

"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.