

How Do Children Learn Languages?

Lecture 2



Today's Main Point

We acquire language in a naturally ordered sequence. In simple terms, this happens because of how our brains develop over time and because we acquire more complex language as the brain develops. This does not simply happen through imitation and a behavioristic process, but rather we acquire language in a dynamic, creative, and instinctive process.

Key Words

Caretaker Speech	Developmental Sequences
Morpheme	Longitudinal
Negation	Utterance
Incidental Vocabulary Learning	Cognitive Development
Innate	Metalinguistic

Portrait of Lotte
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What are the stages of language acquisition?



6 Points

- (1) Developmental Sequences
- (2) Negation Sequences
- (3) Question Sequences
- (4) Pre-School Acquisition
- (5) In School Acquisition
- (6) Behaviorism

1. Developmental Sequences

- We acquire certain features of language in order.
 - It's Krashen's Natural Order Hypothesis.
 - This is due to cognitive development and linguistic mastery.

1. Developmental Sequences

- Cognitive development + linguistic mastery.
 - First children understand singular and plural.
 - Then they acquire plural endings to nouns.

Sequence for Morphemes

Grammar	Morpheme	Example
Present progressive	-ing	Mommy <u>running</u>
Plural	-s	Two <u>Books</u>
Irregular Past	went, brought, ate	Baby <u>went</u>
Possessive	's	Daddy's <u>hat</u>
Copula	is, are...	Cake <u>is</u> great
Articles	the, a	Give me <u>the</u> look.
Regular Past	-ed	He <u>watched</u> the film.
Third person singular	-s	<u>Bolt</u> runs
Auxiliary	be	Arnold <u>is</u> coming back.

The Wug Test

- The wug test.
 - We don't memorize word lists.
 - We acquire rules and patterns.



2. Negation in Sequence

- Negation (Stage 1)
 - Is that a biscuit? (pointing at an apple).
 - No, apple.
- Negation (Stage 2)
 - Daddy no come home. (adding the subject)

2. Negation in Sequence

- Negation (Stage 3) adding complexity
 - I can't do it.
 - *He don't want it. (not adding tense & person)

2. Negation

- Negation (Stage 4)
 - She doesn't want it. (correct)
 - *I don't have no more candies.

The Power of Questions

Did you threaten to overrule him? (x 12)
Jeremy Paxman

3. Question Sequences

- Stages of question formation
- "What Questions" are generally first.
- "Where and Who Questions" come next.

3. Question Sequences

- Stages of question formation
- "Why Questions" come at the end of year two.
 - He's in the "Why Stage!"
 - -wh embedded.
 - "Ask him why can't he go out."

3. Question Sequences

- Six stages for questions.
 - Two factors help explain the stages
 - (1) Cognitive development.
 - (2) Linguistic complexity.
 - Do children learn questions by skill-building?

4. Pre-School

- Age four
- ask questions, give commands, report events
- create imaginary stories
- correct word order and grammar
- master basic structures.



Awareness of Language



The "Apparently" Kid (Noah Ritter)
How many times did he say "apparently?"

5. School Years

- What happens?
- Metalinguistic Awareness
- Language as an object.
- Define a word.
- Describe word sounds.

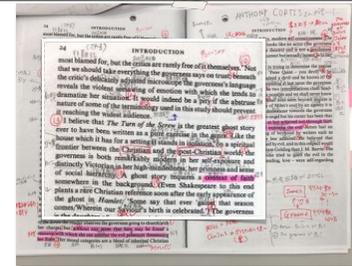


5. School Years

- What happens during the school years?
- Vocabulary growth is amazing. Why?
 - It depends on how much they read.

Vocabulary & Reading

- Meta-analysis (L1) 20 Experiments
- Examined incidental word learning during normal reading.
- What percent did they learn?
 - Students learn about 15% of the new words they meet.
 - Swanborn, M.S.L. and Glopper K. 1999.



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Volume & Incidental Learning, Waring 2007

Rank	Word	Volume of Words Need to Read with Recurrence Rates				Meet 20 Times in a Book	s of Books
		1	5	10	20		
1	the	17	86	171	343		
50	like	225	1,127	2,253	4,506	1.8 Books	4,500
500	present	4,037	20,183	40,366	80,732	17.9 Books	4,500
1000	blood	8,533	42,665	85,329	170,658	17.1 Books	10,000
1500	intent	14,773	73,864	147,727	295,455	19.7 Books	15,000
2000	stumble	23,103	115,625	231,250	462,500	23.1 Books	20,000
3000	sergeant	47,343	236,713	473,425	946,850	31.6 Books	30,000
5000	satellite	132,143	660,714	1,321,429	2,642,857	33.0 Books	80,000
10000	relativity	620,000	3,164,474	6,328,947	12,657,885	158 Books	

Behaviorism and Reinforcement

WHAT IS EASY?

► When I know x% of the words in a story, the story is easy to understand.

When you know 70% of the words in a story, reading is HARD.

Two wales were laudering through the bance. As they laudered, they wained the beautiful colors. They gipped to the buttes of the wind in the blanes. But then, everything became kipe. The wales nimmed around. They frined that something jarvis was going to pioom. Then all of a sleedeen, a big black Stace came out of the bance.

The Stace adair up and made a great buttle. For a thibe, the wales didn't move. They just adair there chamed. Then one of them hault. He hault ujay and got up a nearby blane. He was duffning only about his dowricks.

*Bad words are fake words. We don't know them.

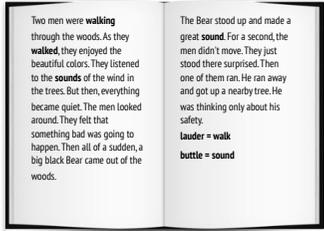
When you know 95-98% of the words in a story, reading is EASY.

Two men were laudering through the woods. As they laudered, they enjoyed the beautiful colors. They listened to the buttes of the wind in the trees. But then, everything became quiet. The men looked around. They felt that something bad was going to happen. Then all of a sudden, a big black Bear came out of the woods.

The Bear stood up and made a great buttle. For a second, the men didn't move. They just stood there surprised. Then one of them ran. He ran away and got up a nearby tree. He was thinking only about his safety.

*Bad words are fake words. We don't know them.

When you know 95-98% of the words in a story, you can guess words from context.



6. First Language Acquisition

- What is behaviorism?
- Kids imitate others
- Kids practice language
- and get +reinforcement
- They form correct habits



6. First Language Acquisition

- Imitation is selective.
- Children choose what they imitate.
- Imitation is strategic, creative, and dynamic.
- Krashen might claim that
 - (a) they imitate comprehensible input
 - (b) and create auto-input.

6. First Language Acquisition

- Imitation and practice are limited.
- Children don't simply repeat what they hear.
- They instinctively (?) find patterns and rules.
- They use them creatively.

6. First Language Acquisition

- Kids create new forms or new uses of words.
- They make sense as they do.
- Lasterday = yesterday
- Lasternight = last night, of course
- my bender = my elbow

6. First Language Acquisition

- Behaviorism is helpful but limited.
- It does not explain the acquisition of complex grammar.

Summary - So What?

- We do learn language in stages.
- Reading: big driver of vocabulary growth.
- Reading many kinds of texts is important.
- Behaviorism is important historically.
- But it provides limited explanatory power.
- Language acquisition is a creative, dynamic process.