

19 - Stages of language development

Stages of language development:

© SPMM Course 6. Language development Basic speech sounds are called phonemes. In English language, there are 46 speech sounds. Most children can differentiate speech sounds before being able to produce them. The basic meaningful part of the language is called morpheme. The rules for combining words into phrases and sentences are called syntax. Language is slower to develop in boys, in twins, in large families, in those from social classes 4 and 5 and those that lack speech stimulation e.g. deaf and neglected children. Stages of language development: The pre-linguistic state (0 to 12 m): Crying is an important form of communication. A onemonth-old child is able to distinguish speech sounds although these phonemes are almost identical sounds. This categorical speech perception is supposed to be innate. By six weeks, the child starts cooing. By six months, babbling is seen. Babbling is nothing but the repetitive production of speech sounds. Spontaneous babbling refers to the situation when the child enjoys making these sounds alone. All babies around same age irrespective of the culture start bubbling. Even the deaf babies of the deaf-mute parents start marbling but stop at 9 to 10 months. The phonemic expansion refers to the expansion of production of phonemes even if such phonemes are not seen in the native language. One word stage (12 m to 18 m): Jargon words and babbling continue up to 18 months. First words are often self-invented but carry meaning and consistently match with the same meaning. There is a clear intention to communicate. Earliest words are context bound; sometimes they do not have any communicative purpose but are used as performatives to refer to actions. A child says 'teddy' only when the teddy is thrown up into the air while playing; thus teddy refers to 'throw up' action rather than the doll. Holophrases are one-word substitutes for whole phrases or sentences. At this stage, a child understands more words than it could produce. Gradually words get decontextualised and fall into one of the following functions;

1. Nominals – specific e.g. Sarah, or general – e.g. ball pen
2. Action words e.g. bye, look.
3. Function words e.g. the for, what, etc. propositions and grammatical functions.
4. Modifiers – e.g. red, big, etc.

5. Personal and social function – e.g. oops, ouch, etc. Two-word sentences / stage 1 grammar (18 to 30m): Telegraphic speech is seen where meaningful words are used without connecting words. At this stage adults interact with children

© SPMM Course in a 'motherese' – short simple raised pitch paraphrased language directed at infants. As object permanence is achieved by this stage, words start to have representational functions. Stage 2 grammar (> 30m): Mean length of utterances increase largely due to the use of function words – propositions, etc. Noam Chomsky: Children are born with an innate language acquisition device. Transformational grammar is important in understanding language development. All languages have a surface structure where the syntax is accurate and actual words are used to construct language; and a deep structure where the most semantic sense is made without similar syntactical rules. A single surface structure can have several deep structures. Children are born equipped with the ability to decipher the transformational grammar of deep to surface structure conversion. Hence, years up to puberty are sensitive though not critical for language development. Social interaction view of language development: Adults such as mother act as LASS (language acquisition support system). This is essential for the function of language is social interaction. The elaborate language code is characterized by longer, complex sentences that are context-independent. It focuses on the past and future, employs pronoun 'I' commonly and allows for the expression of abstract thought. Restricted language code is characterised by short, incomplete sentences, which tend to be context-dependent, frequently uses like 'you know', focuses on the present, employs pronoun I rarely and has little room for expressing abstract thinking. People in lower socioeconomic classes more commonly use the restricted code whereas the middle class and upper class children often use elaborate language code. Such differences emerge from the influence of social interactions in language development.

AGE & LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT 3 months-babbling 9 months-repetitive babbling 12 months-speaks three words 18 months-speaks up to 40 words. 24 months-telegraphic speech, grammatically pairs words and vocabulary more than 240 words 36 months-early comprehension of grammar and syntax 48 months-correct use of grammar 60 months-language akin to adult speech

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