

## The Order of Acquisition and The Order of Use

### Variability Summary B

#### Excerpt From an Interview with Elaine Tarone, University of Minnesota:

One of the things that teachers might want to think about is the fact that every person who speaks a language actually speaks a number of different languages. We have an informal kind of language that we use at home and with our friends. It's quite different from school language—the more formal language that we would use in a classroom or use in a formal interview. That is true for very young learners as well as for older learners.

There is one research study that might be of interest to K–12 teachers, especially first-, second-, and third-grade teachers. This study was done in Australia by Liu. Liu followed a six-year-old Chinese boy for two years, while he was learning English in mainstream classrooms in Australia. Liu tape-recorded this learner, named Bob (a pseudonym), in three different contexts. He taped him at home in play sessions, when they were playing with Legos and coloring and talking about stories from American and Chinese folklore and things like that. He taped Bob at deskwork with his friends. He had a group of four or five little boys who he was very close to, and he did school work with them. Then he taped Bob when he was talking to his teacher.

One of the things that Liu looked at was Bob's acquisition of questions in English. Now, it turns out that second language learners who acquire questions in English go through six fairly set stages in their acquisition of questions. Bob would make progress—move from one stage to the next: first at home in conversations while he was playing, then he would use that new question form several weeks later with friends in his deskwork, and the teacher would be the last one to hear it.

Bob was careful and conservative in the way he used English with his teacher. He only used English forms he was absolutely certain were correct. The teacher was always the last to know. I think that's important for teachers to remember. It is a good reason for doing a lot of deskwork in the classroom. That is one thing the teacher can do. The teacher can set up situations where second-language learners can try out developing forms of their interlanguage with peers, without feeling the pressure of having to be absolutely accurate, as they do when talking to the teacher. (Study 4, Probe 7)

#### Source:

Teemant, A., Pinnegar, S., Harris, R. C., & Baker, D. S. (2001). *The second language acquisition case: A video ethnography of second language learners (Part III)*. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University.

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