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Dr. Wills

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Child Language Learner Assignment

The child I interviewed was named Owen Hughes. He is the sixteenth month old son of a second grade teacher at the elementary school my mother teaches at, Mitchell Elementary School in Santa Clarita. As stated, Owen is sixteen months old, born on September 30, 2014. He is white, male, and an only child (he is also the only grandchild, and his mother told me he gets a lot of attention from both sets of grandparents). However, he does have a very playful dog named Darcy, who is a shepherd (I do not know what type), about two and a half years old, and is very friendly, as well as a cat named Sheldon, who is kind, but often distant. Aside from a slight cold around the time of the interview, he has no health issues, though he does seem to bump his head quite often; he must have hit his head three times in the two hours I observed him (they were slight bumps and he did not cry). He had to go to Urgent Care a couple weeks ago because he fell at Daycare and cut open the back of his head; he did not cry at all, even though he was bleeding quite a bit, but he got glued up and is doing just fine. His parents make around \$140,000 a year and are financially stable, at least from what I could tell.

Being sixteen months old, Owen is not yet speaking full words. He is able to speak short syllables in relation to words, such as saying “ba ba” when referring to a ball or a bottle, so they are close to meaning the same thing as adult words. However, since he cannot say words, he cannot ask questions, give commands, or speak in sentences. He speaks all of the time;

throughout the two hours I spent with him, he was vocalizing almost the entire time, constantly babbling and exploring the world (he is a very active toddler). Even when he is by himself, he is babbling and figuring out how to talk. He cannot imitate any animals; if you ask him “what sound does a cow make?” he will not be able to produce the correct sound. However, he can imitate human speech, if he already knows how to make the sound. When his mother was explaining to me which sounds he could make, he would repeat them after she said them, and he did it on a number of occasions.

He understands language very well; his mother asked him to grab a book from the bookshelf and give it to me, and he did it instantly without hesitation. He seems to be picking it up quickly, and I feel that within a few weeks (a couple months at most), he will begin using actual words. Owen seemed to express himself appropriately using facial expressions and tonality, though most of the time he is jovial and enjoys joking around. He seems to interact the same with everyone, whether it is his mom, his dad, his dog, or me. Even though I was initially a stranger, after about a few minutes of staring at me and getting acquainted with my presence, he was completely normalized to me and simply continued on with doing whatever he wanted to do. I do not know if he understands the concept of “kind of”, though it is hard to tell definitively.

Dialogue:

After about twenty minutes of playing inside, it was time to venture out into the backyard to enjoy the beautiful day, and play with the toys out there. The conversation will involve Owen (O), his mom (M), and myself (R), as we get ready to go into the backyard.

M: Owen, do you want to go outside?

O: [ʔU: da!]

M: Yeah?

O: [da! da! da!]

Owen walked to the garage door

M: Not *that* outside, the backyard. In the back.

M: That's not outside. In the *backyard*. Where's the grass?

O: [mU!]

M: In the *backyard*.

O: [da! da! da!]

M: No, that's the *front* yard.

O: [da! da! ya! ya! bU bU:]

M: We gotta put your shoes on.

O: [da! da!]

M: Ok. Only one per foot.

O: [da da]

O: [u: wi wi]

M: Is it on good? I can't tell.

R: Those are so small.

M: I know. But they're so big though compared to what he used to wear.

R: Really?

M: Wait! They're not on yet, baby.

R: He's like, "But *I'm* ready!"

M: Owen, they're not on honey.

O: [ɔʔ ɔʔ]

M: What was that? Was that your shoe dragging on the ground?

O: [ʔu: ni! ni!]

O: [ʔh ʔo]

M: I don't know how he...

O: [ɛ:]

M: I'm gonna get it on. Hold on! You've got some fat socks on.

M: Push. Push.

O: [ʔU ʔU]

M: So we're just gonna go out to the grass and sit down.

O: [ʔU!]

End of Dialogue segment

Owen is currently in the stage of babbling convergence, and is on the cusp of phoneme acquisition. As stated before, he babbles almost all of the time. His parents never use baby talk when talking to him; they always talk to him as if he is an adult, and always talk normally when

he is around. He attends a daycare during the week, where he is surrounded mostly by older children, which helps introduce and acclimate him to language, and his mother told me that his skills have increased a great deal since he started going to daycare, due to the constant exposure and his willingness to keep up with the other children.

Since he is not exactly speaking yet, there is not too much to comment on, but I feel that very soon he will begin speaking words; he seemed to be exploring the configurations of his mouth and testing different sounds, so I feel like he could begin speaking very soon. He has gotten close; his mother told me that sometimes he will say “ah dah [ʔə də]” in an attempt to say “all done”, such as when he finishes a meal, which illustrates that he is close, but not quite there. However, his environment seems ideal for language development; between his daycare trips during the week and his parents’ objection to baby talk, I believe that he is getting wonderful exposure, and he is a bright child, so I feel that within a few months (at most), he will definitely be speaking, and after that, I feel he will grasp all of other concepts of language (grammar, syntax, morphology, etc.) quickly.