

# **Learning an additional language**



## **Trainer's handbook**

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# How to use this handbook

## Objectives

This module sets out to:

- explore the developmental nature of second language learning
- consider ways in which second language learning is different from first language acquisition
- explore theories of second language acquisition with obvious implications for multilingual classrooms
- remind ourselves of what it is like to be a second language learner.

## Structure




The topics covered are:

- first language acquisition
- stages in first language acquisition
- theories of language learning
- language learning quiz
- a lesson in Clunkclickish

## Organization

Each activity:

- starts with teacher's notes which set out the purpose of the activity, the materials required and instructions for how to proceed
- Is followed by the relevant OHTs and handouts.

Key	
Teacher's notes	
Handout	
OHTs	

## Learning an additional language: objectives

- To explore the developmental nature of second language learning
- To consider ways in which second language learning is different from first language acquisition.
- To explore theories of language learning with obvious implications for multilingual classrooms
- To remind ourselves of what it is like to be a beginner language learner.



# First language acquisition

## Purpose

- To help participants think about first language acquisition.

## Materials

- **First language acquisition quiz** OHT
- **Summary of research findings on first language acquisition** handout

## Instructions

Display **First language acquisition quiz** OHT.

Ask participants to turn to their neighbours and discuss whether the statements on the handout are true or false.

Distribute **Summary of research findings on first language acquisition** handout. Give participants enough time to compare these findings with their own answers to the questions. Take feedback from the group about any of the findings that they found surprising.

## First language acquisition quiz

### True or false?

- Language develops in a predictable way
- Language develops in the same predictable way everywhere in the world
- Babies make all sounds of every language
- Children start by discovering that things have names
- More intelligent children acquire language faster
- Correction by parents help language acquisition in children.



# First language acquisition: a summary of research

- Children talk so readily because they know instinctively in advance what languages are like.
- Children everywhere follow a similar pattern.
- From around six months, babies make language-like sounds.
- The word 'mama' is found all over the world for 'mother'.
- It is not true that babies produce all the sounds of every language.
- Gradually children specialise in the sounds of their first language.
- At about 18 months, babies discover that things have names.
- Then there is a 'naming explosion'; many phrases are produced.
- Children then start to notice patterns in language.
- By three and a half years, children talk freely.
- During the above predictable sequence of events, some learning is required. This learning cannot be speeded up by coaching.
- An ability to cope with language structure does not depend on intelligence.

Source: Aitchison, J. (1997) *The language web*. Cambridge University Press, pp.41–58.

# Stages in first language acquisition

## Purpose

- To draw participants' attention to the developmental nature of first language acquisition
- To make parallels between these stages in English (additional language) and in the first languages of participants.

## Materials

- **Stages in first language acquisition** handout

## Instructions

Distribute **Stages in first language acquisition** handout.

Explain that most work in this area has been done on European languages and that the examples in the handout are based on English.

Ask participants to turn to their neighbours and discuss whether these stages correspond to what they know of other languages they speak.

Take feedback from the group as a whole, noting whether these stages are the same or whether there are any obvious differences.



# Stages in first language acquisition



Most of the research on first language acquisition has been done on European languages. Look at the typical stages of language acquisition for an English-speaking child in the table below.

Drawing on your own experience of other languages, would you say these stages are the same or are there any differences?

Age	Developmental stage	Example
From week 0	Crying	
Week 6	Cooing	goo-goo
Week 6	Babbling	ma-ma, da-da
Week 8	Intonation patterns	
Month 12	Single word	Duck, dog
Month 18	Two word utterances	Daddy there
Year 2	Word endings	My books, Mummy goed
Year 2: 3	Questions	What dat?
Year 2: 6	Negatives	No bed!
Year 5	Complex constructions	What I want to know is when will dinner be ready?
Year 10	Mature speech patterns	

# Theories of language learning



## Purpose

To familiarise participants with some theories of language learning

## Materials

**Theories of language learning** OHT

**The affective filter** OHT

**Ensuring comprehensible input** OHT

**Theories of language learning** handout

## Instructions

Display the **Theories of language learning** OHT,

Ask participants to discuss in pairs or small groups the kinds of situations and experiences which may either act as a block to children's language learning or which may reduce their anxiety.

Take feedback, then display **The affective filter** OHT.

Ask participants to discuss in pairs or small groups steps they can take to help second language learners understand what is happening in the classroom.

Take feedback and then display the **Comprehensible input** OHT.

Distribute the **Theories of language learning** handout.

## Theories of language learning

There are many theories of language learning. Two of the most influential are:

### The affective filter theory

A filter or mental block can make language learning less efficient. Children learn best when they feel relaxed and confident about taking risks.

### The theory of comprehensible input

Context is used to help learners understand the language addressed to them, even though it may contain structures and grammar beyond their current competence.



## Ensuring comprehensible input

- Comprehensible input ensures that children understand the essence of what is being said to them.
- Teachers need to:
  - give instruction that draws on children's experiences
  - give relevant background knowledge
  - make use of context or visual cues
  - offer frequent opportunities for students to express their ideas
  - use consistent language, neither too slow not too fast.



## The Affective Filter

Effective language learning takes place in low-anxiety environments. Teachers can help children break through the *affective filter* by:

- Encouraging them to talk about themselves and things that interest them.
- Getting them to participate and to talk as much as possible, through pair and group work.
- Emphasizing communication rather than accuracy and keeping error correction to a minimum.
- Praising attempts to take risks.
- Being sensitive to the class response and being prepared to change the activity or pace if children look bored or lost.



# Theories of language learning

## ***Affective filter***

A filter or mental block can make language learning less efficient. Children learn best when they feel relaxed and confident about taking risks.

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## ***The theory of Comprehensible Input***

Context is used to help learners understand the language addressed to them, even though it may contain structures and grammar beyond their current competence.

Comprehensible input ensures that children understand the essence of what is being said to them.

Teachers need to:

- provide instruction that draws on children's experiences
- provide relevant background knowledge
- make use of context or visual cues
- provide frequent opportunities for students to express their ideas
- use consistent language, neither too slow not too fast.

# Language learning quiz

## Purpose

- To emphasise the developmental nature of learning
- To explore and, where necessary, challenge participants' assumptions about language learning.

## Materials

For this activity you will need:

- **Stages in learning an additional language** OHT
- **Language learning quiz** OHT
- **Language learning quiz: key** handout

## Instructions

Display **Stages in learning an additional language** OHT

Display **Language learning quiz** OHT, which has a number of statements about learning an additional language. Ask participants to turn to their neighbours and discuss whether the statements are true or false.

Now distribute **Language learning quiz** handout, which gives a summary of the research findings on the different issues raised in the OHT.

Give participants enough time to compare these findings with the answers they provided to the original discussion points.

Take feedback from the group about any of the findings, which they found surprising.

## Stages in learning an additional language

- Pre-production: children may choose to say nothing. They understand language that has been made comprehensible.
- Early production: children have a small active vocabulary and are ready to speak in one or two word phrases.
- Speech emergence: there is a noticeable increase in listening comprehension. Children will try and speak in short phrases and begin to use social language.
- Nearly fluent: children understand what is said in the classroom and can express their ideas comprehensibly.
- Spoken proficiency: children have conversational fluency.



## 1 Language learning quiz

### True or false?

1. Children approach second language learning in the same way as first language acquisition.
2. In the initial stages, teachers should insist on accuracy in grammar and pronunciation.
3. Language flourishes best in a language rich environment.
4. It is a matter of concern when children refuse to speak in class.
5. It takes two years for children to learn enough English to fully participate in classroom activities.
6. There are different cultural patterns in language use.



# Language learning quiz: key

1. Children approach second language acquisition in the same way as first language acquisition.  
FALSE. As fluent speakers of one language, they know that they can draw on their existing experience. For instance, they know what people are likely to say in different situations – greetings, requests, reprimands and so on. They also have a clear idea of how language works, so they can use skills like pattern recognition and inference to work out what something means.
2. In the initial stages, teachers should insist on accuracy in grammar and pronunciation.  
FALSE. Children need to experiment and sometimes they will say things that are inaccurate. They are learning to internalize chunks of speech. They test these chunks by using them in situations that may or may not be appropriate. The feedback they receive helps them determine whether they have guessed correctly. Experimentation should therefore be encouraged.
3. Language flourishes best in a language-rich environment.  
TRUE. Teachers need to be good models of language use. In particular, they should encourage children to practice English as much as possible and provide reinforcement by expanding on vocabulary and by speaking coherently. It is important for children learning English to interact with others in the classroom as much as possible and will motivate them to take risks with the language that they might not take with artificial or meaningless subjects and thus accelerate their learning.
4. It is a matter of concern when children refuse to speak in class.  
FALSE. Most children spend a receptive period of up to several months before they start to speak in the new language. Children should never be forced to contribute before they are ready.
5. It takes two years for children to learn enough English to fully participate in classroom activities.  
FALSE. Most children are able to conduct fluent conversations within two years. Gestures, intonation and other cues help them to understand what's going on relatively rapidly. But it can take between five and seven years to range the same levels of proficiency in academic English as native speakers. Academic language has much less contextual support than conversation.
6. There are different cultural patterns in language use.  
TRUE. Children from different cultural backgrounds may experience culture conflict in school because their ways of learning and communicating are different from the routines of the classroom. For example, some children may not participate verbally in classroom activities because in their home culture calling attention to oneself and showing one's knowledge are regarded as overly assertive and even arrogant. Likewise, some children might be embarrassed by a teacher saying, "You should be proud of yourself"; more effective praise for them might be, "Your family will be proud of you."



# Theories of language learning



## ***Affective filter***

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## ***The theory of Comprehensible Input***

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Teachers need to:

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# A lesson in Clunkclickish

## Purpose

- To remind participants of what it feels like in a classroom where they don't speak the language.
- To explore which approaches are most helpful in this situation.
- To reinforce understanding of the theory of comprehensible input and the affective filter theory.

## Instructions

This activity is designed to remind participants of what it feels like to be in a classroom where learning takes place through the medium of an unfamiliar language.

Divide the group into two: students and observers.

If the trainer speaks a language, which is unknown to most of the participants, you should use that language. Otherwise follow the script below.

English	Clunkclickish or other language)
My name is [trainer's name]	Clunk click X
<b>Point to yourself</b>	
What is your name	Clunk clicky?
Make a line by the door. Take students one at a time to form a line, repeating 'Bang, bang, bang' each time.	Bang, bang, bang
Goodbye! Wave. Keep saying 'Ding dong' and use gestures to encourage students to wave back.	Ding dong!

Now take feedback from the observers.

Check with the students whether their perceptions of the lesson match those of the observers.

Encourage participants to make links with the theory of comprehensible input and the affective filter theory.

# Theories of language learning



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