

Table 5.1. Misconceptions and Realities About the Language Acquisition Process

Misconception	Reality	Implications
<p>Bilingualism means equal proficiency in both languages.</p>	<p>Bilingualism rarely means equal proficiency in both languages.</p>	<p>ELLs include students with a wide range of proficiencies in their home language and English, with varying levels of bilingualism.</p> <p>Bilingual students may be stronger in some areas in their home language and stronger in other areas in English.</p>
<p><i>Semilingualism</i> is a valid concept and “non-non” classifications indicating children are limited in their home language and English (based on test results) are useful categories.</p>	<p><i>Semilingualism</i> and “non-non” categories are the results of tests that do not measure the full range and depth of language proficiencies among ELLs acquiring two languages simultaneously.</p>	<p>The vast majority of children begin school having acquired the syntactic and morphological rules of the language of their community.</p> <p>Current language assessment measures rarely capture the full range of skills that bilingual children bring to the classroom.</p> <p>Classifying students as “limited-limited” or “non-non” is not useful because it does not guide teachers as to what students know or need to learn; instead, it promotes low expectations.</p> <p>Other forms of authentic assessment should be used to determine language proficiency levels of ELLs, including natural language samples.</p>
<p>The more time students spend receiving English literacy instruction (immersed in it), the faster they will learn to read in English.</p>	<p>Students who receive some home language literacy instruction achieve at higher levels in English reading than students who do not receive it.</p>	<p>Instruction in English and interactions with English speakers are important, but not enough to provide the optimal support for ELLs to be able to fully participate in classroom learning and achieve to their potential.</p> <p>Skills developed in students’ native language transfer to English, particularly when teachers help students make connections across languages.</p> <p>Students acquire English when they receive input that is understandable (i.e., by using language in context, providing background knowledge, using visual and context cues, clarifying vocabulary).</p>

Table 5.1. Misconceptions and Realities About the Language Acquisition Process (cont.)

Misconception	Reality	Implications
Errors are problematic and should be avoided.	“Errors” are a positive sign that the student is making progress and are a necessary aspect of second language acquisition.	<p><i>Interlanguage</i> – overgeneralizing grammatical rules from one language to another – is a natural, normal aspect of second language acquisition.</p> <p>Errors such as confusion with verb tenses, plurals, possessives, word order, subject/verb agreement, and the use of articles are common among ELLs and should not be interpreted as signifying that a student has a disability.</p> <p><i>Code-switching</i> is common among bilingual individuals around the world and should not be considered a sign of confusion.</p>
All ELLs learn English in the same way at about the same rate; a slow rate of acquisition indicates a possible disability.	The length of time it takes students to acquire academic language in English varies a great deal, from 4 to 7 years or more.	<p>Many different variables affect the language acquisition process.</p> <p>Even when ELLs appear to be quite proficient in English, they may not yet have acquired full academic proficiency.</p> <p>The reasons for an ELL’s struggles when learning to read are more likely to relate to the language acquisition process than a disability.</p>
ELLs are not ready to engage in higher-level thinking until they learn basic skills.	ELLs are as capable of engaging in higher-level thinking as their fully proficient peers.	<p>Instruction and practice at every grade level must provide frequent opportunities for ELLs to engage in higher-level thinking.</p> <p>Instruction should ensure that ELLs of all proficiency levels have multiple entry points to access content.</p>

Note: Adapted with permission from "Misconceptions About the Second Language Acquisition Process," by J. Klingner, E. Almanza de Schonewise, C. de Onis, L. Méndez Barletta, & J. Hoover, in *English Language Learners Who Struggle with Reading: Language Acquisition or Learning Disabilities?* (p. 17). Copyright 2008 by Corwin Press. ELL = English language learner, "non-non" classifications indicated children are limited or low achieving in their home language and in English.