

Child Language Development



Speaking Acquisition

Phonology

So this studies how those cute little babies actually learn how to articulate certain sounds and eventually mash them all together to create words that we understand. It's a fascinating process to say the least and one you will have to understand for the exam.

Stage 1 (0–2 Months)

Basic Biological Noises – These are noises that reflect biological occurrences in the baby such as crying due to hunger, pain or discomfort. This is categorised as *Reflexive Noises*

Breathing, eating, swallowing and coughing etc. are known as *Vegetative Noises*

Stage 2 (2–5 Months)

Cooing and Laughing – Cooing noises are generally initiated when the child is comfortable. To begin with this sound develops alongside crying but eventually the child learns to respond to their mother's speech or smiles.

Cooing itself is quieter than crying and are shorter bursts of vowel-like sounds with a possible consonant quality at the back of the mouth.

At 4 months the first throaty chuckles begin and laughs begin to emerge!

Stage 3 (5–8 Months)

Vocal Play – In comparison to Cooing, vocal play is normally steadier and longer. Vocal play normally lasts for 1 second with consonant + vowel-like sequences that are frequently repeated. Intonation goes from low to high and vice versa. Nasal and fricative sounds are made in various parts of the mouth. Studies have shown that this is a period of practice of vocalisation for the child.

Stage 4 (7–13 Months)

Babbling – Babbling is much less varied than vocal play. A smaller set of sounds are used which accommodate the native language of the child.

Reduplicated Babbling is firstly used which involves only a couple of sounds such as [bababa]

Then *Variiegated Babbling* occurs when the child begins to use more varied consonants/vowels in one single utterance e.g. [adu]

Stage 5 (9–18 Months)

Melodic Utterance – Variations in melody, rhythm and tone of voice become a major feature towards the end of the first year.

Individual syllables come to be used with a fixed melody producing “proto-words” where the sounds are clear but the meaning is not so.

Parents at this point however will begin to understand the intentions of the child’s utterances such as questioning, calling, greeting or wanting.

After the First Year children begin to develop ways in which they can simplify the words they try to say, since it’ll take a child normally to understand all vowels and consonants at the age of 6–7 years old.

Syllable Simplification/Consonant Clusters

The systematic deletion of certain sounds in order to simplify syllable structure.

E.g. Try >>> [tal]

Kite >>> [kal]

Deletion

This is the elimination of final consonants. Initial consonants, in contrast are typically retained if they precede a vowel.

E.g. Bus >>> [bʌ]

Boot >>> [bu:]

Substitution

One of the most common phonetic processes in early language. Substitution is the systematic replacement of one sound with another that is easier to articulate.

Yet this has its own divisions too, for top grade learn these:

- **Stopping** – the replacement of a fricative by a corresponding stop (remember fricatives generally include sounds with the teeth: f,v,th)
- **Fronting** – the moving forward of a sound's place of articulation
- **Gliding** – the replacement of a liquid by a glide
- **Denasalization** – the replacement of a nasal stop by a non-nasal counterpart

Assimilation

The modification of one or more features of a segment under the influence of neighbouring sounds

E.g. Hymn – We do not pronounce the /n/ at the end of the word

But for children this normally leads to the same vowels and consonants being used in the same word.

E.g. Doggy >>> [gogi:]

Baby >>> [bibi]

Phonological Theory

Whenever you get a text on children speaking, if there is any evidence of the following theories being true to the text then throw it in there, it can only get you marks!

Berko & Brown (1960)

The "FIS" Phenomenon

Child: fis

Adult: This is your fis?

Child: No-my fis

Adult: Oh, this is your fish?

Child: Yes, my fis



This experiment shows that even though the child could not pronounce the /ʃ/ sound, he was able to detect that it was different than the phoneme /s/. So it shows that children have less phonetic rules in their speech than adults.

Cruttenden (1974)

Intonation Experiment (Football)

Used adults, teenagers and young children and asked them to try and predict the football results (win, draw or a loss) using only the intonation of the first team announcement. Adults were more successful at this task; children 7-11 were largely unsuccessful. Teenagers did better than the children but did significantly worse than the adults.

This shows that children, even into the teenage years, are still learning to recognise intonation and stress patterns in speech!

Lexis/Semantics

Age	Average Size of Vocabulary
1	100
2	300
3	700
4	1200
5	3000
7	4000
11	40,000 possibly?

We can already see that children learn an incredible amount of words in a relatively short amount of time. Most of these words begin as words that

describe the immediate environment around them, children are said to be egocentric at this point in their learning.

Children between the ages of 12 months and 18 months will start to use words but in a more creative way, they may use the word even if they don't know specifically what it means.

Underextension – This is when a child uses a word in a restricted way. For example when a child says 'hat' she may only mean the hat SHE wears not anyone elses.

Overextension – When a child uses a word to refer to several but related things such as if a child says 'cat' they may mean anything that has a tail (dogs, monkey, fox)

Lexical/Semantic Theory

Nelson (1973)

Categories of the first 50 words spoken

18 children were studied and Nelson arranged the words into these 5 categories:

1. Classes of Objects (dog, shoe, ball)
2. Specific Objects (Mummy, Daddy)
3. Actions/Events (give, stop, up)
4. Modifying Things (dirty, nice)
5. Personal/Social (hello, bye bye, yes, no)

It was also found that words that describe something that can be touched were most common in the first 50 words learnt.

Grammar

The rules of grammar are not an easy thing to learn in the English language and it must be even harder for those little kiddly-winks.

Holophrastic Stage

Holophrases are one word utterances that express a complete idea and it performs the same function as an entire sentence would.

For example, when a child says 'teddy' it may mean a number of things. It could be a declarative "here's my teddy" it could be an interrogative "where's my teddy?" an imperative "get my teddy" or an exclamative "there's my teddy, great!"

Caregivers will often need contextual clues to try and decipher the intentions of the holophrase the child has used.

The Two Word Stage

At about 18 months children will begin to use 2 words in conjunction with one another, this is the beginnings of grammar in the language. Children may use the two words in a number of different ways:

"dog running" = Subject + Verb

"roll ball" = Verb + Object

"daddy dinner" = Subject + Object

"dolly dirty" = Subject + Compliment

These are the basic blocks of meaning and normally contain 2/3 of the components needed for a complete sentence (Subject - Verb - Object) or SVO

Telegraphic Stage

At about 2 years of age children start to use 3-4 word combinations this indicates the beginnings of the telegraphic stage.

"Mikey want cup" = Subject + Verb + Object

"doggy is naughty" = Subject + Verb + Compliment

Children at this point will still omit functional words such as prepositions, determiners and auxiliary verbs.

After the Age of 5...

Children will begin to use the following grammatical constructions:

- Coordination Conjunctions
- Negatives
- Questions
- Inflections

Grammatical Theory

Brown (1973) Acquiring Inflections

Children tend to acquire inflections in grammar in this particular order:

Present participle “-ing” = “I going”

Plural “-s” = “bricks”

Possessive ‘s = “Mike’s bear”

Determiners/Prepositions (a, the) = “Get the ball”

Past tense “-ed” = “I hugged it”

Third Person Singular verb “-s” = “She loves me”

Auxiliary “be” = “It is sunny”

This process takes place during 2–3 years of age!



Berko (1958) The ‘Wug’ Test

Children were shown a picture of a strange creature and told it was a Wug. Then they were shown 2 of these creatures. They were told “Now there’s another one, there are two ___” The children aged 3 and above answered by saying there were two Wugs.

- The children had never heard of a Wug before, so when they used the plural form it proved that at this age grammatical rules were no longer imitated.
- To hear the grammatical rule being used so often and then for it to become second nature is known as **internalisation**

Pragmatics

Children learn how to interact with others at an early age. Even with the game of peek-a-boo children begin to learn the rules of turn taking and the form of early social interaction, also caregivers may respond to a baby's babbling as if they were having a conversation so already there's interaction between child and caregiver.

As children grow older they will start to develop more conventions of conversation including politeness features, turn taking, adjacency pairs and opening and closing sequences. In addition to this Non Verbal Communication (NVC) develops as well allowing children to make hand and face gestures according to what they are saying.

Pragmatic Theory

Halliday (1975)

The Seven Functions of Children's Language

Halliday believed that children use language in the following ways for the following purposes:

Instrumental – to get something “toilet”

Regulatory – to make requests or give orders “not your teddy”

Interactional – to relate to others “nice mummy”

Personal – to express views and feelings “bad kitty”

Heuristic – to find out about the immediate environment “what that?”

Imaginative – language that comes about through play, storytelling etc.

Representational – to convey information “I'm three”

Theories of Language Development

So, the next question is how do children learn all of these sounds and rules in a matter of years? 4 different theories have been put across to attempt to explain how children do learn language at all.



Skinner (1957)

The Imitation Theory

Skinner suggested that children learn language through imitation and reinforcement.

He argued:

- Children repeat what they hear
- Caregivers reward a child's effort with praise
- When correcting mistakes, reinforcement is used by repeating the correct word

Specific pronunciations of individual words are acquired by copying an adult. This theory explains an important part of their phonological development

However, there are flaws with this theory:

- Children can construct sentences they've never heard before; so they aren't always imitating
- They don't memorise 1000s of sentences; so their development cannot be exclusively based on repeating what they've heard from their parents
- Imitations cannot explain overgeneralisations
- Imitation cannot explain the 'fis' phenomenon

Chomsky (1965)

The Innate Theory

Chomsky believed that unlike imitation, language acquisition was inbuilt.

- He suggests that each child has a *Language Acquisition Device (LAD)* which allows them to take in and then use grammatical rules that are spoken where they live
- This theory explains how children make overgeneralisations in language and why inflections are learnt in a specific order
- All children pass through the same early stages of language acquisition before refining their sounds to their native language
- However this theory does underestimate the significance of Skinner's argument of Imitation

Piaget (1980)

The Cognitive Theory

Piaget claimed that instead of language acquisition being innate it was more to do with the mental process and once a child acquires certain mental capabilities, then it can begin to acquire the language.

- At first a child can't mentally process the concept of something that exists outside their immediate surroundings. This is called being *egocentric*
- At 18 months old children realise that things have *object permanence* - they will always exist even if the child cannot see them. This coincides with a big increase in vocabulary
- Through this development a child is better equipped to understand abstract concepts such as past, present and future
- However, the theory cannot explain how those with learning difficulties are still linguistically fluent - this means that cognitive development and language development aren't as closely linked.

Bruner (1983)

The Input Theory

Bruner believed that in order for language to develop properly there has to be linguistic interaction with caregivers.

- Bruner believes that there is a *Language Acquisition Support System (LASS)* this system is used by caregivers aid a child's linguistic development in social situations
-
- There are clear patterns of interaction between child and carer in everyday social situations such as meal time, playtime and bat time for example
- When children ask questions it shows evidence of successful linguistic support from the carer.



CDS - (Child Directed Speech)

Have you ever noticed how adults will often talk to babies in a really odd kind of voice? This 'odd' sounding voice is called CDS or motherese. But this type of voice isn't yet known to actually aid the child in language development.

Phonology

Intonation is exaggerated and words are stressed more strongly than they are in adult conversation, the pitch is also higher. Words and phrases are often repeated and the pace is often much slower with longer pauses than in adult speech.

Lexis

Vocabulary is simplified, reduplication is often used in association of certain things "choo choo" (Train) "moo moo" (cow). They also use diminutives (addition of suffix) such as "birdie" or "fishy". A high proportion of these words will normally refer to objects that can be seen or touched.

Grammar

Sentence structure is simplified and function words (e.g. auxiliary verbs) are often omitted. The Present tense will replace the past tense; hence they will only talk about what is happening now.

Caregivers will use CDS often to encourage the child to respond and to teach them how dialogue works. The early conversations, at about the age of 2, are normally initiated and maintained by adults. During the ages of 2-4 children

learn a lot about the rules of conversation, such as turn taking, they also begin to respond in a way that enables the conversation to continue.

Of course the classroom setting also teaches children a lot of things, one of these is formality. When in the classroom they are pushed to speak in a more formal manner than they would in the playground for example.

But it is hard for children of a young age to talk with other children as at nursery for example, children will only have 300 words to be able to communicate with, and with little pragmatic understanding at this age it is difficult for any child to maintain conversation with another child. The conversation is normally just a series of short statements, which sometimes, aren't even related to each other. This is known as *closed conversations*.

Reading Acquisition

Learning to read for a child is like trying to decode a series of strange graphemes you've never ever seen before. So it can be tricky for them, but somehow, children are still able to decode these little graphemes and learn to read entirely!

Different books have different purposes for the reader if they are aged at a young age, if a question in the exam asks about a children's book then you're going to have to know what the purpose of the book is in relation to reading acquisition.

For Toddlers (0-18 Months)

- Books for toddlers aim to help speech development by providing pictures for children to label objects
- These are normally based around hypernyms (weather, clothes, animals etc.) and provide then relevant hyponyms (rain, socks, dogs etc.)
- Nouns and Adjectives are the most common word class in early books

For (2–5 years)

- Early story books are designed to be read to children NOT by them! They contain complicated words and grammatical structures.
- Children's understanding of words and structures is ahead of their ability to use them (FIS Phenomenon)

For (5–7 years)

- Books for young children aim to be enjoyable and are an act of shared experience. They aim to introduce children to storytelling!

For (8 years onwards)

- At the age of 8 children become independent readers ... Woo

Well it's all well and good if the children are able to begin reading but how do they really get down to the nitty gritty and deconstruct the words they see in front of them? Well, there are a number of methods and not all of them require skill...

Graphophonic – Looking at the shapes of words and linking them to familiar graphemes to interpret the sound of the word

Semantic – Understanding the meanings of words and making connections between words in order to decode new ones

Visual – Looking at pictures to interpret unfamiliar words or ideas

Syntactic – Applying knowledge of word order/word classes to work out if a word 'sounds' right

Contextual – Searching for understanding from the situation of the story

Miscue – When a child makes an error they may guess similar looking words or words from a picture.

Chall (1983)		Stages of Reading Development	
Stage 0	Pre-reading and pseudo reading	Up to 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pretend reading - Some letter and word recognition - Predicting single words or next stage of story
Stage 1	Initial reading and decoding	6-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading simple texts containing high frequency lexis - Estimation of 600 words understood
Stage 2	Confirmation and Fluency	7-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading texts more quickly, accurately and fluently - Paying more attention to the words and meaning of the texts - Estimation of 3000 words understood
Stage 3	Reading for Learning	9-14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading for knowledge and information becomes the motivation
Stage 4	Multiplicity and Complexity	14-17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responding critically to what they have read and analysing texts
Stage 5	Construction and Reconstruction	18+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading selectively and forming opinions about what they have read

When looking at books in the exam there might be a few things worth to note about. Look at...

1. The Characters - Normally animals rather than humans
2. The Breaking of Stereotypes - Mice or small creatures tend to be the heroes in stories
3. The Coining of New Words - "Gruffalo" why does the writer do this? What's the purpose behind it?
4. Poetic Phonological Devices - Helps children to remember words when reading them out aloud - Rhythmic patterns helps the child with future storytelling - Use of plosive alliterative choices "terrible teeth" - Repeated structure emphasises phrase structure, helping to extend vocabulary
5. Direct Speech - Different voices for each characters - Repetition of syntactic structures

6. Graphology – Where is the picture? If Left it aims to draw attention first – Any facial features in the story? – Text/Image cohesion – Pictures help the children to understand fully what the lexis means!
-

Writing Acquisition

Ohh we are nearly there now, just a little more theory to do with writing then we're done. But just imagine it, as a child you are learning to speak, read and write ALL at around the same time, it's just crazy isn't it?

Kroll (1981) Stages of Writing Acquisition

1. ***The Preparatory Stage (0–18 Months)*** – Children develop their motor skills needed for writing – They begin to learn the basics of the spelling system
2. ***The Consolidation Stage (6–8 Years)*** – Children write in the same way that they speak – They use lots of colloquialisms – They use short declarative statements and familiar conjunctions like “and” – They begin to express ideas in the form of sentences, though without much punctuation and without knowing how to finish off the sentence
3. ***The Differentiation Stage (8–15 Years)*** – Children become aware of differences between spoken and written mode – Begin to understand different genres – They begin to use more complex grammar and sentence structures – Punctuation becomes more accurate and consistent
4. ***The Integration Stage (15+ Years)*** – Writing becomes accurate with a wide vocabulary and more accurate spelling – Children can change language style depending on audience and purpose – General story writing skills improve – They develop a personal writing style.

THE GREAT CHILD LANGUAGE ACQUISITION TIMELINE

AGE	KEY EVENTS
0	Basic Biological Noises Cooing and Laughing Vocal Play Holophrastic Stage Reading books for Toddlers (Just Pictures) Preparatory Stage of Writing
1	Babbling Melodic Utterance Avg. Size of Vocab 100 Overextension/Underextension begin Two-Word Stage Beginnings of Pragmatic understanding Understanding of Object Permanence
2	Avg. Size of Vocab 300 Telegraphic Stage Brown's Theory of Acquisition of Inflections begins Conversations are maintained by Adults Early Story Books begin to be read to them Pre Reading and Pseudo Reading (Stage 0 Chall)
3	Avg. Size of Vocab 700 Grammatical Internalisation (Wug Test)
4	Avg. Size of Vocab 1200 Begin to understand the Rules of Turn taking
5	Avg. Size of Vocab 3000 Begin reading books for enjoyment
6	All Vowels and Consonants Understood Initial Reading and Decoding (Stage 1 Chall) Consolidation Stage (Kroll)
7	Avg. Size of Vocab 4000 Confirmation and Fluency (Stage 2 Chall)
8	Independent Readers Differentiation Stage (Kroll)
9	Reading for Learning (Stage 3 Chall)
11+	Avg. Size of Vocab 40,000 14-17 Multiplicity and Complexity (Stage 4 Chall) 15+ Integration Stage (Kroll) 18+ Construction and Reconstruction (Stage 5 Chall)