

**COMPETENCY 1.0 ORAL LANGUAGE**

**Skill 1.1 Knows basic linguistic concepts and developmental stages in acquiring oral language, including stages in phonology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics, and recognizes that individual variations occur.**

**Learning approach**

Early theories of language development were formulated from learning theory research. The assumption was language development evolved by learning the rules of language structures and applying them through imitation and reinforcement. This approach also assumed language, cognitive, and social developments were independent of each other. Thus, children were expected to learn language from patterning after adults who spoke and wrote standard English. No allowance was made for communication through child jargon, idiomatic expressions, grammatical and mechanical errors resulting from too strict adherence to the rules of inflection (*childs* instead of *children*) or conjugation (*runned* instead of *ran*). No association was made between physical and operational development and language mastery.

**Linguistic approach**

Studies spearheaded by Noam Chomsky in the 1950s formulated the theory that language ability is innate and develops through natural human maturation as environmental stimuli trigger acquisition of syntactical structures appropriate to each exposure level. The assumption of a hierarchy of syntax downplayed the significance of semantics. Because of the complexity of syntax and the relative speed with which children acquire language, linguists attributed language development to biology rather than cognitive or social influences.

**Cognitive approach**

Some researchers in the 1970s proposed that language knowledge derives from both syntactic and semantic structures. Drawing on the studies of Piaget and other cognitive learning theorists (see Skill 4.7), supporters of the cognitive approach maintained children acquire knowledge of linguistic structures after they have acquired the cognitive structures necessary to process language. For example, joining words for specific meaning necessitates sensory motor intelligence. The child must be able to coordinate movement and recognize objects before she can identify words to name the objects or word groups to describe the actions performed with those objects.

Adolescents must have developed the mental abilities for organizing concepts as well as concrete operations, predicting outcomes, and theorizing before they can assimilate and verbalize complex sentence structures, choose vocabulary for particular nuances of meaning, and examine semantic structures for tone and manipulative effect.

### **Sociocognitive approach**

Other theorists in the 1970s proposed language development results from sociolinguistic competence. Language, cognitive, and social knowledge are interactive elements of total human development. Emphasis on verbal communication as the medium for language expression resulted in the inclusion of speech activities in most language arts curricula.

Unlike previous approaches, the sociocognitive allowed that determining the appropriateness of language in given situations for specific listeners is as important as understanding semantic and syntactic structures. By engaging in conversation, children at all stages of development have opportunities to test their language skills, receive feedback, and make modifications. As a social activity, conversation is as structured by social order as grammar is structured by the rules of syntax. Conversation satisfies the learner's need to be heard and understood and to influence others. Thus, his choices of vocabulary, tone, and content are dictated by his ability to assess the language knowledge of his listeners. He is constantly applying his cognitive skills to using language in a social interaction. If the capacity to acquire language is inborn, without an environment in which to practice language, a child would not pass beyond the grunts and gestures used by primitive man.

Of course, the varying degrees of environmental stimuli to which children are exposed at all age levels creates a slower or faster development of language. Some children are prepared to articulate concepts and recognize symbolism by the time they enter fifth grade because they have been exposed to challenging reading and conversations with well-spoken adults at home or in their social groups. Others are still trying to master the sight recognition skills and are not yet ready to combine words in complex patterns.

### **Concerns for the teacher**

Because teachers must, by virtue of tradition and the mandates of the curriculum, teach grammar, usage, and writing as well as reading and later literature, the problem becomes when to teach what to whom. The profusion of approaches to teaching grammar alone are mind-boggling. In the universities, other forms of grammar are taught including: transformational grammar, stratificational grammar, sectoral grammar, etc. In practice, most teachers supported by presentations in textbooks and by the methods they themselves learned, return to the same traditional prescriptive approach - read and imitate - structural approach - learn the parts of speech, the parts of sentence, punctuation rules, sentence patterns.

After enough of the terminology and rules are stored in the brain, children learn to write and speak. For some educators, the best solution is the worst - they do not teach grammar.

The same problems occur in teaching usage. How much can we demand students communicate in only standard English? Different schools of thought suggest a study of dialect, idioms, and recognition of various jargons is a vital part of language development. Social pressures, especially on students in middle and junior high schools, to be accepted within their peer groups and to speak the non-standard language spoken outside the school setting make adolescents resistant to the corrective, remedial approach. In many communities where the immigrant populations are high, new words are entering English from other languages even as words and expressions that were previously common have become rare or obsolete.

Regardless of differences of opinion concerning language development, it is safe to say a language arts teacher will be most effective using the styles and approaches with which she is most comfortable. In a student-centered approach, the teacher may find that the students have much to teach her and each other. Moffett and Wagner in the Fourth Edition of *Student-centered Language Arts K-12* stress the three I's: individualization, interaction, and integration. Essentially, this supports the socio-cognitive approach to language development. By providing an opportunity for the student to select his own activities and resources, his instruction is individualized. By centering on and teaching each other, students are interactive. Finally, by allowing students to synthesize a variety of knowledge structures, they integrate them. The teacher's role becomes that of a facilitator.

### **Benefits of the socio-cognitive approach**

This approach tended to guide the whole language movement within reading. Most basal readers utilize an integrated, cross-curricular approach to successful grammar, language, and usage. Reinforcement becomes an intradepartmental responsibility. Language incorporates diction and terminology across the curriculum. Standard usage is encouraged and supported by both the core classroom textbooks and current software for technology. Teachers need to acquaint themselves with the computer capabilities in their school district and at their individual school sites. Advances in technologies require the teacher to familiarize herself with programs that would best serve her students' needs. Students respond enthusiastically to technology. Several highly effective programs are available in various formats to assist students with initial instruction or remediation. Grammar texts, such as the Warriner's series, employ various methods to reach individual learning styles. The school library media center should become a focal point for individual exploration.

**Skill 1.2 Knows characteristics and uses of informal and formal oral language assessments and uses multiple, ongoing assessments to monitor and evaluate students' oral language skills.**

**Language Skills to Evaluate:**

- The ability to talk at length with few pauses and fill time with speech
- The ability to call up appropriate thing to say in a wide range of contexts
- The size and range of a student's vocabulary and syntax skills
- The coherence of their sentences, the ability to speak in reasoned and semantically dense sentences
- Knowledge of the various forms of interaction and conversation for various situations
- Knowledge of the standard rules of conversation
- The ability to be creative and imaginative with language, and express oneself in original ways
- The ability to invent and entertain, and take risks in linguistic expression

**Methods of Evaluation:**

- Commercially designed language assessment products
- Instructor observation using a rating scale from 1 to 5 (where 1=limited proficiency and 5= native speaker equivalency)
- Informal observation of students' behaviors

**Skill 1.3 Provides language instruction that acknowledges students' current oral language skills and that builds on these skills to increase students' oral language proficiency.**

See Skills 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6.

**Skill 1.4 Plans, implements, and adapts instruction that is based on informal and formal assessment of students' progress in oral language development and that addresses the needs, strengths, and interests of individual students, including English Language Learners.**

**Second Language Learners**

Students who are raised in homes where English is not the first language and/or where standard English is not spoken, may have difficulty hearing the difference between similar sounding words like "send" and "sent." Any student who is not in an environment where they are regularly exposed to English phonology, may have difficulty perceiving and demonstrating the differences between the many English language phonemes.

If students can not hear the difference between words that “sound similar” like “grow” and “glow,” they may be confused when these words appear in a print context. This confusion will of course, sadly, impact their comprehension.

Considerations for teaching to English Language Learners (ELL) include recognition by the teacher that there will be differences in teaching strategies for students for whom English is the primary language and those for whom it is not.

Research recommends that ELL students learn to read initially in their first language. It has been found to be a priority for ELL students to learn to speak English before being taught to read it. Research supports oral language development, since it lays the foundation for phonological awareness a foundational skill for reading skill development.

**Skill 1.5 Recognizes when oral language delays or differences warrant in-depth evaluation and additional help or intervention.**

Without immediate, consistent, and appropriate intervention, children who begin their formal education with cultural/language differences or other delays in literacy development may quickly fall behind, and typically, they do not “catch up.” By the time they reach middle school, they may have already repeated several grades and/or have been assigned to numerous transition classes.

By the time students are in middle school, they are expected to use reading as a primary method of learning and to be able to communicate effectively orally and in writing. Students who have fallen behind in the early grades fail to meet these expectations and are forced to develop coping strategies to compensate for their perceived failures. These coping strategies, which often include inappropriate, problematic, and disruptive behavior, serve to further isolate and remove the students from the mainstream educational process and from effective interventional efforts.

Middle school students with delays in literacy development can be identified in a number of ways: they avoid reading as much as possible; when reading out loud, they read everything at the same rate, slowly; they do not read outside of school; they demonstrate a limited vocabulary, they rely on teachers or classmates for information; they resist participation in classroom discussions; they have limited attention spans; they demonstrate a lack of comprehension of material they have read; they are unfamiliar with and do not exhibit reading strategies; they are poor listeners; their writing is unstructured and contains a high rate of misspellings and grammatical and mechanical errors; they “give up” quickly when given a reading or writing task; they do not ask relevant questions; they do not know what to do when they encounter material they do not understand; and they read and write without a sense of purpose.

In addition to students with delayed literacy development, non-English-speaking students may also be in need of in-depth evaluation and intervention. Because command of the spoken language serves as a basis for understanding and learning alphabetic principles, as well as the structure and content of the language, oral proficiency precedes proficiency in reading and writing. Thus children without strong oral skills are in need of special consideration—assisting them in gaining oral proficiency must become the primary task.

**Skill 1.6 Knows how to provide explicit, systematic oral language instruction and supports students' learning and use of oral language through meaningful and purposeful activities implemented one-to-one and in a group.**

Have students break into groups and ask them to prepare a plan for how to best communicate to their audience (the other members of their group). Tell them to keep these guidelines in mind:

- **Values-** What is important to this group of people? What is their background and how will that affect their perception of your speech?
- **Needs-** Find out in advance what the audience's needs are. Why are they listening to you? Find a way to satisfy their needs.
- **Constraints-** What might hold the audience back from being fully engaged in what you are saying, or agreeing with your point of view, or processing what you are trying to say? These could be political reasons, which make them wary of your presentation's ideology from the start, or knowledge reasons, in which the audience lacks the appropriate background information to grasp your ideas. Avoid this last constraint by staying away from technical terminology, slang, or abbreviations that may be unclear to your audience.
- **Demographic Information-** Take the audience's size into account, as well as the location of the presentation.

*\*Start where the listeners are, and then take them where you want to go!\**

**Skill 1.7 Selects and uses instructional materials and strategies that promote students' oral language development; that respond to students' individual strengths, needs and interests; that reflect cultural diversity; and that build on students' cultural, linguistic, and home backgrounds to enhance their oral language development.**

“Political correctness” is a new concept tossed around frequently in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It has always existed, of course. The successful speaker of the 19<sup>th</sup> century understood and was sensitive to audiences. However due to societal norms of the time, that person was typically a man, and the only audience that was important was a male audience, and more often than not, the only important audience was a white one.

Many things have changed since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Just as the society the speaker lives in and addresses has changed, the speaker who disregards the existing conventions for “political correctness” usually finds himself/herself in trouble. Rap music makes a point of ignoring those conventions, particularly with regard to gender, and is often the target of very hostile attacks. On the other hand, rap performers often intend to be revolutionary, have developed their own audiences, and have become outrageously wealthy by exploiting those newly-developed audiences based primarily by thumbing their noses at establishment conventions.

Even so, the successful speaker must understand and be sensitive to what is current in “political correctness.” The “n word” is a case in point. There was a time when that term was thrown about at will by politicians and other public speakers, but no more. Nothing could spell the end of a politician’s career more certainly than using that term in his campaign or public addresses.

These terms are called “pejorative”—a word or phrase that expresses contempt or disapproval. Such terms as *redneck*, *queer*, or *cripple* may only be considered pejorative if used by a non-member of the group they apply to. For example, the “n word,” which became very inflammatory in the 1960s, is now being used sometimes by African-American artists to refer to themselves, especially in their music, with the intention of underscoring their protest of the establishment.

References to gender have become particularly sensitive in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the women’s rights movement, and the speaker who disregards these sensitivities does so at his/her own peril. The generic “he” is no longer acceptable, and this requires a strategy to deal with pronominal references without repetitive he/she, his/her, etc. Several ways to approach this: switch to a passive construction that does not require a subject; switch back and forth, using the male pronoun in one reference and the female pronoun in another one, being sure to sprinkle them reasonably evenly; or switch to the plural. The last alternative is the one most often chosen. This requires some care, and the speaker should spend time developing these skills before speaking in front of an audience.

**Skill 1.8 Understands relationships between the development of oral language and the development of reading and provides instruction that interrelated oral and written language to promote students' reading proficiency and learning.**

English is an Indo-European language that evolved through several periods. The origin of English dates to the settlement of the British Isles in the fifth and sixth centuries by Germanic tribes called the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. The original Britons spoke a Celtic tongue while the Angles spoke a Germanic dialect. Modern English derives from the speech of the Anglo-Saxons who imposed not only their language but also their social customs and laws on their new land. From the fifth to the tenth century, Britain's language was the tongue we now refer to as Old English. During the next four centuries, the many French attempts at English conquest introduced many of the French words to English. However, the grammar and syntax of the language remained Germanic.

Middle English, most evident in the writings of Geoffrey Chaucer, dates loosely from 1066 to 1509. William Caxton brought the printing press to England in 1474 and increased literacy. Old English words required numerous inflections to indicate noun cases and plurals as well as verb conjugations. Middle English continued the use of many inflections and pronunciations which treated these inflections as separately pronounced syllables. English in 1300 would have been written "Olde Anglishe" with the e's at the ends of the words pronounced as our short a vowel. Even adjectives had plural inflections: "long day" became "longe daies" pronounced "long-a day-as." Spelling was phonetic, thus every vowel had multiple pronunciations, a fact that continues to affect the language.

Modern English dates from the introduction of The Great Vowels Shift because it created guidelines for spelling and pronunciation. Before the printing press, books were copied laboriously by hand; the language was subject to the individual interpretation of the scribes. Printers and subsequently lexicographers, like Samuel Johnson and America's Noah Webster, influenced the guidelines. As reading matter was mass produced, the reading public was forced to adopt the speech and writing habits developed by those who wrote and printed books.

Despite many students' insistence to the contrary, Shakespeare's writings are in Modern English. It is important to stress to students that language, like customs, morals, and other social factors, is constantly subject to change. Immigration, inventions, and cataclysmic events change language as much as any other facet of life affected by these changes. The domination of one race or nation over others can change a language significantly. Beginning with the colonization of the New World, English and Spanish became dominant languages in the Western hemisphere. American English today is somewhat different in pronunciation and sometimes vocabulary from British English. The British call a truck a "lorry;" baby carriages a "pram," short for "perambulator;" and an elevator a "lift."

There are very few syntactical differences, and even the tonal qualities that were once so clearly different are converging.

Though Modern English is less complex than Middle English, having lost many unnecessary inflections, it is still considered difficult to learn because of its many exceptions to the rules. It has, however, become the world's dominant language due to the great political, military, and social power of England from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century and of America in the twentieth century.

Modern inventions - the telephone, phonograph, radio, television, and motion pictures - have especially affected English pronunciation. Regional dialects, once a hindrance to clear understanding, have fewer distinct characteristics. The speakers from different parts of the United States of America can be identified by their accents, but more and more as educators and media personalities stress uniform pronunciations and proper grammar, the differences are diminishing.

The English language has a more extensive vocabulary than any other language. Ours is a language of synonyms, words borrowed from other languages, and coined words/phrases - many of them introduced by the rapid expansion of technology.

It is important for students to understand language is in constant flux. Emphasis should be placed on learning and using language for specific purposes and audiences. Negative criticism of a student's errors in word choice or sentence structures will inhibit creativity. Positive criticism that suggests ways to enhance communication skills will encourage exploration.

**Skill 1.9 Knows similarities and differences between oral and written language and how to promote students' awareness of these similarities and differences.**

Although widely different in many aspects, written and spoken English share a common basic structure or syntax (subject, verb, object) and the common purpose of fulfilling the need to communicate—but there, the similarities end.

Spoken English does follow the basic word order mentioned above (subject, verb object) as does written English. We would write as we would speak, "I sang a song." It is usually only in poetry or music that that word order or syntax is altered: "Sang I a song." However, beyond that, spoken English is freed from the constraints and expectations imposed upon the written word.

Because of these restraints, in the form of rules of grammar and punctuation, learning to read and write occupy years of formal schooling, whereas learning to speak is a natural developmental stage, much like walking, that is accomplished before the tedious process of learning to write what has been spoken is endured.

These rules are imposed upon the written language, in part, because of necessity. Written English is an isolated event. The writer must use an expected, ordered structure, complete with proper spacing and punctuation in order to be understood by an audience that he or she may never see.

In contrast, the speaker of English can rely on hand gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice to convey information and emotions beyond that which is conveyed in his or her words alone. In addition, speaking is not usually an isolated event. A speaker has a listener who can interrupt, ask questions, or provide additional information, ensuring the communication is understood.

Thus, spoken English is a much more fluid form of communication and is more directly suited to meeting the needs of the particular audience. This gives rise to regional dialects and forms of expressions that with time and usage may find their way into formal written English.

However, with technology, there are new avenues for communication that are resulting in a synthesis of these two forms of communication: text messaging and chat room dialogues. In these forms, written English is not bound by the formal rules of spelling, grammar, and punctuation—rather it is free to more closely mimic its spoken counterpart.

Want to shout your answer? USE ALL CAPS! Saying something with a smile? Then show it! ☺ The limited space on cell phones and the immediacy of Internet chat rooms has also led to adaptations in spelling, where, for example, “text message” becomes “txt msg.” Other abbreviated spellings and expressions have gained reached such popular usage that in 2005, the world’s first dxNRE & glosRE (dictionary and glossary), “transl8it!” (Translate!) was published to help in the translation of standard English into text speak. Although these unorthodox forms of communication may frighten formal grammarians, this brave new world of communicating, as employed online and via cell phones, is far from being the death knell for “proper” English. Rather it is just one more indication of the versatility of our language and the ingenuity and creativity of the individuals who employ it.

**Skill 1.10**     **Selects and uses instructional strategies, materials, activities, and models to strengthen students’ oral vocabulary and narrative skills in spoken language and teaches students to connect spoken and printed language.**

See Skill 1.3.