

Language *as* Content and Language *of* Content: What's the Difference?

Defining the Language Construct: Strategies and Implications

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Overview

- Context
- Key question
- A perspective on language
 - Content and language
 - A framework for defining academic English language
- An approach to validity: Defining the language construct
- Status, implications, and next steps

Context

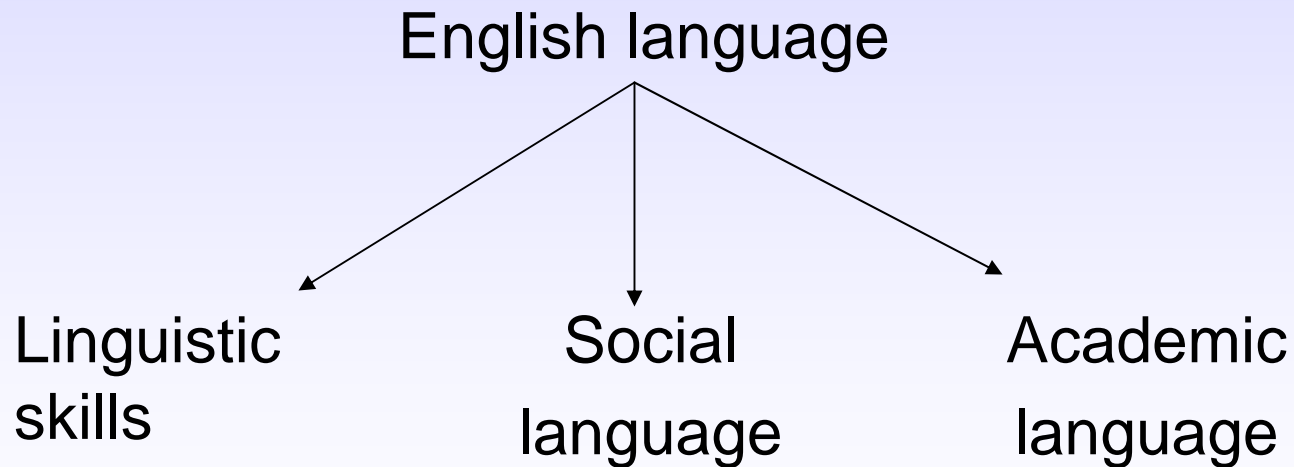
- The English language learner (ELL) population numbers over 5 million students
 - Approximately 10% of all students in grades K–12 nationally
 - One of the fastest growing subgroups in the nation
- ELLs face the challenge of learning the English language simultaneously with academic content
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001
- Substantial performance gap between ELL and non-ELL students

Key Question

- What is the nature of the language that students need to *meaningfully engage with* and *achieve* academic content?
 - How can we define the construct of *language* and the determine the degree to which academic *language* is distinct from academic *content*?

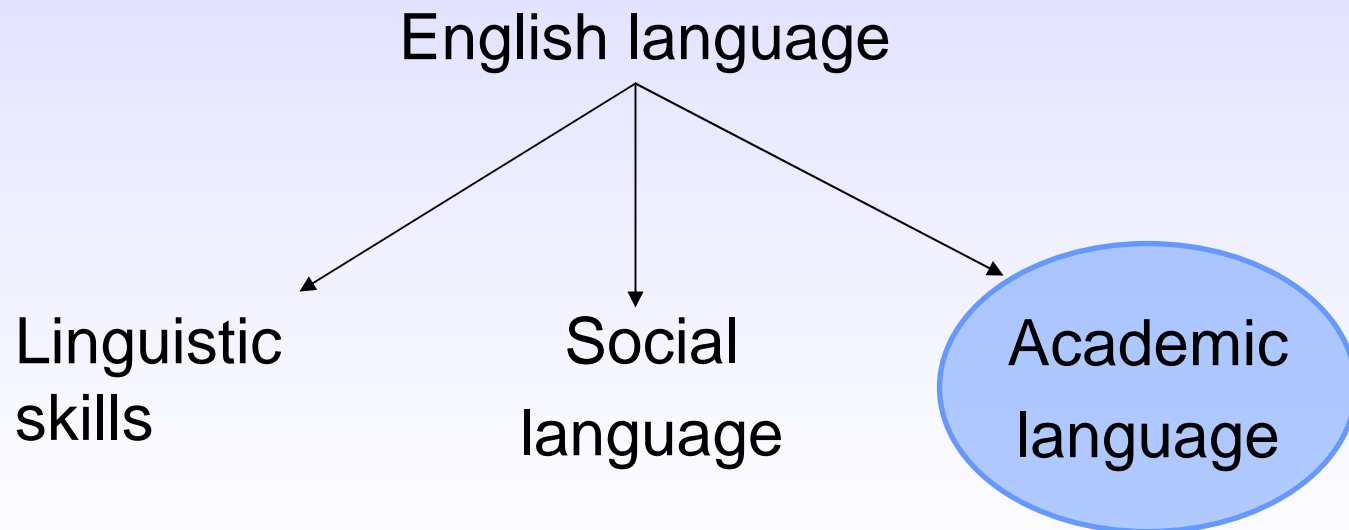
Language: A Perspective

Which aspects of language facilitate academic achievement?



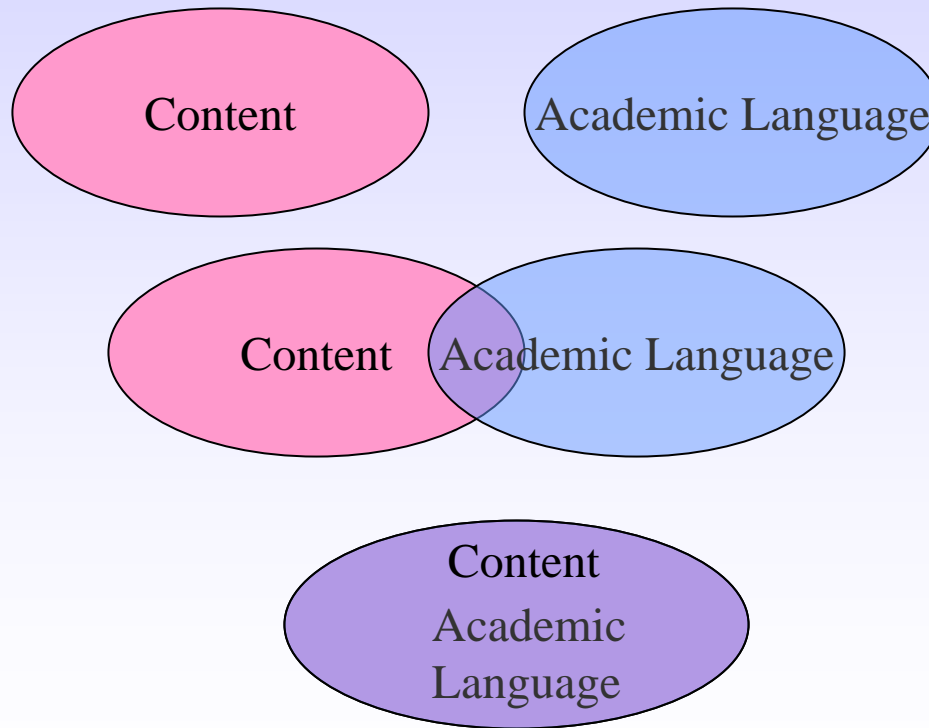
Language: A Perspective (cont.)

How can we define the construct of academic English language?



Content and Language

What is the relationship between academic content and academic English language?



Content and Language: Example

Content

- Reading comprehension

Academic language demands

- Labeling
- Organization
- Comparison/Contrast
- Description
- Summarization
- Analyzing
- Synthesizing
- Variation in:
 - Length
 - Amount of detail
 - Level of abstraction
 - Vocabulary
 - Sentence structure
 - Discourse style

Content and Language: Example

Content

- Geometric concepts

Academic language demands

- Identification
- Classification
- Comparison/Contrast
- Definition
- Analyzing
- Generalization
- Evaluation
- Variation in:
 - Length
 - Amount of detail
 - Level of abstraction
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A Framework for Defining Academic English Language (excerpt)

<i>Academic English Language Function</i>		<i>Operational Definition—The language needed to engage with and achieve in the content (standard or item) consists of the use of:</i>
	Identification	a word or phrase to name an object, action, event, idea, fact, problem, need, or process.
A	Labeling	a word or phrase to name an object, action, event, or idea.
	Enumeration	words or phrases to name distinct objects, actions, events, or ideas in a series, set, or in steps.

A Framework for Defining Academic English Language (excerpt)

D	Inquiring	words, phrases, or sentences to solicit information (e.g., <i>yes-no</i> questions, <i>wh</i> -questions, statements used as questions).
E	Description	word, phrase, or sentence to express or observe the attributes or properties of an object, action, event, idea, or solution.
F	Definition	word, phrase, or sentence to express the meaning of a given word, phrase, or expression.
G	Explanation	phrases, or sentences to express the rationale, reasons, causes, or relationships related to one or more actions, events, ideas, or processes. Discourse markers include coordinating conjunctions <i>so</i> , <i>for</i> , and adverbials such as <i>therefore</i> , <i>as a result</i> , <i>for that reason</i> .

An Approach to Validity: Defining the Language Construct

Involves:

- Systematic approach
- Triangulation of data
- Examination of convergent and divergent validity
- Establishment of a validity argument

Strategies:

- Theory and research
- Content analysis
- Statistical analysis

Theory and research strategies include:

Theory:

- Examination of similarities and differences

Research:

- Examination of the research outcomes as well as the evaluation of technical quality and generalizability of findings

Content analysis strategies include:

- Expert analysis
- Alignment studies

Statistical analysis strategies include:

- Correlations
- Factor analyses

Status, Implications, and Next Steps

- Work is underway
- We anticipate more/less convergence between language and content depending on:
 - Content (e.g., mathematics, English language arts)
 - Grade level/grade span (e.g., grade 4 vs. grade 8; elementary vs. high school)
 - English language proficiency level (e.g., beginning vs. advanced)
- There are implications for the valid and meaningful measurement of language as well as instruction
- A series of white papers that report on findings at key points in our research will be released for review/comment between August 2008 and August 2009

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