

Chapter Three

Developing vocabulary

Grammar focus. Word formation, phrasal verbs

Introduction.

English has the largest vocabulary of any language in the world, an estimated 400,000 words and growing. No one knows all the words, but educated English speakers can figure out the meaning of between one third and one half of the words when they see them in a context. Try out Awareness Activity 3.1 as an informal check on your vocabulary.

Awareness Activity 3.1. How big is your vocabulary?

The following 50 words were randomly selected from the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. Quickly read through the list and mark the ones that you would probably be able to define if you saw them in your reading.

anachronism; inhibitor; tamandua; fernticle; imbibe; meant;
 cavernulous; mammoth; stonemason; release; peacock-fish;
 meistersinger; clamber; pyroligneous; dedentition; supplemental;
 redcoat; bumbaze; arsenical; pyroxylin; post-road; occult; emodin;
 non-importation; meiostemonous; bongrace; one-legged; cantred;
 flesher; dotter; Jew; ship; inutile; statement; forager; invincible;
 inoculable; presbyter; rubicelle; tellurian; misguide; perchlorate;
 auriform; importer; infantilism; gospel; binervate; aganglionic;
 tiddlywinks; distraint

This activity looks at your **passive** vocabulary, the English words that you might not use yourself but would probably understand in the right context. The words that you actively use are called your **active** vocabulary. Count how many words you marked then multiply your number by 2. This is a rough estimate of the percentage English words you passively know.

Note that most of these words are seldom used in conversation. Some you may recognize from your science classes. On the other hand researchers find that when vocabulary is ranked by frequency of occurrence, the following thirteen words account for one third of the words we hear in conversation. They are listed in the order of frequency:

is; the; and; a; to; I; that; it; he; of; she; not; be

Add to these thirteen the following twenty in their order of frequency and we have half of the words that we hear in a conversation.

in; look; this; or; like; do; her; there; what; on; well; has; his; they;
think; know; but; have; just; very

Notice that although these words account for half the words in a conversation, there are only three content words, the verbs *look*, *think*, and *know*, which are common in expressing opinions. (*It looks like you were right. I think you should do it again. I know you did it.*) You'll recognize *like* is an all purpose word in conversation used as a verb (*He likes me.*), adjective (*She is so child-like.*), preposition (*Like many people, he detested her*), conjunction (*Do like I said.*), interjection (*Like, who cares.*), or hedge (*Well, like...I don't know.*). *Well* is

another common conversational word that might be a noun (*Pussy's in the well.*), adjective (*He seems well.*), or adverb (*He did well.*), but is most commonly used as an interjection or hedge to introduce comments (*Well, what do you know?*). The rest are function words, such as pronouns and possessives (*I, he, she, her, they*), prepositions (*by, in, of, on*), auxiliary verbs (*is, do, be, has, have*), conjunctions (*and, but, or*) determiners (*the, a, that, this, his, her*) and questions words (*what*) that form the grammatical frames that we listen for to identify the nouns and verbs in a sentence. It would be difficult to hold even a simple conversation using only these high frequency words.

The words in our random list from the dictionary occur much less frequently. In many cases you might remember the botany, zoology, chemistry, or other science class where you encountered them. Thus English teachers face a formidable task as they help students build their vocabularies as quickly as possible. They cannot rely on the spoken language to help them out. They must teach them vocabulary building strategies.

Awareness Activity 3.2. Street talk versus school talk.

English language learners need to know only 1,000 to 2,000 words to express themselves adequately in interpersonal language but 7,000 to 10,000 words to be successful in serious reading. To see the difference between the basic vocabulary needed for conversation and the extended vocabulary needed for academic reading, let's look at two passages. One is from a cowboy story written for middle school children, the other from a history book for adults. Which

one uses street talk and which one school talk? How can you tell? Which one do you think is easier for an adult English language learner? Be careful, this may be a trick question.

- a. Pete got out his rifle, jumped on this horse, and took off. We just knew he would never give up.
- b. Upon the termination of hostilities in 1945, several European nations avoided the issue of independence for their colonies. Prolonged violent wars of liberation were the result.

I'm sure you picked passage b as the academic text. For native speakers of English passage b is also the more difficult passage. In fact, in journalism they have a simple way of determining if a text is too difficult for the average reader. It is based on what they call the "fog index." It is determined by looking at how many words in a running text are three syllables or longer. Even without knowing the exact formula for determining the fog index, we can tell with just a quick glance at the length of the words that passage b is "foggier" than passage a.

These longer words are derived from Greek and Latin, the source of our academic vocabulary. That's where the tricky part of the question comes in. For people who have learned English on the streets in English speaking countries, passage a is easier. However, for those who learn English overseas in academic classrooms, selection b is often easier since these longer words rather than the vocabulary of street talk are most likely used in their professional reading. They

are also easier to learn since once you know the meaning of the basic word parts, the **morphemes**, you can figure out the meaning of related words that have the same morphemes. Note the words in italics in passage b as reprinted below.

- b. Upon the *termination* of *hostilities* in 1945, several European *nations* avoided the issue of *independence* for their colonies. Prolonged *violent* wars of *liberation* were the result.

Below are some related words based on the morphemes in the six italicized words. Notice that you can define the related words without seeing them first in a sentence. You simply have to know the meaning of the morphemes.

termination, term, terminal, terminate

hostilities, hostile

nations, national, nationalize

independence, independent, dependence, depend

violent, violence, violate, violation

liberation, liberate, liberal

Much of the world speaks either as a first or a second language languages which descend from Latin, such as Spanish and French. As a result, the words we consider academic English are often part of the everyday language for speakers of these languages. In countries such as Mexico, English language texts such as b are often used in beginning reading classes for adults in the academic setting whereas cowboy stories and other fiction are delayed until the

intermediate or advanced level when students can be expected to be more familiar with conversational English.

To see why conversational English can be more difficult for English language learners, I've reprinted below passage a with some of the conversational words in italics. Notice that you cannot be definite about the meaning of the italicized words unless you see or hear them in the context of a sentence.

- a. Pete *got out* his rifle, jumped on this horse, and *took off*. We just knew he would never *give up*.

These two word combinations, which look like verbs followed by prepositions, are called **two-word verbs** or **phrasal verbs**. They are characteristic of spoken English. Phrasal verbs, which native speakers of English consider the easiest and most essential part of interpersonal language, are some of the hardest words for English language learners to figure out. Notice how the same phrasal verb can have a variety of meanings depending on the context.

get out = leave ("Get out of here"); show or display ("Get your gun out."), stop joking ("Oh, get out of here."), appear ("Get out on the stage."), party ("Do you get out much?")

take off = leave in a hurry ("He took off down the road."), remove ("Take off your hat."), parody ("That's a take off from *Star Wars*."), be immediately and immensely successful ("My career took off."), use as a starting point ("The discussion took off from where we stopped."), launch ("The rockets took off at noon.")

give up = surrender (“He wouldn’t give up to the sheriff.”), quit (“He wouldn’t give up smoking.”), pass something upward (“Give the plates up to John.”)

With these phrasal verbs, knowing the meaning of the individual words or morphemes is of little help. Sometimes, if your imagination is good, you can think of a metaphorical extension to figure out the meaning. For example, *get out* ‘to party’ implies that you take your body out of the house to do activities elsewhere.

Awareness Activity 3.3. English dialects

The **Plain English** movement promotes the use of conversational vocabulary even in formal documents, such as textbooks, contracts, government publications, and official announcements. We saw in AA 3.2 that conversational English with its use of phrasal verbs is not necessarily easier or plainer, especially for English language learners. However, even in conversational English we often misunderstand what others are saying even though we know all the words. Suppose you overheard the following lines of conversation. Take the following multiple-choice vocabulary test to see if you understood what each speaker meant.

1. “Look at this. I found it over there in the hammock.”

Where was the object found?

- a.) in the woods
- b.) in a swinging canvas bed
- c.) on an ice flow
- d.) on a small hill

2. “Did you take the triple combination?”

What is the speaker talking about?

- a.) gambling b.) books c.) banking d.) cars

3. “Hey, dude. I was thrashing out there.”

Where are you located?

- a.) wrestling match b.) farm c.) beach d.) principal’s office

4. “John, get me a female and we can finish the job.”

Who’s talking?

- a.) a breeder b.) a dating counselor c.) a repairman d.) a botanist

5. “There’s the most beautiful outfit in the window. It’s so perfect for me. It’s pink and just right for summer. Really, I can’t *live* without it.”

Who probably said this?

- a.) a man b.) a woman

The answers are 1.a, 2.b, 3.c, 4.c and 5.b. How did you do? We are so surrounded by Standard English in school and in the media that we forget that there are other versions of English that are more appropriate in other situations. These different versions of English are called dialects.

Question 1 was an example of a **regional dialect**.spoken in Florida.

1. “Look at this. I found it over there in the hammock.”

Where was the object found?

- a. in the woods b.) in a swinging canvas bed c.) in an ice flow d.) in a small hill

A *hammock* in Florida may refer to the canvas bed that hangs between trees, but it also refers to a bunch of trees usually on a high spot or hill. Regional dialects

develop because of isolation. Before the age of mass communication, mass education, and mass movement of population, the language of each community or region changed ever so slightly in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar from generation to generation as the residents interacted with each other and with other people who might pass through. Over a period of several hundred years, these changes became so numerous that people from widely separated towns or areas could no longer understand each other. The result was the creation of a new language. In this way Latin became Spanish, French, Italian and the other Romance languages and the original Germanic language became Dutch, English, German, and Swedish. To some extent mass communication, mass education, and mass movements of the population prevent regional dialects from developing or even reverse this process by spreading standardized versions of the language, such as Standard American English (SAE).

However, English dialects arise not just because of regional isolation but because of self-imposed social isolation in certain activities. The result is **social dialects**. The last four questions illustrate different kinds of social dialects.

2. "Did you take the triple combination?"

What is the speaker talking about?

- a. gambling b.) books c.) banking d.) cars

A *triple combination* is an example of religious language. In this case it is the language of Mormons. Religion in the United States is usually a personal or a family matter rather than a public affair because of the separation of church and state. As a result, unless we attend the services and interact with the

participants, we do not encounter the special vocabulary that has developed. Perhaps you have visited the services of a different religion or have listened to members of other religions speak privately to one another and have noticed how the language differs in such things as prayers, sermons, greetings, or general conversations that are discussing ways to behave.

The next two questions show how any social group can develop special vocabulary.

3. "Hey, dude. I was thrashing out there."

Where are you located?

b.) wrestling match b.) farm c.) beach d.) principal's office

4. "John, get me a female and we can finish the job."

Who's talking?

c.) a breeder b.) a dating counselor c.) a repairman d.) a botanist

In the third question we see an example of Florida surfing talk with the use of *thrashing*. It is common for teenagers and young adults to create their own special vocabulary as a mark of identity for their own social group and their activities. Other social groups such as families, clubs, athletic teams, and gangs do the same. The special vocabulary developed by professional groups such as doctors, educators, and lawyers is called **jargon**. We've all heard doctors call scrapes and scratches on our arms or legs *abrasions*. However, even common words can become jargon, as illustrated in the fourth question. In the construction industry *male* and *female* refer to certain types of interlocking parts not sex.

The last question introduces another aspect of social dialects.

5. “There’s the most beautiful outfit in the window. It’s so perfect for me. It’s pink and just right for summer. Really, I can’t *live* without it.”

Who probably said this?

- a. a man b.) a woman

There are social rules that govern who can use certain words and when. In this case we see how sex affects the use of English. Since the sexes freely mix in American society, we are generally aware of the words that both sexes use. However, we learn early in our life how to “talk like a man” or to be “ladylike.” In this case, men are not supposed to be emotional about clothing, especially pink outfits for summer. They are not expected to discuss clothing in this way with others before making a purchase. To do so would bring their manhood into question. This may be a stereotype, but it is a culturally accepted one.

In short, regional and social dialects are the variation that exists in the local language because of such factors as family, ethnicity, religion, profession, education, sex, and class or group membership. English may have the largest vocabulary of any language in the world, but we only learn as much of it as we need to interact with the different groups that are important to us. We learn this language by interacting with members of the group either through listening and speaking or by reading and writing.

Grammar.

As we saw in AA 3.1, teachers face a formidable task in helping English language learners build their academic vocabulary. Much of this task revolves around showing students how to recognize **morphemes** or units of meaning that

combine to create new words. For example, with the word *anachronism* English language learners need to recognize that *-ism* means a doctrine, a practice, or a condition as in *pacifism* or *heroism*. *Chron-* has to do with time, as in *chronology* and *synchronic*. *Ana-* means backward, in this case that something is in the wrong time frame.

This word building skill is taught to native speakers in school since most of the academic words that are based on Latin and Greek are not used in everyday conversation. In fact these words are so infrequent in conversation that English speakers are often not even aware of the morphemes when the words are used in their everyday language. For example, most, if given the list *inject*, *object*, *reject*, *deject*, *subject*, and *eject* and asked what these words have in common, would probably answer that they rhyme. They would not be aware that they share the morpheme *-ject* which means to throw and that the added prefixes *in-*, *ob-*, *re-*, *de-*, *sub-*, and *e-* give the direction (into, against, back, downward, under, and outward). This process of creating new words for academic English by combining Latin and Greek prefixes and suffixes in new combinations is called **derivation**. Notice that with these derivations, none of the word parts can be used as independent words. Thus they had to be written in our discussion with an indication on the morpheme where they have to be attached to another morpheme (e.g. *in-*, *re-*, *-ject*). Morphemes which have to be attached to another morpheme to form a word are called **bound** morphemes.

We saw in AA 3.2 that conversational English avoids words of Latin and Greek origins. How are these conversational words created? Although derivation

has played a role in creating everyday vocabulary, as a general rule, two other processes are more common. One is **compounding** and the other **extension**. With compounding two independent words or **free** morphemes are combined to create a new word. Sometimes these are spelled as one word, sometimes as separate words. For example, *fastfood*, a new word in 1970, is sometimes written as one word, sometimes as two, *fast food* or *fast-food*. Other compounds familiar to Internet users include *webpage*, *login*, *inbox*, *online*, and *facebook*. Extension is the most common way to create new words for conversational English. With extension, sometimes called conversion or semantic shift, we simply take a word that already exists and give it a new meaning based on an underlying metaphor, perhaps even changing the part of speech. For example, *green* is not only an adjective describing a color but a noun naming the part of a golf course that is the target of the golfers. It can also mean “money,” “leafy vegetables,” “inexperienced,” or “a member of a political party of the same name that focuses on ecological issues.” *Apple* is not just a fruit but a computer company. *Google* is not just the name of an Internet search engine but also a verb meaning “to look for information on the Internet.” *Spam* is not only a mass produced canned meat of dubious content but mass produced emails also of dubious content.

Other ways of creating new words are less common. They include **blends** or **portmanteaux** where the beginnings and ends of two words are pushed together without regard to morphemes, as in *spork* “spoon fork,” *zorse* “zebra horse,” *motel* “motor hotel”, and *animatronics* “animation electronics;” **acronyms**, where the first letter of each word or syllable in a phrase forms the new word, as

in *scuba* “self contained underwater breathing apparatus”; *CD* “compact disc,” *VCR* “video cassette recorder; “ and **clippings**, where one syllable of a longer word becomes the new word, as in *toons* “cartoons” or *hood* “neighborhood.”

Pragmatics and discourse.

As we saw in the awareness activities, the vocabulary of academic English and conversation differ. English language learners need to know that although *terminate* and *stop* are synonyms, they can not be used interchangeably. Pragmatics governs their usage. Anyone who uses *terminate* in conversation with friends would be considered pedantic and snootish, whereas in an academic discussion the same usage might be considered a sign of articulateness. How did this division of English vocabulary into disparate groupings come to pass?

Clues to the source of this disparity can be found when we compare the origins of the one to two thousand most common words that we need to express ourselves in interpersonal language with the next five to eight thousand words we need for serious reading. Researchers have found that of the thousand most common words we use, 83 percent are of English origins, 11 percent French, 2 percent Latin, 2 percent Danish, and 2 percent Greek or other languages. However, when we look at the words that are needed for serious reading, only about 25 percent are of English origins. About 45 percent are of French origins, 18 percent Latin, 2 percent Danish, and 10 percent Greek. In other words, in conversation we need English words to be successful but in academics we need

to know Latin, Greek, and French. English vocabulary is only “English” when we look at the most frequently used conversational vocabulary.

A brief look at the history of the English language tells us where the other words came from and why they are considered necessary for academic success. Before 449 A.D. the language that became English was spoken in the area that is now the Netherlands, north Germany, and Denmark. In that year began several centuries of invasions of Britain by various Germanic tribes. The most prominent in the beginning were the Saxons and the Angles. Their languages formed the basis for English. In fact, you probably recognize that the words English and England are based on the name of the latter tribe.

The Danish vocabulary resulted from the Danish invasion, settlement, and domination of northern and eastern England during the two hundred years from 800 to 1000. Danish at the time was similar to English so the two languages easily mixed in northern England. Several centuries later when the populations of northern England moved to London and other cities in the south, the Danish words made their appearance in what became Modern Standard English. For example most English words that begin with *sk* are Danish, such as *sky*, *skin*, *skirt*. Our pronoun *they* is Danish, as is the *-s* we use on present tense verbs, such as in *he swims*.

The next invasion in 1066 began the double layer of vocabulary that you discovered in AA 3.2. At the same time that the Danes were invading and settling England, they were doing the same along the northern coast of France. In a few generations these people from the north, Norsemen or Normans, switched their

language to French. They disputed with their Danish and English relatives over who should rule England. The matter was finally settled when William the Conqueror invaded and brought with him a French speaking population that dominated the cities, relegating English to the language of the peasants. Two centuries later, as the result of various socio-economic pressures, English again became the language of the cities. However, the upper classes mixed French words with their English. In fact, in activities where the rich and cultured predominated, French words were preferred. For example, many animals were called by their English name when they were alive (*cow, deer, swine*) but by their French name when dead (*beef, venison, pork*) since the rich only dealt with the dead animals. As the new English-speaking middle class developed, they too used this “cultured” version of English with its many French borrowings. In other words, to be cultured and educated was to use words that the common peasants did not understand.

This set the pattern for the next invasion, an invasion of words rather than people. During the Renaissance Latin and Greek were rediscovered. As the educated sought ways to develop English vocabulary to discuss science, philosophy, and other scholarly subjects, they decided that Latin should be the source of the new words. In other words, rather than develop academic vocabulary from English morphemes, Latin was adopted as the morpheme basis for these new words. Thus rather than “fleshstrings” we have *muscles*, rather than “bookcraft” we have *literature*. This vocabulary invasion from Latin and Greek continues even today. Some claim that English has more Latin words than

Latin has since we borrowed the morphemes rather than the words from the language and have used the morphemes to create thousands of new Latin based words. As a result we feel that to sound educated or official, we should use words that the uneducated do not understand. The result has been educationese, governmentese, legalese, and other versions of English that are incomprehensible to the masses.

In recent years there has been a movement towards Plain English, actually an anti-Latin, anti-French movement, promoting the use of everyday or English-Danish heritage vocabulary. However, the centuries old tradition of using French, Greek and Latin based vocabulary to sound educated is too entrenched in our mind. We feel that to “mount” a horse sounds more educated than to “get on” one. To “extinguish” a fire sounds more elegant than to “put it out.”

Phrasal verbs. As we saw in AA 3.2 academic English tends to use verbs based on Latin or Greek which are easy to decipher once we know the morphemes. However, conversational English prefers phrasal verbs of English heritage where knowledge of the morphemes often is not much help. Since phrasal verbs are so essential for conversational English, let’s take a closer look to see if there are patterns that might be useful for English language learners. Linguists divide phrasal verbs into three types: literal, aspectual, and figurative.

- **Literal.** The meaning of a literal phrasal verb is based on the meaning of the two morphemes, the verb and the accompanying adverbial particle that looks like a preposition. These cause no trouble. Some examples of

sentences with literal phrasal verbs would be: *Pick up your clothes. Get down the box. Take out the trash.*

- **Aspectual.** The meaning of aspectual phrasal verbs is based on the meaning of the verb. The adverbial particle is added to emphasize that the action should start (**inceptive**), should be continued until the action is completed (**completive**), or should keep on going (**continuative**). For example. *We took off.* (*take* in the sense of “go on a trip or journey” thus “leave.”). *He fixed up the toys.* (He fixed them until they were completely fixed.) *They walked on.* (They continued walking.)
- **Figurative.** The meaning is based on a metaphorical extension of either the literal or the aspectual phrasal verb. If the learner can visual the original metaphor, the figurative meaning is often apparent. *He hung up the phone.* (Originally phones were on the wall and you “hung up” when finished. Now you might just push a button or even put the phone down.) *Turn on the lights. Turn off the lights.* (“on” means something is functioning, “off” means it isn’t functioning. Originally a person turned the switch that controlled the lights.)

Another problem with phrasal verbs is that unlike the pattern in Latin, French, Greek, or most other languages in the world, the two morphemes in the phrasal verb do not have to stay together. For example, notice that the following pairs of sentences mean the same thing.

Pick up your clothes. or Pick your clothes up.

He fixed up the toys. *or* He fixed the toys up.

He hung up the phone. *or* He hung the phone up.

Either way is fine unless the object is a pronoun. In that case the particle must be moved.

*Pick up them. *versus* Pick them up.

*He fixed up them. *versus* He fixed them up.

*He hung up it. *versus* He hung it up.

Notice that the adverbial particle moves after the object. It can't move after an adverbial.

She showed up yesterday. *versus* *She showed yesterday up.

Another difficulty with phrasal verbs is their resemblance to verbs followed by prepositions. Notice the following pairs of sentences

He ran up the street.

He ran up the bill.

In the first sentence, *up the street* is a prepositional phrase indicating where he ran. In the second, *up the bill* does not indicate where he ran so it is not a prepositional phrase. Remember, preposition phrases usually are ways to make nouns into adverbials that answer questions such as how, where, when, and why. In the second sentence, *up* is an adverbial particle that is part of the aspectual phrasal verb *ran up* indicating that the bill will rise until it can not rise any more. As a double check as to whether the two *ups* are prepositions or particles, we can change the following noun phrase into a pronoun.

He ran up it.

He ran it up.

Since the first one is a preposition, the up stays in front of the pronoun. Since the second is a phrasal verb, the up moves after the pronoun.

Vocabulary and social context. As we saw in AA 3.3, social context is important for determining the appropriate use of words. For example, although the plain English movement encourages the use of high frequency conversational vocabulary in academic contexts, there are still social restrictions on vocabulary to keep in mind. For example, to show our approval at church, “Amen” is a more appropriate response than “Touche.”

However, there is another hidden problem when trying to match the academic world with the real world of English language learners. Academic discourse itself has its own rules governing reality that are independent of vocabulary. Note the following word problem that a teacher might create to bring “reality” into the classroom.

- John can type one page in 20 minutes. How long will it take him to type two pages?

The problem seems straight forward enough. The words are all easy. But does the reality of the word problem match the reality in the life of the English language learner? What happens if the phone rings while John is typing? Perhaps the computer crashes. What if John decides to edit some of the sentences while typing? How much of a delay will there be if the cat comes in and jumps on his lap? Matching vocabulary with reality isn't as easy as it might

seem. Building vocabulary for communication is more than learning morphemes and new words.

Working with spelling. Spelling is another pragmatic issue that teachers can not ignore. In the same way that English speakers feel that the usage of Latin and Greek vocabulary is a sign of education, they feel that correct spelling denotes the same. However, how can we make sense of a spelling system where *sent*, *cent*, and *scent* are pronounced the same way but mean different things? In the same way that phrasal verbs follow underlying principles that guide their use, English spelling does the same. Let's see if we can identify the underlying principles that should help English language learners.

Suppose you have volunteered to be a tutor in the local schools. The teacher you are assisting has just read to your class a story about a lost dog and the people who gathered to help look for it. She asks all of the students to think of two questions to ask their classmates. The student you are helping speaks Spanish and is learning English while attending class. She writes the following two questions:

Guay ar der no pipel in da rum?

Guen did da dag gou joun?

What do the questions ask? How does the student think that English spelling works? If you know how to read Spanish, you should have figured out that the questions are:

Why are there no people in the room?

When did the dog go home?

The student thinks that spelling follows pronunciation so she is writing English using the Spanish spelling system. Spanish and many other languages have what is called a **phonetic** or **phonemic** spelling system. In other words, spelling is based on pronunciation. English, however, with its concern for identifying morphemes in order to understand academic vocabulary, has developed a spelling system that reflects both pronunciation and meaning, a **morphophonemic** spelling. Thus two words which sound alike may have different spellings because they have different meanings. Some examples would be: *flour, flower; dear, deer; to, two, too; paws, pause; sign, sine; sight, cite, site*. This spelling, which combines both pronunciation and meaning, is deeply ingrained in our culture. Thus as a tutor, teaching how English morphophonemic spelling works is an important part of teaching academic English.

Reflections.

Some concepts.

- We learn vocabulary by interacting with it in appropriate contexts.
- Conversational and academic English use different processes for creating new vocabulary.
- Synonyms are not always interchangeable since the appropriate use of vocabulary is closely related to context.

Some key terminology.

- **acronym**—a means of creating new vocabulary by using the first letters of the words of a name or a phrase, e.g. CD “compact disc”

- **active vocabulary**—the vocabulary that a person actually uses
- **aspectual phrasal verb**—phrasal verbs where the particle indicates that the action of the verb should begin (**inceptive**, e.g. *start up*), should continue until finished (**completive** e.g. *drink up*), or should simply continue (**continuative**, e.g. *carry on*)
- **blend**—also called portmanteau. A means of creating new vocabulary by taking the beginning of one word and attaching it to the ending of another word, e.g. *motel* “motor + hotel”
- **bound morpheme**—a morpheme which must be attached to another morpheme, such as a prefix or suffix, e.g. *re-*, *circum-*
- **clipping**—a means of creating new vocabulary by using one syllable of a longer word, e.g. *hood* “neighborhood”
- **compounding**—a means of creating new vocabulary by combining freestanding words, e.g. *web+page*
- **derivation**—a means of creating new vocabulary by using prefixes and suffixes, e.g. *in-ject*, *sub-ject*, *re-ject*.
- **extension**—also called conversion or semantic shift. A means of creating new vocabulary by giving a new meaning to an existing word or using it as a new part of speech, e.g. *spam* “junk emails”
- **free morpheme**—a morpheme which can stand alone as a word, e.g. **go**
- **jargon**—the specialized vocabulary developed by a profession, e.g. *stud*
- **literal phrasal verbs**—phrasal verbs whose meaning is based on the meaning of the verb and the particle, e.g. *get down* “descend”

- **morpheme**—units of meaning which combine to create words, e.g. *car+port*, *re+do*
- **morphophonemic spelling**—a way of writing words based both on their sound and their meaning, e.g. two, too, to
- **passive vocabulary**—the vocabulary that a person can understand based on context and knowledge of word formation
- **phonemic spelling**—often called phonetic spelling. A way of writing words based on their sounds, e.g. spelling in Spanish
- **phrasal verbs**—sometimes called two-word verbs. Verbs that are made up of a verb followed by an adverbial particle that looks like a preposition, e.g. *get up* “arise”
- **Plain English movement**—an effort to have government or other official documents, contracts, or publications written in conversational English
- **regional dialect**—a variation in a language that identifies the geographic origins of the speakers, e.g. *y’all*
- **social dialect**—a variation in a language that identifies the social class, ethnic group, religion, sex, education, or other social characteristic of the speakers

Rules of thumb: Basic principles for academic vocabulary

1. Academic vocabulary is based on Latin and Greek morphemes. If we understand the meaning of the morphemes, we can determine the meaning of the word, e.g.. *liber-*(free) *-ate* (make into a verb) *-ion* (result of the action)

2. English spelling is based on morphemes and pronunciation, e.g. *sight* (something seen), *cite* (to report)

Some Reflective Activities

1. In a cartoon a baby is sitting in a high chair in a restaurant. Everyone coming by stops to say hello or hi. The baby thinks to herself “that’s why it’s called a hi chair.”

In another cartoon a little girl is drawing pictures of leaves. Her big sister asks her what they are. She answers, “This one is a maple, this one an oak, and this one a gra.” The sister retorts, “There is no such thing as a gra.” The girl’s answer, “Yes there is. If there were more than one it would be a picture of grass.” What do these two cartoons tell us about how children approach English vocabulary?

2. *Get* is one of the most common verbs in the English language. Try your hand at creating phrasal verbs by combining *get* with *up* and *down*. How many different meanings can you come up with? How many are literal, aspectual, and figurative? Can you see why ‘easy’ conversational English with high frequency words can be so hard for English language learners?
3. Explain the rule that was broken in the following:
 - *We stopped the store by.
 - *Did you back up it?
 - *I informationed every one.

4. Since we know that English spelling is based on pronunciation and meaning, we like to play games with our spelling to create puns. Here are a couple of examples.

- Our dog thinks our VCR has a paws button.
- We serve eggcitement for breakfast.
- Join us Saturday for a sportacular at the stadium.

Look around and collect a few more to share with the class.

5. Phrasal verbs are characteristic of spoken English. Think of a phrasal verb substitute for the verbs in the following sentences to give more of a spoken flavor.

- We departed for Ocala at noon.
- The gang discovered where the loot was hidden.
- Our cat arrived on our doorstep with a dead squirrel.
- They delayed the meeting.
- They were distributing these at the bank.

6. What is the difference in meaning between the following pairs of sentences?

- She drank the water vs She drank the water up.
- The shirt faded. vs The shirt faded out.
- The clock ran. vs The clock ran down.
- She sang the song. vs She sang the song through.
- They closed the store. vs. They closed the store down.

7. In the following sentences, are the italicized words prepositions or particles?

How do you know? Remember, if what looks like a preposition is followed by

a noun and the resulting phrase answers the question where, when, why, or how, it is a proposition. If not, it's a particle.

- Stand *up*.
- They sat *in* the rain.
- She poured *out* her heart.
- They looked *at* my wounds.
- He gets *out* next year.

8. Since phrasal verbs are so difficult, adult English language learners try to avoid the problem either by using a Latinate substitute (*destroy* rather than *tear down*) or by using the phrasal verb but never moving the particle. Keeping in mind that language is used in a social context, why might these two strategies cause problems if the English language learner is in an English speaking country?
9. In AA 3.1 we saw that thirty three words account for half of the words that we hear in a conversation. Are the results similar for writing? Find a newspaper article, count out a 100 word passage then list each word, noting how frequently each is used. Compare your results with a classmate. Are the most frequently used words the same as those found for conversational English? What are the implications for teachers, especially those who want to use reading to reinforce the spoken language?
10. Spell check says that the following sentence is correct. What went wrong?

Ewe scent there presence two they're made.

Grammar detective 3. Phrasal verbs in comic strips.

Phrasal verbs are a characteristic of conversation. Since comic strips are based on conversational, they should be a good source for data as we take a descriptive look at how English is used around us.

Instructions:

1. On the Internet or in the newspaper, find examples of 5 phrasal verbs in comic strips. They might all be in the same strip.
2. Cut out or copy the strips and circle the phrasal verbs. Be careful that you do not include verbs followed by prepositional phrases. (Remember the where, when test.)
3. Number your examples and then below the strip write out the phrasal verbs.
4. Be prepared to discuss with your classmates whether they are literal, aspectual, or figurative. You may need to use your imagination even with the literal phrasal verbs since many common verbs have extended their meaning. Therefore, don't limit yourself to one basic meaning for the verb, e.g. *check* can mean "verify" and "examine closely" or "place a mark by." *Run* can mean "operate," "move rapidly," or "flow." Researchers find that literal and aspectual phrasal verbs predominate. Did you find the same?

Teaching ideas.

1. **Spelling match.** To help students remember that English spelling is based both on sound and meaning, write on separate cards words that

sound alike but are spelled differently (e.g. hair, hare, toe, tow, flower, flour). Then on other cards draw or paste small pictures that illustrate each word. Scramble the cards and place them face down. Students take turns turning over one card and then trying to turn over another card to match the picture with the correct spelling.

2. **Act out a story.** Give your students the following list of the most common verbs in the English language and the most common adverbial particles. Review with them the possible phrasal verbs that can be made by combining the two. Then put them in teams and have them create a sketch or short action story using as many phrasal verbs as they can. When it is time for their team, have one student read the story while the others on the team act out the phrasal verbs.

Verbs: take, get, put, go, set, turn, bring

Particles: up, out, on, in, off, down

3. **Word families.** Sometimes students confuse words that have similar morphemes but are different parts of speech. Make a collection of words from their reading, such as *convenient*, *prepared*, *instructional*. Have the students make a list of related words (e.g. *convenience*, *preparedness*, *instruction*) then use each in a sentence.

4. **What is that?**

This is a game for a class that is working with the Latin and Greek morphemes that are so necessary for anyone interested in a career in science or medicine. From your dictionary or some other appropriate

source make a list of twenty five Latin and Greek based English words. Write each one on a separate notecard with the morpheme explanation on the back. Your dictionary should tell you what the morphemes mean so you can prepare the cards. Divide the cards into five groups. Divide the class into three or four teams. Each team has a scribe/spokesperson. The goal is to have your team win the most rounds. For round one, show the first word to the class and pronounce it. Have them discuss with their team what they think the word means and have the scribe write the answer. Repeat until you have completed five words for the first round. To find the winner of the round, check their answers, discussing how they think the morphemes worked to create the word. Repeat the process until you have completed all five rounds and have determined the winner.

For a more advanced class the words might include:

Auriform (auris “ear” + form = ear shaped)

Binervate (bi “two” + nervus “nerve” = two nerved)

Dedentition (de “remove” + dent “tooth” = teeth removal)

Cavernulous (cavern “cavern” + ula “little” = full of little cavities)

A lower level class could do the same with more common academic words where a change in the morphemes creates a new word.

Submarine (sub “under” + marine “sea” = boat that travels under the sea)

Interdepartmental (inter “between” + department = between departments)

Egocentric (ego “I, self” + center = self centered)