

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION BY ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER (ELL) STUDENTS



WHAT ARE EXPECTED LANGUAGE PATTERNS IN ELL STUDENTS?

- Initially, the student may speak in short, simple and familiar sentences
- Within a few months of exposure to English, students may communicate more effectively, but grammatical errors and a limited vocabulary will still be evident. Pronunciation differences may still be evident.
- Students may take more than 2 years to produce correct grammatical forms and word endings on a consistent basis.

WHAT LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS ARE TYPICAL IN ELL STUDENTS?

Interference or transfer from the first language. There may be a short term direct influence of the first language. For example, native French speakers say, "the house of the dog" rather than, "the dog's house".

A silent period. When first exposed to a second language, students are often quiet and focus on listening and comprehension. The younger the student, the longer the silent period may be. Older students may remain silent for a few weeks or a few months, while preschoolers may be relatively silent for a year or more.

Language loss. As students learn English, they may lose skills and fluency in their first language, if they do not use them. They may go through a period of language imbalance during which they may not speak as proficiently as native speakers in either language. Limited use causes the first language to decline, while the second language has not yet reached a proficient level.

Language mixing. This can include use of sounds, words, grammar or the social aspects of language from both languages in the same sentence or conversation.





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WHEN SHOULD I BE CONCERNED?

- When delayed language development is observed in the student's first language (e.g., limited vocabulary, poor grammar, difficulty staying on topic).
- When the student has difficulty communicating in either his/her home language or second language.
- When there is a prolonged period of not talking and the student refuses to engage in non-verbal activities in either language.

HOW CAN PARENTS FACILITATE BILINGUAL-LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT?

- Speak to their children in the language they are most comfortable and proficient in.
- Do not discourage their children with language or learning challenges from using their first language at home.
- Provide rich exposure to both languages in the form of books, music, movies etc.

HOW CAN TEACHERS FACILITATE BILINGUAL-LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT?

- If a student mixes languages, model back what he/she said in the English form.
- Do not discourage students with language or learning challenges from using their first language at school.