

Unit 4-Content Part B

Module 2

Second Language Acquisition

In Module 1 we looked at three aspects of first language acquisition and learning: *What is Language?*; *How Do Children Acquire Language?*; and *Can Adults Facilitate Children's Language Acquisition?* Just as children go through stages when learning a first language, second language acquisition also requires that the learner go through four specific stages to reach language proficiency. The four stages are:

- pre-production
- early production
- speech emergence
- intermediate fluency

During the ***pre-production phase***, students take in the new language and try to make sense out of it to meet basic needs. They continuously process the language, although at this stage are very limited in producing the new language. After numerous opportunities receiving meaningful and understandable messages in the new language, students will begin to respond with one or two word answers during the ***early production stage***. Speech emerges in the form of short phrases and sentences during the ***speech emergence stage***, and students begin to use the new language to communicate more freely among themselves. Finally, students in the ***intermediate fluency*** stage may begin to demonstrate near-native like fluency in social settings, but may experience difficulties in demanding, abstract subjects at school, especially when a high level of literacy is required.

Now read the following article, “***Stages of Second Language Acquisition***”, which will summarize the four stages discussed above, and will provide you with typical student behavior and appropriate teacher behavior for each of the stages of language development. A model for appropriate questioning techniques by the teacher for students during each of these stages is also given, demonstrating that the language used by the teacher need not be complex in order for students to exercise thinking skills.

Stages of Second Language Acquisition

Summarized by Linda Ventriglia (1992)

There are four stages of second language acquisition:

- pre-production
- early production
- speech emergence
- intermediate fluency

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Pre-production

The pre-production phase applies to those who are totally new to English. Students at this level are “taking in” the new language and are trying to make sense out of it to meet their basic needs. Language skills are being developed at the receptive level, a so-called “silent period.” Acquirers of a second language are able to comprehend more complex messages than they can produce.

Expected student behaviors at this level include: following simple commands; pointing and responding with movement; and perhaps simple utterances such as **yes, no, thank you**, or names. Teachers at this level must use strategies that include simplified speech, gestures, pointing, acting out, frequent repetition, props, visuals, modeling and demonstrating.

Early Production

After students have a reasonable opportunity to receive meaningful and understandable messages in English, they will begin to respond with one or two word answers or short utterances. In order for students to begin to speak, they must have a need to express themselves and be given a chance to produce language in a low anxiety environment. Teachers should keep in mind that students are experimenting and taking risks with the new language. Errors in grammar and pronunciation are to be expected. Direct error correction for students at these phases is inappropriate. Teachers need to model/demonstrate the correct responses in context.

Speech Emergence

Speech will emerge in the form of short phrases and sentences. Students will begin to use the new language to communicate more freely among themselves. Learners at this level are successful in subject matter classes when comprehensible instructional strategies are used. In order to provide understandable subject matter content, teachers should begin the presentation of new concepts by using advance organizers. Teachers should attempt to modify their delivery of subject matter by using real objects, modeling, demonstration, visuals and teacher-talk focused on key points. Teachers must provide an opportunity for students to work in small groups. Assessment should include teacher observation and frequent oral comprehension checks. Since students will be engaged in a variety of individual and small group hands-on activities, evaluation should be performance-based, as opposed to solely traditional paper and pencil assessment.

Intermediate Fluency

Intermediate level students may demonstrate near native-like or native-like fluency in social settings. However, they may experience difficulties in cognitively demanding, abstract subjects at school, especially when a high level of literacy is required. Teachers of students at the intermediate fluency level need to keep two points in mind. First, they must assist students to continue to grow intellectually by making sure they attain and use new concepts. Second, they must provide support to foster a high level of reading and writing skills. This can be accomplished by providing relevant content-based literacy experiences (brainstorming, clustering, categorizing, charting, journal or log writing to acquire relevant information).

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Typical student behaviors and appropriate teacher behaviors by student stage of language development are summarized in the following chart.

Stage	Sample Student Behaviors	Sample Teacher Behaviors
Pre-production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Points to or provides other non-verbal response ■ Actively listens ■ Responds to commands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gestures ■ Language focuses on conveying meanings and vocabulary development ■ Repetition
Early Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ One-word responses ■ Short utterances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ask questions that can be answered by yes/no and either/or responses ■ Models correct responses
Speech Emergence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Participates in small group activities ■ Demonstrates comprehension in a variety of ways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Focuses content on key concepts ■ Provides frequent comprehension checks ■ Uses performance-based assessment ■ Uses expanded vocabulary ■ Asks open-ended questions that stimulate language production
Intermediate Fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Participates in reading and writing activities to acquire new information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fosters conceptual development and expanded literacy through content

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It is important to remember that the lack of language ability does not mean a lack of concept development or a lack of ability to learn. Teachers should continue to ask inferential and higher order questions (questions that require reasoning ability, hypothesizing, inferring, analyzing, justifying, and predicting) that challenge the student to think. The language used by the teacher need not be complex for thinking skills to be exercised as shown in the model developed by Jeanne Foote of Montebello Unified School district and replicated below:

Questioning Techniques

Pre-Production	Early Production
■ Points to...	■ Yes/no (Is the “trouble” light on?)
■ Find the...	■ Either/or (Is this a screwdriver or hammer?)
■ Put the _____ next to the _____.	■ One word response (What utensil am I holding in my hand?)
■ Do you have the _____?	■ General questions which encourage lists of words (What do you see n the tool board?)
■ Is this a _____?	■ Two-word response (Where did he go? “To work.”)
■ Who wants the _____?	
■ Who has the _____?	
Speech Emergence	Intermediate Fluency
■ Why?	■ What would you recommend/suggest?
■ How?	■ How do you think this story will end?
■ How is this like that?	■ What is the story mainly about?
■ Tell me about... Talk about...	■ What is your opinion (on this matter).
■ Describe	■ Describe/compare...
■ How would you change this part?	■ How are these similar/different?
	■ What would happen if...?
	■ Which do you prefer? Why?
	■ Create.

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How much language can students comprehend and produce at each of the four stages of second language acquisition? What can teachers expect students to do in class at each of the four stages? Below is a quick reference guide that answers these questions. Feel free to download a copy and keep as future reference when providing instructional services to ELL students in the classroom.

(1)Pre-Production Stage

-minimal comprehension
-no verbal production

listen draw
point select
move choose
mime act/act out
match circle

(2)Early Production Stage

-limited comprehension
-one/two word response

name list
label categorize
group tell/say
respond answer
(with one/two words)

(3)Speech Emergence Stage

-increased comprehension
-simple sentences
-some errors in speech

recall summarize
retell describe
define role-play
explain restate
compare contrast

(4)Intermediate Fluency Stage

-very good comprehension
-more complex sentences
-complex errors in speech

analyze evaluate
create justify
defend support
debate examine
complete describe (detail)

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Module 3

Second Language Acquisition

There are three other important concepts worth mentioning affecting second language acquisition that linguists have developed.

(1) Native language transfer

A term describing the carryover of knowledge to learning. Positive transfer occurs when the prior knowledge benefits the learning task, when a previous item is correctly applied to present subject matter. The native language of a second language learner is often positively transferred, in which case the learner benefits from the facilitating effects of the first language.

(2) Native language interference

Negative transfer occurs when the previously learned material interferes with subsequent material being learned – a previous item in the L1 is incorrectly transferred or incorrectly associated with an item to be learned in the L2. This can be referred to as interference and the learner noticeably shows interfering effects of the native language on the second language.

(3) Overgeneralization

“She wented to the store.”

Although the above example is incorrect in English, it actually follows the rule system of English grammar (using **ed** to show past tense). This shows that children have figured out some the rules of the language but they have not yet figured out exceptions to the rule. The ending **ed** is then applied to **all** verbs to demonstrate past tense.

The logical conclusion derived from these various linguistic assumptions is that second language learning basically involves the overcoming of the differences between the two linguistic systems – the native and target languages.

Language Learning –vs- Language Acquisition

As language teachers in U.S. schools that are increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, we must take a look at the implications of first and second language development on our instruction in order to meet the academic needs of all students.

Is the process for developing a second language (L2) the same as the process for developing a first language (L1)?

Acquiring a language and *learning* a language have traditionally been viewed as closely related but different processes. What distinguishes the two? Language acquisition is the process by which the language capability develops in a human. When a child acquires his or her first language, it is usually a means to solve problems and get their needs and desires met. The child is not usually conscious of the linguistic process he or she is undergoing. On the contrary, language learning is often a more formal process in which learning the new language is both the means and the end. *Learning* a language implies the conscious effort to develop language skills, while *acquiring* a language typically involves the unconscious development of language.

The chart below distinguishes between the characteristics of language acquisition and language learning:

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Language Acquisition	Language Learning
Informal	Formal
Often unstructured	Structured
Means “picking up a language”	Means “knowing about” a language (e.g. the ‘rules’)
Unconscious process	conscious process

Notes on Second Language Acquisition

- Second language acquisition is a time-consuming process, which emerges through developmental stages. It can occur sequentially or simultaneously.
- A strong native language background enhances second language acquisition.
- It is possible for some bilingual children to be delayed in both languages for a period of time because of exposure to a second language before the native language is fully developed (Schiff-Myers, 1992).
- Many students go through a “silent period” as they begin to process a second language. This may last for several months.
- There is no “critical period” for learning a second language (Hamayan & Damico, 1991).
- A relaxed, natural environment, motivation and self-esteem enhance second language acquisition (Krashen, 1982).
- Loss of native language proficiency is common in second language learners if the child is in an environment where the native language is no longer valued.
- It is not appropriate to correct errors or teach rules. Production will emerge as a result of acquisition (Krashen, 1982).
- Code switching is commonly used among second language speakers to enhance the effectiveness of the communication (Mattes & Omark, 1984).

Developed by Joan Pomerantz, The School Board of Broward County, Florida.

Implications for Second Language Learners

- ✧ Learning a second language is as difficult for the child as the adult
- ✧ Learning to function academically in a second language may take 5-7 years, depending on native language literacy level
- ✧ Many children are just as self conscious and inhibited as adults
- ✧ Children need continued support in the native language to avoid falling behind in academic content

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- ✧ Amount of exposure to English does not predict language acquisition
- ✧ Older students may show quicker gains, younger students better pronunciation
- ✧ Oral language skills are no gauge for literacy skills
- ✧ Patterns of language use varies across cultures