

## **COMPETENCY 1.0 KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE PRINCIPLE**

### **Skill 1.1 Identify the basic concepts of phonology as they apply to language development and performance**

The definition of phonology can be summarized as “the way in which speech sounds form patterns” (Díaz-Rico & Weed, 1995). Phonology is a subset of the linguistics field, which studies the organization and systems of sound within a particular language. Phonology is based on the theory that every native speaker unconsciously retains the sound structure of that language and is more concerned with the sounds than with the physical process of creating those sounds.

When babies babble or make what we call “baby talk,” they are actually experimenting with all of the sounds represented in all languages. As they learn a specific language, they become more proficient in the sounds of that language and forget how to make sounds that they don’t need or use.

Phonemes, pitch, and stress are all components of phonology. Because each affects the meaning of communications, they are variables that ELLs must recognize and learn.

Phonology analyzes the sound structure of the given language by:

- Determining which phonetic sounds have the most significance
- Explaining how these sounds influence a native speaker of the language

For example, the Russian alphabet has a consonant, which, when pronounced, sounds like the word “rouge” in French. English speakers typically have difficulty pronouncing this sound pattern, because inherently they know this is not a typical English sound--even though it occasionally is encountered (Díaz-Rico & Weed, 1995).

Mastering a sound that does not occur in the learner’s first language requires ongoing repetition, both of hearing the sound and attempting to say it. The older the learner, the more difficult this becomes, especially if the learner has only spoken one language before reaching puberty. Correct pronunciation may literally require years of practice because initially the learner may not hear the sound correctly. Expecting an ELL to master a foreign pronunciation quickly leads to frustration for the teacher and the learner. With enough focused repetition, however, the learner may eventually hear the difference and then be able to imitate it. Inadequate listening and speaking practice will result in a persistent heavy accent.

Phonemes are the smallest unit of sound that affects meaning, i.e. distinguish two words. In English, there are approximately 44 speech sounds yet only 26 letters, so the sounds, when combined, become words. For this reason, English is not considered a phonetic language where there is a one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds. For example, consider the two words, “pin” and “bin.” The only difference is the first consonant of the words, the “p” in “pin” and “b” in “bin.” This makes the sounds “p” and “b” phonemes in English, because the difference in sound creates a difference in meaning.

Focusing on phonemes to provide pronunciation practice allows students to have fun while they learn to recognize and say sounds. Pairs or groups of words that have a set pattern make learning easier. For example, students can practice saying or thinking of words that rhyme but begin with a different phoneme, such as tan, man, fan, and ran. Other groups of words might start with the same phoneme followed by various vowel sounds, such as ten, ton, tan, and tin. This kind of alliteration can be expanded into tongue twisters that students find challenging and fun.

Vowels and consonants should be introduced in a deliberate order to allow combinations that form real words, though “made-up” words that have no real meaning in English should also be encouraged when introducing new sounds.

Pitch in communication determines the context or meaning of words or series of words. A string of words can communicate more than one meaning; for example, when posed as a question or statement. For example, the phrase “I can’t go” acts as a statement, if the pitch or intonation falls. However, the same phrase becomes the question “I can’t go?” if the pitch or intonation rises for the word “go.”

Stress can occur at a “word” or “sentence” level. At the “word” level, different stresses on the syllable can actually modify the word’s meaning. Consider the word “conflict.” To pronounce it as a noun, one would stress the first syllable, as in “CONflict.” However, to use it as a verb, the second syllable would be stressed, as in “conFLICT.”

Different dialects sometimes pronounce the same word differently, even though both pronunciations have the same meaning. For example, in some parts of the United States the word “insurance” is pronounced by stressing the second syllable, while in other parts of the country the first syllable is stressed.

At the “sentence” level, stress can also be used to vary the meaning. For example, consider the following questions and how the meaning changes, according to the stressed words:

**He** did that? (Emphasis is on the person)

He **did** that? (Emphasis is on the action)

He did **that**? (Emphasis is on object of the action)

This type of meaning differentiation is difficult for most ELL students to grasp and requires innovative teaching, such as acting out the three different meanings. However, since pitch and stress can change the meaning of a sentence completely, students must learn to recognize these differences. Not recognizing sarcasm or anger can cause students considerable problems in their academic and everyday endeavors.

Unlike languages such as Spanish or French, English has multiple pronunciations of vowels and consonants, which contributes to making it a difficult language to learn. While phonetic rules are critical to learning to read and write, in spite of there being numerous exceptions, they do little to assist listening and speaking skills.

### **Skill 1.2 Identify the use and application of phonographemic differences**

Phonographemics refers to the study of letters and letter combinations. Unlike most languages, in English one symbol can represent many phonemes. While some phonetic rules apply, English has numerous exceptions, which makes it a difficult language to learn.

In teaching English to speakers of other languages, the wide variation of phonemes represented by a single symbol must be taught and *drilled*. If it is difficult for native speakers to learn the English spelling system, it is a great leap for the foreign language learner. Graphemes should be introduced long after spoken English. Students must first begin to be able to speak and hear the language before they can be taught to spell it.

The phonology of English is an important component of an ESOL program. Phonographemic differences between words of English are a common source of confusion and thus need to be taught explicitly with plenty of learning activities to enable learners to acquire them sufficiently. Some areas of focus for the ESOL classroom include:

**Homonyms:** A general term that describes word forms that have two or more meanings.

**Homographs:** Two or more words that have the same spelling or pronunciation but different meanings, e.g., stalk (part of a plant)/stalk (follow).

**Homophones:** Two or more words that have the same pronunciation but different meanings and spelling, e.g., wood/would, cite/sight.

**Heteronyms:** Two or more words that have the same spelling, but have a different pronunciation and meaning, e.g., Polish/polish.

Some useful activities for instruction would be to identify misspelled words, to recognize multiple meanings of words and sentences, to spell words correctly within a given context, and to match words with their meanings.

### **Skill 1.3 Apply morphemic analysis to a given word**

Morphemic analysis requires breaking a word down into its component parts to determine its meaning. It shows the relationship between the root or base word and the prefix and/or suffix to determine the word's meaning.

A morpheme is the smallest unit of language system which has meaning. These units are more commonly known as: the root word, the prefix and the suffix, and they cannot be broken down into any smaller units.

- **The root word or base word** is the key to understanding a word, because this is where the actual meaning is determined.
- **A prefix** acts as a syllable, which appears in front of the root or base word and can alter the meaning of the root or base word.
- **A suffix** is a letter or letters, which are added to the end of the word and can alter the original tense or meaning of the root or base word.

The following is an example of how morphemic analysis can be applied to a word:

- Choose a root or base word, such as “kind.”
- Create as many new words as possible, by changing the prefix and suffix.
- New words, would include unkind, kindness, and kindly.

Learning common roots, prefixes, and suffixes greatly helps ELLs to decode unfamiliar words. This can make a big difference in how well a student understands written language. Students who can decode unfamiliar words become less frustrated when reading in English and, as a result, are likely to read more. They have greater comprehension and their language skills improve more quickly. Having the tools to decode unfamiliar words enables ELLs to perform better on standardized tests because they are more likely to understand the questions and answer choices.

Guessing at the meaning of words should be encouraged. Too often students become dependent on translation dictionaries, which cause the students not to develop morphemic analysis skills. Practice should include identifying roots, prefixes, and suffixes, as well as using morphemic knowledge to form new words.

#### **Skill 1.4 Apply principles of morphology as they relate to language acquisition**

Morphology refers to the process of how the words of a language are formed to create meaningful messages. ESOL teachers need to be aware of the principles of morphology in English to provide meaningful activities that will help in the process of language acquisition.

ESOL learners need to understand the structure of words in English, and how words may be created and altered. Some underlying principles of the morphology of English are:

1. Morphemes may be free and able to stand by themselves (e.g., chair, bag) or they may be bound or derivational, needing to be used with other morphemes to create meaning (e.g., read-able, en-able).
2. Knowledge of the meanings of derivational morphemes such as prefixes and suffixes enables students to decode word meanings and create words in the language through word analysis, e.g., un-happy means not happy.
3. Some morphemes in English provide grammatical rather than semantic information for words and sentences (e.g., of, the, and).
4. Words can be combined in English to create new compound words (e.g., key + chain = keychain).

ESOL teachers also need to be aware that principles of morphology from the native language may be transferred to either promote or interfere with the second language learning process.

When students overgeneralize a learned rule or simply make a mistake, corrections should be made in a way that does not embarrass the student. Teachers must also consider a student's stage of progress and the context of the error. Correcting every single error is unnecessary when students are experimenting with language and bravely trying to use a language they are struggling to learn. A useful technique is to repeat segments of spoken language, as if to confirm understanding, and correct any errors. This saves face for the student and allows the teacher to demonstrate the correct word use or pronunciation. If the student fails to notice the correction and makes the same error again, the teacher can repeat the same type of correction. Teachers can also demonstrate variations of words in this manner, such as using a different verb tense to paraphrase what was said.

Constantly interrupting speech to make corrections or correcting every error in a writing sample can discourage participation and cause students to shut down to learning. Keeping track of errors that students repeat allows the teacher to re-teach specific skills or address specific needs, either with a group of students who all need to master that skill, or individually for a student who has not yet mastered a skill after others in the class have.

**Skill 1.5      Apply principles of English semantics as they relate to language acquisition**

Semantics encompasses the meaning of individual words, as well as combinations of words. Native speakers have used their language to function in their daily lives at all levels. Through experience they know the effects of intonation, connotation, and synonyms. This is not true of foreign speakers. In an ESOL class, we are trying to teach what the native speaker already knows as quickly as possible. The objectives of beginning ESOL lesson plans should deliberately build a foundation that will enable students to meet more advanced objectives.

Teaching within a specific context helps students to understand the meaning of words and sentences. When students can remember the context in which they learn words and recall how the words were used, they retain that knowledge and can compare it when different applications of the same words are introduced.

Using words in a variety of contexts helps students reach a deeper understanding of the word. They can then guess at new meanings that are introduced in different contexts. For example, the word “conduct” can be taught in the context of conducting a meeting or an investigation. Later the word “conductor” can be used in various contexts that demonstrate some similarity but have distinctly different uses of the word, such as a conductor of electricity; the conductor of a train; the conductor of an orchestra; and so forth.

Second language learners must learn to translate words and sentences that they already understand in their primary language into the language they wish to acquire. This can be a daunting task because of the many ways meaning is created in English. Voice inflection, variations of meaning, variations of usage, and emphasis are some of the factors that affect meaning. The lexicon of language includes the stored meaning, contextual meaning from word association, knowledge of pronunciation and grammar, and morphemes.

Idioms, particularly those that cannot be translated literally, present a particular challenge to ELLs. Here, again, creating contexts facilitates learning. Grouping idioms according to types of language use helps. Some idioms rely on synonyms, some hyperbole, others metaphor. Having students translate idioms from their native language into English strengthens their ability to appreciate the meaning of idioms. Also, having students create their own original idioms increases understanding.

How idioms are taught greatly affects how well they are remembered and the level of frustration the ELL experiences. Visual representations of idioms make meaning easier to understand and provide a memory cue to prompt recall. Using commercially produced illustrations or having students draw their own representation of the meaning makes learning idioms easier and more fun. Students can also write stories or perform skits that illustrate the meaning of idioms.

**Skill 1.6      Apply principles of English pragmatics as they relate to language acquisition**

Pragmatics is the study of how the context impacts the interpretation of language. Situations dictate language choice, body language, the degree of intimacy, and how meaning is interpreted. For example, when customers walk into bar and sit down on a stool, they expect a bartender will ask them several questions: “What would you like to drink?” and “Would you like to start a tab?” This sequence of events and cues is typical pattern of interaction in a bar. Pragmatic knowledge provides the customer with a set of expectations for the flow of events. Pragmatic knowledge sets customer expectations. Typically people in a bar expect a certain level of social exchange that allows congeniality without intrusiveness. They expect to receive a certain level of service, and to use a particular level of manners. These types of exchanges are fairly universal in bars, but would be completely inappropriate in a more formal setting, for example, when conversing with the president of a corporation.

In the ESL classroom, pragmatics can be illustrated and practiced by repeating the same situation in different contexts. For example, students can write or act out how they would explain to three different people why they failed a test: their best friend, their teacher, and their parent. With a little imagination, different scenarios can be chosen that pique student interest and make learning fun. For example, explain an embarrassing event in different contexts, such as in front of a boy/girl you want to impress, a close friend, and an authority figure. For students with very low language skills, pantomime can encourage participation, teach the concept, and set up an opportunity for using language to describe what has happened.

Comparing the customs of various cultures provides another opportunity for illustrating how context affects meaning, especially when students in a class represent a variety of cultures. For example, in other parts of the world, especially parts of Europe and the Middle East, people commonly greet each other by kissing on both cheeks, even if meeting for the first time. However, in the United States, and many other countries, this greeting is not practiced, and is actually somewhat culturally unacceptable. For some people this practice would even be offensive or might be ridiculed. Describing and comparing cultural practices provides language practice and demonstrates meaning in context.

Explaining the nuances of English requires ongoing reinforcement. As examples surface, they should be explained and alternative ways to express the same message explored to clarify or expand on the meaning. Pragmatic features in communication can be very indirect. For example, when parents say to their children, “Have you finished your homework?” they are implying a command that if homework has not been completed, the children should stop their current activity and finish their homework. The pragmatic features are found in what was actually said, as well as what was not said. Students can generate their own questions that have farther reaching implications.

### **Skill 1.7      Apply principles of English syntax as they relate to language acquisition**

Syntax involves the order in which words are arranged to create meaning. Different languages use different patterns for sentence structure. Syntax also refers to the rules for creating correct sentence patterns. English, like many other languages, is a subject-verb-object language, which means that in most sentences the subject precedes the verb, and the object follows the verb. ELLs whose native language follows a subject-verb-object pattern will find it easier to master English syntax.

The process of second language acquisition includes forming generalizations about the new language and internalizing the rules that are observed. During the silent period, before learners are willing to attempt verbal communication, they are engaged in the process of building a set of syntactic rules for creating grammatically correct sentences in the second language. We don't yet fully understand the nature of this process, but we do know that learners must go through this process of observing, drawing conclusions about language constructs, and testing the validity of their conclusions. This is why learners benefit more from intense language immersion than from corrections.

Language acquisition is a gradual, hierarchical, and cumulative process. This means that learners must go through and master each stage in sequence, much as Piaget theorized for learning in general. In terms of syntax, this means learners must acquire specific grammatical structures, first recognizing the difference between subject and predicate; putting subject before predicate; and learning more complex variations, such as questions, negatives, and relative clauses.

While learners much pass through each stage and accumulate the language skills learned in each progressive stage, learners use different approaches to mastering these skills. Some learners use more cognitive processing procedures, which means their learning takes place more through thought processes, while other learners tend to use psycholinguistic procedures, which employs processing learning more through speech. Regardless of how learners process information, they must all proceed through the same stages, from least to most complicate.

Experts disagree on the exact definition of the phases, but a set of six general stages would include:

<u>Stage of Development</u>	<u>Examples</u>
1. Single words	I; throw; ball
2. SVO structure	I throw the ball.
3. Wh- fronting Do fronting Adverb fronting Negative + verb	Where you are? Do you like me? Today I go to school. She is not nice.
4. Y/N inversion Copula (linking v) inversion Particle shift	Do you know him? Yes, I know him. Is he at school? Take your hat off.
5. Do 2 <sup>nd</sup> Aux 2 <sup>nd</sup> Neg do 2 <sup>nd</sup>	Why did she leave? Where has he gone? She does not live here.
6. Cancel inversion	I asked what she was doing.

Each progressive step requires the learner to use knowledge from the previous step, as well as new knowledge of the language. As ELLs progress to more advanced stages of syntax, they may react differently depending on their ability to acquire the new knowledge that is required for mastery. A learner who successfully integrates the new knowledge is a “standardizer”; he/she makes generalizations, eliminates erroneous conclusions, and increasingly uses syntactical rules correctly. However, for some learners, the next step may be more difficult than the learner can manage. These learners become “simplifiers”; they revert to syntactical rules learned at easier stages and fail to integrate the new knowledge. When patterns of errors reflect lower level stages, the teacher must re-teach the new syntactical stage. If simplifiers are allowed to repeatedly use incorrect syntax, they risk having their language become fossilized, which makes learning correct syntax that much more difficult.

### **Skill 1.8      Apply principles of English discourse as they relate to language acquisition**

The term discourse refers to linguistic units composed of several sentences and is derived from the concept of “discursive formation” or communication that involves specialized knowledge of various kinds. Conversations, arguments, or speeches are types of discourses. Discourse shapes the way language is transmitted, and also how we organize our thoughts.

The structure of discourse varies among languages and traditions. For example, Japanese writing does not present the main idea at the beginning of an essay; rather, writing builds up to the main idea, which is presented or implied at the end of the essay. This is completely different than English writing, which typically presents the main idea or thesis at the beginning of an essay and repeats it at the end.

In addition to language and structure, topic or focus affects discourse. The discourse in various disciplines approach topics differently, such as feminist studies, cultural studies, and literary theory. Discourse plays a role in all spoken and written language, and affects our thinking.

Discourse between speakers of English requires knowledge of certain protocols in addition to other aspects of language. Speakers should have the necessary skills to maintain the momentum of a conversation, as well as to correct misunderstandings. Typical spoken discourse follows predictable patterns. For example, one person might say, “I saw a good movie last night.” The other person would ask, “What was it about?” The first person then answers in a paragraph with a topic sentence: “It was about a bunch of guys who devised a plan to rob a casino.” and then proceeds to fill in the details.