Comparison of Language Differences Versus Disabilities

Learning Behavior Manifested	Indicators of a Language Difference Due to Additional Language Acquisition	Indicators of a Possible Learning Disability
Oral Comprehension / Listening		
1. Student does not respond to verbal directions	1. Student lacks understanding of vocabulary in English but demonstrates understanding in L1	1. Student consistently demonstrates confusion when given verbal directions in L1 and L2; may be due to processing deficit or low cognition
2. Student needs frequent repetition of oral directions and input	2. Student is able to understand verbal directions in L1 but not L2	2. Student often forgets directions or needs further explanation in L1 and L2 (home & school); may be due to an auditory memory difficulty or low cognition
3. Student delays responses to questions	3. Student may be translating question in mind before responding in L2; gradual improvement seen over time	3. Student consistently takes a longer time period to respond in L1 & L2, and it does not change over time; may be due to a processing speed deficit
Speaking / Oral Fluency		
1. Student lacks verbal fluency	1. Student lacks vocabulary, sentence structure, and/or self-confidence	1. Speech lacks clarity in L1 and L2; may be due to hearing or speech impairment
2. Student is unable to orally retell a story	2. Student does not comprehend story due to a lack of understanding and background knowledge in English	2. Student has difficulty retelling a story or event in L1 and L2; may have memory or sequencing deficits
3. Does not orally respond to questions or does not speak much	3. Lacks expressive language skills in English; it may be the silent period in 2nd language acquisition	3. Student speaks little in L1 or L2; student may have a hearing impairment or processing deficit

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Phonemic Awareness / Reading		
1. Student does not remember letter sounds from one day to the next	1. Student will initially demonstrate difficulty remembering letter sounds in L2 since they differ from the letter sounds in L1, but with repeated practice over time will make progress	1. Student doesn't remember letters and sounds after initial and follow-up instruction (even if they are common between L1/L2); may be due to a visual/auditory memory or low cognition
2. Student is unable to blend letter sounds in order to decode words in reading	2. The letter sound errors may be related to L1 (for example, L1 may not have long and short vowel sounds); with direct instruction, student will make progress over time	2. Student makes letter or sound substitutions when decoding not related to L1; student cannot remember vowel sounds; student may be able to decode sounds in isolation, but is unable to blend the sounds to decode whole word; may be due to a processing or memory deficit
3. Student is unable to decode words correctly	3. Sound not in L1, so unable to pronounce word once decoded	3. Student consistently confuses letters/words that look alike; makes letter reversals, substitutions, etc. that are not related to L1; may be processing or memory deficit
Reading Comprehension & Vocabulary		
1. Student does not understand passage read, although may be able to read w/ fluency and accuracy	1. Lacks understanding and background knowledge of topic in L2; is unable to use contextual clues to assist with meaning; improvement seen over time as L2 proficiency increases	1. Student doesn't remember or comprehend what was read in L1 or L2 (only applicable if student has received instruction in L1); this does not improve over time; this may be due to a memory or processing deficit
2. Does not understand key words/phrases; poor comprehension	2. Lacks understanding of vocabulary and meaning in English	2. The student's difficulty with comprehension and vocabulary is seen in L1 and L2
Writing		
1. Errors made with punctuation/capitalization	1. The error patterns seen are consistent with the punctuation and capitalization rules for L1; student's work tends to improve with appropriate instruction in English	1. Student consistently makes capitalization and punctuation errors even after instruction is provided; this may be due to deficits in organization, memory or processing

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Handwriting		
1. Student is unable to copy words correctly	1. Lack of experience with writing the English alphabet	1. Student demonstrates difficulty copying visual material to include shapes, letters, etc. This may be due to a visual/motor or visual memory deficit
2. Student has difficulty writing grammatically correct sentences	2. Student's syntax is reflective of writing patterns in L1; typical error patterns seen in 2nd language learners (verb tense, use of adverbs or adjectives); improves over time	2. The student makes more random errors such as word omissions, missing punctuation; grammar errors are not correct in L1 or L2; this may be due to a processing or memory deficit
3. Student has difficulty generating a paragraph or writing essays but is able to express his or her ideas orally	3. Student is not yet proficient in writing English even though they may have developed verbal skills; student makes progress over time, and error patterns are similar to other 2nd language learners	3. The student seems to have difficulty paying attention or remembering previously learned information; the student may seem to have motor difficulties and avoids writing; student may have attention or memory deficits
Spelling		
1. Student misspells words	1. Student "borrows" sounds from L1; progress seen over time as L2 proficiency increases	1. Student makes errors such as writing the correct beginning sound of words and then random letters or correct beginning or ending sounds; may be due to a visual memory or processing deficit
2. Student spells words incorrectly; letters are sequenced incorrectly	2. Writing of words is reflective of English fluency level or cultural thought patterns; words may align to letter sounds or patterns of L1 (sight words may be spelled phonetically based on L1)	2. Student makes letter sequencing errors such as letter reversals that are not consistent with L1 spelling patterns; may be due to a processing deficit

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Mathematics		
1. Student manifests difficulty learning math facts and/or math operations	1. Student lacks comprehension of oral instruction in English; student shows marked improvement with visual input or instructions in L1	1. Student has difficulty memorizing math facts from one day to the next and requires manipulatives or devices to complete math problems; may have visual memory or processing deficits
2. Student has difficulty completing multiple-step math computations	2. Student lacks comprehension of oral instruction in English; student shows marked improvement with visual input or instructions in L1	2. Student forgets the steps required to complete problems from one day to the next even with visual input; student reverses or forgets steps; may be due to a processing or memory deficit
3. Student is unable to complete word problems	3. Student does not understand mathematical terms in L2 due to English reading proficiency; student shows marked improvement in L1 or with visuals	3. Student does not understand how to process the problem or identify key terms in L1 or L2; may be a processing deficit/reading disability
Behavior		
1. Student appears inattentive and/or easily distracted	1. Student does not understand instructions in English due to level of proficiency	1. Student is inattentive across environments even when language is comprehensible; may have attention deficits
2. Student appears unmotivated and/or angry; may manifest internalizing or externalizing behavior	2. Student does not understand instruction due to limited English and does not feel successful; student has anger or low self-esteem related to 2nd language acquisition	2. Student does not understand instruction in L1 or L2 or across contexts; may be frustrated due to a possible learning disability
3. Student does not turn in homework	3. Student may not understand directions or how to complete the homework due to lack of English proficiency; student may not have access to homework support at home	3. Student seems unable to complete homework consistently even when offered time and assistance with homework during school; this may be due to a memory or processing deficit