

- **Pronoun confusion, such as “he/she,” is quite common during second language learning, and is not a sign of a language disorder.** Rather, it is a reflection of limited experience in using the second language. Experience and opportunity for practice are major factors in appropriate pronoun development for both monolinguals and second language learners. For example, later-born children tend to learn to use pronouns earlier than their siblings due to the increased chance of hearing pronouns being used in multiple person conversations.

- **Children who are outgoing and adventurous seem to learn the second language faster than those who are shy and introverted.** These personality traits are more likely to lead the child toward increased exposure to the second language and create more opportunities for language practice.

- **Children often transfer rules of grammar from the first language to the second.** This is a normal process and not a case of impaired language learning. A child may make an error in English grammar due to direct influence of grammar rules from his or her first language. For example, a child may say “I want the ball big.”

- **Inserting words from one language into sentences in the other language is a typical pattern for children learning two languages.** It reflects the fact that the child has learned a word in one language and not in the other. It is not a sign of a language disorder. Young children tend to insert single vocabulary words from one language into another, primarily to clarify statements. Children over 9 years of age tend to switch languages at the phrase level to convey social meanings.

Parenting Tips:

If parents speak both languages, use complete expressions in one language without mixing the two languages into one sentence or thought.

If you are proficient in a language other than English, communicate with your child in that language. This will give your child a proper model for language development and help him or her become bilingual.

Other Resources:

The American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA)
www.asha.org

The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (NCELA)
www.ncele.gwu.edu/

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Information for Parents on Second Language Acquisition:

What are expectations for the second language learner?



A joint project of the Bilingual/ESOL Department and Exceptional Student Learning Support



english

Introduction:

As your child learns a second language, you may have concerns about differences in the way he or she understands or speaks the second language. However, many of these language differences are a normal part of second language learning and should not be confused with a language disorder. This pamphlet will help you to identify normal behaviors for second language development.

Second Language Learning:

If a child is taught a second language before the first language is completely learned, he or she will begin to focus on learning the second language and the development of the first language may stop. Some second language learners can be delayed in both languages for a period of time because the first language begins to decline and the second language has not yet reached an age-appropriate level. This is a temporary imbalance and is considered to be normal.

Normal expectations for the second language learner:

- **As children learn a second language, they may have situation-specific vocabularies.** For example, a child may use and understand words in the first language for daily routines of the home such as family relationship terms like “brother” or “sister,” social routines, feeding and grooming activities. They may understand words in English for the preacademic concepts learned in school, such as colors, shapes and numbers.

- **When children are first exposed to a second language, they focus on listening.** These children are often very quiet and do not speak much as they focus on understanding the new language. The younger the child, the longer the silent period tends to last. Older children may remain in the silent period for a few months, and preschoolers may be relatively silent for a longer period of time.

- **Children need time to learn the more complex differences, such as the word order, of the two languages.** At first, children learn simple sentence structures in both languages, such as “I want milk.” But as they begin to use more complex grammar, children will learn how to say longer and more complex sentences in one language before the other.

