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What makes it even more remarkable is that researchers are finding evidence for mastery of this complex skill in increasingly younger children. Language Acquisition in psychology refers to the process by which humans acquire the ability to perceive, produce, and use words to understand and communicate. This innate capacity typically develops in early childhood and involves complex interplay of genetic, cognitive, and social factors. Infants as young as 12 months are reported to have sensitivity to the grammar needed to understand causative sentences (who did what to whom; e.g., the bunny pushed the frog (Rowland & Noble, 2010). After more than 60 years of research into child language development, the mechanism that enables children to segment syllables and words out of the strings of sounds they hear and to acquire grammar to understand and produce language is still quite an enigma. Behaviorist Theory of Language Acquisition One of the earliest scientific explanations of language acquisition was provided by Skinner (1957). As one of the pioneers of behaviorism, he accounted for language development using environmental influence, through imitation, reinforcement, and conditioning. In this view, children learn words and grammar primarily by mimicking the speech they hear and receiving positive feedback for correct usage. Skinner argued that children learn language based on behaviorist reinforcement principles by associating words with meanings. Correct utterances are positively reinforced when the child realizes the communicative value of words and phrases. For example, when the child says 'milk' and the mother smiles and gives her some. As a result, the child will find this outcome rewarding, enhancing the child's language development (Ambridge & Lieven, 2011). Over time, through repetition and reinforcement, they refine their linguistic abilities. Critics argue this theory doesn't fully explain the rapid pace of language acquisition nor the creation of novel sentences. Chomsky Theory of Language Development However, Skinner's account was soon heavily criticized by Noam Chomsky, the world's most famous linguist to date. In the spirit of the cognitive revolution in the 1950s, Chomsky argued that children would never acquire the tools needed for processing an infinite number of sentences if the language acquisition mechanism was dependent on language input alone. Noam Chomsky introduced the nativist theory of language development, emphasizing the role of innate structures and mechanisms in the human brain. Key points of Chomsky's theory include: Language Acquisition Device (LAD): Chomsky proposed that humans have an inborn biological capacity for language, often termed the LAD, which predisposes them to acquire language. Universal Grammar: He suggested that all human languages share a deep structure rooted in a set of grammatical rules and categories. This "universal grammar" is understood intuitively by all humans. Poverty of the Stimulus: Chomsky argued that the linguistic input received by young children is often insufficient (or "impoverished") for them to learn the complexities of their native language solely through imitation or reinforcement. Yet, children rapidly and consistently master their native language, pointing to inherent cognitive structures. Critical Period: Chomsky, along with other linguists, posited a critical period for language acquisition, during which the brain is particularly receptive to linguistic input, making language learning more efficient. Critics of Chomsky's theory argue that it's too innatist and doesn't give enough weight to social interaction and other factors in language acquisition. Universal Grammar Consequently, he proposed the theory of Universal Grammar: an idea of innate, biological grammatical categories, such as a noun category and a verb category, that facilitate the entire language development in children and overall language processing in adults. Universal Grammar contains all the grammatical information needed to combine these categories, e.g., nouns and verbs, into phrases. The child's task is just to learn the words of her language (Ambridge & Lieven). For example, according to the Universal Grammar account, children instinctively know how to combine a noun (e.g., a boy) and a verb (to eat) into a meaningful, correct phrase (A boy eats). This Chomskian (1965) approach to language acquisition has inspired hundreds of scholars to investigate the nature of these assumed grammatical categories, and the research is still ongoing. Contemporary Research A decade or two later, some psycho-linguists began to question the existence of Universal Grammar. They argued that categories like nouns and verbs are biologically, evolutionarily, and psychologically implausible and that the field called for an account that can explain the acquisition process without innate categories. Researchers started to suggest that instead of having a language-specific mechanism for language processing, children might utilize general cognitive and learning principles. Whereas researchers approaching the language acquisition problem from the perspective of Universal Grammar argue for early full productivity, i.e., early adult-like knowledge of the language, the opposing constructivist investigators argue for a more gradual developmental process. It is suggested that children are sensitive to patterns in language which enables the acquisition process. An example of this gradual pattern learning is morphology acquisition. Morphemes are the smallest grammatical markers, or units, in language that alter words. In English, regular plurals are marked with an –s morpheme (e.g., dog+s). Similarly, English third singular verb forms (she eat+s, a boy kick+s) are marked with the –s morpheme. Children are considered to acquire their first instances of third singular forms as entire phrasal chunks (Daddy kicks, a girl eats, a dog barks) without the ability to tease the finest grammatical components apart. When the child hears a sufficient number of instances of a linguistic construction (i.e., the third singular verb form), she will detect patterns across the utterances she has heard. In this case, the repeated pattern is the –s marker in this particular verb form. As a result of many repetitions and examples of the –s marker in different verbs, the child will acquire sophisticated knowledge that, in English, verbs must be marked with an –s morpheme in the third singular form (Ambridge & Lieven, 2011; Pine, Conti-Ramsden, Joseph, Lieven & Serratrice, 2008; Theakson & Lieven, 2005). Approaching language acquisition from the perspective of general cognitive processing is an economic account of how children can learn their first language without an excessive biolinguistic mechanism. Conclusion However, finding a solid answer to the problem of language acquisition is far from being over. Our current understanding of the developmental process is still immature. Investigators of Universal Grammar are still trying to convince that language is a task too demanding to acquire without specific innate equipment, whereas constructivist researchers are fiercely arguing for the importance of linguistic input. The biggest questions, however, are yet unanswered. What is the exact process that transforms the child's utterances into grammatically correct, adult-like speech? How much does the child need to be exposed to language to achieve the adult-like state? What account can explain variation between languages and the language acquisition process in children acquiring very different languages to English? The mystery of language acquisition is granted to keep psychologists and linguists alike astonished decade after decade. FAQs Language acquisition refers to the process by which individuals learn and develop their native or second language. It involves the acquisition of grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills through exposure, interaction, and cognitive development. This process typically occurs in childhood but can continue throughout life. Skinner's theory of language development, also known as behaviorist theory, suggests that language is acquired through operant conditioning. According to Skinner, children learn language by imitating and being reinforced for correct responses. He argued that language is a result of external stimuli and reinforcement, emphasizing the role of the environment in shaping linguistic behavior. Chomsky's theory of language acquisition, known as Universal Grammar, posits that language is an innate capacity of humans. According to Chomsky, children are born with a language acquisition device (LAD), a biological ability that enables them to acquire language rules and structures effortlessly. He argues that there are universal grammar principles that guide language development across cultures and languages, suggesting that language acquisition is driven by innate linguistic knowledge rather than solely by environmental factors. Ambridge, B., & Lieven, E.V.M. (2011). Language Acquisition: Contrasting theoretical approaches. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chomsky, N. (1965). Aspects of the Theory of Syntax. MIT Press. Pine, J.M., Conti-Ramsden, G., Joseph, K.L., Lieven, E.V.M., & Serratrice, L. (2008). Tense over time: testing the Agreement/Tense Omission Model as an account of the pattern of tense-marking provision in early child English. 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How does language work in the brain? How do our brains develop a second language or sign language? How does artificial intelligence develop language abilities? How can you help your child improve language acquisition? Language Acquisition Theory- There are as many as 50 regions in the brain involved. Language acquisition is the process by which we are able to develop and learn a language. This generally includes speaking, listening, writing, and overall communication. Our ability to acquire language is a uniquely human trait because although bonobos, a species of primate, can produce vocalizations with meaning, birds can produce songs, and whales have their own version of a language, no species on Earth that we know of can express an unlimited amount of abstract ideas with a limited set of symbols (gestures, words, and sounds). The term language acquisition often refers to the first-language acquisition, which simply means that it's the first language learned as an infant (unless the child learns two or more languages at the same time). However, there is also the term second-language acquisition, which refers to the process in both children and adults when they learn additional languages apart from their native one. Each of these terms has at least one language acquisition theory behind them which seeks to answer the big question of "how do we learn a language?" The History of Language Acquisition Theory As with much of history, it all begins with some philosophers in ancient societies who were interested in how the world worked—in this case, how humans were able to develop language. Using "armchair psychology" (sitting and thinking about the problem), these philosophers came to the conclusion that we were able to learn languages due to the subset of a human's ability to gain knowledge and learn concepts. They believed that language was an innate ability that we were born with. Plato, for example, felt that word-meaning mapping was also innate in one way or another. Scholars who studied Sanskrit—an ancient language used over 3,000 years ago in what is now India—debated for over 12 centuries about whether or not a human's ability to recognize and use the correct meaning of words in Sanskrit was something passed down by generations and learned from pre-established conventions (for example, a child learns the word for horse because he hears older speakers talking about horses) or whether it was innate ("God-given"). Later, philosophers such as John Locke and Thomas Hobbes got in on the language party and argued that knowledge (and language, in Locke's case) come from abstracted sense impressions. What does that mean? They argue that language comes from a sensory experience. Behaviorists, people who believe that everything is acquired through conditioning, argued that language is learned through operant conditioning—a form of conditioning that happens through rewards and punishments, which makes someone associate between a particular behavior and its consequence. In essence, that a child learns that a specific combination of words or sounds stands for a specific concept or idea through successfully repeated associations. For example, a child would learn that their house animal, Whiskers, is a cat while their other house animal, Fido, is a dog. He would do so because when the child would call Whiskers his dog, his parents would say that no, Whiskers is a cat, not a dog. One of the leading proponents for this theory of language acquisition is B.F. Skinner, one of the founders of the Behaviorist movement. However, Noam Chomsky, one of the world's greatest linguists to date strongly criticized Skinner's theory. Chomsky argued that kids often ignore their parents' corrections and would not likely learn that actual, proper use of the word or phrase and end up using it incorrectly, by means of Skinner's conditioning theory. Chomsky's language acquisition theory involved a more mathematical approach to language development based on a syntax (the meaning of a word) study. Learn about Dyslexia, a problem with language development. One of the most well-known and most scientifically accurate theories yet, the Nativist Theory suggests that we are born with genes that allow us to learn language. This language acquisition theory argues that there is a theoretical device known as the language acquisition device (LAD) that is somewhere in our brain. This "device" is in charge of our learning a language the same way the hypothalamus, for example, is in charge of regulating our body temperature. This theory also suggests that there is a universal grammar (a theory by Noam Chomsky) that is shared across every language in the world because universal grammar is part of our genetic makeup. Essentially, almost all languages around the world all have nouns and verbs and similar ways to structure thoughts. All languages have a finite amount of rules from which we can build an infinite amount of phrases. The core concepts from these finite rules are built into our brains (according to Universal Grammar and the Nativist Theory). This language acquisition theory explains well how humans seem to have a far more complicated and complex set of communication patterns than any other species in the world. It also is a working theory for how children are able to learn so quickly so many complicated ideas. This language acquisition theory is comparable to how we think of numbers—everyone in the world knows what "4 apples" look like regardless if we say that there are four, cuatro, vier, or dört apples. The sociocultural theory, also known as the interactionist approach, takes ideas from both biology and sociology to interpret our language acquisition. This language acquisition theory states that children are able to learn language out of a desire to communicate with their surrounding environment and world. Language thus is dependent upon and emerges from social interaction. The theory argues that due to our language developing out of a desire to communicate, our language is dependent upon whom we hang around and with whom we want to communicate. Essentially, the theory says that our environment when we grow up has a heavy influence on how quickly and how well we learn to talk. For example, an infant who is raised by a single dad will develop the word "dada" or "baba" before developing "mama". The learning theory is a language acquisition theory that looks at language learning as learning a new skill and that we learn language much in the same way that we learn how to count or how to tie shoes via repetition and reinforcement. When babies babble, adults coo and praise them for "talking" (and also because it's pretty adorable). When the kids grow older, they often are praised for speaking properly and corrected when they don't. From this correction and praise comes the learning theory that language comes from stimulus and stimulus-response. However, this language acquisition theory, logical as it may be, fails to explain how new phrases and new words form since it's all about repeating and mimicking what people hear from others. The first few years of a child's life are critical for language learning. Between 10-18 months, a child will say their first words and before they reach two-years-old, they will be able to say some simple, short phrases (for example, "water, please"). Studies have shown that an 18-month old can actually tell the difference between correct verbs and incorrect verb pairs. For example, they should know that "is jumping" is correct while "will jumping" isn't. Between the ages of four and seven, kids become more and more able to tell understandable stories. Normally, everyone goes through five stages of acquiring a language. Language Acquisition Theory- Studies have shown that an 18-month old can actually tell the difference between correct verbs and incorrect verb pairs This first stage is also known as the silent period. Although a child may have up to 500 words in their receptive vocabulary (words they've learned from watching and listening as babies do), they aren't able to speak yet. Some kids try to mimic and "parrot you" by repeating everything you say. However, they aren't producing any real words yet. This is the stage when kids listen attentively and they respond to visual and auditory stimuli. They are able to understand and duplicate movements and gestures in order to show their comprehension. However, at this stage, repetition is critical for their phonemic awareness. Stage 2 can last up to six months. During this stage, kids will develop a vocabulary of about 1,000 words and can say one or two phrases. They use short bits of language that they have memorized, but these bits might not be used correctly. In this stage, kids have about a 3,000-word vocabulary and can use simple sentences and phrases. They should be able to sound out stories phonetically and match vocabulary words to definitions. Kids are also able to ask simple questions such as "may I go to bathroom?"—though the grammar may not always be 100% correct. Kids in Stage 4 have roughly 6,000 active words in their vocabulary. They are able to start using more complex sentences and should be able to express basic thoughts and opinions (both in speaking and writing). For English as a Second Language learners, this is the stage when the child begins to use strategies from their native language to learn content in English and may also translate assignments from their native language. It can take 4-10 years to achieve academic cognitive fluency for a second language learner. It also means that all language learners (native or not) are fluent (for their age) in this stage. There are as many as 50 regions in the brain that are involved in language from translating the vibrations in the air into neural activity so our brain can hear it to controlling the complex and complicated physical movements needed to produce speech and communicate to manipulating and using symbols to help make up ideas and thoughts. Around the same time President Lincoln was giving his Gettysburg Address speech, the French neurologist, Pierre Paul Broca, found what is now called today as Broca's Area—an area in the brain that handles language processing, speech production, comprehension, and controls facial functions. It's located in the posterior frontal gyrus. When damage occurs in Broca's Area, the person will probably experience Broca's Aphasia and have language issues. Pierre Paul Broca was the first person to associate the left brain hemisphere with language. The majority of us control our language via the left hemisphere except for 30% of left-handers and 10% of right-handers. Behind Broca's area is the Pars Triangularis which is involved in the semantics of a language. It's used when you stop to think about what someone said—such as a complex sentence. A few years after Broca, a German neurologist, Carl Wernicke, found the counterpart of Broca's Area in the superior posterior temporal lobe—a place now known as Wernicke's Area. This area handles the language that we hear and the process known as receptive language. Wernicke was the first person to map out the language process in the brain—cognition-to-speech, writing-to-reading, and speech-to-comprehension. It was later adopted by Norman Geschwind and is now a map known as the Wernicke-Geschwind model. However, it's rather outdated by now. The same man, Norman Geschwind, found in the 1960s that the inferior parietal lobule is important in language processing. This is the part of the brain that is all about language development and acquisition as well as the abstract use of language. It's the place in the brain where we collect and consider written and spoken words, phrases, and ideas. It's such a complex area and process that it's where we not only are able to understand the meaning of a word but also how they sound and their function in grammar. The inferior parietal lobule is where the brain classifies and orders our sensory, visual, and auditory intake which is why it's thought that kids who don't learn to read or write until they are around age five is due to a late maturation of the lobule. Still within the frontal lobe is the fusiform gyrus, a part of the brain that helps us classify and recognize words into categories. For example, "cat" and "dog" are both classified as nouns and are both animals whereas "jump" and "sit" are both action verbs. Language Acquisition Theory- The majority of us control our language via the left hemisphere except for 30% of left-handers and 10% of right-handers. When learning a second language (an additional language to your native language), the development of meaning is one of, if not the, most important part. There are many types of meaning such as grammatical (morphology of a word, tenses, possession, etc.), semantic (word meaning), lexical (meaning that comes from our mental lexicon), and pragmatic (meaning that depends on context). Mastery of each of these is necessary when acquiring a second language. The stages of second-language acquisition are much like those of a first-language acquisition. However, people and kids learning a second language will take longer than they did with their first-language to come to full fluency in their second language. Kids who grow up bilingual have been proven to usually take longer to begin speaking because their brains are trying to sort out the grammar between the two (or more) language systems. When the child begins to learn sign language as a native speaker from birth, they do so in the same way that a child who can hear learns languages. Signed languages and spoken languages are different in the most basic manner- spoken relies on auditory/oral skills, while signed relies on visual/manual abilities. As a result, it could be thought that sign language acquisition differs from spoken language acquisition theory. However, there really aren't any extreme or noteworthy differences between acquiring the two because they are both parts of the natural (human) language group. Roughly 10% of deaf signers are born into already signing families which makes it easier to learn since the whole family signs and the child from birth is surrounded by sign language. Parents who communicate with their kids (whether or not the kid can hear) by way of sign language help the child naturally acquire sign language in the same way that non-deaf parents teach their children their native language. Both hearing and deaf children use gestures and physical symbolizing to show something when they're young. However, in deaf children, these gestures appear around the same time that a hearing child produces their first spoken words (study here). According to a research paper, "deaf children move from prelinguistic gesturing to performing manual syllabic babbling which occurs at 7-10 months of age. This is an activity which differs from other hand activity of the child because it "possess (1.) a restricted set of phonetic units (unique to signed languages), (2.) syllabic organization, and it was (3.) used without meaning or reference" Language Acquisition Theory- Artificial Intelligence has two languages coded into it- the natural (human) language, and languages created by scratch by programmers. Artificial intelligence (A.I.) can now create their own language, use language, and evolve that language- just like humans! Researchers have noted that A.I. has the ability to exchange a set of symbols that are capable of serving as signs in a generated language. The A.I. languages can either begin from a human language, known as a natural language or be created from scratch by programmers and code. When A.I. translates between two languages, it can create its own language known as an interlingua language. Essentially, it can create its own form of creole or "Spanglish." Google Translate decided in 2016 to take an A.I. designed specifically to translate between 103 human languages, including languages that had never before been translated between each other, and they found that the A.I. was able to encode semantics (the meaning of a word, phrase, idea) within its structures while translating. The researchers concluded that a new interlingua that evolved from human languages exists within the Google Translate network. You can look at their study here. As some may know, in 2017, Facebook's A.I. created its own language. Scary as it may be, it's important to ask, "how did that happen?" Facebook researchers trained chatbots (A.I. that have a conversation via text or audio in order to "chat") using a series of English text conversations that involved humans playing trading games between hats, balls, and books. The chatbots were programmed to use English to communicate and given tasks to trade the aforementioned items. However, the chatbots developed a reworked version of English in order to solve their task better. Many of the exchanges in the reworked English were nonsensical and didn't make much sense to the average reader. For example: "Bob: "I can can I I everything else." Alice: "Balls have zero to me to me to me to me to me to me to me to me to." You can check out more details here! For the process of language acquisition—especially when acquiring more than one language—the younger, the better. Studies have shown that learning new languages helps fight against neurodegenerative conditions such as Alzheimer's. However, there are a multitude of reasons, and numerous studies that show how healthy for our brain it is to be bilingual. Scientists have found brain mechanisms that assist in early language development. Phonemic awareness (one's ability to understand sound in language such as the difference between "bed" and "bad") is essential to language development. The study found that the way an infant's brain responds to phonetic stimuli (such as hearing someone talking) reflects their language ability, as well as their pre-reading abilities. This can be used as a predictor of how well they will be able to read and speak at age three and age five. Adults who learn a second language later in life have more to offer to their language development, although they may be slower than a child at learning it. Being able to maintain your first language (as an adult) after having learned a second language is determined by being able to informally use both the first and second language in daily life, as well as education levels, according to this study. Music plays a huge role in language development, too! Whether it's in the womb, as a child, or learning a second language as an adult, music is useful for learning any and all languages. Music incorporates speech, writing (if you're reading lyrics, for example), and rhythms. Music learning actually matches the speed and effort put into language acquisition. Language Acquisition Theory- in countries such as Ghana where over 250 languages are spoken, people grow up native in multiple (more than two or three) native languages which is proven to help fight neurodegenerative diseases! Delayed Speech. If your child is learning a second language or having lots of trouble with the first/native language, a speech pathologist may be able to help straighten out some of the underlying issues that are going on cognitively with the child's brain. Read! It's never too early to begin reading to a baby- science has proven that babies can learn words while in the womb! Even starting with simple picture books (and describing what's going on on the page) can help a baby or child. Talk! Just like reading, talking to a baby, whether it's in the womb or not, can help them develop language. Narrate the day. For instance, "We are going to cook dinner. Do you like the Macaroni & Cheese we are going to have? Let's wash our hands and sit down to eat." You can even prep a baby for second-language and foreign language learning in the womb!Tell stories! Like talking, telling stories (especially elaborate ones) can help a child develop vocabulary.Listen to music! Music has been proven by a multitude of sources, such as this one, that it aides in language learning. A simple song such as Old McDonald Had a Farm helps a child learn rhythm, vocabulary, and reinforces happy learning.Use the television but at a minimal level. Many people around the world have learned foreign languages by watching TV. Have your child watch cartoons in a foreign language for a small amount of time daily to help aid their foreign learning development.Try using a program, such as Cognifit's, to help your child ramp up his language skills!Go on field trips to fun places such as an interactive or interesting museum (for kids), the aquarium, or the zoo and help them learn the names of their surroundings (animals, plants, and how the world works). Let us know what you think about Language acquisition theory in the comments below! How do people learn languages? Do some simply have a gift for learning a language as an adult? Or do they just work harder at language acquisition? Whatever the reasons, approximately 40 percent of the world's population speaks only one language. In spite of this, many people extol the benefits of learning a new language—to gain a competitive edge in the global marketplace, improve memory, and even learn how to use your mother tongue with more skill. Before you jump in to begin tackling a new language challenge, let's explore a bit about how people learn languages, both as children and as adults. What you discover may be surprising. [Tweet "How many languages do you speak? #Languageacquisition is a fascinating process!"] Language Acquisition—Our Human Instinct As humans, we are wired to learn and communicate by language. Language acquisition is one of the quintessential human traits, because non-humans do not communicate by using language. This should come as no surprise to parents who have observed their children mimicking sounds and even the mouth movements of those around them. The desire to communicate through language is one of the strongest human tendencies. Moreover, studies of the human brain, especially more recent research using MRI imaging, demonstrate how different parts of the brain react to and control sounds and speech. One study in Sweden actually revealed that students learning a new language experienced growth in their brain that was directly connected to their language studies and comprehension. According to the study, "the regions of the brain that grew were linked to how easy the learners found languages, and their brains developed according to their performance." Language Acquisition—Basic Mechanics Language acquisition as a child shares some similarities with—as well as some differences from—learning a language as an adult. As previously noted, children instinctively begin acquiring language through interaction with other children and adults. We are surrounded by conversation, and children will naturally begin picking up sounds, words, and sentences from those around them. The process of learning a new language as an adult is very similar. Stage 1: Learning Sounds The sounds a language uses are called phonemes. English has about 44. Some languages use more and others, less. Learning to recognize and produce these sounds is called "phonemic awareness." Stage 2: Learning Words The sounds in every language connect together in unique ways to form meanings, most simply expressed in words. Sounds that have meaning are called morphemes. Stage 3: Learning Sentences Sounds that form meaning are strung together in coherent strings to form more complex meanings. We call them sentences, and they convey a complete thought. Language Acquisition—Children and Adults While children and adults both acquire the basics in the same way, children are able to reach a higher language proficiency sooner than adults because their brains are more flexible to the new rules. Jason Oxenham, CEO of Rocket Languages, says, "Children's brains have a higher plasticity, meaning that they can better create new neurons and synapses, or connections between information." This simply means that adults and children approach the task of learning a new language differently. As several researchers have found, adults tackle the chore of learning a new language with an adult problem-solving process. Children, by comparison, pay less attention to the rules and simply absorb the new information. Therefore, adults, due to their problem-solving and study skills, start out learning a new language faster. But children find it easier to pass ahead over time and achieve higher proficiency levels in foreign languages. So, the playing field is basically equal. Language Acquisition—Benefits for the Brain Are you considering learning a new language as an adult? The recognized benefits of learning a new language may just convince you to give it a try. Develop a sharper mind. Learning a language involves increasing awareness, and this awareness also transfers to other aspects of your life. Grow better at multitasking. People who speak more than one language show more cognitive flexibility and find it easier to adapt to unexpected situations. Strengthen your memory. Learning a language gives your memory a fantastic workout and trains your brain to recall information better and more quickly. Delay the onset of dementia. Being bilingual or multilingual helps delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease and dementia for as long as five years. That's better than most modern drugs. Speed up decision-making. If your mind is accustomed to constantly choosing between several vocabulary options, then making other decisions will come easier, too. Language Acquisition and Your Business In today's global economy, companies must be able to communicate to consumers and employees alike in multiple languages. While you may find it easy to hire multilingual workers, translating your company documents and communications into various languages in a timely and accurate manner usually requires professional assistance. International Language Services has been providing companies just like yours top-quality, reliable translation services for over 35 years. When it's time for your company to acquire a new language in its business and marketing portfolio, drop us a line. There are three theories of language acquisition: cognitive, inherent, and sociocultural. Each theory has specific aspects that make each of them unique in its development of language. Stephen Krashen and the acquisition of languages Perhaps no-one has looked at the question more closely than the linguist Stephen Krashen, who has introduced some of the most influential concepts to the study of second-language acquisition. Chomsky's theory of language acquisition argues that human brain structures naturally allow for the capacity to learn and use languages. Chomsky believed that rules for language acquisition are innate (inborn) and strengthen naturally as humans grow and develop. Nativists believe that children will learn language no matter what, regardless of the environment they grow up in. The behaviorist theory, on the other hand, suggests that language develops as a result of certain behaviors, such as imitating what they hear and responding to the feedback they get. What are the 2 major theories of language acquisition? Language acquisition is the process of learning to communicate effectively and meaningfully in a target language. There are four main theories: linguistic learning, behaviorist, cognitive learning, and interactionist. Researchers define language acquisition into two categories: first-language acquisition and second-language acquisition. First-language acquisition is a universal process regardless of home language. Babies listen to the sounds around them, begin to imitate them, and eventually start producing words. Mentalist or Innatist Theory of language acquisition emphasizes the learner's innate mental capacity for acquiring a language. Chomsky hypothesizes that infants must be born with some special built-in mental capacity to learn language. Thus, this theory claims that the ability to learn language is inborn to a child. Piaget: Assimilation and Accommodation Jean Piaget's theory of language development suggests that children use both assimilation and accommodation to learn language. Assimilation is the process of changing one's environment to place information into an already-existing schema (or idea). The father of most nativist theories of language acquisition is Noam Chomsky, who brought greater attention to the innate capacity of children for learning language, which had widely been considered a purely cultural phenomenon based on imitation. Chomsky believes that language is biologically inherited whereas Skinner's theory is based on how a child learns how to talk through the use of positive reinforcement from adults who already speak a language fluently. What is the theory of language acquisition? The learning theory of language acquisition suggests that children learn a language much like they learn to tie their shoes or how to count; through repetition and reinforcement. When babies first learn to babble, parents and guardians smile, coo, and hug them for this behavior. Chomsky concluded that children must have an inborn faculty for language acquisition. According to this theory, the process is biologically determined – the human species has evolved a brain whose neural circuits contain linguistic information at birth. Nativists believe that children will learn language no matter what, regardless of the environment they grow up in. The behaviorist theory, on the other hand, suggests that language develops as a result of certain behaviors, such as imitating what they hear and responding to the feedback they get. The father of most nativist theories of language acquisition is Noam Chomsky, who brought greater attention to the innate capacity of children for learning language, which had widely been considered a purely cultural phenomenon based on imitation. According to the Behaviorist Theory, Skinner (1985) equated learning a language to verbal behavior. Therefore, he believes that language acquisition like any other behavior can be observed, rather than trying to explain the mental systems underlying these types of behaviors. What are 1st and 2nd language acquisition theories? First language acquisition is children's acquisition of their native language, while second language acquisition is learning a language after acquiring the first language. Moreover, first language acquisition is a subconscious process, while second language acquisition is an active and conscious process. Researchers define language acquisition into two categories: first-language acquisition and second-language acquisition. First-language acquisition is a universal process regardless of home language. Babies listen to the sounds around them, begin to imitate them, and eventually start producing words. Mentalist or Innatist Theory of language acquisition emphasizes the learner's innate mental capacity for acquiring a language. Chomsky hypothesizes that infants must be born with some special built-in mental capacity to learn language. Thus, this theory claims that the ability to learn language is inborn to a child. There are two major aspects of language proficiency that must be acquired by second language learners. Jim Cummins has identified these as Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS), or conversational proficiency, and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), or academic proficiency. For example, no child will say "Biscuit mummy", instead the child will say "Mummy, biscuit". The reason is thus, when a child starts to put two words together, the child has already mastered the basic rules of syntax. And even when the child makes an erroneous sentence, he applies them correctly. For example, no child will say "Biscuit mummy", instead the child will say "Mummy, biscuit". The reason is thus, when a child starts to put two words together, the child has already mastered the basic rules of syntax. And even when the child makes an erroneous sentence, he applies them correctly. What is nativist theory of language acquisition examples? For example, no child will say "Biscuit mummy", instead the child will say "Mummy, biscuit". The reason is thus, when a child starts to put two words together, the child has already mastered the basic rules of syntax. And even when the child makes an erroneous sentence, he applies them correctly. What is Vygotsky theory of language acquisition? Vygotsky viewed language as an essential tool for communication and that culture and behaviour was understood through language. Vygotsky also highlighted the critical role that language plays in cognitive development. Vygotsky's theory says that social interactions help children develop their ability to use language. The fundamental difference between Piaget and Vygotsky is that Piaget believed in the constructivist approach of children, or in other words, how the child interacts with the environment, whereas Vygotsky stated that learning is taught through socially and culturally. Language courses include 7 language components that aim at developing learners' language competency. These are vocabulary, grammar, functions, reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Noam Chomsky (2002) stated the innatist theory. He mentioned that children were born with the ability to acquire language (innate). He argued that language acquisition of children be related to their innate ability of biological language acquisition device (LAD). This chapter is part of a book that is no longer available to purchase from Cambridge Core Get access Cite Type Chapter Information DOI: [Opens in a new window] Publisher: Cambridge University Press Print publication year: 2005 Get access to the full version of this content by using one of the access options below. (Log in options will check for institutional or personal access. Content may require purchase if you do not have access.) First language acquisition refers to the way children learn their native language. Second language acquisition refers to the learning of another language or languages besides the native language. For children learning their native language, linguistic competence develops in stages, from babbling to one word to two word, then telegraphic speech. Babbling is now considered the earliest form of language acquisition because infants will produce sounds based on what language input they receive. One word sentences (holophrastic speech) are generally monosyllabic in consonant-vowel clusters. During two word stage, there are no syntactic or morphological markers, no inflections for plural or past tense, and pronouns are rare, but the intonation contour extends over the whole utterance. Telegraphic speech lacks function words and only carries the open class content words, so that the sentences sound like a telegram. Three theories The three theories of language acquisition: imitation, reinforcement and analogy, do not explain very well how children acquire language. Imitation does not work because children produce sentences never heard before, such as "cat stand up table." Even when they try to imitate adult speech, children cannot generate the same sentences because of their limited grammar. And children who are unable to speak still learn and understand the language, so that when they overcome their speech impairment they immediately begin speaking the language. Reinforcement also does not work because it actually seldomly occurs and when it does, the reinforcement is correcting pronunciation or truthfulness, and not grammar. A sentence such as "apples are purple" would be corrected more often because it is not true, as compared to a sentence such as "apples is red" regardless of the grammar. Analogy also cannot explain language acquisition. Analogy involves the formation of sentences or phrases by using other sentences as samples. If a child hears the sentence, "I painted a red barn," he can say, by analogy, "I painted a blue barn." Yet if he hears the sentence, "I painted a barn red," he cannot say "I saw a barn red." The analogy did not work this time, and this is not a sentence of English. Acquisitions Phonology: A child's error in pronunciation is not random, but rule-governed. Typical phonological rules include: consonant cluster simplification (spoon becomes poon), devoicing of final consonants (dog becomes dok), voicing of initial consonants (truck becomes druck), and consonant harmony (doggy becomes goggy, or big becomes gig.) Morphology: An overgeneralization of constructed rules is shown when children treat irregular verbs and nouns as regular. Instead of went as the past tense of go, children use goed because the regular verbs add an -ed ending to form the past tense. Similarly, children use gooses as the plural of goose instead of geese, because regular nouns add an -s in the plural. The "Innateness Hypothesis" of child language acquisition, proposed by Noam Chomsky, states that the human species is pre-wired to acquire language, and that the kind of language is also determined. Many factors have led to this hypothesis such as the ease and rapidity of language acquisition despite impoverished input as well as the uniformity of languages. All children will learn a language, and children will also learn more than one language if they are exposed to it. Children follow the same general stages when learning a language, although the linguistic input is widely varied. The poverty of the stimulus states that children seem to learn or know the aspects of grammar for which they receive no information. In addition, children do not produce sentences that could not be sentences in some human language. The principles of Universal Grammar underlie the specific grammars of all languages and determine the class of languages that can be acquired unconsciously without instruction. It is the genetically determined faculty of the left hemisphere, and there is little doubt that the brain is specially equipped for acquisition of human language. The "Critical Age Hypothesis" suggests that there is a critical age for language acquisition without the need for special teaching or learning. During this critical period, language learning proceeds quickly and easily. After this period, the acquisition of grammar is difficult, and for some people, never fully achieved. Cases of children reared in social isolation have been used for testing the critical age hypothesis. None of the children who had little human contact were able to speak any language once reintroduced into society. Even the children who received linguistic input after being reintroduced to society were unable to fully develop language skills. These cases of isolated children, and of deaf children, show that humans cannot fully acquire any language to which they are exposed unless they are within the critical age. Beyond this age, humans are unable to acquire much of syntax and inflectional morphology. At least for humans, this critical age does not pertain to all of language, but to specific parts of the grammar. Second Language Acquisition Teaching Methods Grammar-translation: the student memorizes words, inflected words, and syntactic rules and uses them to translate from native to target language and vice versa; most commonly used method in schools because it does not require teacher to be fluent; however, least effective method of teaching Direct method: the native language is not used at all in the classroom, and the student must learn the new language without formal instruction; based on theories of first language acquisition Audio-lingual: heavy use of dialogs and audio, based on the assumption that language learning is acquired mainly through imitation, repetition, and reinforcement; influenced by psychology Natural Approach: emphasis on vocabulary and not grammar; focus on meaning, not form; use of authentic materials instead of textbook Silent Way: teachers remain passive observers while students learn, which is a process of personal growth; no grammatical explanation or modeling by the teacher Total Physical Response: students play active role as listener and performer, must respond to imperative drills with physical action Suggestopedia: students always remain comfortable and relaxed and learn through memorization of meaningful texts, although the goal is understanding Community Language Learning: materials are developed as course progresses and teacher understands what students need and want to learn; learning involves the whole person and language is seen as more than just communication Community Language Teaching: incorporates all components of language and helps students with various learning styles; use of communication-based activities with authentic materials, needs of learner are taken into consideration when planning topics and objectives Four skill areas The four skill areas of learning a foreign language need to be addressed consistently and continually. Good lesson plans incorporate all four: Listening, Speaking, Reading (and Vocabulary), and Writing (and Grammar). Native speakers do not learn the skill areas separately, nor do they use them separately, so they shouldn't be taught separately. However, it is easy to fall into the trap of teaching about the language, instead of actually teaching the language.