



Lecture 3

First Language Acquisition - II

Here are some statements about L1.

Do you agree or not?

- Children learn their L1 mainly through imitation.
- Parents usually correct grammatical mistakes that the children do while speaking.
- People with high IQs are good language learners.

- Do children simply copy adults or actually learn rules?

Imitation and practice

Patsy What happened to it (the truck)?

Peter (looking under chair for it) Lose it. Dump truck! Dump truck!
Fall! Fall!

Lois Yes, the dump truck fell down.

Peter Dump truck fell down. Dump truck.

Peter (24 months) playing with a dump truck
Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p.15

Children hypothesize and create novel forms

Example 1

Kyo (6,10) I'm hungry.
Dad We'll have some poppy seed bread in a little while.
Kyo No. I want it now.
Dad We have to wait 'til it's defrosted.
Kyo But I like it *frossed*.

Defrosted - *frossed

Lightbown & Spada, 1993, p.5

Example 2

Randall (3 yr) had a sore on his hand. Mother said that they would take him to a doctor.

Randall: Why? So he can *doc* my little bump?

A driver – drives

A doctor – ‘docs’

Example 3

Mother: Get undressed

David (3 yr 11 months): I’m getting undressed.

I’m getting *on* dressed.

I’m getting on dressed.

I’m getting *off* dressed.

(Lightbown & Spada, 1993, p.6)

- Mother says 'undressed', but the child has not yet acquired 'un-' prefix and opposite forms. The child thinks it is 'on', therefore 'ondressed'.
- But 'on' in phrases like 'put on' means wear and not remove. Here mother is asking the child to remove, therefore 'offdressed'

- Children can understand and create novel utterances; they are not limited to repeating what they have heard.
- Utterances that children produce are different but systematically

Wug Test

- 'wug test' developed by Jean Berka Gleason (1958)
- 'Here is a wug. Now there are two of them. There are two _____' or 'Here is a man who knows how to bod. Yesterday he did the same thing. Yesterday, he _____'.

- Children often overgeneralise
- E.g. 'sheeps' and 'mouses'.
- Inferencing rule from the input – hypothesizing

- Rule formation and Overgeneralisation
- A child used 'moon' to refer to –
 - Moon
 - Cake
 - Round marks on windows
 - Writing in books
 - Letter 'O' in a book

(Clark, 2016, p.96)

Correcting errors

- Does correction work?



CHILD: My teacher holded the baby rabbits and we patted them.

ADULT: Did you say your teacher held the baby rabbits.

CHILD: Yes.

ADULT: What did you say she did?

CHILD: She holded the baby rabbits and we patted them.

ADULT: Did you say she held them tightly?

CHILD: No, she holded them loosely.

(CHILDES corpus)

- Children focus on meaning
- Some researchers argue that by extension similar approach should be followed while teaching English as a second language

Language and Cognition

- Stages in language acquisition are related to general cognitive development.
- Acquisition of spatial concepts such as 'inside', 'top of' earlier than the prepositions 'in' and 'on'

- Role of age in L1 acquisition



Genie

- Mistaken to be mentally retarded
- Locked in a room for 11 years – no contact with outside world
- She was rescued when she was 13-year-old
- She had the motor skills and language of a baby

- After rehabilitation, she began learning words; put together two words and three words; but did not go beyond that
- Not grammatically correct sentences – no meaningful sentences

- There is a cut-off age for L1 acquisition, beyond which it can never be complete.
- Acquisition of L1 is not simply a facet of general intelligence.
- Critical Period Hypothesis - Lenneberg

- Brain injuries and language disorders in L1

Broca's Aphasia

- Broca's aphasia results from a damage to Broca's area of the brain.
- Associated closely with syntax and the grammatical functions of language.
- Broca's aphasics have some trouble accessing verbs but have far more trouble accessing grammatical morphemes
- Their ability to access nouns and adjectives remains relatively unaffected.

M.E: Cinderella...poor...um 'dopted her...scrubbed floor, um, tidy...poor, um...'dopted...Si-sisters and mother . . . ball. Ball, prince um, shoe . . .

Examiner: Keep going.

M.E: Scrubbed and uh washed and un...tidy, uh, sisters and mother, prince, no, prince, yes. Cinderella hooked prince. (Laughs.) Um, um, shoes, um, twelve o'clock ball /pønaût/, finished.

Ex: So what happened in the end?

M.E: Married.

Ex: How does he find her?

M.E: Um, Prince, um, happen to, um...Prince, and Cinderella meet, um met um met.

<https://www.departments.bucknell.edu/linguistics/lectures/aphasia.html>

- The patient has little trouble expressing nouns, adjectives, and even verbs in this case; however, grammatical functors like *the*, *a* and pronouns are totally absent.

Wernicke's aphasia

- Wernicke's aphasia results from damage to Wernicke's area of the left hemisphere of the brain.
- Wernicke's aphasics have more difficulty accessing nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

- Persons with Wernicke's aphasia can produce many words and they often speak using grammatically correct sentences.
- However, often what they say doesn't make a lot of sense.
- You may find non-existent or irrelevant words.
- Patients do not realise that they are using the wrong words.

- Examiner: Yeah, what's happening there?
- C.B: I can't tell you what that is, but I know what it is, but I don't now where it is. But I don't know what's under. I know it's you couldn't say it's ... I couldn't say what it is. I couldn't say what that is. This shu-- that should be right in here. That's /bêlli/ bad in there. Anyway, this one here, and that, and that's it. This is the getting in here and that's the getting around here, and that, and that's it. This is getting in here and that's the getting around here, this one and one with this one. And this one, and that's it, isn't it? I don't know what else you'd want.

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