

## Chapter Thirteen: L1 Acquisition

### 1. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILD LANGUAGE LEARNING

important characteristics of this learning:

- Typicality of language learning
- Similarity of language learning
- Spontaneity of language learning
- Creativity of language learning

### 2. MECHANISMS OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

#### 2.1. Structured Input

children are able to learn language because adults speak to them in a special simplified language sometimes called **motherese**:

- being spoken more slowly and clearly;
- using proper nouns instead of pronouns;
- having a structure that seems to assign an interactive role to the young child;
- using repetition and expansion
- etc.

#### 2.2. Innateness Hypothesis

# **logical problem of language acquisition** → what accounts for the ease, rapidity, and uniformity of language acquisition in the face of impoverished data?

# **poverty of stimulus** → the language input exposed to the child is both quantitatively and qualitatively poor but still the child is able to produce correct language forms

# children are not given explicit information about the rules, by either instruction or correction

# the developmental stages of language acquisition are similar

→ children are equipped with an innate template or blueprint for language: **innateness hypothesis**

#### 2.3. Usage-based

# children build up an inventory of similar utterances that they hear in the linguistic input, and gradually try to figure out the rules that underlie them, e.g., *dance-danced; Sara drank tea*

# connectionism: exposure to constructions in the input creates a set of neuron-like connections → repeated exposure to constructions reinforces the connection

### 3. THE ACQUISITION SCHEDULE

#### 3.1. Cooing

# usually the third month of life is called **cooing** period

# perceive voicing contrasts, contrasts in place of articulation, etc.

- # do not react to distinctions that never correspond to phonemic contrasts in any human language
- # discriminate between sounds that are phonemic in other languages and non-existent in their language

### 3.2. Babbling

- # by the age of six months they produce a variety of sounds (which may not occur in their language)
- # by the end of the first year the babbles include sound (combinations) that occur in the target language
- # adult-like intonations
- # the child produces more complex syllable combinations (ma-ma, da-da, ga, ba)

### 3.3. One-word Stage

- # between twelve and eighteen months
- # produce a variety of recognizable single-unit utterances which function as a phrase or sentence
- # realize that sounds are related to meanings

### 3.4. Two-word Stage

- # begins around eighteen to twenty months
- # utterances appear to be strings of two of the child's earlier holophrastic utterances:  
*Mommy go – Mommy milk – Mommy sock*
- # the child's vocabulary moves beyond fifty words
- # by the age of two, capable of understanding five times as many

### 3.5. Telegraphic Stage

- # between two and two-and-a-half years old, they produce utterances that could be classified as 'multiple-word' utterances, consisting of content words
- # by the age of two-and-a-half, they incorporate some of the functional morphemes
  - **Note:** Instead of chronological order of language acquisition a more reliable measure called **mean length of utterance (MLU)** is used, e.g., *car go – cat sitting – I, Adam, want a pen – hello cat*
  - stage 1: MLUs up to 2 ; between 12 and 28 months
  - stage 2: MLUs between 2 and 2.5 ; between 27 to 30 months
  - stage 3: MLUs between 2.5 and 3.0 ; between 31 and 34 months

## 4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF GRAMMAR

### 4.1. The Acquisition of Phonology

- # manner of articulation → nasals, glides, stops, liquids, fricatives and affricates
- # place of articulation → labials, velars, alveolars, and palatals
- # prosodic bootstrapping → [The turtle][is eating][a pigeon]

### 4.2. The Acquisition of Morphology

- # inflections: progressive morpheme → regular plural → possessive → regular past → third person singular present

<u>Stage 1</u>	<u>Stage 2</u>	<u>Stage 3</u>
men	mans	men

# semantic bootstrapping → “if a word refers to a physical object, it’s a noun” or “if a word refers to an action, it’s a verb,”

#### 4.3. The Acquisition of Word Meaning

# **overextension** → the child overextends the meaning of a word on the basis of similarities of shape, sound, etc.

# syntactic bootstrapping → *John blipped Mary the gloon, John gonked that Mary ...*

#### 4.4. The Acquisition of Pragmatics

# context is needed to determine the reference of pronouns. Children, however, are not always sensitive to the needs of their interlocutors, e.g., *He hit me*

# younger children (around age two) have difficulty with the “shifting reference” of “I” and “you” pronouns

# children show a lack of pragmatic awareness by the way they sometimes use articles

### 5. KNOWING MORE THAN ONE LANGUAGE

**Simultaneous bilingualism** → children acquire two languages at the same time

**Sequential bilingualism** → individuals acquire a second language after already acquiring a native language

#### 5.1. Theories of Bilingualism

In simultaneous bilingual research:

**Unitary system hypothesis:** children do not acquire language bilingually; they construct only one lexicon and one grammar: *His nose is perdu* → *His nose is lost*

**Separate systems hypothesis:** children build a distinct lexicon and grammar for each language, e.g., correct word order in two languages

#### 5.3. Heritage Language Learners

# someone who was raised with a strong cultural connection to a language through family interaction, but which is not learned natively and who decides at some point to study that language more formally, for example, in college

# heritage language learner may have no prior linguistic knowledge of the language

# heritage language learner may be bilingual to some degree – he may begin to lose the heritage language—a process known as **language attrition**