

Second Language Acquisition Stages

Pre-production

At the pre-production stage, the learner listens and absorbs the sounds and rhythms of the language. Learners might respond with gestures or physical actions, indicating they have understood what is said. The technique of Total Physical Response, or TPR, actively involves learners in responding to spoken language. Many learners will be shy about speaking and need an environment that feels safe and free of overt correction. The learner may begin to isolate and pronounce individual words.

Early production

At the early production stage the learner produces single words and two to three word phrases. Responses to questions will be a combination of words, phrases, and gestures. Many learners at the early production stage enjoy repeating simple rhymes, songs, or word plays. These sorts of activities help them refine their awareness of the sound system of the language. Learners at this stage still need a safe, comfortable atmosphere to encourage oral language.

Speech emergence

At the speech emergence stage the learner experiments more freely with the language, combining words and phrases. Speech is more complex and at the same time errors in syntax are obvious. The learner responds readily to questions and benefits from modeling of correct language rather than overt correction.

Intermediate fluency

At the intermediate fluency stage the learner is capable of initiating and sustaining conversations and hearing his or her own errors. The degree to which the learner can correct those errors varies with the subject being discussed and the learner's vocabulary relative to that subject. Many learners at this level sound fluent, but they still have large gaps in vocabulary and syntax. They are capable of speaking with intermediate fluency in conversation and group discussions. However, this oral proficiency does not necessarily imply academic fluency. The learner may be able to engage in conversation about daily events and still have difficulty with academic language, reading, and writing.