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Introduction to the Subsystems of Language

Why do you think it is important for teachers to know how languages are organized?

Note: Languages are organized in parallel ways—for example, all languages have words to denote people, places, objects (nouns) that are different from action-words (verbs). All languages string words together to form larger units of meaning (sentences). Research tells us that knowledge of how one language is structured helps one to teach and learn a second language.

1: Language. Language is a system used by a group of people for giving meaning to sounds, words, gestures, and other symbols to enable communication with each other. Each language has its own rules.

2: Components of Language. In Urdu, English, or other languages as well, there are rules that govern five subsystems. The subsystems are:

✓ 1) Phonology, 2) Morphology, 3) Syntax, 4) Semantics, and 5) Pragmatics.

✓ ∴ Phonology is the system of sound. A **phoneme** is the smallest speech sound. The babbling stage in infancy is a baby's first attempt to master the phonology subsystem. English uses 45 different sound elements, called phonemes.

For example: C-A-T has 3 phonemes

How many phonemes in C-H-I-C-K? (Answer: THREE: 1. "Ch" 2. "I" as in the short I sound and 3. The c/k sound. Make sure students don't confuse phonemes with letters. The word chick has 5 letters but 3 phonemes.)

Urdu uses at least 48 phonemes. Many phonemes are common between Urdu and English (e.g. j- or s-) but some are different, for example English does not use certain phonemes represented by the Urdu letters ghain- غ or Khe- خ

How many phonemes in the word *chaawal*?

(Answer: FOUR 1. "Ch", 2. "Aa", 3. "W" 4. "L")

■ Phonemes alter meaning of words when combined (e.g., sat to bat).

✓ Phonology.

Help student-teachers realize the connection between phonemes and reading. Explain that reading teachers must be experts at counting phonemes in a word because they must help children connect letters to phonemes in phonics and spelling work. Explain that counting phonemes is easier in Urdu because it usually (with a few exceptions) has a separate letter for

each phoneme it uses but surprisingly hard in English because English words usually do not have a neat one-to-one match between phonemes and letters.

For example, the -sh- sound in Urdu is always represented by a ش but the spellings of many English words represent this phoneme through different letters. For example, the words *mission*, *machine*, *sugar*, *ocean*, *station* and *she* all use the -sh- phoneme but represent it through the letters ss, ch, s, c, t and sh respectively.

Phonological Deficits

- Frequently appear as articulation disorders.
 - Child omits a consonant: "oo" for you
 - Child substitutes one consonant: "wabbit" for rabbit
 - Discrimination: child hears "go get the nail" instead of mail

1/10/2013
Tue

2. Morphology. Morphology is the basic unit of meaning when combined with into words. A morpheme is the smallest element of language that carries meaning, The word lady has one morpheme while the word unladylike has three i.e. *un*, *lady* and *like*. Similarly, the Urdu word *Khoobsoorat* has 2 morphemes, *Khoob* and *soorat*.

- Study and use of morphemes, the smallest units of language that have meaning.
- A morpheme is a group of sounds that refers to a particular object, idea, or action.
 - Roots can stand alone (e.g., car, teach, tall)
 - Affixes are bound such as prefixes and suffixes and when attached to root words change the meaning of the words (e.g., cars, teacher, tallest)

Morphological Deficits

- Elementary aged: may not use appropriate inflectional endings in their speech (e.g., "He walk" or "Mommy coat").
- Middle school: lack irregular past tense or irregular plurals (e.g., *drived* for *drove* or *mans* for *men*).

3. Syntax is the system of sentence formation—the rules of word order in sentence formation. As children learn language they begin with one or two words and as they add words to create sentences, they generally form them correctly according to the language that they are learning to speak.

It is the grammatical system that orders the construction of sentences.

Syntax involves word order, verb tense, and cohesive ties.

For example, in Urdu a common syntax structure is Subject-Object-Verb

S O V Urdu
S V O Eng

(*Mein paani pee raha hoon* or 'I—water—am drinking') where as in English, we follow a Subject-Verb-Object construction (*I am drinking water*).

- The boy hit the ball.
- The ball was hit by the boy.

Syntax also allows us to accept "I went to the store" as a meaningful (grammatical) sentence while "To store went I" would not be acceptable English.

Syntactic Deficits

- Lack the length or syntactic complexity (e.g., "Where Daddy go?").
- Problems comprehending sentences that express relationship between direct or indirect objects.
- Difficulty with *wh* questions.

→ Note that phonology, syntax, and morphology are subsystems discussed concerned with the form of the language: what language sounds like when spoken and what it looks like when written.

4. **Semantics.** The fourth subsystem, semantics, is concerned with the system of **meaning**, at the word, sentence, and text levels.

- The larger meaning component of language.

More than single words, includes complex use of vocabulary, including structures such as word categories, word relationships, synonyms, antonyms, figurative language, ambiguities, and absurdities

It is our understanding of semantics that allows us to recognize that someone who is "green with envy" has not changed hue, or that "having cold feet" has less to do with the appendage at the end of our legs and more to do with our anxiety about a new experience.

Semantic Deficits

- Limited vocabulary especially in adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, or pronouns.
- Longer response time in selecting vocabulary words.
- Fail to perceive subtle changes in word meaning: incomplete understanding and misinterpretations.
- Figurative language problems.

5. **Pragmatics.** The fifth subsystem, pragmatics, is the social system of language use. Pragmatics involves the rules governing social use of language. For example, what to say, to whom, and in what manner. For example, children learn that the same language is used differently at home, in the school with the teacher, on the playground with friends and that characters in a book might “speak” in another way.

- Knowledge and ability to use language functionally in social or interactive situations.
- Integrates all the other language skills, but also requires knowledge and use of rule governing the use of language in social context.

“‘Pragmatics’ refers to the ways the members of the speech community achieve their goals using language.”¹ The way we speak to our parents is not the same as the way we interact with a sibling, for example.

Pragmatic Deficits

- Problems understanding indirect requests (e.g., may say yes when asked “Must you play the piano?”).
- May enter conversations in a socially unacceptable fashion or fail to take turns talking.
- Difficulty staying on topic.

3) Language Components of Literacy

In previous sessions we identified components of literacy as listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Listening which is **receptive oral** language. Students take in information but do not generate language while listening.

• **Speaking** which is **productive oral** language. Students produce language when speaking.

• **Reading** which is **receptive written** language. Students take in information from text but do not generate text while reading.

• **Writing** which **productive written** language. Students produce

Language Components & Skills *

- **Form**
 - Phonology
 - Morphology
 - Syntax
- **Content**
 - Semantics
- **Use**
 - Pragmatics

Form: rules by which a given communications system is governed; the “how” of language

Content: the meaning component; the “what” of language

Use: reason, purpose: the “why” of language

Integration of the three components is referred to as Language Competence

Problems in language may be result of

Simple delay in development of language competence

Disruption in one or more of the three components

Failure to integrate the three components functionally

Preschool and Kindergarten Indicators

- Difficulty with readiness skills: counting, naming colors, naming the days of the week, and using scissors.
- Unable to follow simple directions, follow a story line, or enjoy listening to stories.
- May exhibit immature-sounding speech, word finding difficulties, and inability to name common objects.

Elementary Level Indicators

- Limited ability to identify sounds, analyzing and synthesizing sound sequences and segmenting words.
 - Problems with temporal and spatial concepts (e.g., before-after, some, few).
 - Word finding (retrieval) difficulties exist.
 - Problems sounding out and blending sounds.
 - Problems with expressive and oral language.
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