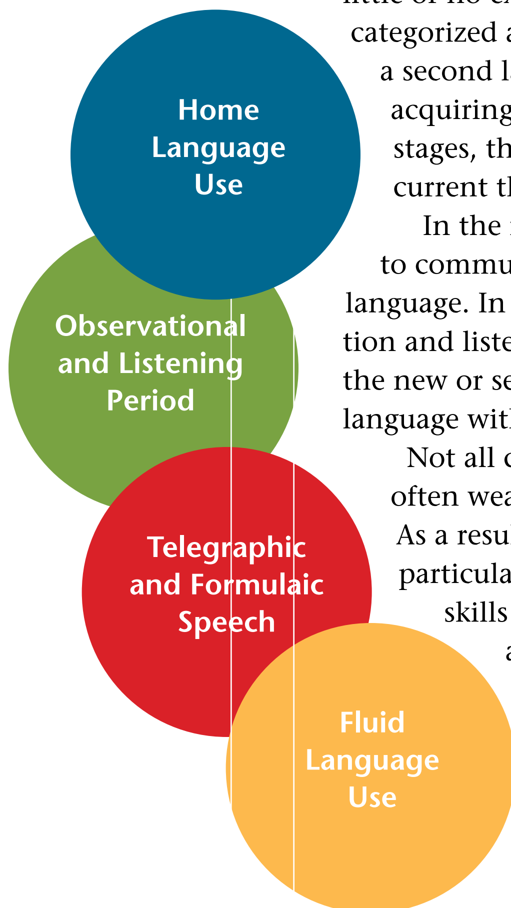
to me as I approached, 'I made a house for you. I have a big house in Thailand. It is up in a tree (using gestures to make a tree). You come see me. OK?' (He puts his hands together like an airplane)."

Stages of Learning a Second Language

What is the experience of children who have learned one language at home and encounter a second language when they enter preschool? In our society the second language is typically English, although in some cases English-speaking children are exposed to Spanish or another language in the classroom. As noted earlier, many children in the United States have had some exposure to English before preschool. This chapter focuses on children who have had little or no exposure to English before entering preschool. They are not categorized as receptive bilingual because they are learning English as a second language more or less from scratch. Generally, children acquiring a second language move through the following four stages, the names of some stages having been modified to reflect current thinking (Tabors and Snow 1994).



In the first stage children may attempt to use the home language to communicate with others who are speaking a different or second language. In the second stage many pass through a period of observation and listening. They next use telegraphic and formulaic speech in the new or second language and finally begin to use the second language with more fluency.

Not all children go through all stages, and the same children very often weave in and out of each stage, depending on the situation. As a result it may be difficult to characterize where a child is at any particular point. Teachers will want to note the child's language skills through his or her performance in a variety of activities and conversations with many partners throughout the week. Using what that information reveals and what the child's family knows about the child's ability to communicate, the teacher may be able to develop a more accurate informal assessment of the child's language development in both the first and second languages.

The Use of the Home Language to Communicate

Imagine yourself as a young child facing a situation in which many people are speaking a different language. If you want to interact with other children, you can do one of two things—stop talking altogether and use nonverbal ways to communicate or use your home language, which may not be understood by the other children or adults. Some children opt to use their home language because it has been their only means of communication. In a study Saville-Troike (1989) noticed that children in a child-care setting continued speaking their home language to communicate with other children, who would in turn reply in their own language. This form of communication was generally effective when the children were playing. Communication broke down when the context did not supply enough information or offer enough environmental cues for meaning to be understood. Eventually, of course, children abandon using their home language with those who do not understand it.

The Observational and Listening Period

Previously, this stage was referred to as the silent or nonverbal period because children tend to be quiet when engaged in challenging school activities. However, what children are typically doing at this stage is spending most of their energy listening to make sense of their new language and observing the gestures and environmental cues associated with the new language.

During this phase children may prefer to use other means (gestures, facial expressions, sounds) to communicate rather than talk (speak) to their teachers. Most children spend only a month or two at this stage. However, it can take up to six months, as noted by Hakuta (1974) in his observations of a Japanese girl attending kindergarten in the United States who did not speak for six months.

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I was worried because Sandy and Henry were not saying much even though they had been in my class for six months. Then I noticed they were really attending as if to catch every single word that came out of my mouth. I suddenly realized they were processing what they were hearing, getting used to the new sounds in English that were not there in Vietnamese or Mandarin, watching where I was pointing to see what I was labeling. It was soon after that they both started expressing themselves more in English.

Although children may not be talking at school during this stage, they are attending to and processing language. Like infants learning to speak their first language, second-language learners develop their understanding of the language before they are able to use it to communicate. In more informal situations they will still use their home language and whatever they know of their second language. During this stage children begin actively to crack the code of the second language.

Children rehearse the second language by repeating in a low voice what other speakers say and by playing with the sounds of the new language (Saville-Troike 1989). Repetition seems to be an important part of this rehearsal process. Typically, young children repeat the ends of utterances they hear around them. At this stage their speech is private and not meant as communication but as practice. They seem to be connecting English words with appropriate objects, actions, and situations. Like other young children acquiring their first language, children learning a second language play with the sounds of the language and gradually decipher the sounds, meanings, and patterns of the new one.

Telegraphic and Formulaic Speech

The next stage of second-language acquisition involves trying out the second language—using what is known to communicate. Because children know so little at this point, they typically resort to the use of telegraphic speech and formulas. *Telegraphic speech* refers to the use of a few content words without functional words or certain

grammatical markers that communicate, for example, action, possession, or location. Young children do the same in acquiring the first language. “Mommy milk,” “Daddy shoe,” and “fish water” are examples. Learning a second language often starts with the use of single words or two-word utterances to name objects: “car,” “apple juice,” “sandbox.” Children are beginning to develop a vocabulary of object names to use in interacting with native speakers.

Formulaic speech, or the use of formulas, is another strategy used by English learners observed by researchers (McLaughlin 1984; Tabors 1997). The formulas are chunks or phrases of language that children use without completely understanding their function. Children use these phrases in certain situations to achieve certain aims because they have heard other children using the phrases successfully (Wong Fillmore 1991). Wong Fillmore’s analysis of the children’s use of formulaic expressions indicates that the children were using chunks of language to engage in activities that promote language learning. That is, the children were guessing about the conditions under which particular utterances might appropriately be made. By using the formulas and receiving feedback telling them whether their guesses were right or wrong, they were able to test their conclusions. Formulas provided the tools for the children to learn more about their language.

Examples of formulas or formulaic speech:

“I like ____.”	“Gimme (Give me) _____.”	“I want/wanna ____.”
“I like milk.”	“Gimme book.”	“I want/wanna play.”
“I like Bob.”	“Gimme juice.”	“I want/wanna go.”
“I like mommy.”	“Gimme blocks.”	“I want/wanna doll.”

Children involved in this process may seem to be regressing in their ability to use language. The packaged formulas they use are typically grammatically correct, but the children now may be making grammatical errors. The process is similar to the one the child learning English as a first language goes through in learning rules for plurals and past tenses. For example, children may say “runned” instead of “ran.” They are no longer using memorized forms but instead are moving to a higher level of language learning by analyzing the language and trying to make sense of it.

Being young scientists, children make hypotheses about language forms and their use in specific situations. Because they are continually testing their hypotheses, they should be provided with rich language

environments that foster spoken language (oral communication or talk). Teachers should realize that most of the children's early attempts with language do not involve grammatical errors made intentionally but rather constitute developmental phases of language learning. Consequently, correcting children's speech at the sound of a perceived "error" might have negative consequences on the children's self-esteem and impede the natural developmental process.

TEACHER

I realized how important it was to allow children to use formulas and expressions that they have learned, even when their use was not always correct. When children used such expressions as 'How you do dese bananas?' or 'Gimme that thing,' I recognized they were interacting verbally and that this was more important than my need for grammatical correctness.

Fluid Language Use

As children demonstrate an understanding of the rules of English, they are able to apply them to achieve increasing control over the language. At this point they are using the new language much more creatively and begin to sound more like native speakers. The types of English used by children at this stage are referred to as (1) social English; and (2) academic English.

Social English, a variety of English used first by children during this phase of language development, refers to the use by children of more fluid speech (language) in the second language. Considered to be informal and predominantly spoken, it is characterized by short and simple sentence structures and, therefore, requires a smaller vocabulary than does academic English (Cummins 1981). Social English is sometimes referred to by educators as conversational English (Shefelbine 1998).

Children use social English most often in interactions with friends and adults in relaxed or playful situations. Some children may progress in this stage with incredible speed. Others may take noticeably longer to use their new language in social contexts, causing some teachers to be concerned about the children's lower progress. By drawing on their knowledge of early childhood development, those teachers should

remember that children reach developmental milestones, including those in first-language and second-language development, at different rates. That knowledge will help teachers view the progress of the children with accurate perspective.

Although children may feel comfortable in communicating with others in social situations, they may not be ready to participate effectively in more cognitively demanding situations (Cummins and Swain 1986). Children who use social English to greet their teachers in the playground or during mealtimes may mislead their teachers into thinking that the children can participate fully in all learning activities.

Academic English, in contrast to social English, takes much longer to learn. Studies have shown that school-age children require five to seven years to master academic English (Thomas and Collier 2002). Academic English, more formal than social English, requires the use of longer, more complex sentence structures. Children also need to master a larger vocabulary (Cummins 1981). Academic English requires children to perform in all four of the language skills addressed in school: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Because of the advanced requirements of academic English and the time it takes to master it, the use of a child's home language as the child masters English will help the child learn important concepts. Some teachers who are not proficient in a child's home language provide academic support in that language by planning activities to be implemented by family or community volunteers who speak the language. When no adults in the classroom speak a child's home language, the teacher can use other strategies included in this guide, such as the following, many of which are common strategies used by preschool teachers to make concepts meaningful for children.