Learning to Write Quality Language Objectives: Lessons Learned from Preservice Bilingual Teachers

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Need for the Study

- The development of academic Spanish is essential in the preparation of bilingual teachers, especially in regions such as the US-Mexico border.
- It is important to identify effective practices in the preparation of bilingual teachers to deliver content area instruction in Spanish.
    - Content knowledge
    - Pedagogical knowledge
    - Effective instructional strategies for emergent bilinguals students
    - Knowledge of academic Spanish

Research Question

- How do preservice bilingual teachers apply their understanding of teaching language through content into their instructional planning?

Academic Language

- Academic language is acquired in school, and is the language students need to succeed in school (Cummins, 2008).
- Academic language requires the use of higher order thinking skills, and teaching academic language is complex (Zwiers, 2008).
- Academic language includes vocabulary, syntactic structures, and discourse elements (Cummins, 2008; Egbert & Ernst-Slavit, 2010; Scarcella, 2003; Zwiers, 2008).
- Teacher must understand the three levels of academic language (text, sentence, and word) to plan and deliver instruction in the bilingual classroom.

Teaching Language through Content

- Freeman and Freeman (2008) identify four reasons to teach language through content to emergent bilingual students:
    1. Students learn content and language simultaneously
    2. Students acquire language in a natural way
    3. Students have authentic reasons to use language
    4. Students acquire the registers of the different content areas
- Teachers who teach language through content need to
    - Understand language
    - Understand how language is used to construct meaning
    - Have knowledge of language development strategies in the different content areas. (Janzen, 2008; Rea & Mercuri, 2006; Schleppegrell and de Oliveira, 2006)
    - Teaching language through content can be accomplished by including language objectives in content area lessons at the word, sentence, and text level (Freeman & Freeman, 2009; Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2013).

The Four Language Domains

- Developing proficiency in academic language requires developing competency in the four language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Egbert & Ernst-Slavit, 2010).
- Teachers of emergent bilinguals must understand the complexities of each of the language domains to support their students' language development.

Qualitative Study

- Aim: To explore preservice bilingual teachers' understanding of teaching language through content by analyzing their lesson planning.
- Setting: University on the US-Mexico border
- Content Area Methods in the Bilingual Classroom
- Participants: 65 preservice bilingual teachers
                                63 male and 2 female
- Data: 271 content area lesson plans
          four semesters

Language Objectives Targeting the Three Levels of Academic Language

Text Level:

Texto: Los estudiantes explicarán oralmente su método usado de cómo hallaron la ubicación de objetos o como pudieron llegar a un punto a otro.

[Text: Students will explain orally their method to find the location of objects or how they were able to get from one point to another.]

Sentence Level:

Oración: Los estudiantes usarán oraciones completas al dar direcciones oralmente de cómo llegar de un punto a otro o la ubicación de objetos.

[Sentence: Students will use complete sentences to give directions orally on how to get from one point to another or to the location of objects.]

Word Level:

Vocabulario: Los estudiantes usarán palabras de señalización al describir la ubicación de objetos o como llegar a un lugar como: alrededor, entre, en frente de, atrás de, adentro, afuera, a la izquierda, a la derecha, encima, de bajo, junto a, y a lado de.

[Word: Students will use signal words when describing the location of objects or how to get to a certain place such as: around, between, in front, behind, inside, outside, to the left, to the right, above, below, adjacent, next to.]

Language Objectives Targeting the Four Language Domains

Listening and Speaking:

Los estudiantes escucharan a la maestra leer un texto y contestaran preguntas oralmente sobre la lectura.

[Students will listen to the teacher read a text and will answer questions orally about the reading.]

Reading and Speaking:

Los estudiantes tomaran turnos leyendo los párrafos de los textos de los libros, discutirán en grupos de cuatro el clima de las diferentes regiones de Texas, y contestaran preguntas en voz alta de la maestra.

[Students will take turns reading the paragraphs from the textbook, they will discuss in groups of four the weather of the different regions of Texas and will answer questions aloud for the teacher.]

Conclusions and Implications
- Preservice bilingual teachers need sustained opportunities across coursework to understand how to teach content to emergent bilinguals and help them develop academic language.
- Preservice bilingual teachers would benefit from multiple opportunities to engage in analysis and discussion of academic texts that would help them understand the complexities of academic language.
- Preservice bilingual teachers need to understand that academic language includes, not only vocabulary, but also grammar, syntax, and discourse patterns.
- Preservice bilingual teachers would benefit from multiple opportunities across coursework to engage in the design of language objectives that address the three levels of academic language (text, sentence, and word) as well as the four language domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

Activity #1
GRADE: Identify a grade level
THEMATIC UNIT:
TEKS: Identify state standards in at least three content areas
Identify possible language objectives that could be accomplished during this unit

Aspects of Academic Language	Language Dimensions			
	Listening	**Speaking**	**Reading**	**Writing**
Vocabulary				
Grammar/Sentence				
Discourse/Text				

*Adapted from Egbert & Ernst-Slavit (2010). Figure 1.9 Dimensions of academic langauge. p. 9

Activity #2
Analyze the following language objectives locating each one in the corresponding cell
1- Define and use vocabulary related to the assignment, including *primary, secondary, source,* and *massacre*
2- Construct sentences with the formats "I want____because____" and "I would____ because____"
3- Write a biography on a favorite historical person

Aspects of Academic Language	Language Dimensions			
	Listening	**Speaking**	**Reading**	**Writing**
Vocabulary				
Grammar/Sentence				
Discourse/Text				

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