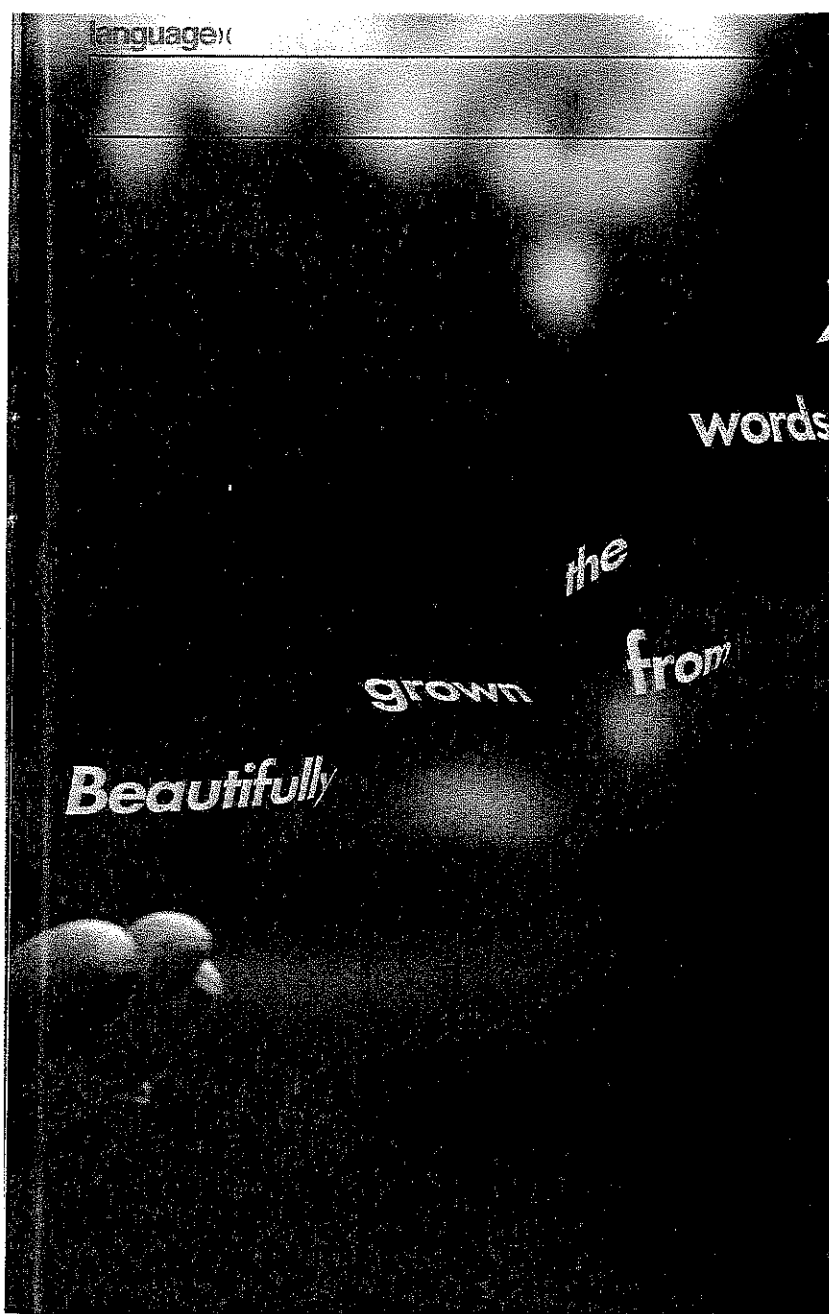*Kathleen Flynn*, *Jane Hill*, and *Cynthia Bjork* explain how mainstream teachers can incorporate language objectives into content area lessons to help ELLs advance in both language acquisition and content knowledge

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Providing a Direction for Learning:

Setting Language Objectives for English Language Learners

There's a word we like to emphasize when we are helping mainstream teachers learn to effectively instruct their English language learners (ELLs), and that word is PIE. And no, we're not talking apple or cherry or even strawberry rhubarb. PIE, rather, is an acronym to remind teachers that when working with their ELLs, their instruction has to be purposeful, intentional, and explicit.

Imagine that you're a high school social studies teacher developing a lesson plan for a unit on women's rights in the U.S. in the 1920s. You have a number of ELLs in your classroom, and these students are at different stages of English language acquisition. How are you going to ensure that all of your students, English language learners and native English speakers, will be engaged in learning the content you present during this unit? And how are you

going to ensure that your ELLs are acquiring language skills at the same time?

These things are only going to happen if you make your instruction purposeful, intentional, and explicit. And one of the best ways you can start doing so is to set learning objectives for your ELLs for each lesson — language objectives as well as content objectives. The No Child Left Behind Act requires that English language learners show annual progress in both learning English and gaining content knowledge. ELLs, therefore, must develop a firm foundation in academic English skills in order to meet content standards and pass state assessments. In this article, we will explain how incorporating language objectives into your content area lessons helps your ELLs advance in both language acquisition and content knowledge, and we will show you how to develop such objectives yourself.

Why Should I Set Objectives for English Language Learners?

Research has shown that setting learning goals is useful for all students (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollack, 2001). Why then is setting objectives so critically important for ELLs? To start with, the mainstream classroom is an overwhelming place for English language learners. Just imagine the confusion an ELL student could feel when bombarded with the stimuli of a typical classroom — the teacher and other students talking; the writing on the boards and walls; the print in textbooks, handouts, and assignments — all in a language he or she is only beginning to understand. Setting learning objectives is therefore particularly important for ELLs in order to focus their learning, help them screen out irrelevant stimuli, and provide them with a sense of accomplishment. The classroom

becomes a friendlier place for ELLs when they have a clearly stated target for learning. When a teacher sets objectives correctly, students work toward clearly defined goals and are able to explain what they are learning and why they are learning it.

Setting objectives will help the mainstream teacher, who also feels confused frequently — confused about how best to instruct his English language learners. With rapidly increasing numbers of ELLs in classrooms across the country, teachers are struggling to develop English language learners' language capacity while, at the same time, delivering content instruction. Despite the rising number of ELLs, few teachers receive the professional development needed to effectively integrate language instruction with content area instruction, despite NCLB requirements. Learning how to develop language objectives that go along with content objectives will greatly increase a teacher's ability to instruct ELLs.

Since well before the advent of NCLB,

researchers and educators have strongly supported the integration of content and language objectives in what many experts refer to as content-based instruction (Hill & Flynn, 2006, citations omitted). Just as language learning cannot occur if we only focus on subject matter, content knowledge cannot grow if we only focus on learning the English language. Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989) offer four reasons for combining language objectives with content objectives:

1. Language forms and vocabulary

will develop as students study areas of interest. Correct grammatical form and necessary vocabulary are best learned in the context of content areas (e.g., modeling the past tense when talking about history).

2. Motivation plays a role in learning

complex language structures. Low motivation can hinder language acquisition because, as with low self-esteem and anxiety, it blocks

language stimulation from reaching the brain. This block is also known as an "affective filter" (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). High motivation, on the other hand, results in an increased ability to learn and use a new language.

3. Teachers can activate and build on

students' prior knowledge in the content area. For example, ELLs may not have studied the American Revolution in their native country, but they may have studied another revolution or even experienced a modern conflict in their homeland. By accessing and activating such knowledge, you can prepare students to learn about analogous events in U.S. history.

4. Language structure and form

should be learned in authentic contexts rather than through contrived drills in language workbooks. For example, when studying the American Revolution, students may learn about the types of uniforms relevant to the 18th century. You can initiate the use of "if-

then" statements (a language structure) by asking the class, "If you had to wear a uniform, how would you show your individuality?" While native English speakers can write their ideas, ELLs can verbalize their thoughts using the sentence starter: "If I had to wear a uniform, then I would . . . ."

What is a Language Objective?

One approach to setting language objectives is to determine language function and language structure.

Language functions are specific uses of language to accomplish particular purposes. In the classroom setting, the language function defines what the reason is for communicating in the lesson, or, to put it simply, why we are opening our mouths. According to Gibbons (1991), we use a multitude of language functions in the classroom each day, including the following:

- Agreeing and disagreeing
- Apologizing
- Asking for permission
- Asking for assistance, directions
- Classifying
- Comparing
- Commanding/giving instructions
- Criticizing
- Denying
- Describing
- Enquiring/Questioning
- Evaluating
- Expressing likes and dislikes
- Expressing position
- Expressing obligation
- Explaining
- Hypothesizing
- Identifying
- Inferring
- Planning and predicting
- Refusing
- Reporting
- Sequencing
- Suggesting
- Warning
- Wishing and hoping

Language structures are what we expect to hear coming out of students' mouths. Rather than looking at why language is needed, we look here at what language is needed. Language structures can be made up of the phrasings, vocabulary, or actual grammar used in the communication. An "if-then" state-

Figure 1: Language Objectives Planning Matrix

What language does the student need to *understand and produce* to fully participate in the lesson?

Language Functions:
What is the purpose for communication in this lesson? What does the learner have to accomplish with the language?

Examples
Name, Describe, Classify, Compare, Explain, Predict, Infer, Suggest, Evaluate, Request, Invite, Apologize

Language Structures
1. Sentence Starter(s) What is the phrasing needed?

2. Key Words Important vocabulary words or phrases

3. "Real-life" Mini-Language Lesson Teach grammatical usage in authentic context

1. This is a _____.
2. The ___ lives in_____.
3. I believe __ is going to___ because _____.

- Content Vocabulary: things, places, objects, measurements, time
- Prepositions, Adjectives
- Connectors: although, as soon as, on the day

- Command form of verb: Put, Take, Press
- Simple future for prediction: (___is going to + verb)
- Word order
- Idiomatic expressions
- Polite tone of voice

ment, or use of the past tense, both mentioned in the previous section, therefore, are examples of language structures.

Let's return to our opening example of a high school lesson on women's rights in the 1920s and see what language objective we can set for our ELLs in that lesson. The language objective is determined by deciding on the function that language will have in the lesson, and by thinking about what language structures an ELL will need in order to participate in the lesson. The language function here is comparing: students will need to compare the rights women had and didn't have in the 1920s. This function leads directly to the language structure to focus on: contractions. Students will have to compare what women could and couldn't do, and what they did and didn't do. The language objective therefore is to learn how to use contractions to make comparisons. While native English speakers are writing about the comparisons, the classroom teacher can pull together a group of ELLs to learn about and improve their use of contractions.

How Do I Develop Language Objectives?

As we noted in the approach above, there are two steps to developing a language

objective. First, determine the language function(s) at the heart of the lesson, i.e., the purpose of using language in that lesson. Does the student need to use language to form an opinion in language arts class in order to persuade? Is the student going to use language to make predictions in science class?

Then, identify the language structure(s) ELLs will need to participate actively in the lesson. We have found that it can be helpful in identifying language structures to think in terms of three activities: (1) sentence starters; (2) key vocabulary; and (3) "real-life" mini-language lessons (grammatical usage). Consider, for example, a student's description of an animal they are reporting on. We could use one or more of these language structures:

Sentence starter
The _____ has _____.

Key vocabulary fur, tail, paws, claws, bird, mammal, reptile

Mini-language lesson on word order with adjectives: *The antelope is graceful.*

Suggested Answer **P140**
"The graceful antelope runs."

Figure 2: Example of Completed Language Objectives Planning Matrix

What language does the student need to *understand and produce* to fully participate in this lesson for animal description reports?

Language Functions:
What is the purpose for communication in this lesson? What does the learner have to accomplish with the language?

EXAMPLES:
Name, Describe, Classify, Compare, Explain, Predict, Infer, Suggest, Evaluate, Request, Invite, Apologize

-Purpose of language use
* Describe (animal)
* Explain (eating habits)

Language Structures
1. Sentence Starter(s)
   What is the phrasing needed?

2. Key Words
   Important vocabulary words or phrases

3. "Real-life"
   Mini-Language Lesson
   Teach grammatical usage in authentic context

1. This is a _____.
2. The ___lives in____.
3. I believe __is going to___ because _____.

* Content Vocabulary: things, places, objects, measurements, time
* Prepositions, Adjectives
* Connectors: although, as soon as, on the day

* Command form of verb: Put, Take, Press
* Simple future for prediction:
   (___is going to + verb)
* Word order
* Idiomatic expressions
* Polite tone of voice

-Sentence starters
* The (animal name) has ___.
* The (animal name) is ___.
* Although (animal name plural) are___, they are also____.

-Animal body vocabulary:
* Mammal, reptile, bird, paws, claws, tail, fur, snout,
-Adjectives for animals:
* large, bulky, slender, fierce, tranquil

-Word order with adjectives:
* The antelope is graceful.
* The graceful antelope runs
-Idiomatic expressions
* At a snail's pace
* Busy as a beaver

Figure 3: Classroom Example "The Future is Now"

As a result of this activity, students will be able to apply their knowledge of advanced and emerging technologies and the understanding of the role of technology to a variety of careers.

Technology Standard 3.
Understands the relationships among science, technology, society, and the individual
Level IV [Grade 9-12]

Benchmark 5 Knows examples of advanced and emerging technologies (e.g., virtual environment, personal digital assistants, voice recognition software) and how they could impact society

Benchmark 8 Knows the role of technology in a variety of careers
Career(s) currently being covered in the classroom can be substituted for the career identified in the activities (e.g., substitute medicine or education for farming).

Activity
In your recent travels you ran across a remote farming community that has been cut off from the rest of the world for generations. You are a farmer from Iowa who has been incorporating various advanced and emerging technologies into your work. Based on your understanding of the positive and negative impacts of these technologies, what types of technology would you choose to introduce to this remote community? On what did you base your decision?

Notes
This lesson plan is taken from *Content Knowledge: A compendium of standards and benchmarks for K-12 education* (4th ed.), available online at www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/.

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The Language Objectives Planning Matrix (Figure 1) can be used by a teacher to think through these steps. A completed matrix (Figure 2) elaborates on the animal description example being used.

Now it is your turn to set a language objective by determining language function and structure using a high school example for Figures 3 and 4. This is a complex lesson, particularly for ELLs in the early stages of English language acquisition. Assume that the teacher has already provided background to ELLs on various technologies using visuals, real objects, and nonlinguistic representations.

What did you select? For this example, the language function is "c," and the language structure is the sentence starter "f". Can you think of another language function or of other possibilities for sentence starters, key words, or mini-language lessons?

There are many ways to set language objectives; this is just one approach we have found useful. Collaboration between the mainstream teacher and the ESL teacher is essential if teaching content objectives along with language objectives is going to occur regularly. Together, these teachers can look at the language of a lesson, examine it, dissect it,

and plan how to teach it effectively. How can you tell when a mainstream teacher's ELL instruction is purposeful, intentional, and explicit? They teach language as naturally as they teach content. ▓

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Figure 4: Identifying Language Function and Structure for the "Future is Now" Lesson
Circle the letter of the appropriate language function and structure

Language Functions
A. Use language to write a correct paragraph on farming technology.
B. Use language to alphabetize emerging farming technologies.
C. Use language to assess usefulness of farming technological devices.
D. Use language to choose correct multiple choice answers.

Language Structures
E. Write a concluding sentence using the word "Finally."
F. Use "The ___ technology could increase efficiency of ___ for farmers."
G. Write a paragraph using complete English sentences.
H. Indent each paragraph about efficiency.