Unpacking the Language Purpose: Vocabulary, Structure, and Function

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Although learning objectives are a hallmark of lesson planning, it is rare for these to be shared with learners, even though best practices suggest doing so. This article examines the practice of establishing purpose for English language learners as a means for developing conceptual schemas. Participants in this study were 332 southern California K–12 teachers who submitted 500 examples of the language purposes they used with students. The authors analyzed these surveys and identified the predominant language purpose forms as those that featured vocabulary, language structure, and language function demands. Implications and future lines of research are discussed.

Establishing the purpose of a lesson, often through a written objective, is a common educational practice. From the time teachers begin their professional licensure, they are encouraged to consider what their students will know and be able to do. Written lesson plans feature a list of objectives to be used as a gauge for success and are usually accompanied by a further recommendation to state them to students. There is an assumption that the teacher-initiated behavior of stating the objective will result in student understanding of the forthcoming content. This statement of the objective for students, what we call *purpose,* is thought to serve as a priming mechanism for new learning (Gagné & Briggs, 1974; Mager, 1962). And there is evidence for the effectiveness of a clearly established purpose. Simply said, when students understand the purpose of a lesson, they learn more (Fraser,

Walberg, Welch, & Hattie, 1987; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).

The establishment of purpose is accomplished through the teacher's intentional use of lesson objectives to alert students to what will be learned and what they will be expected to do with it. Whereas the lesson objective is constructed by the teacher, the act of carefully communicating it to students is the purpose. Stated another way, the objective is the mind of the teacher; it becomes the purpose when it is shared with learners. The reason for doing so extends beyond regulating academic behavior. A clearly stated and understood purpose lays the foundation for a schema of concepts, skills, and information.

A challenge for all learners, and especially for those learning English as an additional language, is that the talk of school is decontextualized and requires students to discuss events, objects, and people that are not present. This ''decontextualized discourse relies heavily on the language itself in the construction of meaning'' (Justice, 2006, p. 66), and students must use highly conceptual vocabulary to make themselves understood in the classroom. There has been debate about whether the classroom discourse can be accurately identified as decontextualized (see Schleppegrell, 2004, for a more complete discussion of this), but it is worth noting that learning about events, objects, and people that are not in the room can be more completely understood through the social nature of interaction. This extends to text-based demands as well. Fang, Schleppegrell, and Cox (2006) examined elementary, middle, and high school textbooks in language arts, science, and history and note the ways in which they become more lexically dense and linguistically unique to the particular discipline. They further state that they ''believe that explicit, shared knowledge about the way language works can help students better handle academic texts'' (p. 269), thus equipping them for the ''discursive conventions that shape and are shaped by disciplinary practices'' (p. 248). A first step to fostering academic discourse in a subject is to establish a clear purpose.

In actuality, there are multiple purposes for each instructional event. Teachers of English to speakers of other languages have at least two purposes for each lesson: developing content

understanding and developing language proficiency. If teachers were to simply focus on content, language learning would only occur incidentally; if they focused only on language learning, content understanding would not likely develop (Hill & Flynn, 2006). Hill and Flynn further explain, ''The educational environment also becomes a friendlier place for ELLs [English language learners] when they have a clearly stated target for learning'' (p. 22). A clearly established purpose also allows students to assess their own progress in learning. The importance of establishing content goals as well as language goals has been well documented in the professional literature (e.g., Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989; Dong, 2004/2005).

Communicating a language purpose is important because learning involves language. Across learning contexts, students use language to think. While they are doing content work (e.g., math, science, social studies, art), students are also reading, writing, speaking, and listening. However, there is limited guidance for teachers about establishing a language purpose. Even the most widely used professional book on teaching ELLs, *Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP Model* (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008), notes that teachers should establish a language purpose for students, but the guidance offered occurs through examples. Although these are helpful, it seems reasonable to suggest that the language purposes teachers use could be better articulated. Thus this study was designed to uncover an organizational system for language purposes such that teachers can receive guidance in this aspect of instruction.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Nature of Goals and Objectives

The terms *goals* and *objectives* have been used for decades to refer to broad categories of written or verbal statements that describe the purpose of a unit or lesson. Goals most often represent a larger curricular focus, whereas objectives represent smaller, more specific segments of learning that lead to the goals (see, e.g., Gronlund & Linn, 1990). Interpretative variations of this occur in subfields of education. For example, in special education, a goal on an

Individual Education Plan typically encompasses a year of instruction, with stated objectives representing incremental benchmarks toward the goal (Billingsley, 1984). These objectives further require that the time and evidence of learning be specified. This perspective is influenced by Mager's (1962) work in the development of behavioral objectives that contain (a) a measurable verb that describes the performance, (b) the conditions under which it is to happen, and (c) the criteria for success. However, as Marzano and colleagues (2001) explain, a narrowly defined objective can result in a negative effect, causing students to do less well than if no objective had been stated; they go on to state, ''This phenomenon might occur because setting a goal focuses students' attention to such a degree that they ignore information not specifically related to the goal'' (p. 94). This can be especially troubling for teachers of ELLs, who are attempting to build schema by encouraging students to draw on their background knowledge and prior experiences. An overly narrow objective may result in students editing out salient information in an attempt to meet the terms of the lesson's objectives.

Classifying Objectives

Various frameworks representing types of knowledge further complicate the educational landscape. The most well known is Bloom's taxonomy, developed in 1956 and intended as the first in a series of volumes that were not completed. The three volumes he and his colleagues conceived were to represent the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains; the second volume, on the affective domain, was written in 1964. Bloom's original taxonomy described six categories: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation. Many years later the cognitive taxonomy was revised (Anderson et al., 2001) and updated to reflect changes in instructional methods. The 2001 version now describes the six categories as Remembering, Understanding, Applying, Analyzing, Evaluating, and Creating. In addition to a change in language to the present progressive verb form, the revised taxonomy places Creating (Synthesis) above Evaluating. These terms are most often used to categorize the type of objectives for a lesson or unit.

Another lens for describing knowledge, and therefore the learning objectives in the classroom, is what Paris, Lipson, and Wixson (1983) label as declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge. They applied this schema to ''strategic readers'' (p. 293): students who know what comprehension strategies to use (declarative), how to apply them (procedural), and when and why to deploy them (conditional). These descriptors have been used by others to categorize teachers' level of knowledge in providing instruction in reading (Reinking, Mealey, & Ridgeway, 1993). Teachers informally use declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge to describe the kinds of learning that will occur.

Language Demands on English Language Learners

Many students may benefit from clearly stated objectives, but it appears that ELLs are more sensitive to this, due to the additional language demand placed on students who are simultaneously learning in English. Although obvious, it bears repeating that many ELLs are less able than monolingual English speakers to process verbal and written directions (August & Hakuta, 1997), even when factors such as socioeconomic status are controlled for (Brown, 2005). This impacts not only students in courses that require high levels of literacy, but also students in those that are perceived as requiring relatively fewer language skills, such as mathematics (Brown, 2005). However, making the purpose of the lesson clear to students can mitigate this. A study of secondary mathematics instruction for ELLs found that a stated lesson objective was a useful component for learning (Hudson, Miller, & Butler, 2006). Some researchers recommend the use of intentionally stated and written language objectives for ELLs in other disciplines such as science (Carrier, 2005) and physical education (Clancy & Hruska, 2005), noting that the language demands can undermine the student performance. This idea is consistent with the findings of Echevarria, Short, and Powers (2006), who, in their 7-year study, found that analysis of the language demand of the task, paired with stated purposes about written and verbal language production, resulted in higher levels of achievement for ELLs.

But the question remains: What is a language purpose, and how do teachers write it? This study was designed to uncover and unpack the types of statements teachers make relative to language purposes. Although language purposes are inextricably linked with content purposes, our analysis is limited to the linguistic demands that teachers place on students.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants in this study were 332 teachers from southern California who were invited to submit current language purpose statements via an electronic survey tool. Recruitment of participants occurred in a number of ways, including as part of trainings and workshops at which we presented, requests at a summer reading conference, via e-mail from district offices, by word of mouth as preservice teachers invited their cooperating teachers to submit examples, and via e-mail to members of various professional organizations. The teachers who responded to this invitation ranged from 1 to 33 years of teaching experience, with a mean of 8.5 years. The respondents represented a range of formal educational credential, with 38% reporting that they held at least one master's degree in either education or the subject in which they taught. A larger percentage (41%) was enrolled in a master's degree program, possibly due to recruitment at a large university. A smaller number (3%) held a specialist degree.

All of the participants held a current California teaching certificate, indicating that they had completed the state licensing requirements for teaching ELLs. These mandated courses include work in English language development, multicultural education, instructional strategies training in specially designed academic instruction in English, and total physical response. In addition, 52% reported that they had completed guided language acquisition design (GLAD) through their school districts. (Project GLAD is promoted by the California Department of Education as a promising practice and is eligible for Title III funding by school districts.) Respondents who did not possess a current California teaching credential (such as interns) were excluded from this study.

As part of the data collection, teachers were asked to indicate the grade level being taught, the subject or content standard being addressed, and the demographics of the classroom. Teachers were invited to submit more than one example, provided that the examples came from different lessons and standards. The majority of participants held a multiple-subject teaching credential and taught in elementary (K–5) or middle schools (6–8), comprising 73% of the respondents. The remainder (27%) held a single-subject teaching credential and taught in Grades 7–12. The single-subject participants held teaching credentials in English (51%), history/social science (25%), science (17%), and mathematics (7%). The demographic data, in terms of student population, for the teachers who submitted examples suggests a diverse pool, with 92% of them currently teaching ELLs. Eight percent of the participants were not currently teaching ELLs but reported having done so in the past 3 years. The majority of participants who answered the demographic questions were female (77%) and White (85%).

Instruments

An electronic survey instrument was developed to collect demographic information and the content and purpose information noted previously. The instrument asked participants to submit purpose statements, defined as ''the spoken and written statements you make to students at the beginning of the lesson so that they know what is expected of them.'' Teachers who contributed were entered into a pool with the possibility of winning Starbucks gift cards. The data submitted were confidential, and contact information was submitted separately for individuals who wanted to enter the pool. In addition, teachers were invited to indicate whether they were willing to participate in a follow-up survey, member check, or both once all samples had been collected and the initial analysis had been completed. The member check is a qualitative research technique that allows a sample of the larger participant pool to read and react to preliminary findings. The intent of the member check is to increase validity and accuracy and reduce researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Procedures

The electronic survey instrument was available for teachers to access for several months. It was monitored weekly, and recruitment efforts continued until the data set included 500 examples. Once the examples had been collected, we analyzed the data, looking for trends and categories using a constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Of the 500 submitted, 34 were discarded because they did not contain a complete thought or were primarily behavioral in nature. For example, the response ''The students will raise their hands and wait to be called on'' was not considered in this study because it did not meet the initial qualification of a language objective. As categories emerged, we re-read all entries to classify them accordingly. In addition, representative samples for each category were coded. A random selection of the teachers who agreed to be interviewed were contacted for follow-up questions. The draft findings were used during member check meetings. At each of the three member check meetings, five randomly selected participants were invited to read and comment on the initial findings. These discussions allowed us to ask questions based on the categories that emerged and allowed participants to compare the study findings with their own experiences.

FINDINGS

An analysis of the 500 examples submitted by teachers resulted in the identification of three categories: vocabulary, language structure, and language function. The most common language purposes included direction on the use of discipline-specific vocabulary (e.g., *tectonic plate, vertices, adverbs*). This type of language objective comprised 47% of the submitted samples. Single-subject teachers appeared to favor this type of language objective, as these objectives comprised nearly 60% of their submitted samples. The second most common were those that focused on language structure, accounting for 29% of the submitted samples. Language structure purpose statements provide students with a focus on the way information is organized, such as ''You will tell your partner the stages from tadpole to frog using past tense words.'' The final category, language function, comprised 24% of the total number of

submissions. Language function purpose statements draw students' attention to the linguistic tools of the language, such as ''Justify your answer'' or ''Explain your position.'' Table 1 contains a summary and examples of each of these.

TABLE 1. Examples of Language Purpose Statements

Content Area	Vocabulary	Language Structure	Language Function
Mathematics	Use *less than, equal to*, or *greater than* to compare groups or numbers.	Highlight addition signal words in a word problem.	Describe the relationship between numbers in expanded form and standard form.
Social studies	Name the routes and explorers on a map.	Sequence the steps of food production using the signal words *first, then, next*, and *finally*.	Justify in a paragraph the ways fire was used for hunting, cooking, and warmth by citing three examples.
Language arts	Use *who, what*, and *why* to ask a question of your partner.	Identify the verb tenses used in the reading to explain what happened long ago and what will happen in the future.	Explain what organizational pattern was used by the writer, and critique its adequacy.
Science	Label a diagram of the digestive system (*teeth, mouth, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, colon*).	Using the sentence frame ''One the one hand, _____. On the other hand, _____.'' (Students will demonstrate their knowledge of the Earth's layers.)	I can tell my team members three ways that an environment can change.

Together, these three categories represented all of the various ways that teachers established the language purpose for students in their classrooms. The five teachers who participated in the member check interview confirmed that these categories were consistent with their experiences and that ''they provide some information about planning language purposes.'' Interestingly, the teachers who participated in the member check discussed the difference between goals and objectives and noted, as did we, that there was not a consistent use of either term. Instead, it seemed that the participants focused on purpose, with some people submitting goals and others submitting objectives. We will return to this discussion after exploring each of the three categories.

Vocabulary
The majority of purpose statements focused on vocabulary. Vocabulary is among the greatest predictors of reading comprehension (Baker, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 1998) and the likelihood that learners will understand the content being taught (Carlo et al., 2004). The relationship between vocabulary and comprehension is so powerful that there is evidence that vocabulary size in kindergarten is an effective predictor of reading comprehension in later school years (Scarborough, 2001). Vocabulary is especially important for ELLs, and much of the current research on these students (e.g., Townsend & Collins, 2009) has focused on the best ways to develop their word knowledge. Vocabulary learning in another language requires attention to specific words that do, and do not, translate well. In addition, vocabulary learning for ELLs must include academic terminology and word study for unfamiliar concepts (Nation, 2001).

Within the broad category of vocabulary, two subcategories were evident. The first related to the specialized vocabulary required in many content areas. Specialized vocabulary consists of defined words whose meaning is altered by the context or discipline (Vacca & Vacca, 2007). For instance, the word *bias* has two distinctly different meanings depending on whether it is used in a history class or a family and consumer sciences class. One sample purpose statement is illustrative: As part of a unit on the human body, a high

school science teacher established a language purpose such that students would understand the multiple-meaning words related to the human body, including *tissue*, *vessel*, *petrified*, and *culture*. Specialized vocabulary has received a great deal of attention from teachers and researchers who are interested in improving the educational outcomes of ELLs (e.g., Unsworth, 1999). These specialized words include high-utility terms that often change meaning in different contexts or content areas. This category also includes words for which students know some part of the meaning but do not have mastery of the full complexity of the word's meaning. There are even studies of words to determine which are the most important specialized words to teach (e.g., Coxhead, 2000). Examples of language purpose statements in the subcategory of specialized vocabulary include the following:

- Distinguish between the common and social studies–related meanings of *constitution*, *right*, and *pact*.
- Use the correct version of *rod* and *cone* when discussing the eye.
- Clarify the meaning of *light*, *perspective*, *line*, and *shape* as related to visual art.

The second subcategory related to the technical vocabulary students need to understand. Technical vocabulary has one definition and is typically used in only one discipline (Vacca & Vacca, 2007). For example, as part of a second-grade geometry lesson, the teacher established the purpose as students using ''mathematical terms (*solid figure, angle, vertices, face*) to explain why their answer is reasonable.'' Technical words, the discipline-specific terms, are important for all students to know (Fang, 2006). To understand a technical term, ELLs must also learn the concept behind the term as well as all of the words used to define the technical word (Brown, 2007). Technical terms are often identified within the content standards or grade level, which were a common source that teachers in this study used to establish the purpose. Examples of language purpose statements in the subcategory of technical vocabulary include the following:

- Employ scientific vocabulary related to seed dispersal during partner conversations.
- Use map terminology (e.g., *compass rose, cardinal directions, legend, scale*) in written directions.
- Apply technical terms for various structures (*presidios, missions, ranchos, and pueblos*) when working in a group.

Language Structure

The second most common category of purpose statements related to the structure of the English language. Although this structure is important for all students in an English-speaking context, ELLs need experiences with the language that help them internalize common forms. Or as Dutro and Moran (2003) note, students needs to learn English, and not just learn *in* English. ELLs do not develop proficiency—oral, reading, or writing—from simply being exposed to the language (Palumbo & Willcutt, 2006). In addressing this need, teachers established purpose related to language structure in three ways.

Categorization proved to be more difficult here than with vocabulary purpose statements. Submitted purpose statements were categorized as examples of language structure if there was an explicit grammatical, syntactical, or lexical emphasis. Nearly all contained some type of language function as well (e.g., *explain, retell, justify, identify*), so it was essential to look beyond the verb to examine the stated intent of the lesson.

The first type noted specific grammar and syntax rules that students should practice. Although the content of lessons was not grammar focused per se, there were a number of times that teachers focused on grammar within the language purpose. For example, in a second-grade science lesson about the life cycle of a frog, the language purpose focused on the use of past tense verbs. When asked about this in the member check, teachers discussed the application of grammar rules across content areas. A fifth-grade teacher noted, ''We teach grammar as part of the literacy block. But we can also have a purpose for students to practice the grammar in other parts of the day.'' This approach is consistent with the systematic English language development that is common in California (Clark, 2009). When asked about recasting and feedback as part of the lesson, the teachers who participated in the member check were clear that the purpose statement allowed them to, as one teacher said, ''provide corrections as students used language because the purpose was public and students knew that it was about practice, not being embarrassed.'' This is consistent with the evidence that explicit corrective feedback results in improved proficiency (Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006) yet is sensitive to the

experiences that some students have with the correction and feedback process (Loewen et al., 2009).

Within the subcategory of grammatical language structure, the most common areas of emphasis included the use of complete sentences, plurals, subject-verb agreement, verb tense, articles as idioms, and figurative language. These areas accounted for 57% of the grammatical language structure samples. We chose to locate idiomatic expressions and figurative language as a form of structure (rather than vocabulary) because they are most commonly used as phrases, complete sentences, and aphorisms rather than as words and terms. In addition, they often serve as a frame for establishing an idea or concept, and therefore influence longer written passages and conversations. Examples of grammar-related language structure purpose statements include the following:

- Use past tense regular verbs to discuss the lab experiment.
- In complete sentences, retell the main ideas from the film to a partner.
- Identify idiomatic expressions that the author uses.

The second type of language structure statement focused on signal words that are common in academic English. Signal words are one of the signs or markers that English speakers and writers use to clue their listeners and speakers (Fry, Kress, & Fountoukidis, 1993). Of the submitted language structure samples, 29% contained explicit directions on the application of signal words. These are part of the academic discourse to explain and are often misused, or not used at all, by ELLs, who tend to be familiar with basic signal words such as *but* and *because*. ELLs are often not as familiar with more complex signal words, especially those that appear more frequently in written English, such as *moreover*, *nevertheless*, and *besides*.

For example, when comparing and contrasting, a number of signal words are helpful in maintaining the structure of the text (spoken or written), including but not limited to *although, as well as, both, by contrast, compared with, different from, however, instead of, on the other hand, similarly, unlike, whereas,* and *yet*. Even more common than comparing and contrasting is putting items in chronological order, and English has a number of words to communicate that structure, including but not limited to *afterward, before, during, finally, following, initially, last, later, meanwhile, next, now, preceding, soon, today, tomorrow, until,* and *yesterday*. Additional examples of

signal word–related language structure purpose statements include the following:

- Retell the steps in the life cycle of a butterfly using chronological order signal words (e.g., *first, next, then, finally*).
- Use the ''if . . . then'' structure to describe the cause and effect.
- Compare and contrast two versions of the same fairy tale using signal words such as *contrast, in common, compared with, likewise, both, similarly*, or *even though*.

The third subcategory provided students with frames that serve to scaffold their language use. These frames provide students with a structure they can use to approximate English as they apprentice into academic English and increase the lexical density of their speech and writing. Although only 14% of the submitted language structure samples were language or sentence frames, the teachers who used them felt strongly about them. College composition experts Graff and Birkenstein (2006) recommend the use of frames (they call them *templates*) as an effective way for developing students' academic language skills. They defend the use of frames or templates by noting that,

> after all, even the most creative forms of expression depend on established patterns and structures. Most songwriters, for instance, rely on a time-honored verse-chorus-verse pattern, and few people would call Shakespeare uncreative because he didn't invent the sonnet or dramatic forms that he used to such dazzling effect. . . . Ultimately, then, creativity and originality lie not in the avoidance of established forms, but in the imaginative use of them. (pp. 10–11)

Examples of sentence frame language structure purpose statements include the following:

- Use the language frame ''Some spiders _____, but all spiders _____'' to describe information found in a text.
- Apply a language frame (''What will your _____ do on _____?'') in conversation lines.
- Present both sides of the argument to a peer using the frame ''On the one hand, _____. But on the other hand, _____.''

Language Function

The final category of language purpose that emerged from the samples collected from teachers involved the functions that

language serves for the user. As noted earlier, most language objectives contained some sort of language function embedded within them. Many of the samples also contained explicit directions concerning the use of vocabulary or structure. If they contained neither, they were most often classified as samples of language function. Of the samples collected, 24% were classified thus.

Halliday (1973) identifies seven language functions: instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, imaginative, heuristic, and representational. These are translated into classroom interactions as well as expectations for student performance on such things as state tests. For example, Bailey and Butler (2002) found the following language functions in several state science content standards: *analyze, compare, describe, observe,* and *record.* Common language functions useful in school contexts for ELLs include *express an opinion, describe, summarize, persuade, question, entertain, inform, sequence, disagree, debate, evaluate*, and *justify* (Newmeyer, 2000). Examples of function-related language structure purpose statements include the following:

- Describe how the moon, earth, and sun move through the phases.
- Summarize the meaning of ''taxation without representation.''
- Question your partner about his or her creative writing.
- Persuade your reader to change a habit.
- Inform your reader about a current event.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study support a framework for developing language objectives that are suitable for use with ELLs as a means of establishing purpose. The data from this study suggest that there are specific ways that teachers establish the purpose of the lesson related to language. The three categories identified from the 500 submissions center on the needs of ELLs, but to develop appropriate language purposes, teachers have to understood the instructional needs of the students in the class as well as the linguistic demands of the task or content being studied. This was obvious to us when different language purpose statements were submitted for similar content and standards. For example, we received several submissions related to the phases of the moon. The

data suggest that there are different language purposes that could be identified for this content, including the following:

- Name the phases of the moon. (vocabulary)
- Use sequence words (*first*, *then*, *next*, *finally*) to describe the phases of the moon. (structure)
- Explain how the moon, earth, and sun move through the phases. (function)

Although the categories we identified could be helpful in guiding the development of a language purpose statement, the specific purpose would need to be instructionally relevant for students in the classroom. Along those lines, we do not recommend that commercial publishers write language purpose statements for their textbooks, but rather that teachers analyze the linguistic demands of the content to determine the purpose that will best serve the students in their classes. Having said that, three concerns were raised by this data set that warrant further discussion.

First, the predominant focus on vocabulary is both understandable and problematic. There is evidence that ELLs need to learn a great deal of vocabulary, but focusing on only this aspect of language will not likely result in increased student achievement. Students need to know more than the terms for the things they see and the ideas they have. Students need to use these words in grammatically correct sentences and understand the function of the language. Knowing individual words will not ensure that students are persuasive when need be, informative as appropriate, and entertaining when the occasion arises. Although only a few teachers in this data set did not teach ELLs, it is instructive to note that their purpose statements were predominately focused on functions, not vocabulary. It seems reasonable to suggest that there should be a balance of the three language purposes and not an overreliance on vocabulary-related purposes. Teachers who participated in the member check were also conflicted about this information. One of them noted, ''I see this happening. They [ELLs] have so many words to learn that we tend to focus exclusively on vocabulary. They need it. But I'm thinking that if they're only learning words, their language isn't progressing. Maybe that's why my school has so many students who are stuck at the intermediate level.'' Another member commented,

> I think that I should teach them the words as part of the lesson but raise my expectations for the purpose to provide my students with more practice with language structure and function. They also need that, not just vocabulary. And they have to use vocabulary to do those other things.

A second concern that was raised as we analyzed the data relates to the specificity issues identified by Marzano and colleagues (2001). We used the terms *goal* and *objective* interchangeably because we were interested in the purpose of the lesson. Having said that, some of the submissions were more goal-like and others were more objective-like. This was not a problem until we received submissions that were so specific and limited that we had to question their worth. Focusing on a specific word, for example, might prevent students from noticing the language used around the word or how to use the word in combination with other words.

Similarly, we received a purpose statement requiring that students ''tell a partner that the sun is the largest body in our solar system.'' It seems unreasonable to suggest that this would require the full amount of instructional time devoted to science for that day. Instead, there are likely many tasks that students will complete that require the use of language. The risk is that the students in that classroom might miss the importance of much of that language if they are focused on simply telling another person about the relative size of the sun. When we asked teachers during the member check about this, they were not terribly worried about it. Given that these represented a very small percentage of the overall submissions, the teachers we interviewed suggested that this finding might be a novice error that will change with feedback from administrators and other teachers. One of them said,

> I had to find the balance, and it took me about a year to do it. Now I know not to be so specific that I lose sight of the overall purpose yet not so broad that they [students] don't know what to pay attention to.

Yet we argue that the level of specificity bears note because more teachers are expected to address both content and language simultaneously.

A third concern that was raised from these data relates to the difference between activities and learning goals and objectives. In some cases, the language purpose that was submitted was actually an activity and not something that students need to learn. For example, one of the submitted language purpose statements was ''Retell a Thanksgiving story.'' Another was ''Use picture cards to support partner conversations.'' In these cases, students are left to intuit the purpose. In thinking about these activity-oriented statements, we wondered if this wasn't the result of teachers trying to comply with administrative expectations rather than understanding what a purpose statement does for the teacher and learner, that is, alert students to what is to be learned and what is to be done with the learning. When we asked teachers in the member check about this, we received confirmation that these statements were not consistent with an understanding of a language purpose. A seventh-grade social studies teacher said, ''It's like they're compliant but not committed. To me, a clear purpose helps me plan the lesson, from my modeling to the work students will do.'' Another commented, ''If you go through the motions without really understanding why, I can see that you might end up with activities. To me, the purpose focuses my time and guides me in planning so that the students really learn something.''

Limitations

A limitation of this study is the convenience sampling of the participants, many of whom were attendees at workshops or conference sessions lead by one or both of us. Although the nature of these sessions varied, all of them concerned aspects of literacy and learning for ELLs and therefore contained content about the importance of establishing purpose. Attention to the topic undoubtedly served a priming function for this study's participants. Another limitation is the means of collection (an electronic survey), which can constrain replies. Future research would include observational data on how these language purpose statements were delivered in the classroom and how well they represented the lesson that followed. Another line of research would be at the student level, such as a comparative study of ELLs participating in the same lessons, with language purpose statements serving as the

independent variable. A third avenue of future research is needed to examine the relationship between professional development and teacher expertise in establishing purpose for ELLs.

CONCLUSION

Every teacher of English to speakers of other languages focuses on both content and language in an attempt to facilitate students' achievement and proficiency. As Short and Fitzsimmons (2007) point out, ELLs are expected to do double the work. Having a clearly articulated language purpose helps students in completing that work. The content purpose statements are derived from standards, but the source of the language purpose has been less clear.

The results of this study suggest that teachers of ELLs are cognizant of the linguistic demands and of the importance of stating these demands explicitly to their students. Our analysis suggests that teachers establish a language purpose by developing objectives that focus on the linguistic demands of the task. Further, teachers should consider the role that vocabulary, language structure, and language function play in the learning. These findings also suggest that, although the importance of vocabulary is well known to the teachers in this study, language structure and function play lesser roles.

When students are alerted to the purpose and know what to pay attention to, they learn to use language academically. This is generally accepted as an effective practice for students learning English, but the research on the refinement of this practice continues to evolve. The development of a categorization of language purposes can help articulate a coherent process for developing objectives that can serve as purpose statements for students.

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