THE STAGES OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Students acquiring a second language will naturally progress through several stages. Given individual differences, the period of time a student will take to pass through a particular stage varies greatly, and because language acquisition is an ongoing process, stages may overlap. As the teacher of second language learners, it is important to be able to recognize each stage's characteristics and to use the following suggestions to assist students according to the stage they are in.

### SILENT/RECEPTIVE STAGE

#### STAGE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>STRATEGIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The student:</td>
<td>The teacher could:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• needs time to become comfortable with classroom activities, the teacher, and classmates</td>
<td>• focus on teaching commands through TPR – Total Physical Response - in which the student responds to commands non-verbally (i.e. &quot;sit down, stand up, close your book&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• begins to understand the message but does not focus on or analyze the form</td>
<td>• use gestures and body language to act out what is being said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• responds to communication non-verbally</td>
<td>• emphasize listening skills and not expect or force the student to speak until he or she is ready</td>
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<tr>
<td>• acquires passive vocabulary (recognizes but cannot yet use certain words)</td>
<td>• use visuals, pictures, and other realia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• will perhaps appear confused and/or hesitant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### EARLY PRODUCTION

#### STAGE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>STRATEGIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The student:</td>
<td>The teacher could:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• understands the main idea of the message but may not understand each word</td>
<td>• use yes/no questions and questions that require dichotomous answer (questions which require repetition of no more than one word that the teacher has used in the question)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• responds verbally with one or two words (may advance to two to three word groupings)</td>
<td>• begin a sentence and have the student complete the sentence with a word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• begins to use words that have been frequently heard, especially those pertaining to classroom environment</td>
<td>• continue to introduce new vocabulary while practicing previously learned vocabulary (the student needs to hear a word many times before feeling comfortable using it)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• mispronounces words (mispronunciation is normal and there is no need for correction, provided the listener understands what is being said)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SPEECH EMERGENCE
STAGE 3

CHARACTERISTICS
The student:
- begins using simple sentences
- improves pronunciation and intonation
- demonstrates an expanded vocabulary using words that have been heard many times and that are now understood

STRATEGIES
The teacher could:
- ask how and why questions
- introduce rudimentary forms of reading and writing
- emphasize to other students the importance of not making fun of or discouraging the student’s efforts (such behavior would inhibit the student’s language production).

INTERMEDIATE FLUENCY
STAGE 4

CHARACTERISTICS
The student:
- begins to use longer sentences and more elaborate speech patterns
- makes errors as he or she attempts to use new vocabulary and more complex grammatical structures
- begins to think in the new language instead of translating from the native language into the new language

STRATEGIES
The teacher could:
- provide opportunities for student to use the new language in comfortable situations
- engage student in activities which focus on speech production and not grammatical form or absolute correctness
- provide opportunities for student to talk about himself/herself, including desires, feelings, abilities, etc.
- introduce colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions

ADVANCED FLUENCY
STAGE 5

CHARACTERISTICS
The student:
- begins interacting with native speakers
- makes few grammatical errors
- has a high comprehensive level but may not be advanced enough to understand all academic classroom language
- continues to learn new vocabulary

STRATEGIES
The teacher could:
- begin to provide some grammar instruction
- focus on reading and writing skills
- continue to emphasize vocabulary – student still requires extensive vocabulary development
- use sheltered English, scaffolding, and cooperative learning techniques