A GUIDEBOOK FOR TEACHING

ABOUT THE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

lan·guage \ 'laŋ-gwij\ *n* [ME]
language, fr. L *lingua* — more at T
pronunciation, and the methods of c
stood by a considerable community
communicating ideas or feelings by
signs, gestures, marks, or esp. artic
suggestion by objects, actions, or con
feelings (3) : the means by which a
rmal system of signs and symbols (a
les for the formation and transformat
a : form or manner of verbal expres
cabulary and phraseology belongin
owledge c : abusive

JOHN CORMICAN
GENE STANFORD

Ninety-four reproducible exercises, plus student activities
and sample test items for effectively teaching about

A Guidebook for Teaching About the ENGLISH LANGUAGE

JOHN CORMICAN
Utica College of Syracuse University

GENE STANFORD
Utica College of Syracuse University

This book is part of A GUIDEBOOK FOR TEACHING Series

For Elin

About the authors

John Cormican, who has taught English language courses for more than fifteen years, and has served as Associate Professor of English at Utica College of Syracuse University, received his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. A regular contributor to *The Old English Newsletter*, he has also published in a number of other journals including: *Ball State University Forum, Papers in Linguistics, Social Casework, Geriatrics, Child: Care, Health and Development* and *University of South Florida Language Quarterly*. His articles cover the study of the English language from Old English linguistics and Germanic philology to today's sociolinguistics.

Gene Stanford, a former high school English teacher, received his Ph.D. from the University of Colorado. He has served as Associate Professor of Education and Director of Teacher Education Programs at Utica College of Syracuse University. Dr. Stanford is the author of numerous books, including *A Guidebook for Teaching Composition, A Guidebook for Teaching Creative Writing,* and *Human Interaction in Education,* and is Consulting Editor for the *Guidebook for Teaching* Series, all published by Allyn and Bacon, Inc.

Preface

From its inception, this book has been designed to serve a unique purpose: providing the English teacher with so many specific ideas and resources for teaching about the English language that he or she could never use them all. There are already too many books that outline in a general way what high school students need to know about their own language, that convey the content of language study without providing specific suggestions for how to help students learn that content.

By contrast, we have tried to produce a comprehensive handbook with an emphasis on practicality. For each aspect of language that a teacher might wish to introduce students to, *A Guidebook for Teaching About the English Language* provides instructional objectives, a summary of the basic concepts related to that area of the content, classroom activities, discussion questions, small-group activities, projects, individual assignments, annotated lists of materials, and even sample tests. Perhaps the most valuable feature of the book is the section of Reproduction Pages, which can be used to make masters for spirit duplication or transparencies for the overhead projector—saving the teacher hours of preparation time.

Although the book often suggests a sequence of activities that might be useful in teaching a particular concept, the teacher can choose those materials and strategies that he or she wants to use without being locked into prescribed lesson plans. In general, for each topic the book provides:

1. A brief introduction to the concepts that the chapter deals with, along with a brief discussion of why these concepts might be important for students to study and an outline of what choices the teacher may need to make in organizing instruction of these concepts

2. A list of objectives that the methods and materials in the chapter help the student achieve, saving teachers the tedium of writing behavioral objectives of lesson plans

3. An overview of the content of the chapter, which serves a dual purpose: first, to remind the teacher of the basic content of that particular area of language study; and second, to provide the raw material for brief lectures by the teachers if he or she wishes to utilize this teaching method

4. A wealth of learning experiences to involve the student actively in the study of the concepts of the chapter

5. Sample tests to determine how well the student has achieved the objectives of the unit

6. Annotated lists of materials, including books, films, filmstrips, cassettes, and slide-tape programs

Rather than promote a single approach to teaching about language, our goal has been to suggest activities and materials that teachers with a wide variety of teaching styles and philosophies will find useful. Thus, for example, although we describe numerous activities that put students to work in small groups (since we believe this is an extremely effective approach that many teachers have neglected), we also include activities that allow the students to work individually. The reader is encouraged to understand the rationale for each of the approaches and to choose those which are most consistent with his or her own goals and students' needs.

However, we do have our own set of biases—our own viewpoint, if you will—based on our own ideas of what language study should be and our own philosophy of education developed from a number of years of teaching English in many different settings. This viewpoint is likely to be evident throughout the book. We believe, for example, that students need to be exposed to new ideas clearly; that students learn more when they are given the opportunity to relate new ideas to their own experience; that students learn from discussions with their fellow students as well as from listening to the teacher; that in order to be valuable education must also be dangerous or controversial at times; and finally that language is intrinsically interesting because language is human behavior.

Most of the activities and approaches included in this book were developed for, and used successfully with, our own classes. We feel confident, therefore, that many other teachers will find them practical and useful. But we have no way of knowing whether *A Guidebook for Teaching About the English Language* has been helpful without feedback from those who use it. We invite you to write us your comments about the book, using the Feedback Form that appears at the end of the book (p. 458). It can be torn out and mailed with a minimum of inconvenience. We promise you a personal reply and will sincerely appreciate your suggestions. They will help us decide what kinds of changes to make when we revise this book.

Our gratitude is extended to the producers of educational materials who supplied us with review copies and to the following copyright holders who gave us permission to use material published previously: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, St. Martin's Press, John Wiley and Sons, Houghton Mifflin Company, University of Michigan Press, Prentice-Hall, and the Ohio Historical Society.

John Cormican
Gene Stanford

A Guidebook for Teaching
About the
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Contents

1

Language as a System of Human Behavior

This chapter introduces language, differentiates it from things with which it is commonly confused, and explains the systematic way that a child acquires language. A practical result of this unit is that students should lose their fear of speaking, since, by definition, all normal children learn the "correct" system of their language at an early age. An ancillary result is that students should develop a heightened awareness of nonverbal types of human communication and of nonhuman communication.

First, the student should be made aware that language is only one method of human communication, but also the most precise one. This idea may be illustrated by using gestures, body language, and writing to express simple ideas like "Come here" and "I am afraid of you." One should also point out initially that preschoolers communicate clearly before they learn to write.

Next, the student should notice how limited his or her communication would be if he or she were limited to the types of nonlinguistic modes of communication that other species have and that he or she was limited to as an infant. Obvious examples that students are likely to be familiar with are dogs and cats. This awareness should increase the student's appreciation for language as a unique human attribute, since only humans have the potential to develop language.

Finally, the student may be introduced to the idea that language is developed by each child in a systematic way with various stages. This topic can serve as an introduction to the concept that language has structure.

The first two topics in this chapter are essential to the study of language as language. The teacher will have to decide whether he or she wishes to introduce the third topic as well.

OBJECTIVES

If all the topics in this chapter are chosen by the teacher, the student should, at the end, be able to:

1. Define language
2. Explain the relationship and difference between language and writing
3. Give examples of nonverbal communication used by humans
4. Explain why the communication systems of species other than humans are not language
5. Demonstrate that language is arbitrary in selecting sequences of sound to represent a particular concept
6. Give at least one example of the systematic nature of the English language
7. Give evidence that a language is learned rather than inborn
8. Identify the stages of language development in a small child

---

CONTENT OVERVIEW

What Language Is

Language is a learned *oral* system of arbitrary symbols used for communication among human beings. Language is arbitrary because each language reflects the peculiar experiences of its speakers, that is, their culture. Nevertheless, each language has its own systematized or patterned way in which these oral symbols may be combined.

It will be obvious to students that a baby is not born speaking English or Spanish or Japanese. It may be less obvious, however, that a child has no particular predisposition toward learning one language as opposed to another. Instead, a child is born with an innate ability to learn language, and the particular one or ones he or she learns are determined by the language or languages he or she hears in the immediate environment.

Since students mastered their language before they came to school and have spent a great deal of time in school reading and writing, it is necessary to emphasize that language is oral and that writing is only an attempt to approximate a particular language graphically. These points may be made by noting that writing is a relatively recent development in the history of man—the earliest writing systems more advanced than picture drawing are only about five thousand years old—while language has been used as long as man has been *Homo sapiens,* since the thinking and cultural developments that define *Homo sapiens* could not exist without language. It should also be noted that many cultures in the world, as well as illiterate members of the literate cultures, have developed language but make no use of writing systems; the converse is never true: no culture ever developed a writing system without first developing a language to be recorded by that writing system.

That language is a system should be readily apparent to students who speak or have studied more than one language. To reinforce this concept or to introduce it to those unfamiliar with more than one language, it will be useful to contrast the parts of different language systems illustrated by the "same" sentence in different languages: *The book is large*; Latin *magnus liber* (literally, "large [is] book"); German *Das Buch ist gross;* Hebrew *hasefer gadol* (literally, "the book [is] large"). It might also be useful to point out the system, that is, word order, inflections, derivational affixes, function words, and intonation patterns, in simple English sentences like *The beautiful girl reads very well, The beautiful girl reads very well?* and *Does the beautiful girl read very well?*

That language is arbitrary can be shown by pointing out that while the biological function of fatherhood is a universal human phenomenon, words for that function do not sound very similar: Spanish *padre*; German *Vater*; Yoruba *baba*; Irish *athir*; and English *father, daddy,* and *pop.* Even onomatopoetic words are arbitrary despite the claim that such words sound like the things they represent in nature. For

instance, the following words for the sounds of a dog barking—Japanese *wung-wung*, Urdu *vow-vow*, French *gnaf-gnaf*, Irish *amh-amh*, and Serbo-Croatian *av-av*—do not sound much like the English onomatopoetic words *bow-wow*, *arf-arf*, and *ruff-ruff* (which do not sound all that similar to each other). Similarly, dropping a book on a desk and asking English-speaking students to write the word for the sound of the book dropping will elicit conventional and dissimilar-sounding words like *thud, bang, boom, plop, bam,* and some creative contributions from the students.

The combinations of sounds used in a language are also symbolic, that is, they stand for something in that particular language. In English, the word *kitten* stands symbolically for a particular thing commonly found in the environment of English-speaking people. The word *nettik* does not. Similarly, the syntactic arrangement of the words in the sentence *The teacher can read a book very rapidly* represents a possible relationship between things common to the English-speaking culture; *a book rapidly very can teacher the read,* on the other hand, is not English and does not stand for anything (despite the fact that it is made up of individual English words, i.e., meaningful combinations of sound).

Since language is symbolic and human, it follows that humans use it to communicate ideas among themselves. While some communication could be carried on if people carried around objects they wanted to communicate about so they could point to them, or if they could draw clear pictures, no one could carry everything around with him or her that he or she might want to talk about, and not all persons can draw intelligible pictures. The most important function of language, however, is in communicating abstract ideas like love, morality, and history; without language, one could not communicate the humane ideas which separate *Homo sapiens* from other species.

Only humans have language. Of course, other species are able to communicate by bodily movements (often instinctive) just as humans can. Many species also communicate orally; the important differences between the oral communications of other species and human languages are that the oral communications of other species are instinctive rather than learned, limited in number as opposed to infinite, restricted to the immediate environment as opposed to capable of representing things not present, and nonspecific rather than specific. For example, a mother chicken may cluck in such a way as to indicate danger to her chicks without having to teach them the meaning of these clucks, but she cannot communicate danger ahead of time so that the chicks will know what to fear, nor can she indicate that the danger is represented by two foxes seventy yards away in some tall grass as opposed to a hawk flying toward the chicks from the northeast. She also cannot communicate a very large repertoire of things to her chicks other than warnings or calls to approach her.

Other Methods of Communication

Humans also have other ways of communicating than through language and the graphic attempts to represent language, that is, writing. Attempts to represent writing and thus language secondarily like Morse code, semaphore, and Braille are interesting but peripheral. More important, however, are gestures, which are conscious body movements (usually of hands and arms), and kinesics, which are largely unconscious body movements and may involve the whole body. Gestures of greeting and farewell are the easiest to illustrate and, of course, vary from culture to culture. Students will also be familiar with standardized insulting gestures and hand movements to indicate that someone else is crazy. They will be less familiar with how the whole body is used to communicate, but even here they should be able to grasp how certain emotions like fear are communicated by the body. They may be made aware of how certain body movements are made to emphasize important words if they are shown silent movies or sound movies or television with the sound turned off.

How Children Learn a Language

Just as a child makes random body movements before he or she learns to use his or her body to communicate, a child makes random oral noises before learning to use the sounds as part of language. The child makes crying sounds initially, cooing sounds during the third month after birth, and babbling sounds in the

fifth or sixth months. It is not until sometime between the ages of eight and eighteen months that the child begins to use the sounds he or she makes to approximate the sounds that an adult would make in order to express an idea, that is, to use language.

At the first or holophrastic stage of language development, the child speaks one-word sentences. *Eat* may mean *I want to eat,* for example. At the second or analytic stage, the child recognizes the different elements in his or her holophrastic sentences and may say sentences like *Me eat.* At the third or syntactic stage, the child has established classes of words and makes substitutions from among these classes in his telegraphic sentences (those sentences devoid of grammatical morphemes like articles, prepositions, and noun and verb inflections); the child may say *Mommy eat* and *Daddy eat* as well as *Me eat,* and *Me drink* and *Me sleep* as well as *Me eat.* The structural stage ends when the child starts using subordinate clauses like *Will you read to me if I drink my milk?* At the last or stylistic stage of language development, the child develops a repertoire of ways to say "the same thing" and knows that they have the same meaning, such as *Give the ball to me* and *Give me the ball.* Even in the stylistic stage, initially the child's language will differ significantly from that of an adult in some ways, such as avoiding passive sentences and using *because* and *therefore* to express time relationships rather than causal ones; at the end of the stylistic stage, the child will not only speak like an adult, but he will also be an adult linguistically.

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Topic I: What Language Is

- Have students break up into groups of four or five and assign each group to come up with a definition of language. Have a member from each group write that group's definition of language on the board. Let the class arrive at the definition of language by discussing the groups' definitions, but be prepared to ask relevant questions to elicit aspects of language that the groups may all have overlooked.

- Ask a student who speaks Pig Latin or any other concealment language to explain how to speak it. The important thing to emphasize here is that the concealment language is systematic (in this case, a systematic changing of an already systematic language).

- Ask students who speak a non-English language to contrast a short sentence in that language with its English equivalent in terms of word order of subject-verb-(object) and modifiers, that is, adjectives before or after nouns, and grammatical categories like grammatical gender or inflections for case. The point to be made here is that English has a system, too, but one that most speakers of English have not thought about consciously.

- Drop an object or break a stick and ask the students to write down the word for the sound they have just heard. You will probably elicit several conventional words from the students. You should then point out that the words may be quite dissimilar and yet are used to describe the same sound. The point here is that even so-called onomatopoetic words are arbitrary; they, like all other words, have no natural connection to the sounds they are alleged to represent but are only conventional, arbitrary symbols for those sounds.

- Ask the students to write down the sound that a dog makes while barking and then ask them what they wrote. If responses include things like *bow-wow, woof, arf-arf,*

and *ruff-ruff,* point out how dissimilar and arbitrary these words are and that none of them really reflects the sound a barking dog makes. If there are students in the class who speak a non-English language, ask them what the words for the barking of a dog are in those languages. They should be different enough from the English words to make the point clearly about language sounds being arbitrary.

- To demonstrate that language is oral and that writing is secondary and sometimes a poor representation of language, have the students say the following phrases, which may be written the same way but that are said differently and have different meanings (students may provide other examples):

    1. Frank's Body Works (car repair shop)
       Frank's Body Works (newspaper headline about a superior athlete)

    2. old maid (spinster)
       old maid (elderly servant)

    3. hot line (direct phone communication)
       hot line (wire with electrical current)

    4. little woman (wife)
       little woman (small female)

    5. old man (father)
       old man (elderly male)

    6. look over the fence (examine it)
       look over the fence (peer on the other side)

- To prove that the English language has a system, ask the students to indicate whether the following sentences are English or not. Although the students may not be able to explain why some sentence is not English, the point to emphasize is that they *know* the system or they could not classify the sentences as English or non-English:

    1. Bill often eats here.

    2. Bill never eats here.

    3. Never, Bill eats here.

    4. Often, Bill eats here.

    5. John writes a lot.

    6. Writes John a lot?

    7. Does John write a lot?

    8. Mary saw door.

    9. Mary saw the door.

    10. He arrived today.

    11. He arrived tomorrow.

    12. He arrived yesterday.

    13. He saw a dog.

14. He saw two dog.

15. He saw a deer.

16. He saw two deer.

- Have each student write a short essay relating an experience where he or she has misinterpreted the communications of a pet or a small baby.

Topic II: Other Methods of Communication

- Divide the class into groups of three or four and instruct them to write a story that will be acted out without words or in mime. Let the rest of the class attempt to determine what the story was about. If your students are good actors, you may discover that they communicate well with gestures and kinesics. If so, emphasize the idea of nonlinguistic communication. If no one can figure out the stories, emphasize the importance of language in human communication.

- As a variation on the activity above, let each member of the group acting out the story say *one* key word as he or she acts. This may help the rest of the class interpret the body movements more accurately and see the importance of body movements accompanying speech in communication.

- Show silent movies or sound movies or television with the sound turned off and let the class carry on a running commentary about what is happening on the screen. They may be able to interpret the screen action quite well.

- If there are any Boy Scouts or other students in the class who can signal messages with flags, have them demonstrate this method of communication.

- Use your state's driver's license manual to illustrate the traditional hand signals for turns and stops while driving a car. It will be necessary to point out to students that for many years cars did not come equipped with turn signals.

- Ask your students what is communicated by traffic signals when the red, yellow, and green lights are on and what flashing red lights and flashing yellow lights mean when one is driving.

- Ask your students to demonstrate how they would warn each other that you were coming back to the classroom if you had left it momentarily after telling them to remain quietly in their seats while you were gone.

- Ask your students to demonstrate gestures with which they are familiar. Be prepared for the worst gestures, but try to elicit handshakes, kisses, salutes, bowing, and kneeling.

- If any of your students plays catcher on a baseball or softball team, ask him or her to demonstrate signals he or she uses with the pitcher.

- Ask students with pets to tell how their pets communicate with them and specifically *what* they can communicate.

- Tape a dog barking, a cat meowing, a cow mooing, a baby crying, etc., and ask the students to interpret what each sound means. There will probably be wide discrepancies in their interpretations.

- Identify students wearing rings or jewelry and ask them to show them to the rest of the class. Have the rest of the class interpret the message conveyed by the jewelry. Class rings, birthstone rings, crosses, and Stars of David will be obvious communicators, but there may also be more subtle messages. You might also want to mention what wedding rings communicate.

- Have each student write a short essay on the many ways he or she communicates with a close friend or relative.

- Have each student observe a sports activity or a ceremony such as a wedding, a funeral, or any religious ritual and report back to the class on the paralinguistic and kinesic aspects of the event.

Topic III: How Children Learn a Language

- Assign different groups to approximate how a child at the ages of one month, one year, two years, and three years would convey the following different messages to its parents: *I am tired; I am hungry; my stomach hurts; I wet my diaper (or pants).* Be prepared for the groups dealing with the child at the first two ages to become frustrated, but use that frustration to point out that babies must often be frustrated too and that language is probably more important to the students now than they may have realized.

- Arrange for some students who have younger brothers, sisters, nephews, or nieces to have them brought to school so the students can talk to their younger relatives and elicit linguistic responses from them. This activity should obviously be coordinated with parents' day or be conducted sometime when adults would be visiting the school anyway in order to inconvenience the parents of the small children as little as possible. The young child will be most likely to talk (coo or babble) with a familiar person, that is, the student who is related to the child.

- Show a film or play a record or a tape of young children talking. If the child is still an infant, no doubt an adult will be talking with the child. You may then point out how the adult stimulates the child to talk and reinforces the child's attempts. If the child is old enough to be corrected by the adult, point out that this correction is necessary for the child to learn the language of the surrounding adult world.

- From a film or their own observations, ask the students to pick out examples of how an adult talking to a small child changes his or her speech pattern to help the child learn; for example, saying, *Give Mommy a kiss* rather than *Give me a kiss,* using short sentences with no subordinate clauses, and using simple words.

- From a film or tape of a baby or observation of a baby, ask the students to pick out which sounds the child can make or if the child is a little older which sounds or sequences of sound he cannot make.

- From a film or tape or direct observation of a baby, have the students listen for intonation patterns which sound like English sentences (even if the words are unintelligible).

- From a film or tape or observation, have the students pick out the kinds of words