



Lecture 4

First Language Acquisition - III

Theory of Universal Grammar

- Skinner – behaviourist approaches to language learning
- Language learning is ‘habit formation’
- Stimulus – Response
- Positive reinforcement – negative reinforcement

- Chomsky criticizes Skinner's theory (1959)
- Basic points of UG theory
- Only human beings capable of language
- All children by 3 (except cases of brain injury) acquire their L1 successfully
- The input is not sufficient
- 'Poverty of stimulus'

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Cgpfw4z8cw>

- Logical problem of language acquisition – children come to know more about the language than what they could learn by listening to the input around them
- No systematic teaching or correction

- Innate ability to learn language
- Child comes to know certain things about language just by being exposed to it

- Human language is very complex and input alone not sufficient
- Children are born with an innate capability to acquire language
- ‘LAD’ – Language Acquisition Device

- Children's language development follows a universal sequence.
- But at what age they reach a particular stage varies from child to child.

- Children begin to learn their L1 at the same age, and in much the same way, whether it is English, Bengali, Korean, Swahili, or any other language in the world.
- Children master the basic phonological and grammatical operations in their L1 by the age of about five or six, as noted above, regardless of what the language is.

- Universal stages across children learning the same language
- Similarities between L1 and L2 acquisition of the same language

Stages in acquisition of questions

Stage 1: Single words with rising intonation

e.g. Cookie? Mommy book?

Stage 2: Declarative sentences with rising intonation

e.g. You like this?

Stage 3: Helping verbs appear, but errors persist

e.g. Is the teddy is tired? Do I can have a cookie?

Stage 4: Correct yes/no questions

e.g. Are you going to play with me?

Stage 5: Correct Wh questions

e.g. Why did you do that? Why the teddy bear can't go out?