

"BABY TALK" (NOVA Presentation)
Language Acquisition

I. Imitation, Biological, & Interactionist Theories of Language Acquisition :

- A. B. F. Skinner - Imitation Theory → children learn language through imitating adults.
 - 1. "On Verbal Behavior" - environmental perspective
- B. Noam Chomsky (linguist) - challenged the imitation view of language acquisition.
 - 1. Evidence against strict imitation theory explanation:
 - a. young children able to follow proper grammar rules
 - b. generative and productive quality of language - children can say a sentence they never said or heard before.
 - c. young can use proper word order
 - 2. Language Acquisition Device (LAD) : children are born with the unique capacity to learn language and grasp the rules of grammar.
 - a. LAD - is located in the brain according to Chomsky and = bio component of lang.
- C. Interactionist Theory: the issue is not whether envr. or bio has an influence in language acquisition but rather how the 2 interact (Dan Slobin).

II. Developmental Psycholinguistics:

- **Major Ques:** When does language development begin?
 - A. Intonation Patterns (David Crystal): intonation carries meaning → use intonation to denote questions, statements, and commands.
 - B. Cry Analysis (Barry Lester) - crying is the first effective form of communication.
 - 1. Different cries have different physiological patterns
 - 2. How caretaker responds to different cries has impact on early lang. development.
 - 3. Cries have prosodic qualities - changes in intonation, pitch and melody.
 - 4. Peter Wolfe: cries as experimental manipulation → produce new sounds and watch their effects on adults - this is the beginning of lang.
 - C. Turn-Taking During Nursing (Harry McGurk): precursor for turn-taking in communication.
- **Major Ques:** How do children come to recognize that the speech they hear is actually made up of separate units (words and the sounds that make them up)?
 - A. Categorical Perception (Peter Eimas; Janet Werker): How do infants segment and process speech and determine what categories are important?
 - 1. Strong bio component - categorical perception at 4 days old demonstrates that they know what sounds are going to be important (Universal Language Perceivers) and by 1 year they have narrowed the categories of speech into those of their native tongue.

III. Rules of Language - Grammar:

- A. Syntax: word order in a sentence (e.g., What makes a statement different from a question).
- B. Semantics: word meaning
- C. Pragmatics: how to use words in socially appropriate ways (e.g., please, thank you, bye bye).
 - Holistic Approach (Jerome Bruner): children learn all 3 of the above together.

IV. Social Interactionist: look at parent-child relationship and its impact on language learning.

- A. Parents reaction to child's intentionality (Jean Berko-Gleason): social use of language comes before words.
- B. First Words = those useful for social interaction (e.g., Hi, bye bye)
- C. We pull intentionality out of the precommunicative child (Catherine Snow):
 1. By asking baby question and commenting on her sounds we demonstrate the rules of conversational communication.
- D. Mother-Child Book Reading: allows analysis of sentences over & over again & may allow to learn rules of grammar.
- E. Scaffolding (Jerome Bruner): by creating a structure envr. we create a scaffold on which the child can acquire language through social interaction.

V. Which Comes First Language or Cognition?

- A. Andrew Meltzoff studies the ability of 15 mos olds to perform Jean Piaget's search and find task which requires object permanence.
 1. Meltzoff concludes that in young children lang and cog develop simultaneously.
- B. Catherine Nelson: in older children cognition is crucial for lang learning (understanding).
- C. Construction of Compound Nouns (Eve Clarke): must know how & when to apply rules e.g., pumpkin-house, tree-house

VI. Cross-Cultural Linguistics (Dan Slobin)

- A. Language Universals and Universal Grammar (UG): universal language rules that govern language behavior of all children at certain stages of development.
 1. overgeneralizations: know the grammatical rule but not the exceptions → these happen in every language.
 - a. past tense of irregular verbs → e.g., teach, run, go → taught, runned, goed
(1) thus, learning rule not mere imitation
 - b. at earlier ages before the language rule is learned they use the correct form e.g., taught, ran, went
 2. Segmentation and classification - patterns of applying the underlying rules of language

- GOAL OF CHILD IS TO LEARN HOW TO COMMUNICATE, NOT TO LEARN GRAMMAR, SYNTAX, AND SEMANTICS. THEY LEARN THESE IN THE SERVICE OF BECOMING AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION.