

John Stanford International School Language Acquisition in an Immersion Language Program

Stages of Second Language Acquisition

Acquiring language is a process that involves several stages. The first stage is often called “the silent period” because the students aren’t doing much talking yet. In school it varies. Some kids are ready to self-generate language (to speak on their own, without a prompt) after two months, but it could take up to a year. However, even if they’re not producing language, they are working hard making sense of the sounds.

Stage	About how long?	About how many words?
Preproduction (the “Silent Period”)	10 hours to 6 months	500 receptive words
Early Production	An additional 6 months	1000 receptive/active words
Speech Emergence	An additional 1 year	3000 active words
Intermediate Fluency	An additional 1 year	6000 active words
Continued Language Development	5 to 7 years	Content Area Vocabulary

What can students typically do?

Preproduction (the “Silent Period”)

Show that they understand what’s been said by:

- pointing to an item/picture or person
- performing an act (such as standing up or opening the door)
- gesturing or nodding (to show agreement or disagreement)
- saying “Yes” or “No”

- using beginning dialog
- using full simple sentences (for example, “There are four pencils.”)

Early Production

Show that they understand and are learning to respond by:

- answering with “Yes” or “No”
- answering questions with one word (for example, “Is the box big or little?” “Big.”)
- putting two or more words together (for example, “small square”)
- using repetitive language patterns (for example, “May I go to the bathroom?” “My name is John.”)

Intermediate Fluency

Show that they can use the language to communicate by:

- using complex statements (for example, “I want to learn about reptiles that live in Africa.”)
- stating opinions (for example, “I think this food is too spicy.”)
- speaking at length
- asking for clarification (for example, “Can you explain the difference between a plain and a plateau to me?”)
- share original thoughts

Speech Emergence

Show that they can use the language to communicate by:

- using 3 or more words and short phrases (for example, “I like pizza.” “Stand up.”)

Continued Language Development

Show that they can communicate freely in the language by:

- participating fully in the grade level classroom activities with support for understanding specialized academic language in the content area
- continuing to grow in their cultural and background knowledge of the language

*adapted from Jerrell, I.A. “Natural Approach to Second Language Acquisition.” *Modern Language Journal*, 6, p. 325, 337; presented by Regla Armengol at the JSIS Language Immersion Boot Camp, August 2000.