

Language acquisition from birth to age 12 is a rapid and complex process that unfolds in predictable stages, transforming an infant's gurgles into a child's fluent speech. This period is often considered a **critical window** for language development.

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### Ages 0-1: The Pre-Linguistic Stage

This stage is marked by an infant's growing awareness and experimentation with sounds.

- **Crying:** Initially, crying is a reflexive response, but it soon becomes a form of communication to express needs.
  - **Cooing (2-4 months):** Vowel-like sounds ("ooh," "aah") that express contentment.
  - **Babbling (6-10 months):** Repetitive consonant-vowel combinations like "bababa" and "dadada." This is a crucial step as it demonstrates the child's ability to produce phonetic sounds.
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### Ages 1-2: The One-Word Stage

Known as the **holophrastic** stage, children use single words to convey complex ideas.

- **First Words (around 12 months):** A child's first word is typically a noun, such as "mama" or "dada."
  - **Holophrases:** A single word can represent a full sentence. For example, "ball" could mean "Give me the ball" or "That's a ball."
  - **Vocabulary Growth:** Vocabulary begins to expand, with many children learning new words daily.
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### Ages 2-3: The Two-Word Stage

Also called the **telegraphic speech** stage, children begin to combine words to form basic phrases.

- **Grammatical Foundations:** Children string together two words, often a noun and a verb, to create a mini-sentence like "go car" (I want to go in the car) or "daddy work" (Daddy is at work).
  - **Morpheme Acquisition:** They start to acquire grammatical morphemes like plurals ("dogs") and verb tenses ("running"), though mistakes are common ("go-ed").
  - **Question Formation:** Simple questions are formed using rising intonation, such as "Doggie go?"
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### Ages 3-5: The Early Fluency Stage

Language skills accelerate as children begin to form more complex and grammatically correct sentences.

- **Sentence Complexity:** Children use three- and four-word sentences and begin to ask more sophisticated questions using "wh- words" like "*what*," "*where*," and "*why*."
  - **Overgeneralization:** They often apply grammatical rules universally, leading to errors like "*foots*" for "*feet*" and "*I goed*" for "*I went*."
  - **Conversational Skills:** Children engage in more back-and-forth conversations, improving their turn-taking skills and ability to stay on topic.
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### **Ages 5-12: The Advanced Language Development Stage** 📖

This period is marked by a refinement of all language skills and a shift from spoken language to literacy.

- **Mastery of Grammar:** Children master most of the grammatical rules of their native language, including complex sentence structures, verb tenses, and conditionals.
- **Vocabulary Expansion:** They acquire an extensive vocabulary, often learning words from reading and schooling.
- **Pragmatics:** They develop a better understanding of the social rules of language (**pragmatics**), such as using sarcasm, telling jokes, and understanding tone.
- **Literacy:** The focus shifts from acquiring spoken language to mastering written language (reading and writing). Children learn how to construct narratives, write essays, and use language for a variety of purposes.

