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A

ability FUNCTION

There are two common ways of expressing the notions of ability and inability. The first is lexically, using the adjectives *able/unable (to)*, *capable/incapable (of)* and verbs such as *to manage (to do something)*, *to succeed (in doing something)* and *to enable/help/assist/empower*, etc. *someone to do something*. The second is grammatically, using the modal verbs *can/can't* and *could/couldn't*:

> Scientists are now able to measure these changes much more accurately.
> He is incapable of singing in tune.
> On a clear day you can see forever.
> You can't take it with you.

Can is limited to present contexts and general truths, but for a future ability *to be able to* is used: *One day we'll be able to live on the moon*. In the past tense, both *could* and *to be able to* are used to talk about general abilities, but only *to be able to* is used to talk about achieving something on a particular occasion:

> She *could / was able to* speak fluent Chinese when she was younger.
> The door was locked but Jeff was able to open it with his credit card (but not
> *Jeff could open it …).

Can and *could* also express **permission** and **possibility**.

Good contexts for teaching the language of ability include talking about skills (e.g. in a job interview); talking about past achievements and difficulties that were surmounted (e.g. in a holiday narrative); making excuses (for things you can't, or couldn't, do) and describing what particular animals are capable of.

Academic Word List (AWL) VOCABULARY

The Academic Word List (AWL) is a list of nearly 600 word families that was compiled from a corpus of academic texts in four different disciplines: arts, commerce, law and science. The words selected for the list are both specialized and versatile: specialized in the sense that, although they fall outside the range of the 2,000 most frequent words in English, they occur with significant frequency in the academic corpus, and versatile because there are examples in all four of the disciplines that were surveyed.

As an example, the words used in the last paragraph that appear in the AWL are *academic*, *compiled*, *texts*, *selected*, *range*, *occur*, *significant* and *surveyed*. They make up nearly 12% of the entire paragraph.

The AWL was compiled principally as an aid to teachers and materials writers working in EAP (English for academic purposes) contexts. It has been hugely influential on the design of materials. It has also been critiqued, on the grounds that individual disciplines use these academic words differently, and so the idea that there is a uniform academic vocabulary may be misleading.

academic writing → **English for specific purposes (ESP)**
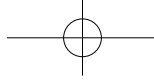
accent   PHONOLOGY

A person's accent is the way their pronunciation reveals their social and/or geographical background. Someone from New Zealand, for example, typically speaks with a New Zealand accent, which nowadays means that *ear* and *air* are both pronounced *ear*. But within New Zealand there will be differences in accent according to factors such as social class and educational background. The same applies anywhere. It is a common misconception that some people speak with 'no accent'. What this usually means is that they speak with an accent that is the listener's own accent, or that they speak a standard variety – that is, one that is not closely identified with a particular region. **Received Pronunciation (RP)** is considered a prestigious British standard accent, although fewer and fewer British people actually speak it. Learners of English may aspire to speak with a **Standard English** accent, but few achieve this, nor is it necessary for **intelligibility**. Worse, the adoption of an alien accent may threaten the speaker's sense of **identity**, since, from childhood, a person's accent is an important marker of who they are.

Traditionally, the teaching of pronunciation has focused on **accent reduction**, i.e. reducing the learner's first language accent in favour of a Standard English one (→ **pronunciation teaching**). Now that English is taught increasingly as an international language (→ **English as an international language**), an alternative approach called **accent addition** is gaining favour, both on practical and ethical grounds. This approach recommends that only those features that promote mutual intelligibility between speakers of English – irrespective of their L1 – should be 'added' to the speaker's L1 accent (→ **phonological core**).

accommodation   SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Speakers may adjust features of their speech – such as their **accent**, their choice of words, even their grammar – so that it is more closely aligned to the accent, vocabulary and grammar of the person they are talking to. This is called accommodation. For example, a person talking to an Australian about bedding might deliberately choose the word *doona* – rather than *duvet* or *comforter* – knowing that this is the Australian term for it. As in this case, accommodation may be motivated by the need to be maximally intelligible. But it may also be motivated by the wish to identify with, or earn the respect of, one's interlocutors. Accommodation extends beyond purely linguistic features to include the way speakers might mirror their interlocutor's gestures, posture and gaze direction. Accommodation may also explain the way that speakers adapt their speech style when talking to children (sometimes called **caretaker talk** or **motherese**) or to foreigners (**foreigner talk**). Arguably, the capacity to accommodate to your interlocutor's speech style in the interests of mutual intelligibility is more important than achieving native-like mastery of pronunciation, especially in situations where speakers are using **English as a lingua franca**.

acculturation   SLA

Acculturation is the process by which a person integrates into a particular culture. Some researchers have claimed that success in second language learning has a lot to do with the learner's degree of acculturation into the second language culture. For example, John Schumann tracked the development of one Spanish-speaking adult learner in the USA, called Alberto, whose English had effectively fossilized (→ **fossilization**). Schumann identified features of Alberto's **interlanguage**, such as the absence of **articles**. Some of these

features closely matched aspects of **pidgin languages** – that is, languages that originally developed for trading purposes and which have a reduced grammar and vocabulary. He argued that this 'pidginized' nature of Alberto's interlanguage was due to his social isolation and his lack of any apparent desire or need to acculturate. The acculturation hypothesis was one of the first theories of SLA that attempted to prioritize social factors over purely cognitive ones, but the term has largely been eclipsed by constructs such as **socialization**, **alignment** and **investment**, i.e. the learner's sense of the extent to which identification with the target language community will be rewarded (→ **identity**).

accuracy   SLA

Accuracy is conventionally defined as the extent to which a learner's language use conforms to the rules of the language, according to the standards of its native speakers. However, given the difficulty of establishing a single standard across all native speakers, not to mention the questionable validity of prioritizing native-speaker standards over those of proficient non-natives, this definition perhaps needs to be adjusted to take account of the learner's likely contexts of use. A more contextually sensitive definition might be: accuracy is the extent to which the learner's use of language is unremarkable according to the norms of the target speech community. ('Unremarkable' captures the probabilistic nature of language usage – the fact that there is no 'right' or 'wrong', only degrees of departure from the norm.)

Accuracy is usually measured in terms of grammatical accuracy. For example, *What means this?* or *I no understand* are inaccurate according to standard usage. It is also possible to talk about accuracy of vocabulary use (e.g. *She sent us a lot of homework*, for *She set us …*) (→ **vocabulary teaching**), and of pronunciation (*Where do you leave?* for *Where do you live?*) (→ **pronunciation teaching**). Because accuracy is relatively easy to test, it is often used as a measure of a learner's progress (→ **testing**).

Accuracy is often contrasted with **fluency**, i.e. the capacity to be communicative in real-time conditions. Accuracy was once thought to be a precondition for fluency. Different **methods** of teaching – such as the **audiolingual method** – and different **lesson designs** (e.g. **PPP**) are based on this assumption. But to withhold fluency activities until the learners are accurate is now considered unrealistic. Nor does an 'accuracy first' approach reflect the way people learn languages naturally. Research into the **order of acquisition** of grammatical structures suggests that accuracy may be late-acquired. Certainly it is the case that you learn to be fluent in your first language long before you are accurate in it.

There is often a trade-off between accuracy and fluency: if you focus on one, the other suffers, and vice versa. What's more, accuracy can vary according to **task** factors, such as the amount of time the speaker has for planning while speaking. The more time you give learners, the more accurate they are likely to be. At issue, too, are the standards by which accuracy is measured. As suggested above, for learners of **English as an international language**, native-speaker standards of English may no longer be applicable.

Classroom activities that target accuracy traditionally include **drills** and grammar **exercises**. There are grounds to believe, though, that the most effective incentive to improve accuracy is receiving negative **feedback**. That means getting clear messages as to when an **error** has occurred, as well as some guidance on how to correct it (→ **correction**).
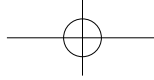
achievement test   ASSESSMENT

Achievement tests are designed to test what learners have learned (or *achieved*) over a week, month, term or entire course. Thus, they differ from **proficiency** tests, which measure overall ability, irrespective of the teaching process. Achievement test items target the specific components of the **syllabus** (such as grammar items), although they may also test the overall **goals** of the course (where these have been specified), such as the learners' communicative performance (→ **competence**). While traditional achievement tests consist largely of grammar and vocabulary exercise-types, more innovative forms of achievement testing include asking learners to assemble and present **portfolios**. The choice of test type has important implications in terms of **washback**, i.e. the effect on teaching (→ **testing**). And, since achievement tests are directly related to the content of the teaching programme, they provide feedback on the teaching–learning process, and are therefore useful data for course **evaluation**. There are good reasons, then, why the design and implementation of these tests should not be left solely to administrators, but should involve teachers themselves (→ **assessment**).

acquisition → language acquisition

action research   METHODOLOGY

Action research is a form of teacher-driven research, the twin goals of which are to improve classroom practice and to 'empower' teachers, i.e. to give them greater control over their working lives. Action research is typically motivated less by the desire to answer the 'big' questions (such as *How do people learn?*) than by the need to solve a specific teaching problem in the local context (*Why are my learners having difficulty with this kind of activity?*). It involves cycles of action and **reflection**. Having identified a problem, the teacher – either alone, or in collaboration with colleagues – follows an **experiential learning cycle** of *planning* ⇨ *acting* ⇨ *observing* ⇨ *reflecting*, which in turn leads to another research cycle. Action research is sometimes thought to lack the rigour of academic research. It can be made more rigorous by collecting data from different sources, or by the use of more than one data-gathering tool. For example, to investigate how coursebooks are being used in a school, a questionnaire could be distributed to teachers. The findings of this questionnaire could then be checked against the results of a survey of student opinions, by classroom observation or by both.

active (voice) → passive

activity   METHODOLOGY

An activity is a general term to describe what learners are required to do, using the target language, at any one stage in the course of a lesson, and can include anything from **exercises** and **drills** (where the focus is primarily on the manipulation of the forms of the language) to **tasks** and **project work** (where the emphasis is on creating meaningful interaction or meaningful texts). Activities can involve any one of the four language **skills**, or a combination of these – such as listening and speaking, or reading and writing. They can also be organized so that learners are doing the activity individually, in pairs, in groups or as a whole class (→ **classroom interaction**). **Activity-based learning**, in which the focus is entirely on arts and crafts, projects and games is – arguably – better suited to the learning styles of **young learners** than a more traditional, knowledge-based teaching approach.

activity-based learning → **activity** → **task-based learning**

adaptive learning   METHODOLOGY

Adaptive learning refers to the use of software that evaluates the current state of knowledge of a learner and then adapts (or 'personalizes') subsequent learning content accordingly. It is the modern equivalent of what used to be known as **programmed learning**, but takes advantage of digital technology. This enables instant comparison of a learner's progress – typically measured by mechanical exercises – with a database of learning targets (or **competences**), and adjusts the delivery of learning content in real time. Adaptive learning programs for language learning are often marketed in the form of **apps**, particularly those directed at the learning of grammatical structures and vocabulary. The adaptive principle is also applied to the design of 'intelligent tutoring systems', designed to replace conventional classrooms and their teachers, thereby fulfilling the dream of advocates of programmed instruction nearly a century ago. Adaptive learning technologies are also being used in the design of computer-based tests, where their capacity to tailor the test items to the user's responses can reduce test time and provide more individualized results. But, because adaptive learning software works best when delivering and assessing **discrete items** of knowledge, their usefulness in the acquisition of language **skills**, such as spoken **fluency**, is debatable. One possible application is in the development of automated 'writing tutors' that provide individualized feedback on learners' written work.

adjacency pair → **conversation analysis**

adjective   GRAMMAR

An adjective is a 'describing' word, like *old*, *expensive* or *boring*. Many adjectives are formed from nouns or verbs by the addition of **affixes**, as in *careful*, *useless* and *undrinkable*. Compound adjectives such as *broad-shouldered* or *top secret* are formed from two words, while others – such as *interesting* or *shocked* – are derived from **participles**.

An adjective typically has the following properties:

- It can go both before a noun and after a **linking verb** (such as the verb *to be*): *a boring film*; *The film was boring*. Note that *a horror film* does not allow **The film was horror*. *Horror* is a noun, not an adjective (→ **modifier**).
- It can be modified by an adverb, like *very* or *rather*: *a very boring film* (but not **a very horror film*).
- It can appear as a comparative or superlative: *The film was more boring than the book*; *the oldest building in the street* (but not **The most horror film …*).

When adjectives precede a noun, as in *The Pink Panther* or *It's a Wonderful Life*, they are said to be **attributive**. When they follow a linking verb, as in *Life is beautiful* or *The king is alive*, they are being used in a **predicative** way. Sometimes adjectives can be used as nouns, with the definite **article**: *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*; *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*.

Adjectives can be either **gradable** or **non-gradable**. Gradable adjectives – like *good* or *cold* – are adjectives that describe qualities that exist to different degrees, as in *quite good*; *very cold*. These contrast with non-gradable adjectives, such as *perfect* or *freezing*. Something is either *perfect* or it is not: you cannot say that it is **a bit perfect*, or **extremely perfect*. You can only say that it is *completely perfect* or *absolutely perfect*.

If more than one adjective precedes a noun, the usual order is:

determiner	adjectives					noun
	evaluation	size	age	colour	defining	
a	lovely	little	antique		Chinese	vase
three		enormous		red	plastic	roses

Adjectives are often taught in the following **lexical sets**: to describe people (*tall, slim, attractive,* etc.); to describe places (*busy, peaceful, industrial,* etc.); to describe the weather (*cold, rainy, mild,* etc.); to describe clothes (*red, woollen, tight,* etc.); to describe accommodation (*cheap, sunny, quiet,* etc.); and to evaluate experiences (*exciting, dull, delicious,* etc.). Texts in which adjectives occur frequently are typically descriptive, and may have a persuasive purpose, especially if the adjectives are strongly evaluative (→ **appraisal**), as in this extract from a brochure (the adjectives are underlined)[1]:

The idyllic and unspoilt Greek island of Skyros is the home of two unique holiday communities, Atsitsa and the Skyros Centre. A holiday at either centre is a delightful combination of sun, sea, and spectacular Aegean scenery and delicious food. More than this, it offers the stimulating company of like-minded people and fascinating courses taught by a staff team that includes world-famous tutors and authors.

adjunct → **adverbial**

adolescents, teaching   METHODOLOGY

Adolescence is an ideal time to learn a second language, according to the research evidence (→ **age**). Adolescents tend to outperform adults, and to progress more rapidly than younger learners, at least to begin with. They do better at grammar than either older or younger learners, although, unlike many younger learners, they do not usually achieve a native-like pronunciation (→ **young learners**). Working against these positive cognitive findings, however, are a number of negative affective factors (→ **affect**) including acute self-consciousness. Adolescence is a period of rapid change, both physical and mental, and one in which the search for a personal **identity** is uppermost. In order to nurture the development of this identity, teaching should provide adolescents with opportunities to take some control of, and responsibility for, their own learning. At the same time, situations that may threaten their vulnerable sense of self-esteem should be avoided. Activities which enable them to express themselves in constructive ways and thereby assert their individuality, but without exposing them to the ridicule of their peers, are recommended. Asking teenagers to perform, without rehearsal, a coursebook role play in front of the class is potentially disastrous. But asking them to collaborate on choosing a scenario of their own, to script and rehearse it, and then to record it – with the addition of sound effects, as if it were a radio play – is likely to work much better. Adolescence is also the stage of life where the development of so-called **soft skills**, such as interpersonal and communication skills and the ability to work in teams, is encouraged. Learning these predominantly verbal skills through the learning of a second language would seem to be a good fit.

[1] *Skyros 96, Skyros*, Eastcliff Road, Shanklin, Isle of Wight PO37 6AA

advanced learner   METHODOLOGY

An advanced learner is one who matches the description of a **proficient user** (levels C1 and C2) according to the **CEFR**, and is thus distinguished from an **independent user** (levels B1 and B2) and a **basic user** (levels A1 and A2). Here is the way the CEFR describes the C1 band[2]:

> Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.

The proficiency of advanced learners may be due to prolonged instruction, or prolonged exposure, or (more likely) a combination of both. This means that no two advanced learners will be the same, nor have the same needs. Some advanced learners will be communicatively fully effective, but may need fine-tuning in order to improve their **accuracy**. Others will demonstrate exceptional grammatical accuracy, but may lack conversational **fluency**. For the teacher of advanced learners this can pose a dilemma. But on the plus side, advanced learners are – by definition – successful learners, and probably largely self-directed, with a clear idea of their needs, and the ability to express these needs in terms of learning objectives. This makes them ideal candidates for a negotiated **syllabus**, whereby the learners themselves are given some say in choosing the goals and content (including the materials) of their course (→ **beginner** → **intermediate learner**).
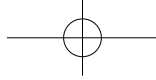
adverb   GRAMMAR

Adverbs are members of a **word class** that is so large and mixed that it is often said 'If in doubt about a word, classify it as an adverb.' The easiest adverbs to recognize are those words formed from adjectives by the addition of *-ly*, like *slowly* and *totally*, and which either describe the circumstances of an action (*Time passed slowly*), or which precede a word or phrase to express degree (*I was totally exhausted*). There are some common adverbs that take the same form as their adjective equivalents: *She's a hard worker* (*hard* = adjective); *She works hard* (*hard* = adverb). Other examples are *fast*, *late*, *early*, *high* and *loud*.

Like adjectives, many adverbs have comparative and superlative forms: *She drove more slowly*; *They sang the loudest* (→ **comparison**). Adverbs can also be premodified by other adverbs: *She drove very slowly*. When an adverb forms the head of a **phrase** (as in *much more slowly*; *very slowly indeed*), the combination is called an **adverb phrase.** This is *not* the same as an **adverbial**, although both single-word adverbs and adverb phrases often function as adverbials in sentences:

subject	verb	adverbial
She	drove	*slowly* (= adverb)
She	drove	*more slowly than ever* (= adverb phrase)
She	drove	*to the store* (= prepositional phrase)

[2]Council of Europe. 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 24.

The kinds of circumstantial meanings conveyed by adverbs include **manner** (*She drove slowly*); **place** (*They ran outside*); **time** (*We arrive tomorrow*) and **frequency** (*It often rains*). Adverbs of **degree** serve to modify the meaning of the word they precede, either by intensifying it (as in *absolutely fabulous*), or by reducing it (as in *fairly crowded*). Some adverbs have a **focusing function**, that is, they focus attention on one part of the clause: *It was only five o'clock*; *She can also sing*. Some adverbs stand apart from their associated clause or sentence, either because they have a linking function: *Eventually, the bus came*; or because they express the speaker's attitude (or **stance**) to what is being said: *Maybe he is busy*; *Frankly, I am fed up*.

Adverbs can take one (or more) of three positions in a sentence: **initial** (*Suddenly it started raining*); **mid** (*It suddenly started raining*) and **end** (*It started raining suddenly*). While there is considerable flexibility allowed (most adverbs can stand in mid-position, for example), many adverbs are limited in terms of which of these positions they can take. And adverbs never go between the verb and its object: **He plays often football*.

Because of the important meanings they convey (such as time, place and frequency), as well as their commenting and linking functions, adverbs appear early in teaching syllabuses. However, they tend to be labelled not as adverbs but as **time expressions** or **linkers**, for example. Only adverbs of manner and of frequency are dealt with as adverbs in their own right.

adverbial   GRAMMAR

An adverbial is one of the five possible elements in a **clause** or **sentence**. It functions like an **adverb** in that (1) it contributes circumstantial information to the clause or sentence, or (2) it serves to comment on what is being expressed or (3) it links clauses or sentences to some other components of the text:

circumstances	comment	link	
In winter,	generally speaking,	it freezes.	As a result,	the pipes burst.

Adverbials can consist of a single word (*She phoned yesterday*), a phrase (*She phoned on Tuesday*) or a clause (called an adverbial clause: *She phoned when she heard the news*).

The most common way of forming adverbials are (1) adverbs and adverb phrases: *She ran fast. She ran faster than the others*; (2) **prepositional phrases**: *She ran up the stairs*; (3) some **noun phrases**: *She didn't run this morning*; and (4) clauses: *As soon as she heard the explosion, she ran*. Note that a sentence can consist of several adverbials, which can be in several different positions: *As soon as she heard the explosion, she quickly ran up the stairs* (→ **prepositions**).

All the above examples demonstrate the way that adverbials function as part of the internal structure of the sentence; in this respect they are called **adjuncts**. But some adverbials act as if they stand apart from the sentence, and are commenting on it: *Not surprisingly, the shops were closed*; *It was not cheap, to put it mildly*. These adverbials are called **disjuncts**. They often express the speaker's attitude, or stance. There is a third class of adverbials, called **conjuncts**, that link clauses, sentences and whole paragraphs: *… All in all, it was a real bargain. … On the other hand, the service was excellent* (→ **linker**).