The 5 Subsystems of Language

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The following table includes the 5 subsystems of language: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.  For each subsystem I have included an academic definition, a student-friendly definition, an example of the subsystem, and a classroom activity relating to the subsystem.

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| Phonology | |
| Academic Definition | Phonology is the study of sound systems in language. This includes phonemes (the smallest units of sound), intonation/stress patterns, and syllable structure/sound sequence. |
| Student-Friendly Definition | Phonology is the study of the sounds we make when speaking in a certain language. |
| Example | t says /t/ in baton but /sh/ in nation |
| Classroom Activity | Matching words that rhyme with images – [PA.002](http://www.fcrr.org/documents/sca/GK-1/PA_Final_Part1_Rhyme.pdf) (Florida Center for Reading Research) |
| Morphology | |
| Academic Definition | Morphology is the study of the structure of words.  This includes morphemes, the smallest units of meaning, and how they are used.  These morphemes include root words, suffixes, prefixes, and the parts of compound words. |
| Student-Friendly Definition | Morphology is the study of how words are built with letters. |
| Example | Paint has one morpheme, *paint.* Painted has two morphemes, *paint* and *–ed.* The *–ed* makes the base word past-tense.  Repainted has three morphemes, paint, –*ed* and *re*-, which changed the meaning to imply that it was painted again. |
| Classroom Activity | Compound word puzzles and inflection puzzles [P.057 and P.058](http://www.fcrr.org/documents/sca/GK-1/P_Final_Part7_Morpheme_Structure.pdf) (Florida Center for Reading Research) |
| Syntax | |
| Academic Definition | Syntax is the rules that govern the way that words are organized in a sentence and the way sentences are arranged. |
| Student-Friendly Definition | Syntax is the way words are put together to make sentences. |
| Example | In the English language, we put adjectives before the noun that they are describing. In other languages, like Spanish, this is the opposite, and adjectives come after the words that they describe. |
| Classroom Activity | Create complex sentences using “sequence trains” [LV20](http://www.fcrr.org/documents/vpk_activities/LV20-1_color.pdf) (Florida Center for Reading Research) |
| Semantics | |
| Academic Definition | Semantics is the study of the meaning and relationships of words, phrases, and sentences in a language.  It also addresses linguistic expressions, modality, and cognates. |
| Student-Friendly Definition | Semantics is the meaning in spoken or written language. |
| Example | The word *leaves*can refer to the plural of “leaf” or is a form of the verb “leave.” |
| Classroom Activity | Identify multiple meanings of words with word webs [V.019](http://www.fcrr.org/documents/sca/G2-3/2-3Vocab_3_Word_Meaning.pdf) (Florida Center for Reading Research) |
| Pragmatics | |
| Academic Definition | Pragmatics is the study of language in context. Pragmatics also addresses “invisible” meaning in language. |
| Student-Friendly Definition | Pragmatics is the study of how language is used and the hidden meaning in language |
| Example | The question “Why did you do that?” said by a teacher in the context of a student completing a classroom project is likely genuine in its need for a response and would encourage a student to vocalize their critical thinking and problem solving skills.  The same question said by a parent after a child draws on the walls or furniture would have a different meaning. |
| Classroom Activity | Identifying facts vs. opinions  [C.019](http://www.fcrr.org/documents/sca/G2-3/2-3Comp_3_Text_Analysis.pdf) (Florida Center for Reading Research) |