

## **Learning Objectives for English Language Learners**

1. Acculturation
2. Language Proficiency
3. Subject Content Knowledge
4. Meta-cognitive/ Meta-linguistic Knowledge

\* There are two elements involved in linguistic comprehension: *Decoding skills* and *background knowledge*.

### **Decoding Skills**

1. Phonological Awareness
2. Orthographic Awareness
3. Syntactical Awareness
4. Semantic Awareness
5. Pragmatics

#### Phonological

- \* The inability to pronounce a word hinders long-term retention.
- \* Phonemes- sounds that signal a shift in meaning in similar sounding words.
- \* Allophones- variations in sounds that do not signal a semantic shift (Dialects).

*Relevancy to ELL learning*- a phoneme in English may be an allophone in another language and vice-a-versa. Example: In English “d” and “t” are phonemes, when they appear at the beginning of a word. In other languages, they are not. Hence, a ESL student may not be able to distinguish the difference between ”dot” and “tot.” Errors in pronunciation related to phonology often referred to as “accent” also indicate potential errors in listening comprehension.

*Problem Areas*- homophones

*Recommendation*: Do not overcorrect pronunciation. As long as meaning is clear, ignore it. Teach pronunciation through modeling and group interaction.

#### Orthographic

- \* Letter to sound correspondence in English is imperfect and inconsistent.
- \* Writing conventions do not correspond to speaking conventions. (sign vs. signal).

*Problem Areas*- homographs

*Recommendation:* Correct spelling errors but do not deduct points. Spelling takes time.

### Syntactic

- \* English is particularly dependent of syntax. Word knowledge is often insufficient to convey meaning.
- \* Syntax signals functions and determines relationships between words in sentences.
- \* Every sentence has “word strings” that act as units of thought and meaning.
- \* The ability to sort words into word groups and to place those word groups in correct syntactical order is essential to comprehension.

*Problem Area-* Without syntactical awareness, a sentence is a stream of words devoid of context.

*Recommendation-* A Teacher can model breaking sentences into constituent parts. Practice pronunciation of “word strings”. Once individual word groups are mastered, reconstruct sentence.

### Semantics

- \* Vocabulary knowledge is the most important factor in comprehension.
- \* Vocabulary is best learned in context and in real “world situations.” Dictionary definitions and rote memorization are ineffective.
- \* Assimilating a new word requires multiple exposures, in various contexts, over time.
- \* Word associations and mental pictures supply depth and breadth of knowledge.
- \* Vocabulary learning requires comprehension support. Connecting new words with sensory experiences cements the word in long-term memory.
- \* Model pronunciation- the ability to correctly pronounce a word helps to cement it into long-term memory.

*Problem Area-* concrete vs. abstract, literal vs. figurative, denotative vs. connotative meanings.

*Recommendation-* Have students build word associations and mental images rather than memorizing definitions. Use word webs to mimic brain’s natural tendency to build neural networks of associations. Allow students to use native language. Research shows knowledge gained in L1 is transferable to L2.

*Recommendations-* Use visuals (illustrations, images, graphs, videos) to reinforce meaning.

*Problem Area-* An ESL student could have phonological and syntactic awareness but still lack a strong semantic foundation. This can fool teachers into thinking that the student comprehends when in fact he does not.

*Recommendation-* Teacher must constantly formatively assess for comprehension.

*Problem Areas-* Collocations are made up of two or more words that normally occur together in the English language. Native speakers have expectations that these pairings will occur in certain situations and anticipate their use. For example, an English speaker would say “a powerful computer” but not a “strong computer”. However, the term “powerful winds” could replace “strong winds” in a sentence with no significant change in meaning.

*Problem Areas-* Idioms are expressive phrases that carry meaning that can’t always be discerned by the individual words or syntactic structure. Native speakers use them frequently because they contain a vast amount of information in a concise form of expression. Idioms are an easy fast way for native speakers to communicate. There are no fast hard rules for understanding idioms and the ESL student must make a concerted effort to learn them.

*Recommendation-* Have students keep word journals. Journals could include common phrases and collocations as well as individual words. Explanations of meaning and word associations can be in native language. Included example sentences of words in context. Sentences should include examples that connect with student’s real world experiences.

*Pragmatics-*

- \* Accurate language choices and social appropriateness.
- \* An awareness of setting (register), roles and relationship of listener and speaker, formal vs. informal or standard vs. non-standard language.

*Problem Areas-* Linguistic pragmatics vary from culture to culture. A lack of pragmatic awareness is often mistaken for rudeness.

*Recommendation-* Be aware that pragmatic usage varies greatly from culture to culture. Do not assume background knowledge of English pragmatics in English language learners! Pragmatic skills require time. English pragmatics must be consciously taught and targeted. Social interaction in mixed language groups model linguistic pragmatics for ESL students.

### **Background Knowledge**

- \* No matter how proficient one’s decoding skills, background knowledge of the topic is essential for comprehension.
- \* The human brain has a natural tendency to file new information under existing categories, to connect new experience with something already known.

\* Teachers must utilize or create background knowledge to facilitate linguistic comprehension.

Acculturation-

\* Native speakers carry with them a store of cultural, historical, geographical, and social knowledge into a conversation.

\* The speaker will assume the listener has this knowledge and not take the time to explain details.

*Problem Area-* Non-native speakers lack this knowledge, reducing their ability to comprehend communication even if they have semantic knowledge of individual words and proficient decoding skills.

*Recommendation-* Do not assume anything! Teachers must constantly assess for comprehension. Do not be fooled by phonological, syntactic, or even semantic fluency. Without cultural background knowledge, the student *is not* comprehending.

*Recommendation-* Teachers must build linguistic or subject area background knowledge before the lesson begins.

*Recommendation-* Teacher must find connections between students prior experiences or skill and the new knowledge or abilities to be mastered.

Language Proficiency

\* Diagnostic testing will determine a linguistic baseline (prior knowledge) and a student's readiness for instruction.

\* Research has shown literacy is transferable from L1 to L2.

\* Images connected to L1 sound symbols (words) are transferable from L1 to L2.

\* The more proficient students are in their first language, the easier it is to learn a second.

*Problem Area-* Students come from different language backgrounds. Even students from similar linguistic backgrounds will have varying degrees of proficiency.

*Recommendation-* Use background knowledge of L1 to facilitate integration of L2.

*Recommendation-* Code mixing (combine L1 and L2) does not interfere with learning L2 and in fact facilitates its integration by connecting new knowledge with old.

*Recommendation-* Use mixed language group interaction. Native speakers model English rhythms and speech patterns.

*Recommendation-* Partner up students from similar linguistic backgrounds but with varying degrees of proficiency. Beginners should be matched with intermediate level students. Intermediate level students should be matched with advanced level students.

### Subject Content Knowledge

\* In some subject areas (Math, Chemistry, Computers), English language learners will already possess pre-requisite background knowledge.

\* When sufficient decoding skills exist combined with prior knowledge gained in the student's home country, subject content vocabulary is all that's needed to comprehend.

*Problem Area-* In some subjects (American History, Civics), the English language learner's baseline knowledge will be non-existent or far below that of native speakers.

*Recommendation-* Teacher must preview lesson to build prior knowledge so that students can assimilate subject content.

### Preview

1. Have students peruse text for unknown vocabulary.
2. Summarize key ideas or concepts. Connect concepts to students' lives.
3. Provide outlines, timelines, and graphs (Visuals).
4. Allow students to research material using native language sources.
5. Formatively pre-assess for background knowledge.
6. Clear up misconceptions and gaps in knowledge.

### *Meta-cognitive/Meta-linguistic Knowledge*

\* Meta-cognitive awareness creates depth and breadth of knowledge.

\* It means to learn "how to learn".

\* It requires self-reflection and critical analysis.

\* Meta-cognitive abilities may have already been developed in L1.

*Problem Areas-* students may come from a language with a different writing system.

*Recommendation-* Have students examine the linguistic strategies used in L1 to comprehend text or study material. Even when L1 uses a different writing system, some skills may still be transferable.

*Problems Areas-* Some students may not have completed literacy training in L1.

*Recommendation-* Literacy training in L1 must be finished before literacy can be developed in L2. While oral proficiency can be developed simultaneously in more than one language, literacy cannot. School may have to employ a paraprofessionals or language volunteers to teach F1 literacy. (Note: As most of AEP students will be 9<sup>th</sup> grade or higher, this will not be an issue. However, there may be elementary teachers in the training seminar).

### **Language Acquisition**

- \* Language acquisition follows a predetermined sequence: listening, speaking, reading, writing.
- \* Two of these linguistic skills are related to oral language: listening, speaking.
- \* Two are related to written language: reading, writing.
- \* Two involve receiving and interpreting language: listening, reading.
- \* Two involve an act of creation: speaking, writing.
- \* It is always easier to receive than create. Therefore, listening comprehension will always come before the ability to speak. The ability to read will always precede the ability to write.
- \* Writing is the last and most difficult skill to acquire.
- \* An oral foundation is usually required before written proficiency can take place.

### **Oral Language versus Written Language**

- \* Although one can help reinforce the other, oral skills and written proficiency are separate abilities activating different parts of the brain.
- \* Skill in one does not translate into skill in the other.
- \* Oral language is more concrete, informal, and flexible with more simplified or truncated structures. Written language is more abstract, formal, and rigid with more complex sentence structure.

*Problem Areas-* Oral fluency can be achieved in six months to two years. Academic proficiency requires a minimum of five years. Many teachers are fooled by ESL students' oral fluency into thinking that these students can handle academic content without help.

*Recommendation-* Use scaffolding strategies when dealing with ESL students.

#### *ESL Scaffolding Interventions*

1. Diagnostic testing to determine individual baselines of language and content.

2. Preview vocabulary- allows use of native language.
3. Model vocabulary- accurate pronunciation facilitates long-term retention. Complex words are broken down into syllables and pronounced slowly. Allow students to include their own phonetic spelling in their word journals.
4. Teachers must focus on their speech. Speak deliberately and clearly. Native speakers tend to run words together. Example: “ya wanna go” for “do you want to go.”
5. Build background knowledge: Preview important concepts. Provide outline, timelines, graphic organizers, illustrations, videos.
6. Model text. Teacher should read text or directions aloud.
7. Provide text with larger font.
8. If possible, provide summaries or even entire texts in native language. Allow students to research content in native language to build background knowledge before reading it in English.
9. Segment text to make it more comprehensible: paragraphs are separated into sentences, sentences into word groups or units of thought. Practice pronouncing these “word strings.” Examples include prepositional phrases, subject/verb, verb/ direct object, article/adjective /noun, verb/ adverb etc.
10. Record text: gives students the opportunity to listen to it over and over again or to stop and clear up any misunderstandings.
11. Use paraprofessionals or more advanced students who share a student’s native language.
12. Use group interaction. Have native speakers working with ESL students to model English speech patterns.
13. Review Lesson- reinforces vocabulary & key concepts. Fills gaps in understanding.
14. Assess formatively. Differentiate instruction. Modify instruction if something is not working. Offer multiple summative assessment options.

### **Sample Activity- Current Events**

1. Student chooses an article from newspaper.
2. Teacher highlights details and key concepts.
3. Student writes summary based on highlighted areas.
4. Student peruses for vocabulary words that he does not know.
5. Student writes student friendly definitions in native language.
6. Teacher models word pronunciation. Complex words are segmented and pronunciation articulated. Words are entered into word journals along with student friendly definitions and phonetic spellings.
7. Teacher corrects grammar and structural errors. The student rewrites the summary with the corrections.

8. Teacher reads the summary aloud, modeling English speech patterns and rhythms, assessing for comprehension, explaining key concepts and vocabulary in context, and correcting gaps in understanding.
9. Student practices reading aloud. Teacher assesses performance.

### **Activities to Promote Oral Fluency**

1. *Pattern Language Activities*- Songs, poems, children stories reinforce English phonology, pronunciation, and speech patterns by using real conversational language and repetition.
2. *Physical Response* – Students follow commands or instructions. Sounds and words are reinforced through comprehension support (Body language, facial expressions, gestures and visual or other sensory support mechanisms).
3. *Role Playing* – By imitating real world scenarios language is made relevant. The same comprehension support mechanisms used in Physical Response also apply. Advanced students can enact plays that model real life conversation, speech, pronunciation, structure, and pragmatics.

### **ESL Affective Needs**

- \* No student will accept instruction from a teacher who invalidates his prior life experiences.
- \* Cultural bias demonstrated by the teacher, either consciously or unconsciously, will isolate the student and sow distrust.
- \* By allowing the student to use his native language when possible and encouraging him to express himself culturally in assignments and activities, the teacher validates and empowers the student.
- \* This creates a positive learning environment, forms a bond of trust between teacher and student, facilitating not hindering acculturation and English acquisition.