

## **Topic: An analysis of the application of the ICPALER model to morphology and its implications for oral language**

### **Overview of Oral Language**

Children's ability to use oral language effectively is vital for successful literacy acquisition. According to Roskos et al. (2009, pg. 1) "oral language is the foundation of learning to read and write." It is essential that children are given a wide range of language experiences before reaching school level so that they have a knowledge of ideas, conventions, purposes and effective use of expressive and receptive language.

Oral language is a form of verbal communication which includes symbols and these are words or parts of words (Munro, 2009). It is through one's experiences with others that they are able to link these symbols with concepts and identify the meanings of words (Munro, 2009). Therefore, it is vital that children are given opportunities to communicate with others and learn from their experiences also. This assists children with developing a stronger knowledge of language in general and consequently they are able to communicate more easily whilst effectively comprehending the expression of others.

One's use of oral language enables them to learn in all areas, not just literacy (Munro, 2009). If a child has a strong grasp of language skills, they are able to question, converse, investigate, initiate and link meanings in all areas. Throughout a child's school life, these skills are necessary in order to function effectively and achieve to an acceptable standard.

Munro (2009, pg. 81) states, "children's belief that they can use language and can be successful doing it is necessary for effective language use." It is important that children continue to develop their confidence in social and academic situations so that they have a positive self image and so that they continue to engage in learning by asking questions and by having rich conversations. If they do have a positive self image they are more likely to become risk takers and continue conversing in a confident manner with others.

Munro (2009, pg. 24) states, that "language helps children to integrate new information, ideas and experiences into their existing framework of knowledge and beliefs." This supports the fact that a child's knowledge and use of language is integral for continuous learning. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are all necessary skills to obtain and those children who arrive at school with a wide range of language experiences, will already have a strong knowledge of how language works and how effective talking is (Roskos et al., 2009). Therefore, it is important that children who have difficulty with language are identified at school early on so that they are given the opportunity to catch up to others and further their work in all areas.

It has become evident that oral language is not as apparent in the home as it once was. It was reported in the Herald Sun that president of the Victorian Principals Association, Gabrielle Leigh believed that the constant use of televisions in homes was having an effect on the conversations that once would have taken place instead of watching television (Drill, 2009). The more opportunities children are given to interact with others and have rich conversations, the more likely they are to further their knowledge about particular topics and develop a deeper vocabulary. Parents also have many more work commitments in the world we live in today, therefore some may find it difficult to spend the necessary time engaging in rich conversations with their children and allowing them to ask questions and clarify meanings.

Therefore, as some children are not provided with rich opportunities and experiences, it is important that schools place a strong focus on language development. Kirkland and Patterson (2005, pg. 3) note, "we are finding that as schools become more pressured to cover test content, the opportunities for oral language in classrooms diminish." They continued noting "the development of oral language is crucial to a child's literacy

development, including listening, speaking, reading and writing.” Consequently, schools have to be aware of the language needs children have and address these by integrating language development into all areas of the school day. It is essential that teachers “set clear learning goals for children and deliberately engage them in activities that help them to explore language and develop the language skills they need,” according to Roskos, Tabors and Lenhart (2009, pg.4).

When children reach school, they arrive with a range of differing ability levels when using language. Kirkland and Patterson (2005, pg.1) state “as children enter school, they bring diverse levels of language acquisition to the learning process.” Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to address this and acknowledge that the curriculum outcomes may expect much more from these children than what they are capable of. Teachers need to develop methods to ensure the children who do not have strong language skills are given the necessary support.

### Overview of Morphemic Development

Morphology, is an essential component for expressive and receptive language development. Wolter et al. (2009, Pg 1) believe, it is “an important contributor to early literacy development.” Bauer (2003, p.1) writes that morphology is “the study of words and their structure” and Aronoff & Fudeman (2005, pg. 1) wrote “its etymology is Greek: *morph*-means ‘shape, form’, and *morphology* is the study of form or forms.” It is evident from the above that morphology is an area of language development which is necessary for children to learn as it assists them with gaining an understanding of how words are formed, which then leads into how meanings are linked, comprehension when conversing in conversations, reading, writing and spelling. Having a knowledge of morphology is critical for one’s expressive and receptive language development.

Morphemes are the small units in a word. Haspelmath (2002, pg. 3) writes that “the smallest meaningful constituents of words that can be identified are called morphemes.” There are ‘bound’ and ‘free’ morphemes. Bound morphemes are parts of a word which have meaning; these tend to be prefixes and suffixes. However it is important that these are used in the correct way so that they fit in with the grammatical structures in a sentence (Munro, 2009). Some examples of bound morphemes are *pre*, *ing*, *un* and *ed*. Free morphemes are the actual words or one could say they are the root word. Some examples of free morphemes are *walk*, *paint* and *dry*. By having an understanding of free and bound morphemes when speaking Green (2009, pg. 1) believes, it can in turn “support a variety of literacy skills, including word identification, linguistic comprehension, and reading fluency by enabling children to analyse the internal structure of words in order to decode them more quickly and accurately.”

Children need to understand suffixes and how adding an -s changes the meaning of the word. For example, Wolter et al. (2009, pg.1) state, “a child who has morphological awareness understands that the word trees is composed of two meaningful parts, or morphemes: the base word tree and the plural-s.” If a child did not understand this they would think that someone was only speaking about one tree and they would only refer to one tree if they were speaking themselves. This demonstrates how meanings can be mixed and expressive and receptive language are both affected by the inclusion or exclusion of bound morphemes.

A topic which has created discussion is the differences in morphology between some languages. For example, an English speaking person who eats two melons a day would say ‘I eat two melons a day.’ However, a person speaking Indonesian or Japanese would say ‘I eat two melon a day’ (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2005). Another example of this is in the Warlpiri language, the plural of a noun is formed by repeating the singular word, for example ‘kamina’ means girl, to make it plural, it would be changed to ‘kaminakamina’ (Isac & Reiss, 2008). Therefore, teachers need to be aware of the fact that some of their students come from

speaking languages where adding the suffix –s to a noun to make it plural (there are exceptions to this rule) is not necessarily what they would do in their native language. Children's 'I language' is also affected by what they hear and receive, Isac & Reiss (2008, pg. 36) found that "each person has slightly different experiences of language acquisition, it is not surprising that each ends up with different grammars, different bodies of information." It is crucial, that teachers are aware of children's backgrounds, basic conventions in their first language and how it may affect their learning of the English language, particularly the use of morphemes. Arnonoff & Fudeman continued to say (2005, pg 10) that "if we want to appreciate what morphology really is, it's best to have some idea of what the morphology of individual languages is like."

An area of morphology that causes some confusion for children who are encountering difficulties is the use of 'ed' and 'ing.' These suffixes change the tense of words and when they are not used correctly it can change the entire meaning of words and sentences. For example, a child may have been discussing what they did on the weekend and said 'I jump in the puddle.' What the child should have said was 'I jumped in the puddle.' This demonstrates how powerful bound morphemes are and how the meaning of them needs to be taught to children otherwise they understand what they are saying but others may not. This child needs to be taught that the bound morpheme 'ed' means past tense. When one is receiving or expressing a message the tense being used is very important as it is a determining piece of information indicating when the event occurred, is occurring or is going to occur.

Bound morphemes have meanings and an example of this is with the suffix 'let.' Green (2009, pg. 2) believes, "a reader who encounters the unfamiliar word *owlet* could use existing knowledge of the word *piglet* to infer the suffix *let* turns the base word into a 'younger version of itself.'" This demonstrates the importance of inferring meanings between bound morphemes and words which have the same ones. Kieffer & Leaux (2007, pg. 137) state, "children develop awareness of morphology throughout their childhood and into their adolescence." Unfortunately, some children are not exposed to correct use of morphology and therefore do not speak in the correct manner themselves. It is therefore vital to teach children the meanings of bound morphemes as it not only assists one with identifying a single word but many words which have the same suffix or prefix. This also assists children with correctly placing words with bound morphemes into sentences that make sense.

A child's vocabulary can be extended further if they have a sound understanding of a range of morphemes. Vocabulary and morphemic awareness are very closely linked and Kieffer & Leaux (2007, pg.139) state "students with larger vocabularies tended to have greater understanding of morphology." As a result of children learning a range of different morphemes, this enables them to predict and understand the meaning of words better. It can also work in reverse, the stronger their vocabulary the more they understand about morphemes. For example, if a child saw the word 'signature' they may look at the root word being 'sign' and consequently infer meaning from this, therefore their comprehension is also of a higher standard.

If a child has an understanding of morphemes when speaking, this should assist them with spelling strategies. Once again, this is a result of understanding the meaning of the root word, pronouncing it correctly and not omitting the consonant when a bound morpheme is added. An example of this is the word 'demand,' if a child hears this word correctly and says it correctly they should quite easily be able to add, -s, -ed and -ing to this word in their written work without making a spelling error. Wolter et al. (2009, pg.2) stated that "researchers found morphological awareness to be related to spelling and writing ability in the early school years."

## OVERVIEW OF THE ICPALER FRAMEWORK

John Munro's ICPALER framework gives schools and teachers an understanding of students' language abilities. Teachers can analyse the different sections of the model relating to a child's expressive and receptive abilities. The teacher is then able to go further and develop tasks to assist students in the area/s they may be having difficulties with which are outlined in this framework. ICPALER is a mnemonic to assist with remembering the different sections.

'I'- This stands for the **ideas** being communicated, it includes the areas of words, sentences discourse and topic.

'C'- This outlines the **conventions** of language and 'how' it is used.

'P'- This determines why language is used and the **purposes** for communicating

'AL'- The **ability to learn** and what children need in place to learn effectively

'E'- **Expressive** communication.

'R'- **Receptive** communication (Munro, 2009)

The concept of morphology fits into many components of this framework. The first section 'ideas' covers the areas of word, sentence, discourse and topic. When looking at 'words' one realises immediately that the understanding of bound and free morphemes is evident in this section, as Munro (2009, pg. 9) stated "it is morphemes that we use, as speakers of language, when we link individual words and parts of words into sentence meanings and conversations or recountings." Therefore, it is necessary that children understand how words are formed so that they can understand them in context.

Green (2009, pg. 1) wrote, "morphological knowledge can also enable children to substantially increase their vocabulary and comprehension skills by using the meanings of familiar base words and suffixes to infer the meanings of unfamiliar derivatives." It is vital that children have an understanding of the meanings of base words so that they understand the topic or theme which is being discussed and can therefore contribute to conversations.

When children are in a conversation, they need to be aware of choosing the correct vocabulary to suit the audience. For example, if a fifteen year old child was speaking to a seven year old about the Gold rush in Victoria, they would not choose to use words such as prospecting, immigrants and alluvial gold. They would choose more simple words or phrases to explain this such as digging, people from other countries, and gold near rivers. The fifteen year old child may have a deep understanding of the parts of words and different meanings such as 'prospect,' 'immigrant,' 'im-', 'ing' and '-s.' This enables the child to engage in rich conversations with understandings of the topic or theme. However, it is necessary that one evaluates the audience and uses the appropriate vocabulary.

The greater one's understandings of morphemes and how they can be manipulated, the stronger their ability to create sentences, recall events and sustain conversations with more than one idea which flow. Therefore, a child needs to initially identify the meanings of free and bound morphemes to comprehend sentences spoken. This should then assist them with engaging and sustaining a discourse throughout a conversation. For example, when one is speaking in past tense they would use bound morphemes such as 'ed' whilst there would also be manipulation of letters occurring in free morphemes such as 'run' to 'ran.' By having this grounding of word knowledge and morphemic knowledge it should assist children more easily with discovering what tense the conversation is being spoken in, which follows on to linking sentences appropriately, sequencing and continuation and flow of ideas.

Conventions in the ICPALER model refer to the rules that are used by students. Munro (2009, pg.18) states, "speakers of a language need to know these rules or conventions so that they can comprehend what others say and make themselves understood."

One's knowledge of morphemes is linked to this section of conventions as a child needs to understand the phonological make up of words and have a clear understanding of the sound

patterns. If they are aware of the phonology of words, they will know how to say the word correctly and they will also understand it when they are listening to someone speak. This then assists children with their spelling throughout written work as they are able to hear the letters and are aware of letter patterns throughout words. Evidence has shown that children who use their knowledge of the morphological structure of words are able to increase the phonetic plausibility of spelling attempts from a young age (Treiman et al, 2006, cited in Larkin & Snowling, 2008).

According to Munro (2009, pg.21) “grammatical conventions are those we use to combine words to make sentences so that we can understand each other.” Therefore, children need to understand which words prefixes and suffixes can be attached or not attached to so that the sentence makes sense to the listener or reader. For example, if a child was speaking and said ‘My Daddy maded me laugh,’ they have made an error by adding a bound morpheme to a word which does not require it. Although the statement can be understood, it is a grammatical error which needs to be taught to children if they are not exposed to its correct use regularly.

When a child or adult is speaking or listening there are always purposes. Children need to be aware of what their own purpose is and the purposes of others speaking, such as parents friends or teachers. If a child has a strong understanding of free and bound morphemes, their vocabulary knowledge is larger. According to Green (2009, pg. 1) “morphological knowledge can also enable children to substantially increase their vocabulary and comprehension skills by using the meanings of familiar base words and suffixes to infer the meanings of unfamiliar derivatives.” Therefore, it becomes easier for children to comprehend meanings and consequently discover the purposes behind what someone is saying if they have an understanding of morphemes.

The ability to decipher the meanings of words assists children with understanding idioms used by others and they should, in turn, be able to use them also. This is because one can make links between words such as madness and carelessness, as the suffix ‘ness’ means ‘state of.’ Therefore, if a child heard, ‘There is method to my madness,’ they would be able to make links between other words they are familiar with that end in ‘ness’ such as ‘carelessness.’ Once the meaning of madness has been discovered, the child may read ‘between the lines’ and think that madness is linked with insanity or crazy and then realise that the idiom may mean there is a reason for why this person is doing these strange or crazy actions. In accordance with the above, Green (2009, pg. 2) stated “the derivational suffix allows each sentence to be parsed differently, and correct parsing contributes to successful comprehension.”

The Ability to Learn section encompasses a variety of aspects which require morphemic knowledge. The ICPALER framework points to the fact that it is vital children “retain ideas in short term memory” (Munro, 2009) and this is why symbolism and conceptualisation are very important aspects. A child needs to be able to conceptualise free morphemes and then conceptualise with the bound morpheme added on, in order to remember the meaning as well as possible. For example, some children might hear the word dog and in their mind they would picture a dog with four legs, ears, fur, a long tongue and sharp teeth. If the suffix –s was added they would need to be able to pronounce the word as ‘dogs’ and in their head symbolise not just what one dog would look like but many. Therefore, it is important that children are taught to conceptualise and use actions which will assist them with storing ideas in their short and long term memory.

Children need to believe that they can use morphemes successfully. They need to understand the conventions and realise that if they do understand these they can decipher many other aspects of language and literacy successfully. This is where one’s metacognition is necessary as children need to say out loud what they have learnt and describe how it fits in with knowledge they already have and suggest how it can be adapted to new situations.

For example, the prefix 'un' which means 'not,' can be found at the beginning of words such as 'unhappy' and 'unequal,' the child then needs to suggest other words where it can be found and what these words mean.

### **Difficulties children may encounter and teaching strategies**

There are many indicators that determine when morphemic awareness has not been successfully grasped. As suggested earlier, morphological knowledge supports many different areas of literacy development, Green (2009, pg. 1) believes it supports "word identification, reading fluency, reading comprehension and spelling."

If a child is reading out loud and clearly is not reading each word correctly, they may have a problem with their morphological and vocabulary knowledge. According to Munro's Oral Language Observational Profile (2009, pg.83), teachers can analyse the problems more closely through monitoring the types of words they use, such as their age appropriateness, their use of synonyms, time taken to recall or say words and the breadth of their vocabulary. A teacher would then need to look at that child's receptiveness by monitoring how well they understand conventions that others use. Once the problem area has been diagnosed teaching strategies need to be put in place. In relation to improving a child's morphemic knowledge it has been suggested that a teacher should revise vocabulary that children are already aware of, say these words out loud and test their comprehension (Munro, 1994, cited in Munro, 2009). A teacher should then go onto teaching the child to say new word meanings and learning the processes involved to understand these word meanings (Munro, 1994, cited in Munro, 2009). A teacher should also follow this procedure for teaching the meanings of bound morphemes but go further by adding these onto appropriate words, act them out and put them into sentences.

If a teacher notices that a child's reading fluency is not up to the standard it should be, this may be due to the fact that they have difficulties with oral sentence structure as a result of low morphological knowledge and understanding. Therefore, a teacher should once again refer to Munro's Oral Language Observational Profile (2009, pg.83) and observe how well the child understands and says simple and complex sentences, sequences events, understands sentences that are linked by conjunctions, uses correct tense and accurately repeats sentences. There are many strategies that can be taught in order to improve children's comprehension of sentences. This can be achieved by asking the children to describe what they heard in a story and finish the sentences so that it is evident if they have understood what has happened and if they can describe sentence meanings (Munro, 2009). Another strategy is asking students to follow instructions and then gradually build these up to further the complexity (Munro, 2009). Whilst doing this, the teacher would need to ensure that words which have a range of bound morphemes are included; clearly they would need to be prepared in advance. From doing these activities, one is testing how well they understand vocabulary as well as their comprehension skills (Munro, 2009).

As mentioned earlier, the discourse throughout a conversation also improves if a child has the appropriate morphemic knowledge in place. Teachers need to teach listening skills with the children to listen for words they understand, words they do not understand, conjunctions and how to decipher the meanings of unknown words. Once this skill of listening has been taught, children need to be able to retell experiences; this could be to the class or in the form of a game. It is essential when doing this that children use conjunctions and have thought about the language they are going to use before actually saying it (Munro, 2009). They need to ask themselves what tense they are going to speak in, therefore will they be using 'ed' or 'ing' bound morphemes? They need to consider the sequence of events and how they are going to connect these. Children need to constantly verbally rehearse these strategies to themselves in order to improve the discourse throughout a retell or conversation.

Morphemic knowledge is very closely linked to vocabulary and it is therefore important to teach phonological skills. Teachers need to continue revising and teaching sound patterns

such as onset and rime, taking of prefixes and suffixes, segmenting and blending and identification of phonological patterns in words which consist of a range of syllables (Munro, 2009). All of these strategies assist children with taking words apart and seeing what units they consist of, this then helps children see what morphemes are and how words are constructed from them.

In accordance with this, children need to have the correct pronunciation of words. This then assists with spelling throughout a child's written work. To achieve this it can be quite difficult for some, however there are teaching strategies which can be put in place. Munro (2009, pg. 97) suggests, "(1) perform the movement patterns to produce sounds, (2) articulate sound patterns of increasing length, (3) imitate intonation patterns in sentences of increasing length, (4) retrieve words rapidly, (5) chunk strings of words and (6) manipulate the speed or rate of articulation." If a teacher is practising these skills alongside the strategies for phonological awareness, children should be gaining a stronger idea of morphemic awareness along with many other aspects of language at the same time.

Children need to have a purpose when speaking and need to understand the purpose that someone else has when speaking. Therefore, it is necessary that teachers teach children how to break down sentences and idioms by analysing each word, practising making inferences and suggesting other times the words or idioms could be used. Another teaching strategy which assists children with 'purpose' is to ask them to discuss and suggest the tense of verbs in relation to what they heard earlier on in a text (Munro, 2009).

Children need to have an 'Ability to Learn' to be successful with their own literacy acquisition. Therefore, teachers need to teach children short term memory activities so that they can remember morphemes and their meanings. Teachers need to ask children to repeat sentences (Munro, 2009) and add prefixes and suffixes onto words, children need to practise using short term memory skills such as visualising to help them with recalling details. Teachers need to ask students to say out loud what they have learnt, what they need to remember and why. Teachers also need to teach and revise with students the discrimination between sounds (Munro, 2009).

### **Conclusion**

It is evident that children who have an awareness of morphemes and their appropriate use have a clearer understanding of language and literacy. Findings showed that children who could dissect and attack words had a superior understanding of texts (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2007). This then assists with writing, spelling, comprehension and expressive language which clearly emphasises the great importance of giving children as many opportunities as possible to use and improve their language skills. If children do not have an understanding of morphemes it is crucial that the appropriate skills and strategies are taught. There is evidence to show that engaging children in language building activities in the classroom each day meets the needs related to children's language development (Kirkland & Patterson, 2005).

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