

Language Acquisition

Language acquisition is a long-term process

- Children learn new language in the same way they learn their first language
- There are two types of language proficiency. Basic social communication skills and thinking and language skills to do academic work
- It takes five to seven years to develop full academic proficiency

There are many factors that influence language acquisition

- Mother tongue maintenance
- Age
- Aptitude
- Motivation
- Attitude
- Personality

Language acquisition occurs through meaningful use and interaction

- Language is learned best when it is being learned for a real purpose
- Language should be taught through meaningful situations
- Language learners should interact with other learners who can model the target language

Language Acquisition Stages

Stage I: The Silent/Receptive or Preproduction Stage:

This stage can last from 10 hours to six months. Students can understand new words that are made comprehensible to them. This stage often involves a “silent period” during which students may not speak, but can respond using a variety of strategies including pointing to an object, picture, or person; performing an act, such as standing up or closing a door; gesturing or nodding; or responding with a simple “yes” or “no.” Teachers should not force students to speak until they are ready to do so.

Stage II: The Early Production Stage:

The early production stage can last an additional six months after the initial stage. Students can usually speak in one- or two-word phrases, and can demonstrate comprehension of new material by giving short answers to simple yes/no, either/or, or who/what/where questions.

Stage III: The Speech Emergence Stage:

This stage can last up to another year. Students can use short phrases and simple sentences to communicate. Students begin to use dialogue and can ask simple questions, such as “Can I go to the restroom?” and are also able to answer simple questions. Students may produce longer sentences, but often with grammatical errors that can interfere with their communication.

Stage IV: The Intermediate Language Proficiency Stage:

Intermediate proficiency may take up to another year after speech emergence. Students are beginning to make complex statements, state opinions, ask for clarification, share their thoughts, and speak at greater length.

Stage V: The Advanced Language Proficiency Stage:

Gaining advanced proficiency in a second language can typically take from five to seven years. By this stage students have developed some specialized content-area vocabulary and can participate fully in grade-level classroom activities if given occasional extra support. Students can speak English using grammar and vocabulary comparable to that of same-age native speakers.