Vocabulary Instruction for English Language Learners

Mitch Bobrick
Ann Friedman
Academic Language

Language used in the learning of academic content in formal schooling context; aspects on language strongly associated with literacy and academic achievement, including specialized academic terms or technical language, speech registers, and discourse related to each field of study.
Essential Components of Academic Language

- Vocabulary – all the words that someone knows, learns, or uses
- Syntax – the way words are arranged to form sentences or phrases
- Grammar – the rules according to which the words of a language change their form and are combined into sentences
Native English-Speaking “Struggling Readers” & ELLs are DIFFERENT

A Starting Point for Understanding Some Challenges Faced by English Language Learners
## Six Indicators the Panel Studied & Compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Native English-Speaking “Struggling Readers”</th>
<th>English Language Learners</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position on the path to literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivation</td>
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<td>Oral English proficiency</td>
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<td>Background knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabulary terms with multiple meanings</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Context in which literacy is developed</td>
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(Short, D., & Fitzsimmons, 2007)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Native English-Speaking “Struggling Readers”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary terms with multiple meanings</td>
<td>More likely to recognize multiple meanings</td>
<td>May know one meaning of a word (<em>power</em> means strength, <em>Cherokee</em> is a large car), but not other meanings, including the one needed for a particular subject (political power, Cherokee tribe)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Often have conceptual knowledge of term or concept, if not the technical or academic label</td>
<td></td>
<td>May apply knowledge of cognates to understand new academic terms</td>
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(Short, D., & Fitzsimmons, 2007)
Challenges

- Only 4% of English Language Learners’ day is spent engaging in English informal “student talk”!!!

- Only 2% of English Language Learners’ day is spent engaging in English informal “academic talk”!!!
Vocabulary Instruction

A “Tier” Approach

**Tier One:**
- the most basic words
- *clock, baby, happy*

Rarely require extensive instruction in school

Beck, 2007
Vocabulary Instruction

A “Tier” Approach

Tier Three:

- words whose frequency of use is quite low, often limited to specific domains

- *isotope, lathe, peninsula*

Best learned during content area instruction

Beck, 2007
Vocabulary Instruction

A “Tier” Approach

Tier Two:

- part of a mature language-user’s repertoire
- words that appear in written language more than in oral language
- *crucial, forlorn, momentum*

Instruction in these words will significantly enhance a student’s language ability

Beck, 2007
LIVING ON THE EDGE OF DANGER

Ants probably aren’t your favorite insects. But you can’t help being interested in the story of one spunky kind of ant. It has some special tricks for living in the hot, dry sands of the Sahara, in Africa. This desert is one of the most difficult places on Earth for animals to live.

Most desert animals have learned how to beat the heat by burrowing and living underground during the hottest part of the day. They come out to hunt for food at night and in the early morning. Of course those animals include the predators, which come out at the same time to hunt. So ants and other small insects searching for their food are in danger of becoming food for larger animals, especially the desert lizards.

Head for Home

As the morning sun rises, the sands heat up rapidly, and almost every creature scurries back to its burrow. Those that are still hungry and keep looking for food risk the danger of dying of heat shock before they get home.

Most desert ants and other insects head for home when the temperature gets up to about 95 degrees Fahrenheit. They must sneak past the ant lizards and win the race against rising temperature to get home safely. By the time the temperature gets...
THE TREE

by LINDA MARASCO

IT WAS AT SUPPER THAT FATHER told us about the tree. “Saturday,” he said in his authoritative voice, “we move the tree.” Everyone stopped and turned to Father. “The tree with the scar,” he said. “The one in the back. We’ll move it to the front.” Everyone was still looking at Father. He broke a piece of bread and dipped it in the moat of gravy around his potatoes.

Joe was the first to speak. He picked up his glass and twisted it in his hands, intently studying the liquid as it swirled. He cleared his throat.

“It’s the first day off I’ve had in two weeks,” he went on. “It’s only fair that . . .” Then he stopped. Everyone was looking at Father.

“All right,” he said. “Saturday is my day off, too, but all right.” He looked at Diane and me. Diane stared back.

“I’m going to the movies with Fran,” she began defensively. “I asked on Tuesday.” She took her plate into the kitchen.

Father looked at me.

“What about you?” he asked.

I looked down at my potatoes.

“Joanne and I were going to play tennis.”

Diane entered the room, her dark ponytail swaying. “I thought you said Joanne was upset for the week,” she said.
How effective are definitions?

students frequently interpreted one or two words from a definition as the entire meaning (Scott & Nagy, 1989)

exotic    foreign; strange; not native

“The colonists were exotic in America.”

Beck, 2007
Student-friendly Explanations

Explanations in everyday connected language, rather than dictionary definitions.

Beck, 2007
Academic Language

Language used in the learning of academic content in formal schooling context; aspects on language strongly associated with literacy and academic achievement, including specialized academic terms or technical language, speech registers, and discourse related to each field of study.
Student-friendly explanations, often include words such as *you*, *something*, and *someone*. These terms help students to get an idea of how to use the word.

- If you gape at something, you stare at it with your eyes and mouth wide open.
- A beverage is something that people drink.
- Drowsy means feeling like you are going to fall asleep.

Beck, 2007
### Vocabulary Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name:</th>
<th>Teacher Name:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Vocabulary Word:</th>
<th>Source:</th>
<th>Sentence from Passage (word in context):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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**FOR Beginners:** Shared writing experience: **model** one word by filling out this Vocabulary Card completely on the board/transparency; students can draw their picture after modeling.

**FOR Intermediate:** Tell students the words, model finding the proper definition for the first word, and help them brainstorm ideas for the synonym.

**FOR Advanced:** Have students work in pairs to complete three vocabulary cards completely (facilitate).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple Synonym:</th>
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</table>
The Vocabulary Log

Strategies for Implementation
Bringing Words To Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction

by Isabel L. Beck
Margaret G. McKeown
Linda Kucan
| **Student Name:** | ______________________________ |
| **Teacher Name:** | ______________________________ |
| **Date:** | ______________________________________ |
| **Vocabulary Word:** | ______________________________ |
| **Source:** | ______________________________________ |
| **Sentence from Passage (word in context):** |
| | ______________________________________ |
| | ______________________________________ |
| **Definition:** |
| | ______________________________________ |
| | ______________________________________ |
| **Simple Synonym:** | ______________________________ |
Tier Two—“mortar words”

High frequency academic language learners use across contexts

elegant
cunning
teased
Tier Two in Action

Contextualize
Repeat word
Explain meaning
Expand: Examples in context
Engage: Students interact with examples
Repeat word
Contextualize

• Read passage from book

Then, when Trisha…
Repeat word

Elegant
Tell meaning

Elegant means...
Examples in context
Children interact with examples
Thumbs up, Thumbs down game

1 2

3 4
Children interact with examples—continued…

• Talk with your partner about something you consider to be **elegant** (from your environment, tv or movies, books, etc.)
  – Try to use the word **elegant** when you tell about it.
  – You could start by saying:
    “The ____________ was elegant because….”
Children interact with examples—continued…

Show how you would sit if you were at an elegant dinner.
What’s the word we have been talking about?
Using Your Vocabulary Log

Allow for Choice…

- Picture or visual representation
- Concept wheel or word web
- Cognate if applicable
- Additional Example/Non examples (rewrite sentence with synonym or antonym)
Vocabulary Log

Student Name: Maria Hernandez
Teacher Name: Ms. Crabtree
Date: January 17, 2007
Vocabulary Word: elegant
Source: Thank You, Mr. Falker
Sentence from Passage (word in context):
There was a new teacher. He was tall and elegant.
Definition:
showing style and grace.
Simple Synonym: graceful
New word: elegant
Related Word: stylish
Related Word: fancy
Related Word: graceful
Identify Cognates

Elegant (French)

elegante (Spanish)

elegant
New word: elegant

Example: A bride

Example: A graceful flower

Non-example: A muddy pig
New word
elegant
Example
Example
Non-example
Follow-up - Text Talk

Thank you, Mr. Falker

teased

elegant

cunning
Follow-up:
Using words in reading & writing situations

• Incorporate in daily message
  – “Today is Tuesday. There will be an elegant display of deserts at our class party today.”

• Creating a dictionary
  – Use your vocabulary cards on rings!

• Encourage children to use new words in their writing
  – “At first I was nervous about what to wear to the party. Mom said to wear the purple dress. I must say, I looked quite elegant when I put it on with my new pearl necklace.”
Want to learn more about developing your students’ Vocabulary knowledge?

Check out Isabel Beck’s Power Point, at the 2007 ESOL Conference [and get your hands on her book, *Bringing Words To Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction*,

– It’s a great resource!]
Sentence Walls

A visual opportunity to develop content literacy for the English language learner
Sentence Walls

provide a visual scaffold of language (e.g., phrases, sentences) to help students communicate in classroom discussions about content
Sentence Walls

serve as a template for the kinds of vocabulary and language structures ELLs will encounter when they read about the topic they are studying

Carrier and Tatum, 2006
Compare/Contrast two forms of energy

__________ is like ____because

____ and _____ are alike/different in these ways:
Evaluate and defend the uses of different forms of energy

I think _____energy is best because...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C condenses</th>
<th>D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>evaporates</td>
<td>F falls</td>
<td>G gas</td>
<td>H heats up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>evaporation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>L</td>
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<td>P precipitates</td>
<td>precipitation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>R rain</td>
<td>S snow</td>
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<td></td>
<td>rises</td>
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<td>U</td>
<td>V vapor</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When water evaporates, it __________.

When it rains, water ______________.

When the sun heats the water, the water ______________.
Sentence walls for questions

What happens when ________________?
- water heats up

What causes ________________?
- rain

What is _____________ made of?
- ice

How does _____________ happen?
- evaporation
Sentence wall use is introduced in the context of a lesson modeled by the teacher incorporated into whole-group and small-group work provided to support both oral and written language