

# *LINGUISTICS & LITERACY*



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## *About this Publication*

This magazine is a compilation of essays written by students in the Master of Education Program at the University of Mary Washington College of Graduate and Professional Studies in Fredericksburg, Virginia. The articles in this

magazine are representative reflections and research essays written by students in the following classes during the Fall semester of 2009: Linguistic Foundations of Literacy, and Introduction to English Linguistics.

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# FOCUS ON LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

## *Patterns and Knowledge of Language by Heather Hanson*

Many native English speakers do not realize how difficult it is to learn English as a second language. Tacit knowledge is knowledge that any person knows inherently about their own native language. Focal knowledge is not inherent to native speakers of any language, but rather this knowledge is gained when the speaker has learned the rule surrounding this knowledge (Tyler, 2009, p. 1). Once the speaker understands the rules surrounding an aspect of grammar, they can locate a pattern and follow the rule from that time forward. Native English speakers are lucky in that they have the necessary tacit knowledge to understand the strange forms and dialects that English takes at times. Tacit knowledge helps native speakers to interpret and construct sentences and abstract concepts, which generally means they will be able to communicate more efficiently than a non-native speaker who must rely on memorization of rules learned as focal knowledge. When working with students learning English as a second language, it is important to remember that teaching them will be different than teaching native English speakers, who may understand certain rules without explanation due to the tacit knowledge they already have about their language. Non-native speakers need explanations of rules and patterns to add to their focal knowledge about English, and to help them learn the rules to communicate effectively in English.

There are several aspects of English that are particularly hard to grasp, if one does not have the tacit knowledge to turn to. For example, the morpheme *-s* can have several meanings: plural, possessive, etc. This morpheme can be confusing for new English speakers because it relies on the context of the word it is applied to for its meaning. Due to the arbitrariness of the sign, the object doesn't have a connection to the sound of the morpheme, which would make it impossible for anyone to guess what the morpheme means (Pinker, 1994, p. 75). A person with the tacit knowledge understands that the morpheme can mean multiple things. However, a person without that tacit knowledge would rely on learning each of the rules that can be applied to *s* (Pinker, 1994, p. 120). It may be difficult for non-native speakers to understand each form, and when each form

should be applied. For English speakers, the way a morpheme is grouped is how we can decipher the meaning of the word. Morpheme groupings can be ambiguous, based on the speaker or the listener's tacit knowledge, as in the example *unlockable*. This word can mean both *not able to lock* and *able to be unlocked*. The way a person interprets the word grouped as it is, is tacit knowledge (Pinker, 1994, p. 126). However, because a non-native speaker must rely on their memory to remember each rule of English, and memory is fallible, there are bound to be mistakes in their new usage of English rules.

English speakers also rely on their memories to keep track of modal verbs and idioms. Modal verbs are not like normal verbs: they have no agreement. (i.e. *he can* not *he cans*.) These verbs do not have a regular rule, and the only way to know they do not behave like other verbs is memorization (Pinker, 1994, p. 132). Modal verbs are generally learned through both tacit knowledge and focal knowledge, as the native English speaker listens to their friends and family while learning the language and understands the use of the verb. The native English speaker also memorizes the meaning of the modal verb as part of their focal knowledge. However, a non-native English speaker would need to be corrected when using the modal verbs incorrectly, and taught to understand how to use the verb.

Idioms are phrases or combinations of words that mean something different from the words that make them up. For example, in some parts of the United States, the name of the natural phenomenon that occurs when it rains while the sun is shining is *sunshower*. In other parts of the United States, this is called *the devil is beating his wife*. Even a native English speaker would not be able to understand this second idiom from the words that it contains if they had not previously heard it used in this context. However, due to context clues, and hearing the idiom spoken around them and the help of the person using the idiom, they could come to understand the definition. Idioms need to be memorized, and are particularly confusing since the words that make up the idiom do not need to be related in any way to the actual definition of what it is describing. Only when particular idioms are explained to the listener do they become part of the focal knowledge.

Native speakers often lack focal knowledge, and tacit  
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## *Language Differences by Brianne Slattery*

The world would be a less complicated place if everyone spoke the same language, but since that is not the case, teachers must make adjustments to work with the differences that their students bring to school with them. Students not only bring vernacular dialect differences, they bring with them different cultural backgrounds and ideologies that affect their school lives. Within this paper, ideas from chapter six, *The Sounds of Silence*, of Pinker's book *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language* and chapter five, *Oral Language Instruction*, of Adger, Wolfram and Christian's book *Dialects in Schools and Communities* will be discussed. These ideas include why Standard English should be taught, how best to overcome instructional barriers, as well as why including some common language mistakes could add interest to language instruction within the classroom.

Teaching Standard English is essential in today's society and is seen as a necessity in post-secondary education as well as in the business world (Quible & Griffin, 2007). Knowing Standard English provides all students the opportunity to succeed within the economy (Adger, Wolfram & Christian, 2007, p. 101). Adger, Wolfram and Christian (2007) even say that parents of vernacular-speaking students expect their children to learn Standard English because they recognize the benefits of learning the language dialect most commonly used in society and associated with economic success (p. 99). However, it is not as simple as it sounds, there are barriers to teaching Standard English to everyone and these speed bumps affect all classrooms. These bumps include opposing attitudes and negative language ideologies, as well as the chronological age of the student.

Students who bring different languages and dialects into the classroom sometimes find themselves bombarded with negative attitudes. Since Standard English is taught and expected within the school setting, teachers can unknowingly discourage students with different language backgrounds by reprimanding non-Standard English usage. Adger, Wolfram and Christian (2007) say that when vernacular-speaking they will resist learning Standard English, for example African American students think that speaking Standard English will make them "act White" (Fordham, S., 1998, p. 100). Students view their language patterns, vocabulary and structures as a way to "signal social loyalties" (Adger, Wolfram & Christian,

2007, p. 100) and view learning Standard English as being disloyal to their culture. In order to combat negative language ideologies, it is essential for teachers to explain that they are not trying to change students' language usage but are trying to add to their repertoire in order to create a balance between the student's own language and the standard within society (Adger, Wolfram & Christian, 2007, p.101).

Another barrier that teachers must manage and take into consideration is the chronological age of the students they teach. Even though younger students tend to easily learn new languages or variations of a language because of influential peer groups (Adger, Wolfram & Christian, 2007, p. 107), they might not understand the language fully (i.e. grammar), as well as the benefits. On the other hand, older students may better understand the language and its nuances, as well as better analyze and monitor their speech and language mechanics (Adger, Wolfram & Christian, 2007, p. 107). This leaves open the idea of when to introduce Standard English in the classroom and suggests that introducing it at a young age and continuing its instruction and usage throughout the years will be beneficial. Duration of exposure to a second language system is especially important to acquisition since it is an essential factor in fully learning the language (Adger, Wolfram & Christian, 2007, p. 107).

A way to help students become aware of language usage and variations is to introduce common language mistakes to students, including concepts like oronyms. These concepts can be used to highlight the importance of understanding our language, the mistakes we all encounter, as well as how and why we make them. Language mistakes, like oronyms, occur because people imagine different word boundaries and cannot hear where a space is supposed to be between words. People can hear and misinterpret what is said depending on the collection of words being spoken and the order they are spoken in. The listener takes what they think they hear, combine it with what they have stored in their mental dictionary with the context of what was said and they make up the difference (Pinker, 1994, p.183). A part of the miscommunication also has to do with the sound combinations within words which can alter with tense changes, as well as the combination of words before and after a word which can blend sounds together and make clear pronunciations harder to hear than if the word was isolated (Pinker, 1994, p. 184). As mentioned, an example of sentences or words that when spoken can sound and project

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## *Valuing Dialects and Bilingualism* by Bridget Hodgson

The question of dialect is a much-debated issue in the field of English language acquisition. This essay explores two experts' research on the use of the vernacular dialect and its effects on language acquisition. Adger, Wolfram, and Christian (2007) investigate the use of the vernacular with regards to writing and grammar. Specifically, they note that successful English language acquisition does not eliminate the use of the vernacular dialect (p.104). Cummins believes that bilingualism should be encouraged since second language acquisition helps children to further develop and enhance their cognitive skills (1994).

The most common theme in both articles is the need for social acceptance of the speaker's primary language. Although one text discusses the vernacular dialect and the other focuses on second language acquisition, the theme is similar in that both texts are advocating social and linguistic acceptance to benefit the speaker. Adger, Wolfram, and Christian (2007) note that the vernacular is used among speakers as a form of solidarity (p.100). In this way, the vernacular becomes a way for ethnic or geographically close groups to identify with one another. This is also true when the speaker moves away from the geographic area associated with the specific dialect; he will often continue to use the vernacular as a form of allegiance (2007, p.100). Similarly, Cummins advocates the continued use of the speaker's native language while acquiring the second language (1994, p.51). In fact, students who are educated in bilingual programs are more likely to reach the proficiency level of their English-speaking classmates faster than those who are educated in English-only programs (1994, p. 50). Students are building their literacy and cognitive skills in their native language, which they can then transfer to the second language (Cummins, 1994, p.50). Additionally, they are more comfortable learning and communicating in their native language, which removes the anxiety.

The need for social acceptance leads to the other theme discussed in both the articles, i.e., the steps that can and should be taken to incorporate the vernacular and native language into curriculum. Adger, Wolfram, and Christian (2007) noted that vernacular speakers who were explicitly corrected by teachers actually used *more* grammatically incorrect vernacular features over time (p.109). They suggest

a number of methods to incorporate the vernacular into the curriculum, including role-play situations (Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, 2007, p.109). They also encourage the use of the vernacular in certain writing forms, including note taking, dialogues, and dialogue-journals (Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, 2007, p.109). In this way, the learning is meaningful, because the students can apply the practices to real-life situations. Giving meaning to learning is also a core belief of Cummins, who believes that students must be able to relate learning to previous experiences (2007, p.47). In sharing their identities and experiences, students can bridge the gap between the two cultures. This is especially important in the areas of literacy and communication, since there are ample starting points for discussion, reading, and writing activities.

The biggest obstacle, according to both articles, is often the school community itself. Cummins has thoroughly researched the social implications of language, and the misconceptions associated with second language learners (1994, p.38). Among them are social and linguistic prejudice, fear of the demise of the *traditional* classroom, and the false assumption that conversational English is the same thing as English proficiency (1994, p.38). Most importantly, he notes that many English language programs attempt to completely replace students' native language, and this is a mistake (1994, p.52). This process of *eradication* (Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, 2007, p.104) can damage students' cognitive development as well as self-esteem. Rather, English language education should be built on *bidialectism* (Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, 2007, p.104). Students need to be aware of the value of different dialects and language and their levels of appropriateness (Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, 2007, p.104). Once educated on these issues, students have more ways to communicate depending on the formality of the situation. It is important that bilingualism is taught as an asset and not a crutch. If our job as educators is to prepare students for the future, then we must encourage them to develop all of their language learning capabilities.

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## ***Second Language Acquisition and Dialects in Writing*** ***by Mary McBroom***

The article I chose to discuss is *The Acquisition of English as a Second Language* by J. Cummins. After reading the article I then synthesized it with *Dialects in Schools and Communities* a book read in class this semester. By the age of 5, children have developed linguistically in their native language. Children write the way they speak. Therefore, with patience and effort by their instructors, they become effective writers. As they develop academically they learn to write for a specific audience. Their language development plays a key role in their ability to write effectively for different purposes. Students bring a range of language skills to writing and there are many issues for teachers to consider when guiding students, ESL or vernacular dialect speakers, in the writing process (Adger, Wolfram, Christian, 2007, p. 113).

Both readings I chose to focus on discuss the development of students in spoken or written language of English when their native language is Spanish or non-standard English. For teachers this is not a simple task. It must be approached with patience and involve a tremendous amount of modeling. The Cummins article discusses ESL students and their ability to acquire the English language. Many times they speak English fluently and have developed the ability to communicate well; however, their understanding of the language is weak (Cummins, 1994). Adger et al. writes about the distinction between language acquisition involving tacit knowledge and simple exposure to language and language learning, the explicit knowledge of language rules which comes from the teaching of language structure (Adger, Wolfram, Christian, 2007, p. 108).

The theme of Standard English is strong across both of these readings. They discuss Standard English for ESL students as well as those students who speak the vernacular features of the language. Unfortunately, both are sometimes viewed as less intelligent by educators and require various teaching methods to help them adjust to Standard English in speaking and writing. All children need linguistically rich classrooms in all subject areas to develop expertise in literacy and in academic talk. Contrasts exist between their interpersonal communication within their families, with their peers and their academic language. (Adger, Wolfram,

Christian, 2007, p. 110). Cummins writes about these misconceptions in language proficiency and their relationships.

Both readings discuss the non-standard dialect spoken in native languages. Students who speak this non-standard, vernacular are frequently thought of as having an educational handicap and to be less capable of logical thinking (Cummins, 1994). The Cummins article speaks of linguistic prejudices facing Hispanic students. Some feel that Latin students simply do not have the scholastic aptitude to master 2 languages. This is sometimes attributed to genetics and environmental factors. Cummins discusses this view as a misconception. Chapter 5 in *Dialects in Schools and Communities* touches on this misconception from the direction of curriculum development. Students must see the importance of learning the language and the curriculum should be explicit and articulated (Adger, Wolfram, Christian, 2007, p. 104).

Bidialectism is a word used in Chapter 5 that refers to the ability to use two dialects to interact in different settings. Speakers of vernacular dialects learn Standard English in school and while maintaining their home dialect (Adger, Wolfram, Christian, 2007, p. 105). ESL students do this as well. Many of them speak English at school and return home to a Spanish speaking environment. In many ESL families the children are the ones communicating in English for the parents because they are the ones in school each day. Cummins points out that while many ESL students speak the language and communicate with peers, they often do not fully understand the meaning of the language (Cummins, 1994).

Approaches to teaching a second language and teaching a second dialect are similar because they both aim to support students in learning a second language system to use in certain circumstances (Adger, Wolfram, Christian, 2007, p. 108). Language acquisition involves tacit knowledge of language rules that comes from exposure to a language and language learning which takes place through actual teaching of the language (Adger, Wolfram, Christian, 2007, p. 108). ESL students learn a great deal of the language by interacting with peers. Their tacit knowledge of the language develops as they are exposed to and immersed in the school community. Educators often view students as proficient simply because they can communicate and participate in conversation. In reality their understanding of the language is low. When their academic ability is evaluated, they are often

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## *Spoken and Written Language* by Shannon Twyman-Ward

In a language there are two dimensions—the spoken and the written. With children, spoken language comes before written language. It is biological meaning that children naturally acquire it regardless of their environment (Tyler, 2009, p. 62). Children use their background knowledge of spoken language as a foundation for writing, and many times they transfer this knowledge into their writing (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007, p. 115). As a result, teachers should build on their students' foundational knowledge in order to help with these skills (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 113). In the books *Linguistic Foundations* (2009) and *Dialects in Schools and Communities* (2007) the authors discuss the spoken and written language continuum and the tremendous role that speech plays in one's writing.

One of the main themes in both texts is how students' dialects influence the manner in which they write. In a spoken language there are many dialects, the language variations based on differences in speech patterns (Tyler, 2009, p. 69). Students come to school with a broad range of language variations and language skills. This can pose a problem for teachers who are trying to teach their students the writing process. For example, one challenge that teachers face teaching speakers of vernacular dialects is the need to differentiate between appropriate features of writing and appropriate features of a conversation (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 113; Tyler, 2009, p. 69). In a conversation there are at least two speakers present. These speakers can leave gaps in their explanations assuming that their listeners can mentally fill in the spaces. In other words, speakers can take more for granted (Tyler, 2009, p. 70).

Unlike speakers of a vernacular dialect, writers normally follow certain standards and conventions. These standards are necessary in learning to write in most American schools (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 114; Tyler, 2009, p. 69). Writers have to take care to provide their readers with background knowledge because they are not able to assume a reader's culture, beliefs, or prior knowledge (Tyler, 2009, p. 70). They are not able to individualize their writings on a personal level with facial expressions and body movements. Because they are not in a face-to-face conversation with their readers, writers have to determine the register, the language variation based on different social situations and settings (Tyler, 2009, pp. 69-70).

Furthermore, sentence structure and grammar are two more themes that both books address. The sentence structures of spoken and written language are grammatically different

(Tyler, 2009, p. 74). In a face-to-face conversation, the speakers do not necessarily speak in sentences. A conversation simply can consist of short phrases or one word. The participants of a conversation are able to do this because they are able to rely upon the facial expressions and body movements of the speaker to fill in the gaps and gather meaning (Tyler, 2009, p. 74). Also, conversations are not planned; therefore, there might be interruptions, and speakers may run ideas together in an illogical fashion (Tyler, 2009, p. 74).

On the other hand, writers have to organize their sentences in a logical order. This is so that their audience is able to follow their train of thought. Writers have to organize their writings into an orderly progression because the readers are not able to ask them questions while reading the text (Tyler, 2009, p. 74). Students that speak a vernacular dialect might have trouble with organizing their writings due to cultural differences. For example, African-American children might write in an episodic style which some teachers could perceive to be illogical (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 115). Besides organization, the goal of teaching students to write is to help students to develop an awareness of the needs of the readers and how to adjust their writing to accommodate these needs. This can be a difficult task for students learning to write (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 114).

Children need instruction in bridging the gap between spoken language and written language (Tyler, 2009, p. 77). There are a variety of ways in which teachers can accomplish this task. In *Dialects in Schools and Communities*, Adger, et al. recommend that students receive practice in writing for a variety of audiences. This can help with both written and spoken language. It helps students think about the particular needs of their readers. For example, their readers may not need the same information from fiction as they do from nonfiction (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 118; Tyler, 2009, p. 77). In addition, this type of practice gives students exposure to the concept of register in the spoken language. Also, students should have exposure to the writing process. By doing so, this helps them to organize their thoughts to meet the needs of the audience. Another suggestion that Adger, et al. make is to give students the option to write in their vernacular dialect. One way to do this is through a dialogue journal in which the teacher and student respond to each other's comments (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 121). Students may not be writing in standard form, but this helps teachers to give them a chance to practice with sentence structure as well as setting up a logical progression of thought.

The spoken and written continuum can be compared to a cycle in which both parts benefit each other. By taking

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## *Spoken vs. Written Language* by Brittany Berneski

Spoken language and written language are two modes of communication that have been carefully analyzed by linguists. This essay explains the findings of two researchers who examined the differences between spoken and written language. Tyler (2009) describes the spoken-written distinction as a continuum. At one end of the continuum, we find conversational speech. On the other end of the continuum, we find formal writing, such as published books. Adger, et al. (2007) discusses issues related to Standard English in regards to teaching oral language and writing instruction to vernacular dialect speakers.

One of the main themes in both articles is that there are specific features related to spoken language. Tyler points out that speech occurs in face-to-face situations in which the speaker and listener can see each other because they share the same time and place (2009, p. 64). Because speakers and listeners interact with one another through face-to-face conversations, they take turns speaking and listening and therefore get to know each other and are able to form social relationships (Tyler, 2009, p. 68). Tyler also points out that interruptions are common in spoken language (2009, p. 68). We interrupt one another to complete the speaker's thoughts and to echo the speaker's ideas (Tyler, 2009, p. 69). Similarly, when we interact in spoken language, as described by Adger, et al., the listener is able to provide immediate feedback to the speaker (2007, p. 114). Adger, et al. points out that, when listening to the speaker, we use specific listening behaviors (2007, p. 114). These listening behaviors include the use of certain facial expressions, body orientation, and the use of words such as *Uh-huh* and *Yeah* (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 114). Adger, et al. also points out that, because the speaker and listener share the same time and place, the listener is able to immediately ask for clarification if something that was spoken was misunderstood (2007, p. 114). Adger, et al. describes this back and forth speaking and clarifying as a kind of conversational ballet in which both the speaker and listener are constantly aware of whether or not the conversation is successful or if adjustments need to be made if something goes wrong during the conversation (2007, p. 114).

In addition to specific features related to spoken language, there are also specific features related to written language. In contrast to spoken language, Tyler points out that with written language, the reader interacts with the text rather than the writer (2009, p. 68). Therefore, the reader is not able to ask for clarification if they read a difficult concept

or a confusing phrase (Tyler, 2009, p. 68). Tyler also discusses the fact that the writer cannot spell words according to their own individual dialects because the reader might be unfamiliar with the dialect being used and therefore unable to read and understand the text (2009, p. 67). Similarly, Adger, et al. points out that, in order for all individuals to understand the written language, the conventions of American English need to be taught and used (2007, p. 114).

When using American English, Adger, et al. discusses the careful choices that writers make in regards to the different styles of language (2007, p. 113). These styles of language include vocabulary, grammar, and text structure (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 113). When using vocabulary words in writing, Tyler points out that the writer must avoid vagueness and ambiguity (2009, p. 72). Because the reader is unable to ask for clarification, the writer must use specific terminology and therefore cannot use words such as *this*, *that*, *him*, *them*, and *it*, without first providing background knowledge to the reader (Tyler, 2009, p. 72). Tyler also discusses how writers deliberately organize their writing by using a variety of sentence structures to ensure that the reader is given enough background knowledge to understand new information to come (2009, p. 74). Similarly, Adger, et al. discusses how the mechanics of writing are carefully chosen to express the end of a sentence, a question, or excitement (2007, p. 114). In contrast to spoken language in which our voice uses intonation when speaking, writers have to show expression and pauses through the use of the correct mechanics of writing (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 114). For an example, in spoken language, a question is indicated by the raise of our voice, whereas in writing, a question mark needs to be used in order for the reader to understand the text (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 114). Adger, et al. points out that, during writing instruction, the task of the teacher is to help children develop an awareness of the readers' need and teach them ways to accommodate them using the conventions of American English so that all readers will be able to understand the written text (2007, p. 114).

This information is very beneficial to teachers of all content areas. Children need to be aware of the fact that there are distinct differences between spoken and written languages (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 113). In some schools, there might be a huge dialect difference in the student population (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 103). Children need to realize that it is acceptable to use their dialects when speaking with their classmates, especially if a certain dialect predominates in an area (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 100). It is during writing instruction, that it becomes a tricky situation. Teachers need to help children become aware of the readers of their writing.

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## *Oral and Written Language and Literacy* by Debra Tharp

Language is the key to communication between human beings. The use of language is a vital component in human behavior and understanding. It is interesting to explore, and to compare and contrast two forms of language communication, both spoken and written language. In this comparison the information of the article, Tyler (2009), discussing “Speaking, Reading and Writing”, will be compared to information found in the text concerning school dialects by, Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, (2007). Contrasts will be made of these articles to evaluate the differences in language communication that is spoken, face-to-face, and language that is used to communicate in writing. There are many interesting similarities and differences in both of these forms of oral and written language. It is important for all educators to be aware of the differences of oral and written language, develop an understanding of literacy, and how it is developed in students (Tyler, 2009, p.62). The development of oral language as the foundation of writing is also the key to understanding literacy.

Language development begins at birth and continues to develop at a very rapid pace throughout infancy and during the first five years of life. By the time the student has begun school at the age of five the language has been developed. Tyler (2009, p. 61), discusses that not only are students able to speak their language, they have developed a competence and mastery of the language to be able to carry on conversations. They can at this point gain meaning from conversations and can organize the information into units of thought (Tyler, 2009, p.61). Also, at this point in a child’s development, a specific dialect will have already developed in the child’s speech pattern. The spoken language development is vital in the classroom. The classroom that the five year old student enters should be rich in language covering all subject areas. This will help the students develop their literacy and academic skills, according to Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, (2007, p 110). The conversation that a student is exposed to in the classroom is very different from the language that the student has been exposed to in the home. The classroom language is focused on a language of learning and teaching, a more professional type of setting. There is an atmosphere of talk that is focused on directions and academics. The student, with practice and instruction will develop an understanding of the language of the classroom. Some specific aspects of language may be very different in the classroom than in the language at home. A student may be asked to respond to

questions in the classroom. Children who are not from mainstream homes and communities may need explicit instructions involving academic language use in the early years (Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, 2007, p. 110).

Children come to school with very little knowledge of the written language. They may have an awareness of the alphabet, and be familiar with written language from having had books read to them. These are wonderful first steps to literacy development in writing, as the student sees how writing is used to communicate. Tyler (2009, p.62), discusses also that children do have a basic knowledge of the spoken language, and it is the basis and foundation of the future development of written language. The teacher will build on the language skills the students have to develop ways of teaching reading and also eventually writing (Tyler, 2009, p.62). The basis to reading and writing is the process of decoding. The student begins to learn the process of learning the letters as symbols that turn into sounds. This process is the beginning of learning reading and writing skills (Tyler, 2007, p. 62).

Teachers that are concerned about having a classroom that is linguistically rich give many opportunities for the students to have discussions on academic subjects. To help students develop their spoken language, teachers can engage students in numerous types of social interactions (Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, 2007, p. 111). To better develop oral language skills teachers need to be aware that during whole-class instruction it is not the best time to develop the students’ linguistic skill. It is more beneficial for students to have small group discussion to develop linguistic skills. The problems stem from the fact that this type of instruction is teacher talk. When students’ participate in the classroom, it is usually certain students who dominate the conversations. This may contribute to some students becoming less likely to volunteer information and participate. Most of these types of students become just listeners, and are not participants (Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, 2007, p. 111).

The students’ development of the spoken language in school is critical to their success in writing later on. This can be developed in the classroom by specific methods of teaching that promote spoken language skills. One good example of this is found in Adger, Wolfram, and Christian (p.111, 2007). Students in this learning process during the whole-group activities enjoy the “Think/Pair/Share” method. The first step would be the teacher giving the problem to the students (Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, 2007, p. 111). The second step, the students will think for 30 seconds. Then the students discuss with a partner in their pairs. Finally, several groups in pairs give their results to the group leader. There is

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## *Spoken and Written Communication* by Laura Caton

Spoken and written methods of communication have perplexed many since people could write their thoughts down for others to read. Tyler (2009) explores the various methods of communication by discussing the history and examining the new technology available that may or may not improve the transfer of information. Pinker (1994) looks at the development of speech from birth, how it has developed and changed with the introduction of technology, and continues to change as people learn a language and develop. Both Tyler and Pinker discuss technological advances that will enable more rapid communication, but also point out the difficulties of achieving such communication.

When Pinker (1994 p. 157-158) wrote his book fifteen years ago speech to text software was just starting. At this time the software had difficulty with numbers, various dialects, and the speed of verbal speech. Speech to text software has improved significantly over the past fifteen years though it still requires one user to invest significant time so that the computer might become proficient at noting the speaker's individual pattern of speech. Most text that is input through this method still requires a person to review it because it will have many grammatical errors or misspellings. Pinker (1994 p. 157-158) mentions that the computer has a slower processing speed compared to humans and cannot understand a variety of people upon first interaction. The computer needs considerable time to learn the speech patterns and speed of the speaker, which involves the person helping it to choose the correct choice of words at times.

Pinker (1994 p. 156-157) mentions that humans can understand speech at various speeds depending on the context. All speech is composed of phonemes or individual sounds to create a word or words, for example one hears each individual sound in the word *dog*. For casual speech most people speak about ten to fifteen phonemes per a second, while some television commercials may speak as fast as twenty to thirty phonemes per a second, and finally artificially accelerated speech can be understood up to forty to fifty phonemes per a second. Pinker (1994 p. 156-157) is amazed that the brain can absorb this much information in such a short period of time while the computer synthesizer has trouble with the cadence casual speech.

While our minds can comprehend a lot of information in a very short period of time occasionally the information is

misinterpreted. Pinker (1994 p.155) mentions that there are many phrases in the English language that can be understood in at least two ways, which are called oronyms. For example, these two sentences can be understood in two different ways depending upon how you put the sounds together "*The stuffy nose can lead to problems* or *The stuff he knows can lead to problems*" (Pinker, 1994 p.155). If someone were to misunderstand an oronyms this would be known as a mondegreen. By understanding context and whom the person is talking about mondegreens are often prevented, but song lyrics are sometimes more difficult to understand unless you are looking at a printed version of the lyrics.

Pinker (1994 p. 178) noticed that when all the vowels are removed from words people can still understand the text. A reader uses sentence context and consonants to recognize common words in the English language. For example, even though x stands for all the vowels in the following sentence one can still read it, "*yxx cxn xundxrstxnd whxt x xm wrxtxng xvxn xf x rxplxcx xll thx vxwxls wxth x*" (Pinker, 1994 p. 178). Recently I have also read that Cambridge proved that passages in which the letters of each word are jumbled except for the first and last letter are still readable. As you will find in this sentence "*I cduolt blveiee taht I cluod aulactly uesdnatnrd waht I was rdenieg*" (Fry & Kress, 2006 p. 504). Words with only the first and last letters can be understood because the first and last letters are what allow our minds to predict the most common word. Our minds do not usually look at the middle or the end of a word as these parts are often considered extra material. English is a very repetitive language allowing good readers to skip letters or certain words because they are redundant. This allows the reader to absorb more information due to using less memory to decode the text. If a reader is always stopping to understand or pronounce a word by looking at all the parts of each word in a passage the person will remember very little due to the concentration he or she required to decode the passage. For example, when most people read a medical or a law textbook the mind is focused on decoding the words not understanding what they mean. Thus, when working with young children they should be reading text that is easy for them to decode so that they can work on comprehension skills (Pinker 1994 p. 177-178). English has stolen words from almost every language, in the process, becoming irregular or unpredictable at times. Pinker (1994 p.186-188) and Tyler (2009 p. 67) discuss that words are not spelled like they sound because the pronunciation of a word may have changed, but the spell has not since it has been permanent recorded for hundreds of years. If words were spelled liked they sound words would

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## *What Classroom Teachers Need to Know about Language* by Frida J. Krachenfels

Teachers need access to a large amount of information and tools to help them deliver language instruction effectively. They face challenges every day with students who speak vernacular (non-standard English that belongs to a particular group) dialects of English and/or have diverse cultural backgrounds. Many barriers present themselves when students try to graduate from high school. For example, 22 state officials have agreed to a proficiency exam that covers competency in Standard English, literacy, and in mathematics for a high school diploma. In another instance, employers are looking for employees with proficient usage of Standard English (capable of reading and writing) (Murnane & Levy, 1996 as cited in Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 4). In addition to these challenges English Language Learners (ELLs), are confronted by obstacles to fit into our society and to learn the academic curriculum on a daily basis. Today's educators are not fully prepared to face such challenges due to the current inadequacies of professional development and the lack of knowing language fundamentals. Classroom teachers need to fully understand Standard English and its structure in order for them to successfully teach students with diverse cultural backgrounds and vernacular dialects of English (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 13).

Vernacular dialects of English have different pronunciations and at times different grammar structures that may vary among communities (Adger, Wolfram & Christian, 2007, p. 1). Teachers can learn the vernacular dialects of English within their classroom and school by observing how they are speaking. Generally this will take time and effort, but in addition to understanding the student's vernacular dialect, it is also important for the educator to fully understand oral and written language, the basics of language structure (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 4). Oral and written language requires a basic understanding of linguistic (language) concepts. This would not include the prospective English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual (educators that teach the same material in Standard English and the child's native language) teachers that need to be in a more intensive program for the English language. With continuous professional development school districts or counties can offer this (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 13).

Oral language is the base of learning how to read and

write which includes the basic parts of language, language irregularities, lexicon (vocabulary) structure, vernacular dialects, academic English, and why it is difficult for ELLs to acquire Standard English. The basic parts of language are composed of phonemes (sounds: examples are, *v* and *b*-different sounds) and morphemes (sequence of sounds that form the smallest unit of meaning; examples are, *eat*, *cat*, or *sad*). With phonemes, some foreign language speakers may not hear the difference between initial sounds of words. In Spanish for instance, the words, *vanilla* and *banana*, begin with similar sounds, which can cause confusion (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 14). In vernacular dialects pronunciations can be different, such as the words *pin* and *pen* in which they sound the same in Southern states, but sound different in the Northern states (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 14).

The second part of language, morphemes, can either be an independent or a free unit. For example, *jump*, *dog*, or *happy* can be a free unit. Then another morpheme (suffix or prefix), such as *-ed* or *-ing*, can be added to change the verb form in expressing when an action is taking place, such as *jump-ed* and *jump-ing*. Teachers need to understand these differences and how it may impact children's comprehension, pronunciation, and to spell words (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 14).

The function of sentences and discourse structures (phrases used by the native English speaker to communicate with other native English speakers) are another important piece to acquiring academic language. Examples of sentences would include, a simple rhetorical (not literal) question, 'Can you hand in your homework?' If the student gives the teacher a bewildered look he/she may be trying to figure out if the sentence was a request or a question. The teacher needs to observe the cause (example: different culture or dialect) and eliminate the communication barrier. On the discourse position, a teacher may think that all students know what's expected from them academically. Teaching the function of sentence and discourse structures is a vital piece for students to understand school English (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 16).

An essential component in teaching the English vocabulary is the understanding of the formation of words. A teacher should be cognizant of sets of patterns, such as *evade* and *evasive*, *conclude* and *conclusive*. In this case students can acquire two new words at one time (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 16). Another way to teach such patterns is using cognates (words that have the same pattern forms within close languages) to second language learners. For example, there

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# FOCUS ON DIALECTS

## *Linguistic Differences Between Standard English and African American English* by Cathleen Hannifin

African American English (AAE) is a dialect of English that is spoken by nearly 80% of all African Americans (Dillard, 1972, cited in Perez, 2000, para. 3). AAE has more similarities to Standard American English (SAE) than differences (Tyler, personal communication, September 14, 2009). Students who speak AAE, however, may still experience discrimination and educational inequality (Perez, 2000, para. 1; Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 25). Differences between AAE and SAE could result in AAE speakers having difficulty spelling, being assigned to special education programs, or being treated unfairly by their peers (Redd & Webb, 2005, pp. 24-5). Teachers need to learn some of the differences between African American and Standard English in order to distinguish between the mistakes students make because of dialect differences and the mistakes that could indicate that a student is in need of special education (Redd & Webb, 2005, pp. 28, 30-1).

African American English varies from region to region, but there is a “basic core” of the dialect that extends across geographical borders (Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 19). While many speakers of AAE understand that SAE is used in the classroom, some words and grammatical concepts are so embedded in the dialect that AAE speakers may not realize that they are using a non-standard form of English (Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 23). For example, a student may refrain from using the words *dissed* in a paper, realizing that it is a slang term. The same student, however, may use the phrase *suck teeth*, not realizing that this phrase is a historically black one and many teachers might not understand its meaning (Redd & Webb, 2005, pp. 20-3).

Compared to Standard American English, African American English is a highly contextualized dialect. For this reason, AAE eliminates many of the redundancies found in SAE (Redd & Webb, 2005, pp. 28-9). “Two boys” would be described in SAE as *two boys*. In AAE, however, they could be described as either *boys* or *two boy*. Since the speaker has already stated there are two young men, making the word

“boy” plural is a redundancy (Adger et al., 2007, pp. 44-6; Redd & Webb, 2005, pp. 29-30). When transitioning to SAE, some AAE speakers have the tendency to produce hypercorrections (Adger et al., 2007, p. 116). Like a child first learning SAE, AAE speakers may over-generalize grammatical rules, using the word *womens* instead of “women” or *oxens* instead of oxen (Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 30).

Some sounds in AAE are also pronounced differently than they are in SAE. The /i/ in “thing” or “think” may be pronounced as an /a/, forming *thang* and *thank*. The initial /th/ sound in words may be pronounced as /d/ or /v/, producing words like *dem* instead of “them” and *bruvver* instead of “brother.” At the end of a word, the same /th/ might be pronounced as /f/, making “with” sound like *wif* (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007, p. 39; Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 26). Because of these pronunciations, AAE has many homophones not present in SAE. If a teacher says the word “pin,” an AAE speaker might think of the word *pin* or the homophone *pen*. “Thank” could be *think* or *thank* (Adger et al., 2007, p. 38; Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 27). These homophones might account for some of the misspellings seen in African American students’ papers (Adger et al., 2007, pp. 115-6; Redd & Webb, 2005, pp. 27-8).

Teachers need to be aware of the differences that exist between African American and Standard English. As African American students might have the tendency to produce hypercorrections, teachers might also have the tendency to excuse misspellings and grammatical errors on account of student dialect. Some mistakes made by students who speak AAE, however, are the same mistakes made by speakers of SAE. These mistakes often are made because a student has no previous knowledge of a grammatical rule (Redd & Webb, 2005, pp. 28, 30-1).

Individuals who speak AAE after years of schooling are often thought of as being unintelligent or lazy by both Caucasians and other African Americans (Franklin & Hixon, 1999, sec. 5, paras. 8-9). Many people in the United States, regardless of ethnicity, believe that an individual needs to use Standard American English in order to become a successful person (Franklin & Hixon, 1999, sec. 7, paras. 1-7). Because Standard American English is the English used in the world of business, it is important to teach it in schools. Bidialectalism,  
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## *An Educational Dilemma* *by Ruth Schmoyer*

Educators today face challenges that did not exist in previous eras when society was more static. Because of our mobile population, any given classroom may have students from a variety of countries and cultures, and their languages or dialects may differ greatly from that of the teacher or from one another (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 3). Since language is closely intertwined with self-concept, the instructor of such a mixed group is faced with an important question. How is it possible to validate the person by not disparaging the culture and dialect while at the same time giving the student the language skills necessary to function successfully in the academic or business world?

One of the first steps in solving this dilemma is for teachers to develop an understanding of language and the role that it plays in personal identity. The ability to communicate through language is an intrinsic part of all human beings and the societies in which they live (Pinker, 1994, p. 5). Therefore, condemning the way a person speaks devalues the individual and the culture which is represented. When educators understand this concept, it should make a difference in the way they approach their students regarding language usage and communication.

Within a classroom there may be English language learners with their varied accents, as well as native speakers whose dialects contrast noticeably with one another because they have come from different locations around the country. These geographical variations in speech patterns generally involve vocabulary and pronunciations or accents that are associated with a particular region (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007, p. 6). Even within those areas, however, there may be variations from one locale to another. Sometimes these are so subtle that they are discernible only to residents of those particular sections of the country. This is illustrated by the tendency of people from urban areas of the South to classify those in rural areas as having a backward or more country accent than their own. Someone from outside the area would not be able to detect the difference and would only be able to identify both dialects as southern in origin (Fridland, 2006, p. 51).

In addition to geographical influences on dialect formation, social, ethnic, and cultural imprints also are reflected in linguistic patterns of an area and blur any distinctive lines which would clearly separate one dialectical

region from another. For example, speech patterns representative of the Deep South may be prevalent among some white southern speakers but not nearly as evident among black speakers from the same area. Therefore, while people from other sections of the country can readily identify Southern American English, most are not able to determine the specific area or people group in the South of which the speech is characteristic (Fridland, 2006, p. 52).

The recognition of Southern American English frequently comes with a negative stereotype not associated with dialects from most other parts of the United States, and it often receives the same critical response as African American Vernacular English, which is also unfavorably identified. Sometimes these attitudes of disapproval are then extended from the language to the speakers themselves as a result of this linguistic discrimination (Bailey & Tillery, 2006, p. 12), and unfair presumptions are made about personal attributes such as character, intellect, or ability. Those who make these assumptions do not understand that everyone speaks a dialect and no one particular dialect is better than another (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 22).

For teachers it is especially important not to make value judgments related to language usage when dealing with children and their parents. Educators must be open-minded and not have set expectations for evaluating students based upon their own linguistic experiences. They must recognize that their own backgrounds may have an influence on their perceptions of the students, and they must put aside preconceived ideas as to what composes the "correct" speech patterns. If teachers carry dialectical or other prejudices into the classroom, they can have devastating effects on students through personal interactions, as well as through improper diagnostic testing and placement in classes or ability groups (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 8). Speaking ability does not necessarily indicate learning ability but may reflect cultural differences or the effects of home environment. This is especially true for those who are learning English as a second language, as some of these children may have acquired a mixture of languages or dialects in their homes and communities (Fought, 2005, pbs.org). For this reason, it is important that placement into remedial or English as a Second Language classes be done carefully after close observation in relation to other criteria and not based upon language usage alone (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 9). Hasty or unfounded decisions in such matters can affect a child's entire school career as well as self-image and goals in life.

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## *Language Attitudes and Dialect Prejudice* by Sharon King

Have you ever been on a job interview and knew the very moment you were no longer being considered for the position because of something you said or how you said it? Have you ever tried to explain something to someone and feel dismissed because you weren't speaking the way the listener thought you should? Have you ever been traveling and upon going into a shop to ask for directions, find the person behind the counter looking at you with contempt? If you can answer yes to any of these questions or can think of similar experiences you have had, you may have been a victim of linguistic profiling. Linguistic profiling is but one example of how the attitudes of others about a person's language can feed prejudices founded on differences either social or ethnic (Adgar, 2007, p. 22-23).

As we learn more about language and the many dialects, it is important to also address the issues that arise as a result of the language differences. In a classroom setting, a teacher has the potential to experience several language differences or dialects. Given the proper education and training about dialect differences, teachers can be better prepared to communicate successfully with the students and to elicit productive engagement from the students. Classrooms of today are more diverse than in the past; therefore the need for better understanding of language differences is paramount. Without the understanding, the students are placed in an almost impossible situation where they feel devalued because of the differences and thus lose interest in education altogether.

As children we learn, whether consciously or unconsciously, how others based on the way they speak view some people. Our thinking is greatly influenced by our environment and what we are exposed to on a daily basis. Children learn what they see modeled. This is a part of socialization. Thusly, one can be socialized to exhibit prejudice, consciously or unconsciously. While some may find a Southern drawl interesting or humorous, others may find it insulting. While some may find a California dialect fun and quirky, others may find it adolescent. Do any of the views on the differences warrant judging a person to be ignorant, unreliable, or immoral? No. There is no correlation between dialect difference and ability, educational or otherwise (Adger, 2007, p. 23).

If we are to somehow impact the negative attitudes toward language and dialect prejudice, we must first address

our own prejudices and then follow through by instilling in our students the importance to not feed stereotypes and prejudices. Adger, Wolfram and Christian find two options for addressing these issues – eradicate the differences or change the attitudes (2007, p. 23). Changing the attitudes is the more realistic solution since eradicating the differences would be nearly impossible. Language is constantly changing or evolving so to try to eliminate the differences would become a cyclic endeavor. Attitudes, however, are more manageable. As teachers, it would require education and training in the area of language and dialects, especially the dialect(s) used locally by students and families. By providing the teachers with the tools to recognize, address, and possibly incorporate the local dialects into the classroom setting, teachers will be better equipped to communicate with their students, interact with their students, and place value on the various cultures and dialects represented in the community (Adger, 2007, p. 23-24, 26).

Once teachers are able to recognize and acknowledge their own prejudices about language and dialects, they can then begin to model respect for differences in the classroom. Teachers would be able to stress to students the importance of respecting one another's differences. One way to do this would be to teach students about the various languages and dialects in their own communities (Adger, 2007, p. 27). It would also be helpful for teachers to be mindful of how they interact with students when students are speaking using their local dialects. It is easy to find ourselves dismissing a student if we don't feel the student is using Standard English. That would be the natural reaction since it is our job to teach Standard English. However, by dismissing a student's use of his or her dialect, we might also be discouraging that student from participating in the learning experience. That would be a great disservice to the student.

Another approach that teachers could use is to examine language myths (Adger, 2007, p. 26). It can only benefit students, and teachers, to know what dialects exist in the community, who uses them, and what the differences are. Once students are armed with this knowledge, they can then begin to discuss the various dialects and any misconceptions associated with them. Having an open discussion can dispel any fears students may have about their own dialects and how they are viewed by their community and society as a whole. Perhaps, then, students and teachers will be able to embrace the differences and learn from one another.

While I have focused mainly on the language attitudes

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## *Vernacular Dialects in the Classroom by Tiffany Walker*

Educators often have students that speak dialects other than Standard English in their classrooms. This essay will explore how teachers must take into account students' vernacular dialects when instructing both in spoken and written language. Adger, Wolfram, and Christian (2007) describe how teachers must find a balance between the vernacular and Standard English when instructing to help foster learning of a second dialect.

The first theme that is apparent in both chapters 5 and 6 of *Dialects in Schools and Communities* by Adger, Wolfram, and Christian (2007) is that educators must value all students' vernacular dialects even when instructing in Standard English. Students' speech patterns must be taken into account so that they are not alienated during oral language or writing instruction. Students should also be able to identify with the experiences of the speakers of the standard dialect if they are to see themselves using it later (Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, 2007, p.104). Educators should be aware of what students bring to the table so that both teacher and student are not focusing on how the dialect may have a supposed deficit in comparison to Standard English. If students are given the opportunity to use their dialect in instruction as well as Standard English, then they will be aware of the value of both as well as what context to use each in (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007, p.105). The students should be given assignments where it is clear that either the vernacular or standard dialect is acceptable or given instructions that only one of the dialects should be used. However, students should be given assignments that give them ample opportunity to use both

A second major theme in both chapters was that students should not receive instruction in Standard English whether it is spoken or written in a skills approach method. This type of instruction tends to alienate the student as they focus on rules and conventions and therefore lose sight of the value of their oral or written message (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007, p.118). The students may then reject learning Standard English because it is not seen as relevant. If the skill being practiced seems as though it does not apply to the spoken or written language task at hand, then the skill may not be learned. In addition, students may reject learning Standard English through the skills approach because they want to remain loyal to their social group by using their own dialect

when speaking or writing. The best approach is to teach students in contextualized situations rather than conducting skills exercises. For example if the student is having difficulty with the "ed" past tense ending when writing about a life experience, then focus on this in their writing. The skill is applicable to the writing and the student can see the relevance to his writing. For spoken language, students should try role playing to practice conversation in Standard English. The drill and kill skills practice can be ineffective because the students may not see the relevance in oral or written language and they may be led to believe there is a deficit in their own dialect.

In order to assist students in seeing that there is not a deficit in their own dialect, the best approach to spoken and written instruction is to emphasize the differences between the dialect and Standard English that will be used in the school environment (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007, p. 108). Standard English should then be learned as an additional dialect so that the students know when to use their native dialect (i.e. social relationships, home, neighborhood, etc.) and when to use Standard English (i.e. standardized exams, job interviews, etc). This idea allows the student to have a value for each dialect and one is not seen as being more important than the other. Both chapters also emphasized that students need to be made aware that their native dialect and Standard English are both acceptable dialects of the English language. This also makes students aware that both dialects can coexist in the world and both can be used (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007, p. 109). In addition, students can see the value of their oral or written message no matter which dialect is used. I see this many times with my own little ones as they write. They are so focused on conventional spelling and mechanics that they lose sight of their overall message. The kids then quickly write down a few thoughts to be finished with the writing task. I have been trying to emphasize getting our thoughts down on paper if we are writing and then going back to revise if it is a situation where the standard dialect should be used instead of their vernacular dialect. These chapters opened my eyes to letting the kids know it is okay to not just speak in their dialect, but to write in their own dialect and not in the standard dialect on all occasions.

It is very important that educators be aware of the different dialects that are present in their classrooms on a daily basis according to Adger, Wolfram and Christian (2007). Students do take pride in their different vernacular

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## ***Creoles and African American English: Not in the Classroom by Christen Oliver***

Dialects, creoles, and vernaculars have a historical heritage that converges on the educational community leading to instructional differences found in many classrooms across the country and globe. Students enter school with a pre-constructed world, language, and vocabulary, which then meet a more publicly determined world leaving students to not only learn a new community, but also the mannerisms and functions of that community. Often, the student's background and experience is left at the door and is not utilized in the classroom. However, according to Jeff Siegel (2006), a professor at the University of New England (Australia) and University of Hawai'i, these experiences and background should be used in the classroom, and in particular the varying vernaculars, in order for students to best succeed in the standard constructed world of the new community, whether national, global, or small town.

Students enter school with a varying array of linguistic experiences and backgrounds. Some of which include creoles. A creole is a distinct language developed from a pidgin. A pidgin is a system of communication created by various language speaking people who must find a way to communicate. These speakers develop their own vocabulary and jargon by making up words, borrowing from each other, or borrowing from the standard language spoken by their employers (Pinker, 1994, p. 21). According to Steven Pinker (1994), author of *The Language Instinct*, linguist Derek Bickerton found evidence in which a pidgin was developed into a creole (which is a language) by the children of pidgin speakers. These children of pidgin speakers infused grammatical structure where it did not exist before, therefore, creating a new, rich, and expressive language different from that of their parents (Pinker, 1994, p. 21). Examples of creoles exist primarily in Caribbean and Pacific island communities. Nevertheless, another popular type of vernacular found in the classroom is that spoken by African Americans, known as African American Vernacular or African American English. While this vernacular of Standard English is more popular among African Americans, it is possible for students of other ethnicities to also speak this vernacular if it is prevalent in the community they were brought up in. Both creoles and AAE contain a grammatical structure in the same way that Standard English does (Pinker, 1994, p. 18). However, these alternative structures are often

unused and under utilized in the process to learn Standard English (Siegel, 2006, 48).

According to Siegel (2006), it is important for students to acclimate to the use and understanding of Standard English in order to be successful in our current society. Students and adults who do not speak Standard English, using their vernacular dialects instead, are at times stereotyped in negative views personally and educationally (Pinker, 1994, p. 15). This ideology is not only spread throughout the community, particularly those of higher socio-economic standing, but also through the educational system. Many of the vernacular students enter the classroom speaking are unwelcome and excluded from use and references during instruction (Siegel, 2006, p. 40, 41, 43). Reasons for the exclusion of the use of vernaculars in the classroom result from the concern that it will ultimately be detrimental to the learning of Standard English, which is utilized in not only an academic setting, but in the business world as well.

Continuing on, Siegel expounds upon the concerns by those who feel that giving attention to vernaculars in the classroom will waste already precious class time, interfere with new knowledge, and will only further disadvantage already disadvantaged students (2006, p. 46). In response to all three claims, Siegel explains and demonstrates that exactly the opposite occurs. When students are able to utilize their own vernacular, (which is not taught in school, but utilized), students are better able to become literate in the Standard English taught. In a study completed by Simpkins and Simpkins (1981), students whose language basis was AAE were given reading material known as part of the *Bridge* series progressed significantly higher than those who developed their reading through traditional instruction in Standard English. Such a method utilizes various dialects when teaching reading for a higher rate of effectiveness (cited in Siegel, 2006, p. 48). In addition, students are better able to acquire a second language or dialect when the understanding of the first language or dialect is complete. In such cases, students are able to better transfer their knowledge of one language or grammatical structure to another. When students are unable to fully develop or make use of their language, the ability for transference dramatically diminishes, which will ultimately keep disadvantaged students further disadvantaged (Siegel, 2006, p. 48, 52, 53).

Moreover, what implication do language vernaculars have on education? Well, when a student's first language is valued in the educational setting students are able to make stronger gains, better connections, improved cognitive processes, and will have an increased motivation to do so (Siegel, 2006, p. 59). Ultimately, it is giving students a basis in which to activate and use their prior knowledge of

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## *Word: Dialect and Depiction* by Craig Lesher

Have you ever wished you could do amazing things with the English language like James Joyce? Or, maybe you would like to write clear, crisp prose like Ernest Hemingway. Maybe, you want to tell someone that you love them and you want to do so with just the right word. That sentiment is important. On a more professional note, if a teacher wants to foster and model good communication skills and help student speakers of non-standard English to excel. Gaining a firm grasp of word structure and meaning is a good place from which to start. Indeed, helping others communicate more clearly is a worthy goal regardless of the subject (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 22).

The focus of this article is the morphology and the challenges of teaching Standard American English (SAE) to those who speak different dialects and languages. As I write, I continuously ask myself, “Does this phrase sound right?” Morphology, the study of how language actually works in communication (Pinker, 1994, p. 509) begins to explain why something sounds right. To access the structure of the information bound within words, consider learning about this branch of linguistics. Surprisingly, words, though by nature arbitrary, follow rules in all languages and their dialects (Tyler, 2009a). Non-standard dialect, or vernacular, speakers differ from SAE speakers in how they use inflectional endings such as *-es* or *-ed*. ELLs face additional challenges when they encounter derivational affixes (Tyler, 200c). Therefore, we will look behind the curtain of casual usage by showing a way to graphically dissect and represent words and their internal structures. The sort of diagrams discussed may help teachers discover and clarify inflectional and derivational issues especially for students with diverse backgrounds.

First, we need to talk about rules. We might prefer to do away with rules. Yet, if I did not follow some sort of pattern while composing the ideas in this article, you might find it difficult to understand me. Rules or established patterns help prevent misunderstanding. Our instinctive knowledge of the universal set of grammar rules makes it easier for us to learn our native languages and to understand one another (Pinker, 1994). Native speakers follow tacit rules unknowingly. Gradually, they are taught the focal rules. Focal rules are the prescriptive rules of grammar that teachers emphasize. Schools teach the prescriptive rules of the languages which are designed to reinforce the usage of the prestige dialect

(Pinker, 1994, p. 508). Focal rules we must learn, but at least we learn the tacit ones, naturally.

So, the tacit rules are inherited, but where do focal rules originate? Neither England nor America ever established a formal academy with the purpose of guarding and protecting the language from haphazard usage. An informal network, however, has defined the generally accepted concept of SAE. This informal network tends to prescribe proper usage and how language is supposed to work. Because test makers established SAE as the coin of the realm in achievement testing, teachers help emphasize the prescriptive rules of language (Pinker, 1994, p. 385). Academic and other environments impose a standard so that thoughts and ideas may be communicated clearly and to increase safety and productivity. I noticed that the best preparation for numerous positions in the U.S. Navy was to learn the vocabulary and communication style associated with the task and the community. Similarly, SAE, is the lingua franca, or common language, of the classroom (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 22). No Child Left Behind and college entrance exams, in fact, assume a high level of literacy in their language of power, SAE. This assumption does not mean that users of SAE are more intelligent than speakers of other dialects (Pinker, 1994, cited in Tyler, 2009a). Certain dialectical features, however, have been labeled as highly stigmatized by some who are more at ease with SAE (Adger, Wolfram & Christian 2007, p. 106). As long as students must understand and communicate freely and effectively in SAE in order to gain acceptance in college and the work force, their teachers’ ability to equip them will impact their ability to excel beyond the subsistence level.

I noticed in a few hours as an ESL teacher that ELLs appreciate learning the general rules. Native language speakers may also find this information helpful because it starts to unlock the mystery of the language and reduce some of its arbitrariness. Armed with more knowledge, learners might begin to look for more word rules and continue on into the rules for sentences, paragraphs and essays. Finding word roots and understanding how suffixes change a word’s category may help students better grasp meaning and usage. Ultimately, they may learn to communicate more effectively.

A teacher who is unaware of the derivational rules of morphology might miss those golden opportunities to catch their students in the act of rightly using words (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 109). Knowing the order of affixation may help the learner increase in confidence or self esteem by better understanding the rules and power of derivations.

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## ***African American English: Does Dialect Weaken Writing? by Heather Carafiol***

One essay is enough to prevent a student from receiving his diploma. In eleventh grade, Virginia students are required to pass the End of Course English Reading and Writing SOL Assessments. Unfortunately, every year I see twelfth graders who have repeatedly failed the test, striving to pass in order to graduate. Across America, there are noticeable correlations between poor writing performance and dialect, most notably among African American students (Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 57). Teachers are aware of the stereotype: students who speak “broken” African American English (AAE), disregarding numerous grammatical rules and suffering when they try to read and write Standard Written English (SWE). Educators must find a way to understand and effectively address the needs of these students.

Many theories attempt to explain the poor literacy performance of AAE speakers. Perhaps it is a simple language barrier; the students are so used to using AAE that the SWE dialect seems foreign. Some researchers suggest that students from lower-class backgrounds suffer because they lack interactions and activities that foster a strong foundation in literacy (Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 59). Even the famous comedian Bill Cosby has commented on the issue, suggesting that African American children cannot distinguish between standard educational language used in schools and street slang that they are exposed to at home, primarily as a result of poor parenting (Cosby, 2004, ¶ 11-12). What many individuals fail to realize, however, is that both AAE and SWE are dialects of English. They are the same language, yet AAE speakers are stigmatized for their inability to utilize SWE. Of the numerous American dialects, the AAE group is often targeted as inferior, usually because of race or the extreme sound of the dialect (Adger, Wolfram & Christian, 2007, p. 87). This judgmental attitude towards AAE speakers almost conditions them to accept failure, since that is what the public expects of them (Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 69).

When writing, AAE speakers can struggle in many ways. Even if students are familiar with SWE concepts, discrepancies often appear within their writing (Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 66). I frequently encounter students that cannot distinguish between formal and informal language, inserting slang into formal essays. Many students are shocked when I explain that contractions are informal English. The

mistakes of AAE writers can seem extreme to teachers, primarily because when these students use their oral resources as supplements in writing, the AAE stands out as more of a deviation when compared to a dialect more closely resembling SWE (Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 64). Standardized testing can also adversely challenge AAE speakers if the tests contain a bias towards a certain dialect (Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 94). Clearly, these students need help, and a writing teacher must acknowledge her role in helping them to succeed.

Teachers must support and encourage students as they learn to use SWE, and there are numerous approaches that teachers have used to help improve the writing of AAE speakers. Many educators use “The Traditional Approach” by immersing the students in SWE alone and meticulously editing all written and spoken language (Redd & Webb, 2005, pp. 75-82). While noting the errors in performance is valid, constantly being corrected may become demoralizing. Teachers should be aware of students’ self-esteem, and also be sure to create positive learning experiences from mistakes. For example, instead of simply handing back graded drafts, I use samples of mistakes from the students’ papers as review exercises to help them grasp concepts.

Other educators embrace dialects as a teaching tool, as seen in the “Dialect Awareness Approach,” in which students study a variety of dialects (Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 89), and the “Culturally Appropriate Approach,” which teaches SWE but focuses on African American culture and practices to do so (Redd & Webb, 2005, pp. 94-101). For example, texts that incorporate multiple dialects, such as Zora Neale Hurston’s novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, help students appreciate differences in dialect. I have noticed that the combination of AAE dialogue and SWE prose enlightens all students. Overall, research suggests many teaching approaches with a wide range of activities, and ultimately the teacher must blend a combination of techniques to create a program that will best support the students.

The suggestions and scenarios presented by Redd and Webb are illuminating. Even I occasionally fall into the trap of marking every error on a paper, but I realize that red marks alone will not foster growth as a writer of SWE. All young writers, regardless of dialect, struggle to see mistakes in their own writing. When I grade writing, I provide students with at least one compliment and one suggestion for improvement. My students also write daily journal responses, and I always reiterate that by writing a succinct paragraph, they are preparing themselves to write with fluency. Teachers need to

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## ***Bridging the Gap: African American English and Standard Written English*** **by Sarah Jones**

At every English teacher's disposal is a toolbox filled with concepts, theories, and proven instructional strategies used to further enhance students' learning. Yet, when teaching writing to those students who speak a dialect different from that of Standard English, notably African American English (AAE), educators often struggle with bridging the gap between students speaking a particular dialect and their ability to compose in an academic setting. A primary concern for English teachers today is discovering effective ways to help such students find a balance between how they speak and how educational "standards" expect them to write. Therefore, in order to ensure that AAE speakers master Standard Written English (SWE) in a positive and meaningful way, writing teachers must be aware of the following three factors: print code and interdialectal hypotheses, the composing process itself, and language attitude.

Of all the educational theories designed to analyze the impact of AAE on SWE, perhaps the most useful for predicting errors found in AAE speaker's papers are the print code and interdialectal hypotheses. In their book *A teacher's introduction to African American English*, authors Teresa M. Redd and Karen S. Webb prove that dialect, specifically black discourse, doesn't directly interfere with students' thinking and writing. Instead, the errors found in most AAE speakers' writing is due to their unfamiliarity with various literary conventions, ranging from grammar mechanics to tone, and their tendency to drop endings (Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 63-64). Often, the struggles of learning Standard Written English and applying it against the oral features of a student's first language produce errors that are commonly mistaken by teachers to be influenced directly by one's dialect. On the contrary, it's not the dialect itself but the student's inclination to rely on oral resources, as seen in print code studies, or how less experienced writers employ a type of redundancy reduction strategy (similar to when there is unsupervised learning) while attempting to learn a form of English that no one speaks: Standard Written English, an example of the interdialectal hypothesis, that accounts for the majority of errors among AAE speakers (2005, p.64). Writing instruction should parallel this notion that reading and experience with texts paired with the natural desire to simplify, rather than

dialect alone, are the most prominent factors influencing AAE speakers' writing performance.

Indeed, the previously mentioned hypotheses are beneficial in predicting how AAE students will react to unfamiliar forms of SWE, but the composing process itself poses a challenge all its own. The act of writing, especially in the academic arena, is a higher level of thinking that some students, whether AAE speakers or not, have extreme difficulty comprehending. The composing process, one that is loaded with multiple recursive steps that adhere to specific guidelines, can too often cause an inexperienced writer to get lost in the wilderness of writing.

Furthermore, there is a sheer difference between competence and performance, between a student's potential and the actual product. Therefore, teachers of composition need to be able to distinguish a performance-based problem (i.e. ineffective proofreading skills) from a knowledge-based problem (i.e. practice with grammar or print code and interdialectal hypotheses scenarios) (Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 66-67). Moreover, teachers must remember that written language isn't simply oral language transcribed onto paper; rather, it's filled with concepts galore, like orthography—determining the proper spelling and standard usage of words—that make the English language quite complex and must be taken into consideration during composition instruction (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 25). Educators have a daunting task, here, but if overlooked it could be detrimental, especially to those speakers of AAE who are already struggling with SWE concepts.

Lastly, it is crucial that writing teachers establish a positive language attitude towards AAE and to those students who speak it. Students are perceptive, emotional creatures that feed off the energy exhibited by their instructors. Being a teacher in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires a certain attitude toward language that will foster communication between multi-ethnic, diverse populations. Today's society is consistently creating more and more diverse classrooms, and in turn, teachers are much more likely to come across students whose native dialect and culture differ from their own (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 5). Especially from a linguistic standpoint, teachers who fail to recognize and respect these differences run a great risk of destroying their students' confidence and/or their ability to communicate effectively (2000, p. 5). Additionally, teachers should be aware of their pupils' outlook on language while encouraging them to have mutual respect for all. Unfortunately, though, there are stereotypes

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## *Language Standards by Desiree Morris*

We, as teachers, play an important role, if not the most important role, in our students' background knowledge and experience with language and literacy. As such, it is our responsibility to understand our students' cultural background and to respect the multiple dialects we may hear in our classrooms. It is also imperative that we make distinctions between those students who may speak with different dialects and those students with legitimate language disorders. Students who speak with different dialects do not have disorders, but merely speak differently. There is a prejudicial preference for Standard American English in our country's public schools. Our country's perceptions of language standards are influenced by claims that English is declining and beliefs that we must defend it at all costs, even at the detriment of our students. Teachers are at the forefront of changing language standards and as such, we must work hard to not mislabel students and continue striving to meet the needs of all students.

Currently, Standard American English or SAE is the dialect most often taught in schools, although there are many different dialects of American (U.S.) English. It is a common misconception that other dialects, including African American English or AAE and Southern dialects are inferior to SAE because of its current dominance in our schools. It is our task as teachers, to bring an end to this fallacy. A dialect is not a language in and of itself; in fact it is merely a different way of speaking the same language. Our students learn and speak different dialects at home and expecting students to know and speak SAE when they arrive at school is an irresponsible expectation on the educator's part. Expecting students to put their cultural background aside and model society's established standards is unacceptable. It is even more foolish to label those students who speak with different dialects inept or having language disorders. Rather teachers should embrace different dialects and respect the diverse cultures they may encounter in their classrooms. Pinker (1994) argues that "the rules people learn in school are called *prescriptive* rules, prescribing how one "ought" to talk" (p. 383). SAE includes the existing set of rules taught to students in our country's public classrooms. We expect our students to pronounce "they" rather than "dey." We correct students when they say "ain't" "workin'" and "birfday." We often mistakenly claim these students who speak different dialects or have language differences as having language

deficits. We label the students who say these terms and recommend they have remedial assistance. We do not take time to understand where these differences in pronunciation or speech originate. Most of the time students speak the same dialect that their family speaks. We must understand the community in which we teach and the different dialects outside of our classrooms. As educators we must look beyond our own language dialect and understand the community in which we are teaching. It is no wonder we make false accusations when we hold all of our richly cultural and diverse students to one common standard of speech.

Our national exams, including the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) or the Nation's Report Card show promising scores on verbal and writing skills (Adger, 2007, p. 90). But it is important to remember that mostly middle class European Americans test makers write these assessments for a once homogenous group of middle class European American students. The truth is these tests do not measure what they claim to measure nor do they meet the needs of the students they assess. In fact, most of these exams segregate those students who speak with different dialects. The tests claim to test students' intelligence or aptitude, but they inadvertently measure students' ability to apply only SAE rules to language. These types of assessment contain biases towards certain groups of students who are in the testing pool; students who are not native SAE speakers. The tests demand those students to suppress their own cultural norms in order to answer the questions correctly. This type of segregation keeps groups of students' scores low and not reflective of their full potential and understanding of language and literacy.

Language standards in schools should not diminish dialects, but instead embrace the many different ways of saying the same thing in English. Our tests should assess students' understanding of material and their ability to learn, not dwell on their different speech patterns. We should assess students' knowledge of material and ability to put that knowledge to use, not inadvertently encourage stereotyping and prejudice. Teachers are at the forefront of ending the misconception that other dialects are inferior to SAE. Teachers have firsthand experience with students and can recognize a language deficit from a language difference. Understanding the community in which one teaches is necessary to best help students learn and meet their full potential. Teachers who notice a language difference would

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## *A Dialect Does Not Equate to a Deficit* by Stephanie Iero

There was a conversation I had with an older teacher a few months ago which, especially since taking a linguistics class, has troubled me. The teacher was describing a situation involving African American students and how she felt sorry for them because they will never learn “real English.” She described to me how poorly they do in class discussions and on reading tests. She attributed this to the fact that their families cannot speak properly at home and how it has “infiltrated” into her classroom. Now upon further reflection of this conversation, I realize she was describing the deficit theory of linguistics. At that time, I was unprepared to carry on a conversation about students and how their dialects relate to education. Thus, I have taken this opportunity to explore the deficit theory, its lack of existence, and the role that context of a situation plays.

In the 1960s, people were trying to explain why disadvantaged students tend to have high rates of failure in school and as a result the “deficit theory” was born (Powell, 1998, p.21). Proponents of this theory believe that speakers of dialects with vernacular form have a social and cognitive handicap because their dialects are illogical, sloppy, or have bad grammar (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007, p.17). It is believed that children from lower socioeconomic families lack the verbal stimulation in their homes and thus enter school without the linguistic resources needed for success (Powell, 1998, p.21). I believe the teacher was subconsciously a proponent of the deficit theory. She believed these students were at a disadvantage intellectually because their families did not speak Standard English at home and in her opinion it influenced their achievement at school.

According to several linguistic resources the deficit theory does not exist (Adger, et al., 2007; Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Powell, 1998). No one linguistic system can be shown to be better than another and there is no reason to assume that using a particular dialect is associated with an inherent deficit or advantage (Adger, et al, 2007, p.18). Rebecca Powell (1998) points out several linguistic studies that have shown all language variations are equally systematic and complex (p.22). Standard English has traditionally been associated with the upper class, so it has been assigned a higher standing in our society and schools (Powell, 1998, p.22). Now there is a misconception by some teachers that anything else is unacceptable and students who speak in a dialect are at a

disadvantage. However, all children who enter school are highly competent language users, but they may not always be in situations where they are able to demonstrate their “linguistic competence” (Powell, 1998, p.22). Teachers without this understanding will assume that there is something wrong with students whose ways of using language are not what they expect (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p.5). The teacher I spoke with did not have this definition or understanding of dialects and language variation. She fell into the misconception that there was something inherently wrong with these students.

Instead of immediately labeling students as verbally incompetent, others factors should be taken into consideration first. Halliday and Hanson (1985) argue the “context of the situation” where the interaction takes place needs to be looked at instead of immediately claiming the deficit theory (as cited in Powell, 1998, p.22). When in the classroom, teachers usually expect students to respond to others in fully grammatical, complete sentences and when students do not do this these teachers claim that the students are falling behind. Rebecca Powell (1998) urges teachers to instead look at the “context of the situation” because sometimes responding to certain tasks with brief utterances would be entirely appropriate (p.22). For example, Rebecca Powell (1998) recounted an example of verbal incompetence that was related to her by a teacher (p.23). The teacher was upset that the student was not answering questions about a picture they were both looking at in full sentences. In this scenario, it is unnatural to restate the entire question that was posed, within the answer, especially since both participants are looking at the picture. In conversational English, simply giving a one word answer would be entirely appropriate for this particular situation. It is incredibly important to look at the context that produced a particular response rather than simply claiming verbal incompetence like the teacher did in this scenario.

Rebecca Powell (1998) further explored the idea of having actual open dialogue and discussions in today’s primary classrooms, rather than teacher questions and student answers (p.24). She suggests that several questions asked of students today do not really require students to use complete sentences in a response (Powell, 1998, p.24). Today’s primary classrooms do not permit a great deal of collaboration between student and teacher; rather a more informal environment which allows the use of dialects should be used to elicit better discussions (Powell, 1998, p.24). Powell (1998) argues that we need to not judge our student’s

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## *The Deficit Theory and Dialects* by Christine Bilodeau

Many students are labeled as incompetent language users for the following infractions: use of incomplete sentences, “misuse” of pronouns, and the use of short words and short sentences over more complex words and sentences (Powell, 1999, p. 21). However, teachers who utilize these criteria for evaluating language proficiency may be subscribing to a theory which indulges unjust biases against certain dialects: the “deficit theory” of linguistic deprivation. Briefly, the “deficit theory” proposes that students who are economically disadvantaged are necessarily linguistically disadvantaged as well, because they lack opportunities to develop linguistic skills at home (Powell, 1999, p. 21). According to Powell, the “deficit theory” attempts to unfairly equate certain dialects of English with inferior linguistic development.

Powell notes that there are two main problems inherent in the “deficit theory”. First, it does not take into account that the context of a situation can change the way people speak. Second, it does not acknowledge the complexity of dialects in comparison to Standard English (Powell, 1999). The following is an exploration into these two facets of the “deficit theory” with a particular emphasis on dialect. The exploration concludes with solutions for addressing this problem area of the educational system. To begin, dialects are dependent on a location, a group of people, and/or a social stratum (Adger, Christian, Wolfram 1999, p. 1). Within a school, however, there is an expectation that all students will suddenly standardize their use of English. This expectation does not give any value to the knowledge of any dialect or language other than Standard English. In Christa Smith Anderson’s article on Hawaiian Creole language, we are afforded a glimpse into the psychology of a speaker of a marginalized language. A teacher expects his students to erase their Creole language completely and replace it with Standard English. The students feel ashamed and guilty for speaking Hawaiian Creole (Anderson, 2005, para.5). These could easily be the feelings of the speaker of a marginalized dialect who is told to stop speaking a certain way and speak “normal” or “standard” English. In the article by Fillmore and Snow, the authors agree that when teachers do not recognize non-standard ways of speaking they undermine their students' confidence in their ability to communicate (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 5). This shame and lack of confidence can clarify why a student

would choose to use short words and sentences rather than longer, more complex options. If the teacher places a stigma on the dialect, the student may be terse in class simply to avoid the negative associations with the dialect.

In the instance of unrealistic expectations for the use of Standard English, the context of the academic setting (the expectation for *only* Standard English) completely interferes with the students’ responses. The students’ responses are altered and the teachers’ evaluations of the students’ linguistic abilities are therefore skewed. That is, students’ use of incomplete or shorter sentences may arise from the school context rather than any linguistic incapability.

Students may also be labeled as incompetent language users for “misuse” of Standard English, as in the case of the “misused” pronoun (Powell, 1999, p. 21). However, this can easily be a description of a grammatical rule of a dialect rather than a description of a broken rule of Standard English. For example, in *Dialects in Schools and Communities*, the speech patterns of an 11 year old boy from Baltimore, Maryland are charted. It is noted that in this boy’s specific dialect, the relative pronoun forms can be absent if they are the subject of a relative clause (Adger et al., 1999, p. 63). This is a grammatical difference between one dialect and Standard English, but a difference does not equate to a deficiency (Adger et al, 1999, p. 19).

Just as the Hawaiian Creole language was undervalued by a teacher in Anderson’s article, certain dialects are seen as inferior and undesirable by many teachers throughout the United States. Powell writes that if a student uses a dialect *perceived* to be deficient (regardless of the fallacy of that bias) the student will be categorized as linguistically deprived (Powell, 1998, p. 22). Adger, Christian and Wolfram corroborate that speakers of vernacular dialects are often held in low esteem (Adger et al., 1999, p. 27).

In conclusion, the “deficit theory” of linguistic deprivation is based on omission (the context of a situation has a large effect on speech patterns) and false assumption (certain dialects are linguistically deficient). In order to change the circumstances that give rise to this theory, we need to first change the context of the situation in which students’ language skills are evaluated. We need meaningful interactions between students and teachers and clear and realistic expectations transmitted from teachers to students (Powell, 1998, p. 25). This will allow natural speech patterns to emerge from students, allowing for more accurate

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# FOCUS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

## *Second Language Acquisition Basics for Teachers by Sarah Holsomback*

“I do not understand what happened and why he failed the science test. He speaks English well.” This statement is likely heard in every school wherein there are English Language Learners (ELLs). Teachers and school personnel may have misconceptions of the process of second language acquisition (SLA) and what it means to be fluent or academically equipped for grade level work due to various reasons, one of which is varied requirements in teacher preparation programs. A student’s second language is any language that is acquired after their first; therefore, students may have two or three different second languages. This is fairly common, and one example is when people belong to a particular tribal group within their country, speaking their tribal language and the national language. There are several factors that affect second language acquisition; selected concepts will be developed further in this paper and followed by a brief overview of the current SLA teaching approach. The concepts include: age, Basic Interpersonal Conversation Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), individual differences and the teacher’s native language.

Age is a factor in second language acquisition and learning a language is different at different ages (Tyler, 2006, p. 5). Children can learn two languages simultaneously, but will likely learn to read and write only one language upon entering school (Tyler, 2006, p. 6). Younger children will usually speak their second language quite well after two to three years, but will be behind their English-speaking peers in vocabulary, reading and writing (Tyler, 2006, p. 6). Those who immigrate after puberty will likely always retain their accent (Pinker, 1994, p. 295). However, if the adolescent is literate in their first language, reading and writing may be eased with vocabulary transfers and their sophisticated cognitive skills aiding, in spelling and grammar (Tyler, 2006, p. 6). Teens and adults acquire morpho-syntax, how parts of a sentence relate to each other, faster than children (Tyler, 2009, slide 9). A challenge for adolescents in learning a second language is their inhibitions that may prevent them from practicing their second language in social interactions (Tyler, 2006, p. 6). Most adults never

master a foreign language, especially the phonology or the systems of sounds (Pinker, 1994, p. 295). Adults are usually better risk-takers and like teenagers have sophisticated cognitive skills to learn a new language. In spite of this, adults are also self-sufficient and very closely tied to their identity as a speaker of their native language and will likely not need or want to change their linguistic behavior (Tyler, 2006, p. 6-7).

The opening dialog highlights the difference between Basic Interpersonal Conversation Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS is highly contextualized oral language and is frequently referred to as “playground talk” (Tyler, 2009, slide 10). There is minimal vocabulary and no literacy skills are needed to master BICS (Tyler, 2009, slide 10). A school-aged child in the target language environment can acquire BICS in two to three years (Tyler, 2009, slide 10). Example tasks that a student who has mastered BICS will be able to do are communicate with their classmates, request help, orally catalog their daily routines, and describe their feelings.

CALP includes decontextualized written language, complex discourse, grammar and vocabulary (Tyler, 2009, slide 10). CALP is often referred to using only the middle words, *academic language*. This is where many teachers lack understanding and assume that because a student speaks English well with teachers and friends that he or she is able to master the academic content as well. Prior knowledge and experiences are related factors to the speed of acquiring CALP because a student may not have experiences with items used to teach fractions or experiences with the changing of seasons to understand the tilt of the earth’s axis. CALP takes much longer to acquire than BICS and can take longer than ten years (Tyler, 2009, slide 10). A 3<sup>rd</sup> grader in Virginia would need to acquire the following vocabulary for just one of the Science state’s standards: *adaptations, shelter, hibernation, migration, camouflage, mimicry, instinct, and learned behavior*. A student who has mastered CALP would be able to participate and comprehend an academic lecture on photosynthesis, be able to read and understand a textbook on the topic and be able to explain photosynthesis using words like *chlorophyll, pigment* and *carbon dioxide*.

Individual differences among learners affect one’s second language acquisition. These include motivation, personality  
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## *Tacit Knowledge: Help and Hindrance in ESL Instruction* by Sherri Tombarge

Teachers of students for whom English is a second language and English as a Second Language (ESL) students themselves bring a common quality to the classroom. Both have tacit knowledge – an implicit understanding of how they may and may not construct sentences and have them be understood (Tyler, 2009, p.1). This implicit understanding is not of grammar in the sense of a prescriptive grammar taught to encourage use of a standardized form of a language, but of how a language works in use. It is grammar as the term is used by linguists, those who study how language works and describe its patterns (Tyler, 2009, p. 3). Indeed, both the teacher and the student bring tacit knowledge to the classroom, but while the teacher's tacit knowledge is of English, the student's tacit knowledge is of some other language. The student's tacit knowledge of his or her native language may add to his or her instinctive knowledge of how language in general works, but it is little help in understanding how one specific, non-native language, English, works. Yet the teacher's tacit knowledge, which is conveniently in the English language, may be, in itself, a kind of handicap. For while that teacher will easily identify the student's errors, and know one or several ways to correct each, the very fact that tacit knowledge is intuitive (Tyler, 2009, p. 1) means that the teacher may not be able to offer the student a clear explanation that he or she may use when faced with similar constructions in the future. Both the teacher and the student find themselves in dire need of some focal knowledge, the teacher of his or her native language and the student of his or her second language.

Focal knowledge is learned understanding (Tyler, 2009, p. 2) of how one's own language ought to be used, usually in more formal contexts. It is understanding of prescriptive grammar and usage, that used in dialects considered standard and used to varying degrees in many public-speaking situations, such as television newscasts, and in many published works, such as academic papers and newspapers. Because focal knowledge is learned, speakers may be better able to explain why structures that fall into this category of understanding are correct or incorrect. How much of a native speaker's knowledge of the standard dialect is focal knowledge is an interesting grey area, since native dialects

vary in how closely they match standard forms of the language (Tyler, 2009, p. 2). This fact suggests that a teacher whose native dialect differs greatly from the standard dialect, but who uses the standard dialect correctly with facility, might make the optimum teacher for ESL students since that teacher's focal knowledge may cover more concepts of Standard English than that of a teacher who grew up speaking a dialect closer to standard English and therefore has more tacit but less focal knowledge.

The tacit-focal knowledge dilemma encompasses grammar, vocabulary, and phonological aspects of dialect. A good example of the dilemma as it applies to vocabulary may be found in Steven Pinker's treatment of the words *disinterested* and *uninterested* (1994, pp. 416-17). Pinker notes that the two words are not synonyms according to current correct usage in Standard English. In current Standard English, as Pinker points out, the word *disinterested* means "unbiased," though it is often misused to mean "apathetic," which is closer to the meaning of *uninterested*. When he calls *disinterested* a "lovely word," Pinker alludes to the joy English teachers feel when a word is used correctly to express a subtle difference in meaning from another word (1994, p. 416). Pinker then presumably breaks down his own case by revealing that in an earlier era, the eighteenth century, the two words were indeed synonyms (1994, p. 417). It seems likely that standard dialects evolve over time just as vernacular dialects do, at a slower rate, however, because language gatekeepers, such as copy editors and English teachers, don't allow new terms and constructions into the standard dialect until they are well and broadly established in vernacular dialects, if then. The meaning of this word, at least in Standard English, has evolved since the eighteenth century. Therefore, for those in the current era who grew up speaking a dialect close to Standard English, the correct meaning of *disinterested*, that is, "unbiased," is tacit knowledge. For others, it must be focal knowledge, learned from memorization of vocabulary lists in school, or not at all, hence the common misuse of the word. This discrepancy may be indicative of the current state of the word's evolution. A future generation may find that the standard dialect again defines the two words as synonyms, dissolving the tacit-focal knowledge dilemma in this case. For the moment, however, the tension between the two definitions, and thus between tacit and focal knowledge, remains the current state of affairs.

Confusion of nouns created from verbs by adding the

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## ***Standard English for Second Language Learners by Leslie McKenrick***

All children have the desire to communicate. In acquiring their first language they listen to the dialect and learn the vocabulary and the rules that pertain to their language. Proficiency develops the more they are exposed to the language and required to converse in it. Their parents introduce them to forms of written language when they read books to them, read their birthday cards to them, or teach them to write their name. Over time they become aware of the relevance of language and how that language gives them a sense of belonging in their community. Upon entering school their teacher will undertake expanding their use of Standard English in spoken and written form. For the child whose dialect or first language is different from Standard English mastery can be a difficult task. The two articles referred to in this paper recognize that vernacular dialect students and second language students come with varying levels of proficiency in conversational and academic English. Though these forms are connected, proficiency in one area does not necessarily indicate proficiency in another. The articles further recognize that students come with personal attributes and first language skills that can affect and promote second language acquisition. Teachers must accept and value these attributes and first language skills thereby creating for the student a sense of belonging in the school community as they provide a variety of learning opportunities to converse and write in the language of the school.

Acquiring proficiency in conversational and academic Standard English requires time for any learner; however, for the second-language learner it tends to require more time. Time varies for both with academic language proficiency requiring a longer time frame (Cummins, 1994, p.54). The student's first language is not the same as Standard English and he or she will be required to learn a new language or dialect in spoken and written form. The ESL student will try to use the rules he knows from his native language to help him understand this new language (Cummins, 1994, p.54). For instruction the teacher must be aware of the student's proficiency in conversational and academic domains. The teacher must not assume that a strong conversational proficiency indicates a strong academic proficiency as well. According to Cummins it has been suggested by Krashen

(1989) that a major causal variable in second-language acquisition is comprehensible input received by the learner. For proficiency to improve the learner must have the ability and motivation to make sense of the language. It affects the comprehensible output the learner sends (Cummins, 1994, p.45). Teachers' acceptance and support influences ability and motivation.

It has been observed by linguists that active use of the language plays an important role in the acquisition process (Cummins, 1994, p.45). It is the teacher's responsibility to provide opportunities when the ESL student can be actively engaged in conversational activities that promote understanding. Comprehensible input with regard to oral language can have meaning for the ESL student when presented in a format that has quantity and quality activities that the learner understands and is motivated to use (Cummins, 1994, p. 45). Examples of activities that would promote active use of language might include math problem solving, research projects, Buddy Reading, role play and drama assignments, puppet theater, and storytelling all done with a strong English-speaking partner. In *Dialects in Schools and Communities* Adger, Wolfram, and Christian refer to Lyman's *Think/Pair/Share* as an alternative participation pattern that affords students linguistic, cognitive, and social advantages. The linguistic advantage is practice in academic talk; the cognitive advantage is active involvement by the student; and the social advantage is that students actively construct lessons rather than passively listen (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007, p. 111). The students also need to see how their learning is relevant to their life outside the classroom. Homework assignments should reflect activities that require students to demonstrate to their parents what they have learned in school along with a shared daily reading time with parents. Parents can be invited to school to see demonstrations of their child's learning. In the process students will learn that conversational and academic speech serve different functions in school and home settings (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007, p.111). When planning a variety of oral language lessons the teacher must also take into account students' attributes that may affect the success of the acquisition process. Is the student shy or outgoing, what is the age of the child, how high is the conceptual level of the student, how confident is the student and how motivated is the child are all questions the teacher needs to consider (Cummins, 1994, p.46).

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## *Comparing First and Second Language Acquisition* by Lauren Sabol

As a teacher of English as a second language I am faced with the challenge of explaining the language process to uninformed teachers. As the ELL population of our schools continues to grow the question arises more frequently. One cannot assume that language learning is identical in both first and second languages. It is important to understand that both processes depend on several factors. However, they are not one in the same. Comparing the similarities and differences of first and second language acquisition allows for deeper understanding of the students in our schools and can guide us in how to best assist them.

Age plays an important role in both first and second language acquisition. Most children acquire their first language within the first four years of their lives unless they have been isolated from language altogether (Pinker, 1994, p. 266). Children acquire their native language somewhat effortlessly. When it comes to the oral component of second language acquisition, younger children also tend to be more successful (Tyler, 2006, p.2). Teenagers and adults have a more difficult time learning to speak a second language. Language is a major part of one's identity. Incorporating a new language into their lives may seem unnecessary or even intimidating to older individuals (Tyler, 2006, p.3). Pinker also suggests that maturational changes in the brain have effects on one's ability to learn a second language at an older age (Pinker, 1994, p.298). Although first language acquisition generally takes place in the first several years of one's life, there have been cases where children have been isolated from language altogether. This results in the child being mute (Pinker, 1994, p. 281). In the rare instance the individual begins to acquire their first language in puberty or adulthood, the results are similar to those of an individual of the same age learning to speak a second language (Pinker, 1994, p. 296). Therefore in both first and second language acquisition, age is a crucial factor in determining how successful one will be.

It is essential that learners are surrounded by speakers of the target language in both first and second language acquisition. When young children are acquiring their native language it is important that they are around speakers of that language. Learners of a first language are able to make

inferences about what they hear when they are surrounded by proficient speakers of that language (Pinker, 1994, p. 282). Being around speakers of the first language also provides learners with the basic framework with how the language operates (Pinker, 1994, p. 289). Without this, learners will not have the ability to make sense of what they hear nor will they be able to deliver their knowledge of language appropriately. This is also necessary in second language acquisition. Second language learners need to be surrounded by speakers of the target language in order to learn the correct units of the language and how they are used to communicate (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 24).

No matter the age of the individual learning a language or the amount of support that is provided, one will acquire a language at their own rate. Although all children go through the same stages of first language acquisition, each will pass through them at their own pace (Pinker, 1994, p. 274). The same goes for second language acquisition. Instruction will guide individuals in the language process. However, the individual will not acquire what they learn until they are ready internally (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 24). As teachers we must not become fearful when we see some second language learners struggle as others prosper. Each individual will improve at their own rate.

First and second language acquisition also have many differences. As stated earlier, children tend to acquire their native language with very little effort. It is not learned through formal instruction nor do they have to think about what they are saying before they say it. Language is something we are born with, something that is a part of our biological makeup as human beings (Pinker, 1994, p. 4). Second language acquisition on the other hand does not come as naturally. As humans we have the need to communicate with one another. Once we have learned a first language, is it unnecessary (biologically) to learn another (Pinker, 1994, p. 300). Therefore, first language acquisition comes naturally to individuals whereas second language acquisition seems to rest on the other end of the spectrum and is much more difficult. Because of this, it is easy to see why first language acquisition occurs in a matter of only four years. It takes much longer for second language learners to acquire the new language. Ramirez, Pasta, Yuen, Billings, and Ramey's study suggests it takes seven to ten years for an individual to acquire a second language (as cited in Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 22).

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## *Program Choices for Second Language Learners by Catherine Barbour*

Facebook has been a wonderful social networking tool to find old friends from high school or college that are now literally scattered around the world. One friend that I found is living in the southern part of Italy married to an Italian winemaker. Chetan has been living in Italy for the past 17 years and is able to speak Italian conversationally but is challenged to read and write in Italian. In corresponding with Chetan I asked her what it was like to learn a second language at the age of 32. Chetan responded that initially she felt as if she had a handicap not being able to understand and or communicate with other non - English speaking Italians. Chetan lives in a small village where Italian is the only language spoken. Her husband speaks English and was her translator when they were out in the community. Chetan's husband travels frequently for his business. She found that his absence is what motivated her to learn the language as when he was gone she had no one around to translate for her. Chetan says that she has become completely immersed in the Italian culture and language even dreaming at night in Italian. She shared that when struggling to explain an idea to her English speaking friends she now wants to revert to speaking Italian which is her primary language. Chetan's experience as an adult learning a second language is not all that different from second language learners of all ages in our classrooms. Pinker, (1994) states that acquiring language is an instinctual process that is motivated by the need to be able to communicate with other humans. We are all hard wired from birth to learn a language. The first language that we learn is the language that we hear spoken in the home Cummins, (1994) explains the need to acquire a second language is most often necessitated by the desire to communicate with others who speak that language although proficiency and speed of learning is more of a challenge. Just being exposed to a second language by itself doesn't mean that a person will acquire it. We may learn a word or two such as the name of a food or color but will not be able to hold a meaningful two way conversation with another speaker of the same language. Cummins, (1994) explains that to acquire a second language there must be a need and a desire to learn a second language coupled with the learner's ability to make sense out of the language. Second language learners

come to school most often motivated by a desire to learn English so that they can figure out their environment and become effective communicators with other students in the lunch room, out at recess or within their community just like Chetan who lives in a small Italian village with non -English speaking people.

Goldberg's, (2008) review of the research on immersion only second language programs revealed they aren't the best or most comprehensive instructional model for learning a second language as was previously thought and still currently practiced in many schools. The student may learn conversational English like Chetan learned conversational Italian however; immersion only programs lack the direct teaching of Academic English which is the language needed to be successful in school. Goldberg (2008) states that the research is still not clear in the area of how long it takes a student to become proficient in a second language but the thinking is at least six years from beginning to the point where the student is approaching native like proficiency. Second language learners are thought to move through a series of levels of proficiency over a period of instructional time moving from beginning to intermediate levels rapidly and then slowing down the progress of learning approaching the advanced levels. At the intermediate level the second language learner is able to rely on the context of a conversation where hand gestures and other non-linguistic cues can be used to assist in communication (Cummins, 1994). This is at the point where most second language learners in immersion only schools stall out in the language learning process. At the advanced levels the second language learner is required to engage in more complex interactions that involve abstract concepts and references. At this level the speaker must understand vocabulary, sentence structure and nuances of the language (Goldenberg, 2008). Proficiency of Academic English which is the language needed to be successful in school is in the advanced proficient level. This is language that is frequently not used outside of the classroom and would not be picked up or learned in casual conversation. Goldberg, (2008) states that second language learners learn best when the English instruction is composed of direct, explicit language instruction in syntax, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and the norms of usage in the classroom and opportunities to use the second language in situations that are motivating such as talking with peers, taking a field trip or discussing a movie or play. Successful

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## ***How Can General Education Teachers Help English Language Learners*** ***by Tara Higgins***

Imagine it is your first day of school in a new district. You must find your new classroom, meet your new teacher, make new friends, not to mention learn the routines and systems in an entirely new school. Now imagine that this is not only a new school, but a new country. You do not speak English as your native language. Your challenge is now to be successful in school while learning a new language so that you can interact with peers and adults and so that you can learn the academic content expected of you. You will look to your classroom teacher, whom you will most likely be relying on for most of your academic instruction, for guidance and help in this new community.

Before a classroom teacher can be expected to effectively teach an English language learner (ELL), he should be familiar with what exactly a second language is. Typically developing children acquire their first language by the time they reach the age of five years. Any language that a child acquires after the age of five is considered to be a second language. School aged ELLs must not only learn the conversational language used in informal social settings, but they must also learn the academic aspects of their second language (Cummins, 1994, p. 39). Academic language refers to the complex language used in classroom instruction.

A teacher of ELLs should also know the misconceptions about second language acquisition that are not supported by language research. The first of which is the idea that children who do not speak a standard version of their first language have a cognitive handicap that will prevent them from logical thinking (Cummins, 1994 p. 37). Another misconception is that once a student has a solid grasp of conversational skills in his second language, he has mastered proficiency (Cummins, 1994 p. 38). Often, students whose conversational skills are proficient are released from second language programs, and never reach full proficiency, or end up with a learning disability label. A final misconception about instructing ELLs is that immersion in an all-English environment will help a student to become quickly fluent in English. Students will gain conversational English quickly, and are released from their programs after about a year (Goldenberg, 2008, p.12). A report by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence found that students immersed in English only classrooms still were

not proficient in English until grade 3 or later (Goldenberg, 2008, p.12). That means it takes students four years to reach intermediate proficiency, and many are being released after only one!

So then, what does research show is successful practice when instructing ELLs? Goldenberg has cited three major points to consider as a result of a report published by the National Reading Panel. The first is that teaching students to read in their first language scaffolds higher proficiency in reading in English. This may be because of a phenomenon called *transfer*. This is the idea that if you learn a literacy skill or any other concept in your first language, you know the concept in another language or can learn it more easily in a second language (Goldenberg, 2008, p.15). Ideas such as phonological awareness, decoding, and comprehension strategies may transfer across languages. A second teaching practice that works when teaching ELLs is that of utilizing effective, proven, best practices during instruction. Goldenberg points out that while many aspects of best practice apply to all learners, modifications should be made when instructing ELLs (Goldenberg, 2008, pp.17-18). Cooperative learning groups, discussions, and mastery learning are just three teaching strategies that Goldenberg has cited as best practice for all. Modifications to consider when teaching ELLs include but are not limited to: modifying text to include visuals, engaging in clear, focused, systematic instruction, and providing support in the learner's first language when necessary (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 19).

Many general education teachers wonder what they can do to help the ELLs in their classrooms to reach English language proficiency. You should know that it takes at least five years in school for students to reach the proficiency levels of their native-English-speaking peers with respect to academic language (Cummins, 1994 p. 42). Depending upon when the student arrived in the U.S., some may even require up to seven years to attain the proficiency levels of their peers. Less time however is required to attain basic interpersonal conversation skills in English. Conversational language, which is richly embedded in context, is more quickly acquired (Cummins, 1994, p. 42). Most cognitive academic language lacks this type of conversational context, and therefore students take longer to attain cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP.) By utilizing the previously mentioned modifications to instructions, the gift of time to attain CALP is something any classroom teacher can easily grant an ELL. Providing direct instruction of the

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## *Spanglish: A Great Communication Tool by Jennifer Holliday*

When I was young I wanted to speak Spanish because I wanted to be one of those people that could switch between two languages and look smart. When I took my Spanish I course and realized that I was doing well in Spanish and learning the language I decided to continue to learn it through high school and later in college. When my parents realized that I wanted to pursue a Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages with a concentration in Spanish, they were thrilled because I had taken a passion and kept working on it. My mother would complain when I was in Wal Mart and would find native Spanish speakers to talk to because she could never keep up with me. What came out of my desire to be able to speak two languages was my acquiring a third language that we commonly call Spanglish. In the following I am going to discuss the phenomenon of Spanglish and why so many people are using it.

The first place we should start on our journey to discover why Spanglish has become so popular is to define what Spanglish really entails. As author Ilan Stavans says that Spanglish is not impossible to define, it is the fact that people refuse to define Spanglish (Stavans, 2004, p. 5). He goes on to offer a definition that states that Spanglish is what has happened because of the interactions between Anglos and Hispanics. He goes on to describe an encounter he had with a student who was at his school based on affirmative action, and her impact on his life (Stavan, 2004, pp.6-10). Spanglish has emerged because of the desire to communicate between the two languages because of the population of the United States and other areas where English and Spanish are common languages to co-exist (Stavans,2004, p. 9).

In Ilan Stavan's book *Spanglish: The Making of a New American Language*, 2004 he offers a Spanglish dictionary for anyone who may not be familiar with Spanglish. He also offers the first chapter of *Don Quixote* in Spanglish, both of which I found enjoyable because as Spanglish continues to grow in the United States we need a dictionary for this new composition of English and Spanish. Of course a dictionary is a tool, not the authority on how to speak Spanglish (Stavans, 2004, p. 55). The lexicon does not tell people how to speak a language, but it is the users that develop the language and use the lexicon as a guide (Stavans, 2004, p. 55). Languages all

over the world are dying on a daily basis (Stavans, 2004, p. 38). Just as with death in the world of people and animals, new languages are born. Spanglish came about when people needed to communicate between the two languages (Stavans, 2004, pp. 38-39).

In the article *¡Viva Spanglish!* by Lilly Gonzalez (2001) she tells a story about one of her encounters with Spanglish. Gonzalez grew up speaking Spanish, but her older sister taught her English so she would be prepared to go to school. When Gonzalez arrived at school she found that her classmates spoke Spanish. Seeing she was the only one who spoke English and not wanting to be singled out she spoke Spanish like her classmates. This worked until one day she could not express herself in Spanish, so she spoke in English. When her mother questioned her about not speaking English at school she wanted to say she was embarrassed. She could not think of the Spanish word, so she used *embarazada*. Gonzalez told her mother that at four years old she was too pregnant to speak English.

This story is common to many Spanglish speakers. People tend to joke about Spanglish a lot but Spanglish is becoming more mainstreamed. People are using Spanglish as a communication tool when their native language does not work. This works for the most part, but there is an understanding that the people speaking Spanglish have some knowledge of both languages. Many people think that English is going to lose its foothold in the United States but according to Betty Bimer (2005) in her article *Habla Español?* English has a strong hold on the United States. She points out that immigrants come from many different countries not just Spanish speaking countries and the grandchildren or great-grandchildren end up being fluent in English because it is much easier for children to acquire new languages then it is for adults. People become nervous when they see Spanish signs, or advertisements, but because English is the predominant language, children learn English and there is only a small percentage of the population that speaks a different language.

Spanglish is a great communication tool for many people living in the United States. Spanglish helps people speak a common language because Spanglish is a hybrid of English and Spanish. More people can use Spanglish because it uses what they know from both languages. It is true that there are times that the translations end up being funny to the native speaker, but overall the people can communicate effectively.

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## *Language, Culture, and Code-Switching* by Christa Stoots

What was Spanglish before Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492? It may not have existed even with England north of Spain because many Spanish speaking people oppose the use of Spanglish even to this day. Whether Spanglish existed before the era of European colonization or not, Spanglish is a common language that is being used today and its use is not isolated to the United States. It is also spoken in countries such as Argentina, Dominican Republic, Colombia, and Spain (Stavans, 2003, p. 5). After reading Ilan Stavans' first chapter in *Spanglish: the making of a new American language*, I gained insightful information, not just as a speaker of English and Spanish, but as a teacher who has to communicate with many parents that are from different parts of Latin American.

Spanglish is a term used for code switching between English and Spanish. I have had many conversations with other bilinguals where the conversation started in English and somehow switched to Spanish without even realizing it. It was an unconscious process that occurred naturally, an "instinct" as Steven Pinker (1994) would call it (Pinker, 1994, p. 186). However before Spanglish became a natural occurrence, it once was unnatural and taboo. Stavans (2003) stated that Spanglish was more than language but an "encounter" of one civilization or culture with another (Stavans, 2003, p. 6). One culture becoming the dominant culture through colonization and the other culture left to either learn the language or flee. Spanglish may appear be a combination of two languages, language is more complex than it seems. Pinker (1994) defines language as a "psychological faculty, a mental organ, a neural system, and a computational mode" (Pinker, 1994, p. 5). If language is an organ then speaking Spanglish is a thoughtless process but how does culture play a role? The English language has many dialects, Spanish has many dialects as well, and therefore Spanglish has many dialects as well. Dialects are associated with regions or social groups (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007, p. 1). People associate themselves with a particular region or social group that is engulfed in culture that varies from region to region.

Knowing where your students are from plays an important role in communication. This can be accomplished by having students complete a survey asking where their

family is from. Since dialects differ from one region to the next, knowing where the student is from will allow the teacher to expect some differences in vocabulary and pronunciation. For example, the Spanish word for small is *chiquito*, but a student from the Hialeah, Miami-Dade area might pronounce it as *chiquico*. This does not mean that the student has a language deficiency, it just means that the student uses a different dialect altogether. Having some kind of awareness in the differences in Spanglish will benefit the teacher with communicating with her students and parents but is not a problem-free solution because misinterpretations and misunderstandings can still arise regardless of the language spoken.

Spanglish is spoken in many different parts of the world. It is easy to speak Spanglish if you know English and Spanish, but it is important to know that there are different dialects of Spanglish that will vary from one place to the next. A Puerto Rican in New York may call a roof a *rufo* where a Puerto Rican in Miami might not know what the word means at all. As teachers we must be aware of where are students come from whether they speak Spanish or English because both languages have different dialects. It is really easy to offend or confuse someone that does not speak the same dialect, I remember asking someone in Miami if they ate papayas (a type of fruit), that person happened to be from Cuba was insulted because I was using foul language. The last thing I want to do is offend a student or their parent the same way I accidentally offended that one woman from Miami.

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*"Spanglish is the encounter, perhaps the word is marriage or divorce, of English and Spanish, but also of Anglo and Hispanic civilizations ... It is a very creative jazzy way of being Latino in the U.S. today."*

*—Ilan Stavans*

## **Patterns and Knowledge of Language** **by Heather Hanson**

*continued from p. 3*

knowledge can be hard to explain since the speakers don't remember why they learned it was a rule. Teachers of English as a second language must take the time to learn the "why" surrounding English rules. Fully explaining why a rule is a rule will help the non-native speaker grasp the rules more quickly, than if it seems random. When a student understands the rule, they can start to apply it themselves in other situations where it seems appropriate, and begin to develop a better understanding of the language (Pinker, 1994, p. 132). Pointing out patterns, as well as pointing out words or phrases that do not fit a set pattern will be helpful in helping the student. The rules may be arbitrary, in and of themselves, but the student may be able to recognize patterns in his/her own language, that the teacher may be able to help them apply to their learning of English. Teachers' knowledge of tacit and focal knowledge is helpful when helping students learn English as a second language. Knowing that the teacher will be creating focal knowledge in their student, the teacher can come prepared to each lesson with background information to explain the rules to the student, which will help the students to become more effective English speakers.

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## **Language Differences** **by Brianne Slattery**

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two meanings depending on how the words are separated are called oronyms (Pinker, 1994, p. 155). Pinker (1994) includes the sample, *the good can decay many ways / the good candy came anyways* (p. 155), and words phrase such as *Puller Surprise / Pulitzer Prize* and *Bohemian Rap City / Bohemian Rhapsody* (p. 156) and *Lactose and tolerant / Lactose intolerant*. Oronyms are also common occurrence within song lyrics, such as the Beatles' *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds* with the commonly mistaken lyrics *A girl with colitis goes by* which is actually *A girl with kaleidoscope eyes* (p. 183). Oronyms are phenomenon that happen all of the time to all of listeners and speakers, and including concepts like oronyms in instruction helps to shed light on language distortions that most students have experience with. This also adds interest to

lessons and connects all students, no matter their language or dialect.

Adding interest also connects to the most important part of bringing language instruction into the classroom, which is raising language awareness and acceptance. Awareness and acceptance allow students to understand how important their own language is, no matter their vernacular dialect. It allows students to understand how important learning Standard English is for success in academics and in society, and it allows students to understand common language mistakes and why we make them. For teachers, it is most important for them to recognize the unique qualities of their students and their language differences. It is vital for teachers to work with the challenges students present, and to accentuate the benefits of learning about language and the differences and commonalities among us. The more time teachers spend introducing and working with students on language variations, the more students will become aware of their own language usage, as well as how and when to switch between their own dialect and Standard English. A successful learning environment provides an atmosphere of acceptance and exploration to help build awareness and understanding and this can be accomplished using language instruction in the classroom.

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## **Second Language Acquisition and Dialects** **by Mary McBroom**

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viewed as LD. They can communicate yet they are not proficient in the language therefore, they are labeled (Cummins, 1994).

The contrast between spoken language and written language presents challenges for all writers regardless of their dialects (Adger, Wolfram, Christian, 2007, p. 113). School writing is



usually more formal than the spoken language students use when talking with each other (Adger, Wolfram, Christian, 2007, p. 113). Writing is received visually and speech is conveyed with intonation and stress, facial expressions and hand movements. Different conventions exist in writing in other languages and dialects; however American English is necessary in learning to write in American schools (Adger, Wolfram, Christian, 2007, p. 114). Speakers of all dialects face challenges as they develop writing skills. Several areas may cause these challenges because of the differences in language and the skills that writing requires.

Teachers can support the development of writing in all students by using the suggested set of factors written on page 117 in the *Dialects in Schools and Communities*. A basic understanding by teachers in what students bring with them to school, their background knowledge, is important. Peer editing and teacher editing are both important but should be approached in a considerate and positive manner. Suggestions to focus on a specific skill in writing rather than every dialect error may be helpful. Also suggested are opportunities for students to write in their own language and to dialogue with their peers (Adger, Wolfram, Christian, 2007, p. 120-121).

Many important points were discussed in both readings and should be considered by all teachers. English conversational skills may be acquired rapidly by ESL students yet it may take up to 5 years for them to reach a level of academic proficiency in English. Teachers and schools must be prepared to make a commitment and support the academic development of all students (Cummins, 1994, p. 54). Vernacular dialect speakers are also at risk for losing out unless writing instruction explicitly addresses the contrast between their language and Written Standard English. Policies and practices that support writing development across school years and consider diverse languages is crucial to the development of all students (Adger, Wolfram, Christian, 2007, p. 124).

It is up to teachers and schools to develop our diverse student population. As always we have considered various learning styles and educational needs and in today's classroom we are faced with language and dialect diversities. In order for all students to be successful these diversities must be approached with varying teaching methods and parents must be included in the process. As with all students, writing and language development takes time, perseverance and dedication. We have to focus on the small steps while not

losing sight of the big picture. Students must learn standard writing and language skills to be successful in the working world; however, it takes time.

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### ***Spoken and Written Language by Shannon Twyman-Ward***

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advantage of this, teachers can help their students develop an awareness of the needs of their audience as well the proper conventions of academic writing. Nevertheless, teachers can use the written component of language to address issues of register and interaction with different people. This is especially important for English language learners who not only have to learn how to write in English, but have to adapt to the social norms and structure of a conversation in a different culture.

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### ***Spoken vs. Written Language by Brittany Bemski***

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Children need to know that not all readers speak and write in the same dialects as they speak and write. Therefore, Standard English is taught and used in American schools to provide a common premise for all readers of text (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 99).

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## ***Oral and Written Language and Literacy*** ***by Debra Tharp***

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an important linguistic advantage to the students in the development of their oral language skills. Having all students participate in this type of academic conversation, and getting practice with participation is vital to the success of the lesson (Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, 2007, p. 111). This type of lesson teaches both cognitive and social lessons to help students develop oral language. Tyler (2009, p. 63), discusses that speaking develops before writing, and all writing is based on words that are spoken. Our system of writing is a way for people to recreate the spoken language (Tyler, p. 63.2009).

There are many differences between spoken and written language. Speech is a temporary event. The only place it is stored is in the listeners' memory. In contrast writing a message gives the receiver a permanent message that was communicated, and can be received more than once. The most important difference involving both speech and writing in linguistics is that speech will come and go and writing has a more permanent record. Writing in communication allows the writer to give messages that can be seen again over time. Speech on the other hand, will only get transferred from the speaker to the listener only one time, unless the message is repeated. Generally oral communication is done on a "face-to-face basis," and written is not usually face-to-face (Tyler, 2009, p. 64). Books are the most permanent form of written communication. Printed material goes directly between the writer and the reader, and spoken material is transferred between the speaker and the listener. An important point, made by Tyler (2009, p. 65) is that spoken and written communication has important consequences in the process of the students' development of their skills in literacy (Tyler, 2009, p. 65). The writing that a student will do in school is more formal than their style of speech and styles of writing used outside of school (Adger, wolfram & Christian, 2007, p. 113).

Another major difference between speech and written language is present in terms of dialects. Tyler (2009, p. 69), points out that these variations in language, in reference to specific situations are called "registers." This can create problems in writing. Adger, Wolfram and Christian, (2007, p. 115) Differences in dialects may cause errors in the written language, and present challenges for many people who have distinct dialects. Writing in Standard English presents difficulties as many vowel sounds are often changed

in speech (Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, 2007, p. 115).

In writing unlike in speaking there are many standards that have to be followed for good writing. Teachers evaluate and correct students' writing far more frequently than they do their speaking (Tyler, 2009, p. 66). It is important to note another difference is that writing can be returned to for rereading, but spoken words cannot be re-listened to unless it is recorded. Recording voices has not been common to the history of man. Only in the last century has this been possible. Tyler (2009, p. 66), points out that there is an important aspect to writing standards and that people place a greater value on literacy, as people need to be instructed as to how to read and write, but all people develop language without instruction (Tyler, 2009, p. 66). A great strategy for teachers to evaluate students writing on a regular basis was pointed out by Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, (2007, p. 121). In this strategy, students' write in a dialogue journal. In this journal both the student and the teacher can communicate throughout the school year. Students write about their own topics, and their teacher responds back to their writing with observations, opinions and comments. The teacher can also ask valuable questions and give answers to questions given by students. There is no formal evaluation just good communication. This method helps to develop confidence in their writing (Adger, Wolfram, and Christian, 2007, p. 121).

Language both oral and written are the keys to successful communication. Oral communication is developed beginning after birth. Oral communication develops very rapidly throughout the first five years of life. Oral language is the foundation of written language and the key to the development of literacy.

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## ***Spoken and Written Communication*** ***by Laura Caton***

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almost always be different depending on the person who was writing (Tyler 2009 p. 67). Many words in the English language are derived from root words. These root words can have prefixes and suffixes add to the original word depending on the context. With the addition of some affixes the

pronunciation of the word may change, but the spelling does not. Frequently, root words and affixes confuse young children and people who are learning the language. Once the reader understands root words and affixes they can transfer their understanding about roots or affixes to different unknown words that have a similar pattern (Pinker 1994 p. 188).

All languages begin in the spoken form and progress to written forms. There are many languages today that exist **only** in the spoken form. Once a language starts to be written the written and spoken forms are limited by the spellings, grammatical organization, etc that have been previously recorded (Tyler 2009 p. 62). Tyler (2009 p. 65-66) writes about this process of recording a language or “permanence”. Tyler writes about how language has changed little since Shakespeare started to write. Language has changed very little since Shakespeare started to write due to the “permanence” of the written word and the invention of the printing press. Spoken language has changed how people say some words, but we still write those words just as Shakespeare wrote them over five hundred years ago. When one compares Shakespeare to *Beowulf* or other earlier writings it is easy to see many progressions in the written and spoken word. Since the creation of the printing press, languages particularly English have changed very little in comparison (Tyler 2009 p. 65-67).

Various types of technology particularly the television have brought spoken and written language into almost all homes. Over the years there have been many controversies about the television and whether or not it teaches children how to speak and read. Tyler (2009 p. 75) believes that one needs to have a relationship with the learner in order for the instruction to be absorbed therefore television would not provide a productive learning environment. Television offers shows where people seem to be having everyday conversations. However, those are often scripted so the language is not spontaneous; therefore it is not natural speech, which is difficult to imitate or learn (Tyler 2009 p. 75).

Pinker (1994) and Tyler (2009) both discuss a wide variety of ways we use communication which have grown in the past twenty to thirty years with the popularity of technology. In essence though the modes of communication have not changed, with the introduction of technology, as we still have to read, write, or speak to one another. Communication though has not improved with the introduction of technology as with mondegreens song lyrics are easily mistaken for other words (Pinker 2009 p. 183-184).

In fact there may be more miscommunication since the introduction of technology. Possibly the increase in miscommunication is due to a less social society, for example one can utilize Caller ID and voicemail thus avoiding communication. Various means of communication can be misunderstood for a variety of reasons including mondegreens, context, or not recognizing a word. Even though communication is at times misinterpreted, it is critical to everyday life, and the best means to convey our thoughts to one another.

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### ***What Classroom Teachers Need to Know by Frida J. Krachenfels***

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can be a comparison of the Spanish noun that has an ending pattern of *-idad* and more or less have an English cognate that has an ending pattern of *-ity*, such as *natividad* and *nativity*, *curiosidad* and *curiosity*. The ELL can acquire an understanding of how the words are aligned to one another and if the child does not know the word in English nor Spanish, he/she can be taught both words at the same time (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 17). Lexicon (vocabulary) instruction needs to be more than giving the student the definition such as *digestion*, which is how food is transformed in the body for energy. It should include how the word can be used, like *digestion* and *digest*, also how it relates with other words and concepts (*food* and *stomach*). This information can be used for the student to understand the content word and its many uses in different contexts (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 18).

Lastly, classroom teachers need to know why it is difficult for ELLs to acquire oral language. For many years, educators have been unclear on what methods to use to teach ELLs and have been told from experts to talk and teach ELLs in simplified English (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 24), which may have been creating failing university entrance exams. It has been found that these students were not learning how Standard English was structured and its patterns well enough to get into a university. Fillmore and Snow (2000) indicated that ELL's need to network with people who know Standard

English frequently (p. 20). This would give them a better understanding of the Standard English rules and be corrected within a non-threatening manner. Educators must understand how to assess a variety of methods, resources, and techniques for helping ELLs learn Standard English. The classroom teacher needs to understand and respect the differences in standard dialects (language considered more prominent among a region or social class) and vernacular dialects to preserve the students' outlook of school (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 20).

Written language is another important element classroom teachers need to know about language. It is more than just oral language transcribed on paper. There is a difference in how people speak and how they write. Teachers need to be aware of this differentiation and how this affects children's erroneous spelling and grammatical sentence structure. Teachers also need to be aware of student's narrative and expository paragraphs and knowing how to assess the quality of the written work (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 25). The reason why spelling is difficult for children comes from how simple sounds, like *sure* and *sugar*, are different than *sun* and *soup*. The English language keeps the spelling of morphological (structure of words) components to maintain the spelling characteristics of morphemes and to make it easier to identify in larger words. For example, the words *electrician* and *electricity* have different sounds of the letter *c*, but the morpheme *electric* keeps its meaning more noticeable to comprehend. The educator should be aware of the English language sound system and its history to be sensitive of the phonemic complexity that children of diverse languages and vernacular dialects may have when learning Standard English (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 26).

Understanding why students have trouble with organizing narratives and expository writing can help with teachers' choice of teaching approaches. Students with diverse backgrounds will bring these factors to writing. For example, in the Japanese culture, their narrative essays would include short stories instead of recounting all of the events that are needed to write a narrative. This may appear as a misunderstanding to the teacher, and could have been bypassed if the educator looked into the culture before assessment (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 28). Classroom teachers need to be confident in their own writing which will give them a strong foundation of the English structure and be able to teach and assess their students (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 29).

To teach Standard English effectively classroom teachers need to be aware of the diverse cultural backgrounds and

various dialects that may be prevalent in their classroom. Educators need to have a strong foundation of oral and written language in order for them to teach language effectively. This in turn will help students get a job with enough knowledge in Standard English and have a better chance in passing university entrance exams. In order for teachers to keep abreast of new and validated instructional approaches consistent professional development should be available by counties to supply the array of updated information on language. Educators can limit the daily challenges of communication barriers if they welcome and respect the child's background and language development (Fillmore & Snow, 2000, p. 13).

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### **Vernacular Dialects by Tiffany Walker**

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dialects and teachers should be accepting of all dialects in their classrooms. One dialect is not better than another and if students can recognize this idea, then they may be more willing to learn the Standard English that is expected in many educational settings. Students should learn Standard English as an additional dialect and not as a replacement for the vernacular dialect that they already speak and write in. Standard English can be a medium to communicate in the educational setting as well as in the business world in the future for the students (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007, p. 110). However, awareness still needs to be raised among educators so that the skills approach instruction is a thing of the past and contextualized situations for spoken and written language are accepted practices. Educators should use instructional methods that allow for scenarios to use Standard English and vernacular dialects. The students need to see the relevancy to themselves and the world around them. All dialects can coexist in the world as long as we understand there is a time and place to use each one.

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## **Linguistic Differences** **by Cathleen Hannifin**

*continued from p. 12*

allowing students to use two English dialects, permits instructors to teach SAE explicitly by comparing and contrasting its features to AAE (Adger et al., 2007, pp. 109-10; Perez, 2000, para. 7).

African American English is used by many African Americans. Despite this fact, speakers of AAE are often considered to be unintelligent or lazy. Because SAE is considered the language of business and personal success, it is essential to teach this Standard dialect in the classroom in a way that does not offend speakers of AAE. Bidialectalism allows students to learn Standard English by comparing it to AAE, the dialect with which they are most familiar. Teachers must still make an effort to understand which mistakes students make in their assignments due to dialect differences and which repeated mistakes might be indicative of a disability. This discretion would help teachers provide explicit instruction of SAE for speakers of AAE instead of assigning them to special education programs. At the same time, those children who do have a disability could be more easily identified.

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## **An Educational Dilemma** **by Ruth Schmoyer**

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While instructors must respect the various heritages that are represented in the classroom, they must also ensure that students gain the necessary language skills to function successfully in society. By building upon the comprehension of language structures which students already use, teachers

can help them apply this understanding as they make the transition to the standard usages required in formal writing and speaking. Equipping students to use academically acceptable grammar will enable them to express their ideas in various settings and will give them opportunities for advancement both academically and socially (Tyler, 2009, p. 5). They can then take their place in the world as articulate and confident individuals, not just because they have learned a set of rules, but because their teachers have also validated their culture and background.

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## **Language Attitudes and Dialect Prejudice** **by Sharon King**

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and dialect prejudices in regard to education, it should be noted that the suggested options to address the issues could also be applied in general. It is indeed necessary to address the language and dialect issues in schools; however, this approach would be even more successful if addressed in general. Children learn their attitudes at home and in their communities. Wouldn't the ideal place to begin be the same place the children learn the attitudes?

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## ***African American English by Heather Carafiol***

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utilize and embrace the entire writing process: writing often, providing examples, experimenting with style and audience, communicating with peers and the teacher, and editing to create a finished product (Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 74). Student and teacher collaboration will ultimately lead to success.

Language is constantly changing. It is unfair to tell a student that he is not speaking “proper English,” when he is simply speaking one of many American dialects. Standardized writing tests make success a difficult goal for many students. Logically, though, all students should be encouraged to learn the standard dialect of their society, and teachers should embrace this theory to promote success instead of alienating students (Pinker, 2007, p. 414). By helping African American English speakers to improve writing skills, teachers empower these students in their education, future goals, and confidence within society.

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## ***Creoles and African American English by Christen Oliver***

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something, which is a great avenue to acquire long-term educational foundations and goals. Furthermore, it is extremely important for students to feel as though they are a part of their learning community, not on the outside of it. Any time a teacher is able to use a student's background or language experience in the classroom to better make

connections to new information, those avenues must be explored and implemented.

Dialects, vernaculars, and creoles are all ways in which students create and identify themselves. In no way should these attributes be seen as a way that would hinder the understanding and acquisition of Standard English, but as a tool to better teach use and understanding of the standard grammatical structure and vocabulary used for future success in and out of the classroom. The study and exploration of this area in a student's educational and language development has opened my eyes to new ways in which my students learn. Before the beginning of this course, I didn't feel that I had a bias or prejudice towards a particular vernacular of the English language. In addition, I did spend time correcting my student in their pronunciation of such words as *library*, *ask*, *can* and *may*. I now notice that it is better to understand why they say something the way they do, and as long as they use Standard English in their formal writings and debates, that addressing some of those nuances is more of a hindrance to their character and educational development.

Lastly, Siegel (2006) discusses an instructional tool that should be utilized in the classroom, which is the awareness of language variations. Through awareness, students learn and discuss not only their linguistic heritage, but also that of their fellow classmates. Students then create a final comparison to that of the Standard English taught in schools (2006, p. 48, 49). This approach not only allows students to fully appreciate their own heritage and to be validated, but also creates a great learning opportunity for further academic connections and interpersonal understanding. Furthermore, it can increase student efficacy and motivation for greater success in the classroom. Ultimately, each instructor and educator will choose their own method for instructing and developing an understanding of Standard English, as well as other materials in their classroom. However, the benefits of utilizing the talents and knowledge students already enter the classroom having only serves to better enrich and progress the educational experience, while knocking down barriers and biases.

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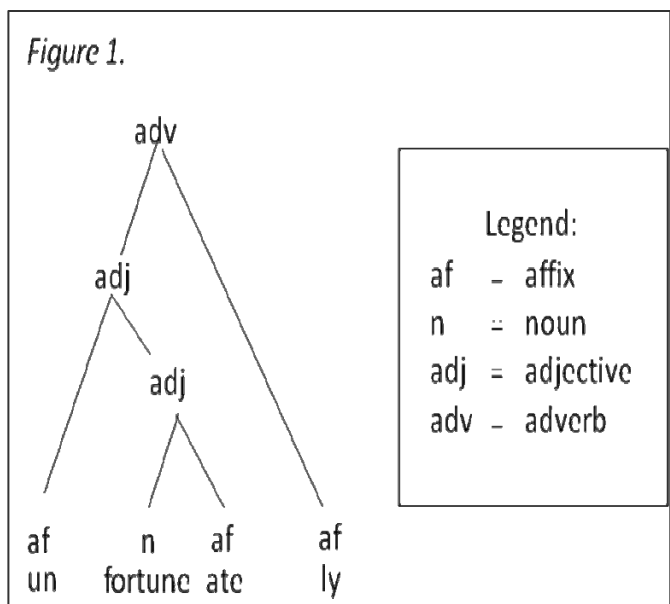
## Word: Dialect and Depiction by Craig Leshner

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Linguists help us understand these rules by describing how language and dialects actually work. Dialects, by definition, are different from one another. SAE is, in fact, a dialect. A mistake in one dialect is not necessarily a mistake in another dialect. No single dialect is the best. They are equal. Mistakes within a dialectic do happen, and a proper understanding of morphology may help a teacher identify why students make mistakes. If a mistake occurs at the morpheme level, it may lead to mistakes in the other areas as well. Morphemes are the building blocks of language and students who handle them with ease may go on to better understand the rest of the standard language and reduce the mistake rate (Adger, et al., 2006, p. 11). Theoretically, remaining dialectically agnostic might cause confusion. On the other hand, knowing how to use the right dialect might gain the speaker some prestige, power or influence in situations outside of the classroom (Tyler, 2009d). Morphology reveals the ins and outs of the different dialects and informs the decision to choose the best dialect for a given situation.

Words it seems are the underrated or overlooked part of a language. We want to get beyond mere vocabulary and write sophisticated, well-organized thoughts. But, maybe there is more to be gained by focusing on the meaning at the level of a single word. Maybe there are ways to improve communication by looking intently at words. One assumes that speakers easily grasp the concept of *word*. It takes effort, however, to define *word*. When we know a word, we know about its pronunciation, its meaning, its category, and its affixes and internal structure. Morphology is the study of a word's internal structure and the study of prefixes and suffixes (affixes) (Harley, 2006, 14). Morphology looks behind that ubiquitous curtain of familiarity and reveals the morphemes used within the construct of a word. A morpheme may be the bedrock of efficient communication. Morphemes are less ambiguous because they cannot be further subdivided and continue to have meaning (Pinker, 1994, p. 510). The word *unfortunately*, for example, consists of four morphemes, i.e. *un-fortune-ate-ly*. *Fortun* is the root. Further dividing it changes its meaning or results in no meaning at all. Because we became comfortable with words like *unfortunate*, we do not think much about the individual bits of meaning that are lurking within it, i.e. information bits waiting to be explored and extracted.

Exploratory urges stimulated, in this case, by things lurking in plain view can be satisfied. A graphic representation technique has been used to teach beginning linguistics students about morphology (Tyler, 2009b). This technique effectively describes the morphology of words. Earlier, *unfortunately* was reduced to its basic units of meaning *un-fortune-ate-ly*. The glossary of terms for these basic units includes roots, affixes, stems, inflections and derivations. *Fortun-* is the root and *un-*, *-ate*, and *-ly* are the derivational affixes. Though we do not see *fortune* in this example, to be clear, *fortune* is one of several possible stems which may be formed from the root *fortun-* in this case by adding *-e* (Pinker, 1994, p. 508). *Un-* is a prefix meaning negation and *-ate* is the suffix which converts nouns to adjectives. *Fortunes* exemplifies *-s* as an inflectional ending used to pluralize a word. In some dialects, the speaker does not add an *-s* (Adger, et al., 2007, p. 205). In that case, the plural and the singular may be spoken in the same way. Figure 1 shows the graphic result of *unfortunately*'s morphemes sequentially joined together. The joining of morphemes involves testing and checking. Linguists use three hypothesis tests to analyze a word's internal structure. First they ask, "Do all of the morphemes have meaning or function in the language?" In the case of *unfortunately*, the root and all of the affixes do have meaning or function. In the next hypothesis test, linguists ask, "Do combinations of morphemes create real words?" *Unfortune* does not mean anything. We would say misfortune instead. So *fortune-* is joined to *-ate* first which results in the new word *fortunate* the word changes category from noun to adjective. Linguists then ask, "Do the combinations of morphemes follow the



affixal rules?” The affixal rules drive the formation of *unfortunate* because *un-* negates adjectives without changing the category (Merriam-Webster, 2009). Adding *un-* to *fortunately* is against the rules because *un-* is not added to adverbs. Linguists discovered this rule about *un-* by experimenting with other adjectives and adverbs and eventually lexicographers codified it. The last affix, *-ly*, is added to form the negative adverb *unfortunately*.

The analysis of a word’s affixes and internal structure or morphology, in the case of *unfortunately*, is complete resulting in a negative adverb.

Diagramming in this fashion engages the cognitive abilities of the learner in a different way and facilitates visualizing language concepts. Increased experience in decoding, analyzing and illustrating various word solutions may unlock the morphological rules encapsulated in a word’s internal structure. Analyzing words with more than one possible meaning can also be instructive. For example, *unlockable* may refer to a lock that may be unlocked or *unlockable* may refer to a lock that is not lockable. To better understand this word and others like it, one might investigate the order of affixation. *-Able* is added to *unlock* to communicate that the lock may be unlocked. *Un-* is added to *lockable* to convey a lock that may not be locked (Tyler, 2009c). So, affixal order does mean something. Of course, in conversation, this word’s meaning might be ambiguous without some context to help clarify.

In summary, understanding that morphemes are the building blocks of language and that all dialects have credibility warrants some sophistication when teaching them. Morphology may help teachers unlock the curiosity of the learner about words. Learners may be encouraged to analyze words and practice word depiction on their own. Ultimately, better understanding may expand the speaker’s comfort zone and help improve communication, raise standardized test scores, and empower the next Maya Angelou. *Word!*

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### *Bridging the Gap by Sarah Jones*

*continued from p. 19*

largely based on mainstream culture’s prejudices that often filter into the classroom. With AAE speakers, for example, one such occurrence is the idea that if they speak proper English, then their peers will say they are “acting white” (Redd & Webb, 2005, p. 69). Attitudes arise out of expectations, so higher expectations will yield a more successful and productive learning experience overall.

As standards and statistics continue to flood the educational system, teachers are faced with a plethora of tasks and decisions to make, especially when teaching writing. In addition, the intermingling of dialect and culture has become an increasingly important aspect of educating the youth of today. Teachers have the power to demystify the stereotypes and become familiar with the various hypotheses surrounding this great art of language. And, for AAE students in particular, teachers need not blame their dialect for errors in SWE. Instead, it’s time to readjust attitudes, confront racial insecurities, and maintain high expectations for *all* students (Redd & Webb, 2005, p.70).

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## **Second Language Acquisition Basics** **by Sarah Holsomback**

*continued from p. 23*

type, identity and aptitude (Tyler, 2009 slides 12-13). If a student experiences success it is likely that he or she will keep trying and this is true in learning a second language. Success is key to motivation (Tyler, 2009 slide 12). A student's personality type has an affect on how urgent it may seem to acquire the dominant language. If a student is shy and does not feel a need to communicate with many peers and/or the teacher, he or she may acquire the target language more slowly than someone who has a very extroverted personality and thrives on social interactions (Tyler, 2009 slide 12). Students who have a strong sense of identity and a deep desire to belong will generally take more risks in social settings and practice their new language (Tyler, 2009 slide 12). Like every student's learning process, aptitude and cognitive abilities are a factor for students acquiring a second language (Tyler, 2009 slide 13). These differences among students require teachers to see each ELL as an individual.

A teacher's background can bring about varied strengths for ELLs. Native speaking teachers will help ELLs produce the language better (Tyler, 2009, slide 13). Students of native speakers hear the natural voice and benefit from hearing the fluency of native speakers (Tyler, 2009, slide 13). Nonnative speaking teachers have better insights in helping ELLs (Tyler, 2009, slide 13). They are more aware of the problem areas for second language English learners and will likely have more empathy for these students as well. These teachers can especially help students by having a deeper level of discernment in knowing the differences in the tacit and focal knowledge of a language (Tyler, 2009, slide 13). Native and nonnative speaking teachers can both be effective teachers of ELLs with training, modeling and knowledge.

The current second language teaching approach is called the communicative approach. The goal of this method is for students to be able to communicate meaningfully and appropriately in a target language environment (Tyler, 2009, slide 5). Teachers will likely use interaction as a catalyst for language acquisition and will plan lessons integrating skills and the four language domains of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teachers of the communicative approach will provide students with opportunities to practice and use their new language within meaningful contexts (Tyler, 2009, slide 5). The students' desks will likely not be in rows but rather in clusters and students will be provided a choice of how they may respond to instructional goals and tasks (Tyler, 2009, slide 5). For example, students could respond orally to a

question, point to the correct answer or draw a picture to demonstrate knowledge of the concept.

Not all teachers of ELLs have extensive training and professional development in second language acquisition. This may put them and their students at a disadvantage. There is not a specific formula for students acquiring a second language, but there are some general factors that affect each learner that have been detailed in this paper. The age of the student is relevant to what may be easier or more difficult for the ELL. Each learner's prior experiences, individual differences in personality and aptitude, and their teacher's language background all influence their acquisition journey. The more equipped teachers are in SLA, the more effective they will be with their students and the more successful ELLs will be in today's world.

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## **Tacit Knowledge in ESL Instruction** **by Sherri Tombarge**

*continued from p. 24*

inflectional suffix {-ing} with those created by adding the derivational suffixes {-tion} or {-ment} is an example of a morphosyntactical problem faced by ESL students and their teachers. In the former case, the progressive form of a verb, such as *restating*, from *restate*, is used as a noun (gerund) that emphasizes the action as a process. In the latter, the noun, *restatement* refers to a completed action:

- (1) His *restating* 20 times the goals of the program became an annoyance to the committee, whose members hoped to break soon for dinner.
- (2) The *restatement* of the program's goals, clarified after over 20 hours of committee meetings, made it much easier to get funding.
- (3) *Oversimplifying* the problem won't solve it.
- (4) The *oversimplification* of the problem confused the committee and caused funding to be approved prematurely.

In this case, the teacher's tacit knowledge of English will not allow him or her to differentiate between inflectional and derivational endings, so explanation of the subtle difference in meaning may be difficult. Such subtle differences may

seem like utter nonsense to the ESL student, who will find he or she must accept the pronouncement of misuse without the explanation that would help him or her avoid future similar errors.

A phonological example of the tacit-focal knowledge dilemma may be seen in the pronunciation rules for *the* and *a/an*. Tacit knowledge will guide native speakers to pronounce *the* /θə/ and to use *a* before a consonant sound and to pronounce *the* /ði/ and to use *an* before a vowel sound. However, unless they are asked to explain the difference, they may never acknowledge this rule of pronunciation, though the rule can be discovered fairly easily through trial and error. A much more difficult issue involving these articles is the morphosyntactical problem of when an article is needed. The use of the article before countable nouns, but not before non-countable nouns is puzzling to many ESL students:

- (1) I want to buy a coat.
- (2) I want to buy chocolate.
- (3) I discovered the discipline of geography.
- (4) I discovered geography.

The rule itself is equally puzzling to most native speakers, though in practice their tacit knowledge of English eliminates the problem. The use of articles in English involves many such rules. Each is tacit knowledge for native speakers that must become focal knowledge for those who wish to become proficient in working with ESL students who need clear explanations as a starting point to mastery of article usage in English.

Teachers working with ESL students thus find their tacit knowledge of English to be both a help and a hindrance. Certainly, they could neither speak nor write English without it, yet the fact that it is intuitive rather than learned also causes them to be unable to explain as much as they understand about grammar and usage. These teachers, therefore, need an understanding of the tacit-focal knowledge dilemma and as much training as they can practically acquire in English linguistics and the process of second language acquisition.

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## Language Standards by Desiree Morris

*continued from p. 20*

be first to defend those students who are mislabeled with having a language disorder. It is our responsibility as teachers to promote cultural understanding, accept differences, and embrace change.

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## The Deficit Theory and Dialects by Christine Bilodeau

*continued from p. 22*

evaluations of verbal capabilities.

Finally, teachers' appraisal of students' linguistic development should be free of biases against English dialects. Dialects should be considered not as deprived or inferior forms of Standard English, but as enriched forms of the common language. When students' dialects cease to be equated to linguistic deprivation, we will find that we have very few "incompetent language users" after all (Powell, 1999, p. 21).

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## *Dialect is not a Deficit* by Stephanie Iero

*continued from p. 21*

verbal proficiency unless we give them tasks that would provide a valid demonstration of the proficiency (p.24). Thinking back to the teacher's classroom, I would say she did not have many open discussions with students. When discussions happened, they were usually one sided with the teacher asking all questions and the classroom sitting quiet or giving one word answers. This teacher did not take context into consideration at all when evaluating her students' competencies.

Next time when I need to discuss dialect and how it relates to students, I will be prepared. I am now aware that context plays a big role with situations when teachers are identifying students as verbally incompetent. Teachers need to be aware of the use of context and reflect upon their teaching practices to truly analyze what is happening in a situation, rather than labeling students as disadvantaged or incompetent due to their dialect. Expecting less from students because of their dialect is wrong. Instead teachers need to accept and understand different dialects in order to build upon them to provide for meaningful discussions, so teachers can accurately evaluate student learning and linguistic achievement.

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*"It has been shown that all children entering school are highly competent language users; however, they may not find themselves in situations where they are able to demonstrate their linguistic competence."*

*—Rebecca G.Powell*

## *Standard English for Second Language Learners* by Leslie McKenrick

*continued from p. 25*

Along with oral language instruction must come written language instruction. Pinker states that "although language is an instinct, written language is not" (Pinker, 1994, p. 186). Written language lacks the voice, intonation, and face-to-face of conversation that gives context and understanding to the speaker and recipient. Written language which in school tends to be more formal (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007, p.113) requires students to make more decisions about vocabulary, grammar, spelling, spacing, and sentence structure than they do in their speech style. Written language does not have the immediate feedback that conversation does. The writer needs to consider how to communicate with the reader (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007, p.114). When considering the comprehensible input of their students in relation to writing teachers are obligated to model the writing process to promote understanding. Writing class stories and poems allows students to walk through the steps of the process, to actively contribute to the story using their second language, and to see their words in print. Students need to feel a part of the learning community and that what they bring to the experience is of importance (Cummins, 1994, p.54). Emphasis at early stages of writing should be on the creative part of the writing process. Students are learning how to communicate with the reader of their story. The teacher encourages the students to use familiar words they know that will give understanding to themselves and the reader. Eventually the student will be expected to apply the mechanics of writing to his written expression as his proficiency in language acquisition improves. As with oral language working with a partner in written language provides the ESL student with engagement and feedback in the process. They can determine if their partner understands what they have written and make changes for clarity as they are engaged in the activity. Academic speech is emphasized in written language. It is suggested that written language instruction should include academic content and that because ESL learners may take five or more years to become proficient in academic English it would not be beneficial to wait for English proficiency before introducing content (Cummins, 1994, p.56). Content textbooks written at the respective grade's reading level may create an obstacle for the ESL student who is not reading on

grade level. Peer tutoring, cooperative learning, small group projects, and research groups can all help the ESL student participate actively at a level of understanding that promotes success (Cummins, 1994, p. 55). Creative writing in various genres using the content material allows the ESL student to demonstrate his proficiency in the writing skills through styles that present less difficulty for him and emphasize success.

Along with personal attributes there are cognitive attributes that affect language acquisition. Such cognitive processes would be memory, categorization, generalization, and inference that Cummins says have a system of rules students choose to follow, synthesize into grammar, and internalize to be used for production (Cummins, 1994, p.50). Does the student have the ability to retain information, can he categorize words, can he infer meaning from the context, can he generalize the rules and skills of the language, and can he apply oral language knowledge to written expression are all questions the teacher needs to consider when planning writing activities.

In *Dialects in Schools and Communities* Farr and Daniels(1986) are cited with regard to suggesting key factors in effective writing instruction that include: teachers understanding and appreciating the linguistic competence that students bring to school, teachers having positive expectations for students' achievement, students having experience in writing for a wide range of audiences in and out of school, students having collaborative writing activities, and students having experience in using writing across the curriculum and not just in English (Adger, Wolfram, & Christian, 2007, p.118). While one article deals with second-language students and one article deals with students of vernacular dialects , both stress that teachers need to value and cultivate what students bring to the learning process, have a knowledge of the student's proficiency in his language, and recognize the attributes that affect the student's ability to acquire language proficiency. They must see that students' personal attributes (age, personality, motivation, and confidence) and cognitive attributes (memory, categorization, generalization, and inference) influence their comprehensible input and output in language acquisition. Teachers must realize that oral and written language require different skills for proficiency and yet are interconnected for successful Standard English use.

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### ***Program Choices for Second Language Learners by Catherine Barbour***

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second language learners are confident in their identity and ability to learn a second language (Cummins, 1994). Schools that forbid the speaking of a student's native language destroy the connection to who they are as a person and the culture that exists in their homes which then in turn takes away the desire to learn a second language. Schools with immersion only second language programs could be sending a mixed message to their second language learners that a requirement to learn English means that their native language and culture has to be given up. A student may be Hispanic, celebrate all that is of value in the Hispanic culture and be a proficient second language learner. Cummins, (1994) states that one's native language does not exclude the learning of a second language. Chetan has probably learned conversational Italian from being submersed in the language, having a desire and confidence in her ability to learn a second language, and a solid sense of her identity as an American. She jokes that she speaks Italian with a twist of a Southern Virginia accent. Without formal instruction in an academic setting she finds herself challenged with reading and writing in Italian. Had Chetan attended formal school in Italy and participated in an explicit dual instruction program in academic language such as syntax, grammar, sentence structure and proper usage required for reading and writing she would probably be a proficient reader and writer in Italian.

Research is still evolving in the area of best teacher instructional practices for second language learners (Goldberg, 2008). What we do know is that instruction in reading in the native language and or in the native language and second language at different times of the school day promotes higher levels of reading achievement in the second language. Researchers think that when instruction is provided in the native language or dual instruction in both languages that transfer of learning takes place across the languages (Goldberg, 2008). A second language learner can learn a skill or concept such as a comprehension strategy in the native language and apply that same skill or concept in the



second language. Goldberg, (2008) states that direct instruction on what is the same and or different between the speaker's native language and English language has been found to increase student learning of the second language. Finding that there is a connection or some common ground between two languages helps in the transfer of knowledge for the second language learner. Chetan probably transferred much of what she knew in English to Italian. She already had experience with language being a proficient speaker of English, a wealth of background knowledge, and an ear for sounds and syllables making her able to quickly pick up the differences and similarities between the English and Italian.

We know from Goldberg (2008) and Cummins (1994) that a second language learner must be motivated to learn, confident in their identity, and be provided multiple opportunities to practice speaking in safe and supportive situations. Learning a second language is a process that occurs over a period of time with the student moving through levels of proficiency. Goldberg (2008) recommends direct instruction in Academic Language is a requirement for the second language student to be able to move into the advanced proficiency level where the student can read, write and speak demonstrating an understanding of the nuances of the English language. Research clearly indicates that immersion only programs are not as effective as dual language programs (Goldberg, 2008). Second language learners learn best when dual instruction is provided where the student can transfer what is learned in the native language to English. The research on second language learners and best practices is still in the early stages and constantly evolving. For schools that have high populations of second language learners it is vitally important to keep current on the research and to adopt best practices as they emerge.

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## *First and Second Language Acquisition by Lauren Sabol*

*continued from p. 26*

Teachers need to be knowledgeable of first and second language acquisition to better understand the students in their classroom. One must approach first and second language acquisition in the same way when it comes to age, being surrounded by the target language, and considering one's individual rate of learning. There is a major difference however when it comes to our biological makeup as human beings and our ability to acquire one or more languages. Although first and second language acquisition have many similarities, there are crucial differences as well.

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## *Spanglish by Jennifer Holliday*

*continued from p. 29*

Teachers need to recognize Spanglish as a communication tool and not a threat to English. We need to be encouraging children to speak to us in whatever capacity they can because the goal for many of these children is to learn English so that they can help at home. As educators we need to respect that goal and realize that children are trying and the road to achieve that goal comes in many different forms.

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## **General Education Teachers Can Help by Tara Higgins**

*continued from p. 28*

second language is also beneficial to ELLs (Goldenberg, 2008, p.13). This direct instruction should provide explicit direction on syntax, grammar, vocabulary, and social use of the second language but should also provide meaningful use of the second language (Goldenberg, 2008, p.13). The general education classroom an ideal environment for practice in meaningful, necessary communication. As a classroom teacher there are perhaps many practices already in place that are beneficial for ELLs to include predictable routines, graphic organizers, additional practice of key concepts in or out of school, repetitive information, summarizing text, and building fluency in reading (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 20). Teachers who implement these instructional strategies are sure to further the cognitive academic language proficiency of their students, as long as they include the necessary modifications for ELLs. A final practice essential for classroom teachers to keep in mind when working with English language learners is that of keeping assessment of content knowledge and assessment of language development separate (Goldenberg, 2008, p. 21). Every effort should be

made to ensure that students are provided with experiences that enhance their language learning, but not expected to produce and comprehend language beyond that of their proficiency level when being assessed for content. Adding visuals, simplifying items, while keeping the content the same will make certain that ELLs' knowledge is assessed fairly.

Imagine again that you are an ELL entering your new classroom on the first day of school. If your teacher and the other professionals shaping your education are armed with the knowledge of how children acquire a second language, they can be more confident in their abilities to help you learn the English language and succeed. Knowing what works based on research and what does not, modifications that lead to greater achievement, and teaching strategies that can be employed in the general education classroom can help teachers become better teachers of English language learners.

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