

EARLY LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN CHILDREN

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Annotation: *This article explores the process of early language acquisition in children, examining how language develops from infancy through the early stages of childhood. It provides a detailed analysis of the key stages of language development, including pre-linguistic communication, babbling, first-word production, and the emergence of complex grammatical structures. The study discusses the cognitive, social, and environmental factors that influence language learning, highlighting the role of interaction with caregivers and exposure to linguistic input. Examples are presented to illustrate how children gradually acquire vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical competence. The article emphasizes the importance of early language acquisition as a foundation for effective communication, cognitive development, and future academic success.*

Key words: *early language acquisition, child language development, language learning, infancy, early childhood, first language acquisition, cognitive development, linguistic input, vocabulary development, grammatical development, communication skills, language acquisition stages.*

Early language acquisition is the process by which children naturally learn their first language during the earliest years of life. It is one of the most remarkable aspects of human development, as children acquire complex linguistic knowledge without formal instruction. From birth, infants are exposed to a rich linguistic environment that enables them to distinguish speech sounds, recognize patterns, and gradually understand the meaning of words and sentences. During the first few months of life, babies communicate through crying, facial expressions, and gestures. As they grow, they begin to produce sounds, engage in babbling, and imitate the speech of people around them.

By the age of one year, most children are able to produce their first meaningful words. Their vocabulary then expands rapidly as they interact with family members and explore their surroundings. Between the ages of two and three, children start combining words into simple sentences and gradually develop an understanding of grammatical rules. This process occurs through continuous exposure to language and active participation in social interactions.

Several factors contribute to successful early language acquisition. Biological factors, such as the innate capacity for language learning, play an important role. At the same time, environmental influences, including communication with parents, storytelling, play activities, and social interaction, significantly support language

development. Researchers emphasize that children learn language most effectively when they are engaged in meaningful communication within a supportive and stimulating environment.

Early language acquisition is closely connected to cognitive and social development. Language allows children to express their thoughts, needs, and emotions while also helping them understand the world around them. Strong language skills acquired during early childhood provide a foundation for literacy, academic achievement, and effective communication throughout life. Therefore, understanding the mechanisms and stages of early language acquisition is essential for parents, educators, and researchers who seek to support children's overall development.

Child language development refers to the gradual growth of a child's ability to understand and use language effectively. This developmental process begins in infancy and continues throughout childhood as children acquire increasingly complex linguistic skills. Language development involves several interconnected components, including phonological development (speech sounds), lexical development (vocabulary), grammatical development (sentence structure), and pragmatic development (the appropriate use of language in social contexts).

The earliest stage of language development is characterized by nonverbal communication, such as crying, eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures. These forms of communication allow infants to interact with caregivers before they can produce words. As children's cognitive abilities develop, they begin to recognize familiar sounds and words, leading to the production of their first meaningful utterances. Around the age of two, children typically experience a rapid increase in vocabulary, often referred to as the "vocabulary spurt," during which they learn new words at an accelerated rate.

As children grow older, they begin to combine words into phrases and sentences. Their understanding of grammatical rules becomes more sophisticated, enabling them to express complex ideas, ask questions, and engage in conversations. Language development is influenced by both biological maturation and environmental factors. Frequent interaction with parents, teachers, siblings, and peers provides valuable opportunities for children to practice and refine their language skills.

Furthermore, child language development is closely linked to cognitive growth and social interaction. Through language, children learn to organize their thoughts, solve problems, share experiences, and build relationships with others. Educational research has consistently demonstrated that strong language abilities contribute to academic achievement, reading comprehension, and effective communication. Consequently, supporting language development during childhood is essential for fostering children's intellectual, social, and emotional well-being.

First language acquisition is the process through which children learn their native language naturally and unconsciously through exposure to their linguistic environment. Unlike second language learning, which often involves formal instruction

and deliberate study, first language acquisition occurs spontaneously as children interact with parents, caregivers, and other members of their community. This process begins at birth and continues throughout early childhood, allowing children to develop the ability to understand and produce language effectively.

One of the most significant characteristics of first language acquisition is its universality. Regardless of cultural or linguistic background, children follow similar developmental patterns when acquiring their first language. Initially, infants respond to speech sounds and begin distinguishing the sounds of their native language from other languages. During the first year of life, they progress through stages such as cooing and babbling before producing their first meaningful words. As their vocabulary grows, children start combining words into phrases and sentences, gradually mastering grammatical structures.

Several theories have been proposed to explain first language acquisition. The behaviorist theory, associated with B. F. Skinner, suggests that language is learned through imitation, reinforcement, and repetition. In contrast, Noam Chomsky's nativist theory argues that children are born with an innate capacity for language learning, often referred to as the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Interactionist theories combine both perspectives, emphasizing the importance of social interaction and environmental input in supporting the child's natural linguistic abilities.

The process of first language acquisition is influenced by various factors, including cognitive development, social interaction, and the quantity and quality of language exposure. Children who are regularly engaged in meaningful conversations and language-rich activities tend to develop stronger linguistic skills. Caregivers play a crucial role by providing models of language use, responding to children's attempts at communication, and creating opportunities for interaction.

First language acquisition is fundamental to a child's overall development. It enables children to communicate their thoughts and emotions, participate in social relationships, and acquire knowledge about the world around them. Moreover, the successful acquisition of a first language provides the foundation for literacy development, academic learning, and the acquisition of additional languages later in life. Therefore, understanding first language acquisition is essential for educators, linguists, and parents who seek to support children's linguistic and cognitive growth.

Cognitive development refers to the growth of mental processes that enable children to think, understand, learn, remember, and solve problems. Language acquisition and cognitive development are closely interconnected, as each process supports the other. As children develop cognitively, they become better able to understand the meanings of words, recognize patterns in language, and use language to express their thoughts and ideas. Cognitive abilities such as attention, memory, perception, and reasoning play a crucial role in language learning. For example, children must remember words and their meanings, recognize speech sounds, and understand relationships between objects and concepts. According to developmental

psychologists, language not only reflects cognitive growth but also contributes to it by providing children with tools for thinking, organizing information, and interacting with their environment. Therefore, cognitive development serves as a foundation for successful language acquisition and overall intellectual growth.

Vocabulary development is the process through which children acquire and expand their knowledge of words and their meanings. It is one of the most important aspects of language acquisition because vocabulary provides the building blocks for communication. During infancy, children begin by understanding a limited number of words before they are able to produce them. As they grow older, their vocabulary increases rapidly through interaction with family members, peers, and the surrounding environment. Researchers have observed that many children experience a significant increase in word learning during the second year of life, often referred to as the "vocabulary explosion." Children acquire vocabulary through listening, observation, imitation, play, storytelling, and social interaction. A rich vocabulary enables children to express their thoughts more accurately, understand complex ideas, and participate effectively in communication. Furthermore, strong vocabulary skills contribute to reading comprehension, academic achievement, and lifelong language proficiency.

Grammatical development refers to the process by which children learn the rules and structures that govern language. This includes understanding how words are combined to form meaningful phrases and sentences, as well as learning the appropriate use of verb tenses, word order, plurals, and other grammatical features. In the early stages of language acquisition, children often produce single words and simple two-word combinations. As their linguistic abilities develop, they begin constructing longer and more complex sentences. Although young children frequently make grammatical errors, such mistakes are considered a natural part of language learning and demonstrate their attempts to apply grammatical rules. Through continuous exposure to language and interaction with others, children gradually refine their understanding of grammar and achieve greater accuracy in speech. Grammatical development is essential for effective communication because it enables children to express precise meanings, convey relationships between ideas, and participate successfully in social and academic contexts.

Communication skills refer to the ability to express thoughts, feelings, ideas, and information effectively through verbal and nonverbal means. The development of communication skills begins in infancy and progresses alongside language acquisition. Even before they can speak, infants communicate through crying, facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and body movements. As children acquire language, they become increasingly capable of expressing their needs, asking questions, sharing experiences, and participating in social interactions.

Effective communication involves not only speaking but also listening and understanding others. Through daily interactions with parents, caregivers, teachers,

and peers, children learn how to use language appropriately in different social situations. They develop the ability to take turns in conversations, interpret verbal and nonverbal cues, and adjust their language according to the context. Strong communication skills contribute to the formation of positive relationships, emotional development, and successful participation in educational settings.

Moreover, communication skills are essential for academic achievement and future professional success. Children who develop effective communication abilities are generally more confident in expressing their opinions, collaborating with others, and solving problems. Therefore, fostering communication skills during early childhood is a critical aspect of language development and overall personal growth.

Language acquisition occurs through a series of developmental stages that most children experience during early childhood. Although the exact timing may vary among individuals, these stages generally follow a predictable sequence. The first stage is the pre-linguistic stage, which begins at birth and includes crying, cooing, and babbling. During this period, infants experiment with sounds and begin recognizing the speech patterns of their native language.

The second stage is the one-word or holophrastic stage, which typically occurs around the age of one year. At this stage, children use single words to express complete ideas or needs. For example, a child may say "milk" to indicate a desire for a drink. As vocabulary grows, children enter the two-word stage, where they begin combining words to convey more specific meanings, such as "want toy" or "mommy come."

The next stage is the telegraphic stage, during which children produce short but meaningful sentences that contain essential words while omitting less important grammatical elements. As language development continues, children gradually acquire more complex grammatical structures, expand their vocabulary, and improve their pronunciation. By the age of five or six, most children have developed a substantial command of their native language and can communicate effectively in a wide range of situations.

Understanding the stages of language acquisition is important because it helps parents, educators, and researchers identify normal patterns of development and provide appropriate support for children's linguistic growth.

These stages demonstrate the remarkable capacity of children to acquire language naturally through interaction and experience.

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