

PA Literacy Corps

Applying Research to Practice: Teaching & Learning Strategies

Second Language Acquisition
&
English as a Second Language



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INTRODUCTION

On Friday, May 16, 2003, at a symposium on *Issues and Challenges in Assessment and Accountability for Adult English Language Learners*, hosted by the National Center for ESL Literacy Education (NCLE), over 100 teachers, program administrators, researchers, test developers, and policy makers gathered to discuss the field's vision for English as a Second Language (ESL) program accountability and learner assessment. Cheryl Keenan, director of the Division of Adult Learning and Literacy in the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education, described the Department's vision for assessment and accountability to include:

- Any adult who needs or could benefit from education services will have access to high quality services in a variety of venues, through a variety of service providers, at a variety of times, and in a variety of places.
- The quality of those services, including the instruction provided, will be high and will be based on scientific evidence.
- Teachers will be well trained and knowledgeable about what they are teaching, why they are teaching, and how to teach the learners in their classes.
- Programs, states, and the federal government will be responsible for what happens to learners, in terms of educational outcomes and employment, and will be able to track learners' progress.

The symposium identified what we know:

- The learner population in adult ESL programs is large and growing.
- Programs have varying amounts of experience working with adult English language learners.
- Federal and state policies guide the development and use of assessments.
- Assessments must be appropriate, valid, and reliable.

Cheryl Keenan pointed out, "If we look at the many different subpopulations in adult education and at the subpopulations within the ESL portion of adult education, we see that not all adult learners are in programs for the same reasons, or for the same outcomes, or at the same places along the way. It is our responsibility to get them to the next step, whatever that next step is for them."

In response:

PA Literacy Corps tutors are well-trained and knowledgeable about second language acquisition and teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). In particular:

- They know the fundamentals of learning a language.
- They know why they are teaching adult ESL learners.
- They know what to teach ESL learners.
- And they know how to teach ESL learners, using research-based teaching strategies that equip students with a wide range of lifelong learning strategies.

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

ESL tutors must be sensitive to cultural differences. Cross-cultural interactions can be uncomfortable and can lead to misunderstandings if we don't recognize cultural differences in expectations, attitudes, beliefs, values, and customs. In particular, we want to recognize that there are cultural differences in how ESL adult learners may interpret: (1) what they say, (2) what they hear, (3) eye contact, (4) the physical distance established and maintained between two talking individuals, (5) the meanings of head nodding and smiling, (6) body contact, such as embracing or patting someone's back, shoulder, or head, (7) hand gestures, and (8) written language and symbols.

One area of possible misunderstanding is when you interpret feedback from learners. American learners tend to use body language (nodding their head, eye contact, and smiling at you) to communicate to you that they are paying attention and interested. There are cultures that may avoid looking at you as a sign of respect; some cultures may nod their head, but not necessarily to communicate that they understand or agree with what you are saying; and other cultures may hide all emotions as they are taught to do when they are children.

Another area of possible misunderstanding is when you either criticize or compliment learners. How criticism is received and interpreted varies enormously within and across cultures. In fact, in many cultures, public criticism is perceived as humiliating, rude, inappropriate, or even immoral.

Correcting learners' mistakes or errors is a sensitivity issue most teachers must deal with on a regular basis. Some cultures place great emphasis on "correctness" and expect teachers to teach by rules and item-by-item, as opposed to contextualized learning. Some learners have been taught not to ask teachers or tutors for clarification because it is viewed as a sign of disrespect.

Check marks on learner assignments can be confusing to many cultures. Frequent verbal compliments from teachers are viewed by some cultures as insincere praise; on the other hand, some cultures expect and give more positive comments than Americans, including more pats on the back and embraces than are normally given by American teachers.

However, body language and contact can often lead to misunderstandings due to cultural differences. Some commonly used American hand gestures have offensive meanings in other cultures, and some cultures view any touching of the opposite sex to be offensive.

Other forms of communication within a classroom can also cause learners discomfort; for example, asking a learner to stand before the class to answer questions or present information is viewed by some cultures as inappropriate. Feelings about peer teaching and learning support also vary among cultures. Furthermore, the meaning of a teacher's or tutor's questions can be misconstrued by learners, as well as the common practice of allowing learners an opportunity to think about and then answer questions.

In summary, cultural differences are complex issues, but there are some things you can do to increase your cultural sensitivity:

- Avoid stereotyping and be tolerant of differences in how learners communicate.
- Establish a good rapport with learners. Try to gather information about the types of classroom communications your learners prefer.
- Explain that miscommunications can happen and that by working together you can reduce communication problems or misunderstandings.
- Explain the teaching behaviors/communications you use and how you interpret learners' responses. Be consistent.

- Do not assume all learners will volunteer to answer questions in class.
- Praise learners in a sincere and specific manner.
- Encourage learners to ask questions and request clarification—assure them that you want to know when they are confused or need more information.
- Do not assume learners will ask you questions when they don't understand and do not assume that nodding heads indicate understanding.
- Ask questions in a non-threatening way and allow learners plenty of time to answer—be sure to explain to learners that “wait time” is an appropriate teaching/learning technique.
- Avoid situations that are likely to call attention to learners and do not allow learners to “put down” other learners' ideas or questions.

LINGUISTICS

Historically, linguistics is mentioned in the writings of Plato (c. 427 - 346 BC). Modern linguistics can trace its beginnings to the 17th and 18th centuries when European scholars began to develop the idea of the differences and similarities of different grammars, based on the belief that all languages share common features.

Linguistics is the study of the structures and processes of language, and how language works and is organized. Linguists identify and study the elements common among languages. Within the field of linguistics, there are many different theories and philosophies within a large number of subfields that include: anthropological linguistics, applied linguistics, biological linguistics, clinical linguistics, computational linguistics, educational linguistics, ethnolinguistics, geographical linguistics, mathematical linguistics, neurolinguistics, philosophical linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, statistical linguistics, and theolinguistics.

Language is always changing, evolving, and adapting to the needs of its users, incorporating new practices and new technologies for new purposes. Typically, linguists research:

- *Phonetics*: the study of the sounds of languages and their physical properties.
- *Phonology*: the study of how sounds function in a given language or dialect.
- *Morphology*: the study of the structure of words.
- *Syntax*: the study of the structure of sentences.
- *Semantics*: the study of meaning in language.
- *Discourse analysis*: the study of connected spoken and written discourse.
- *Pragmatics*: the study of the social meanings of utterances.

Word order and speech patterns change over time, and new words often emerge from:

- Other languages.
- Shortened forms of longer words, such as *lab* from *laboratory*.
- Combining words, such as *brunch* from *breakfast* and *lunch*.
- Proper names, such as *Kleenex* and *Jello*.
- Mistakes in word usage; for example, 400 years ago, the word *pease* was used to refer to either a single pea or a bunch of them. But over time, people assumed that *pease* was a plural form, for which *pea* must be the singular, and a new word - *pea* - was born.

The Great Vowel Shift

For many different reasons, the sounds of a language change over time. One example is the *Great Vowel Shift* of the 15th century, which was first studied by the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen (1860–1943). It is commonly thought that the Great Vowel Shift significantly changed the pronunciation of English words and, in particular, English vowels.

Prior to the 15th century, the word *cheese* would have rhymed with the modern pronunciation of *place*, while *twice* would have rhymed with the modern pronunciation of *peace*. Seven different vowel sounds changed as a result of the Great Vowel Shift. Of course, there are pronunciation exceptions, which suggests that the Great Vowel Shift was not uniform, and did evolve over time. In fact, the Great Vowel Shift is probably why we spell so many words in ways that make little sense from a phonetic standpoint.

Split Infinitives

The criticism of split infinitives has an interesting origin. In the phrase, *He was asked to quickly write his name*, the word *quickly* splits the infinitive *to write*. Split infinitives are considered poor usage of English because 17th century grammarians believed Latin was the ideal language, and that English should be as much like Latin as possible. In Latin, an infinitive, such as *to write*, is a single word, so it's impossible to split. Now, more than 300 years later, we're still being taught that split infinitives are wrong because someone in the 1600s thought English should be more like Latin.

Standard English and Dialects

No two people have had exactly the same language experience; each individual's language is influenced by age, education level, occupation, region of the country, and many other factors. The uniqueness of language comes from the words and phrases people adopt from their different experiences.

Most languages have a standard form that is used in government, education, and other formal contexts. However, Standard English is just one dialect of English. Different dialects have different rules. For example:

- I didn't find *any* ticket.
- I didn't find *no* ticket.

The first sentence follows the rules of Standard English; the second sentence follows a set of rules present in several other dialects. In fact, many modern languages, including Italian and Spanish, either allow or require more than one negative word in a sentence.

A modern example offers three ways of saying someone said something:

- So, Sue *goes*, "Great, I want to join them!"
- So, Sue is *like*, "Great, I want to join them!"
- So, Sue is *all*, "Great, I want to join them!"

LANGUAGES AND WRITING SYSTEMS

Languages

Every language belongs to one of about 250 families of languages. Each family includes languages that are somehow related to each other. The best-known languages are those in the Indo-European family, which includes English and about 200 other languages.

Reports of the number of languages in the world vary enormously. Researchers identify almost 7,000 distinct languages. Of those, only 230 are spoken in Europe, while more than 2,000 are spoken in Asia (Anderson, 2004).

Some areas of the world have more languages than others. For example, in Papua-New Guinea, there are an estimated 832 languages spoken by a population of around 3.9 million, making an average of only about 4,700 speakers per language. These languages belong to between 40 and 50 distinct families (Anderson, 2004).

Worldwide, the number of languages is steadily decreasing. When a language is no longer passed on to children, it does not survive the death of the current native speakers. About 25 percent of the world's languages have fewer than 1,000 remaining speakers, and linguists estimate that within the next century at least 3,000 of the 7,000 existing languages will die out (Anderson, 2004).

Originally, over 300 languages were spoken in North America; of those, about half are no longer spoken. What little is known about them comes from early word lists or a limited number of print records. Of about 165 indigenous languages now spoken in North America, only eight are spoken by as many as 10,000 people. About 75 are spoken only by a few older people, and can be assumed to be on their way to extinction (Anderson, 2004).

Writing Systems

Languages have evolved over time, but writing systems have been invented. Worldwide, writing systems are very different, but all fall into one of three major categories: logography, syllabary, or alphabetic.

- In *logographic* writing systems, each symbol tends to represent a word.
- A *syllabary* is a set of written characters for a language, each character representing a syllable.
- In *alphabetic* writing systems, each symbol tends to represent a phoneme.

Logographic Writing System

In a logographic writing system, a whole word is represented by a single symbol; one example is the traditional Chinese writing system. There is no limit on how many words can exist in a language, but there is a practical limit as to how many symbols people can actually learn.

- Some researchers believe adults can recognize about 5,000 symbols in isolation — although with contextual cues, researchers say it is possible to recognize a few thousand more.
- Estimates of adult vocabularies suggest that an educated adult knows between 50,000 and 75,000 words.

Because it is extremely difficult for a person to memorize and discriminate among the thousands of symbols that exist in a written language, reading in a logographic system is often slow and labor intensive.

Syllabary Writing System

Syllabary writing systems represent word parts with symbols. One example is the American Cherokee writing system, which was invented by Sequoya in the early 19th century. Each syllable in the language is represented by a unique symbol, and those symbols are combined to make words. Because the Cherokee language is written in the syllabary form, Cherokee words can almost always be spelled as they are pronounced.

Alphabetic Writing System

The English alphabetic writing system has thousands of unique syllables, but only uses between 39 and 47 phonemes (the larger number includes diphthongs and glides as separate phonemes). It uses a symbol to represent a phoneme.

Alphabetic writing systems vary in complexity. For example, in Spanish, there is nearly perfect one-to-one correspondence between letters and phonemes. As such, Spanish words tend to be spelled the way they sound — this is what linguists call a *shallow orthography*. English, on the other hand, definitely does not have one-to-one correspondence between letters and phonemes. Many English words are irregular or exception words, and are not spelled the way they sound— this is what linguists call *deep orthography*.

It is interesting to note that, in English, there are only two letters that always represent the same sound — the letter *V* always corresponds to the sound /v/ and the letter *Q* always corresponds to the sound /k/. There is an exception, even in this case, which is the reverse is not true; the sound /v/ can be represented by either the letter *V* or the letter *F* (as in the word *of*), and the sound /k/ can be represented by the letters *C*, *Q*, and *K*. This inconsistency between letters and sounds in English results in spelling ambiguity.

Many English words are polyphonic, meaning there are multiple pronunciations for the same spelling. For example, if you go for a walk facing the *wind*, you will *wind* up with messy hair.

Other English words are homophonic, meaning that, despite different spellings, they are pronounced the same. For example, it is a *rite* of passage for children to learn to *write right*.

There is no specific code for spelling in English. Pollack Pickeraz (1963) claimed that there are 45 phonemes in the English language, and that the 26 letters in English can represent the 45 phonemes in about 350 ways.

HOW LANGUAGE IS LEARNED

Language acquisition is a part of human development that begins in infancy. Most children are exposed only to one language (monolingual), but some children learn more than one language from birth and are considered *simultaneous bilinguals*. Children who learn a second language later in life are referred to as *sequential bilinguals*.

Conversely, when children are cut off from their first language, it is called *subtractive bilingualism*. Language problems can result when children do not continue to develop their first language, but have yet to master their second language. Moreover, research indicates that children have the capacity to learn more than one language and there is no evidence that one language grows, while the other shrinks.

There are predictable patterns in the development of language. These patterns are called developmental sequences or stages. With children, these stages are similar to their cognitive developmental stages. Research indicates that there are consistencies in how children learn language; in particular, how they learn grammatical morphemes, to negate something (deny, reject, disagree with, or refuse something), and to form questions. Research is just now beginning to examine how these childhood patterns may relate to adult second language learning.

What does it mean to know a language?

There are four aspects of language:

1. *Language forms* (linguistic competence): knowledge of grammatical forms, spelling, vocabulary, and pronunciation.
2. *Social interactions* (sociolinguistic competence): the ability to use language, both verbal and nonverbal, appropriately in social contexts.
3. *Language skills* (discourse competence): the ability to read, write, understand, and use spoken language.
4. *Learning strategies* (strategic competence): the ability to use strategies to be understood and knowing how to learn independently.

Language Forms	Social Interactions
Grammar Pronunciation Spelling Vocabulary	Formal/informal language Language functions Polite intonation Using colloquial language appropriately Body language
Language Skills	Learning Strategies
Writing for different purposes Reading for different purposes Listening only for the information you need	Using gestures to demonstrate meaning Asking for definitions Asking someone to speak more slowly Guessing meaning of new words

Communicative competence is a term commonly used to describe the ability to use language in a variety of settings, with varying degrees of formality. In order to achieve communicative competence, learners need to become proficient in all four aspects of language. In fact, attaining a degree of competence in all areas should be the goal of any second language instruction.

SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a theoretical and experimental field of study, which seeks to understand language development in terms of the acquisition of second languages. SLA describes the processes that people go through when they need to use a language other than their native one for communication. Since the early 1970s, SLA researchers have been attempting to describe and explain the behavior of children and adults learning a new language.

Second Language Acquisition Research

Research indicates that learning a second language is different from learning a first language. Obviously, all second language learners have already learned a first language. This prior knowledge about the first language may or may not help with learning a second language, depending on the similarities between the two languages. Adult second language learners are more mature cognitively and have more world knowledge than when they learned their first language; both factors can help with the learning of a second language.

The following matrix illustrates the different ways researchers have examined child and adult language acquisition.

	Child (C)	Adult (A)
L1	C1	A1
L2	C2	A2

Key:

- L1 = first language
- L2 = second language
- C1 = child's first language
- A1 = adult's first language
- C2 = child's second language
- A2 = adult's second language

Looking at the research matrix, researchers often compare:

- C1 and C2: first and second language acquisition in children.
- C2 and A2: second language acquisition in children and adults.
- C1 and A2: First language acquisition in children and second language acquisition in adults.
- A1 is rare—normally adults have already learned their first language.

General Research Findings

- Research has found some similarities and some differences between L1 and L2 developmental sequences.
- Research also indicates that L1 influences L2 development in terms of rate and route of development.
- There is evidence of transfer of reading and writing skills from L1 to L2 (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982; Meisel, Clahsen, & Pienemann, 1981; Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll, & Kuehn, 1990).

Morpheme Order Studies

During the 70s, the *Morpheme Order Studies* (Brown, 1973) investigated the order in which certain items of grammar were acquired. Researchers concluded that:

- There is a natural order in which grammar is acquired.
- This order does not reflect the order in which they were taught.
- Natural order cannot be altered by instruction.

The implication, according to some researchers, was that teaching language involved engaging learners in natural communicative tasks that were at the learner’s approximate level of proficiency—it was not to drill grammar. However, subsequent research indicates that a grammar focus in class does appear to be beneficial for most learners.

Stephen Krashen's Language Acquisition Model

Stephen Krashen (1982) developed a second language acquisition model that integrates five hypotheses. Overall, he regards communication as the main function of language and views language as a vehicle for communicating meanings and messages. As such, he stresses the importance of vocabulary and focuses on teaching communicative abilities. Krashen’s model aligns with Communicative Language Teaching that focuses on using language for meaningful interaction, rather than SLA models that focus on learning grammar rules. Like Noam Chomsky, he believes that human beings have an innate ability to acquire language through sufficient input and exposure.

Krashen’s acquisition-learning hypothesis asserts that we have two different ways of developing language ability—through *acquisition* and through *learning*. He believes we acquire language through informal exposure, formal study, and attention to language form and rules. He believes that language that has been *learned* may be less permanent than language that has been fully *acquired*.

- *Acquisition* refers to natural, subconscious processes that we go through as we develop language. We may not be aware that we have gained new knowledge, but that new knowledge has been subconsciously stored in our memory. When we acquire language, we do not analyze rules through formal instruction.
- *Learning*, on the other hand, refers to consciously learning the rules and patterns of language, including error correction.

Language Acquisition	Language Learning
Subconscious	Conscious
“Picking up” a language	Knowing about a language
Implicit knowledge	Explicit knowledge

Research indicates that acquisition makes the largest contribution to language development—it is responsible for fluency and the greatest part of accuracy. In fact, research shows that when we focus on form while speaking, we produce less information and we slow down (Hulstijn & Hulstijn, 1982).

Although second language teaching is typically directed at learning and not acquisition, it is still possible to encourage acquisition very effectively in the classroom. Krashen’s theory suggests that we should balance instructional time between acquisition activities and learning exercises.

According to Krashen:

- It is important to realize that students cannot both learn and acquire at the same time because one can focus on only one thing at a time, either on form or on meaning.
- Therefore, there must be a separation between acquisition and learning activities in second language instruction, with more time spent on acquisition than learning activities.

Acquisition activities:

- Focus on meaning and use, not on analysis of rules.
- Provide input that is natural and authentic.
- Present language rules inductively—instruction is discovery-based with little or no emphasis on grammar rules.

Krashen’s natural order hypothesis describes second language development as following a predictable sequence, just like first language development. However, the order of acquisition for first and second languages is similar, but not identical.

Not all learners are at the same developmental stage and, consequently, they may not be ready to acquire certain areas of first or second languages at the same time or rate. For example, *ing* (progressive) is acquired fairly early in first language development, but the third person singular *s* is acquired six months to a year later. In adult SLA, the progressive is acquired early (like first language development), but the third person singular *s* may never be acquired.

Krashen's monitor hypothesis explains how we examine our language and sometimes correct our errors. The acquired part of our language development relies on our intuitive judgments about correctness. Our learned language, on the other hand, acts as a monitor that edits and corrects our language. This monitoring can happen internally before we actually speak or write, and can also occur as self-correction after we can produce sentences.

Krashen believes that overuse of the monitor can inhibit fluent language production and the acquisition of the second language. However, conscious or learned knowledge of language does provide us with grammar, punctuation, and spelling rules—these are important parts of language development, but make up a small part of our language competence.

Krashen's input hypothesis describes how we acquire language by exposure to *comprehensible input*, which is the language that surrounds us—what we hear or read. Krashen believes it's not just a matter of immersing learners in the second language—*comprehensible input* is the key. He claims that people acquire language best when they are exposed to comprehensible input that is a little beyond their present level of competence—Krashen refers to this as *i + 1* (*i* is input at the learner's current level and *+1* means a step beyond).

Language can be made comprehensible to learners by:

- Providing input that is relevant and meaningful to learners—drawing on their background knowledge and experiences.
- Providing input that is not grammatically sequenced.
- Providing a sufficient quantity of input.
- Using visuals, real objects, and gestures.

Research reveals that:

- More comprehensible input results in more language acquisition.
- Teaching methods containing more comprehensible input are more effective for both beginning and intermediate language learners.
- The development of second language proficiency can occur without formal instruction.

Effective SLA instruction uses two different types of learning activities: input (acquisition) and grammar (learning) activities.

- Input activities give learners as much comprehensible input as possible.
- Input activities include meaningful messages and create *i+1* opportunities for learners.
- Input activities put emphasis on listening and reading comprehension activities.
- Learning activities focus on grammar rules that are presented deductively or inductively depending on the age of the learners.

Krashen's affective filter hypothesis compares the learner's emotional state to an adjustable (affective) filter that either passes or hinders input necessary to acquisition. In some cases, this affective filter serves as an imaginary barrier, which prevents learners from acquiring language through available input.

- Affective barriers include motives, attitudes, needs, and emotional states that prevent learners from acquiring language through input.
- Learner anxiety, stress, fatigue, embarrassment, and/or nervousness can act as a filter and inhibit language acquisition.

Practice speaking can create conversation, which creates a source of comprehensible input; however, the important part of this comprehensible input is what the other person says. Speaking can also make learners feel part of the second language culture, which can lower the affective filter. Forcing learners to speak the language before they are ready can raise the affective filter, which becomes a barrier to language acquisition (Loughrin-Sacco, Bommarito, Sweet, & Beck, 1988; Young, 1990).

Krashen believes that this filter increases in strength at about age 12, which could explain why younger children seem to do better in second language acquisition. It may also explain why two learners acquire language at different rates, even though they are exposed to the same input.

As such, SLA instruction should provide comprehensible input in a low-anxiety atmosphere. Teachers and tutors should:

- Provide encouragement that is meaningful.
- Allow mistakes.
- Allow for different learning styles and needs.

Second Language Development: Nature vs. Nurture Theories

Most researchers agree that there is a degree of both nature and nurture in learning language—the difference between nature and nurture theorists is in which plays the predominate role.

Nature Theories

Nature theories claim that knowledge is genetically transmitted and innate—that much of the capacity for language learning is part of the genetic makeup of human beings. Nature theorists do not deny the importance of environmental stimuli, but they believe that language acquisition cannot be accounted for on the basis of environmental factors only. They believe we are born with a built-in device, which predisposes us to acquire language; this *Language Acquisition Device* (LAD) is a human language learning system.

Nature theorists assert that adults can acquire multiple languages because the ability to learn languages does not disappear after childhood. In fact, they believe that adults can acquire all but the phonological aspect of any foreign language by using their ever-active LAD.

According to nature theories, what makes adults different from children is their ability to apply abstract problem-solving skills, which allows them to consciously process the grammar of a foreign language. Nature theorists believe that adults can both acquire and learn language, while children rely on language acquisition.

Natural Approach to SLA Instruction

Nature-based theories are the foundation of the *Natural Approach* (NA) to SLA teaching, which was largely created by Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell (1983). NA instruction is meaning-based and is presented in themes or topics that learners will find interesting and can discuss in a comprehensible way. The focus of each learning activity is organized by topic, not by grammatical structures.

Krashen believes that if there is enough comprehensible input, it will automatically contain the grammar learners are ready to acquire. This makes it a lot easier to plan interesting lessons and also allows some individual variation in terms of what students are ready to learn in terms of grammar.

Typically, learners remain relatively silent during the initial stage of NA instruction; however, they are actively engaged in trying to understand conversation. Beginning students are not expected to say much, if anything, when they respond to teacher/tutor commands. If they do speak, they are not required to do so in complete sentences and errors are not corrected.

The second stage begins when learners feel ready to produce speech. Teachers and tutors initiate speaking by asking yes/no and either/or questions, and questions that require single-word answers. However, learners are not expected to use a word until they have heard it many times.

Pictures, charts, advertisements, and other visuals are used in the third stage as the basis for acquisition activities. Grammar is included only for more advanced learners and only as a supplementary activity. In NA instruction, there are two purposes for including grammar: first, to satisfy the curiosity of some learners about the structure of language and, second, to fill in some of the gaps left by acquisition. Grammar rules are used when they do not interfere with communication, as in the editing stage of writing.

The role of the teacher or tutor includes:

- Serving as the primary source of comprehensible input for the learner.
- Creating a low-anxiety learning environment where there is a low affective filter.

The learner role includes making decisions as to when to speak, what to speak about, and what linguistic expressions to use while speaking.

Nurture Theories

Nurture theories claim that knowledge comes from experience, from our interaction with the environment through our reasoning or senses. Behaviorist language acquisition theories are the best-known examples, where environmental factors are believed to be the dominant factor in language acquisition.

Behaviorists believe that knowledge is the product of interaction with the environment through stimulus-response conditioning. The behaviorist view of language acquisition was influenced by psychologist, John B. Watson (1923). Watson claimed that language development is the result of a set of habits.

- Behaviorists believe that language is learned through mimicry and memorization of forms, which leads to habit formation.
- Behaviorists assert that the goal of language instruction is to replace bad habits (errors in pronunciation) with good habits.

Behaviorism produced some well-known theories and applications in the field of foreign/second language teaching, including B.F. Skinner's view of language acquisition and the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) or the Army Method.

Skinner's View

In 1957, psychologist B.F. Skinner described language acquisition for both L1 and L2 learners as the result of linguistic input from speakers in their environment, and positive reinforcement for their correct repetitions and imitations, adding that when language learners' responses are reinforced positively, they acquire the language easily.

Skinner's claims were criticized in Noam Chomsky's *A Review of B.F. Skinner's Verbal Behavior*. Chomsky (1959) was the first to refute behaviorism as an explanation for language acquisition. He believes that human beings are able to create innumerable forms of language with limited input—that human beings have an innate ability to analyze and make guesses about language. Chomsky claims that there is “neither empirical evidence nor any known argument to support any specific claim about the relative importance of feedback from the environment.”

In the mid-1960s, Chomsky proposed the *Transformational Generative Grammar Theory*, which challenged the behaviorist theories. The basis of this theory is a set of transformations that learners use repeatedly, instead of using a long list of language rules. Chomsky believes that a relatively small number of transformations can help learners make an unlimited number of sentences. An example of a transformation is adding the word *not* and an auxiliary verb to any sentence to make it negative.

Audio-Lingual Method

Behaviorism resulted in the creation and use of the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) for teaching foreign languages, which was developed following WW II for military personnel—it was first called the Army Method.

The ALM method teaches a language, it does not teach about a language, and the goal is error-free speech. ALM instruction focuses on developing good language habits through memorization, drill, and practice. Learners are rewarded for correct responses and the positive reinforcement encourages good language habits, which, in turn, contribute to the successful learning of a language. Vocabulary is limited and learned in context, and there are few, if any, grammatical explanations. Priority is given to spoken rather than written language. ALM did not work well in schools because it did not teach long-term communicative proficiency. However, it is thought to have had more impact on foreign language teaching than any other method.

Factors Related to Learning a Second Language

Research indicates that intelligence is not necessarily a strong factor in learning language. In fact, aptitude may be a stronger factor because it involves the ability to identify and memorize new sounds, the ability to understand word usage, the ability to figure out grammatical rules, and the ability to memorize new words. Self-confidence can also be a factor, especially in terms of assertiveness, adventurousness, and comfort level with taking risks.

Motivation is also a factor in terms of communication needs and the perceived value of learning a second language. Learner preferences and learner beliefs are also important, and can influence the kinds of teaching and learning strategies students prefer for learning a second language.

Age and Language Acquisition

Researchers have differing opinions about adult learners' ability to acquire English as a second language. Many researchers favor the argument that opportunities and motivations to become proficient in English are key factors in how well adults acquire a second language, others argue that second language acquisition is limited by maturational constraints, possibly biologically based, that are related to the age at onset of language learning (Stevens, 1999).

Some researchers have tried to determine if there is a *critical period*—a biologically determined period of life—when language can be acquired more easily or a point beyond which it is more difficult to learn language. Some say the critical age period is between 12 and 13; others say it is as young as two years of age.

Most researchers agree that the younger the person, the easier it is to acquire language; this is the basis of the *Critical Period Hypothesis*, which suggests that there is a chronological cut-off point in adolescence after which a language learner cannot attain fluency. However, most researchers also agree that the ability to acquire language remains in adulthood.

Other Factors

Researchers have found that learning a second language is influenced by (1) the linguistic distance between L1 and L2, (2) learners' level of proficiency in L1, (3) learners' knowledge of L2, (4) societal attitudes toward learners' native language, and (5) learner attitudes toward learning a new language (Waiqui, 2000).

Linguistic distance

Specific languages can be more or less difficult to learn, depending on how different or similar they are compared to the languages the learner already knows. For example, Dutch or Spanish are Indo-European languages and use the same writing system as English, while languages such as Arabic, Korean, or Vietnamese use different writing systems (Waiqui, 2000).

Native language proficiency

The learner's level of proficiency in the native language has an impact on the acquisition of a second language. This includes native oral language and literacy, training in formal and academic features of native language use, and knowledge of rhetorical patterns and variations in genre and style of the native language. The more academically advanced in their native language knowledge and abilities, the easier it will be for learners to learn a second language (Waiqui, 2000).

Knowledge of the second language

Learners' prior knowledge of the second language is a significant factor in their current learning. Prior knowledge can range from conversational fluency acquired from contacts with the English speakers to formal knowledge obtained in English as a foreign language classes in their countries of origin (Waiqui, 2000).

Language attitudes

Language attitudes of learners, their peer group, the school, the workplace, the community, and society at large can have an enormous effect on the second language learning process, both positive and negative (Waiqui, 2000).

Effect of First Language Literacy on SLA

Adult second language learners come from diverse backgrounds and have widely differing experiences with literacy in their first languages. Their level of literacy in the first language can influence the way they develop English literacy and the progress they will make in learning to read and write English.

Some ESL learners have immigrated to the United States where they have attended schools and developed oral fluency in English, but they are not literate in their native language and have a difficult time with reading and writing in English. They may remain in ESL classes throughout their elementary and secondary school education and enter ESL programs as adults or need special attention in college programs (Harklau, Losey, & Siegal, 1999). In addition, many need to be given opportunities to increase their self-confidence in educational situations and develop positive images of themselves as readers.

Huntley (1992), Birch (2002), Hilferty (1996), and Strucker (2002) describe six levels of literacy in the first language (L1) that affect English literacy development (second language - L2) and should be considered in adult ESL literacy instruction:

- Preliterate
- Nonliterate
- Semiliterate
- Nonalphabet literate
- Non-Roman alphabet literate
- Roman alphabet literate

L1 = first language
L2 = second language

Two studies suggest that either previous or simultaneous acquisition of L1 literacy can have a positive impact on English literacy development (L2) among *preliterate*, *nonliterate*, and *semiliterate* populations.

- Robson (1982), in a study of Hmong learners of English at a refugee camp in Thailand, found that adults with minimal literacy in Hmong acquired English reading skills more rapidly than those who had no Hmong literacy.
- Burtoff (1985) studied adult Haitians learning English in New York City and found that those who received native language literacy instruction while learning English developed stronger literacy skills in the L2 than did the English-only group, even though the total number of instructional hours for the two groups was equal.

Nonalphabet literate and *Non-Roman alphabet literate* learners have valuable reading skills in their first language that they may be able to transfer to second language reading. But they need direct, systematic, sequential instruction in the sound-to-symbol correspondences of written English, rather than merely addressing sound-symbol issues as they arise (Strucker, 2002).

Preliterate learners

Preliterate learners come from cultures where literacy is uncommon in everyday life because the language is not written, has only recently been written, or is being developed. For example, most Bantu people of Somalia are preliterate in their native Af-Maay because it has been codified for just a short time (Van Lehman & Eno, 2002). Because Preliterate English language learners often have had little or no exposure to written text, they may not be aware of the purposes of literacy in everyday life.

Literacy instruction for preliterate learners builds on their oral language knowledge and is supported by oral language activities (Carroll, 1999). They may progress slowly in literacy and other language instruction, and often require re-teaching of skills and concepts (Robson, 1982; Strucker, 2002).

Nonliterate Learners

Nonliterate learners come from cultures where literacy is available, but they have not had access to literacy instruction, often because of their socioeconomic status. For example, some adult learners from Central America may not know how to read or write in their native Spanish because of disrupted schooling due to war and poverty.

Nonliterate learners have probably had some exposure to written language and may have a greater awareness of the value and uses of literacy than preliterate learners. As such, they are often highly motivated to learn.

However, they may be reluctant to disclose their limited literacy background, and they may acquire language skills slowly because they cannot make full use of printed instructional materials.

Semiliterate Learners

Usually, *semiliterate* learners have had access to literacy in their native culture, but because of their socioeconomic status or educational situation, they have not achieved a high level of literacy in their native language. They may have left school at a young age for economic or political reasons, as was the case with many Southeast Asian refugees and Central American immigrants in the 1970s and 1980s (Holt, 1995; Ranard & Pflieger, 1995).

Nonalphabet Literate Learners

Most often, learners who are *nonalphabet literate* read a language that is written logographically, such as Chinese and Japanese. They may try to read in English by memorizing whole words and, because they depend on whole word recognition to the exclusion of phonological decoding, they may not become proficient readers in alphabetic languages. In order to become good readers in English, adult learners must develop an alphabetical strategy (Birch, 2002); they must be able to process an alphabetic script in the way it was designed to be used (Adams, 1990).

- A study of 16 Russian and 11 Japanese learners in an intensive English program at a Canadian university and 16 Russian learners of English in a university in Israel found that the Japanese learners who used both a syllabary and a logographic writing system relied more on English word recognition than did the Russian learners, who used a phonologically-based alphabet. The researchers concluded that because the Japanese readers were not used to focusing on phoneme-to-sound mapping in reading, they were more likely than the Russian learners to depend on sight recognition of letter sequences (Wade-Woolley, 1999).

Non-Roman Alphabet Literate Learners

Non-Roman alphabet literate learners read in a language that uses a non-Roman alphabet, such as Cyrillic or Thai, but that is still phonetically based. For example, Nepali students, whose Sanskrit-derived letters descend below the lines of text, may attempt to direct their visual attention below the lines of English text where only the tails of some English letters (*g, j, p, and y*) are written (Strucker, 2002). These learners are accustomed to reading with an alphabet, but they may struggle to find words in the dictionary and may need time to process written materials presented in class because the orthography of their L1 is different from that of English. Strategies that these learners may have developed to read their native language may not work as well in English reading and spelling (Birch, 2002).

- In addition to directionality issues (their alphabet reads right to left; the Roman alphabet reads left to right), Arabic students learning to read in English are likely to have problems with vowels, which are usually not written out in everyday Arabic writings (Ryan & Meara, 1991).

Roman Alphabet Literate Learners

Roman alphabetic literate learners (such as Spanish or Serbo Croatian) have already developed reading skills and formed reading behaviors in their L1. They already know that written language can represent speech, and their educational background and literacy skills may be an important part of their self-image. The English alphabet will be more familiar to them than to others whose native language does not use the Roman alphabet; many of them may appear to have little difficulty reading English, especially those from languages such as Spanish that have many cognates with English. However, they still need to learn English sound-symbol correspondences before they are able to read well (Hilferty, 1996; Strucker, 2002). And they need to understand that English may not have the same level of one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds as their native language

L1 Effects on L2 Learning at Different Literacy Levels

L1 Literacy	Explanation	Special Considerations
Preliterate	L1 has no written form (e.g., many American indigenous, African, Australian, and Pacific languages).	Learners need exposure to the purposes and uses of literacy.
Nonliterate	Learners have no access to literacy instruction.	Learners may feel stigmatized.
Semiliterate	Learners have limited access to literacy instruction.	Learners may have had past negative experiences with literacy learning.
Non-alphabet literate	Learners are fully literate in a language written in a nonalphabetic script (e.g., Chinese).	Learners need instruction in reading an alphabetic script and in the sound-syllable correspondences in English.
Non-Roman alphabet literate	Learners are literate in a language written in a non-Roman alphabet (e.g., Arabic, Greek, Korean, Russian, and Thai).	Learners need instruction in the Roman alphabet in order to transfer their L1 literacy skills to English. Some, such as readers of Arabic, will need to learn to read from left to right.
Roman alphabet literate	Learners are fully literate in a language written in a Roman alphabet script (e.g., French, German, and Spanish). They read from left to right and recognize letter shapes and fonts.	Learners need instruction in the specific letter-to-sound and sound-syllable correspondences of English.

From *Reading and Adult English Language Learners: A Review of the Research*, by M. Burt, J. K. Peyton, and R. Adams, 2003, Washington, D.C.: National Center for ESL Literacy Education and Center for Applied Linguistics.

Stages of Second Language Acquisition

All second language learners progress through similar stages to acquire English language proficiency. However, the length of time each learner spends at a particular stage may vary greatly.

Pre-production Stage

During this early stage, learners do not usually produce their own language, and they understand only language that has been made comprehensible.

Instructional tip: For students in the pre-production stage of language learning, provide activities geared to connect with their knowledge, but do not force production (speaking). Listening is difficult for learners, but pointing, labeling, and drawing activities work well. Be sure to provide some clues to meaning.

Early Production Stage

Learners have a limited, active vocabulary, and may feel ready to speak in one- or two-word phrases.

Instructional tip: At this stage, learners can demonstrate their comprehension of material by giving short responses to easy *yes/no* questions and *either/or* questions. They can also respond to simple *who*, *what*, *when*, *an/or where* questions.

Speech Emergence Stage

Learners have some listening comprehension, and will try to speak in short phrases and use social language.

Instructional tip: Ask learners *how* and *why* questions that elicit short responses.

Intermediate Fluent Stage

Learners understand what is said during tutoring sessions. They can express their ideas comprehensibly in both oral and written communication. They are to read and understand intermediate level print materials. Some researchers estimate that learners know about 6,000 words at this stage.

Instructional tip: Ask open-ended questions that allow learners to create more complicated responses and to use complex sentences.

Advanced Fluency Stage

Researchers estimate that it takes learners between 4 and 10 years to acquire advanced fluency. This is the stage that Jim Cummins calls *cognitive/academic language proficiency* (CALP).

BICS and CALP

Jim Cummins (1981) defined two kinds of skills second language learners need to become proficient in English. The first, he calls *basic interpersonal communication skills* (BICS); the second type of skills, he calls *cognitive/academic language proficiency* (CALP).

BICS are everyday language skills, while CALP involves the language skills needed to understand and communicate in unfamiliar or more formal or higher-level language situations.

- BICS take about two years to acquire when learners are immersed in the second language and have opportunities to use the second language.
- CALP skills can take 7 to 15 years to acquire, depending on the learner's prior education, experience using complex language, literacy in the first language, and amount of exposure in the second language.

Cummins' theory is that many second language learners demonstrate a much higher level of BICS than their actual level of CALP. In other words, they can converse in and understand common, everyday language, but have limited or no proficiency in language forms and, consequently, cannot understand or figure out unknown or higher-level language. The mismatch between an individual's levels of BICS and CALP can create problems in higher education settings, the workplace, and other formal or complex situations.

Developing CALP

Cummins believes that there are clear differences in acquisition and developmental patterns between conversational language (BICS) and academic language (CALP). He feels that misconceptions of the conceptual distinction between these two types of skills can contribute to the academic failure of second language students. In particular, Cummins believes the differences in the rate of acquisition of the two types of skills need to be considered.

There are two major aspects of CALP:

- Extensive vocabulary, complex grammar, and the correct use of the conventions of writing.
- The ability to use language to solve problems and stimulate cognitive development.

Researchers have identified three ways to help learners attain competence in academic language (CALP):

1. Encourage free reading, which helps learners absorb the conventions of writing.
2. Teach subject matter in the second language to students who are second language learners.
 - The focus is on the subject (not language) and the emphasis is on meaning (not form), which results in more comprehensible input and more language acquisition.
 - Research shows that learners in these classes acquire considerable amounts of both second language and subject matter, while providing learners with exposure to the kind of language they will need to succeed in the academic mainstream.
3. Encourage proper use of the learner's first language.
 - Good instruction in the first language gives learners knowledge which makes second language input much more comprehensible.
 - Good instruction in the first language helps learners develop literacy in the second language.

- If learners know how to read in their first language, the ability to read transfers quickly to other languages.
- The ability to use oral and written language to solve problems and gain new knowledge also transfers across languages.

Other Approaches to Second Language Acquisition

Freirean Approach

In the late 1950s, Paulo Freire developed a program of literacy instruction for rural Brazilian villagers. Freire's literacy instruction was based on lists of words and vocabulary that he considered critical to life in Brazil. From these lists, *generative words* became the basis for helping learners develop basic decoding and encoding skills.

Referred to as participatory, learner-centered, or liberatory education, Freirean approaches revolve around the discussion of issues drawn from learners' real-life experiences. The theory is that education and knowledge have value only insofar as they help people liberate themselves from the social conditions that oppress them.

The following concepts are central to the Freirean approach:

- Generative words and themes are the basis for conversation, reading, and writing activities.
- Learners begin with encoding and decoding exercises and move to more complex activities.
- Collaboration and dialog are ongoing among teachers and learners; they face one another and discuss issues of concern in their lives.
- Instruction is often presented as problem posing using objects, pictures, and written texts; teachers and learners describe what they see, examine the relationships among the objects and people represented, and talk about how they feel about what they see. Ultimately, they articulate the problem illustrated and propose solutions.

Communicative Language Teaching

During the 1970s, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) evolved as linguists began to look at language as a tool for expressing meaning. CLT emphasized meaning over form, fluency over accuracy, and reinforced learner-centered education. In CLT, the teacher/tutor sets up a situation that students are likely to encounter in real life. Students' motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics.

Second Language Acquisition Instructional Programs

The three major approaches to SLA are English immersion programs, bilingual education programs, and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

English Immersion

English immersion instruction is entirely in English. Lessons are delivered in simplified English so that students learn English while learning academic subjects. The focus is on meaning through subject matter instruction. Canadian French immersion programs are a well-known French version of immersion programs. Research on French immersion programs has found evidence that this type of approach is successful; learners develop fluency, functional abilities, and confidence in using the language. However, French immersion learners do not tend to do well in terms of learning and using correct grammar forms.

Bilingual Education

Bilingual education incorporates use of both the first and second languages; thereby, ensuring that learners will continue academically while learning English as their second language. The rationale is that if learners are taught some subjects in their native language, they can learn English without losing ground academically. Critics of bilingual education argue that this approach keeps learners dependent on their native language and slows the process of learning English. Proponents of bilingual education argue that if learners first learn to read in their native language and then transfer those skills over to English, they will develop stronger English literacy skills in the long term.

There are two forms of bilingual education:

- Transitional bilingual education is taught to groups of learners who share the same native language. Instruction for some subjects is in the learners' native language, while they also receive instruction in developing English language skills.
- Two-way bilingual education (also called dual-immersion or dual-language) is characterized by instruction given in two languages. The goal is for learners to become proficient in both languages. Instruction is usually team taught by instructors who are proficient in both languages; each instructor is responsible to teach in only one of the languages.

English as a Second Language (ESL)

A general definition of ESL is the teaching/learning of English for use in a setting where English is the primary language. The ESL approach shares many of the characteristics of English immersion instruction. Typically, classes are comprised of limited English-speaking learners who speak many different languages. They may attend classes to work strictly on English skills or they may focus on both academics and English. The teacher uses the *English only* approach to instruction. They may also be matched with a tutor, who also uses the *English only* approach to tutoring activities.

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

A general definition of English as a Second Language (ESL) is the teaching/learning of English for use in a setting where English is the primary language. Typically, ESL classes enroll limited or non-English-speaking learners who speak many different languages; ESL learners may or may not be literate in their first language (L1). ESL learners may attend classes to work strictly on English skills or they may study both academics and English. The teacher uses the *English only* approach to instruction in basic reading, writing, and math skills, as well as speaking and listening skills. The need to communicate is intensified with ESL students and it is important to remember that, if they are new arrivals to the United States, they are adjusting to American culture at the same time that they are learning a new language.

The Need for English as a Second Language

During the 1970s, immigration into the United States began to increase as refugees from Southeast Asia and Central America began to arrive. The 1990 Census reported 25.5 million people in the United States were speaking languages other than English in their homes; this was almost a 40 percent increase over 1980. Of those, it was estimated that between 12 and 14 million adults had serious difficulties with speaking, understanding, reading, and writing English.

In the 1990s, the U.S. immigrant population grew rapidly, and in many states, the foreign-born population more than doubled between 1990 and 2000 (Capps, Fix, & Passel, 2002).

- In 2000, 68 percent of the nation's foreign-born population lived in California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Texas (Capps, Fix, & Passel, 2002).
- Between 1990 and 2000, the immigrant population in 22 states grew twice as fast as it did in the six states mentioned above.
- States with the largest ESL enrollments included Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Texas, and Washington (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). These states have developed infrastructures and systems to serve English language learners.
- At the same time, states that have not previously had significant numbers of immigrants have witnessed a rapid growth of their immigrant populations.
- The following states experienced more than 125 percent growth: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Kentucky, Nebraska, Nevada, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah (Capps, et al., 2002).

The foreign-born population comes from all over the world, but most come from Latin America or Mexico.

- In 2000, more than one-quarter of the foreign-born population came from Mexico, and over half from Latin America generally (primarily Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador).
- Of the remaining immigrants from Latin America, 2.8 million were born in Caribbean countries, and 1.9 million in South America (Capps, Passel, Perez-Lopez, & Fix, 2003; U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

More than 35 million adults in the United States are native speakers of a language other than English (U. S. Census Bureau, 2001). The majority of individuals who speak a language other than English at home speak Spanish (60 percent).

- The United States is already the fifth largest Spanish-speaking nation in the world. By 2010, only Mexico will have more Spanish-speakers than the U.S.
- The majority of individuals who speak a language other than English at home speak Spanish (60 percent).
- The second most prevalent language is Chinese.
- The remaining eight of the top 10 languages spoken are (in descending order) French, German, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Italian, Korean, and Polish (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).

The rate of immigration to the U.S. has increased steadily since the end of World War II, thereby increasing the need for ESL classes. Today's immigrants are poorer than previous generations of immigrants and they are more likely to remain poor longer, be more reliant on public assistance programs,

and be uninsured. According to the Center for Immigration Statistics, lower educational levels among populations of new immigrants are the main cause for this poverty gap (Camarota, 2001).

Immigrants compose an increasingly large share of the U.S. labor force and a growing share of low-wage workers. Immigrants are 11 percent of all U.S. residents, but 14 percent of all workers and 20 percent of low-wage workers (Capps, Fix, Passel, Ost, & Perez-Lopez, 2003).

Nearly two-thirds of low-wage immigrant workers do not speak English proficiently, and most of these workers have had little formal education. Immigrant workers are much more likely than natives to drop out of high school (30 versus 8 percent), and are far more likely to have less than a ninth-grade education (18 versus 1 percent). Three-fourths of all U.S. workers with less than a ninth-grade education are immigrants (Capps, Fix, Passel, Ost, & Perez-Lopez, 2003).

Enrollment in ESL Programs

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of adult learners enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Almost half of the adult education students served in federally funded programs are English language learners. Population trends and projections for the next 10 years indicate that the number of adult English language learners in the United States will continue to grow

In program year 2002-2003, 43 percent of participants in state-administered adult education programs were enrolled in ESL classes (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

- Data from the U.S. Department of Education, Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) indicate that 1.1 million ESL students were enrolled in federally funded programs in 2002, and almost 1.2 million in 2003.
- This does not include those served in adult basic education (ABE) and adult secondary education (ASE) classes, private language schools and academic institutions, as well as volunteer literacy services and other community-based programs.
- Of the 1.2 million adult learners in 2003, almost 50 percent were of Hispanic or Asian origin.
- Other learners were Africans, Eastern Europeans, and Pacific Islanders (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

In Pennsylvania, the numbers of ABE and GED students have fluctuated over the past few years, but the percentage of ESL students has increased steadily since program year (PY) 1996-97, when ESL students made up 23 percent of adult learners. ESL students made up 25 percent of adult learners during PY 1997-98, 27 percent during PY 1998-99, 29 percent in PY 1999-2000, and 31 percent in PY 2002-03. The percentage of ESL students was only slightly lower than the previous year in PY 2003-04 when it was 29.7 percent. A total of 16,195 adults were enrolled in ABE-funded ESL classes during PY 2004-05; these adult learners represented 30 percent of the total number of adult learners served.

Why Adults Participate

Participants in adult ESL classes give a number of reasons for enrolling in programs. They want to:

- Learn English to communicate in their everyday lives.
- Get a job or pursue better employment.
- Become a citizen of the United States.
- Get a high school diploma or GED (General Educational Development) certificate.
- Acquire skills needed to advance to higher education programs (e.g., vocational training, college, university).
- Acquire skills to help their children succeed in school.

(Skilton-Sylvester & Carlo, 1998; Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2003.)

RESEARCH-BASED SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

Research on Learning Strategies

Research indicates that the conscious, purposeful use of learning strategies is related to language achievement and proficiency (Oxford et al., 1993; Thompson & Rubin, 1993). ESL learners need guidance in how to use specific strategies efficiently and effectively as a way to improve language learning and academic performance (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995).

Research indicates that if learners explore how, when and why to use specific learning strategies, and evaluate and monitor their own learning, they will become more actively engaged, self-directed, and independent learners (Cohen, 1998). In turn, they will become more efficient and positive in their approach to learning, which will increase motivation, self-efficacy, learner autonomy, the transfer of skills, and language proficiency.

Research has shown that all learners can benefit from instruction in learning strategies. In a training project to develop self-evaluation and monitoring strategies, Wenden (1987) found that providing ESL adult learners with a checklist of criteria to self-evaluate their speaking skills resulted in successful use of self-evaluation as a learning strategy. Researchers report that learning strategies are teachable and can have positive effects on task performance and the language learning process (Gagne, 1985; Sano, 1999; Johnson, 1999; Dadour, 1996).

Chamot and O'Malley's (1994) research on second language learners reinforces the idea that students who learn to consciously monitor their own learning, and who have a repertoire of strategies to use when learning becomes difficult, perform better than students who do not use learning strategies. Successful language learners tend to select strategies that work well together in a highly orchestrated way, tailored to the requirements of the learning task; well-tailored combinations of strategies often have more impact than single strategies (Chamot & Kupper, 1989). Successful language learners can easily explain the strategies they use and why they use them (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Learning strategies are particularly effective when used with communicative approaches to second language teaching. Researchers Canale and Swain (1980) recognized the importance of communication strategies as a key aspect of communicative competence. Communication strategies are used by learners intentionally and consciously in order to cope with difficulties in communicating in a second language (Bialystok, 1990). According to Oxford (1990), learning strategies are especially because they are tools for active, self-directed learning, which is essential for developing communicative competence.

Researchers report a desire for control and autonomy of learning on the part of the learner through the use of learning strategies (Oxford, 1990; Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Cohen (1990) believes that use of particular strategies must be a conscious choice on the part of the learner. Researchers have summarized key features of learning strategies:

1. Allow learners to become more self-directed.
2. Are problem-oriented.
3. Involve many aspects of learning, not just the cognitive.
4. Can be taught.
5. Are flexible.
6. Can be transferred.
7. Are influenced by a variety of factors (Oxford, 1990).

Second Language Learning Strategies

Second language (L2) learning strategies are specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques learners use to improve their progress in understanding, internalizing, and using the L2 (Oxford, 1990). Strategies are the tools for the active, self-directed involvement learners need for developing L2 communicative ability (O'Malley & Chabot, 1990).

O'Malley & Chamot's list of learning strategies for ESL students (1990):

- A. Metacognitive strategies:** higher-order skills that may entail planning for, monitoring, or evaluating the success of a learning activity' (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).
- *advance organizers:* planning the learning activity in advance.
 - *directed attention:* deciding to concentrate on general aspects of a learning task.
 - *selective attention:* deciding to pay attention to specific parts of the language input or the situation that will help learning.
 - *self-management:* trying to arrange the appropriate conditions for learning.
 - *advance preparation:* planning the linguistic components for a forthcoming language task.
 - *self-monitoring:* checking one's performance as one speaks.
 - *delayed production:* deliberately postponing speaking so that one may learn by listening.
 - *self-evaluation:* checking how well one is doing against one's own standards.
 - *self-reinforcement:* giving oneself rewards for success.
- B. Cognitive strategies:**
- *repetition:* imitating other people's speech overtly or silently.
 - *resourcing:* making use of language materials such as dictionaries.
 - *directed physical response:* responding physically.
 - *translation:* using the first language as a basis for understanding and/or producing the L2.
 - *grouping:* organizing learning on the basis of common attributes.
 - *note-taking:* writing down the gist of texts.
 - *deduction:* conscious application of rules to processing the L2.
 - *recombination:* putting together smaller meaningful elements into new wholes.
 - *imagery:* visualizing information for memory storage.
 - *auditory representation:* keeping a sound or sound sequence in the mind.
 - *key word:* using key word memory techniques, such as identifying an L2 word with an L1 word that it sounds like.
 - *contextualization:* placing a word or phrase in a meaningful language sequence.
 - *elaboration:* relating new information to other concepts in memory.
 - *transfer:* using previous knowledge to help language learning.
 - *inferencing:* guessing meanings by using available information.
 - *question for clarification:* asking a teacher, tutor, or native speaker for explanation, help, etc.
- C: Social mediation strategies:**
- *cooperation:* working with fellow students on language or other learning tasks.

Use of Learning Strategies

Certain learning strategies or clusters of strategies are linked to particular language skills or tasks. For example:

- L2 writing benefits from planning, self-monitoring, deduction (applying rules for comprehension), and substitution (selecting alternative words, etc.) learning strategies.
- L2 speaking benefits from paraphrasing, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation strategies.
- L2 listening comprehension benefits from elaboration (relating new information to prior knowledge), inferencing, selective attention, and self-monitoring strategies.
- L2 reading comprehension benefits from reading aloud, guessing, deduction, and summarizing strategies (Chamot & Kupper, 1989).
- Cognitive (translating, analyzing, etc.) and metacognitive (planning, organizing, etc.) strategies are often used together, to support each other (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Oxford (1990) synthesized existing research to identify factors that influence the choice of learning strategies used by students learning a second language.

- More motivated learners tended to use more strategies than less motivated learners.
- The particular reason for studying the language was important in the choice of strategies.
- Females reported greater overall strategy use than males in many studies, although sometimes males surpassed females in the use of a particular strategy.

- Attitudes and beliefs were reported to have a profound effect on the strategies learners choose, with negative attitudes and beliefs often causing poor strategy use or lack of orchestration of strategies.
- The nature of the task helped determine the strategies naturally employed to carry out the task.
- Students of different ages and stages of L2 learning used different strategies, with certain strategies often being employed by older or more advanced students.
- Learning style often determined the choice of L2 learning strategies.

Rubin (1975) reported that successful L2 learners (1) are willing and accurate guessers; (2) have a strong drive to communicate; (3) are often uninhibited; (4) are willing to make mistakes; (5) focus on form by looking for patterns and analyzing; (6) take advantage of all practice opportunities; (7) monitor their speech, as well as that of others; and (8) pay attention to meaning.

Training ESL Students to Use Learning Strategies

Researchers have identified two approaches to strategy training: uninformed strategy instruction and direct and integrated instruction.

Uninformed strategy instruction

In uninformed strategy instruction, students work with learning materials and activities designed to elicit the use of specific strategies, but are not informed of the name, purpose, or value of the specific learning strategy (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995). The most common uninformed strategies are *textbook rubrics*, which are language textbooks that include instructions such as: *Read the text, are any of your ideas mentioned?* and *Close your book, can you remember the advice?*

Textbook rubrics assume that learners will identify and use the appropriate metacognitive, memory and social strategies, using the cues to use specific strategies that are embedded in the text (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995; Cohen, 1999). Wenden (1987) argues that there are three conditions that may prevent learners from benefiting from textbook rubrics: (1) some learners will not understand instructions that have been written in the target language, (2) not all learners will have an awareness of the specific strategy being cued, and (3) learners may not develop metacognitive awareness about a specific strategy's use and purpose, which will prevent them from adding it to their strategy repertoire and successfully transferring it to new tasks.

Direct and integrated instruction

Direct and integrated instruction informs learners of the value and purpose of learning strategies and helps them identify, develop, and use strategies in a systematic way as they learn the target language (O'Malley & Chamot, 1995). In this approach, the teacher or tutor helps learners become aware of the purpose and benefits of using specific strategies and provides opportunities for practice and self-evaluation (Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1987). As a result, adults become efficient learners who have developed the skills to successfully organize and conduct their own learning (Wenden, 1987).

Learning Strategies Questionnaire

When you are learning another language in the classroom, what special things do you do or what tricks do you use for:

- learning grammar
- getting meanings from contexts
- using the language socially outside the classroom
- using the language for work, obtaining information, etc. (Bialystok, 1983).

Research-based guidelines for strategy training for L2 learners:

- Strategies should be chosen so that they mesh with and support each other, and so that they fit the requirements of the language task, learners' goals, and learners' style of learning.
- Strategy training should, if possible, be integrated into regular L2 activities over a long period of time, rather than taught as a separate, short intervention.
- Learners should have plenty of opportunities for strategy training during tutoring sessions.
- Strategy training should include explanations, handouts, activities, brainstorming, and materials for reference and home study.
- Affective issues that can influence strategy choice and success (such as anxiety, motivation, beliefs, and interests) should be directly addressed by L2 strategy training.
- Strategy training should be explicit, overt, and relevant, and should provide plenty of practice with varied L2 tasks involving authentic materials.
- Strategy training should be somewhat individualized, as different learners prefer or need certain strategies for particular tasks.
- Strategy training should provide learners with a mechanism to evaluate the value of particular strategies and their own progress.

Training Adult ESL Students to Use Learning Strategies

Preview learning materials to identify appropriate strategies.

Name and describe the strategy so learners obtain an understanding of the strategy and its purpose; why it is important, when it can be used, and how to use it.

Model its use and explain how to perform the strategy, step-by-step.

Provide ample assisted practice time, monitor, provide cues, and give feedback. Practice results in automaticity so the learner doesn't have to think about using the strategy.

Promote learner self-monitoring and evaluation of strategy use. Learners will be more likely to use the strategy if they see how it works for them; it will then become part of their learning schema.

Encourage continued use and generalization of the strategy. Help learners see how the strategy can be used in other learning situations and real-life settings.

TEACHING READING SKILLS

Overview of Reading Skills

English language learners have varied reading backgrounds and experiences; some are fluent readers in their native languages and others are not. Their view of literacy will be influenced by their own backgrounds and the literacy practices of their culture.

Research on the reading development of adult English language learners has focused primarily on: phonological processing, vocabulary knowledge, syntactic processing, and background knowledge. These skills are included in the more extensive list of skills identified as fundamental to reading by the National Reading Panel report: alphabets (phonological awareness-phonemic awareness and phonics), fluency, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension.

Approaches to Reading Instruction

A *bottom-up* approach to reading instruction is based on the assumption that learners have acquired oral language as native speakers usually do in childhood—students begin the process of learning to read with learning sounds and letter-sound correspondences. A *top-down* approach is based on the theory that comprehension comes from within the learner—the background knowledge of learners helps them predict meaning from text, even if all the words are not understood. Since adult ESL learners may or may not have acquired English oral language, teachers and tutors need to tailor reading instruction to meet individual learner needs, which may mean helping learners create meaning from text as they work on sound-spelling correspondences. A balance between the bottom-up and top-down approaches is often the best approach.

Teaching Decoding Skills

Phonological processing or alphabets, including phonemic awareness and phonics, is often referred to as decoding skills and involves interpreting written letters as sounds and combining letters correctly into words. It includes awareness of individual speech sounds and the ways sounds are represented in print by letters, syllables, and words.

Some English language learners come from countries that have no written alphabet, or where an alphabet is just being developed. If there is a written tradition in their country, the alphabet may be written from right to left, as is the Arabic alphabet. In other cases, learners' native writing may not be alphabetic, as with Chinese languages (Burt, Peyton, & Adams, 2003). ESL learners should be given opportunities to develop sound-symbol correspondence and letter recognition skills. This should not be done in isolation, but with familiar texts that they have practiced orally or heard before.

Learning the alphabet will take time. Introduce only a few letters at a time, starting with uppercase letters. Learners should not be expected to master the alphabet all at once. Manipulatives work well.

- Cut letters out of construction paper—they should be at least four inches high.
- Post a chart of the whole alphabet during each tutoring session. Point to the letter *A* on the alphabet chart and say, “This is the letter *A*.”

- **Decoding** is the process of word identification. The terms “word identification” and “decoding” are usually considered to be broader than phonics. Using phonics is only one of several important approaches to identifying words.
- **Phonemic awareness (PA)** is the awareness of sounds that make up spoken words. PA is not necessary for speaking and understanding spoken language, but it is important for learning to read.
- **Phonics** focuses on the alphabetic system. It is a way of teaching reading and spelling that stresses symbol-sound relationships.
- **Word analysis** is a general term that usually refers to word identification or decoding. Some researchers refer to using word parts to determine the meaning and pronunciation of unknown words as word analysis; other researchers define word analysis as phonics.
- **Word structural analysis** is the process of using familiar word parts (base words, prefixes, and suffixes) to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words.
- **Cues** aid in the identification of unknown words and can involve phonics (letter-sound associations), structural analysis (word meaning elements) and semantic (meaning) and syntactic (rules and patterns of language) information (Hodges & Harris, 1995).

- Write the letter *A* on the board or on a piece of paper and say, “This is the letter *A*.”
- Hold up the cutout letter *A* and say, “This is the letter *A*.”
- Hold up the letter and ask the learner, “What letter is this?”
- Repeat steps until all letters of the alphabet are introduced and then begin with lowercase letters.

Learners need to know the sounds of the letters in English.

- Begin with the consonants that the learners are most familiar with—from their names or common words they know.
- Introduce a few sounds at a time.
- Point to or hold up the letter *B*. Ask the student, “What letter is this?”
- Say, “The letter is *B*; the sound is /b/.”
- Ask, “What is the sound?”

Phonemic Awareness (PA)

Phonemic awareness is the ability to focus on and manipulate sounds in spoken words. Words are made up of single phonemes and phonemes that are blended together (sl, tr, ck, lp). Some phonemes (k, t, g, p, b, d, etc.) cannot be said without adding a vowel.

Since Elkonin (1963) first suggested that training in phonemic awareness is a good beginning to reading instruction, many other researchers have concurred. In alphabetic languages, letters and letter clusters represent phonemes. Understanding phonemes helps learners understand the correspondences between letters and sounds (Hodges & Harris, 1995).

Researchers report that PA can be taught and that direct instruction may be effective with adult ESL learners to increase reading achievement and, in particular, fluency. Research has found that adult learners have improved their ability to recognize words with regular and irregular spellings when word analysis skills were taught after instruction in PA.

Research also indicates that focused and explicit instruction in one or two PA skills at time is more likely to be effective than teaching three or more skills—for example, focusing on blending and segmenting skills may be most effective. Simple demonstration and corrective feedback have been found effective when teaching PA to ESL adult learners.

PA skills include the ability to

- Recognize individual sounds in words (phoneme isolation).
- Recognize common sounds in different words (phoneme identity).
- Recognize the word with the odd sound out of a group of words (phoneme categorization).
- Listen to a sequence of separately spoken sounds and combine them into a recognizable word (phoneme blending).
- Break words into sounds (phoneme segmentation).
- Recognize what word remains when a specific phoneme is removed (phoneme deletion).

The goal is to teach learners to:

- Hear rhymes and alliteration.
- Rhyme words.
- Compare and contrast the sounds of words for rhyme and alliteration.
- Blend and split (segment) syllables.
- Count out the number of phonemes in a word.
- Add or delete a particular phoneme and regenerate a word from the remainder.
- Discriminate between pairs of words that are pronounced orally.
- Discriminate among objects, some with the target sound and others without.

Adult learners should have at least some phonemic awareness skills before beginning phonics instruction. They should be able to demonstrate their understanding that every spoken word consists of a sequence of basic speech sounds and a sequence of letters represents a sequence of sounds.

PA teaching strategies

- Use letters, rather than only oral instruction, to teach adults how to manipulate phonemes.
- Use PA instruction and systematic phonics instruction to help adults decode regularly and irregularly spelled words.
- Use guided oral reading procedures and other fluency instructional techniques to supplement regular word recognition instruction.
- Use systematic phonics programs that focus on individual phonemes or that focus on larger parts of words; for example; (1) synthetic phonics programs and (2) programs that emphasize the analysis and blending of larger subparts of words including onsets, rimes, phonograms, and spelling patterns.
- Avoid drill and rote memorization and, instead, encourage curiosity about language and experimentation with words.
- Engage learners in activities that direct their attention to the sounds in words, such as rhyming and alliteration games.
- Combine instruction in blending with instruction in letter-sound relationships.
- Teach blending and segmentation as complementary processes.
- Systematically sequence examples when teaching blending and segmentation.
- Give learners a starting word and ask them to list rhyming words.
- Present learners with word pairs, some alike and some different. Have learners indicate which pairs are different and which ones are alike. For example:

<i>run-ran</i>	<i>man-man</i>	<i>tub-tug</i>	<i>cube-tube</i>
<i>ten-ten</i>	<i>bit-bet</i>	<i>pat-pet</i>	<i>got-pot</i>
<i>fast-fast</i>	<i>top-tap</i>		

- Give learners groups of words and ask them to identify those that begin with the target sound. For example: *doll, dog, bat, dish, frog*

Elkonin Strategy and Boxes

Elkonin (1963) developed a strategy for segmenting words:

- Give learners a matrix where the individual boxes correspond to the number of sounds in a selected word.
- Each box should contain the grapheme(s) that represent the phoneme for which they stand.
- Guide learners in drawing a matrix for different words. For example, have learners replace the letters in the matrix below with these letters: S T O P

S	U	N
---	---	---

Phonics Skills

Phonics helps learners develop an approximate pronunciation of an unknown word. Phonics involves association of letters and sounds, syllables, word families, onset and rimes, sequential decoding, and decoding by analogy.

Understanding how the alphabetic writing system relates to the spoken English language is fundamental to learning how to spell English words. Phonics instruction should be systematic, meaningful, contextual, and functional. This means that specific phonics skills should be taught when the learner is ready to use them in reading. It is recommended that the following two main approaches to phonics instruction be used in combination.

- An **analytic approach** teaches consonants in the context of the entire word to avoid the distortion of the sounds, which can easily happen when teaching them in isolation. For example, the letter *c* is taught as the sound that is heard at the beginning of the word *cat*, not as an isolated *c* sound.
- In a **synthetic approach**, each word is decoded sound by sound, and both vowels and consonants are taught in isolation. For example, the word *cat* would be taught as three separate units: *cuh-a-tuh*. The consonant sounds can become distorted without the vowel sound being added.

Teaching Phonics

The following sequence for teaching phonics is recommended:

1. Alliteration, rhyme, onset, and rimes.
2. Single consonant sounds
3. Consonant blends (*bl*, *gr*, and *sp*)
4. Consonant digraphs (*sh*, *ch*, and *th*)
5. Short vowels
6. Long vowels
7. Vowel or vowel-consonant pairs (*oo*, *ew*, *oi*, and *oy*)

Teaching Ideas

- Type a short story omitting all the vowels. Have learners read the story and write in all the vowels.
- Make two columns of words. Each column needs to have a word that shares the same vowel sound. Have learners connect words with the same sounds.
- Have learners check words in a list that have either a soft or hard *c* and *g*.
- Use words and names that are part of learners' visual environment to reinforce letter-sound associations.
- Create a phonics chart that contains words with a particular phonogram (a group of words which share the same letter combination associated with a sound).
- Have learners brainstorm to generate a long list of words containing a particular phonogram.

Analogy Technique

Some educators feel the best way to teach learners to decode words is by analogy. Analogy is a technique that involves familiarity with similar words (analogy) using onsets (beginning consonants, consonant blends, or consonant digraphs) and rimes (word families). Give learners the first word (header) and then have learners identify the words in the group. Usually an onset is attached to the rime.

b-at
c-at
f-at
h-at
p-at
s-at
v-at

Other rimes include: *ab*, *ack*, *ade*, *ag*, *ake*, *alk*, *ame*, *all*, *an*, *ark*, *ate*, *eat*, *eld*, *end*, *id*, *ift*, *ink*, *oke*, *old*, *ook*, *oon*, *ub*, *uck*, *ump*, *unk*, *it*, *oad*, *oat*, *op*, *ot*, *ote*, *oud*.

Vowel Patterns

Vowel sounds can be spelled many ways, making them difficult to decode. For example, the long *e* sound can be spelled in 17 ways. Teaching vowel patterns produces good results. There are five main vowel patterns:

- VC (short vowel-consonant) (*bit*)
- VCC (short vowel-consonant-consonant) (*neck*)
- VCE (long vowel-silent e) (*cake*)
- VVC (long vowel) (only *ai*, *ea*, *ee*, *oa* – [*wait*])
- CV (long vowel) (*so*, *he*, *fly*)

Teaching Fluency Strategies

Proficient readers recognize the vast majority of words in texts quickly, which allows them to focus on the meaning of the text. They are able to decode words in text automatically, with no conscious cognitive efforts (Eskey, 1988). Since approximately 300 words account for 65 percent of the words in texts, rapid recognition of these words is the foundation of fluent reading. This is particularly important for ESL learners because reading in a second language is usually a slow, laborious process (Anderson, 1999).

The 100 Most Frequently Used Words in the English Language

the	he	be	but	which	out	into	no	made	long
of	for	this	what	their	them	has	make	over	little
and	was	from	all	said	then	more	than	did	very
a	on	I	were	if	she	her	first	down	after
to	are	have	when	do	many	two	been	only	words
in	as	or	we	will	some	like	its	way	called
is	with	by	there	each	so	him	who	find	just
you	his	one	can	about	these	see	now	use	where
that	they	had	an	how	would	time	people	may	most
it	at	not	your	up	other	could	my	water	know

Research identifies two effective teaching strategies to improve reading fluency: *repeated reading* and *extensive reading*. Both approaches have been found to increase ESL students' automatic word recognition.

- *Repeated reading* (Samuels, 1979) engages learners in re-reading a short passage silently or orally until they are able to read it with ease. Re-reading passages have been found to increase students' oral reading rates and accuracy, and improve their comprehension (Young, Bowers, & MacKinnon, 1996). Blum, Koskinen, Tennant, Parker, Straub, and Curry (1995) found that repeated reading improved ESL learners' ability to read fluently and accurately books of increasing difficulty, and also enhanced their motivation to read.
- *Extensive reading* encourages students to read for pleasure and information both inside and outside the classroom, to read for meaning, and to engage in sustained silent reading (Day & Bamford, 1998; Davis, 1995; Krashen, 1995). Researchers have found that extensive reading improves ESL students' reading comprehension (Mason & Krashen, 1997), promotes their vocabulary knowledge development (Day, Omura, & Hiramatsu, 1991), and enhances their writing skills (Hafiz and Tudor, 1990) and oral proficiency (Cho & Krashen, 1994). Extensive reading has also been reported to be effective in facilitating growth of readers' positive attitudes toward reading and increasing their motivation to read (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Mason & Krashen, 1997), and in increasing reading speed and comprehension (Bell, 2001).

Teaching Vocabulary Development Strategies

Vocabulary knowledge includes the number of words a learner knows and the amount of knowledge a learner has about a specific word. The number of vocabulary words is important to English language learners, as they frequently know far fewer English words than native speakers and find themselves at a disadvantage, particularly in academic contexts (Folse, 2004). However, they also need to know how to pronounce and spell the word, what the root of the word is, if there are prefixes or suffixes attached to the word, what part of speech the word represents, how the word is used in sentences, what connotations the word has, if there are multiple meanings of the word, and in what contexts the word is used.

Help ESL learners develop vocabulary through a variety of techniques.

- Use visuals to present new words.
- Develop matching exercises to match words to known words or pictures.
- Demonstrate some words.
- Use parts of speech to help learners build words.
- Ask learners to guess the meaning of words from the context (see cloze procedures).
- Use lexical sets to help learners connect words.
- Teach dictionary skills.
- Check to make sure learners have the correct meaning of words by using a technique called *concept checking*--which is simply asking learners questions such as, "Can you borrow books from a gas station?"

Adult Learner Activity: Fill in the Blank

Using a word that adults will need to learn, write the complete word.
Then write the word with one letter missing, replaced by a blank that learners fill in.
Keep adding blanks until learners are writing (and spelling) the entire word on their own.

Time

_ime

_i_e

i _

Write the word on their own: _ _ _ _

Teach vocabulary before the learner reads the passage.

Because a learner needs to know 95 - 98 percent of the words in a text to be able to predict from context, teaching vocabulary through context clues has limited success with adult English language learners. As such, teaching words before they appear in a text is recommended. Try using flash cards or roleplaying conversations.

Make two sets of flash cards: one set of five or six vocabulary items to be practiced and one depicting visuals of the words.

- Hold up one of the cards and say, "This word is [say the word]."
- Have the student repeat the word several times.
- Hold up another card and repeat the procedure until all the vocabulary words have been introduced.
- Display the card next to the appropriate visual and have the student read the word, first with you, then alone.
- Have the student put the word cards next to the appropriate visual and say the word.

Talking about the topic provides the content of reading for beginning-level learners. Because of limited written and oral vocabulary, beginning-level students will need to hear words and concepts several times before they feel comfortable reading it. One way to do this is to role play a conversation between two people.

- Draw stick figures of two people.
- Move from side to side in front of each figure as you model the conversation.
- Have the student repeat each line of conversation several times.

Once the learners have practiced the conversation orally, they can begin to read it.

- Write each line of the conversation on a strip of paper.
- Put the strips, in order of the conversation, on the board or a wall.
- Read the sentences, pointing to each word as you read it.
- Have the student read aloud with you several times, and then alone.
- Hand each of the sentence strips to the student and have him or her put them in order.

Keep a running list of vocabulary items.

These can be words from instructional materials, discussions, or words that learners have heard at home, at work, or in the community.

- Have learners keep their own vocabulary notebook where they write down the word and its definition and other strategies that help them remember the words (e.g., translation in native language, drawing, use in a sentence).

Every tutoring session, review several of the words in a different way so that the learners have lots of exposure to the words. Choose from the following list:

- Give the meaning of the word and ask which word it is.
- Find a theme and ask which words belong.
- Ask about words that can go together.
- Ask which words are hard to remember and which words are easy to remember.

Teaching Prefixes and Suffixes

A learner's vocabulary can be increased with the use of prefixes and suffixes.

Prefixes

- Teach different prefixes and their meanings. For example, prefixes that make a word negative.
- Review the meaning of these words so that you are certain the learner understands them.
- Have learners replace words in sentences with a negative prefix word that has the same meaning. For example, have the learner replace, *It is against the law* with *It is illegal*.

Suffixes

Teach different word suffixes and their meanings.

- Present the learner with a short passage with the suffixes underlined.
- Explain that the underlined part of the word is called a suffix because it comes at the end of the word, and that a suffix changes the part of speech of the word.
- Be sure to explain that a suffix can also change the meaning of the word.

Teaching Comprehension Strategies

Research indicates that, although learners approach reading in their native and other languages in a highly individual way, there are general factors, which have an impact on reading comprehension (Sarig, 1987; Anderson, 1991). Learners' reading comprehension strategy choices, as well as their background knowledge, have a significant impact on second language reading comprehension (Afflerbach, 1990; Barnett, 1988). Haenggi and Perfetti (1992, 1994) and Bialystok (1991) believe that comprehension is determined primarily by the efficiency with which readers can identify words and encode them into working memory.

Research reports that when ESL students read in a second language (L2), they have access to their first language (L1) as they read and many use it as a strategy to help comprehend the L2 text. Several studies have shown that translation, using L1 as a means for understanding and/or producing L2, is a common cognitive strategy for adult language learners (Block, 1986; Chamot, Kupper, & Impink-Hernandez, 1988; O'Malley, Kupper, & Impink-Hernandez, 1987). These researchers believe that all second language learners access their L1 while trying to comprehend L2 text, and that their L1 is constantly available to them.

Cook (1992) believes that as learners acquire L2 knowledge, it is being linked to their L1 knowledge. Cohen (1995) found that learners with access to two or more languages automatically shift between them because it is easier for them to think in one language than another or because using another language helps them understand the grammar or vocabulary of L2. Kern (1994) reported that learners made frequent use of translation as a strategy to understand the L2 text to facilitate the construction of meaning. Hawras (1996) believes that, for beginning language learners, translation is the only comprehension tool at the student's disposal.

Reading comprehension skills include:

- Activating prior knowledge.
- Creating visual images.
- Asking questions of text.
- Inferring.
- Summarizing and synthesizing.
- Self-monitoring of reading processes.

Teaching reading comprehension skills involves:

- Modeling and explanation of specific strategies by thinking aloud (metacognition processes).
- Guided practice, using a variety of text and print genres.
- Independent practice with feedback.
- Application of strategies in real reading situations.

Background Knowledge - Schema Theory

Schema theory describes the process by which readers combine their own background knowledge with the information in a text to comprehend that text. All readers carry different schemata (background information) and these are also often culture-specific. This is an important concept in ESL teaching, and pre-reading tasks are often designed to build or activate the learner's schemata.

Background knowledge aids in reading comprehension. Readers generally understand texts more easily if they are familiar with the topics covered and the genres and text structures involved. Text about culturally familiar topics should be selected for beginning ESL students and teachers should build on ideas and concepts from learners' cultures and personal experiences whenever possible.

Teach Pre-Reading Strategies

Pre-reading activities help readers think about what they are going to read. They help learners focus on the text and begin thinking in terms of what they already know about the subject. As a result, the text becomes more meaningful to them, which, in turn, increases their level of understanding. Examples of pre-reading strategies include previewing, brainstorming, determining the purpose for reading, understanding the author's language and writing style, activating prior knowledge, and predicting meaning.

Determining a Purpose for Reading

An effective reader has a purpose for reading a particular passage. The purpose may be to learn something specific, it may be to answer a question, or it may be for enjoyment. Have learners identify their purpose for reading by asking them to think about and discuss why they are reading a particular text.

Previewing

Previewing a passage involves (1) skimming the text, (2) reading headings, (3) reading the first sentence, and (4) scanning the passage to see if a key word is repeated. Ask learners to skim and preview the text by reading the title, the table of contents, headings, illustrations, charts, and tables. As they preview a passage, help them discover as much as possible about the text.

Examining the Author's Language and Writing Style

Language and style are determined by the writer's choice of point of view, diction, writing style, and tone. Understanding the author's writing style and use of language makes it easier for a learner to understand what the writer is trying to say.

Activating Prior Knowledge

KWL (K = Know, W = What, L = Learn) is a commonly used strategy that was developed by Ogle in 1986. KWL activates a learners' prior knowledge and can be used as an advance organizer to prepare learners to read a specific selection and also as a follow-up activity to encourage readers to think about what they've just read.

- K = Know—What do you already know about the topic or what do you now know that you didn't know before reading the text?
- W = What—What do you want to find out from reading the material or did you find what you were looking for?
- L = Learn—What do you want to learn from reading or what did you learn from reading?

Predicting Meaning

When learners make a prediction about what they are going to read, it involves higher level thinking rather than asking them what they have read which encourages literal recall.

- Making a prediction engages learners in the text by building on their existing understanding (schema).
- Learners will better understand text when they can connect with their own experiences and purposes for reading.
- Making a prediction prepares learners for reading and they are able to check the consistency of what actually happens against what they thought would happen.

Procedures:

Learners can be instructed make a prediction based on available clues, such as the title and subheadings; illustrations, tables, and charts or graphs; and a review of the table of contents. For example:

- Learners can use the index or table of contents to predict what they think a story will be about and what they would like to find out.
- They can use the title and illustrations for determining the author's purpose for writing the text.
- To further clarify the author's or their purpose for reading a long text, they can read to the end of the first page or second page or middle of the story or they can read several different parts of the story. At the end of each section, they can stop reading and refine their purpose.
- They can read the last page of the story first.
- They can identify key vocabulary words and make predictions based on the frequency with which certain vocabulary words are used.

Directed Reading Activities

Directed reading activities are step-by-step strategies that are used to teach learners reading skills. Directed reading strategies for reading comprehension begin with pre-reading activities that:

- Motivate learners for reading particular texts.
- Prepare learners for reading through previewing texts.
- Help learners activate, recall, and utilize their prior knowledge.
- Assist learners in predicting the meaning of what they are about to read.

During reading, directed reading activities include:

- Engaging learners in silent reading.
- Developing learners' vocabulary.

Directed reading activities involve critical reading skills, including:

- Identifying facts, main ideas, and details.
- Determining the chronology or sequence of events.
- Finding evidence to support or contradict predictions.

Identifying the Main Idea

The main idea is why the author is writing—it is the main point the writer is trying to make to the reader. It is important that learners see the difference between the main idea and the subject or topic of the paragraph—the main idea says something about the subject or makes an assertion about the subject.

- Show learners how the main idea holds the paragraph together and how all sentences in the paragraph relate to the main idea and provide details and supporting evidence—the main idea encompasses all of the sentences in the paragraph.
- Show learners the topic sentence of a paragraph and how it states the main idea. Explain that the rest of the sentences are supporting sentences that contain evidence, further explain, prove, or give examples of the main idea. The topic sentence is usually the first sentence, although it is sometimes the last sentence or can be anywhere in the middle of the paragraph.

To improve comprehension, instruct learners to:

- Identify the main idea in each paragraph to help them stay focused.
- One way of doing that is to have them underline the topic sentence.

Evaluating What Was Read

An important part of reading comprehension is the ability to evaluate what was read. After identifying the facts presented in the passage, help learners develop the skills to differentiate between fact and fiction, fact and judgment, and fact and opinion—these are important critical thinking skills, as well as reading comprehension skills.

- Point out that opinions and judgments are debatable—facts are not.
- Explain that facts are things we know for certain are true, things we know for certain have happened, and things we know for certain exist. Also explain that opinions are things we believe are true, we believe have happened, and we believe exist.

Using Graphic Aids and Illustrations

Help learners “read” graphic aids and understand illustrations, and connect them to the text. You can also suggest that learners develop and use their own graphic aids to help them understand text; for example, help learners develop their own story graphs.

Some examples of story graphs include:

- A *spider map* that is used to describe/illustrate a central idea.
- A *series of events chain* that describes/illustrates the stages of something.
- A *continuum scale* that is used to illustrate timelines.
- A *compare/contrast matrix* that is used to illustrate similarities and differences.
- A *problem/solution outline* that presents a problem, possible solutions, and expected results.
- A *network tree* that illustrates causal information.
- A *human interaction outline* that shows the nature of an interaction among people.
- A *fishbone map* that illustrates the cause and effect of an event.

Assessing Reading Comprehension

There are three basic ways to assess reading comprehension: questioning, retelling, and metacognition checks.

Questioning

Questioning requires writing good questions, being able to interpret responses, and asking probing questions if needed.

- A variety of questions should be asked and learners should be able to respond in a variety of ways.
- Questions should not simply ask learners to recall directly stated information (literal or factual information).
- When possible, questions should require learners to use higher-level critical thinking skills.

Retellings

Retelling can reveal more about a learner’s level of comprehension because it allows learners to tell what was important to them.

- Retellings can reveal how learners sequence events by the order they use when presenting information.
- Retellings also reveal learners’ oral language skills.

Metacognition Checks

Metacognition is awareness and knowledge of one’s mental processes. When doing a metacognition check, learners talk about the processes and strategies they use and what they are thinking before, during, and after they read. Learners are asked to reflect on their thinking as they read sentences or paragraphs.

- They can summarize what they’ve read or predict what is coming next.
- They can talk about difficulties they are having reading the passage.
- They can analyze what they’re reading.
- They can relate what they’re reading to their own experiences.
- They can evaluate what they’ve read.

Engage Learners in Reading

Use a variety of strategies to ensure that learners are actively engaged in reading.

- Plan learning activities that involve learners in the text or content; for example, have them reexamine, reconnect, and rethink the major ideas or concepts. Learners can gain a deeper understanding of the content by representing the text in new and different ways.
- Give learners opportunities to respond to texts. One suggestion is to have learners maintain reading logs, in which they copy quotes from the text and then write their own response; *first-response writes* are a technique in which learners read and then quickly write about the ideas that came to them as they were reading. Graphic logs are a variation; learners write quotes from the text and respond with a drawing or symbol that corresponds to the quote.
- Develop *beyond-the-text* learning activities that make learners go back to the text, reflect on its meaning, clarify and question, and reread with a different purpose in mind.

- One type of beyond-the-text activity is to have learners transform a piece of writing from one genre to another (e.g., rewrite a short story as a poem or play).
- Another is an *open-mind* activity to help learners understand what a character is thinking or feeling. Learners draw or are given a picture of an empty head. Inside the head, they can draw pictures of what the character sees, write questions the character might be wondering about, or write key words that show the character's feelings or ideas.

Select texts that meet learner needs and are interesting to them or let learners choose texts that are relevant to their lives. Use print materials that learners are likely to see in everyday life, such as newspapers and magazines, work memos, schedules, and medical instructions.

- Select texts that contain words and grammatical structures familiar to the learners (Eskey, 1997).
- Use authentic reading material, written by the learners themselves.

Encourage Free Reading

Free (voluntary) reading and sustained silent reading can build students' vocabulary and develop reading habits that extend beyond the classroom (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Coady, 1997). Extensive reading for a sustained, uninterrupted period of time is not only valuable for developing vocabulary, but is also an important way to develop reading proficiency and language acquisition in general (Grabe, 1991; Krashen, 1993).

- Encourage learners to read outside of tutoring sessions.
- Use a variety of methods to increase learners' interest so they will want to read more.
- Encourage learners to make reading a habit.
- Teach learners how to select an appropriate book.

Try the Language Experience Approach for ESL Learners

The language experience approach (LEA) is ideal for ESL learners with well-developed speaking skills and low-level reading and writing skills because it capitalizes on their strengths and allows their reading and writing to evolve naturally from their experiences and spoken language.

To use the LEA:

- Build on the experiences and language of learners.
- Encourage learners to discuss their experiences and provide activities that will allow them to generate language they have already developed.
- Then, transcribe learners' personal experiences as they dictate them to you.
- Read the transcription back to the learner.
- And, finally, help the learner read them.

TEACHING WRITING SKILLS

Research identifies two different approaches to second language writing: product-oriented and process-oriented.

- Product-oriented emphasizes getting it right.
- Process-oriented focuses on the steps that go into writing and involves multiple drafts.

The purpose of writing determines the most effective approach.

- Functional writing (such as filling out forms or writing checks or resumes) requires getting it right.
- Extensive writing tasks (such as letters, journals, and essays) require more planning and revising.

Scaffolded Writing

Scaffolding is the systematic support provided to learners by tutors or materials. Scaffolded writing is an effective technique for beginning level writers. Examples include:

- Provide text with key information missing.
- Give learners sentence starters.

Parallel writing is also an effective technique. Give learners a model and have them write a text using similar vocabulary, structures, and organization.

Extensive Writing

Extensive writing is appropriate for more advanced learners. Using the process approach to writing, have learners go through each of the steps.

- Identify purpose for writing.
- Identify the audience.
- Brainstorm ideas.
- Organize ideas using graphic organizers or outlines.
- Write first drafts, without worrying about mechanics.
- Share drafts.
- Revise and edit.

Suggestions for Responding to Learner Writing

- Always begin with a response to the content.
- Provide positive feedback on what is clear in their writing; I like the way you. . . .
- Develop editing marks that learners understand.
- Develop a realistic sense of what each learner can do and do not expect perfection.
- Do not rewrite their work.

Grammar

Grammar is the way language manipulates and combines words; it is a description of the structure of a language; and it is the way words change themselves and group together to become sentences.

Some grammar rules are more difficult for ESL learners to understand than others. For example, prepositions and idioms are often difficult for ESL learners.

Grammar Approaches

- A prescriptive approach to grammar specifies what is right and what is wrong.
- A descriptive approach to grammar focuses on describing and explaining the way people actually use language, and avoids making judgments about correctness.

Traditional Grammar

Traditional grammar begins with different word classes and studies how those word classes function in sentences. Word classes include nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, articles, and prepositions.

Traditional grammar recognizes seven different clause types that are created from word classes.

Clause Type
Subject + Verb
Subject + Verb + Object
Subject + Verb + Complement
Subject + Verb + Adverbial
Subject + Verb + Object + Object
Subject + Verb + Object + Complement
Subject + Verb + Object + Adverbial

Approaches to Teaching Grammar

Deductive Approach

In deductive teaching, the tutor presents the learner with a grammar rule and then gives the learner exercises to practice the rule.

- An example is the Grammar-Translation Approach to second language acquisition.

Advantages include:

- Gets straight to the point.
- More rules can be explained more quickly.
- Respects the intelligence and maturity of students.
- Acknowledges the cognitive role of language acquisition.
- Allows tutors to deal with grammar items as they come up.

Disadvantages include:

- Starting with grammar rules might be too much for younger or beginning learners.
- Explanations are not as easily remembered.
- Encourages the belief that learning a language is simply knowing the rules.

Inductive Approach

In inductive teaching, the tutor presents the learner with samples of language and the learner has to come to an intuitive understanding of the rule.

- An example is Audio-Lingual Method.

Advantages include:

- Rules learners learn for themselves make sense to them.
- The rules are more likely to be remembered.
- Learners are actively involved in the learning process, which motivates continued learning.
- Promotes problem solving and pattern recognition.
- Develops self-reliance and independence.

Disadvantages include:

- Time and energy spent working out rules may be extensive.
- Learners may hypothesize the wrong rule.

Writing Activities

Writing Stories

- Ask adult learners to copy a story.
- Have them underline all the parts they can read.
- Have them circle specific words that begin with a designated sound or common sight words.
- Erase some words, read the story, and ask learners to supply the missing words.

- Type the story, leaving out every fifth word, and ask learners to fill in the missing words (cloze procedure).
- Type the story and cut it into strips so that there is one sentence on each strip of paper.
- Scramble the sentences and ask learners to rearrange them in the proper sequence.

Completing Forms

Begin with NAME (first, middle initial, last), which learners always want to learn first.

Then add ADDRESS.

Continue this process until they can complete a simple form with their own personal identification items.

Making Lists

Making a list can be a great learning activity.

- *Shopping lists:* Learners write a list of things they want to buy. Then you can take a field trip to a store where they locate the items and their prices, or learners can do this as an outside activity.
- *Family lists:* Learners make a list with the names of members of their families, including their ages and relationship to the writer. If they add telephone numbers, this can be their emergency contact information.
- *'Who am I?' lists:* Learners list all the words they know that refer to their identity: wife, learner, mother, refugee, female, daughter, etc.

Writing Biographies—Language Experience Approach

Learners select photographs, hand-crafted items, ethnic costumes, musical instruments, and even special foods that mean something to them.

- You can take notes as learners talk about these items, and provide a simple story that each learner copies into a tiny book.
- More advanced learners can write their own story about these items.

ESL Dialogue Journals

A dialogue journal is a written conversation in which you and your learner communicate regularly.

- Dialogue journals can help you understand and address a learner's particular language and literacy needs.
- Dialogue journals not only provide a means of communication, but they also provide another context for language and literacy development.
- They provide adult learners with an opportunity to use English in a non-threatening atmosphere and interact with a proficient English writer.
- They also allow adult learners to use reading and writing in purposeful ways.

TEACHING SPEAKING AND LISTENING SKILLS

Encouraging ESL Learners to Speak

Sometimes ESL learners are reluctant to speak and there are several reasons why. Some learners are afraid of making mistakes or are afraid others will laugh at the way they speak. Others feel they don't know how to speak English or just don't like or want to speak English. Whatever the reason, there are some things you can do to encourage learners to speak English.

- Explain why speaking English is important to learners; how it helps them reach their personal goals; how it contributes to the well-being of their family.
- Encourage them to discuss why they don't want to speak English.
- Before an activity, teach the vocabulary that is needed and allow students to practice before they actually do the activity.
- Don't correct all mistakes; develop your own guidelines for correcting errors and mistakes.
- Don't correct mistakes while learners are speaking, wait until they finish.
- Repeat instructions in different ways.
- Ask learners to repeat instructions for activities.
- Give lots of praise and encouragement.

Pre-speaking skills are important because they help ESL learners gain confidence. They allow learners to think about what they want to say and the words they want to use. They also provide learners with an opportunity to practice.

- Roleplaying is a great way to practice speaking with ESL learners.
- You can also use a technique called *eliciting*, which is asking learners leading questions to get them to talk about similar ideas or concepts. Eliciting can help learners develop their message and identify the facts and words they want to use.
- Tape recording a dialogue between you and your learner can also be very helpful to ESL learners.

Teaching Listening Skills

The goal is to prepare learners to listen—to equip them with active listening strategies they can use to better understand what the speaker is saying.

ESL learners should be given opportunities to practice:

- Repeating what was said.
- Answering questions from a speaker.
- Summarizing and condensing what was said.
- Transferring information heard through speaking or writing.
- Conversing in a face-to-face conversation.

One way to improve listening skills is by taping dialogues and asking learners to answer questions about what is being said. Listening activities should be developed to match the learner's level of English language skills.

- Have learners match what they heard with pictures.
- Have learners identify the main idea of the conversation and the perspectives of each speaker.
- Ask learners for specific information. Have learners check their answers by listening to the tape.
- Develop a cloze procedure from the dialogue and have learners fill in the missing words.
- Have learners take notes as they listen.

ESL LESSON PLANS

To develop a lesson plan, first identify the learning objectives to be met, and then the skills necessary to meet the lesson objective, the materials and equipment needed, and the activities appropriate to accomplish the objective. A good lesson plan includes a warm-up, a review of previously taught material, an introduction to the new lesson, presentation of new information, opportunities to practice and apply the new language or information, and an evaluation of how the lesson went and what was learned.

The aim of ESL lessons varies enormously and can focus on a specific topic or a specific grammar, communication, vocabulary, or pronunciation skill.

An ESL lesson typically includes the following:

- A warm-up activity.
- A review of material learned in previous lessons.
- A presentation of new material.
- Oral practice.
- An activity using new information or skills.
- Homework assignment.
- Preview of next lesson.

Sequencing and Pacing

There are two important dimensions of planning lessons that are particularly important when teaching ESL: *sequencing* and *pacing* (Richards, 1994).

Sequencing

Sequencing refers to how activities are organized within a lesson. Different educational methodologies sometimes vary in regard to the preferred sequencing of particular teaching activities and this will be reflected in how activities are organized within a lesson. For example, some ESL teachers believe grammar rules should be taught before learners try to use them, while others believe rules should be taught after learners have tried them out.

In other cases, most teachers follow the same or very similar sequencing. For example, ESL reading lessons usually have three stages of activities that coincide with commonly used practices of adult reading instruction:

1. Pre-reading activities that include finding a reason for reading, introducing the text, dealing with language, and asking questions about the text.
2. During-reading activities that focus learners on the text and help them extract meaning, as they read.
3. After-reading activities that further develop comprehension by eliciting learner responses to the text.

The important thing to recognize is the need to be purposeful when you organize activities within lessons, basing the sequence of activities on sound teaching practices and the needs of learners. The transitions between activities are also important to the overall cohesiveness and meaningfulness of the lesson.

Pacing

Pacing lessons for maximum learner engagement and outcomes is considered to be a basic teaching skill for ESL teachers. The pacing of a lesson is determined by the amount of time allocated for each activity within a lesson, but also involves monitoring learners' engagement in activities to maintain the momentum of the lesson.

There are several recommended strategies to help with the pacing of a lesson:

- Use a variety of activities within a lesson to vary the intensity of learner engagement and maintain learner interest.
- Set a goal and a time limit for each activity, allowing learners enough, but not too much, time to complete it.
- Avoid over-long explanations or instructions for activities.

ESL Learning Activities

As a general rule, use authentic instructional materials as much as possible when developing ESL learning activities.

ESL Pre-Skill Activities

Use pre-skill activities to help ESL learners prepare for instruction. These include pre-reading, pre-writing, pre-speaking, and pre-listening activities. Pre-skill activities guide learners in understanding the purpose of learning the skill and the ways the skill can be used.

Pre-skill activities:

- Help students predict the type of information they will be reading or hearing.
- Make the lesson more meaningful to learners.
- Help learners establish connections between what they already know and what they are about to learn.
- Help students learn and practice new vocabulary they will be reading or hearing.
- Allow students to practice before they write or speak.

Activities for Beginning ESL Learners

When designing beginning-level activities, be sure to enunciate words clearly, use concrete language, avoid idioms, and speak slowly.

- Use gestures to help emphasize key words and phrases.
- Do not force learners to speak until they are ready.

Learning Activities

- Using magazines and newspapers, have learners cut out pictures of things that are of interest to them and then write sentences about the pictures.
- Cut out headlines from various articles and have learners match headlines with stories.
- Cut photo captions from photographs and have learners match captions with photos.

Activities for Intermediate Level ESL Learners

When you work with learners who are engaged in intermediate-level activities, you should repeat ideas, use direct definitions and comparisons, and make corrections indirectly by modeling the correct form.

Learning Activities

- Have learners read a magazine or newspaper article of interest to them; instruct learners to circle words they don't understand and ask them to try to figure out the meaning from the context or by finding the definition in the dictionary.
- Use newspaper advertisements that deal with money to develop activities that provide learners with practice in reading, comparing, and talking about prices.
- Ask learners to read and talk about sports scores from the newspaper.
- Discuss an issue found in an editorial that may be pertinent to learners' lives.

Activities for Advanced Level ESL Learners

Activities for advanced learners should be more challenging. Allow learners enough time to complete tasks independently, if possible.

Learning Activities

- Have learners write a letter to the editor.
- Have learners follow a news item over a period of time and discussing the events that occur.
- Ask learners to read an article that describes a problem and discuss the problem's cause and effects.

ESL Teaching Tips

Comprehensible input

Tutors can communicate with new non-English speaking students from the very first day.

- Communication must to be *comprehensible*.
- Show students how to use drawings, gestures, actions, emotions, voice variety, chalkboard sketches, photographs, and visual materials to provide clues to meaning.
- Adding visual and kinesthetic support along with the language will provide additional comprehensible input.
- Allow new learners of English translation time when listening and speaking.
- Explain to other learners that newcomers are translating the language they hear back to their native language, formulating a response and then translating that response into English.
- Remember that there will be times when you will not be able to get an idea across to newcomers.
- Make the explanation of the task clear using step-by-step manner with visuals.
- Use of a variety of techniques to make content concepts clear.
- Focus attention selectively on the most important information.
- Introduce new learning in context.

Provide clues to meaning

- Use drawings, dramatic gestures, actions, emotions, voice, mime, chalkboard sketches, photographs and visual materials to provide clues to meaning.
- If necessary, repeat your actions using the same simple structures and actions.
- Simplify your message as much as possible breaking them into smaller, manageable parts to give newcomers a chance at comprehending.
- Make sure the student's attention is focused.
- Don't insist, however, that students make eye contact with you when you are speaking to them. This is considered rude in many cultures.

Modify your speech

- Use speech that is appropriate for learners' language proficiency.
- Talk at a slow-to-normal pace, in short sentences.
- Use a pleasant tone
- Use simple sentence structure (subject-verb-object) and high-frequency words
- Use names of people rather than pronouns.
- Pause after phrases or short sentences, not after each word. You do not want to distort the rhythm of the language.
- Avoid using the passive voice and complex sentences.
- If you have something important to convey, speak one-on- one to the newcomer rather than in front of the class. The anxiety of being in the spotlight interferes with comprehension.
- Ask simple yes/no questions so that newcomers have an opportunity to respond.
- Accept one-word answers or gestures.

Be an active listener

- Give full attention to your newcomer and make every effort to understand his / her attempts to communicate
- Smile
- Talk in a calm, quiet manner. Raising your voice does not help comprehension
- Demonstrate your patience through your facial expressions and body language.
- Give your ESL students extra time to respond.
- Encourage new learners of English to act out or to draw pictures to get their meaning across.
- Don't jump in immediately to supply the words for the student.
- If the student response is heavily accented, correct by repeating the words correctly. Do not ask the student to repeat the correction. This can be very embarrassing.
- Resist the urge to over correct. This will inhibit newcomers so that they will be less willing to speak. Allow students to use a bilingual dictionary for words that cannot be acted out.

Check comprehension frequently

- Don't ask "Do you understand?" unless you have taught it. This is not a reliable check since many students will nod "yes" when they don't really understand.
- Teach the phrases (or have a bilingual volunteer teach them) "I don't understand," "Slowly, please," and "Please repeat."
- Write down messages so students have a visual as well as auditory input. Make a list of phrases you want your student to learn and to understand. Ask a bilingual volunteer to work with the student on those phrases.

Structure learning

- Write clearly defined content objectives on the board for students. These objectives are reviewed at the beginning of a lesson and students should state at the end of the lesson whether the objectives have been met.
- Concepts taught should be appropriate for the age and educational background of students.
- Consider the students' L1 literacy, second language proficiency, and the reading level of the materials.
- Use supplementary materials to promote comprehension. These include charts, graphs, pictures, illustrations, math manipulatives, multimedia, and demonstrations by teacher and other students
- Adapt content to learners' needs through use of graphic organizers, outlines, labeling of pictures, study guides, adapted text, and highlighted text.
- Develop meaningful learning activities that integrate lesson concepts with language practice opportunities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Build background and activate prior knowledge

- Concepts should be directly linked to students' background experience. This experience can be personal, cultural or academic.
- Links should be explicitly made between past learning and new concepts.
- Key vocabulary is emphasized. New vocabulary is presented in context. The number of vocabulary items is limited.

Teach learning strategies

- Provide ample opportunities for students to use learning strategies. Learning strategies should be taught through explicit instruction. You want students to develop independence in self-monitoring.
- Consistent use of scaffolding techniques throughout the lesson. Introduce a new concept using a lot of scaffolding and decrease support as time goes on. Restate a student's response or use think-alouds
- Use of a variety of question types, including those that promote higher level thinking skills.
- Help students learn strategies such as predicting, summarizing.

Develop learner questioning strategies

Involving ESL learners in the discussions in their content area classes can be frustrating if teachers do not develop strategies for asking questions.

- Choose easy questions and structure the form of the question to their current language ability.
- Accept single word/phrases as correct answers.
- Do not insist that students speak in full sentences.
- Let ESL students know which questions they will be responsible for answering in advance.
- Allow for think time and preparation of answers.

Hierarchy of Questions

Ask newcomers to point to a picture or word to demonstrate basic knowledge.

- "Point to the penguin."

Using visual cues, ask simple yes/no questions.

- "Is a penguin a fish?"

Ask either/or questions in which the answer is embedded.

- "Is a penguin a mammal or a bird?"

Break complex questions into several steps.

- “Look at the mammals. Find the bear, the dog, and the cat. Why are these animals all mammals? How are they the same?”

Ask simple *how* and *where* questions that can be answered with a phrase or a short sentence.

- “Where do penguins live?” “How do bats hear?”

Do not expect ESL learners to answer broad open-ended questions.

- “How do fish breathe underwater?”

Sample ESL Lesson Plan – Making an Appointment

By Susan Carey

Topic of Activity: Making an Appointment

Lesson Goal: In the context of making an appointment, students will practice speaking fluency.

Introduction:

Good speaking skills require many abilities to be integrated. Elements such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar must be integrated with listening and comprehension, and finally combined with the social aspects that make a conversation interactive. This lesson uses a discourse that is predictable and sequential to help learners expand their ability to compose sentences and practice speaking. Because the process of scheduling an appointment follows a series of expected steps, students can expect certain information to be exchanged. This allows them to rehearse and prepare for the conversation.

Learning Objectives/Skills:

- Students will practice expanding simple sentences (with subjects, verbs and objects) by adding prepositions and phrases. This will be demonstrated by their oral participation during the class.
- Students will practice speaking fluency as demonstrated by repeating sentences modeled by the instructor.
- Students will practice listening skills by helping to construct new sentence variations.
- Students will practice dialogue through roleplaying and partnering.
- Students will practice writing by creating appointment cards.

Time Needed:

This lesson can be completed in one hour.

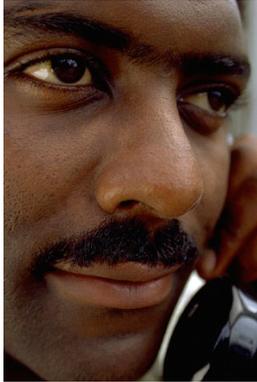
Materials needed:

- List of prepositions
- Blackboard or flip chart and markers
- Pictures of people making appointments; see samples below
- Appointment cards (see sample attached)
- Students notebooks

Learning Activity #1 – Warm-up

5 minutes

To introduce the topic of making appointments, the instructor displays two pictures that could represent people making appointments. One picture shows a person scheduling an appointment by telephone. The second picture represents a person making an appointment in person or at an office. Ask students what kinds of appointments they might need to make, and whether they prefer to schedule them in person, by telephone, in writing, or by another method. Students may suggest they have friends or family members who schedule appointments for them. Ask students for examples of problems that could occur with setting up appointments. During the lesson, identify strategies to help resolve these problems.



Learning Activity #2 – Review a Previous Lesson

5 minutes

The purpose of this activity is to review a previous lesson in which students experimented with composing simple sentences. A sentence is primarily composed of three parts, the subject, the verb, and the object. The instructor asks a student to read a sentence from the homework and writes it on the board. For example, the sentence may be, “She has a big house.” Then, referring to the list of prepositions (in, on, around, between, with, under, over, behind, for, etc.), the instructor solicits ideas from the students to expand the sentence and records these on the board; for example:

She has a big house. . .
on Bridgeport Avenue.
around the corner.
next to the hospital.

As each preposition and phrase is added, the instructor reads the complete sentence and then directs the class to read the sentence aloud together.

Learning Activity #3 – Present Dialogue Sequence

20 minutes

The purpose of this activity is to develop the concept that some conversations follow a sequence. Students have previously learned the greeting sequence. The instructor asks students to select two students to practice this sequence. For example:

Student 1: Hi, Chris.
Student 2: Hi, Sylvia.
Student 1: How are you today?
Student 2: I'm fine. How are you?
Student 1: I'm fine, too. Thank you.

When this short exchange is complete, the instructor continues to explain that there are patterns or sequences to making appointments, and begins to outline the sequence shown below. This sequence is a suggested outline and can be modified to fit best with students' interests and abilities. Encourage students to use prepositions, their needs, and their experiences to expand the sentences. The instructor records their ideas to show where words are placed in the sentence, and helps students identify words to express their ideas. The instructor may suggest that students use their notebooks to record sentences and new vocabulary words they can practice later. Like Activity #2, as each new sentence is constructed, the instructor will read the sentence aloud to the class, and the class will repeat the sentence.

Key elements to scheduling an appointment include:

- Begin with your name.
- Add a simple sentence, such as, “I need an appointment.”
- Ask or suggest synonyms for appointment.
- Expand the sentence using prepositions.
- Enlarge the sentence with more detail (describe who the appointment is for).
- Describe the need for the appointment (illness, immunizations, check up, interview, pick up application forms, etc.).

The blue words indicate the base structure. The words in black indicate how the sentences can be expanded to provide more description.

Hello, my name is Sylvia Santos.
 would like
 want to make

I NEED AN APPOINTMENT WITH YOU FOR MY SON.
 a meeting
 an interview
 the doctor
 the teacher
 the counselor
 the director
 the dentist
 daughter.
 mother.
 cousin.

HE IS SICK.
 and he has a fever.
 has an ear ache.
 is vomiting.

IS TODAY OKAY?
 tomorrow
 next Tuesday
 good?
 open?
 convenient?

WHAT IS A GOOD TIME?
 I can come at 2 o'clock.
 after

OKAY. THEN IT IS TUESDAY AT 1:00 IN THE AFTERNOON. THANK YOU.

Learning Activity #4 – Roleplay

15 minutes

The purpose of this activity is for students to role-play making appointments. Ask students to select a partner to work with. Students will take turns either asking for an appointment or being the receptionist.

Distribute appointment cards to each student. Explain to students the steps needed to complete the appointment cards. Explain any information on the appointment card that students may not be familiar with. The following information must be recorded, based on the information the student provides to the receptionist; see the highlighted areas below.

- Person’s name (students may want to create an appointment for their child and use their name).
- Check the day of the week the appointment is scheduled.
- Record the time of the appointment.
- Circle whether the appointment is in the am or pm.
- Record the title of the person the appointment is with. For example, it may be the doctor, dentist, director, or teacher.

SAMPLE APPOINTMENT CARD

_____ has an appointment on

Mon Tue Wed Thur Fri Sat

Date: _____ at _____ AM/PM

With: _____

24 Elm Street, Bridgeport, CT 06606
(203) 336 – 4731

If unable to keep appointment, kindly give 24 hrs. notice.

Learning Activity #5 – Homework

5 minutes

The purpose of this activity is for students to practice writing. It provides an opportunity to begin expanding sentences and to incorporate new vocabulary. Ask students to complete the following homework activity:

- Describe a time when you needed to make an appointment.
- Suggestions for what students can write about include: tell who the appointment was with, who made the appointment for you, whether it was made in person or by telephone, and whether the appointment was successful.

Learning Activity #6 – Preview of Next Lesson

5 minutes

The next lesson will focus on some of the dialogue that can be expected when visiting the doctor with a sick child.

- Students are encouraged to think of questions doctors may ask them, and questions they may want to ask the doctor.

Assessment:

Students will have successfully completed this activity if they can:

- Communicate their needs for an appointment to a student who can complete the appointment card correctly.
- Comprehend the appointment needs of another student and complete their appointment card correctly.

The appointment card with the student's name and their written homework will be added to their portfolio.

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IDIOMS

An idiom is “an expression whose meaning cannot be predicted from the usual meanings of its constituent elements”(Webster’s dictionary).

An idiom is a speech form or an expression that is peculiar to itself grammatically or cannot be understood from the individual meanings of its elements, as in *keep tabs on*.

<http://www.dictionary.com/search?q=idiom>

Idioms are used to enrich language by taking the existing words, combining them in a new sense, and creating new meanings, just like a work of art (Lennon, 1998). Most native speakers frequently use idioms in their daily lives; as such, they a very important part of any natural language (Vanlancker-Sidtis, 2003; Wray & Perkins, 2000).

In general terms, an idiom is a commonly used expression whose meaning cannot be determined from the meaning of its parts. Native speakers of a language use idioms all the time. The number and frequency of idioms make them an important aspect of vocabulary acquisition and language learning.

Idioms must be understood as a whole. Breaking an idiom into individual words often destroys its meaning and makes comprehension much more difficult. Many English language learners try to translate idioms directly into their native language, which can cause misinterpretation.

Research tells us that because idiomatic expressions are so frequently encountered in both spoken and written discourse, they require special attention in language programs and should not be relegated to a position of secondary importance in the curriculum (Cooper, 1998).

Native Speakers and Idioms

Researchers believe that most native speakers use a combination of the following strategies when they try to figure out the meaning of an idiom.

1. First, they try to interpret it literally.
2. If the literal meaning of an idiom does not fit the context in which the expression is situated, the native speaker then searches for the idiom in a special mental idiom lexicon and then chooses the figurative meaning (Cooper, 1999; Cornell, 1999).
3. When a native speaker encounters an idiom, both its figurative meaning (of the entire idiom) and its lexical meaning (of each individual word) are activated at the same time. The figurative meaning of an idiom is quicker to comprehend than its literal meaning (Matlock, 1998).

Idioms differ in their degree of analyzability. Some idioms are highly analyzable or *decomposable*, with the meanings of their parts contributing independently to their overall figurative meanings. Other idioms are considered *non-decomposable* because it is difficult to see any relation between an idiom’s individual words and its figurative meaning.

- *Decomposable* idioms include *spill the beans* (*they are no longer contained*), *let the cat out of the bag* (*it comes out*), and *sweep under the rug* (*hide*). Each can be analyzed by looking at its individual words.
- *Non-decomposable* idioms, such as *kick the bucket* and *shoot the breeze*, do not allow an individual analysis of words to determine its meaning (Nunberg et al, 1994).

According to a study by Lazar, Warr-Leeper, Nicholson, and Johnson, approximately seven percent of the sentences in third-to eighth-grade reading materials use idioms (Harris, 1999).

Pollio, Barlow, Fine, and Pollio studied political debates, psychological texts, novels, and psychotherapy sessions and found that “most English speakers utter about 10 million novel metaphors per lifetime and 20 million idioms per lifetime. This works out to about 3,000 novel metaphors per week and 7,000 idioms per week. (Cooper, 1998).

Studies of idiom use in television shows, political debates, and other communication forms have found that people use between three and four idiomatic expressions per minute. In some cases, understanding idioms is crucial to understanding the plot or overall meaning (Cooper, 1998).

Research shows that both decomposable and non-decomposable are understood equally well in supporting contexts. Obviously, decomposable idioms are more easily understood than non-decomposable idioms without contextual information (Gibbs, 1991).

Second Language Speakers (L2) and Idioms

Trying to understand L2 idioms is difficult because (1) idiomatic expressions often include words in ways they are not often used with their usual meanings, (2) they are difficult to understand based on the meanings of their parts (individual words), and (3) there are not always one-to-one correspondences between L1 and L2 idioms. Research tells us that there are many factors that influence the usage and comprehension of L2 idioms, including (1) the lack of input and familiarity with figurative language and (2) the influence of L1 (Wray, 1999). Consequently, there is a high possibility of communication breakdown (Irujo, 1986).

In order to interpret the meaning of idioms, L2 speakers tend to rely on the strategies they used when they acquired their first language.

- They often rely on the literal meaning conveyed by the context and guess what the idiom means.
- Even when an idiom has a perfect match in their native language, they often try to understand the meaning from the L2 context.

Some researchers believe that parallels between idiomatic expressions in the learner's L1 and the L2 will have a significant effect on the comprehension of idioms—this is called the *interlingual factor* (Cornell, 1999). Sometimes, this factor will be a positive one, but it can also be a negative factor. In studies of different groups of L2 learners, Irujo (1986) found that L2 learners easily comprehended and produced the idioms that were identical to their L1 idioms.

While research findings indicate that L1 may have some effects on learners' processing of L2 idioms, it is not known exactly what kinds of comprehension strategies are used in L2 idiom processing. When L2 learners encounter an unknown idiomatic expression, they do not use a single strategy, but rather experiment and evaluate possible answers through trial and error—this is called the *heuristic method* (Cooper, 1999).

English language learners make use of their native language when processing target language idioms. Irujo (1986) conducted a study to determine whether advanced learners of English use knowledge of their first language to comprehend and produce second language idioms. She found:

- Identical idioms were the easiest to understand and produce.
- Different idioms were the hardest to understand and produce.

Russian Idioms

Idiom: Kashi nye svarish

Literal: It's impossible to cook kasha with somebody.

English: It's impossible to deal (or have business) with somebody.

Spanish Idioms

Idiom: A buen hambre no hay pan duro.

Literal: *For good hunger there is no hard bread.*

English: Anything tastes good when you're hungry.

Idiom: A donde fueres haz lo que vieres.

Literal: *Wherever you go, do what you see.*

English: When in Rome, do as the Romans do.

Chinese Idioms

In the Chinese language, idioms are referred to as *chengyu* or *ready phrases*. Chengyu are often written with classical Chinese grammar and usually consist of four characters.

Idiom: *If you don't enter the tiger's lair, you cannot catch any cubs.*

English: Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Idiom: *Driving the tiger away from the front door and letting the wolf in at the back.*
English: Out of the fire and into the frying pan.

Research-based Idiom Instruction

- Provide learners with examples of words that have different meanings depending upon the context in which they are used.
- Focus on context when helping learners understand idioms—context is the key for understanding the meaning of an idiom. For learners of all ages, the comprehension of the idiomatic expressions is facilitated by contextual support (Cacciari & Levorato, 1989; Nippold & Martin, 1989). Research findings have demonstrated that accuracy was greater for idioms in context than idioms in isolation, and that accuracy was significantly correlated to specific measures of literacy (Nippon & Martin, 1988).
- Teach the origins of idioms—this will help students more easily figure out the metaphorical meanings (Nilsen, & Nilsen, 2003).
- Discuss the origins of words and phrases to help students understand how language transforms over time—this enables them to hypothesize in a more meaningful way the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases (Nilsen, & Nilsen, 2003).
- Encourage students’ natural inclinations toward narrative forms of meaning making in conjunction with text-based lessons—students tend to be more engaged with textual content and demonstrate less resistance to reading material that might otherwise be challenging or frustrating (Zigo, 2001).
- Because students tend to respond to texts through narrative approaches, encourage them to engage in role-playing to allow memories, images, and stories to surface as they begin to develop interpretations (Zigo, 2001).
- Keep in mind that students are more likely to understand, recall, and care about what an idiom means after having investigated it through an exploration of their own experiences of metaphorical language (Zigo, 2001).
- Research the origins of an idiom. Advanced and older students may especially enjoy learning the origin of an idiom. For example, *mad as a hatter* came from the fact that hat makers used to go mad from continual use of certain chemicals. (For beginning or younger students, this may be too much information and may confuse them.) By knowing the origins of idioms, students can more easily figure out the meanings. Discussions about the origins of idioms may also help students understand how language transforms over time (Nilsen & Nilsen, 2003).

CORRECTING LEARNER ERRORS

Teaching and learning involve dealing with errors. Errors are inevitable, but should they be addressed? If they are addressed, the questions are *how* and *when*? The situation is, when a language learner makes an error, the teacher or tutor has two choices: to address it or to ignore it and continue on.

This is an important issue for all tutors and all learners. There are legitimate arguments both for and against addressing errors. Research tells us that:

- Errors that are left uncorrected on a daily basis can easily lead to permanent errors, which can later become irreversible.
- The most frequent request from ESL learners to tutors is for their English to be constantly corrected.
- There are personal differences in how people react to criticism.
- When teaching ESL learners you must be sensitive to cultural differences in what learners expect in terms of teacher feedback, as well as how they react to different forms of feedback.

Most researchers agree that it is very important that tutors address errors with a reasoned and consistent strategy.

- Relying on a consistent approach helps tutors avoid reacting emotionally to learners' errors (Chaudron, 1988).
- Besides being consistent regarding the manner in which an error is corrected, tutors should also be consistent in the particular errors that they choose to address. By working consistently on particular errors, repetition should make the individual learners aware of specific trouble spots so attention can be focused on those areas (Burt & Kiparsky, 1972).
- Error correction can assist language learners if the tutor consistently applies these criteria: (a) the learner's amount of exposure to the language structure or form, (b) the seriousness of the error, (c) whether or not the error has impaired communication significantly, (d) the frequency of the error, and (e) the needs of the students.

Devising a reasoned and consistent plan for correcting learners' errors requires informed judgments about the nature of the errors.

- Is the error serious? What constitutes a serious error?
- What are the learner's individual needs? Self-confident, capable students will often profit from even minor corrections. On the other hand, most struggling students should probably receive correction only when they make major errors (Walz, 1982).

The goals of corrections are to have the learner (1) understand the error, (2) be able reproduce a corrected version, and (3) not repeat the error. So, you need to think about four things:

1. What to correct. Should all errors be corrected? Should all mistakes be corrected?
2. How to correct. What kinds of feedback can you provide to help learners correct errors and mistakes? Should you encourage learners to self-correct?
3. When to correct. Should you interrupt a learner to correct an error or a mistake?
4. How to follow up so the error is not repeated.

What To Correct

Tanner and Green (1998) and other ESL researchers make a distinction between errors and mistakes.

- Errors are made from not knowing the correct form of language, when learners have incorrectly learned or don't yet know the correct language form.
- Mistakes occur when learners incorrectly retrieve a language form from their memory or may occur when learners don't pay attention or are careless with language forms.

In other words, errors have to do with knowledge of the language and mistakes have to do with language performance.

Corder (1967) supports Tanner and Green, considering performance slips as mistakes, hardly of a serious nature. On the other hand, Corder believes “true” errors cannot be self-corrected without some additional information because there is a lack of understanding by the language learner. Corder suggests it is wise to allow learners ample opportunities and sufficient time to self-correct.

Allwright and Bailey (1991) conclude that it is unfair to penalize students for errors when they lack exposure to such forms or functions—that learners should be truly commended and encouraged for attempting to push the boundaries of their language abilities.

- Learners who make errors while creating language may not even be aware of what a correct form looks like or be cognitively ready to comply with the morphological, syntactic, or lexical rules associated with the error. As various morpheme studies suggest, learners may acquire structures in a natural order, so elements that are beyond their language capabilities cannot be acquired until the particular language learner is linguistically capable (Dulay & Burt 1974a, 1974b; Bailey, Madden, & Krashen, 1974; Larsen-Freeman, 1976; Brown, 1983).

What is a serious error?

- Errors that significantly impair communication.
- Errors that occur frequently?
- Errors that reflect misunderstanding or incomplete acquisition of the current tutoring focus?
- Errors that have a highly stigmatizing effect on the listeners?

Recurrent errors, profound pronunciation errors, or errors of familiar forms can cause the frustration level to rise, not only for individual speakers, but for listeners. As such, tutors should try to address such errors (Burt & Kiparsky, 1972; Hendrickson, 1979; Walz, 1982).

Burt and Kiparsky (1972) also consider global errors to be more serious than local errors.

- Global errors should almost always be corrected because they cause confusion regarding the relationship between constituent clauses, whereas local errors occur within a clause and should be corrected on a case-by-case basis.

When To Correct

By having their errors addressed on the spot, learners realize that an error has been made, and may even desire such correction (Cathcart & Olsen, 1976; Chenoweth, Day, Chun, & Luppescu, 1983). However:

- There is a question as to whether or not learners have grasped the meaning or understood the seriousness of the error.
- Correcting errors on the spot temporarily interrupts the flow of communication, which can be delayed even further if the learner acknowledges the error, listens to an elaboration by the tutor, and repairs the error, (Chaudron, 1988).
- If language learners constantly receive corrective feedback, they may become discouraged, frustrated, and even lose enthusiasm for speaking in the target language (Chastain, 1975; Vigil & Oller, 1976).

Schmidt and Frota (1986) suggest that, just as interrupting L2 dialogue in the classroom to repair an error is influential feedback, so is allowing errors to go uncorrected because students may assume that the spoken L2 is accurate.

- Learners may internalize faulty language structures and develop classroom pidgins (Ringbom, 1987; Hammerly, 1991).
- Besides these arguments advocating classroom correction, there is also ample empirical evidence that correcting learners' errors is an effective means of improving grammatical accuracy of L2 speech (Tomasello & Herron, 1989; White, 1991; White, Spada, Lightbown, & Ranta, 1991; Carroll & Swain, 1993; Trahey & White, 1993).

How To Correct: Error Correction Techniques

The purpose of error correction is to improve learners' accuracy and language acquisition.

- To help learners become not only increasingly accurate but also increasingly independent as English speakers, learners should always be provided with ample opportunities to self-correct, and engage in peer correction.

Walz (1982) divides error correction into three distinct types: (1) self-correction with the teacher's help, (2) peer-correction, and (3) teacher correction.

Self-correction, with the teacher's or tutor's help, is an excellent way to address errors.

- Pinpointing is one way a teacher or tutor can help; the teacher or tutor localizes the error by repeating the learner's utterance up until the point where the error has occurred, and exaggerates the word which has preceded the error with a rising intonation.
- Teachers or tutors can also rephrase a question when a learner fails to answer or answers incorrectly without confidence. Generally, the rephrased question is a reduced form of the original.
- Cueing is another useful feedback tool that can be employed when a learner stumbles during an answer or makes an obvious error. The teacher or tutor then offers the learner options to fill-in the missing element or repair the error.
- Teachers or tutors can rephrase a question when a learner responds with a correct form but an inappropriate response. Using this technique, learners are given a chance to hear the question again, and obtain new information enabling them to give an appropriate response.
- Teachers or tutors may wish to explain a key word as a means of providing feedback to clear up confusion or apparent confusion on the part of the learner. The teacher or tutor can write an explanation on the board, use pointing techniques, or make gestures to enlighten the learner.
- There are times when a teacher or tutor may not comprehend a learner's utterance, or the pronunciation of word is so poor that tutor wishes to model it. Through questioning, the teacher or tutor is able to employ a more subtle way to discover, or model the word.
- Yet another way a teacher or tutor can aid the learner in self-correction, is by providing an answer to the question that was asked. This provides the learner with a model of a correct structure, and still allows the learner to come up with his or her own response.

The last and least effective way to address errors is for the teacher or tutor to provide the corrections.

- The teacher or tutor can supply the correct answer when time simply does not permit using other methods, when the frequency of errors within a particular utterance are so prevalent that comprehension is impossible, or when using drills.
- The other technique that tutors can use is paraphrasing; this technique may not be effective, especially if teachers or tutors do not reassess the learners' comprehension to see if they have realized that the response has been corrected by the tutor. Learners who have confidence with their own self-correction techniques will probably be the only ones who benefit from this kind of correction.

Research-based Suggestions:

- Don't focus too much on correcting errors as you may give learners the impression that grammatical correctness is more important than content.
- When responding to writing, concentrate first on the content of an ESL learner's essay rather than on mechanics, allowing learners to develop their ideas before turning to grammar.
- Research has found that at least half of learner errors resulted from inattentive editing and proofreading.
- Learners who read their papers aloud correct many of their own errors without realizing it.
- You can expect to see more errors in first drafts on essays and exams.
- Errors often disappear in ESL students' prose as they progress through multiple drafts.
- Build a process-approach into writing assignments and require that learners turn in assignments in stages. Have learners first write a proposal, then drafts of the paper, and finally, they can write a mini-paper reflecting on the process they went through to get to the finished product.
- ESL learners can work on correcting sentence-level errors a little at a time, focusing on the errors that appear most frequently in their writing.

- Marking every error is not always the best approach to responding to learner writing, learners can become demoralized when a lot of errors have been marked.
- Hold learners responsible for finding and correcting their own errors by making only minimal marks on papers.
- It is more efficient and effective to look for patterns of error in student writing and make minimal correction/suggestions.
- When learners know which types of errors they make most often, they can learn to correct them on their own.
- The following kinds of comments from teachers and tutors encourage learners to revise:
 - ✓ There are three past tense errors in this paragraph. Can you find them?
 - ✓ I notice that you often have trouble with subject/verb agreement. Why don't you go through the paper and see if you can find the mistakes?
 - ✓ Try reading this paper aloud to yourself to see how many grammatical errors you can find.
 - ✓ When you turn in the next draft, indicate how many errors you corrected on your own.

TRANSITIONING ESL LEARNERS

Transitioning to postsecondary education or training for high-skilled employment is often confusing and sometimes difficult for adult learners. ESL students have widely divergent educational backgrounds and may need special assistance in strengthening their reading, grammar, and writing skills so they can succeed (Lombardo, 2004; Tacelli, 2004). While native English speakers have a written vocabulary of 10,000-100,000 words, English language learners will probably know only 2,000-7,000 words when they begin academic studies (Hadley, 1993). They may have difficulty understanding college-level texts and writing college-level papers (Santos, 2004).

Traditionally, there have been differences between the adult ESL literacy curriculum and the academic ESL curricula. In particular, there have been differences in *purpose*, *content*, and contextuality of educational services (Rance-Roney, 1995). The challenge for adult educators is to provide adults with a balanced curriculum that will best serve ESL learners' needs.

Purpose: Historically, the goal of federally-funded adult ESL instruction has been to provide learners with the language skills necessary to function in American society, and to attain and retain a job (Young, Fitzgerald, & Morgan, 1994). We now recognize a slightly different goal that requires higher-level academic skills—the goal is to equip all adults with the skills to succeed in postsecondary education and training in preparation for high-skilled employment. As such, the purpose of ESL instruction is to teach adults the grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing skills necessary to succeed in remedial or developmental courses and mainstream academic coursework (Wrigley, 1994).

Content: In most adult ESL programs, the focus is on oral/aural communication and on reading comprehension and writing. The vocabulary and content center around personal expression and on survival needs in the home, workplace, and community (Crandall & Peyton, 1993). Conversely, in academic programs, the focus is somewhat less personal. Students usually learn language through an examination of grammar, less frequently used vocabulary, and longer readings. The content is frequently a precursor to upcoming subject study (Chamot & O'Malley, 1987).

Contextuality: Much of the content and practice in ESL literacy instruction centers around issues within the context of adult life, such as making a doctor's appointment or looking for a job (Crandall & Peyton, 1993). In academic English classes, language study is either context-reduced (where there are few clues to help derive meaning) or context-embedded (where clues to meaning are available from the surrounding text material) (Snow, Met, & Genesee, 1989).

Learner Challenges

ESL adult learners moving on to postsecondary education or training often face, for the first time in their language study, a need to be self-directed and independent learners. For learners to be successful in postsecondary education, they need to believe that advancement is possible through their *own* efforts (Rance-Roney, 1995). Yet, they often experience an absence of the consistent positive feedback they have probably found in the adult ESL classroom. Some ESL learners may feel that they do not belong in college, and, without assistance, these students may soon drop out (Johnson, Haas, Harrell, & Alameida, 2004).

ESL learners also encounter higher-level academic challenges and inflexible standards such as passing course tests, making postsecondary-level study difficult.

- Academic courses frequently require 30 to 50 pages of reading per night.
- Learners need to learn a style of writing that may differ markedly from that of their first language. They must have knowledge of American English rhetorical organization, written sentence structure, punctuation, and cohesion words. Academic writing tasks are more often based on articles, books, or topics unrelated to the learners' lives.

In addition, there are practical issues related to American postsecondary education systems. Some learners may be the first in their families to enter college and may have little understanding of college costs or how to pay for their education.

Learning Strategies

Teaching adult students learning strategies will help prepare them for higher-level education and/or training. Learning strategies are conscious thoughts and behaviors used by students with the explicit goal of improving their knowledge and understanding of new material. Researchers have identified four broad categories of postsecondary education strategies: (1) cognitive strategies for memorizing and manipulating target language structures, (2) metacognitive strategies for managing and supervising strategy use, (3) affective strategies for gauging emotional reactions to learning and for lowering anxieties, and (4) social strategies for enhancing learning, such as cooperating with other learners and seeking to interact with native speakers.

Language use strategies come into play once the language material is already accessible, even in some preliminary form.

- Their focus is to help students utilize the language they have already learned.
- Language use strategies include strategies for retrieving information about the language already stored in memory, rehearsing target language structures, and communicating in the language despite gaps in target language knowledge.

Learners need to be able to:

- Self-diagnose their strengths and weaknesses in language learning
- Become aware of what helps them to learn the target language most efficiently
- Develop a broad range of problem-solving skills
- Experiment with familiar and unfamiliar learning strategies
- Make decisions about how to approach a language task
- Monitor and self-evaluate their performance
- Transfer successful strategies to new learning contexts

Pre-Academic Programs

Pre-academic or pre-university programs prepare ESL students to meet the language requirements to study at an American university or college. In addition, pre-academic programs often help ESL students learn about the typical college curriculum, expectations for college students, etc.

Pre-academic programs are often intensive; classes usually meet for 20-25 hours per week. These programs teach general academic and study skills, as well as vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing, and listening and speaking.

Pre-academic course usually focus on developing Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). CALP involves the language skills needed to understand and communicate in unfamiliar or more formal or higher-level language situations.

The primary goal of pre-academic ESL programs is to help students develop the skills they will need in order to excel in higher education. Typically this includes:

- Reading extended texts, including textbooks.
- Critical reading.
- Writing research papers, reports, and essays, including choosing topics for a paper and organizing writing.
- Finding and using resources including using libraries, the Internet, and research documents.
- Listening to and understanding lectures.
- Note taking.
- Speaking in academic settings, including making oral presentations and formulating and asking questions.
- Test taking strategies.
- Study skills.

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