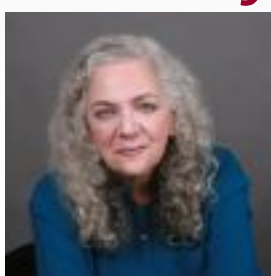




# Grammar and Syntax for SLPs

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*Grammar and Syntax: Developing School-Age Children's Oral and Written Language Skills* is a professional reference book that emphasizes practical strategies for speech-language pathologists (SLPs) in their diagnosis and treatment of preschool, school-age children, and adolescent developmental language difficulties. Grammar and syntax are among the skills that learners need for school success and that SLPs and education professionals can support. To promote interprofessional collaboration, this book is amply sourced with research across disciplines, including speech-language pathology, linguistics, education, and psychology. This book offers a general review of English grammar and syntax that may be of interest to reading teachers, learning disabilities tutors, and teachers of English Language Learners.

Effectively diagnosing difficulties with oral and written grammar and syntax depends in part upon formal testing of children's development and use of language form. However, to promote comprehensive diagnostic practices, *Grammar and Syntax* describes multiple approaches for gathering and analyzing observational evidence. This book not only discusses how grammatical and syntactic difficulties can manifest in younger children's oral language, but also explains how difficulties may not appear until learners are faced with the demands of advanced oral language and learning to read and write. The grammatical and syntactic abilities that underlie literacy difficulties are described in detail. Then, this book offers strategies for creative approaches to curriculum-based interventions.

One of my favorite undertakings as the author of this book was that I had the opportunity to describe the *cognitive-linguistic, psycholinguistic, metalinguistic, and pragmatic foundations for grammatical and syntactic maturity. Cognitive-linguistic competence* is a precondition for children to talk about ideas, concepts, feelings, and states of being. Some cognitive scientists suggest that language arises from cognitive processes, including attention, perception, memory, information processing, pattern recognition, and abstract thinking. Grammar and syntax flourish when children think complex thoughts and represent these thoughts in the words they speak. Simply put, to view syntactic development from a cognitivist perspective suggests that language is enhanced because a thinking child is immersed in an intellectually stimulating environment. This would promote interventions where children are learning interesting information, being creative, and expressing their ideas in speech and writing.

Sometimes, cognitive-linguistic development is explained by *information processing theory*. If we consider the workings of the brain's "storage units," not only does the brain store information, but it also activates, or reactivates, information that it has stored. Information processing theory could describe how grammatical and syntactic patterns come to be used repeatedly. More frequent usage of these patterns would result in a continuous strengthening of these connections. Syntactic growth might be a consequence of innumerate activation patterns along with the unlimited novel, creative variations that the brain allows within these patterns. This is because, unlike a computer, a human brain is capable of original thought. Human behavior is unpredictable; ingenuity and creativity are unbounded; and new connections are predicated on having enriching learning experiences as a basis for cognitive growth.

*Psycholinguistics* explores how the human mind is organized to generate and process language. Psycholinguistic research is concerned with how the mind works when language is being used. The purpose is to discover what the mind of a language user is doing. It appears that when language is in use the mind is engaging certain conscious ideas and intellectual faculties, along with activating unconscious processes, memories, and reflexive or instinctual behaviors. Language users experience unconscious and conscious use of their stored systems of grammar and syntax. The conscious exploration of one's one language is known as *metalinguistic awareness*. Speech-language interventions might be a means for enhancing the unconscious, daily use of grammar and syntax, or may offer learners strategies for developing their conscious, metalinguistic examination of grammatical and syntactic structures. This book considers the use of metalinguistic skills in the context of enhancing reading comprehension, written expression, and academic success.

*Pragmatics* is the branch of linguistics that explores the use, purpose, and intention of spoken and written messages. Pragmatic skill involves using language at length, in a coordinated fashion, with elaboration and complexity, in order to engage in interpersonal communication, to narrate experiences or events, and to speak publicly to a group or an audience. Interaction takes place not only during face-to-face communication but also when an individual is reading or writing any form of text. Inherent to pragmatic skills are sentence-level meaning making and processing abilities. Messages are shaped in part by their grammatical and syntactic components. Sentence-level skills for effective reading comprehension and written expression are discussed in this book.

Syntactic abilities have an impact on the pragmatic aspects of language comprehension. Language processing is dependent upon understanding the purposes and intents of other speakers. Pragmatic language ability influences how well listeners follow along when they need to process an extended series of verbal messages, which means that they are processing syntax at length, sentence by sentence. Older children and teens need to be able to understand speakers' lengthy messages that contain multiple syntactic forms per utterance. The length and complexity of these messages require simultaneous syntactic and pragmatic interpretations. Expressively, because mature speakers are adept at so many different communicative purposes, they require an array of advanced syntactic forms to convey their messages. The influential nature of pragmatics in the development of grammar and syntax is a key consideration addressed throughout this book.

Finally, I enjoyed writing about the linguistic properties of mature grammar and syntax. I offer ideas for comprehensive skills assessments, with primary emphasis on the clausal structures that typify mature English. Measuring the grammar and syntax of mature speakers is in part related to the available data on developmental trajectories, but assessment is specifically geared toward how speakers arrange multiple grammatical forms to build grammatically complex utterances.

In all, *Grammar and Syntax* offers strategies that can help SLPs document how language deficits contribute to learners' academic and literacy needs and, accordingly, can help enhance their linguistic participation in and out of school.

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