

Spoken Oral Language and Adult Struggling Readers

Dariusz Bakhtiari
Daphne Greenberg
Nicole Patton-Terry
Elena Nightingale
Georgia State University

ABSTRACT

Oral language is a critical component to the development of reading acquisition. Much of the research concerning the relationship between oral language and reading ability is focused on children, while there is a paucity of research focusing on this relationship for adults who struggle with their reading. Oral language as defined in this paper includes: phonological awareness, morphological awareness, vocabulary, syntactic knowledge, listening comprehension, and dialect. Definitions of each of these constructs are provided. We explore the research on each aspect of oral language and its relationship to reading in adults who have low reading skills. Overall, adults who have difficulty with reading often have difficulty with oral language skills. Suggestions for instructors of Adult Basic Education classes are discussed.

Oral language is a critical component to the development of reading acquisition (National Reading Panel (NRP), 2000). However, much of the research concerning oral language and reading achievement is focused on children, and comparatively fewer studies focus on oral language and reading achievement in adults who struggle with their reading (Curtis, 2006; Taylor, Greenberg, Laures-Gore, & Wise, 2012). Research on adult literacy programs often focuses on skill building in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics and does not focus as much on oral language skills (Curtis, 2006). However, as the research discussed in this literature review will show, adults who struggle with reading often are also weak in their oral language skills. The purpose of this paper is to synthesize studies that have investigated aspects of oral language among adults who are struggling readers and to suggest future research studies relevant to this area of study. Oral language as defined in this literature review includes: phonological awareness, morphological awareness, vocabulary, syntactic knowledge, listening comprehension, and dialect (Hoover & Gough, 1990; Sabatini, Sawaki, Shore, & Scarborough, 2010; Taylor et al., 2012; Terry & Scarborough, 2011). The paper will begin with an

explanation of how articles were selected for this literature review, continue with definitions of the key constructs explored in this review, explore what is known about each construct and adults who have difficulty reading, and then end with suggestions for teachers of Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes.

SELECTING ARTICLES FOR THIS LITERATURE REVIEW

Articles for this review were gathered using the Electronic Resources Information Center (ERIC) and the EBSCOhost online research databases. In order to be included in the sections on adult literacy and oral language, authors had to describe their participants as having difficulty with reading and include measures of at least one aspect of oral language skill and reading skill. The following search terms were used to search for articles for this review: adult basic education, struggling adult readers, oral language abilities, phonological awareness, morphological awareness, vocabulary knowledge, syntactic knowledge, listening comprehension, and dialect. Only peer-reviewed articles were included. Due to lack of articles in the relationship of dialect use and reading in adult learners, articles that included children were reviewed in the area of dialect.

DEFINITIONS

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is the ability to manipulate spoken words as a whole as well as their combined and individual sounds (Elbro, Borstrom, & Peterson, 1998; NRP, 2000). This skill is considered critical for being able to sound out unfamiliar words. There are many tests that are used to measure phonological skill, one of which is the Elision subtest of the Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP; Wagner, Torgesen, & Rashotte, 1999). In this test, individuals are asked

to repeat a word and are then asked to say the word without a certain sound (e.g., *what is sling without /l/?* where the answer is *sing*).

Morphological Awareness

Morphological awareness is defined as the ability to analyze and distinguish between different morphemes within words and manipulate their structures (Apel & Thomas-Tate, 2009; Wolter, Wood, & D'zatko, 2009). Morphemes include all base words, prefixes, and suffixes within full words that still hold meaning (Carlisle, 2003). Carlisle (2003) also posits that knowledge of meanings of base words, prefixes, and suffixes plays a significant role on vocabulary growth and language comprehension. To illustrate this skill, take for example the word *shifted*. This word contains two morphemes: the base word *shift* and the suffix *-ed*. A reader proficient in morphological awareness will know that the suffix *-ed* indicates that the verb occurred in the past.

The Grammatical Morphemes subtest of the Comprehensive Assessment of Spoken Language (CASL) battery is an example of a task that measures morphological awareness (Carrow-Woolfolk, 1999). In this task individuals are asked to complete analogies in which one word is left out and there is a certain morpheme that is being manipulated (e.g., *boat is to boats as hat is to...; where the answer is hats*).

Vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge is the degree to which an individual knows meanings of words. Proficiency in vocabulary knowledge is needed to be a good reader. Perfetti's (2007) Lexical Quality Hypothesis explains that a person needs to have precision and flexibility in his or her own knowledge of words in order to be a proficient reader. To be precise, an individual needs to know what is the correct context in which to use certain words (e.g., *orange* can be used as both the name of a color and as the name of a fruit, the use

of which is determined by context). An individual with poor precision may use some words at times in which it does not make sense. Individuals who are flexible in their knowledge of words have the ability to convey different meanings of words in several different ways (e.g., “exercising” may be another way of saying “jogging a few miles” or “doing aerobics”). According to this hypothesis, individuals who have higher quality lexical representations are able to read more proficiently than individuals who have lower quality lexical representations.

There are two types of vocabulary: expressive and receptive. Expressive oral vocabulary knowledge is the extent to which an individual possesses the breadth and depth of spoken vocabulary as measured by spoken phonological and semantic representation (NRP, 2000; Oulette, 2006). The Boston Naming Task (BNT) is a measure that focuses on expressive vocabulary in which participants are shown a target picture and are asked to name the picture (Kaplan, Goodglass, & Weintraub, 2001). Receptive oral vocabulary knowledge is known as the breadth and depth of comprehension of words that are audibly heard (NRP, 2000). A task that measures receptive vocabulary knowledge is the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – 4 (PPVT-4; Dunn & Dunn, 2007) in which a participant is shown four pictures and is asked to point to a picture of a spoken target word.

Syntactic Knowledge

Syntactic knowledge is the extent to which an individual possesses comprehension of how the grammar of a language is constructed and awareness of all of its rules and regulations (Scott, 2009). Individuals who are proficient in their syntactic knowledge are able to string together words with skill and efficiency, and furthermore, these individuals have been seen to possess greater reading comprehension compared to those who are weaker in syntactic knowledge (Taylor et al., 2012). An

example of a task that taps into syntactic knowledge is the Sentence Combining subtest of the Test of Language Development – Third Edition (Newcomer & Hammill, 1997). In this task, examiners say two or more simple sentences to participants who are asked to combine those sentences into compound or complex ones.

Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension is defined as how well an individual understands sentences when they are spoken as opposed to being written (Sabatini et al., 2010). Proficiency in listening comprehension involves an understanding of spoken vocabulary and sentence processing capabilities. If an individual is not able to comprehend spoken sentences, then that individual will typically have difficulty comprehending written sentences (Elbro, 1996; Perfetti, 2007). An example of a listening comprehension task is the Understanding Directions (UD) subtest of the Woodcock-Johnson III (WJ-III; Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001). On this task, individuals are told to point to one or more objects in a picture in a certain order and the examiner makes a note about whether or not the individual pointed to the correct objects.

Dialect

Dialects are variations of languages that keep many of the same forms and features of that original language (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006). These are linguistic systems that require speakers to have knowledge of the systematic rules that govern language form, content, and dialect use. Different dialects of a language can form because of the political, social, and cultural forces that different groups have faced throughout history (Green, 2002; Labov, 1995). Dialects are variations of a language which are spoken by a group of people and can occur in all languages. Thus, importantly, everyone

speaks a dialect and no one dialect is more “correct” or “bad” than another. Rather, what is often used to differentiate these dialects are their linguistic features, the contexts in which these features are used, and the relative prestige they are assigned.

For instance, in the United States, Mainstream American English (MAE) is often used to refer to dialects that are deemed more socially acceptable, more aligned with printed English, more characteristic of affluence, and most often used in formal contexts like school and the workplace. Conversely, Nonmainstream American English (NMAE) is often used to refer to dialects that are most often used in informal contexts, more characteristic of disadvantage, or spoken by social or cultural minority groups. Not surprisingly, many NMAE dialects are considered by some to be low-prestige and are often perceived to be “incorrect,” “bad,” or “improper” English. These perceptions are inappropriate linguistically; however, these differences have become important in discussions about the reading achievement of cultural and language minority students.

The way in which a person speaks has been shown to have an impact on the way people learn to read (NRP, 2000, National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Dialects of a language contain phonological, morphological, semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic differences from the mainstream language. For example, an individual who speaks a nonmainstream form of English may say the sentence, “*He runnin’.*” This is said instead of the correct mainstream form of English, “*He is running.*” It has been hypothesized that these differences in spoken language may be able to explain, at least in part, why some individuals experience difficulty in reading mainstream English. An example of a test that measures an individual’s spoken dialect use is the Diagnostic Evaluation of Language Variation – Screening Test (DELV-ST; Seymour, Roeper, & deVilliers, 2003). This

test is made up of two parts. In Part I, individuals are asked to repeat sentences and complete cloze sentences. In Part II, individuals are asked to answer questions about pictures that they are shown or repeat nonwords. Examiners record responses and determine whether or not they indicate that one is speaking with strong, some, or little to no variation from mainstream American English.

WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT ORAL LANGUAGE AND ADULT STRUGGLING READERS?

The following sections focus on what is known about adult literacy learners in each area of oral language.

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is the oral language skill most studied in the field of adult literacy. All studies that we found suggest that adults who have low literacy skills struggle with phonological awareness skills. Two examples of studies that include phonological awareness skills will be described here.

Greenberg, Ehri, and Perin (1997) conducted a study that included children and adults reading at the third to fifth grade level (as measured by Woodcock Reading Mastery Test – Revised (WRMT-R; Woodcock, 1987). Participants were also given a phoneme deletion task and a phoneme segmentation task. Phoneme deletion skills were measured by Rosner and Simon’s (1971) task in which participants are asked to delete phonemes in common words to make new words (e.g., *Say snail without the /s/*). Phoneme segmentation skills were measured by how well participants could segment words by placing a chip every time they heard a sound pronounced (i.e., if the word *bicycle* is said, a participant would put 7 chips down). It was found that the adults had great difficulty with these tasks, with the children outperforming the adult readers

on both of these tasks. On the phoneme deletion task, adults had an overall mean score of 12.8 correct (out of 40 possible correct, $SD = 7.3$) while children had an average of 24.1 correct ($SD = 7.7$). On the phoneme segmentation task, adults in this study had an overall mean score of 2.6 correct (out of a possible 10 correct, $SD = 2.6$), and children had an average of 6.3 correct ($SD = 2.8$).

In a study by Thompkins and Binder (2003), adults who read at the second through fifth grade levels as measured by the Test of Adult Basic Education, version 7 (TABE-7) were administered phoneme recognition, deletion, and phonological spelling tests. To measure phoneme recognition, participants indicated whether word pairs had the same sound at the beginning, middle, or end (e.g., “Do *taste* and *take* begin with the same sound?”). In order to measure phoneme deletion, participants were asked to take words and say them without one of the letters, (e.g., “Say *sun* without the ‘s’”). For phonological spelling, 10 nonwords were presented for participants to spell orally. Results of this study found that the adults performed poorly on the phonological awareness tests and that their phonological awareness as a whole accounted for a unique portion of the variance in their reading ability.

Morphological Awareness

Herman, Cote, Reilly, & Binder (2013) examined the effect of morphological awareness on reading ability in 169 native English speakers who were enrolled in ABE programs. Three separate tasks were adapted from other researchers and administered to participants in order to measure their morphology knowledge: the Test of Morphological Structure: Derivation (Carlisle, 2000), the Test of Morphological Structure: Production (Carlisle, 2000), and the Derivational Suffix Choice Test of Pseudowords (Mahony, 1994; Singson, Mahony, & Mann, 2000).

In the Test of Morphological Structure: Derivation task, participants heard a base word and were asked to complete a cloze task using a derived form of the word they were given (e.g., *Call. I was busy, so I could not answer the phone when you ____*). During the Test of Morphological Structure: Production task, participants were asked to name the base form of a word in a cloze task after hearing a derived word (e.g., *Windy. The ____ made her hair messy*). On the Derivational Suffix Choice Test of Pseudowords, participants were again presented with a cloze task, but were given four nonword choices to fill the blank. Each nonword contained a different suffix that matches typical suffixes in English. An example of this task is the sentence: “The woman is teaching us how to ____ food with a fork,” where the answer choices could be: *blicking, blick, blicks, blicked*. The researchers found significant positive correlations between all three morphological awareness tasks and reading comprehension ($r = 0.30$ to 0.48).

In a similar study, Tighe and Binder (2013) investigated the effect that morphological awareness has on reading ability in struggling adult readers. This study included adults who had an average passage reading comprehension grade level equivalency of 4.4 and an average phonological decoding skill grade level of 5.8 as measured by reading scores on the TABE. The morphological tasks used in this study are the same as those described in Herman et al. (2013). The researchers in this study found that morphological awareness significantly accounted for 37.3% of the variance in their sample’s reading comprehension skills. Furthermore, scores on all three morphological awareness tasks were significantly positively correlated with reading comprehension ($r = 0.69$ to 0.77). The adults had the most difficulty with morphologically complex words (i.e., words with multiple morphemes).

Expressive Vocabulary

Gold and Johnson (1982) found a positive correlation between pre-test verbal language skills and post-test reading ability ($r = 0.49, p < 0.001$) in adults reading on average at the third grade level as measured by the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT; Jastak & Jastak, 1965). The Verbal Opposites Subtest of the Detroit Test of Learning Aptitude (Baker & Leland, 1967) was used to measure verbal language ability. On this subtest, participants were told a target word, and were asked to give the antonym of the target. In a similar study, Cantwell and Rubin (1992) looked at struggling adult readers' ability to name objects. Significant correlations were found between adult's object naming ability and reading skill ($r = 0.49, p < 0.05$).

Sabatini et al. (2010) used the Woodcock-Johnson Picture Vocabulary (WJPV) subtest to measure expressive vocabulary knowledge in adults who read on average at the third grade reading level as measured by the WJ Passage Comprehension subtest (Woodcock et al., 2001). They found that expressive vocabulary skills of adults struggling to read (average grade equivalency = 4.3) were only marginally higher than their reading skill levels, despite having many years of oral language experience.

Hall, Greenberg, Laures-Gore, and Pae (2012) measured expressive vocabulary knowledge using the BNT with adults who read between the third and fifth grade level. The mean score on the BNT was a 36, which is roughly the same average as 7 to 10 year old typically developing children on this task. The adults' scores on this expressive vocabulary test contributed to a significant portion of the variance in their reading comprehension (16.4%, $p < 0.000$) and exception word reading scores (1.8%, $p < 0.05$).

Receptive Vocabulary

In the study conducted by Greenberg et al. (1997), adults reading between the third to fifth

grade levels (as measured by WRMT-R; Woodcock, 1987) were administered the PPVT (Dunn & Dunn, 1981). Results indicated that adults outperformed grade-matched children on this task at the third and fourth grade levels but not at the fifth grade level. The authors suggest that adults have greater life experiences which might give them larger vocabularies at the third and fourth grade levels but that advantage disappears at the fifth grade level. According to Greenberg et al. (1997), a possible explanation for the disappearance of this advantage is that at the fifth grade level, exposure to written language influences vocabulary development more than exposure to oral language.

Pae, Greenberg, and Williams (2012) compared third grade children to adults who read at the third to fifth grade level as measured on the WJLWID subtest. The PPVT-III Form B was administered to the participants. Adults in this study performed only slightly better (M (raw score) = 139.45) on this task than the children (M (raw score) = 132.99). However, during item analysis on the PPVT-III, it was found that adults in this study performed better on items pertaining to daily activities rather than constructs that are discussed in school.

Syntactic Skill

After an extensive literature search, only one study was found that looked at syntactic skills and adults who have low literacy skills. Taylor et al. (2012) assessed the syntactic skills of 82 adults using the Word Ordering subtest of the Test Of Language Development – Intermediate (TOLD; Newcomer & Hammill, 1997). In this study, adults read between the third and fifth grade level as measured by the WJLWID subtest. The majority of adults in the study had difficulties with word order in sentences and with using target words to create sentences. The average age equivalency score on the Word Ordering subtest of the TOLD – Intermediate was found to be

8.89 years of age. Syntactic knowledge was found to be significantly positively correlated with scores on reading comprehension ($r = 0.37, p < 0.01$) and reading fluency ($r = 0.22, p < 0.05$).

Listening Comprehension

The listening comprehension skills of adults were measured by Sabatini et al. (2010) using three subtests of the WJ-III: Oral Comprehension (OC), Understanding Directions (UD), and Story Recall (SR). On the OC task, participants listen to a short passage and are asked to provide a missing word in the passage. On the UD subtest, participants are presented with a picture and are asked to point to various items in certain orders on the page. During SR, participants hear a short paragraph and are asked to orally retell the story. The adults in this study read on average at the third grade level as measured by the WJ-III Passage Comprehension subtest (Woodcock et al., 2001). Performance on all three listening comprehension subtests were significantly positively correlated with passage comprehension (OC: $r = 0.52$; UD: $r = 0.46$; SR: $r = 0.36$) and reading fluency (OC: $r = 0.25$; UD: $r = 0.32$; SR: $r = 0.20$) and indicated that adults had listening comprehension skills of those at the third to fifth grade levels.

Mellard, Woods, and Fall (2011) also measured listening comprehension in adults who identified words and comprehended passages on average at the fourth grade level as measured on the Letter-Word Identification and Passage Comprehension subtests of the WRMT-R. In order to measure listening comprehension, the researchers used the Listening Comprehension subtest of the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF-3; Semel, Wiig, & Secord, 1995). On this task, participants hear a paragraph and are then asked to answer a few questions about the paragraph. Adults performed poorly on this task with average grade equivalency performance at the eighth grade level and below.

Dialect Use

One area not investigated in the area of struggling adult readers is the relationship between dialect use and reading. Recent studies link children's NMAE use and their reading achievement. However, they have met with mixed results. Connor and Craig (2006) found that children who used NMAE more frequently than children who spoke NMAE at lower rates performed at similar levels on reading tasks as those who primarily spoke MAE. Children who spoke NMAE frequently performed better on phonological tasks than children who spoke NMAE at a moderate rate. Other studies that have examined NMAE use and reading achievement have found an inverse relationship between rate of NMAE use and reading skill (Charity, Scarborough, & Griffin, 2004; Craig & Washington, 2004; Terry, Connor, Thomas-Tate, & Love, 2010). In other words, the more NMAE an individual spoke, the more poorly that individual performed on reading tasks. More research should be conducted in order to inform the differences between the results of these studies. For example, Terry (2012) found that students performed better at reading tasks despite amount of spoken dialect use if they attended schools with higher socioeconomic levels. In addition, in a study by Craig et al. (2009), children who spoke high amounts of NMAE and learned to use MAE when taking literacy tasks outperformed other students who spoke high amounts of NMAE but did not learn to use MAE on these tasks.

There is some research on dialect use and adults in college. For example, Treiman and Barry (2000) compared British college students studying in Wales to American college students studying in Michigan. The researchers asked college students to spell a variety of words that included an /r/ sound such as *horde* and *leper*. British dialect speakers may pronounce these words as *haud* or *lepah*, while speakers of MAE would pronounce the /r/ sounds in the word. The researchers found that MAE students

produced fewer spelling errors when presented with these types of words compared to the British college students.

Understanding dialect use in subgroups of adults who have difficulty reading may shed important information. For example, according to Labov's (1995) mismatch hypothesis, individuals who speak NMAE frequently may experience a greater linguistic barrier when trying to map spoken forms of words onto written forms of English than individuals who speak MAE because spoken NMAE forms do not align well with print forms. The more NMAE an individual speaks, the more mismatches s/he will encounter while reading and writing and will therefore have difficulty reading and writing. For instance, an NMAE speaker may commonly say *skreet* instead of *street*, which is acceptable in NMAE oral conversation and is still commonly understood to mean the same thing as its MAE counterpart. However, when it is time to learn to read or write the word *street*, a mismatch between what is spoken and what is the MAE version may cause confusion for the individual because *street* is not spelled with a *k*. The same mismatch problems may occur for adults who have literacy difficulties and who speak a dialect different from MAE.

In addition, a group of similar hypotheses that are referred to as dialect awareness (Charity et al., 2004), dialect shifting-reading achievement hypothesis (Craig et al., 2009), and the linguistic awareness/flexibility hypothesis all state that the reading difficulties children who speak NMAE experience may be due to metalinguistic knowledge of the context (Terry & Scarborough, 2011; Terry, 2012). A fundamental part of each of these hypotheses is that individuals acquire the ability to change dialect use given the appropriateness for a particular context through a metalinguistic channel, usually through what is known as code switching.

Further exploration is warranted to investigate code switching/metalinguistic skills in adults who have difficulty reading.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Research Findings

Oral language skills are related to reading (NRP, 2000). As seen through the research presented here, adults who have difficulty with reading often also have oral language difficulties. Adults' oral language abilities in terms of phonological awareness, morphological awareness, vocabulary skill, syntactic skill, and listening comprehension all play a critical role in reading acquisition. Phonological tasks have been explored most often with adults struggling to read, and it has been seen to explain variance in their reading ability. In contrast, morphological awareness has not been as widely investigated with this population. However, research suggests that adults with more proficient morphological awareness skills have better reading ability (Tighe & Binder, 2013). The expressive and receptive vocabulary skills of adults struggling to read were found to be only marginally better than their overall reading ability, despite having more years of oral vocabulary experience than children. Studies with struggling adult readers indicate that syntactic knowledge and listening comprehension are also related to their reading ability. Lastly, spoken dialect has not been explored with adults who have difficulty with reading; yet, dialects differ in their phonological and morphosyntactic structures. Therefore, both basic and intervention research of oral language abilities of adults who struggle with reading might also benefit from addressing dialect differences explicitly.

Future Directions

There are various gaps in the literature that need to be addressed. For example, there was only one

study found that included syntactic skills among adults who struggle with their reading. In addition, recent adult literacy researchers (Nanda, Greenberg, & Morris, 2010; Nanda, Greenberg, & Morris, 2014; Pae et al., 2012) have indicated that it is unclear whether tests designed for children are appropriate for adult learners. Therefore, although the studies described in this review clearly show that adult learners have difficulties with various oral language skills, it is unclear whether the measures that are used to assess these skills are valid and reliable with this population. In addition, while the tests appear to capture the adults' weaknesses, the measures may not be adequate in capturing their strengths. Finally, dialect use has not been studied with struggling adult readers, but based on the cited literature, we feel that further research with adults who have low literacy skills is warranted. For example, in a study by Craig et al. (2009), children who spoke high amounts of NMAE and learned to use MAE when taking literacy tasks outperformed other students who spoke high amounts of NMAE but did not learn to use MAE on these tasks. It may be useful to explore whether these types of findings are also apparent with adult learners.

Suggestions for Instruction

This literature review highlights the importance of oral language skills and corresponds to several of the newly released College and Career Readiness (CCR; Pimentel, 2013) standards. While following these CCR standards are not required in ABE classrooms, they do provide a framework that ABE instructors can use as a guide in their teaching. According to these standards, it is recommended that ABE instructors focus both on complex reading and writing skills as well as speaking and listening skills. It is hoped that adults who are exposed to all of these skills will improve both their print and verbal communication skills. The following sections contain suggestions from various sources for ABE instructors

to follow when teaching specific oral language skills.

Phonological awareness. The CCR (Pimentel, 2013) suggests that adults should be able to understand spoken words, phonemes, and syllables. Instructors can facilitate this by asking students to identify rhyming words and to produce other rhymes. As appropriate, students can practice saying the sounds of all letters, especially the short and long vowel sounds in different combinations. Students can also be given exercises in which they are asked to isolate or subtract phonemes in words in order to produce other words. For example, McShane (2005) suggests that in order to teach phoneme isolation, teachers can ask individuals to pick out and provide single sounds from words (e.g., "What is the last sound in *camp*?" (/p/)). In order to teach phoneme deletion, it is suggested that teachers ask individuals to identify a word when a single sound is removed from a word (e.g., "What is *task* without the /t/ sound?" (ask)) (McShane, 2005).

Morphological awareness. Tighe and Binder (2013) suggest that instructors should explicitly teach adults how to break down morphologically complex words (i.e., words with multiple morphemes) and understand each part individually in order to improve reading skills. Teachers can ask students to provide the different morphological parts (base, suffix, prefix) of a word. An instructor could ask, "Label the base, prefix, and suffix in the word *uncollected*." In this example, the base would be *collect*, the prefix is *un-*, and the suffix is *-ed*. Asking students to provide all three parts seeks indication that a student understands each part of the word and knows which parts can be morphologically broken down.

Vocabulary. Curtis (2006) suggests that ABE instructors incorporate intensive vocabulary lessons into their classrooms. Specifically, instructors can introduce new words and their meanings to learners and the learners are then encouraged to think about and use those words in several different contexts.

McShane (2005) suggests that teachers ensure frequent exposure to new words, especially those that they would normally encounter regularly in everyday life. For example, if adults in a classroom live in the suburbs, the teacher may want to hold a class discussion on what the word *suburb* means and then have students read a passage on suburban living. The CCR (Pimentel, 2013) suggests that students acquire and use words gathered through conversations with others and reading in order to improve their communication skills. A way to do this is to present passages to students using words that they may not know and ask students to use those words in conversations with each other and in writing.

Listening comprehension. To improve listening comprehension skills, instructors can ask learners to recall spoken stories, follow spoken directions, and answer questions about spoken stories (Sabatini et al., 2010). Like McShane's (2005) suggestion for teaching vocabulary, instructors can include stories or directions that individuals may hear in everyday life or at work. To illustrate this, an instructor may tell a story about adults like them in another ABE course and then ask them questions about those individuals. Additionally, the CCR (Pimentel, 2013) suggests that individuals should participate in different types of discussions (e.g., one on one, or in small or large groups) with different people to develop their comprehension skills. Instructors should encourage students to ask questions in order clarify topics that have been discussed. Furthermore, instructors should help students distinguish when it is appropriate to use formal speech (e.g., when giving presentations) and informal speech (e.g., when talking to friends).

Syntactic knowledge. Syntax skills can be improved by giving students flashcards with different words written on them, and asking the students to put the words together in order to produce progressively

more complicated sentences. The CCR (Pimentel, 2013) suggests that instructors encourage their students to demonstrate knowledge of grammar use when writing and speaking. A way instructors can do this is by providing sentences and asking students to explain the different functions of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, etc.

Dialect. Instruction could be designed to be responsive to students' dialect differences. For example, grammatical morphemes like *-ed* are often omitted in many spoken NMAE dialects; therefore, they are often absent from students' writing. Similarly, dialect differences would be important to consider when teaching about syntax, as the spoken syntax of many NMAE dialects differs from written syntax. Instruction that makes clear how these forms are represented in speech and print may benefit adult learners. ❖

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