

**TITLE****World of Words**

WES Reading Strategies and Practice (RET21)

**Length****Essential Skill**

Reading Text

**Prerequisites****Course Description**

Words and language are part of our lives from the time we are born. As we grow, we build our comfort with words, our appreciation of words, and our competence with words and language. Being able to speak, read and understand words and languages enriches our lives, opens opportunities, and forms a basis for lifelong learning. Proficiency with words and languages stimulates our imagination, creativity, and innovation, and helps us strengthen the nine essential skills Canadian employers and workers have identified as crucial to personal and career success.

This course reveals the broad extent to which words and language surround us. It encourages the adoption of better language skills and strengthens motivation to read and understand written and spoken language. In this course, learners will explore the role of words and language in the contemporary world. Participants will engage in various activities to:

1. Describe the importance of words and language.
2. Describe different types of written material.
3. Explore the value of printed material.
4. Demonstrate the complexity of language.

Various strategies will be used to promote appreciation of the value of reading, including individual reading, group reading, and reading aloud.

**Skill Statement**

**Explore how words are used in everyday life and in the workplace.**

**Implementing Environment****Skill Component 1: Describe the importance of words and language.****Performance Criteria**

- 1.1 Describe how we live in a world of words (one-on-one communication, television, radio, print, Internet).
- 1.2 Describe the role of speaking (oral communication) in everyday life.
- 1.3 Explore the role of language in everyday life (e.g., purchasing, selling, renting, understanding news).
- 1.4 Appreciate the significance of oral communication through media like television and radio.
- 1.5 Demonstrate building of vocabulary and understanding of word meanings.

**Skill Component 2: Describe different types of written material.****Performance Criteria**

- 2.1 Identify types (e.g., information, education, entertainment, amusement, news, gossip, fiction, non-fiction, autobiography, history).
- 2.2 Explore personal preferences in written material (news, history, etc.).
- 2.3 Identify First Nation songwriters like Willie Dunn (Mi'kmaq) and Buffy Sainte-Marie (Cree).

**Skill Component 3: Explore the value of printed material.****Performance Criteria**

- 3.1 Compare different interpretations of articles and news reports.
- 3.2 Demonstrate understanding of the role of written material (e.g. fiction) as entertainment.
- 3.3 Express interest in exploring different types of reading material.
- 3.4 Discover the importance of printed material in exploring career choices.

## Skill Statement Continued

### Skill Component 4: Demonstrate the complexity of language.

#### Performance Criteria

- 4.1 Explore the components of stories, fictional or non-fictional (e.g., plots, characters, locations).
- 4.2 Describe potential biases in magazines and newspapers.
- 4.3 Critically analyze written material, examining style, use of language, etc.
- 4.4 Demonstrate the value of exploring the differences and similarities among languages.
- 4.5 Develop a plan for expanding language use and competence.
- 4.6 Explore non-verbal language systems like American Sign Language (ASL).

#### Course 2 Resources/Content:

- Lesson Plan: What's That? ..... 2/5
- Lesson Plan: Did you intend to do that? ..... 2/6
- *Lost in Translation* reprint from Utne Reader. .... 2/7
- Lesson Plan: There's work and then there's work. .... 2/9
- *There's work and then there's work* summary of article by Apollo Pampallis. .... 2/10
- Sign Language Backgrounder. .... 2/11
- Lesson Plan: Sign Language. .... 2/12
- Lesson Plan: First Nations Musicians ..... 2/13



# Lesson Plan

## What's That?

microwave  
remote controller  
VCR  
coronary bypass  
hard drive  
romaine lettuce  
answering machine  
cordless phone  
ozone layer  
UV reading  
CD  
condo  
condom  
email  
megabyte  
video games  
CD-ROM  
Internet  
cell phone  
laptop computer  
cholesterol level  
snowboard

**Objective:**

To have participants understand how language evolves and how technology is a major driver of changes in language and terminology.

**Time:**

One morning or afternoon.

**Materials:**

Paper and pen/pencil.

**Instructions:**

- Ask participants to make lists of the words and phrases they hear in everyday conversations (in stores, restaurants, on television, etc.)
- Have participants present these lists.
- Compare these lists to the following list of words and phrases that would have been typical five years ago.

Discuss the following questions:

- 1) What are the new words and phrases?
- 2) What words and phrases are still common today?
- 3) What would some have made of these words and phrases 20 years ago...50 years ago...100 years ago?

# Lesson Plan

# Did You Intend To Do That?

*When you were born, you cried  
and the world rejoiced.*

*Live your life  
so that when you die,  
the world cries and you re-  
joice.*

White Elk

**Objective:**

To illustrate that languages are complex, that there may be different words for an action depending on whether intention was involved, and that translation from one language to another can produce a misleading understanding.

**Time:**

One morning or afternoon.

**Materials:**

People (participants or Elders) fluent in several languages, including First Nations languages.

**Instructions:**

- Summarize the ideas about language complexity expressed in the article titled “**Lost in Translation**” published in the September/October issue of *Utne Reader*, excerpted from **Stanford** (May-June 2010). The main point is that in some languages (Japanese and Spanish, for example), intention (or not) of an action determines which verb is used. Describe the example of “breaking a cup.”
- Have participants and fluent First Language speakers discuss whether this distinction, that is, whether intent matters, is important in First Nations languages.
- Are there other important differences between English and First Nations languages that could be barriers to communication if ideas, actions or concepts are translated from one language into another?

# Lost in Translation

We don't shape language, language shapes us

by Joan O'C. Hamilton, from *Stanford*

LERA BORODITSKY'S JOURNEY to answer one of psychology's most intriguing and fractious questions has been a curious one. She's spent hours showing Spanish speakers videos of balloons popping, eggs cracking, and paper ripping. She's scoured campuses for Russian speakers willing to spend an hour sorting shades of blue. She's even traipsed to a remote aboriginal village in Australia where small children shook their heads at what they considered her pitiable sense of direction and took her hand to show her how to avoid being gobbled by a crocodile. Yet she needs little more than a teacup on her office coffee table to explain the essence of her research.

"In English," she says, moving her hand toward the cup, "if I knock this cup off the table, even accidentally, you would likely say, 'She broke the cup.'" In Japanese or Spanish, however, intent matters, she explains.

If one deliberately knocks the cup, there is a verb form to indicate as much. But if the act were an accident, Boroditsky says, a smile dancing across her lips as she translates from Spanish, the speaker would essentially say, "The cup broke itself."

The question is: Does the fact that one language tends to play the blame game while the other does not mean that speakers of those languages think differently about what happened? If so, what might linguistic differences tell us about cognition, perception, and memory—and with what implications for such perennial debates as the influence of nature versus nurture? Welcome to the intensely spirited academic debate on which Boroditsky has spent the last decade shining a bright new light.

As anyone who's studied a new language understands well, languages differ in myriad ways beyond simply having, as comedian Steve Martin once observed, "a different word for everything." They may assign nouns different genders—in German, *moon* is masculine; in French and Spanish, feminine—or none. Others require specific verb choices depending on whether an action was completed or not, or whether the speaker witnessed it or is reporting secondhand.

Boroditsky is not a linguist. She is a cognitive scientist—specifically, an assistant professor of psychology, neuroscience, and symbolic systems at Stanford University—who pays attention to what a speaker of a given language thinks, perceives, and remembers about an event. In that realm, the answer to the blame-game question turns out not to be obvious at all.

Boroditsky's research suggests, for example, that the mechanics of using a language such as English, which tends to assign an agent to an action regardless of the agent's intent, also tends to more vividly imprint that agent in the speaker's memory. She is amassing a body of intriguing and creative evidence

that language influences how its speakers focus their attention, remember events and people, and think about the world around them. And these influences may provide insight into a given culture's conception of time, space, color, or even justice.

Consider space. About a third of the world's languages do not rely on words for right and left. Instead, their speakers use what are called absolute directions—north, south, east, and west. For everything. In Australia, for example, if a coach were leading a basketball clinic for the aboriginal Thaayorre in their native language, she'd have to order her players to dribble up the south side of the court, fake east, go west, then make a layup on the west side of the basket.

The upshot of the need to constantly stay oriented in order to communicate the simplest concept, says Boroditsky, is that in communities of these speakers, even small children can perform phenomenal feats of navigation, and everyone is

*Continued on page 17*



## EMERGING IDEAS &gt;&gt;

**Lost in Translation** *from page 15*

constantly mentally synchronizing their spatial relationships.

Boroditsky's colleagues and mentors say her research is generating breakthrough insights. She is "one of the first to show truly convincing effects of language on cognitive processes," including mental imagery, reasoning, perception, and problem solving, says Dan Slobin, a professor emeritus of psychology and linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley.

Slobin, like Boroditsky, is often called a "neo-Whorfian" cognitive scientist. The connection between language and thought has long captivated poets, philosophers, linguists, and thinkers of many sorts, but the modern debate has its roots in the work of the early-20th-century American linguist Benjamin Whorf and his Yale mentor, Edward Sapir. They thought that the structure of language was integral to both thought and cultural evolution.

Others—most notably MIT linguist Noam Chomsky—later argued that all languages share the same deep structure of thought and that thought has a universal quality separate from language. Those scientists believe that languages express thinking and perception in different ways but do not shape thinking and perception.

Boroditsky's research challenges this view. She has shown that speakers of languages that use "non-agentive" verb forms—those that don't indicate an animate actor—are less likely to remember who was involved in an incident. In one experiment, native Spanish speakers are shown videos of several kinds of acts that can be classified as either accidental or intentional, such as an egg breaking or paper tearing. In one, for example, a man sitting at a table clearly and deliberately sticks a pin into a balloon. In another variation, the same man moves his hand toward the balloon and appears to be surprised when it pops. The Spanish speakers tend to remember the person who deliberately punctured the balloon, but they do not as easily recall the person who witnesses the pop but did not deliberately cause it. English speakers tend to remember the individual in both the

videos equally; they don't pay more or less attention based on the intention of the person.

Almost a decade ago, Boroditsky, then a young assistant professor at MIT, conducted a study of Mandarin speakers that thrust her into the spotlight. English speakers, she explains, tend to see time on a horizontal plane: The best years are ahead; he put his past behind him. Speakers of Mandarin, however, tend to see time both horizontally and verti-

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cally, with new events emerging from the ground like a spring of water, the past above and the future below. Boroditsky's first paper on this work attracted what her colleagues say were unusually spirited rebuffs claiming the work was flawed and could not be duplicated. But later studies have shown the same results.

Boroditsky, 34, blends intellectual gravitas with an unmistakable love of whimsy. Photographs show her driving a banana-like vehicle around the Burning Man festival. She has dubbed her lab "Cognition," and

her tongue-in-cheek website includes funny profiles of her graduate students and an invitation to sing along to the "Cognition national anthem," a music clip of Groucho Marx singing "Whatever it is, I'm against it."

She had to be fearless to pursue her research fascination. "Language influencing thought was extremely controversial for decades," explains Dedre Gentner, a Northwestern psychology professor who became a mentor to Boroditsky. "If you talked about language's impact on cognition, you were considered an idiot or a lunatic. We talked about it in my lab, but I used to warn the students not to talk about it outside the lab. Lera," she adds with a chuckle, "was bold enough to ignore that warning. It's now a fully researched and discussed issue."

Boroditsky's results are attracting more and more researchers to the field and producing additional evidence for measured acceptance of Whorfian arguments. "I'm not sure I would have gone into this if I'd known it was so controversial," she says. But an emotional and intense response from psychologists who previously rejected the idea that language affects thinking is not surprising, she says.

"This work is at the center of some of the biggest debates in the study of the mind—nature versus nurture; is the mind divided into modular regions; is there a special encapsulated language 'organ' in the brain. It's pretty bothersome for someone to come along and say that perhaps many of the phenomena that we in psychology have been studying could differ from language to language. It would be much easier if we could just study American college sophomores and assume that our observations would be the same everywhere." **UR**



Excerpted from *Stanford* (May-June 2010), which distinguishes itself from the alumni magazine pack with insightful in-depth features that are relevant far beyond the campus grounds.

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# Lesson Plan

# There's Work and Then There's Work

*Whatever you do in life,  
do the very best you can  
with both your heart and mind.  
Lakota Instructions for Living  
passed down from  
White Buffalo Calf Woman*

**Objective:**

To illustrate that one's attitude toward a job affects whether the work is felt to be drudgery or an opportunity.

**Time:**

One hour.

**Materials:**

The summary of an article, *There's work and then there's work* by Apollo Pampallis.

**Instructions:**

- Have participants read the summary of the article and discuss the writer's perspective.
- Do other languages have two different words for "work," as Greek does?
- Even if a language has only one word for work, how does one's attitude influence one's performance, job satisfaction, career future, etc.?
- Does the idea of how you approach work affect other events in your life— being a parent, lover, friend, son or daughter?

# There's Work and Then There's Work

*The more you understand, the more you will trust and the less you will fear.*  
Ojibway

An article by Apollo Pampallis tells us that the Greek language has two words for “work.” One word is *doulia*, which is derived from slave, *doulos*. *Doulia* is used to mean the kind of work we’ve come to accept as necessary, something we’re forced to do because we need to pay bills or to buy things

The other word for work is *ergasia*, derived from the word *ergon*, which means creation. *Ergasia* refers to something one chooses to do, implying a vision, a love for doing it.

Pampallis gives the following example of how the work involved in one job can be seen as either slavery or creative.

*In the upmarket Athens suburb of Philothei were two garbage collectors. One was very sensitive to his perceived “low status job” which he did begrudgingly, while the other saw it as an opportunity to be outdoors, keep fit and meet people. He did not worry about his social status and felt that he “owned” the sidewalks of Athen’s most upmarket suburb. He also would politely but firmly educate people about self-respect and cleanliness when he saw them littering, regardless of what their social status was. Guess which one was sickly and had children with low self-esteem and were ashamed on their father, and which one inherited a house in the same neighbourhood from a rich and lonely widow, whose husband had died young through work pressure?*

So there’s work and then there’s work. Does the same idea apply to other parts of people’s lives? Can you say there’s parenting and then there’s parenting? Can you say there’s being a friend and then there’s being a friend? Can you say there’s being a student and there’s being a student?

# Backgrounder

# Sign Language

Ways of communicating by signs have developed wherever there have been people who have hearing problems. These ways of communicating by signs are complicated language systems that use the shape and location of the hands as well as facial expressions to exchange complex thoughts and emotions.

A great variety of sign language systems have developed in different countries based on different languages. American Sign Language, or ASL is the dominant sign language in most of the English-speaking world, although British Sign Language (BSL) and ASL are very different.

Wikipedia reports the results of a study conducted in 1972. Several people fluent in English and ASL told a story in English, then switched to ASL or vice versa:

*The results showed an average of 4.7 words per second and 2.3 signs per second. However, only 122 signs were needed for a story, whereas 210 words were needed; thus the two versions of the story took almost the same time to finish.*

According to Wikipedia, there's some indication that North American First Nations have a history of sign language.

*In 1541, 1688, 1740, 1805, and 1828 there were reports that the Plains Indians developed a sign language to communicate between tribes of different languages. This sign language is believed to have developed in the lower Rio Grande prior to the Europeans settling and to have spread northward and become what is known as Plains Indian Sign Language (PISL). There is no evidence to show that it influenced the development of American Sign Language. By 1885, PISL had an estimated 110,000 users of various tribal dialects, but today it has only a small fraction of that number. It was not a language for deaf people but a communication between tribes and, in some cases, a ritual language.*

# Lesson Plan

# Sign Language

**Objective:**

To explore sign languages as alternatives to spoken language.

**Time:**

Several hours.

**Materials:**

A person experienced in one of the standard types of sign language.

**Instructions:**

- Arrange to have someone experienced in sign language talk about signing and teach participants how to sign. Have participants read the backgrounder on sign language before the signing session.
- Ask participants for their own experience with sign language. Do they know anyone who signs? Does sign language seem to follow the same patterns of oral language?

# Lesson Plan

# First Nations Musicians

*So live your life that the fear of death can never enter your heart.*

*Trouble no one about their religion;*

*respect others in their view, and demand that they respect yours.*

*Love your life, perfect your life, beautify all things in your life.*

*Seek to make your life long and its purpose in the service of your people.*

*Prepare a noble death song for the day when you go over the great divide.*

*Always give a word or a sign of salute when meeting or passing a friend, even a stranger; when in a lonely place.*

*Show respect to all people and grovel to none.*

*When you arise in the morning give thanks for the food and for the joy of living.*

*If you see no reason for giving thanks, the fault lies only in yourself.*

Chief Tecumseh, Shawnee Nation  
1768-1813

## Objective:

To explore the value and importance of First Nations musicians in both traditional and popular culture.

## Time:

Several hours.

## Materials:

Lyrics of songs and recorded music of First Nations musicians, if available.

## Instructions:

- Have participants discuss the essential role that music has always played in First Nations cultures. In addition, many First Nations musicians have become world-class stars as singers, songwriters and instrumentalists. One prominent example is Buffy Sainte-Marie, a Cree woman who has written many hit songs recorded by other artists. She is probably best known for her anti-war song *Universal Soldier*. Other important musicians are Robbie Robertson (Mohawk) and Willie Dunn, Mi'kmaq filmmaker, musician, and politician best known for his song *The Ballad of Crowfoot*.
- Ask participants to generate a list of First Nations musicians, with particular emphasis on the lyrics of their songs. Discuss the content of the lyrics and their relevance to First Nations experiences.

# Notes

*Be kind to everything that  
lives.*  
Omaha proverb