

# The linguistic competition and other sports

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## Fencing

The linguistic competition is what I like to refer to as fencing. The first round of fencing commences, and you are speared by the sword of your competitor. That sword is the primary language and the secondary language. In this case, English represents your sword that failed to draw in time. Your opponent wins, and the primary language scores a point. Your secondary language stood no chance, and you had no time to make contact with your opponent. The question is, how do we defend ourselves from this situation? And how can we use our own sword in such a way that it overtakes our opponent? There is overwhelming evidence that both languages in a bilingual's repertoire are always active to some extent, even if one of them is not required for the current context (Bialystok, 2017). It comes down to strategy. How can we plant our feet, move our body, and draw our sword to tap them for the win? We could take quicker steps, move in a different direction, or bend our bodies in a different way. This may give us a chance to see the gap, draw our sword, and touch our opponent. And just like that, the word that we were trying so hard to find comes out. And it is one point for us.

Bialystok (2017) argues that bilingual language processing is based on an attention system, the Supervisory Attention System. This system inhibits the unwanted language so that processing can proceed in the target language. It is not just changing the steps we take towards our competitor but it also involves focused attention. And attention requires relaxation. With this in mind, let us take a couple of deep breaths. How do we feel? Relaxed? A little more focused? So now there is that English word again we hope comes to mind when we need to make a quick draw.

## Strategy 1: Relax, focus, and take a deep breath.

Strategy 2: Get to know the word you want to call to mind. For example, what does the word look like, what does it sound like, and how does it move? Now talk about it. How would we like to use it? Put it in a sentence. We can also write the word several times to help us remember the word and how to spell it. We can also create a story from it. And before you know it, we have learned some new steps, which will move us closer to

overtake our competitor. So, let us take our spots on the mat. Deep breath and draw. We tap our opponent. And we win.

## The horse carousel

Context is everything. We need to learn the context so we can see where and how the word fits in the sentence. It involves learning about your surroundings and finding the best home for that word to sit in. Context is everything when one word has several meanings. Let us take a look at a horse carousel. We all remember going to the carnival as a kid and there in the middle of the hyped-up crowd was a large shiny circular structure with different coloured wooden horses moving round and round all the while being held into place by a cylindrical rotating piece. In this case, the word sits in the middle of the structure while the different coloured horses represent the context. Our mission is to get on every single horse and get to know them. Once you get to know each horse, you will then understand the word that anchors them. Taylor (2014) notes: “One requirement for comprehension is knowledge of the meanings of the words of which an utterance is composed”. The horse carousel and all its workings, takes much longer to learn versus the quick game of fencing. Fencing is a quick draw while going on each horse takes time. And depending on the time you need in getting to know the horses, you may slow down the speed of that carousel or speed it up.

## Archery

Words as placeholders. The lazy man’s way of making sentences. For example, using the word stuff. For instance: Why is your stuff on the floor? What is that stuff in your car? Where did you get all that stuff?

It is a very generic word, and if this was a sport, stuff would represent the bullseye in a game of archery. The black dot. Centre of the board. Question of the day. A clear target. “An expression is vague, if its meaning is not precise. For vagueness at sentence-level this means that a vague sentence does not give rise to precise truth conditions” (Van Rooij, 2011). Although generic words lack accuracy in a sentence as Van Rooij explains, words and phrases such as stuff, things, that there may actually help us in our fight to win the fencing match. It can be a weapon to beat the linguistic competition of the primary language. These simple words may come to mind much easier and quicker than its long descriptive counterpart. And so placeholder words can help us win the game of fencing. When simple words are all you have, and your linguistic competitor wants to take over, the placeholder comes to mind. And just like that you win another point.

Language learning is a sport. It is our primary language versus the secondary language. A back and forth, push and pull, until soon something gives way, and you learn a new move, a new strategy for maneuvering around your fencing competitor, and you can spin that carousel a little faster and get to know each horse



in a little more detail. Finally, the placeholder becomes a choice and not just a quick automatic insert. The placeholder sits on the table staring at you, holding your spot, waiting patiently. You see it as bright as day, and you can make the decision to either pick it up or leave it alone. Soon you will be on the starting lineup, running out on the field, in a big arena with more options and strategies at your fingertips. And you know you will be okay because your tools are in the bag with room for more.

## References

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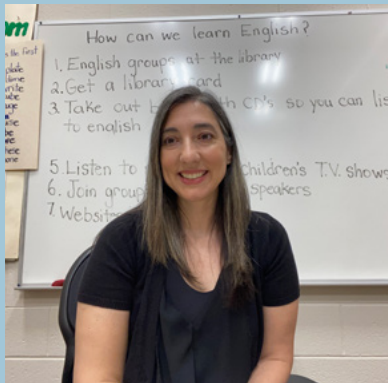
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## Author Bio



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