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Foreword

This book, adapted for the Australian market, was originally written by lecturers in the field of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in England. It had a clear brief to provide a comprehensive introduction to language and learning in the primary school and has been taken up as required reading by a number of Initial Teacher Education programs in England.

The Australian adaptation of the originally-published UK book aims to provide a comprehensive introduction to language and learning in the Australian primary school. As Australia adopts the Australian Curriculum, the editor of this book is endeavouring to provide a guide to undergraduate primary education students and classroom practitioners in the teaching of language and literacy in Australian classrooms. Through analysis of The National Curriculum in English for primary schools in England (DCSF 2006) there is an attempt to demonstrate some synergy with the Australian Curriculum: English.

Traditionally, Australia and England have exchanged the best in educational research, policy and practice in order to enhance learning outcomes in Australian and English classrooms. For example, the much-admired theorising behind The Bullock Report (1975) made a significant impact on teaching English in Australia.

This book makes the universal assumption that pedagogical practice in the primary English language classroom is not without very strong research-based theoretical roots. By exploring this theory, the authors in the chapters have provided a strong theory–practice link for those enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate teacher education programs. It is the editor’s and authors’ belief that students will be well placed to understand the resultant pedagogical practice and curriculum offerings in primary schools today.

The book has a series of boxes which aim to allow the reader to explore the research further or undertake a focused task to assist in clarifying the ideas being discussed or giving actual classroom-based teaching ideas:
1. *Research box.* This aims to draw the reader’s attention to theoretical aspects underpinning what is being discussed. It is correctly referenced with signposts for further exploration should the reader like to do so.

2. *Task box.* This is a practical university class activity to help readers clarify their thoughts.

3. *Teaching ideas.* This is to provide an opportunity for contributors to bridge the theory-practice divide instantly by drawing the attention of the reader to perhaps: a well-known pedagogical approach; a National Literacy Strategy activity; a useful idea for grouping; or a popular use of a resource. These ideas are ‘springboards’ only, for the readers to try something out rather than being a prescriptive set of lesson ideas.

The editor and authors have tried very hard to explore and respond to diversity as part of each of the chapters. Similarly aspects of special educational needs are embedded in the specific chapters and contributions.

**Chapter 1** is written by the editor, Robyn Cox. It is titled ‘Exploring language and learning’ and provides some theory about what is currently understood about language acquisition. This chapter also gives an introduction to educational linguistics which ensures that the reader has theory with which to move forward when reading the rest of the book. However, readers may want to ‘dip’ into sections of this chapter as they read the more curriculum-based chapters that follow.

The next four chapters sit together as they are all about the learning and teaching of literacy in the primary school.

**Chapter 2,** also written by Robyn Cox, provides focus on developmental aspects of language acquisition, research findings and classroom practice in relation to talk in the primary school.

**Chapter 3,** written by Andrew Lambirth, presents a very strong introduction to the theories behind models of teaching reading and, by reading this, teacher education students will be well placed to plan for the reader in their primary classrooms.

**Chapter 4,** written by Liz Chamberlain, provides an insightful view into the teaching of writing together with the theories that inform classroom practice.

**Chapter 5** is an innovative chapter in an teacher education textbook because it is written by Jean Webb, a Professor of Children’s Literature, and gives an insight into the literary theory utilised by researchers in the field of Children’s Literature. The author makes explicit links to the classroom and calls on the professional teacher to utilise the vast array of books written for children across time and place.

**Chapter 6** is about the developing area of information and communication technology (ICT) in the primary literacy curriculum. Written by Bob Fox, it closely focuses on established uses of ICT, from the use of interactive whiteboards to emerging uses such as the use of Wikis and blogs.
Chapter 7, written by Jane Medwell, introduces the importance of handwriting to the literacy learner. Medwell combines this with ideas about typing and keyboard skills. This is an innovative presentation of a topic rarely given much focus in recent books written for teacher education.

Chapter 8, again written by Jane Medwell, is a very strong discussion about assessment in English in the primary school. Medwell investigates the broad area of assessment to provide a strong base for assessment in the primary English curriculum. Medwell expertly presents current debates in the area and calls upon the reader to engage in the wider research into assessing English literacy.

Chapter 9 is a very strong chapter about planning for the English classroom. It is written by Carrie Ansell and provides some practical ideas for planning which are situated in the theoretical framework of the inclusive classroom. The chapter focuses on planning, which is much more than simply differentiation.

Chapter 10, the final chapter, is written by two experienced teacher educators currently engaged in research and teaching in relation to the new Australian Curriculum: English. While the authors are seeking to ‘pull together’ the previous chapters with an overview of the shape and structure of the new curriculum, they are also bringing a challenge to the curriculum by analysing where the main pedagogical and content focus lies. This chapter is a strong addition to the current writing in and around the Australian Curriculum: English for Australian teacher education students and classroom practitioners.
Contributors

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Robyn Cox is Associate Professor at the Australian Catholic University and a Vice President of the Primary English Teaching Association of Australia (www.petaa.edu.au) and a former member of the executive committee of the United Kingdom Literacy Association (UKLA; www.ukla.org). She is the author of several international journal articles in the field of literacy research and has been involved in teacher education in four countries over a 20-year period. Robyn is well known for her commitment to the development of a strong professional knowledge base in initial teacher education.

Cal Durrant is Associate Professor and Director of the Literacy Research Hub at the Australian Catholic University in Sydney. He is also Commissioning Editor for the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) and has served on its Executive Council for the past fifteen years. Cal has taught, researched and published in the areas of English curriculum, literacy, technology and media education, and along with Andy Goodwyn (UK) and Louann Reid (USA) he is currently co-editing a text for the International Federation for the Teaching of English (IFTE) called ‘English in a Globalised World: International Perspectives on the Teaching of English’ to be published by Routledge.
Bob Fox has been a primary teacher, a head teacher, an advisory teacher and a university lecturer, training teachers in the effective use of ICT. He is the author of various books, academic papers and conference presentations on ICT-related matters. He has recently retired as e-learning co-ordinator in the Institute of Education at the University of Worcester.

Andrew Lambirth is Professor at Greenwich University London. Before joining higher education, he was a primary school teacher in Peckham and Bermondsey in South-East London. Andrew has published widely in the field of the teaching of literacy and English. His latest book is called Literacy on the Left. He is well known for his interest in sociocultural, class and political perspectives on education and the teaching of literacy.

Jane Medwell teaches the postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) and early childhood studies in the Institute of Education, University of Warwick. She has been a lecturer in other universities and a teacher in primary schools. She has conducted research in effective teachers of literacy, information technology (IT) and literacy, writing and handwriting as well as teacher education.

How do we learn language? Is it the same as how we learn to walk or how we learn to do mathematics? These are the questions that characterise the long theoretical journey by researchers and thinkers which produced the theories of language acquisition which underlie much of the pedagogy of the primary English literacy classroom today. The first section of this chapter outlines the three main language acquisition theories that emerged early in the twentieth century: the behaviourist theory of language acquisition; the cognitivist theory of language acquisition; and the sociocultural theory of language acquisition.

**Behaviourist theory of language acquisition**

Early work by B.F. Skinner identified that all learning is a result of stimulus response and that people will learn when they are rewarded for their efforts. This grew out of experiments with animals and a growing knowledge of physiology and neural work, and proved to be an adequate explanation for language acquisition and language learning. During this period a number of questions were raised about this view of language learning. Those questions focused on the particularity of humans to learn language so efficiently and why, if it was as simple as stimulus-response, animals could not learn to talk. So began a series of experiments across the world to try to teach those animals with physiology similar to that of humans, such as the ape family, and, most famously, chimpanzees, to speak.
Many famous experiments were conducted into primate language research, in particular with chimpanzees, gorillas and orang-utans. However, because non-human primates lack vocal cords and other human speech organs, the experiments often utilised primates’ manual dexterity and had them operate keyboards. It is now generally accepted that apes can learn to sign and are able to communicate with humans. However, it is disputed as to whether they can form syntax to manipulate such signs. The idea that chimps could use the language of symbols but were unable to generate syntax or grammar was what convinced researchers that language is unique to the human species.

Cognitivist theory of language acquisition

During this time another researcher emerged who felt strongly that it was not as simple as the picture painted by the behaviourists and that there was something very unique about language acquisition. His theory was supported in part by the outcome from the previous animal studies that chimpanzees could not produce ‘novel sentences’ – or those sentences they had not heard before – which is something that young children can readily accomplish.

Chomsky (1959) thus established that the human species had something which animals did not have which is a language acquisition device (LAD). The argument emerged that language acquisition is specialised learning which is peculiar to humans. Chomsky’s theory about language acquisition was based on his idea of the ‘novel sentence’. He stated that a young language learner had the ability to create a ‘novel sentence’, that is, a sentence that they have composed without ever hearing it spoken before. If young language learners only ever repeated what they heard then the swiftness of language acquisition for interaction in toddlers and pre-schoolers would not be possible.

Task box

Spend some time talking with a young child, thinking very carefully about Chomsky’s ideas of novel sentences.

Talk to children about something they are doing and ask them a question such as ‘Tell me about your game’. I am certain that they will give you the information in bursts of language, words which are linked together but may not be particularly grammatically perfect. The language will be rich with meaning and probably have groups of words put together that this language learner has never put together before.
If you do not think that this will happen, make some notes of the groups of words that they use and then ask the parents, teachers or carers if they have heard the children use this language before.

Make a note of how many words the child uses together. Are there one-word utterances; two-word utterances (what is the function of each of these words – descriptor + name, and so on)?

**Sociocultural theory of language acquisition**

Chomsky’s (1957) work is known as seminal because it changed the way we think about language acquisition and, as a result, language teaching and learning. It began to engage educators in thinking about what might be the best way to provide contexts for babies and children to acquire language. It was not long before this thinking moved into more formal educational contexts and, even, what it might mean for the learning of literacy (the comprehending and composing of written language).

Research into language learning at this time took on a new perspective – the importance of other adults in relation to the child learner took on a rising profile and began the movement of researchers looking at child–adult interaction as the central basis for language acquisition.

The earliest of these child interaction studies resulted in an array of findings – often referred to as child studies – where individual children’s learning patterns were extrapolated to the wider population. Following from these strong research beginnings many more practical pedagogical implications emerged and important secondary results came from these studies, most noticeably the child observation instruments which form the basis for many of the currently used child observations and assessment schedules in the early years, and often formed the basis for moderation processes. Some examples are the ELL project (Pascal and Bertram, 1997), Biks and Gutches (Clay, 1990b) and First Steps (DEWA, 1999). The identification of the specific language addressed to infants and young children by caregivers become important and a new term was conceived: ‘motherese’. Once this was identified, focus moved to making sure that those whose professional duty was working with young children had knowledge of the importance of language play, games and imaginative play.

Michael Halliday’s (1975) *Learning How to Mean* presented the rich data and analysis of his own son’s first 20 months of language learning. Halliday began what turned out to be his distinguished contribution to the field of linguistics when he noted that language acquisition is indeed a series of choices that the learner makes while learning to interact. He accepted the importance of the LAD, but more importantly he underscored the importance of the role of the interlocutor with the child learner. The identification that the language choices learners made were a result of the functional purpose of the language led him to develop a series of language functions.
One of the results from Halliday’s (1975) work was the recognition that children are motivated to acquire language because it serves certain purposes or functions for them. He went so far as to identify these functions, and it is always useful for students seeking to work with young children who are acquiring language to be familiar with these.

The first four functions help the child to satisfy physical, emotional and social needs:

- **Instrumental.** This is when the child uses language to express their needs (for example, ‘Want juice’).
- **Regulatory.** This is where language is used to tell others what to do (for example, ‘Go away’).
- **Interactional.** Here language is used to make contact with others and form relationships (for example, ‘Love you, mummy’).
- **Personal.** This is the use of language to express feelings, opinions and individual identity (for example, ‘Me good girl’).

The next three functions help the child to come to terms with his or her environment:

- **Heuristic.** This is when language is used to gain knowledge about the environment (for example, ‘What is the dog doing?’).
- **Imaginative.** Here language is used to tell stories and jokes, and to create an imaginary environment.
- **Representational.** The use of language to convey facts and information.

At the same time an increased focus on children learning two languages either at the same time (simultaneously) or one after the other (consecutively) became apparent and a body of literature emerged which presented case studies of bilingualism in children. This growing area of research became known as studies in bilingualism and generated a range of theories and pedagogical practices. It was the recognition of the rich linguistic background of some children entering school that led to, what this writer believes to be, the most famous 10 words ever written about language and education. These words were conceived by the team who produced the Bullock Report – the first enquiry into the teaching of English conducted internationally and commissioned by the then Department of Education in the UK. These words were: ‘No child should leave their language at the classroom door’ (DES, 1975: 45).

These famous words were to make an impact on the teaching of English in primary classrooms across the world, but unfortunately in many parts of the world today where English is the primary language it may be thought that these words were never uttered. Notwithstanding the fact that these words are enshrined in
many curriculum documents, policy statements and pedagogical frameworks this writer believes that still many children leave the home language at the classroom door. We will leave this discussion to later chapters.

**Language learning as a social constructive process**

Emerging from the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vigotsky (1896-1934) was the link between language learning and cognitive development which provided clear directions to educators that learners are assisted by the scaffolding provided by more expert users. Thinking about this a little more enables us to clearly see how a pedagogical model can emerge from Vygotsky’s thinking – the idea that a task which is too difficult for a child to master alone can be learned with guidance from someone who can already do this task suggests a potent model for classroom learning. Vygotsky labelled this as the zone of proximal development (sometimes known simply as ZPD) – a novice learner begins the task and may become puzzled or confused, then the more expert other can assist by demonstrating the next level of the task. Often it is essential that the novice and the expert mediate this interaction with dialogue or talking. This idea further ascribed importance to the language learner’s interlocutor who needed to recognise that the language addressed to young children needed to be focused, and delivered into the zone of proximal development.

Primary language education across the world has become aware of Vygotsky’s influential ideas, and practice associated with scaffolding, more expert others and a clear focus on the language addressed to young children by teachers is apparent in the Australian Curriculum: English and most state-based curriculum documents across Australia.

**Emerging areas of language acquisition research**

Currently there is again a focus on studies into language acquisition – both first language and additional language acquisition. The current research activity centres on the ability of researchers as never before to see inside the brain; using large man-machine interface (MMI) machines researchers can look at brain functioning while language learners are learning and using language. The studies started originally looking at medical patients who had lost the ability to use language and this then moved to looking at language learning. Researchers, teachers and curriculum designers need to follow these studies closely over the next few years and monitor the pedagogical implications, especially in relation to those children learning English as an additional language (EAL/D) in schools, and those children whose language acquisition and use may not conform to expected progression rates.
English language as system

Every language has a system or a way that it functions – the identification and outlining of this system occurs some time after the language system is in everyday use. There are many languages used by humans, and some researchers even suggest that there are languages used by other species. The most famous of these, often described, is the way that bees communicate with each other through a series of dances which signal to the others where the best sources of honey are. This language is characterised by a system, just as human languages have an elaborately documented system.

It is difficult to give an exact figure of the number of languages that exist in the world, because it is not always easy to define what a language is. It is usually estimated that the number of languages in the world varies between 3000 and 8000. The top five languages are Mandarin, Hindi/Urdu, Spanish, English and Arabic, although this is often disputed. Millions of speakers grow up and, without close tuition or instruction, manage to speak their mother tongue by the time that they are 5 years old. Languages are dynamic and can change and adapt to circumstances – already in learning to be a teacher you will have begun to add some new words or vocabulary to your language and within a few years your language will have adapted and changed to help you become a teacher.

Each of these 3000 to 8000 language systems is complex and has taken scholars many years to describe. The ways to describe languages are sometimes called a grammar.

As soon as we talk about grammar some of you might think 'Oh no! This is a topic that I know nothing about'. David Crystal (2006) gives us a reason why the word 'grammar' might make you nervous. He talks about the history of teaching grammar in Britain in a way that helps us think about grammar in schools and gives us an overview of how the teaching of grammar took place in schools over the past 50 years. Before the 1960s traditional grammar was taught in primary schools, and this involved a close focus on correct usage and the analysis of sentences; some of this pedagogy was derived directly from the study of Latin grammar.

After the 1960s and before the 1990s, and connected with what is sometimes known as progressive pedagogy, grammar was not taught as a discrete subject but treated more as an investigation into language use, with minimal use of grammatical terms, such as nouns and verbs. From the mid-1990s, when linguistic understanding became more applied to educational contexts, we saw a re-birth of the teaching of grammar, and in Australia it is notable that the emergence of Systemic Functional Grammar became more central to the teaching of English literacy in schools. A further renewed interest in teaching about language emerged when the focus on the difference between written and spoken English also emerged from studies into grammar in educational contexts.
Traditional grammar

This grammar taught people to analyse a sentence by making sense of the word classes and divisions within the sentence; sometimes sentences were divided into subject and predicate – with the predicate being divided into verb and object. This continued until all the features of the sentence had been identified. Sometimes this analysis or parsing is considered essential, like a doctor needs to know about anatomy to identify parts of the human body. However, if we focus too much on the detail of the language we can often lose focus on the use of language for communication. This leads us to the next type of grammar.

Descriptive grammar

The most important understanding about descriptive grammar is that it does not tell you how to speak or write – it describes how people use language. Analysts collected samples of language and attempted to describe the regular structures of the language as it was used, not according to a view of how it should be used. It works with a system of word classes, inflectional endings for tense and number, and a relatively short number of sentence structures. Descriptive linguists say that the English language system is characterised by three levels: (1) the grapho-phonic system, (2) the semantic system and (3) the syntactic system.

Generative grammar

This manner of talking about language had its roots in the work of Chomsky (1957), who described language acquisition in relation to two levels – deep structure and surface structure. Developing from this to a notion that language learners were born with a knowledge of language as system regardless of the language that they were learning was known as universal grammar (Chomsky, 1965). Universal grammar (UG) is a theory of linguistics which suggests that there is a universal grammar that is shared by all languages, thought to be innate to humans. It attempts to explain language acquisition in general, not describe specific languages.

Universal grammar proposes a set of rules intended to explain language acquisition in child development: that all humans are born with a deep universal grammar which is shared by all languages, and that learners then pick up the surface features of language.

Systemic functional grammar

Michael Halliday (1987), in his work looking at language acquisition in the early years, suggested that language acquisition is simply a series of choices that the learner makes. Each time you compose in oral or written language you make a series of choices about participants, processes or time markers.
Halliday's (1985) impressive book titled *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* began to collect together his growing system or way of describing the English language. This has been an influential movement in education and has most notably contributed to the teaching of story-writing in primary schools.

In Australia we have a long term engagement with Halliday's Functional Grammar (sometimes known as Systemic Functional Grammar [SFG]) and it has been the view of language underpinning state-based curriculum documents since the early 1990s. Halliday's view of language is seen as a robust way to assist learners in acquiring the language of power and thus become more persuasive writers and speakers. The recently released Australian Curriculum (http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/_resources/Australian_Curriculum_-_English.pdf, accessed May 2012) is underscored by these ideas and learners are encouraged to use the metalanguage developed by the functional linguists (see Derewianka, 2011; Humphrey, Droga and Feez, 2012).

So far, we have talked only about the English language and, when talking about language acquisition, have referred primarily to English as a mother tongue. It all becomes much more complex when we begin to talk about other languages and the ways linguists have developed to talk about them. If you learnt a foreign language in secondary school or primary school, or even when you have been overseas, then you will know that sometimes along the way you find out more about your first language or mother tongue.

This topic has so interested researchers in the past 100 years or so that there has been very focused enquiry into second language acquisition (SLA), and this in turn has assisted English language scholars in devising ways of describing language which assists those learning English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D), those learning English as a second language (ESL) or even those learning it as a foreign language (EFL). These three acronyms can often be troublesome for those who think about teaching English – so here is an easy way to think about it:

**Task box**

Using the definitions below, your task is to discuss with a friend and think about people you know or have met who are learning/have learnt EAL, ESL or EFL.

**EAL/D** – those learners who are learning English as an additional language, and perhaps already know one or two others (even if these are spoken only in very specific contexts). In Australia this also includes those language users who might use a different dialect of English and are acquiring another dialect of English such as Standard Australian English. The use of this language would be in everyday life and possibly for education or working. The context in which the language is being learnt is an English-speaking community, for example, Australia, Canada, the USA or the UK.
ESL – those learners who are learning English to be able to speak it in their everyday life at work and at school. This is predominately used when we know that this is the first other language that the speaker is learning. Because the language is being used in everyday life, it is expected that the context that the language is being learnt in is an English-speaking community. For example, Australia, the UK, the USA or Canada.

EFL – this is where the language is being learnt in a language context where not many other people speak English. Thus the language is seen as a foreign language within that language community. An example is learning English in China with a view to moving to Australia to study at university.

The whole area of SLA research has generated many different ways of describing the English language, and these are used in the vast array of teaching and learning materials that have been developed for EAL, ESL and EFL learners.

The teaching of English grammar in primary schools in Australia

The Australian Curriculum: English has chosen to describe the English language in the following broad ways: Language variation and change; Language for interaction; Text structure and organisation; Expressing and developing ideas; Sound and letter knowledge. There is no specific list of grammatical terms in the Australian Curriculum (the glossary does provide a large number of terms) but the content descriptions offer some insight into what might be expected of teachers.

Here is a list of some of these:

− words that represent people, places and things (nouns, including pronouns);
− happenings and states (verbs);
− qualities (adjectives); and
− details such as when, where and how (adverbs).
English language as a vehicle for learning

The links between language and learning are well established, and from the 1970s through to the Australian Curriculum today these links have been foregrounded by policy makers, curriculum writers and teachers. Again, the Bullock Report (DES, 1975) gave us a solid insight into the importance of language for learning: ‘It is the role that language plays in generating knowledge and producing new forms of behaviour that typifies human existence and distinguishes it from that of all other creatures’ (DES, 1975: 47: original emphases). This was also in tune with other research findings of the time, most notably Bruner (1975), who proposes that language and thought are central to language as a vehicle for learning, and describing linguistic competence, communicative competence and analytical competence as being the key skills that the language learner requires to both access the curriculum and to demonstrate knowledge and understanding.

A further key theorist of the importance of the links between language and learning was James Britton. James Britton has been said to be the chief architect of a theory of language and learning which has influenced the thinking and practice of several generations of teachers in the UK, USA, Canada and Australia. Corson (1988: 14) concludes the first chapter of his well-known book *Oral Language Across the Curriculum* with the statement: ‘A good deal of schooling is devoted to “language on display”; the chief objective of the school is to encourage mastery of the language of the culture.’

The next chapter picks up this issue and moves forward with the discussion about the role of language in learning.