LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

in Early Childhood Education

BEVERLY OTTO

FIFTH EDITION

Pearson

Correlation of Chapter Content with NAEYC® Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs

Standard	Key Elements of the Standard	Chapter and Topic
1: Promoting Child Development and Learning	1a. Knowing and understanding young children's characteristics and needs 1b. Knowing and understanding the multiple influences on development and learning 1c. Using developmental knowledge to create healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging learning environments	Ch 1: Becoming Speakers, Readers and Writers, p. 2 Ch 2: Learning to Communicate: Theoretical Perspectives, p. 25 Ch 2: The Brain's Role in Language Development, p. 38 Ch 2: Contexts of Language Development, p. 42 Ch 3: Culture and Language, p. 58 Ch 3: Language Diversity, p. 62 Ch 3: Factors Influencing Second Language Acquisition, p. 75 Ch 4: Phonological Development, p. 95 Ch 4: Semantic Development, p. 105 Ch 4: Syntactic Development, p. 115 Ch 4: Morphemic Development, p. 121 Ch 4: Pragmatic Development, p. 122 Ch 5: General Guidelines for Interactions with Infants, p. 135 Ch 5: Infant Curricula, p. 138 Ch 5: General Guidelines for Interactions with Toddlers, p. 145 Ch 5: Toddler Curricula, p. 151 Ch 6: Development of Phonological Knowledge, p. 171 Ch 6: Development of Semantic Knowledge, p. 175 Ch 6: Development of Syntactic Knowledge, p. 180 Ch 6: Development of Morphemic Knowledge, p. 183 Ch 6: Development of Pragmatic Knowledge, p. 185 Ch 7: Guidelines for Interactions with Preschoolers, p. 198 Ch 8: Development of Phonological Knowledge, p. 241 Ch 8: Development of Semantic Knowledge, p. 247 Ch 8: Development of Syntactic Knowledge, p. 249 Ch 8: Development of Morphemic Knowledge, p. 251 Ch 8: Development of Pragmatic Knowledge, p. 252 Ch 10: Development of Phonological Knowledge, p. 297 Ch 10: Development of Semantic Knowledge, p. 302 Ch 10: Development of Syntactic Knowledge, p. 305 Ch 10: Development of Morphemic Knowledge, p. 307 Ch 10: Development of Pragmatic Knowledge, p. 310 Ch 13: Hearing Difficulties, p. 383 Ch 13: Articulation Disorders, p. 386 Ch 13: Fluency Disorders, p. 388 Ch 13: Specific Language Impairment/Delayed Language, p. 391 Ch 13: Cognitive Impairment, p. 393 Ch 13: Autism, p. 394
2: Building Family and Community Relationships	2a. Knowing about and understanding diverse family and community characteristics 2b. Supporting and engaging families and communities through respectful, reciprocal relationships 2c. Involving families and communities in their children's development and learning	Ch 3: Cultural Context of Families and Language Development, p. 60 Ch 3: Guidelines for Teachers in Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Classrooms, p. 83 Ch 4: Early Communication Contexts, p. 91 Ch 5: Family Connections, p. 164 Ch 7: Family Connections, p. 235 Ch 9: Family Connections, p. 290 Ch 11: Enhancement of Family Connections, p. 347 Ch 14: Goals for Establishing School-Home Connections, p. 401 Ch 14: Factors Influencing Family/Parental Involvement, p. 405 Ch 14: Opportunities for Parents' Participation and Involvement at School, 407 Ch 14: Encouraging Parents to Enhance Children's Language Development at Home, p, 411
3: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families	3a. Understanding the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment 3b. Knowing about and using observation, documentation, and other appropriate assessment tools and approaches 3c. Understanding and practicing responsible assessment to promote positive outcomes for each child 3d. Knowing about assessment partnerships with families and with professional colleagues	Ch 6: Observing Children's Experiments with Language, p. 184 Ch 8: Observation of Kindergartners' Language Competencies, p. 255 Ch 12: Using Informal Observations to Document Children's Language Development in the Classroom, p. 353 Ch 12: Screening Children for Language Delays, p. 365 Ch 12: Diagnosing Children's Language Competencies for Specific Areas of Difficulty, p. 370 Ch 12: Using Portfolios to Document Children's Language Development, p. 375 Ch 12: Sharing Assessment Information with Parents, p. 377

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Language Development in Early Childhood Education

Fifth Edition

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Pearson
330 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10013

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Cover Art: Arthur Tilley/Getty Images
Media Producer: Michael Goncalves
Editorial Production and Composition Services: SPi Global, Inc.
Full-Service Project Manager: Jason Hammond
Printer/Binder: RR Donnelley/Crawfordsville
Cover Printer: Phoenix Color/Hagerstown
Text Font: Melior Com

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CIP data is available at the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Pearson

eText Access Card Package
ISBN 10: 0-13-430077-7
ISBN 13: 978-0-13-430077-1

Student Edition
ISBN 10: 0-13-455262-8
ISBN 13: 978-0-13-455262-0

eText
ISBN 10: 0-13-451979-5
ISBN 13: 978-0-13-451979-1

To early childhood professionals who make a difference
in the lives of children and their families.

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About the Author

Lifetouch Church Directories and Portraits

Beverly Otto, Ph.D., an early childhood educator for over 30 years, is professor emeritus in the Teacher Education Department at Northeastern Illinois University. She earned her doctorate at Northwestern University in teaching and learning processes with a focus on emergent literacy. Dr. Otto teaches courses in language development and emergent literacy for preservice and in-service teachers along with research for classroom teachers. Her major professional goal is preparing teachers to support children's lifelong learning through language and literacy development. Dr. Otto also served as department chair as well as associate dean in the College of Education.

Dr. Otto is the author of *Literacy Development in Early Childhood* and has authored articles published in international, national, and state professional journals. Her field-based research on emergent literacy has been presented at international, national, state, and local conferences. She has served as a consultant to early childhood centers, school districts, and the Illinois State Board of Education.

PREFACE

In writing this text, it has been my goal to provide preservice early childhood teachers with a foundation of knowledge they will need to develop classrooms and learning environments where children's language development will be enhanced. *Language Development in Early Childhood*, Fifth Edition, is a book about language development from birth through age 8. It is a foundational text that incorporates theory and research as well as guidelines and activities for enhancing language development in early childhood settings.

This text provides a comprehensive view of language development, focusing on the development of phonological, semantic, syntactic, morphemic, and pragmatic language knowledge. Development of children's knowledge of written language is also included as part of children's language development.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

This edition was developed as an Enhanced eText[1], which features

- Alignment among Learning Outcomes, chapter sections, and pop-up multiple choice quizzes for each Learning Outcome section in every chapter
- Links to video clips
- A digital Glossary linking to key terms in the eText

Integrating the quizzes and videos into coursework can reinforce key concepts.

Each chapter has been updated and expanded to reflect recent research and best practice. Revisions in wording and chapter structure have been made to increase the text's readability and improve student comprehension.

[1] The Pearson eText is the only ebook format that supports video and the assessments. Other third-party ebooks such as VitalSource, Kindle, and Nook do not support these digital enhancements.

Also new to this edition are:

- Updated research on the theoretical foundations of language development
- Increased discussion of the effects of culture on language development and implications for teachers
- Updated Family Connection features to Chapters 5, 7, 9, and 11
- Updated Teacher Resources for Chapters 3, 5, 7, and 9
- Updated checklists for teachers to use in observing and documenting children's language competencies throughout the kindergarten year
- Updated information on assessment tools and procedures in Chapter 12

ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The text begins with three chapters that address general language issues: Chapter 1, *Language in Our Lives;* Chapter 2, *Theoretical Perspectives and Contexts of Language Development;* and Chapter 3, *Language Development among Children of Linguistic Diversity.* Each of these chapters introduces foundational concepts and perspectives that are built on in subsequent chapters.

Chapters 4 to 11 focus on the different ages of children and guidelines for enhancing language development at each age level in early childhood settings. Language development is described at each age from infancy through primary years. Guidelines and activities are provided for enhancing children's language development. Professors and students will find this feature beneficial as it strengthens students' understanding of the ways in which children's language develops in early childhood settings. Updated information and resources on using symbolic gestures and signing with infants and toddlers are included in the revision of Chapters 4 and 5. Specific guidelines for enhancing language development of English language learners are included in Chapters 5, 7, and 9. Chapter 12 emphasizes assessment processes involved in observing, screening, diagnosing, and documenting children's language development. Chapter 13 focuses on language disorders and includes guidelines for teachers working with children with special needs, including autism. Chapter 14 emphasizes the role of school–home connections in enhancing children's language development and learning. The Appendix supplements Chapters 3 and 14 with a list of common greetings and expressions in different languages for early childhood teachers to use in establishing rapport and school–home connections with families of second language learners.

FOR THE PROFESSOR

Each chapter has five features that will be useful to you and your students. Each chapter opens with Learning Outcomes, which highlight key concepts to guide readers. Pop-up quizzes and video segments in the Pearson Enhanced eText provide

additional focus on key concepts. The Chapter Review section provides additional questions and terms to use in reviewing chapter content. The Chapter Extension Activities at the end of each chapter provide opportunities to apply chapter content through observation or through interaction with children or practicing teachers.

The *Instructor's Resource Manual* provides additional suggestions for in-class activities, extension activities, and useful forms, and the *Test Bank* includes a variety of assessment items. The *PowerPoint Slides* present the main concepts from each chapter and can be adapted for your own use. You can download these resources from www.pearsonhighered.com. First click on *Educators*, and then click on *Download Instructor's Resources.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank my family and colleagues for encouraging me in this fifth edition. I am also deeply indebted to my nieces and my grandchildren for the privilege of witnessing their language development in all of its passion and joy. I am also indebted to the many children and teachers whose anecdotes, language examples, and photos appear in this text and to the parents who graciously shared their children with me.

In the preparation of this fifth edition, I have deeply appreciated the guidance and insightful contributions of Julie Peters, Senior Acquisitions Editor, Early Childhood Education at Pearson. I would also like to thank the following reviewers for their thoughtful comments:

Shonna Crawford, Evangel University;

Megan A. London, Eastern Maine Community College;

Philip Prinz, San Francisco State University;

Kitty Warsame, Prairie View A&M University;

and Kathy Whipple, Baylor University.

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Chapter 1

Language in Our Lives

Dmitriy Shironosov/123RF

Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

- Describe the range of language competencies needed by children.
- Explain each of the five aspects of language knowledge.
- Distinguish between the three levels of language knowledge.
- Identify the receptive and expressive modes of oral and written language.
- Explain the critical role of children's oral language competencies in school settings.

In the toddler room, Adam and his teacher are sharing a book in the library corner during independent activity time. As his teacher turns the pages, Adam talks about the pictures and responds to questions his teacher asks.

In the preschool room, Kiesha is at the easel, painting a picture. When she finishes, she makes some letterlike forms with her paintbrush and then says, "That's my name."

In the kindergarten room, Juan is participating in "show-and-tell," describing the special rock that he found when he went for a walk with his dad. He is especially fascinated by the silvery sparkles running through the rock and says, "See the sparkles here, and here, and here" as he points to his rock.

In each of these instances, children used language effectively to communicate. Adam was engaged in the storybook sharing, taking an active role in responding to the storybook content. Kiesha showed her awareness that graphic symbols have meaning, representing her name in this case. Juan communicated the special features of the object he had brought for show-and-tell.

As an early childhood professional, you will have many interactions with children that are based in oral and written language. You will be talking with children as they interact in your classroom, engaging in the learning activities you provide. As you read books to and with children, you will introduce the children to new vocabulary as well as written language. When you create classroom posters and other displays involving print, you are showing children how written language can be used to communicate in different ways. Through these interactions, you will have a significant influence on children's language development. As you prepare for your role as an early childhood professional, it is important that you acquire knowledge of how children develop language competencies. This knowledge will enable you to provide guidance, support, and mediation to enhance children's development. Throughout this text, the emphasis is on increasing your knowledge of language development as well as strategies and activities that will enhance children's language development. This chapter provides an overview of the role of language in our lives and the different aspects of language knowledge. The chapter closes with a description of research that highlights the relationship between oral and written language.

BECOMING SPEAKERS, READERS, AND WRITERS

How did the children in the opening vignette learn to communicate using language? Did it occur automatically without any direct influence from the environment? Is learning to read different from learning to speak? How do children become fluent in more than one language? These questions have sparked intense research and debate for many years. Gradually, we are coming to better understand the ways in which children become effective speakers, listeners, readers, and writers. Throughout this text, we will explore the ways in which children become effective communicators and the ways in which we, as teachers, can enhance their development of language. This text differs from other language development texts in its attention to language as communication rather than a focus on speech production and the development of articulation. This approach recognizes that language is a medium of communication with others and within us. The focus here will be on the years from birth through age 8, an age span commonly referred to as the early childhood years. Although this text will include descriptions of activities to enhance language development, it is not intended to be a language arts methods text. The language development approach of this text examines the development of both oral and written language within settings in early childhood. Oral language development and written language development are interrelated processes that culminate in children's communicative competencies.

Language is essential to society. It forms the foundation of our perceptions, communications, and daily interactions. It is a system of symbols by which we categorize, organize, and clarify our thinking (Stice, Bertrand, & Bertrand, 1995). Through

language, we represent the world and learn about the world. Without language, a society and its culture cannot exist.

To be able to function successfully in a society and its culture (and subcultures), children need to develop a wide range of language competencies. Not only do children need to acquire an oral language, but also they need to be able to use that language effectively in a variety of settings. Further, in literate cultures, children need to develop competencies in using written language as well. Throughout life, people communicate in a variety of settings: talking on the phone with friends, interacting with a store clerk as they purchase groceries, listening to a radio talk show, and using language in professional or educational settings, such as an attorney in a court of law or a college professor and his students in a university classroom. Our language competencies allow us to participate effectively in a variety of social events and occupational settings and in our daily routines.

There is no one standard of communicative competency that teachers should encourage children to attain. Instead, it is important for teachers to recognize that children will need a wide range of communication competencies to ensure their effectiveness in a variety of settings throughout their lives.

Communicative competencies involve both receptive and expressive language. **Receptive language** refers to a person's comprehension of oral or written language. **Expressive language** refers to a person's production of language to communicate. Expressive language develops orally first during social interactions and as a child's speech mechanisms mature, allowing the child to gain control over producing specific speech sounds. In literate cultures, children also develop expressive written language as they learn how to communicate using the visual symbol system of their specific culture (e.g., the 26 letters of the English alphabet).

Receptive language development and expressive language development are closely related. Although linguists and child development educators agree that receptive language begins to develop prior to expressive language, there is little agreement regarding how long expressive language development lags behind receptive language development (Owens, 1988). The relation between the development of receptive and expressive language appears to be a dynamic one, influenced by a child's specific developmental level, each aspect of language knowledge, and learning environment.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING 1.1 Click to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE KNOWLEDGE

When children are acquiring language, they are developing five different aspects, or components, of language knowledge: phonological, semantic, syntactic, morphemic, and pragmatic. Each of these aspects refers to a specific domain of language knowledge; however, the aspects do not develop in isolation from each other. Each of these

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Language forms the foundation of our perceptions, communications, and daily interactions.

aspects of language knowledge is present in any interaction in which language is used. Initially, a child's knowledge of the aspects or components of language will be only receptive. This means the child will perceive the specific characteristics of language but will not be able to produce language that demonstrates this knowledge. The sections that follow describe each of the five aspects of language knowledge, along with examples illustrating each aspect.

Phonological Knowledge

As children hear and perceive oral language, they learn that language is embedded in a sound–symbol system. **Phonological knowledge** refers to knowledge about sound–symbol relations in a language. A **phoneme** is the smallest linguistic unit of sound, which is combined with other phonemes to form words. Phonemes consist of sounds that are considered to be a single perceptual unit by a listener, such as the /m/ sound in the word *mother* (Goodman, 1993; Hayes, Ornstein, & Gage, 1987).

How phonological knowledge develops. Children's development of phonological knowledge is fostered by their perceptual ability to distinguish sounds and by the ways in which language is used around them. Young infants about 2 months of age have been found to be able to distinguish between a /p/ sound and a /b/ sound long before they are able to produce those sounds. Children's discrimination of sounds precedes their ability to produce those same sounds due to the complex coordination of the speech mechanism in making those sounds.

In every language, some speech sounds are more important than others. Gradually, young children learn to discriminate and produce the speech sounds that are found in their home language. For example, in English, the sounds represented by the letters /l/ and /r/ are perceived as significantly different phonemes. In contrast, the Japanese language does not distinguish between the /l/ and the /r/. Consequently, when native Japanese speakers learn English, they may have difficulty articulating English words such as *rate* and *late*. Another example of the perception of significant differences in similar sounds is found in situations in which native English speakers are learning Spanish. In Spanish, /r/ and /rr/ represent different phonemes, as in *pero* (but) and *perro* (dog). For English speakers learning Spanish, this is confusing when the oral pronunciation of the two phonemes represented by *r* and *rr* seems indistinguishable (Goodman, 1993).

Phonological knowledge does not develop in isolation from other aspects of language knowledge. Learning to distinguish between similar-sounding words, such as *can* and *car*, is facilitated by the different ways in which those two words are used in meaningful contexts. The phonemic differences between the two words become meaningful because the two words are used to refer to different objects and actions.

Children's phonological knowledge during infancy and toddlerhood is evident when children produce and distinguish between the sounds used in their home languages in communicating with those around them (Gillon, 2004). As children move into the preschool years, they may acquire a more conscious awareness of distinct speech sounds in their language and begin to deliberately manipulate their language. This is known as **phonemic awareness**. This conscious awareness of individual speech sounds contributes significantly to children's understanding of the relation between speech and print. The development of literacy skills requires that children be able to use symbols to represent the sounds of their language in writing and to decode the symbols when reading. Children who are unable to consciously focus on or segment the sounds in a word may experience difficulty in learning to read and write (Klingberg, 2013; Lieberman, 1973, in Scarborough, 2002).

Watch a teacher as she engages children in phonemic awareness activities. Why do you think the teacher refers to phonemic awareness as the "backbone" of reading?

In addition to the perception of individual sounds in a language, young children notice differences in the prosody of the language. **Prosody** is the way variations in intonation, loudness, tempo, and rhythm are used to add meaning to what is said (Crystal, 1987; deVilliers & deVilliers, 1978; Goodman, 1993; Sandler & Lillo-Martin, 2005). Variations in prosody have both acoustic properties and psychological or emotional properties. For example, "they're coming" can be said in different ways to indicate a statement or a question. It can also be said in a way that conveys a sense of boredom, excitement, or dread.

Young children acquire knowledge of prosody as well as the specific sounds used in a language through interactions with people in their environment. Children's perception of prosody contributes to both their phonological knowledge and their subsequent semantic knowledge. Infants' perception of the speech intonation of those around them is evident when they begin to babble and appear to mimic the intonation of others. Infants learn to sense when their parent or caregiver is happy, excited, calm, tense, or angry from the intonation, loudness, tempo, or rhythm of the adult's speech. Prosodic features are also communicated in sign language, through facial expression, body posture, and rhythmic signing (Sandler & Lillo-Martin, 2005).

Children also become aware of prosody as they interact with their parents and caregivers in storybook sharing. As an adult directs a child's attention to a storybook by reading the text or simply talking about the pictures, variations in prosody occur. For example, when an adult reads the longtime favorite story "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," she typically uses different "voices" for each of the bears: a loud, gruff voice for the papa bear; a gentle, moderate voice for the mama bear; and a tiny, squeaky voice for the baby bear.

Storybook sharing is a very effective way to encourage children to begin to perceive variations in prosody because the range of language used in storybooks and the range of dramatic expression in story sharing are much greater than in day-to-day conversations. In addition, the pictures in young children's storybooks contribute to the meaning of the shared story, reinforcing the meanings implied in the oral story. Parents and caregivers often tell of instances in which they did not read a storybook with the same intonation or dramatic speech they used previously, and the child stops them and tells them that they need to read the story the "right way," meaning that they need to use the anticipated intonation, loudness, tempo, or rhythm.

Semantic Knowledge

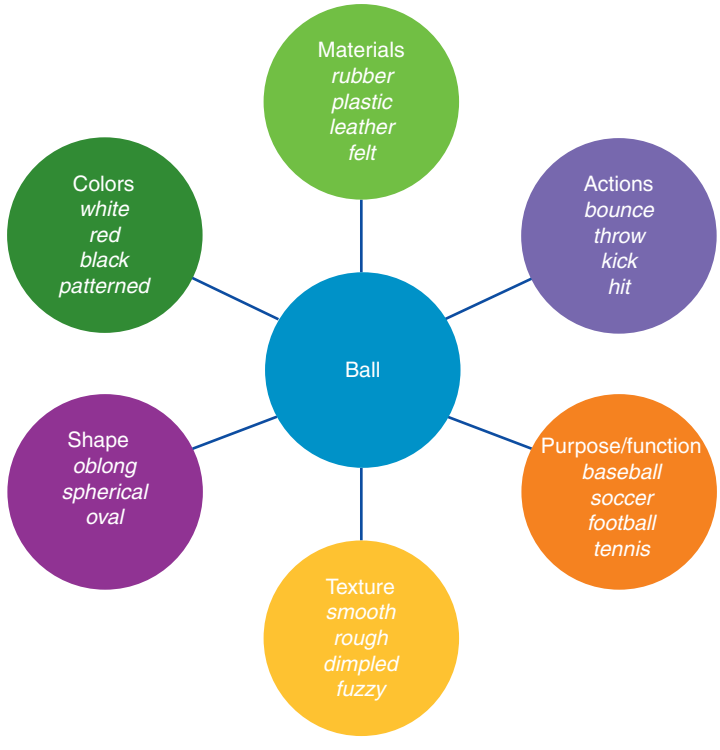
In learning that oral symbols, or spoken words, have meaning, semantic knowledge is acquired. The development of semantic knowledge is closely tied to the development of conceptual knowledge (Vygotsky, 1962). **Semantic knowledge** refers to the word labels that specify concepts and also to the semantic networks, or schemata, that represent the interrelations between concepts. Semantic networks–**schemata**–are thought to be cognitive structures in our memory that organize our conceptual knowledge. These semantic networks facilitate new learning and recall and contribute to the reorganization and elaboration of prior conceptual learning.

For example, the English word *ball* references the idea of a round object that has certain properties of rolling and bouncing and that is often used in a game or other physical activity. In acquiring concepts, children learn that objects and actions with similar features or functions can be grouped into the same category or into related categories. For example, when a child learns that a small, round, red plastic object is called a *ball,* he may see similarities when he sees a white soccer ball and also call it a ball, or he may attempt to roll the soccer ball on the floor. A semantic network, or schema, develops when a child begins to see the relations between concepts.

Over time, as a child experiences different types of balls that are used for different purposes, a schema develops for balls. See Figure 1.1 for an example of what adults might have in their *ball* schema. A young child's schema for *ball* will initially be much more limited in complexity and may include only "roundness," "throwing," and "bouncing."

Vocabulary development is closely related to general linguistic competence and to reading comprehension. Children with larger and more developed vocabularies have more options for expressing what they want to say and, thus, have greater linguistic flexibility. One activity that contributes to vocabulary development is storybook sharing, where an adult reads to a child. The vocabulary used in storybooks is often more descriptive and precise than is the vocabulary used in daily conversations. Storybook experiences expand a child's listening vocabulary. A larger vocabulary also increases a child's ability to comprehend written text because reading comprehension is directly related to listening comprehension and oral vocabulary. When a specific word (and concept) is part of a child's oral vocabulary or listening vocabulary, the child can more easily comprehend and decode it when he encounters the word in written text.

FIGURE 1.1
Semantic Network or Schema for *Ball*



Children's development of semantic knowledge is also influenced by their awareness of the grammatical structure in which language is used. This syntactic knowledge is crucial because the grammatical or syntactic structures carry implied meaning. Word order affects the meaning of what is said.

Syntactic Knowledge

To use language effectively, it is necessary to know how to combine words to create meaningful expressions. Each language system has rules or a grammar that prescribes how words are combined to create sentences or meaningful phrases. This aspect of language knowledge is called **syntactic knowledge**.

Children learn that word order, or **syntax**, is important in creating meaning and in comprehending another's message. The question "Did you hit Jack?" asks for different information than "Did Jack hit you?" Knowledge of the importance of word order is known linguistically at an unconscious level before children can verbalize their understanding of that language concept. For example, in English, adjectives immediately precede the nouns they modify: "The beautiful flower was on the table," not "The flower beautiful was on the table." When children are learning to speak English, their awareness of the position of adjectives relative to the nouns that are modified is evident even in their two-word utterances: "big ball," "blue car." This occurs long before children can consciously identify adjectives and the words they modify.

Differences between languages may be problematic for second language learners because syntax varies from language to language. For example, in Spanish, some adjectives follow the nouns they modify. A young Spanish bilingual child will have the task of learning two sets of syntactic rules, one for Spanish and one for English.

Children also learn that words cannot be haphazardly combined, as in "flower table the beautiful was the on." The fact that such random combinations of words have not been documented among young children indicates that word order knowledge develops early. Research has documented few instances of children violating syntactic rules simply because utterances that do not observe the specific language's syntax are not comprehendible, useful, or meaningful. To speak in a way that violates syntactic rules dooms the speaker to be misunderstood or ignored.

Morphemic Knowledge

Morphemic knowledge refers to knowledge of word structure. In acquiring syntactic knowledge, children learn that some words have related meanings but are used in different ways in speech and in written language and have different word structure. For example, *happy, happiness,* and *happily* have related meanings; however, each word is used in a different way grammatically. *Happy* is an adjective, *happiness* is a noun, and *happily* is an adverb. Thus, each has a different grammatical function. *Walk, walking*, and *walked* are related in meaning; however, the location in time or tense is different. In learning how to use words in an appropriate syntactic manner, children also learn that prefixes and word endings change the meaning of a word and its grammatical use.

Each word is composed of one or more meaningful linguistic units. The smallest unit of meaning in language is the **morpheme**. There are two types of morphemes: (a) **free morphemes** are used alone as words (e.g., *house*, *turtle*, *book*), and (b) **bound morphemes** must be attached to free morphemes (e.g., the final *-s* in house*s*, the *-ly* in slow*ly*, and the *-ing* in go*ing*).

Bound morphemes are of two types: derivational and inflectional (Lindfors, 1987; Owens, 1988). **Derivational morphemes** include prefixes, such as *un-* in *unhappy*, and suffixes, such as *-ness* in *happiness*. These morphemes are added to a root or stem to change the meaning of the word or the grammatical function of the word in the sentence. Table 1.1 provides examples of how derivational morphemes change the meaning and grammatical function (part of speech) of a word.

Inflectional morphemes are word endings added to change verb tense, possession, or plurality or to make comparisons. For example, many verbs add the *-ed* morpheme to show past tense, as in *walk–walk*ed. To show possession, an apostrophe and the letter *s* are added to the end of a noun, as in *Jack–Jack*'s hat. Plurality is indicated by adding an *-s* or *-es* to a noun, as in *cat–cat*s and *dish–dish*es. To make comparisons, *-er* and *-est* are added, as in *fast*, *fast*er, and *fast*est. Although many English words are "regular" in the sense that these inflectional morphemes can be used, there are also irregular words that do not follow these patterns. For example, to make a comparison based on the word *good*, you would say *good*, *better*, and *best*, not *good*, *gooder*, *goodest*. To indicate the past tense of go, you would say *went*, not *goed*.

The ability to use morphemes appropriately is one of the characteristics of an effective language user. Knowledge of morphology allows children to better comprehend others' speech, such as understanding plural nouns and verb tense. Knowledge that *cat* means one in number and *cat*s refers to more than one cat allows more precise communication.

As children's speech progresses beyond the one-word and two-word stages, their understanding of how words are formed is used as they attempt to communicate. Many utterances of young children are novel, not simply repetitions of prior adult speech. In the production of an utterance, children use their knowledge of morphemes to create their messages. As children become more aware of how morphemes are used, their language becomes more precise and meaningful.

TABLE 1.1
Examples of Derivational Morphemes

Using prefixes and suffixes to change meaning and part of speech			
Prefix	**Stem**	**Suffix**	**New Word**
un-	*accept* (verb)	*-able*	*unacceptable* (adjective)
im-	*proper* (adjective)	*-ly*	*improperly* (adverb)
dis-	*grace* (noun)	*-ful*	*disgraceful* (adjective)