LAS LINKS AEL
Academic English Learners

Mastery of academic language is the single most important determinant of academic student success.

> *"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."*
>
> Helen Keller

LAS Links for Academic English Learners (AELs)

- What is Academic English?

- Who are Academic English Learners (AELs)?

- What is Data Recognition Corporation's initiative to serve AELs?

What is Academic English?

In their literature review on Academic English, Andstrom, et al. (2010), noted that Academic English is "an evolving construct not agreed upon in the literature" (p. 4). This observation is followed by their statement that "whatever one's perspective on Academic English, there is consensus that students must be able to understand and use language in a variety of situations to be successful in school" (p. 4).

Following the same line of thought, DRC identified two general target language use (TLU) sub-domains:

1. School Life, which is similar to School Navigational Language (SNL) in Bailey & Heritage (2008). Examples of language use tasks include casual conversation with peers about teachers and courses, and following generic classroom instructions (p. 12)

2. Content Learning, which is similar to Curriculum Content Language (CCL) in Bailey & Heritage (2008). Examples include:

   - Language knowledge and skills essential for all content areas, which is similar to Essential Academic Language (EAL) in Scarcella (2008)

   - Language knowledge and skills particular to each grade and each content area. The required language knowledge and skills may also vary with teachers' idiosyncratic pedagogical practice

Students are often engaged in language-use tasks that arise from a variety of academic situations. We suggest that these tasks be defined and described in five dimensions, as shown in Figure 1.

These dimensions are:

1. Context (e.g., one-on-one vs. teacher-led instruction)

2. Amount and type of linguistic demand (e.g., oral vocabulary vs. extended writing)

3. Types of language function (e.g., to describe vs. to summarize)

4. Level of cognitive complexity as a result of the combined effect of 1, 2, and 3

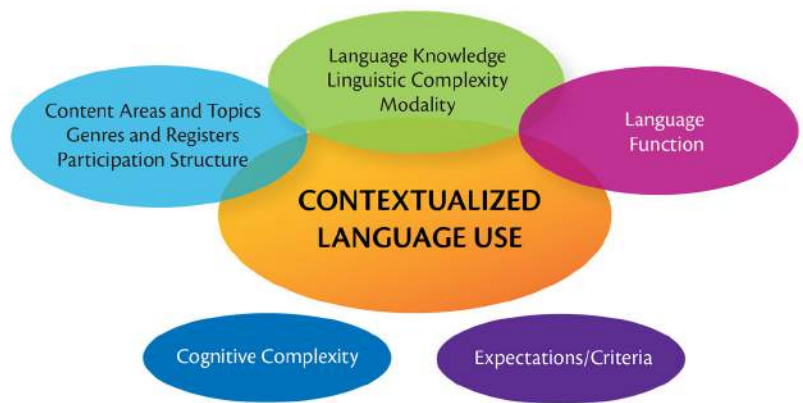5. Expectations or criteria for judging student performance on the task

Figure 1

Dimensions for defining and describing academic language tasks

Figure 1 serves as a foundation for the development of an assessment for Academic English. It allows a comprehensive analysis of the language demand from actual learning contexts. It also allows meaningful inference of, and alignment to, language demand from content learning standards, such as the College and Career Readiness Standards.
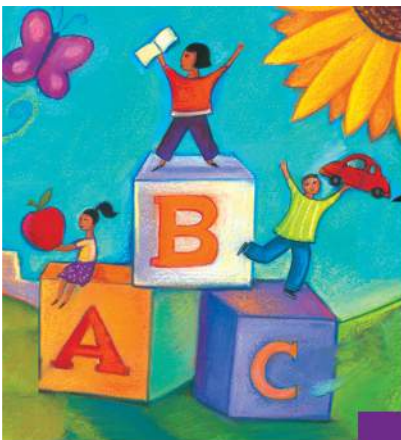
Who are Academic English Learners (AELs)?

As Scarcella (2003) pointed out, academic situations "expose learners to a range of linguistic features that learners do not normally encounter in their day-to-day interactions" (p. 28). In this sense, Academic English requires acquisition by all students, regardless of their home language. The rate and success of acquisition may be affected by several factors, including not only students' general English proficiency but also their exposure to academic language at home and school.

Academic situations may become increasingly complicated as students progress in their studies. As a result, even students who are already proficient in general English may see the need for continuing their acquisition of Academic English.

To close achievement gaps, it is critical for educators to obtain an accurate picture of their students' needs. Given the demand for acquisition of Academic English, we suggest that educators adopt a broader definition of Academic English Learners to ensure these learners are identified and receive the support they need to acquire Academic English. Typically, these students may be observed from the following groups:

- Limited English Proficient students (LEP)
- Speakers of English who have lacked exposure to Academic English, e.g., Standard English Learners (SELs)

Types of Language Proficiency Scores Include:

1. Domain scores: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing

2. Composite scores: Overall, Comprehension, Production, Oral, and Literacy

3. Scores for each language domain used in various strands of content areas:

   a. Social, Intercultural and Instructional Communication

   b. English Language Arts, Social Studies, and History

Figure 2

LAS Links Academic Language Report

What is DRC's initiative to help serve AELs?

Our updated English Language Proficiency Assessment, LAS Links®, carefully considers the various language tasks that a student may encounter in academic situations. Tasks in LAS Links that represent the major academic strands at each grade span are analyzed to determine the areas of academic language where students exhibit proficiency and where students need additional support and instruction.

LAS Links provides rich, multiple layers of score reporting at the composite, domain, and academic strand levels, to help educators identify and respond to language needs of individual students or student groups in their acquisition of Academic English. LAS Links also provides Lexile® measures and suggested reading titles for each student.

Diagnostic information about the strengths and weaknesses of each student and student group will inform teachers, districts, and school systems in their strategic planning of instructions. That information provides effective and appropriate scaffolding to students from all backgrounds, who may be struggling academically due to limitations with language proficiency.

Support all your learners in their acquisition of Academic English with LAS Links

The LAS Links suite of assessments measures academic language in all four domains: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing for the major academic strands:

• Social, Intercultural, Instructional

• Language Arts, Social Science, and History

• Mathematics, Science, and Technical Subjects

For more information, please visit www.LASLinks.com or contact your Assessments Solutions Consultant at 800.538.9547.

References

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