

***Oral Language Development and Literacy Learning: Understanding Language Structures to Provide Scaffolding for Students***

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**Clay's Research**

Clay's studies of oral language revealed that control of sentence structure is very important in early stages of learning to read. When teachers of early readers choose texts that are close to a child's oral language, the child can anticipate and self-monitor using what he or she knows about language.

If children have been slow to acquire speech or have been offered fewer opportunities to hold conversations (for many reasons) **there can be limitations in the grammar they control**, which might mean that they have **difficulties with comprehending oral and written language**. Such children **may not have control of some of the most common sentence structures used in story book English** and therefore are **unable to anticipate** what may happen next in the sentences of their reading texts.

Clay, M. (1991). *Becoming Literate*. p.38

From oral language, children learn to anticipate...

- words
- phrases
- sentences
- paragraphs
- story structure

"Sometimes it is necessary for a child to **gain control over a particular language structure first** (say it aloud) before he returns to using the visual information."

Clay, LL 2, page 112

**Oral Language Research**

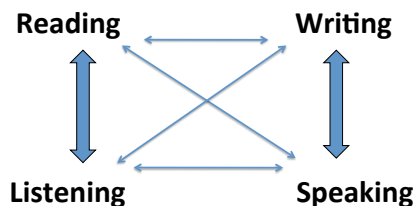
**English language proficiency** has been found to be the **#1 student-level predictor of academic outcomes** (GPA & standardized tests)

Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, (2008)

I am encouraging teachers to understand that learning in one language area enriches the potential for learning in the other areas. Therefore, if we plan instruction that links oral language and literacy learning (writing and reading) from the start--so that writing and reading and oral language processing move forward together, linked and patterned, from the start--that instruction will be more powerful.

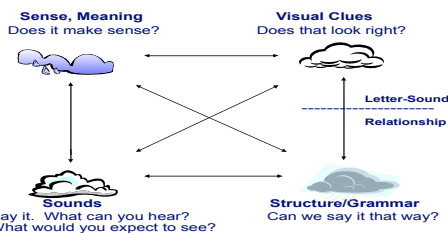
Clay (1991) *Becoming Literate*

### Interpretative and Productive Language Acquisition



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### Sources of Information



Clay, M. (2005). *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. Page 112.

### Noticing Language Behaviors

Describe how something is said rather than what is said.

Show how a child interacts with different features of language.

Are important to observe (but often ignored)!

Help to determine next instructional steps/ possible language objectives to teach.

**“...teachers should look more closely at language behaviors. Knowing what the pupil does leads to more significant teaching”**

Clay, M. (1998). *Change Over Time*, p.105

All readers anticipate up-and-coming text, and therefore **children who do not control some of the simple rules of grammar** (for using verbs, plurals, and possessives in their speech) **will be slower to solve these simple problems** in their reading and in their own attempts to write.

Clay, *Biks and Gutches*, 2007, p. 8

### Language Related (LR) Approximations

- LR approximations are attributable to the reader’s language –the way they speak, the language structures they use, the vocabulary they know– and **how similar or different their language is from book language**
  - LR errors differ from errors due to difficulty with interpreting print
- This is the first study to look at LR approximations for EALs

Briceno, A. and Klein, A.F. (2016). Making Instructional Decisions: Deepening our Understanding of English Learners’ Processing in Reading. *Journal of Reading Recovery*, Fall, 2016.

### Language Related (LR) Approximations

- 95% of ELs’ running records contained LR errors
- 54% of all the errors ELs made were LR
- 5 types of errors comprised 93% of all the LR errors ELs made

### LR Approximation #1

- What do you notice about this running record?
- How might the errors impact comprehension?

A Treasure Island, level 11, 177 words

p. 15	Grandma	said,	"The	starfish	and	the	crab	are	treasures,
	Meg,	and	the	seaweed	is,	too.			
	But	they	all	have	to	stay	here	in	the
								pool.	pool?

### LR Approximations 1: Teacher Tolds

- Most tolds (2/3) due to **unknown vocabulary**
  - E.g.: sea, drawer, parrots, naughty, island
  - multiple meaning words (e.g.: pool)
- Other tolds (1/3) due to **tricky language structures**
  - question words at the beginning of a sentence
  - the use of the conditional “would;”
  - sight words such as “come” or “here” at the beginning of a sentence and page; and
  - the uncommon word “shall”

### LR Approximation #2

- What do you notice?
- How might the errors impact comprehension?

Berries for Baby Elephant, level 8, 93 words

p. 8	"The	berries	are	all	gone	down	here.					
	I	ate	all	the	berries	and	I	am	still	hungry,"	cried	crying
	Baby	Elephant.										

### LR Approximation #2: Irregular Verbs

- Irregular past tense verbs tend to be difficult (Hakuta, 1976; Rumelhart & McClelland, 1985).
- Students may overgeneralize rules, saying “singed” and “swimmed” instead of “sang” and “swam” (Rumelhart & McClelland, 1985)
  - Young ELs tend to acquire **irregular verbs that vary significantly from the root verb sooner** than regular verbs that take inflectional endings or irregular verbs that are not very different (e.g., come & came) (Ionin & Wexler, 2002).
    - ‘was,’ ‘were,’ ‘am’ and ‘is’ differ from the verb ‘to be’
    - An EL may control “I am” and “he was” before “I came” and “he ran.”

### LR Approximation 3

- What do you notice?
- How might the errors impact comprehension?

The Missing Puppy, level 5, 67 words

p. 4	Bella	went	to	look	for	the	little	puppy.
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	She	look	and	look	and	look		
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

Figure 3

The Missing Puppy, level 5, 67 words

p. 8	Bella	went	to	look	for	the	little	puppy.
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	She	look	and	look	and	look		
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

### LR Approximation #3: Inflectional Endings

- Regular verbs - In most cases, ELs left off the ending, usually the past tense -ed
  - Look/looked; like/liked; shout/shouted
- “-ing” is often acquired before “ed” & “s” on verbs (Brown, 1973; Hakuta, 1976; Larsen-Freeman, 1975)
- Plurals – the -s ending was left off plurals
  - Flower/flowers,

### LR Approximation #4

- What do you notice about this running record?
- How might the errors impact comprehension?

I Feel Like a Dummy, level 13, 211 words

p. 4	But	Victor	was	proud	of	his.
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	His	snowflake	didn't	look	like	a snowflake!
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Victor	was	upset.			
	✓	✓	✓			

### LR Approximation #4: Contractions

- 3 stages to learning contractions
  - Affirmative term: do
  - Two words: do not, I am
  - Contraction: don't, I'm
- Some students didn't read contractions (it/it's)
- Some students seemed to ignore the contraction (I will / I'll)
- Read the contraction instead of 2 words (won't/will not)
- Read the opposite (can/can't; will/won't)

### LR Approximation #5

- What do you notice about this running record?
- How might the errors impact comprehension?

Danny Looks for Abby, level 9, 120 words

p. 4	I	looked	in	the	shed.	She	was	not	there.				
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
p. 5	I	looked	around	behind	the	shed.	She	was	not	there.			
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
	Where	was	Abby?										
	✓	✓	✓										
p. 6	I	looked	under	behind	the	garbage	can.	She	was	not	there.		
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
p. 7	I	looked	under	in	the	bushes.	She	was	not	there.	Where	was	Abby?
	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

### LR Approximation #5: Prepositions

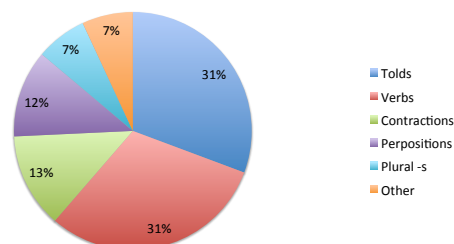
- Prepositions tell: With whom? Where? When?
  - with my mom, at the park, in the morning
- ELs commonly mixed prepositions that shared visual information (in/on, at/to, for/of)
- Sometimes students monitored but were unable to fix it
- Prepositions can be very difficult for ELs
- The choice of preposition often seems arbitrary (e.g., why do we get on a plane or bus but in a car?)

“So if a running record is a result of careful observations it will tell us how close a child’s language predictions are to those of an author. Over time there is likely to be a slow change toward the standard dialect of the books ... I **think a problem arises when you think of a running record as an assessment, with a score (% correct), or yielding a ‘pass’ on a book level.**”

Clay, quoted in Rogers & Mosley Wetzel, 2014, p. 126-127

## LR Errors

LR Errors as a Percentage of Total LR Errors



## IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

### 1. Ongoing Assessment – Language & Literacy

- Continually assess oral language and look for patterns across **reading, writing and speech**
  - Observe patterns in students reading, writing, talking
    - sentence structure and vocabulary
  - Ex: if the child does not control the third person singular “s” in her speech, s/he may struggle to read the final “s” on verbs and may not use the “s” in writing

### 1. Ongoing Assessment – Language & Literacy

- Continually assess oral language and look for patterns across reading, writing and speech
  - Analyze running records again with a focus on language
    - Closely examine tolds
    - Don’t assume visual errors
    - Think beyond the accuracy rate

### 2. Careful Books Selection & Scaffolding

- Use book orientation to scaffold tricky language
  - familiar words used in new or different ways
  - unfamiliar vocabulary
  - tricky language structures
- Practice tricky structures; know when to “back off” (Clay, 2005)

## 2. Careful Books Selection & Scaffolding

“Get the new phrase or sentence:

- To the ear (listening)
- To the mouth (saying)
- To the eye (reading)
- To the written product (creating text)

Clay, 2004, p. 5

## 2. Careful Books Selection & Scaffolding

- Check for understanding frequently.
  - In the running record, consider:
    - Tolds
    - Verbs
    - Contractions
    - Prepositions
  - Is the child understanding my teacher language?

## 3. Intentional Language Expansion

- Sentence transformations
- Books to expand language

### Syntactical Development

*based on Clay's Theory of Literacy Development*

*Change in grammar takes time, and I doubt if we know why. The child reads easy grammars well, reads more, and has more exposure to alternative ways of varying the construction of sentences. Talking and writing alone may not introduce enough exposure to literary variations of language use.*

Clay, Talking, Reading and Writing, JRR, Spring, 2004, p. 13

### Syntactical Development

*based on Clay's Theory of Literacy Development*

*“Encourage the use of alternative constructions: expanding the phrase, moving things around, transforming simple statements.”*

Clay, M.(2004), “Talking, Reading and Writing”, JRR, Spring

**In interactions, think about these simple sentence types and development of more complex syntax. . . Asking *where, when and who* to expand sentences by adding prepositional phrases.**

Consider:

- Back in your Reading Recovery lessons and in small groups in the classroom, what will you notice about your English as an Additional Language learners?
- What might you do differently to scaffold language?

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What are your next steps?  
Feel free to contact me!

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