

A Simple Look at Language Acquisition

This chart outlines developmental stages for learning another language. First-language acquisition is universal regardless of language: babies listen, then begin to approximate sounds, and finally say words. Second-language acquisition is impacted by first-language knowledge and skills.

NAME OF STAGE	CHARACTERISTICS OF STAGE	SIMPLE WAYS TO SUPPORT LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT
Pre-production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Silent period” ● Listens to new language but doesn’t speak it 	Read aloud <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sing ● Have kids point to pictures and act out words ● Use words needed every day (<i>open, door, book, water</i>) ● Use of peer “buddy” who shares native language but at a higher language level ● Support in native language (if available)
Early production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Begins to use short words and sentences to speak ● Still listening to learn new language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask kids to point to pictures and say words ● Ask yes/no questions ● Use simple sentence stems (<i>I like . . . This is . . .</i>)
Speech emergent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Talks more and uses longer sentences ● Increasing vocabulary with familiar topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Turn and talk with partner ● Answer how/why questions ● Have kids label, list, describe, predict ● Use word banks with pictures ● Use simple question stems

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NAME OF STAGE	CHARACTERISTICS OF STAGE	SIMPLE WAYS TO SUPPORT LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT
Intermediate fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Speaks fluently in social and academic areas ● Gaps in vocabulary and understanding idioms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask, <i>What would happen if . . . why do you think?</i> ● Use cooperative learning activities ● Introduce idioms and figurative language ● Use more advanced sentence stems
Advanced fluency	Communicates fluently both in and out of school	<p>Continue using visuals with content vocabulary</p> <p>Teach note-taking skills</p> <p>Expand figurative language and idioms</p> <p>Use complex sentence stems</p>

Social language, the talk that takes place in daily life, is developed first. It's developed from listening and talking with others in social situations both in and out of school. **Academic language** is used to express opinions, analyze problems, or answer higher-level questions. It includes using and understanding content area vocabulary but is more than just knowing these words.