

### **Jim Cummins and Language Acquisition**

Jim Cummins's language acquisition theories have directly influenced classroom instruction. Cummins distinguishes between two types of language, Basic Interpersonal Communications skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) have directly influenced classroom instruction.

This distinction had led teachers to a better understanding of language ability and expectations.

Research has shown that the average student can develop conversational fluency within two to five years.

Developing fluency in more technical, academic language can take from four to seven years depending on many variables such as language proficiency level, age and time of arrival at school, level of academic proficiency in the native language, and the degree of support provided.

Later, Cummins expanded the concept of conversational and academic language to include two distinct types of communication, depending on the context in which it occurs, context-embedded communication and context-reduced communication.

Context-embedded communication provides several communicative supports to the listener or reader, such as objects, gestures, or vocal inflections, which help make the information comprehensible.

Examples of context-embedded communication are a one-to-one social conversation with physical gestures, or storytelling activities that include visual props.

Context-reduced communication provides fewer communicative clues to support understanding. Examples are a phone conversation, which provides no visual clues, or a note left on a refrigerator.

Similarly, Cummins distinguished between the different cognitive demands that communication can place on the learner. According to Cummins, language can be cognitively undemanding or cognitively demanding.

Cognitively undemanding communication requires a minimal amount of abstract or critical thinking. Examples of cognitively undemanding communication are a conversation on the playground, or simple yes/no questions in the classroom.

Cognitively demanding communication requires a learner to analyze and synthesize information quickly and contains abstract or specialized concepts. Examples of cognitively demanding communication are academic content lessons, such as a social studies lecture, a math lesson, or a multiple-choice test.

Cummins's language acquisition theories break language down into categories that are very critical for teachers to understand. His theories can be summarized as:

- Second language learners become proficient in Basic Interpersonal Communication years before becoming proficient in Cognitive Academic Language.
- The ease of understanding language depends on the context in which it is used. Context-embedded Communication is easier to understand than Context-reduced Communication.
- The ease of understanding language also depends on whether the language is cognitively demanding or undemanding.