conversations (Fries, 1952). Research in descriptive grammar has expanded and has been enriched by the availability of storing, sorting, and analysis technologies. Corpus text is processed using register analysis, or analysis that examines frequency, organization, and form of words and phrases as compared across many registers (Conrad, 2000). Information about language use across large numbers of registers adds nuance to descriptive grammar studies that acknowledge the grammar of each form of language is unique-for example, the ways in which individuals speak on subway trains are not the same as those by which they present themselves at a business meeting.

Several decades after C. C. Fries had begun his work, in 1959, Sir Randolph Quirk (1920 - ), a linguist from the University College of London, initiated the Survey of English Usage (SEU), a project to assemble a one million spoken and written (British) English language corpus. The spoken portion of the corpus was further annotated and computerized as the London-Lund corpus by Sidney Greenbaum and Jan Svartvik, two linguists trained through Quirk's SEU (Svartvik & Quirk, 1980).

### **The Spoken English Corpus**

Another corpus to incorporate spoken text was the Spoken English Corpus, assembled between 1984 and 1987 at Lancaster University. The Spoken English Corpus was also the first machine-readable corpus and was used to analyze speech features such as dialects and intonation (Knowles et al, 1996). Spoken text, though invaluable as a source of information on actual language usage, is difficult to incorporate systematically into a corpus. Corpus programmers must first establish rules for how to encode the speech of overlapping speakers, how and if to code intonations, perceived emotions or tones, and for how to insert orthography into the transcription (McEnery & Wilson, 2001). However, if these issues are addressed fully, spoken corpora can be invaluable sources of information on how language is used in conversation and in relation to others.

The availability of spoken corpora allows researchers today to empirically observe the pragmatic aspects of language use and the features of discourse and speech acts (Jiang, 2005). In pragmatics, language is understood from the point of view of speakers and language users. These actors choose language based on constraints and limitations encountered, on situations presented, and on what they have previously learned about the way their language affects their relationships with others. From the point of view of pragmatics, language choices significantly affect further decisions, both of how to speak, and of how to act (Jiang, 2005).

### **Corpus Linguistics & Language Acquisition Studies**

Corpus linguistics has been used as a tool in second language acquisition research since early in the twentieth century. By mid-twentieth century, language acquisition research was linked to the field of second language learning, and vocabulary lists used in language courses were increasingly pulled from natural speaker corpora (McEnery & Wilson, 2001).

The first corpus to specifically address second language acquisition concerns was the Collins Birmingham University International Language Database (COBUILD), founded in 1980 at the University of Birmingham and directed by John Sinclair (1933-2007), a British linguist (1991). COBUILD is a monitor, or open, corpus-it allows new text to be added continuously, and does not specify a maximum limit on the number of entries. The disadvantage of such a design is that it makes quantitative analyses less feasible; however, for purposes of second language pedagogies, it is advantageous for the corpus to be flexible, to be kept updated, and to increase its scope over time (McEnery & Wilson, 2001). COBUILD is used by language teachers in the creation of classroom materials, primarily through concordance analysis. Using concordances affords the teacher an accurate, up to date picture of how particular words are used in different contexts by fluent or native language speakers.

More recently, learner corpora have revolutionized the field of second language pedagogical research. Learner corpora are collections of text written or spoken by those not yet fluent in a language. In 1990, Sylviane Granger of the University of Louvain in Belgium initiated the collection of the first learner corpus-the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE). ICLE consists of essays written by students of English from various countries and of various levels. Through analyzing learner corpora such as ICLE, researchers can observe the differences in language use between language learners and natural language speakers, and further between learners at various levels (Shirata & Stapleton, 2007). However, the scope of learner corpora at present is limited by the singular emphasis of written text.

### **The Visual Corpus**

One group addressing this concern by collecting video taped data from language classrooms is led by Steve Reder, a linguist at Portland State University. Between 2001 and 2006, the ESL

classes at the Portland State University Laboratory School were taped for a total of more than 5,000 hours of data collected from over 1,000 adult English learners. This data is the basis of the Multimedia Adult ESL Learner Corpus (MAELC), a corpus that can be used to find particular instances of explanations or questions and to immediately retrieve videos that illustrate the pedagogical methods used. MAELC visually captures the classroom experiences of adult students during the early stages of language learning, when gestures and visuals are generously used (Reder et al., 2003). A visual corpus allows researchers to examine classroom dynamics, to observe patterns of speech of different students, and to detect the non-verbal cues of language pedagogy.

## Applications

### Corpus Linguistics in Practice

Despite strong evidence that language learning occurs best in natural environments and with exposure to authentic language use, most ESL textbooks and other materials used in today's classrooms are based on rationalist, structural views of language (McEnery & Wilson, 2001). Second language learning is still primarily implemented through drills of vocabulary or of 'slot-filler' sentence completions, while typical language textbooks used at present are not context sensitive, for example. Because language is for the most part situation-dependent-language used in the home is different than that used in the workplace or that of the courthouse, the local bar, the academic journal, and so on-ignoring context in the teaching of a language prevents students from being able to acquire fluency (Barbieri & Eckhardt, 2007).

### Rationalist vs. Natural Language

The rationalist-based methodologies of currently available language teaching material are inadequate in teaching discourse and communication skills, the appropriateness of language in various contexts, and proper idiom and collocation use (Shei & Pain, 2000; Basanta & Martin, 2005-6). Therefore researchers recommend that teachers familiarize themselves with existing corpora and experiment with designing their own corpus-derived lessons instead of relying on textbooks addressing prescriptive, hypothetical language use (Jiang, 2005). Teachers may do this through using corpus driven methodologies to emphasize the active role of the student in the exploration of language, the authenticity of natural language use, and the organic nature of language learning.

Grammar, for example, can be taught as it emerges from natural language use-it does not have to be presented as a set of rigid, inflexible rules (Barbieri & Eckhardt, 2007). Rules of grammar need not be made explicit-rather, the student should be guided to note features of a language and how these shift for themselves. The "open-choice principle" of rationalist linguistics, which postulates that grammar is a frame within which slots are filled with words, has been experimentally invalidated, while the "idiom principle", which postulates language learning and making

occur within schemas and in the form of phrases and commonly encountered idioms, has gained acceptance in the field of language acquisition (Barnbrook, 2007).

### Concordances & Collocations

Two features of language that have been empirically shown to affect language fluency and acquisition through familiarizing students with idioms-and that can be used by teachers in the design of classroom materials-are concordances and collocations. Concordance analysis discloses the different ways in which a word might be used; collocation analysis describes the relationships between words commonly found together. Research has found that native speakers have a broad knowledge of both concordances and collocations, and use these systematically and frequently (Shei & Pain, 2000). The automation of these tasks allows fluent speakers faster access to language constructs, which in turn leads to more clear and coherent speech.

Teachers must design curricula material with particular attention to concordance and collocation, especially as current textbooks and pedagogies emphasize one word drills or phrases out of context, thus handicapping learners by preventing them from learning to use words in context and from learning the ways in which words naturally co-locate (Shirata & Stapleton, 2007). Second language learners should be frequently exposed to complex collocations and a variety of concordances that are natural to fluent speakers in order to help them automate the retrieval of common phrases and language constructs and schemas (Shei & Pain, 2000).

### Data Driven & Discovery Learning

Data driven learning and discovery learning are two language-teaching methodologies inspired by corpus studies that can be adapted to any classroom (Barbieri & Eckhardt, 2007). Data driven learning combines product and process learning in an inductive, active exploration of language (Johns, 1991). The student discovers authentic language by examining concordances from large corpora - or, by sifting through examples of language use in various, natural contexts. As such, the student is also a researcher, driven by a desire for the understanding of a language - the product, and enabled by the availability of an organic, flexible representation of language use-the process (Johns, 1991). Discovery learning is primarily process oriented, and emphasizes open-ended exploration of corpus text and 'serendipitous' discoveries (Bernardini, 2000).

### Speech Acts

Corpus research is also used in the teaching of speech acts (Jiang, 2005; Basanta & Martin, 2005-6). Speech acts require both sociolinguistic and socio-cultural knowledge, or the ability to both form appropriate verbalizations and to apply these in the appropriate circumstances. These pragmatic features of language exchanges help the learner gain "communicative competence" (Jiang, 2005, p. 37) that gives students the confidence to use language in different ways. As other aspects of language, spoken forms of discourse and conversation exist as schemas that should



be incorporated into language classrooms. Dialogues, for example, can be structured around commonly encountered forms within which students can find patterns and derive understandings of language independently (Basanta & Martin, 2005-6).

## Viewpoints

### Future Directions of Corpus Linguistics & Language Studies

One criticism leveled at the use of corpus linguistics in language teaching is that the selection of corpus material in a classroom does not reflect a neutral view, and is in fact a product of the teacher or researcher's biases and preconceptions (Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 1999). Ultimately, the corpus or the teacher controls what information is available to students, thus blunting opportunities for critical thinking about the presented text. Proposed solutions to these criticisms include allowing the students to select the texts they are interested in studying, and encouraging teachers to critically examine corpus selections for personal and societal biases (Hammond & Macken-Horarik, 1999).

Despite criticisms such as these, corpus linguistics as practiced today, with the aid of automation and with the availability of large, comprehensive corpora, is a booming field that researchers predict will continue to dominate research on language in the decades to come (McEnery & Wilson, 2001; Biber et al, 1998). Furthermore, language pedagogy has been and will continue to be profoundly affected by any developments in corpus linguistics, as empirical observations of language use are critical to formulating theories of language learning and teaching.

## Terms & Concepts

**Collocation:** The ways in which some words naturally occur alongside others, for example, "achieve" and "goal."

**Concordance:** A list of the occurrences of particular words or phrases in the corpus. Through concordance analysis, researchers can determine in which contexts a word, concept, or phrase is most prevalent, can compare the frequency and use of synonyms or similar ideas, and, with the help of statistical software, can characterize patterns of use.

**Corpus:** Empirical collection of representative written and/or spoken text that is annotated and sorted into categories (registers).

**Data Driven Learning:** A pedagogy that combines product and process learning in an inductive, active exploration of language. The student is encouraged to discover authentic language through examination of concordances from large corpora.

**Discovery Learning:** A process oriented pedagogical method that emphasizes open-ended exploration of corpus text and 'serendipitous' discoveries.

**Learner Corpus:** Collections of text written or spoken by those not yet fluent in a language that can be used as comparison to native speaker corpora in the design of curriculum materials.

**Lexicography:** The study of the meaning and use of words that took root with the first corpus studies of language in pre-modern times. Empirical lexicography relies on measurements of the frequency of words and of the relation between words in various texts.

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# Sociolinguistics

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## **Abstract**

This article provides an overview of English as a Second Language (ESL) in public schools, with special attention given to some of the sociolinguistic concerns informing ESL theory and program models. The sociolinguistic concept of communicative competence has been particularly influential in the field of ESL by shifting emphasis away from grammatical correctness and towards effective and culturally appropriate speech. Sociolinguistic findings highlighting cross-cultural differences in classroom communication have also been incorporated into recent thinking about ESL. Instructional and assessment strategies used in ESL include scaffolding, realia, and the teaching of

speech acts and register variation, as well as differentiated scoring and pre-referral interventions.

## **Overview**

Language use varies according to a wide variety of social factors, including age, gender, education, and communicative context. The study of sociolinguistics—a branch of the field of linguistics—aims to understand this inextricable connection between language and society. Sociolinguistics is a subfield of linguistics concerned with the interaction between language and society. In particular, sociolinguists study how language use varies according to a range of social variables, such as age, gender, educational level, and ethnic background, as well as according to communicative context. Recent approaches to English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction have incorporated findings from sociolinguistic research to facilitate English-language learners' (ELL) second language acquisition (SLA) and comprehension of other core subject areas.

The issue of teaching English to immigrant and other non-English speaking students has been a controversial topic among American educators, scholars, administrators, politicians, and the public for over a hundred years. Before that time, many immigrant groups offered native language instruction in community schools. With the arrival of larger numbers of, and often poorer, immigrants towards the end of the 1800s, public opinion began to embrace the notion of the "melting pot," in which newcomers were expected to abandon their linguistic and cultural background and embrace English in order to be American. Following this shift in perceptions, immigrant children typically had to undergo the submersion ('sink or swim') method of learning English by attending mainstream classrooms with no special attention given to their needs as language learners from culturally diverse backgrounds. It was a method that consistently failed these students by neglecting to provide the necessary supports for language learning and access to subject matter, and it frequently led to their premature exit from school.

During the 1960s, ESL began to develop as an independent field, in large part as a response to a 1965 immigration law that allowed for an expansion in the number and diversity of

immigrants permitted to enter the US. The emphasis of the Civil Rights Movement on equality also contributed to the growth of the field. The professional organization Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) was founded, ESL materials were developed in earnest, and the number courses in ESL and linguistics increased significantly, all with the aim of providing equitable language instruction to non-English speaking students.

The 1960s also saw a dramatic change in the scientific understanding of the nature of language and language acquisition, which eventually would lead to advancements in ESL methods. Linguist Noam Chomsky published his revolutionary studies (1957, 1965) in which he argued that humans have an innate capacity for language, a capacity which allows a child to learn language by trial and error, based on comprehensible input. Soon cognitive scientists, inspired by Chomsky's theories, began to develop new ideas about first and second language acquisition. Earlier approaches considered SLA to take place through repetitive drills and rote memorization. In light of Chomskyan linguistics, however, scholars began to recognize that children's acquisition of L2, or second language, is similar in many important respects to their acquisition of L1. Thus, with cognitive language-learning mechanisms in place, L2 acquisition must also entail active engagement with learning-including making mistakes-and not just passive, repetitive exercises.

This approach to SLA offered significant improvements on earlier theories that made a sharp distinction between L1 and L2 acquisition. Yet scholars began in the 1970s and 1980s to criticize the cognitive approach for its lack of attention to the social interaction that is central to language learning. Research showed that in addition to the need for comprehensible input and learner trial and error, L1 and L2 acquisition also requires meaningful communicative interface. Wong Fillmore (1982, 1991) demonstrated that ESL classrooms in which students had the opportunity to interact with L1 and L2 speakers in socially significant ways - arguing, debating, and explaining - were more successful than less interactive and textbook-based learning environments.

Recent developments in theories of language acquisition, which look towards sociolinguistic theory, depart substantially from Chomskyan linguistics while building on ideas that emphasize the interactional context of language learning. Based initially on the influential work of sociolinguist Dell Hymes (1974), it is now widely recognized that speaking a language is as much about culturally rooted communicative competence as it is about cognitively rooted linguistic (grammatical) competence. The notion of communicative competence accounts for the fact the speakers know how to adjust their speech according to the situation. For example, one uses a different linguistic register for talking to one's friend on the phone than for speaking with the school principal. The same holds for written communication, as a student knows that he or she should write differently in a journal or blog entry than in a report on migratory birds.

ESL instruction has shifted in accordance with these changes in thinking about L1 and L2 language acquisition. Traditional approaches to ESL instruction, including grammar-translation, the audio-lingual method, and the direct method, reflected a lack of awareness about sociolinguistic processes in language acquisition. In the grammar-translation method, the teacher's chief role is to provide students with drills and to correct their grammatical errors. It is an approach which is concerned primarily with reading and writing rather than with speaking or listening. In contrast, the audio-lingual method puts primary focus on oral production as the first stage of language acquisition. Students spend most of their time listening to tapes and mimicking drills spoken by a native speaker. Finally, in the direct method, students interact with one another and with instructional materials in a more dynamic, less drill-oriented learning environment. The goal is for students to acquire an intuitive rather than explicit knowledge of grammatical structures. All three methods have been criticized for their failure to emphasize real-life communication. For example, students who have learned through the audio-lingual method may be able to produce phrases with near-native fluency but they may not be capable of using the phrases in meaningful interactive scenarios.

In response to the shortcomings of traditional methods second language teaching and to advancements in our understanding of SLA, educational researchers have developed new sociolinguistically-informed approaches to ESL instruction. Second language teaching has largely shifted from a focus on grammatical competence to one in which communicative competence and effective social interaction are key.

Most ESL instructors embrace sociolinguistic methods as do several major professional organizations. Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) have published widely on the topic while the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) serves the interests of ELL's as well as bilingual educators. NABE also conducts lobbying efforts to secure rights and funding for ELL's and speakers of minority languages. The American Association for Applied Linguistics has a multidisciplinary orientation and is dedicated to the practical application of linguistic theory and knowledge, including SLA, language teaching, and bilingualism.

## Applications

### ESL Program Models

There are several basic ESL program models, each with its own set of assumptions of the nature of L2 acquisition and the place of sociolinguistics in language learning. Each model may vary greatly from setting to setting depending on factors such as state and local policy, the size and diversity of the minority population within a given school or district, and the experience of the classroom teachers. Some schools may combine models to suit ELL's with different language backgrounds and degrees of English proficiency.

At one time, pullout programs, in which a specialist in second language acquisition takes ELL students out of their mainstream classrooms for a portion of the day for English instruction, were very common. This model is problematic not only because students miss instruction in core subjects and therefore fall behind in content areas, but also because ELL's in pullout programs are often stigmatized as being in remedial classes and have a higher drop-out rate than ELL's in other programs (Thomas & Collier, 1997).

Another model is structured immersion, in which ELL's are taught content in mainstream English-language classrooms by a teacher who is trained in adapting instruction to the needs of the ELL students. Advocated by proponents of the English-Only movement, this method is particularly ineffective for younger students and students with low English proficiency (Ovando, Collier & Combs, 2003). Furthermore, because ELL students in structured immersion program often do not receive adequate language support, this method frequently results in students' exposure to a less academically rigorous content.

Currently, the most widely accepted model of ESL is content ESL (sheltered content). In this model, students learn all content in English, but through ESL methods and in a classroom consisting exclusively of other ELL's. In contrast to ESL pullout and structured immersion, content ESL programs have been effective, as students are able to learn English primarily through the authentic language of an interactive content-based classroom, rather than through language instruction alone. Teachers use instructional supports such as scaffolding and realia to ensure students comprehend the subject matter. However, most researchers agree that this method should be reserved for students who have already attained a moderate degree of English proficiency (Ovando, Collier & Combs, 2003).

More generally, the norm in ESL is a dynamic and integrative approach to language learning. In addition to ESL Content instruction, ESL teachers also team-teach and coordinate content curricula with mainstream classroom teachers. ESL professionals sometimes assist grade-level teachers in integrated ELL-mainstream classrooms.

### **ESL Goals & Standards**

TESOL (1997) has articulated three overarching goals for ELL's in grades K-12: acquisition of competence in social language, in academic language, and in socio-cultural knowledge. Together, these goals acknowledge scientific findings about the nature of language, including that it is functional, it is deeply intertwined with culture, and that it varies systematically from person to person, group to group, and place to place.

Three standards are in place to support each goal. Grade level groups have overlapping but distinct progress indicators. For example, Standard 1 of Goal 1 (competence in social language) is "Students will use English to participate in social interactions" (TESOL 1997, p. 9). For this standard and goal, a sample

progress indicator in grades pre-K - 3 is for students to be able to "offer and respond to greetings, compliments, invitations, introductions, and farewells" (p. 31). For grades 4 - 8, progress indicators include, in addition to those from earlier grades, being able to shop in a supermarket and "correspond with pen pals, English-speaking acquaintances, and friends" (p. 71). Sample progress indicators for grades 9-12 encompass those from earlier grades but also consist of new ones, for instance, being able to "obtain, complete, and process application forms, such as driver's license, social security, college entrance" (p. 109).

### **Speech Acts & Communicative Competence**

Recent research in ESL methods and SLA has shown the effectiveness of teaching speech acts to ELL's. Speech acts are utterances that also perform an action, such as apologizing, thanking, requesting, and complimenting. For example, in telling someone "I like your shoes," the speaker is not only making a statement but is also making a compliment. Speech act theory was established by J. T. Austin (1962) and further developed by his student J. R. Searle (1969) to address concerns in the philosophy of language. Today, speech acts are recognized as a component of communicative competence and are central to discourses in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology.

Often, speakers use indirect speech acts, which are especially difficult for language learners to understand. A common form of indirect speech acts occurs with refusals or rejections. If a parent asks a child to take out the garbage and the child responds, "I'm on the phone," this statement constitutes a refusal even without a literal refusal. Likewise, by looking longingly at a friend's piece of pie and saying, "Boy, I really love pie," the speaker is making an indirect request for pie.

Successful performance of speech acts depends on linguistic knowledge, including vocabulary and grammar, but it also requires cultural knowledge. ESL classrooms at all grade and proficiency levels can successfully employ speech act modules that include videos, role playing and skit writing. These activities train the ELL student to recognize, produce and respond to speech acts in appropriate ways.

### **Standard English, Language Variation, & the ESL Classroom**

ELL students often have unique ways of speaking English. Even students who have become fluent in conversational English may speak with an 'accent,' and they may in certain contexts code-switch, or alternate between L1 and L2. Rather than aberrant, code-switching is a normal practice among bilinguals worldwide.

From a linguistic point of view, all languages, and all dialects of a single language, are equally complex and equally capable of effective communication. Yet, it is clear that people discriminate against others based on their language or the dialect. ESL teachers frequently struggle with how to teach their students English without stigmatizing their speech, which may

be communicatively effective and even the norm within their home communities. Knowledge of Standard English—a variety of spoken and written English learned in school—is important, because most people see it as the 'correct' form of English. Since Standard English is an educated variety, it is associated with power and prestige, and not knowing this variety could hinder a student's future success.

Early approaches to ESL emphasized eradication of non-standard features of spoken and written English. However, such efforts often result in the child feeling stigmatized and inadequate. An effective alternative is to teach students about register and dialect variation and context-appropriate speech. Many ESL teachers find it useful to give lessons on the basic notion of sociolinguistic variability—language varies from place to place, context to context, and person to person. Each person has a repertoire of registers, or context-dependent ways of speaking, at his or her disposal. For example, at work, an auctioneer speaks in a register characterized by its fast pace and distinct intonation, but he likely speaks differently when at the dinner table. Parents use baby talk when interacting with their newborn but then shift to another way of speaking when answering the phone. Registers also are written phenomena, so that one writes a quick note to their roommate using a different kind of language than in writing a job application. ESL teachers can instruct their ELL students about the appropriate contexts of use for one register or variety of English versus another. In particular, they can emphasize that Standard English is important for use in many formal contexts. On the other hand, teachers may encourage students to use non-standard varieties, such as one that employs frequent code-switching, for appropriate tasks such as interacting with classmates or writing a valentine to their mother.

### **Culturally Relevant Classroom Instruction & Assessment**

While part of the ESL model is for teachers to help students understand the local, American expectations for classroom communication, they must also be sensitive to ELL's' native language communicative competencies. For instruction and assessment to be culturally relevant, they should take into account cultural differences in norms for classroom behavior, such as the value of competition or expectations for teacher-student interaction (Kramsch, 1993; Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996). Some cultures put much more value on collaboration and group achievement than on individual success, and students from these backgrounds may find it difficult to shine in overtly competitive classroom scenarios. Likewise, in some cultures, the typical mode of student-teacher interaction is one in which the student exhibits a great deal of respect for the teacher, speaks only when spoken to, and is not encouraged to ask questions.

Many ESL teachers find it useful to employ a variety of strategies in their classrooms that emphasize a range of communicative styles. In language instruction and assessment, teachers can combine individual with group work, and formal activities with less formal ones such as one-on-one interviews, story retelling

sessions, role playing, and skit and journal writing, among many others. In content areas, scaffolding is key, and teachers will need to employ differentiated scoring, a means of distinguishing among language use, content knowledge, and other criteria such as creativity or artistry. Differentiated assessment can give ELL's a fairer account of their strengths and weaknesses without letting language learning influence every aspect of assessment.

## **Viewpoints**

### **ESL & Bilingual Education**

The field of ESL is inextricably linked with the controversial topics of cultural diversity, minority rights, and bilingual education. Although the US Constitution cedes most decision making regarding education to individual states, ELL's have basic educational rights protected under federal law. These include the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (1964) which prohibits discrimination based on "race, color, or national origin" in any federally funded program, and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (1974).

In addition, the Bilingual Education Act (Title VII), originating in 1968 and repeatedly reauthorized, was the first federal acknowledgement of the special needs of English language learners in school, but was largely dismantled in 2001. In that year, under the 'No Child Left Behind' legislation, Title VII was renamed Title III—The English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act. In its new form, Title III shifted grant funding for ESL and bilingual programs from the federal to the state level.

ESL is sometimes used in conjunction with bilingual education. In ESL/bilingual programs, students receive some instruction in their L1, for a limited (early exit) or extended (late exit) period of time. In contrast with earlier approaches to SLA that argued that L1 'interfered' with L2 acquisition, more recent research shows that knowledge of L1 and the continued development of proficiency in it contribute significantly to L2 development. ELL's can transfer academic, literary, and general learning skills from L1 to L2, a phenomenon which Cummins (1979) has called common underlying proficiency or language interdependence. Ramírez, Yuen, Ramey, & Pasta (1991) show in a longitudinal study of students in structured immersion, early exit bilingual and late exit bilingual programs, that only those in late exit programs performed equal to native English speakers on English-language standardized tests.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the inclusion of L1 education in an ESL program helps tremendously in counteracting the social discrimination that many non-English speaking groups experience in the US. Many ELL's, seeing the apparent lack of relevance and prestige of their language and culture, gradually undergo L1 language loss. Additive bilingualism can serve to boost students' self-esteem and minimize feelings of alienation from their home community.

Even when providing bilingual education is not feasible, schools can support the continued growth of students' native language competencies through other strategies. They can hire bilingual school staff such as librarians, counselors, and lunchroom workers, they can encourage the use of L1 outside of class or for certain tasks in class, and they can provide L1 books and other materials in classrooms and in the library.

While ESL teacher training and certification programs now embrace multiculturalism and socio-linguistically-based approaches to language learning, the general public and the legislators who serve them often do not share these perspectives and may advocate unsound programs for ELL's. Opponents of bilingual education contend that, ultimately, it is detrimental to individuals and to American society for ELL's to use their L1 outside of the home. Senator S. I. Hayakawa (R-CA) began what is called the English-Only movement in the early 1980s to gain support for legislation banning languages other than English from all public domains, including schools. English-Only advocates support the structured immersion model of ESL. They argue that providing L1 language services for non-English speakers discourages their rapid integration into mainstream American life and impedes their acquisition of English. Yet both of these arguments have been proven false by a large body of research on the topic (Cummins 1979; Krashen 1996; Crawford 1999).

With the continually shifting demographics of the United States, public and private debates over ESL, bilingual education, and language of instruction are certain to continue.

## Terms & Concepts

**Academic Language:** Acquisition of academic language is one of the three goals articulated by TESOL for ELL's. Academic language is a particular style of language used in the context of formal education. It can include technical jargon, discipline-specific vocabulary, and stylistic conventions specific to formal communication.

**Authentic Language:** Authentic language is natural language used for real communicative purposes. It stands in contrast to the artificial language employed in more traditional ESL settings, in which students perform language exercises for the exclusive purpose of acquiring vocabulary or grammar.

**Communicative Competence:** A concept originally developed by Hymes (1974), communicative competence refers to the capacity of speakers not simply to know grammatical structures of a language (linguistic competence) but also, crucially, to use language in contextually and culturally appropriate ways. Communicative competence is a cornerstone of ESL instruction today.

**Differentiated Scoring:** Differentiated scoring is an approach to the assessment of ELL's. By using a scoring rubric which sepa-

rates language from other skills, teachers are able to evaluate ELL's content knowledge more fairly.

**English-Language Learner (ELL):** ELL refers to a student whose first language is not English but who is in the process of acquiring English skills. A similar term is Limited English Proficiency (LEP), but LEP has come under criticism for portraying language learners in a negative light by focusing on their deficits rather than their abilities.

**Pullout Program:** A pullout program is a model of ESL education by which ELL's from different content classrooms and grade levels leave their regular classrooms to attend intensive English language classes taught by an ESL specialist.

**Linguistic (Grammatical) Competence:** Linguistic competence is a concept originated by Noam Chomsky. It refers to a speaker's knowledge of a linguistic system, or the rules of a language. Linguistic competence is a strictly mental capacity removed from cultural or communicative facets of language abilities.

**L1:** L1 refers to a person's first language or native tongue. In the case of ESL students, L1 is any language other than English.

**L2:** L2 refers to a person's second language or sometimes to any language acquired by a speaker after L1. In the case of ESL students, English may be their L2. However, many ESL students already speak two or more languages.

**Pre-Referral Intervention:** ELL's are frequently misplaced in special education programs. A pre-referral intervention involves a series of investigations into various aspects of a student's capabilities before concluding whether he or she has a disability.

**Realia:** Realia are a kind of scaffolding or support used to help ELL's learn content. They include hands-on materials from real life, such as groceries, clothing, and cosmetics.

**Register:** A register is a sub-set of language that is used in a particular social setting. Public speaking constitutes a particular register which differs in grammar, vocabulary, and prosody, from other registers, such as baby talk.

**Scaffolding:** Scaffolding is a general term in educational theory derived from the educational theorist Lev Vygotsky. In the context of ESL, the term is used to refer to the extra support provided by a content teacher to ELL's, such as using simplified language, realia, hands-on activities, and group learning. Like scaffolding on a building, the learning supports are gradually removed as the student gains linguistic proficiency.

**Sheltered Content / ESL Content:** ESL content and sheltered content are both terms for a model of ESL education in which ELL's are taught content in English, but in a classroom consisting exclusively of other ELL's and through ESL methods.



**Social Language:** Acquisition of social language is one of the three goals articulated by TESOL for ELL's. Social language consists of the styles of a language that are used in, and typically acquired through, social interaction.

**Socio-Cultural Knowledge:** Acquisition of socio-cultural knowledge is one of the three goals articulated by TESOL for ELL's and involves the ability to behave and interact in culturally appropriate ways.

**Sociolinguistics:** Sociolinguistics is a subfield of linguistics concerned with the interaction between language and society. In particular, sociolinguists study how language use varies according to a range of social variables, such as age, gender, educational level, and ethnic background, as well as according to communicative context.

**Speech Act:** A speech act is an utterance that is also an action, such as apologizing, requesting, thanking, and refusing. Speech acts are not just language-specific, but culturally specific as well. Recent work in ESL and language acquisition suggests that teaching speech acts to ELL's facilitates their learning of the language and communicative competence.

**Structured Immersion:** Structured immersion is a model of ESL often advocated by English-only supporters. In the structured immersion method, ELL's learn content entirely in English in mainstream classrooms. Structured immersion teachers are trained in ESL instructional strategies.

**Submersion (sink or swim):** The submersion or 'sink or swim' method of ESL is really not a method at all. It involves simply placing ELL's in mainstream classrooms without any additional support.

**Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL):** TESOL is an acronym referring to the professional organization, the profession, and the academic discipline of teaching English to speakers of other languages.

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## Essay by Sabrina Billings, Ph.D.

Dr. Sabrina Billings earned her doctorate in Linguistics from the University of Chicago in 2006. Her research explores the intersection of linguistic diversity, popular culture, and education in East Africa. She also worked for several years in the field of educational research in the Chicago Public School system. She is currently an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Arkansas.

# Ebonics: African American Vernacular English

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believe standard language competence should not mean a rejection of the African American language and culture. Features of the Ebonics dialect are described as is a teaching method that uses Ebonics to facilitate the learning of Standard American English, which was adopted by the Oakland, California school district in 1996 and resulted in much media coverage and controversy. Political and educational leaders, both Caucasian and African American, hold different views on the endorsement of Ebonics.

## Overview

Ebonics is a word formed from "ebony" and "phonics." It has its roots in West African and Niger-Congo languages and has become synonymous with Black English or African American Vernacular English (AAVE). Rather than the once-held view that Ebonics is slang or bad English, it is now considered one of many dialects of what is called Standard American English (SAE) (Debose, 2006).

A dialect is a "subgroup within a language which differs from another dialect in vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. Speakers of two different dialects of the same language are able to understand one another, while speakers of two different languages usually cannot" (Fox, 1997, ¶ 6). For example, an American speaking a dialect of Standard English might say "my friends and I went to a movie," while an Australian might say "my mates and I took in a cinema." The word "mates" has different meanings and is pronounced differently by an American and an Australian. Variation in vocabulary, pronunciation, and usage do not present complete barriers between the two communicators, however a phrase of similar meaning spoken in French or German would not be understood by speakers of dialects of SAE (Fox, 1997).

### Ebonics as a Dialect

Perez (2000) describes phonological features of the Ebonics dialect. For example, the R, L, and T sounds may be omitted: "guard" and "car" become "god" and "cah," "tall" and "help" become "taw" and "hep," and "past" and "desk" become "pass" and "des." Sounds may also be similarly pronounced or interchanged: "this," "them," and "those" become "dis," "dem," and "doz."

## Abstract

Ebonics, a word formed from "ebony" and "phonics" has become synonymous with Black English. Rather than the once-held view that Ebonics is slang or bad English, it is now acknowledged as one of many dialects of what is called Standard American English. Since Standard American English is the measure of success in the larger society, most political and educational leaders believe competence in this form of language is a worthwhile goal for speakers of the Ebonics dialect. At the same time, they

Perez also describes syntactic features of the Ebonics dialect. For example, transformations may occur in verb forms: "she walks" becomes "she walk," "she is good" becomes "she good," "we were happy" becomes "we was happy." Other transformations may occur in sentence structure: "we have" becomes "us got," "we don't have any" becomes "we don't got none," "John runs" becomes "John he run," and "how did you do that" becomes "how you do that."

Perez continues to explain that although Ebonics had been accepted as a dialect of SAE beginning in the 1970s, few people had heard of it before December 18, 1996, when the Board of Education in Oakland, California, passed a resolution recognizing Ebonics as the dominant language of many students in the district. The decision raised much controversy. Many Americans, both African American and White, considered endorsement of the stigmatized, nonstandard dialect as an impediment to African American success. Others believed it should be preserved as an important part of the heritage of the African American community.

Since Standard English is the measure of success in the larger society, most political and educational leaders believe SAE competence is a worthwhile goal for speakers of the Ebonics/Black English dialect. At the same time, they believe SAE competence should not mean a rejection of the African American language and culture. Instead, SAE competence should be viewed as language expansion and enrichment, giving students the language skills to communicate with a wider community. Perez cites the example of Martin Luther King, Jr. to explain this point. Although Dr. King wrote and spoke Standard English, he also was accomplished at using dialect with his congregation and community. He may not have been so successful within both the African American and larger American community if he had been competent in only SAE or Ebonics.

### The Oakland Controversy

Manzo (2002) describes a controversy that erupted after the Oakland school district adopted the Standard English Proficiency Program (SEP), "a voluntary state program that assisted teachers of children who spoke what is often called black English. The program, which was in effect until 1998, was designed to help teachers understand the rules and structure of the vernacular, show students the way it differs from Standard English," and teach them to use one language form over the other, depending on circumstances (Manzo, 2002, ¶ 25). Because such language programs were not uncommon, particularly in urban districts, the furor that erupted in 1996 over Oakland's plan for raising student achievement was startling to many.

The resolution of the Oakland school board, "based on the recommendations of the district's African-American Task Force, quickly became a target of political leaders who argued that low expectations and ill-conceived initiatives had been short-changing black children for generations" (Manzo, 2002, ¶ 41). Manzo explains that the Oakland district became the subject of international ridicule. Black leaders and scholars — even the author

Maya Angelou, who has won critical claim for books written primarily in Black English — were outraged by the measure, though it was clear later that many detractors based their opinions on the inaccurate portrayals. "The squall eventually blew over, leaving officials to smooth racial tensions and find practical ways to address students' academic needs" (Manzo, 2002).

## Applications

Picower (2004) chronicles the controversy that erupted over Ebonics in Oakland in 1996. She was a teacher at a school in the Oakland district in which most educators had chosen on their own to participate in the Standard English Proficiency (SEP) initiative. This statewide project, founded in 1981, acknowledged the orderly, rule-governed nature of Ebonics and took the stance that Black English should be used to aid its speakers in learning to read and write in Standard English. The Oakland school board did not intend to alter or switch the teaching of Standard English with the teaching of Ebonics. However, it did try to take students' home dialect into account in offering them better understanding in their own dialect to master Standard English. Essentially, a misunderstanding about the program was produced by a media blitz of false information. Picower explains that her school's mission was to utilize and appreciate Ebonics, the familial language of many of the students, and to use strategies that would educate them toward a competence in Standard English. Since students came to school speaking their home language, Picower found it amusing that media coverage suggested that Oakland's intention was to *teach* Ebonics.

### The Oakland Approach

Perez (2000) describes the instructional practices of using Ebonics to teach Standard English that were implemented as part of Oakland's SEP initiative. Teachers become familiar with the features of Ebonics and then apply teaching strategies based on the concept of using bi-dialects. With this approach, students retain their home dialect while learning and using the Standard English dialect of the larger society. The format for this instruction is based upon foreign language teaching methods and incorporates the use of contrastive analysis. Specifically, this approach compares Standard English features with those of the student's dialect and is structured so that students observe how their linguistic features differ from those of Standard English.

Teachers begin by discussing dialects and make the point that various dialects of English are different, not deficient. They discuss speech and language of radio and television broadcasters, actors in television or movie roles, and characters in books. Discussions also focus on the appropriateness of specific language or dialect in certain situations, and on the distinction between "school language" and "home/community language."

### Using Contrastive Analysis

Perez (2000) describes one type of contrastive analysis technique, a word discrimination drill using Standard English and

Black English rules. In this drill, the teacher presents patterns that are combinations of Standard English (SE) and Black English (BE). Students indicate their ability to differentiate the patterns by saying "same" or "different." For example, when the teacher presents "help (SE) – hep (BE)," students respond with "same" or "different." In the sentence discrimination drill, the teacher presents patterns that are similar to those in the word drill except that key words are placed in sentences. For example: "I hep my sister" (BE) and "I help my sister" (SE), and students respond with "same" or "different." In the "home-school" discrimination drill, students must identify whether the patterns are representative of "home" (BE) or "school" (SE). In the translation drills, students are required to translate not only Standard English patterns into Black English, but also Black English into Standard English. For example, "She is busy" is translated by students into "She be busy;" or "Justin book lost" is translated into "Justin's book is lost" (Perez, 2000, "Ways of Using Ebonics").

Response drills help students to use the contrastive methodology in a natural context. In one example, students are required to negate the teacher's example with a dialectically consistent response. If the teacher's example is "Mary play basketball" (BE), students respond with "No, she don't" (BE); or if the teacher says "Mary plays basketball" (SE) students respond with "No, she doesn't" (SE) (Perez, 2000, "Ways of Using Ebonics").

### Using Children's Literature

Perez also describes successful programs that use children's literature for teaching Standard English. The first step of this approach is to introduce a new pattern from a book. The teacher reads the book to the children and gestures children to repeat the syntactic pattern once the pattern has been established. For example, in Margorie Flack's *Ask Mr. Bear*, children quickly pick up the Standard English possessive form by asking Danny's question: "Can you give me something for my mother's birthday?" (2000, "Ways of Using Ebonics"). In step two, children practice repeating the new Standard English pattern. Initially, it's common for children to say the pattern in their own dialects. After they feel comfortable with the pattern, the teacher encourages them to use the Standard English form by pointing out the contrast between their dialect and the Standard English form. These are follow-on practice activities:

- Children act out the story and recite the syntactic patterns;
- Children tape record their retelling of the story and play it back to their classmates;
- Children draw pictures to retell the story and dictate or write an accompanying pattern;
- Children make and use puppets to practice the Standard English pattern (Perez, 2000, "Ways of Using Ebonics").

### Using Student Dictation

Perez describes another way of using Ebonics to teach Standard English which involves the use of students' writing or dictation:

The teacher begins by having students dictate a passage or story, or selecting one that has already been written. Next, another version of the passage or story is developed in which the teacher replaces the Black English with Standard English patterns but retains as many of the student's words as possible. This version is introduced as "another passage or story" and the student is asked to read it aloud. The second passage or story is compared to the original. The student then revises the original passage by expanding the sentences. In the final step, sentences selected from the revised passage are used to generate new sentences by substituting words and phrases. For example, an original sentence might be "It sits on a log." A transformation might be "A rabbit sits on a log" which might be transformed again to "A rabbit with long ears hops on a log." The sentence transformations allow students to expand their vocabulary and invent more elaborate sentences while using Standard English sentence patterns (Perez, 2000, "Ways of Using Ebonics").

Perez concludes that three things are needed in utilizing Ebonics or Black English as an aid and connector that facilitates the teaching of English:

- Teachers must understand the value of Standard English for speakers of Black English;
- Teachers who know about Black English must teach Standard English in a way that respects Black English, while ensuring that students learn Standard English;
- Students who speak Black English must be willing to learn an additional way of communicating with a wider community (Perez, 2000, "Ways of Using Ebonics").

## Viewpoints

### Dialect Prejudice

Many consider "the speaking of Ebonics to be a sign of ignorance, bad linguistic habits and believe students should be prohibited from using the dialect. These opponents include African Americans who express irritation with any suggestion that African American children should not be expected to learn the same language habits that all other educated American children master" (Fox, 1997, ¶ 13).

Fox continues to propose that since SAE is seen as the language of America, and those who wish to do well in the workplace must learn to speak Standard English. In different areas of the U.S., one hears regional dialects that are not discriminated against. For example, no one criticizes a Bostonian for saying "pahk the cah in Hahvahd Yahd" or a Texan for saying "Y'all come back soon, heah." When pronunciation and vocabulary are the main source of telling the difference between one dialect and another, its speakers are not judged negatively. However, if differences defy basic rules of SAE, the speakers are often criticized. For

example, if a person says "He might talk good, but he don't make no sense," the speaker makes a poor impression (Fox, 1997, ¶ 15).

Fox (1997) further explains, "Ebonics stirs images of the problems of urban life such as poverty, crime, unemployment, substandard housing, and inferior education... to the degree that the language of urban African Americans is associated with these conditions, people of all races express the belief that, if the young people can escape the language, they might also escape the poverty and the other problems that seem to go with it" (¶ 16).

Hamilton (2005) suggests that dialect prejudice is one of the few mainstays of bigotry found throughout the culture. A sociolinguist uses the word "dialect" to mean many different languages such as Appalachian English or Boston English, etc. To a sociolinguist, all dialects are the same. However, language is a reflection of its speakers. For instance, French culture is acknowledged as good quality given its fare and fashions. A person speaking in a French accent is received positively. If a group, such as speakers of the Ebonics dialect, is considered by majority societies to be subordinate, their speech is perceived similarly.

### **A Social Construct**

Pandey (2000) suggests that one thing the Ebonics debate made clear is that language is a social construct, and socially owned and judged. She believes that the debate successfully illustrated how language mirrors mainstream societal beliefs and how society itself resides in language. For many African Americans, the dialect referred to as Ebonics is simply improper speech that they do not respect nor recognize. Ironically, there are those who consistently and fluently employ this variety of speech, yet vehemently deny its very existence. They might even insist (in Standard English), that their children use "correct English" at all times, yet what they fail to realize is that the dialect they themselves employ in their unguarded moments is none other than the one they reject and resent.

Hutchinson (1997) contends that there is no conclusive proof that Black English, as some claim, has a separate syntax, grammar, and structure that fulfill all the requirements of a separate language. He asserts that while some young African American students — heavily influenced by rap, hip-hop culture, slang, and street talk — mispronounce words, misplace verb tenses or "code switch" when they talk to each other, many young Caucasians, Latinos, and Asians do the same.

Hutchinson takes issue with Ebonics advocates who make claims that devising new teaching methods based on Ebonics will help black students more easily learn Standard English. He also points out that advocates do not explain how generations of black students, like white students, mastered Standard English without their teachers approaching the subjects as a foreign or incomprehensible language.

To resolve the conflict, Hutchinson encourages black leaders, educators and parents to demand quality education, greater funding for teacher training programs, insist that teachers and school administrators recognize, accept and respect cultural diversity among students, and adhere to the highest educational standards in predominantly minority school districts.

### **Ebonics & Hegemony**

Dubose (2006) discusses policy options related to Ebonics, ranging from a traditional policy of suppression to a visionary policy of full recognition. He expresses strong support for a policy of full recognition of Black English and is puzzled by the tendency of sociolinguists to opt for a policy of limited recognition.

Debose asserts that hegemony explains the choice of limited acceptance for Ebonics, defining hegemony as one way that a dominant group of a society maintains its dominant position. He writes, "hegemony is exercised through ideas, attitudes, myths, and values, perpetuated through education and socialization. Hegemonic ideas and values validate the existing social order and justify inequalities in the distribution of social goods. In the realm of lifestyle and culture, the customs and practices of elite groups symbolize the benefits of membership in the elite and become desirable for persons striving to attain elite status" (2006, pp. 93–94).

When a certain language, or manner of speaking the general language of a community, is related to a superior class or stratum, the ability to speak the dialect, and to speak it as the first-class do, is validating. One idea that Americans hold onto, and which most African Americans accept, is the superiority of Standard English (Debose, 2006).

### **Success in Oakland**

Manzo (2002) cites a positive example from one teacher's personal experience regarding the use of Ebonics to teach Standard English. He reports that when the teacher's grandson moved to Oakland from Buffalo, New York, he was experiencing difficulties in deciphering the code of Standard English. As a result of Oakland's educational approach, the teacher's grandson became a good student and a "polished speaker."

The grandson began to speak regularly before his church congregation and presented a speech with his classmates in a contest. They impressed the judges enough to be awarded first place for 5th graders by performing an original script by their teacher.

## **Terms & Concepts**

**African American Vernacular English (AAVE):** This term refers to a dialect of Standard American English and is also referred to as Black English or Ebonics.

**Black English:** This term refers to a dialect of Standard American English and is also referred to as African American Vernacular English or Ebonics.

**Bi-Dialectic:** This term refers to those who are able to use two or more differing dialects such as Standard English and a native dialect.

**Contrastive Analysis:** This term describes the systematic study of a pair of languages in order to identify their structural differences and similarities.

**Dialect:** This term refers to a subgroup that is part of a language. Dialects can be distinguished in three ways: vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Individuals who are able to speak two separate dialects are usually able to understand each other.

**Diversity Education:** This term refers to public education policy and teaching methods that encourage tolerance for people of different backgrounds.

**Ebonics:** Ebonics is a word formed from "ebony" and "phonics" and has become synonymous with Black English, a dialect of Standard American English, spoken by African Americans.

**Hegemony:** This term is used to describe cultural and non-military dominance of one social group over others.

**Sociolinguistics:** This term refers to the study of how language use influences norms and expectations within a society, including how dialect differs between groups that are separated by such social variables as ethnicity, status, and level of education.

**Standard American English (SAE):** This term describes is the dialect of American English perceived by Americans to be most free of regional characteristics; it is most closely related to a generalized Midwestern accent and is desirable for those who broadcast national news.

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