

Stage I is the learner's entry into second language acquisition. Entry may occur at any age. Stage I may be completed by a four- to five-year sequence that begins in elementary or middle school, a one- to two-year high school program, or a one- to two-semester college or university program.

Stage II represents a developmental progression from Stage I in terms of vocabulary acquisition, fluency, oral and written comprehension, and sophistication of expression. The Stage II student may be a student in middle school or high school in the traditional levels 1, 2, or 3, or a college or university student in a second semester course.

Stage III is a pivotal stage, as students move from the comfort of learned material to the challenging world of creating with the language. Students begin to adapt vocabulary to personal needs and to pursue their own interests in the language; in short, they become independent users of the language studied. The students' repertoire of vocabulary and structures increases, but as students attempt more original and complex tasks and messages, maintaining accuracy becomes problematic. Project participants have come to believe that the most critical factor in foreign language education today is sustaining students in their efforts to produce their own thoughts and feelings in a second language. Students are often unable to coordinate everything they know. Ideas and feelings spill out in a rather unpredictable fashion, leading teachers to wonder whether or not students have learned anything in the first few years of language study.

It is at Stage III that the instructional implications of classroom language learning vis-à-vis language acquisition become very clear. Many of the students tested in Stage III, generally those in the third year of language study, failed to perform as well as their teachers had predicted. Although the students had succeeded in demonstrating their knowledge of language systems and rules and were reading level appropriate materials, they simply were unable to put it all together when asked to speak and to write. The project participants quickly realized that many of these students were the very ones who

would not be encouraged to continue, and who would eventually lose heart and enthusiasm for language study, even though they had been quite successful at Stages I and II. Discussion among project participants revealed that most of the students in question were motivated and willing learners, but that the need to "cover" certain concepts and materials before the end of the year would, unfortunately, leave these students behind. They would either drop language study altogether or move on quite unprepared for the demands of the next level. Through this process, participants learned first hand that the time needed to successfully complete Stage III outcomes varies greatly among individual learners. More important, it was observed that the successful completion of Stage III generally requires more than a traditional third year high school course or a third or fourth semester of college or university study. This realization led to a clear understanding that the time allocated for typical intermediate level courses is grossly inadequate. If these courses are not redesigned to allow language acquisition to take place for the majority of students, the problem of attrition at the upper levels of language learning will continue.

Within Stage III, learners exhibit very different backgrounds and profiles. At the secondary level, many students have progressed through first- and second-year high school courses. At the college and university level, students currently come into Stage III by several routes--commonly from elementary college or university programs, or from three or four years of high school study. However, some students enter Stage III courses with other backgrounds, which may include, but are not limited to:

- an extended sequence of language instruction that began in elementary or middle school,
- immersion or intensive programs in the United States and/or other countries, and
- a home background in the language being studied.

These students, too, need adequate time to acquire and refine the skills and knowledge which will enable them to advance.

Students at Stage IV demonstrate increasing success with the Stage III outcomes. The Stage IV student tends to be a risk-taker who is willing to make mistakes and to self-correct. The Stage IV student explores topics that are less familiar, experiments with more complex structures associated with advanced functions, and engages in more elaborate and organized discourse. To achieve Stage IV outcomes, students are likely to have completed four to six years of middle/high school foreign language study or five to eight semesters of college or university foreign language study. Additionally, students may have spent significant time in a country where the target language is spoken.

Stage V is a specialist stage that not all students will pursue and that may be rare at the secondary level. With sufficient time, opportunity, and practice, nonnative speakers are fully capable of realizing Stage V outcomes. However, at the present time, it appears that few students can achieve these outcomes. The Stage V student is likely to be highly motivated and interested in pursuing further education and/or career opportunities associated with a foreign language. Although some high school students with immersion experience may reach Stage V, the majority of Stage V learners are at the college or university level. The Stage V outcomes are included in the *Language Learning Continuum* for the following reasons:

- There are some students who are functioning at this stage and need to be challenged beyond Stage IV outcomes.
- Although not all students will be able to achieve Stage V outcomes, they still need to be given opportunities and practice with tasks at this level so that a strong foundation is provided for those who wish to move beyond Stage IV in future foreign language study.
- It is likely that, as we build stronger elementary and middle school foreign language programs in our communities, the number of Stage V students will increase.

- College and university colleagues with interest in the study of literature may find Stage V descriptions to be a bridge between the *Language Learning Continuum* and the competencies necessary for the advanced study of literature. In the interest of a more coherent curriculum, dialogue between language learning specialists and literary specialists should continue.

Unlike previous stages, Stage V has no ceiling. The learning outcomes presume a wide focus that does not limit itself to literary content. Business and other professional contexts, foreign study experiences, and a variety of graduate courses may all serve as a point of departure for developing Stage V outcomes. Stage V outcomes are assessed holistically. Students should be able to use the functions, contexts, content, text type, and accuracy components of this stage in a sustained manner and in extended discourse.

Framework Categories. To better understand the individual components of the *Language Learning Continuum* and their interconnectedness, an explanation of the categories developed by project participants may be helpful.

- **Functions** are specific tasks that one normally performs in a language, such as obtaining information, expressing likes and dislikes, describing, and giving advice.

What can the student do with the language?

- **Context** refers to the situations and settings in which a particular function takes place, such as the function of greeting and leave taking that may occur in social interaction that is face-to-face. The context provides a delivery system, answering the questions "where," "when," and "with whom."

In what situation can the student perform these functions?

• **Text type** refers to the structure of the written or spoken language, ascending from the word and phrase levels to sentences and paragraphs. This section describes the range of text types normally used by students at various stages in their development.

How does the student express himself or herself in terms of discourse?

• **Content** refers to the amount of relevant information understood or conveyed by the student--what topics and areas of interest the student is able to listen to and understand, talk about, and write about. Examples include familiar topics such as school, and family, or more advanced topics such as current events, history, art, and literature. The content provides the substance of the message.

What is the student able to communicate about?

• **Accuracy** refers to the degree to which students' language and behavior are both structurally correct and culturally appropriate. Sociolinguistic elements, vocabulary, syntax, pronunciation, and fluency all play a role in this category.

How closely does the student's performance match the criteria?

0253-6

The following tables illustrate the *Language Learning Continuum* at each stage.

Language Learning Continuum

Stage I

Oregon
1 & 2

Function

Students develop the ability to:

- greet and respond to greetings;
- introduce and respond to introductions;
- engage in conversations;
- express likes and dislikes;
- make requests;
- obtain information;
- understand some ideas and familiar details;
- begin to provide information.

Context

Students can perform these functions:

- when speaking, in social interaction that is face-to-face;
- when listening, in social interaction and using audio or video texts;
- when reading, using authentic materials; e.g., menus, photos, posters, schedules, charts, signs, and short narratives;
- when writing notes, lists, poems, postcards, and short letters.

Text Type

Students can:

- when speaking and writing, use short sentences, learned words and phrases, simple questions and commands;
- when listening, understand some ideas and familiar details presented in clear, uncomplicated speech;
- when reading, understand short texts enhanced by visual clues.

Accuracy

Students:

- communicate effectively with some hesitation and errors, which do not hinder communication;
- demonstrate culturally acceptable behavior for Stage I functions;
- understand most important information.

Content

Stages I and II often include some combination of the following topics:

- **The Self:** family, friends, home, rooms, health, school, schedules, leisure activities, campus life, likes and dislikes, shopping, clothes, prices, size and quantity, and pets and animals.
- **Beyond Self:** geography, topography, directions, buildings and monuments, weather and seasons, symbols, cultural and historical figures, places and events, colors, numbers, days, dates, months, time, food and customs, transportation, travel, and professions and work.

Language Learning Continuum

Stage II

Oregon
3.4

Function

Students expand their ability to perform all the functions in Stage I. They also develop the ability to:

- express their needs;
- understand and express important ideas and some detail;
- describe and compare;
- use and understand expressions indicating emotion.

Context

Students can perform these functions:

- when speaking, in social interaction that is face-to-face;
- when listening, in social interaction and using audio or video materials;
- when reading, using authentic materials; e.g., short narratives, advertisements, tickets, brochures, and media materials;
- when writing, in letters and short guided compositions.

Text Type

Students can:

- when speaking and listening, use and understand learned expressions, sentences and strings of sentences, questions, and polite commands;
- when writing, create simple paragraphs;
- when reading, understand important ideas and some details in highly contextualized authentic texts.

Accuracy

Students:

- demonstrate increasing fluency and control of vocabulary;
- show no significant pattern of error when performing Stage I functions;
- communicate effectively with some pattern of error, which may interfere slightly with full comprehension, when performing Stage II functions;
- understand oral and written discourse with few errors in comprehension when reading; demonstrate culturally appropriate behavior for Stage II functions.

Content

Stages I and II often include some combination of the following topics:

- **The Self:** family, friends, home, rooms, health, school, schedules, leisure activities, campus life, likes and dislikes, shopping, clothes, prices, size and quantity, and pets and animals.
- **Beyond Self:** geography, topography, directions, buildings and monuments, weather and seasons, symbols, cultural and historical figures, places and events, colors, numbers, days, dates, months, time, food and customs, transportation, travel, and professions and work.

Language Learning Continuum

Stage III

Function

Students expand their ability to perform all the functions in Stages I and II. They also develop the ability to:

- clarify; ask for and comprehend clarification;
- express and understand opinions;
- narrate and understand narration in the present, past, and future;
- identify, state, and understand feelings and emotions.

Context

Students can perform these functions:

- when speaking, in social interaction that is face-to-face, and in simple transactions on the phone;
- when listening, in social interaction and using audio or video texts;
- when reading, using short stories, poems, essays, and articles;
- when writing, in journals, letters, and essays.

Text Type

Students can:

- when speaking, use strings of related sentences;
- when listening, understand most spoken language when the message is deliberately and carefully conveyed by a speaker accustomed to dealing with learners;
- when writing, create simple paragraphs;
- when reading, acquire knowledge and new information from comprehensive, authentic texts.

Accuracy

Students demonstrate a tendency to become less accurate as the task or message becomes more complex; some patterns of error may interfere with meaning. They generally choose appropriate vocabulary for familiar topics, but as the complexity of the message increases, there is evidence of hesitation and groping for words, as well as patterns of mispronunciation and intonation. Students generally use culturally appropriate behavior in social situations. When reading and listening, students are able to understand and retain most key ideas and some supporting detail.

Content

Content includes topics culturally pertinent to the target language; e.g., history, art, literature, music, current affairs, and civilization, with an emphasis on significant people and events in these fields. Familiar topics include career choices, the environment, social issues, and political issues.

Language Learning Continuum

Stage IV

Function

Students expand their ability to perform all the functions in Stages I, II, and III. They also develop the ability to:

- give and understand advice and suggestions;
- initiate, engage in, and close a conversation;
- compare and contrast;
- explain and support an opinion.

Context

Students can perform these functions:

- when speaking, in social interaction that is face-to-face, in simple transactions on the phone and in group discussions, prepared debates and presentations;
- when listening, in social interaction and using audio or video texts, including TV interviews and newscasts;
- when reading, using short literary texts, poetry, and articles;
- when writing, in journals, letters, and essays.

Text Type

Students can:

- when speaking, use simple discourse of paragraph length in a series of cohesive and coherent paragraphs;
- when listening, understand most authentic spoken language;
- when writing, create a series of coherent paragraphs;
- when reading, acquire knowledge and new information from comprehensive, authentic texts.

Accuracy

Students can engage in conversations with few significant patterns of error and use a wide range of appropriate vocabulary. They demonstrate a heightened awareness of culturally appropriate behavior. However, as the task or message becomes more complex, they demonstrate a tendency to become less accurate. In reading and listening, students are able to understand and report most key ideas and some supporting detail.

Content

Content embraces concepts of broader cultural significance, including institutions such as the educational system, the government, and political and social issues in the target culture. Both concrete and abstract topics of human and personal interest include music, literature, the arts, and the sciences.

Language Learning Continuum

Stage V

Function

Students expand their ability to perform all the functions in Stages I, II, III, and IV.

They also develop the ability to:

- **conduct transactions and negotiations;**
- **substantiate and elaborate opinions;**
- **convince and persuade;**
- **analyze and critique.**

Context

Students can perform these functions in almost any context, including many complex situations.

Text Type

Students can perform these functions in extended discourse when appropriate.

Accuracy

Students use culturally appropriate language characterized by a wide range of vocabulary.

There are few patterns of error, but speech may contain some hesitation and normal pauses.

Students comprehend significant ideas and most supporting details.

Content

Content embraces concepts of broader cultural significance, including issues in the target culture, such as the environment and human rights. Abstract ideas include the artistic, literary, political, and social spheres.