WORD LEVEL CHALLENGES

1. Vocabulary Depth. English has the largest vocabulary of any language. Not only does English borrow words from other languages, but it is also the language of technology, academics, and diplomacy. As a result, there is an extraordinary number of word connotations to be learned for a variety of settings. Learners need to be familiar with a large number of these words in order to comprehend lectures and to read content.

2. Phraseological Patterning. In all languages, words tend to evolve in meaning from the concrete to the metaphorical and to often be used idiomatically. For example, in English parliamentary language the word table can be used in expressions like table a motion; chair as chair a committee; and floor as hold the floor. In a similar manner, take off, raining cats and dogs, and hold the phone! are idioms which have specific meanings and uses.

3. Word Morphology. Morphology is the study of language that is concerned with units of meaning in words. In English, meaning is usually assigned to the endings of words, as in time (verb tense: he walks, he is walking, he walked, etc.), plurality (cats, children), and word category (noun - fault; verb - falsify; adjective - false; adverb - falsely, etc.). Many other languages assign meaning to the beginning of words. Hence, many ELLs, especially from Asian language backgrounds, tend not to pronounce word endings as completely.
as native English speakers, since word endings do not possess similar meaning in other languages. Learners also may not readily recognize these meaning patterns in print.

**SENTENCE LEVEL CHALLENGES**

4. **Sentence Complexity.** The English sentence has varied clause patterns, such as independent clause (e.g., I see the ball); coordinating clause (e.g., I hit the ball, and he caught it); and subordinating clause (e.g., Although he was tired, he did his homework). In addition, the English sentence has voice: active (e.g., She saw the movie); and passive (e.g., The movie was seen by her).

Other languages may or may not have similar structures. For example, the Arabic language does not express subordination. As a result, it is very challenging for Arabic language speakers to recognize and use subordinate clauses in reading and writing. In general, when another language does not have a feature similar to English, learners will be challenged to use it accurately.

5. **Transitional Devices.** Our thinking is broadened and our production of language is refined through transitional words. When we hear or read text, our comprehension is increased by the use of these words to connect ideas to each other.

The following examples describe the different categories of transitional words: addition: besides, further, too, moreover. comparison: whereas, nevertheless, vis a vis. proof: because, evidently, in fact, that is. exception: yet, still, in spite of, sometimes. time: immediately, soon, finally, later, next. repetition: in brief, as I have said, as noted. emphasis: definitely, absolutely, certainly. sequence: following this, at this point, thus. example: for instance, to illustrate. summary: in brief, on the whole, therefore.

Because transitional devices are more commonly used in receptive (listening and reading) use of language, they are usually the most difficult to use in speaking and in writing. They require a great deal of practice.

6. **Pronominal References.** In oral and in written language, there is consistent reference to people and things through the use of pronouns. This can become a source of confusion in comprehending meaning.

The following pronouns are examples:

**Referring to persons:** I, my, mine, me, myself; who, whose, whom, whoever; everybody, anybody, somebody; no one, nobody.

**Referring to things:** This, one, each, some, any, all, that, many, more, much, these, few, whatever, whichever.

Learners need constant reminders about how the above words refer to antecedent people and objects in all aspects of language use.

**TEACHING SUGGESTIONS**

1. "It's the vocabulary, stupid!" Oblique presidential reference aside, one important suggestion is to be aware of the enormous importance of highlighting vocabulary, especially content-related words which support and enhance meaning. Transitional devices, phraseological usage of metaphors and idioms, and connotative meanings must be anticipated and taught, so students will be better able to comprehend what they hear and read.

2. **Anticipate problem areas prior to teaching or use of text.** Complex, unfamiliar sentence structures, unknown vocabulary, and pronoun references can be anticipated by acknowledging them and utilizing a 'teachable moment' in the process of teaching content.

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The time taken to overcome inherent difficulties with English will result in enormous benefit to struggling learners, regardless of cultural or linguistic background. Ongoing, periodic focus on language will result in a more strategic approach to learning.