



Lecture 2

First Language Acquisition - I

L1 acquisition

- L1 (First language/ mother tongue)
- Language acquired during early childhood
- Most of functional grammar acquired before the age of three years
- How is L1 acquired?

Main reference book:

Lightbown, P. M. & Spada, N. (2013). *How are languages learned*. Oxford: OUP. Chapter 1

Stages in L1 Acquisition

Stages in L1 acquisition

- Comprehension precedes production
- Ability to distinguish between sounds
- Studies have shown that very young babies can hear the difference between sounds as similar as /p/ and /b/
- By around the age of 1 year, babies tune to the language they are exposed to

- For example, babies with Arabic as their L1, stop reacting to the difference between /p/ and /b/

(Werker, Weikum, & Yoshida 2006)

- At 12 months, most babies produce single words
- Nouns occur first
- By 15 – 24 months, two word combinations

- 'Mommy juice', 'kiss doll', 'baby fall down'
 - Telegraphic sentences
 - But word order not violated
 - 'baby kiss' and 'kiss baby' may mean different
- (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p.7)

- Depending on the situation, 'Daddy uh-oh' might mean

'Daddy fell down'

'Daddy dropped something'

'Daddy, please do that funny thing where you pretend to drop me off your lap.'

(Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p.7)

Pre-talking stage – 0-6 months

- Are children born with a blank slate? No.
- Babies respond to the human voice and especially to speech sounds.
- ‘cooing’

Baby interacting with grandmother

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=puY-xnhC3aI>

Babbling – 6-8 months

- Infants typically engage in vocal play
- At about seven months, babbling appears.
- Repeated consonant+vowel sequences - [bababa] or [nanana].
- vocal play and babbling - "practicing" speech?

Babbling baby

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJzVZvMPkAI>

One word/Holophrastic stage 9-18 months

- Roughly between 12 and 18 months – child begins to speak in single word utterances
- E.g. ‘milk’, mummy’
- Occasionally a sequence of words/ compounds may appear.
- E.g. Allgone, sitdown
- But these are ‘memorized chunks’

- One multipurpose word used to convey many intentions and meanings
- E.g. Choi & Bowerman (1991) note that English speaking children say "Up!" to mean "Carry me please".

Both under- and over-extensions

- Too narrow usage: may use word 'doggie' to refer to the family pet only
- Too broad usage: may use word 'doggie' to refer to all four-legged animals
- Over-extensions more common

Two word stage – 18-24 months

- Sudden increase in vocabulary
- Subject + verb - Jenny sleep (Jenny is sleeping)
- Subject + object - Suzy juice (Suzy is drinking juices)
- Subject + complement - Daddy busy (daddy is busy)

- "mini-sentences" with simple semantic relations
- Examples:
- "Mommy work" (when asked "Where's mommy?", means "Mommy's at work now")
- "Go bye-bye" (child watching dog walk out the back door, means "The dog is going outside.")

- Depending on the CONTEXT, the same utterance may have more than one meaning.

What was said	Action	Possible Meaning
Mummy sock	Child picks up sock	This is mummy's sock
Mummy sock	Mother puts sock on child	Mummy's putting my sock on

Telegraphic Stage – 24-30 months

- From the age of about 2, children begin producing three and four word utterances.
- Grammatically complete sentences
- E.g. 'Amy likes tea' or 'Mummy sleeps upstairs'
- But structural elements such as articles may be missing
- E.g. 'Daddy home now' or 'Laura broke plate'.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCrARABi7Lw>

- Roger Brown
- Adam, Sarah, Eve
- Natural order for acquisition of L1 English

Acquisition of grammatical markers

- Brown (1973)
- 1) –ing
- 2) plural ‘-s’
- 3) possessive ‘-s’
- 4) the, a
- 5) past tense –ed
- 6) third person singular verb ending – s (eg): he sings
- 7) auxiliary verb ‘be’ (eg): I am dancing

Late acquisitions

- Infrequent complex aspects of grammar (e.g. If clauses)
- Reading & writing
- Rephrasing
- Vocabulary acquisition continues throughout