

In communicative development, **discourse** refers to how individuals learn to use language to create coherent, meaningful conversations and texts. It's the process of moving beyond single words or sentences to master the larger structures of communication. 🗣️

The Developmental Process

Children's communication development is often described as a progression from simple to complex discourse abilities:

1. Early Stages (Infancy to Toddlerhood):

- **Micro Functions:** Infants and toddlers start with basic, one-word utterances that perform simple **micro functions**, such as requesting ("Up!") or greeting ("Hi!").
- **Contextual Reliance:** Their early discourse is heavily reliant on **contextual links**. They use gestures, tone, and shared knowledge with a caregiver to make their simple utterances understood.

2. Preschool Years (Ages 2-5):

- **Sentence Cohesion:** Children begin to connect sentences using simple **formal links** like "and." They learn to use pronouns correctly to refer back to people or objects.
- **Simple Narratives:** They start to tell simple stories or recount events, demonstrating an early grasp of narrative discourse.

3. School Age and Beyond:

- **Complex Discourse:** As children mature, their discourse becomes more complex and sophisticated. They learn to use a wider range of **cohesive devices** (e.g., "however," "therefore") to create more detailed and structured arguments or narratives.
- **Macro Functions:** They learn to master different **macro functions** of language, such as explaining complex ideas, persuading others, or debating a topic.
- **Adapting to Context:** A key part of this development is learning to adjust their discourse to different social contexts, such as speaking formally to a teacher versus informally to a friend.

Importance for Communication Development

Understanding discourse is crucial for assessing and supporting communication development because it reveals more than just a person's vocabulary or grammar. It shows how they can use those tools to interact meaningfully with the world. Challenges in discourse development can affect a person's ability to:

- **Socialize effectively:** Difficulty with turn-taking or staying on topic can lead to social isolation.

- **Succeed academically:** Producing coherent written essays and participating in classroom discussions are essential for learning.
- **Communicate professionally:** Many jobs require the ability to present information clearly and persuasively.

In short, a child who has a large vocabulary but struggles with discourse may still have significant communication difficulties. The goal of communication development is not just to acquire words, but to master the art of connecting them into a coherent whole.

