Reading:

An Introduction to Language	Fromkin & Rodman	Chapter 10
Listen to Your Child	David Crystal	
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Stages of Acquisition

Year 1

- Biological noises (0-2 months)
- Cooing and laughing (2-5 months)
- Vocal play (5-8 months)
- Babbling (6-12 months)
- Melodic utterances (9-18 months)

Motherese/ caretaker speech - Adults caring for babies tend to:

- Use simple vocabulary and short sentences
- Speak slowly
- Widen the pitch of their voice
- Have 'conversations' with the baby even before the child can respond meaningfully. Typically, the mother will speak and wait for a reaction from the child (gurgles, laughs) before speaking again. This introduces the child to one of the basic skills of conversation: turntaking.

Fathers and mothers exhibit similar linguistic behaviour to their child but fathers tend to:

- Use a wider range of vocabulary
- Ask more direct questions
- Interact with the baby in a more intense way – playing dramatically, bouncing etc
- Be less likely to understand the baby's vocalisations, possibly because they may spend less time with the child

Year 2

The Holophrastic Stage

- Occurs at 12-18 months
- Single word utterances eg. "teddy", "gone", "more"
- 60% of children's first utterances are nouns – people, animals and things that the child sees eg. "ball", "dog"
- Research by Katherine Nelson showed that these first words are often the names of objects which are small and easily handled by the child, or things which move or make a noise eg. "car"

Errors

Children's acquisition of vocabulary may exhibit errors of:

- Underextension: the child restricts the applications of a word eg. uses 'white' only to describe snow and is confused to hear the same word used to describe blank pages in a book.
- Overextension: the child uses a word in a wider context than an adult would, misunderstanding the precise application eg. uses 'ball' to describe not only a ball but also any round object such as a wheel or a marble.

Errors such as these are part of the learning process and constitute evidence that learning is taking place as the child tests out the applications of words.

The Two Word Stage

Around the age of two, once children have about 50 words in their vocabulary, they begin to put words together. Most of their utterances however, consist of only 2 words eg. "more juice". During this stage there are no inflections to mark number, person or tense. Pronouns are rare although children may use "me" to refer to themselves.

The Telegraphic Stage

There is no 'Three word stage'. When a child starts stringing more than 2 words together, the utterances may be 2,3,4,5, words or longer. Utterances at this stage (around 2-3 years) are characterised by their lack of function words – there is generally an absence of prepositions, conjunctions and articles. Utterances consist mainly of content words ie. nouns and verbs. Eg. "Andrew want that", "Megan build house". Due to this omission of all but the most important words, this is known as the telegraphic stage.

Pre-school Years

At around age 3 there is a dramatic change in children's language, characterised by:

- Use of 'and' leading to use of compound/complex sentences
- Non-fluency – children find it hard to produce more complex sentences and may start to repeat words and phrases as they struggle for what to say next
- Use of 'and then' as they start to tell stories
- Use of other conjunctions (around age 4) such as 'because', 'when', 'while'

Theories of Language Acquisition: revision

Imitation

This theory states that children learn by imitating speech they hear from adults and older children.

- Children not exposed to language do not speak eg. in 1920 two 'feral' children named Amala and Kamala were found in India having been reared with wolves – they had no language
- Compare humans language with birdsong – a bullfinch will learn any song it is exposed to
- But – children produce utterances that they will never have heard an adult produce eg. "Cowboy did fighting me."
- Children who cannot speak due to neurological or physiological difficulties learn the language spoken to them although they cannot physically imitate it. This is shown by the fact that as soon as their speech impairment is resolved they begin to speak immediately.
- Even when a child is deliberately trying to imitate, s/he is unable to produce sentences beyond her grammatical capability.

  Eg. *Adult: Adam, say what I say – Where can I put them?*

  Child: Where I can put them?
- Cazden's 1972 research – child repeatedly uses the form "holded" despite adult rephrasing the sentence several times with the correct form "held" – the child did not notice the difference.

Reinforcement

This theory states that children learn by being corrected/ praised for their linguistic 'performance'.

- Brown's 1973 research shows that children's language is in fact rarely corrected – they are corrected when they get their facts wrong or when they don't tell the truth
- See specific examples above to show that correction is not usually successful

Children form rules and construct a grammar

This theory states that children notice adult utterances and internalise a set of rules about language that they test out and modify.

- Children produce utterances they can never have heard before
  Eg. We goed to the park yesterday.
- Children's utterances increase in complexity as they work towards mastering the rule.
  Eg. No want food.
  I no want food.
  I don't want no food.
  I don't want any food.
- Between the ages of 5-7 children from all different backgrounds reach the same stage of grammar acquisition, however much they have been spoken to.
- Awareness of rules is proved by Berko-Gleason's 1958 research. Children were shown a drawing and told 'This is a wug'. When shown two of the drawings, children stated that they could see 'two wugs'. This showed that they unconsciously knew what a noun was and that plurals are formed by adding s. The fact that they could apply this to a word they had never seen before shows that this cannot be imitation.
- Importance of errors – children may go through a stage of forming all past tenses with –ed eg. swimmed . This apparent 'error' in fact shows that the learning process is taking place. The child is learning what a verb is and the rule for making past tenses in regular verbs. At the next stage the child will realise that some verbs are irregular and learn these too eg. speak/ spoke

The Innateness Hypothesis

Noam Chomsky argues that humans are genetically 'prewired' to acquire language.

- He envisages a 'Language Acquisition Device' which is triggered into action when the child hears language.
- Input…….Language Acquisition Device……Output
- The child operates on the Input (= adult speech), making hypotheses about the grammar of the language (eg. that adjectives go before nouns) and testing them out. After a process of trial and error, the output (= child's speech) becomes identical to the input.
- No physical evidence of Language Acquisition Device although there is some evidence that all languages are acquired along broadly similar lines – a Universal Grammar that the same principles underlie all languages.
- Compare to birdsong – a cuckoo will sing a fully developed song even if it never hears another cuckoo.

The Critical Age Hypothesis

This theory states that language is acquired rather than learned and that there is a particular period during which children acquire it most easily.

- If children are not exposed to language until after this period is over (perhaps around puberty) they may never catch up.
- Case of 'Genie' supports this hypothesis. Genie discovered in USA in 1970 at about age 13 – had been locked away by her parents and deprived of all human contact. When discovered she had no language at all. After working with linguists for several years, she acquired quite a large vocabulary but her language consisted mainly of strings of content words and her syntax never fully developed to an adult level.
- Compare birdsong – the chaffinch acquires its song in several stages, like humans acquire speech, but it does not learn after 10 months of age.
- Compare people's difficulties with learning second languages, such as French or German, at school, with the ease with which they acquire their mother tongue.

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