



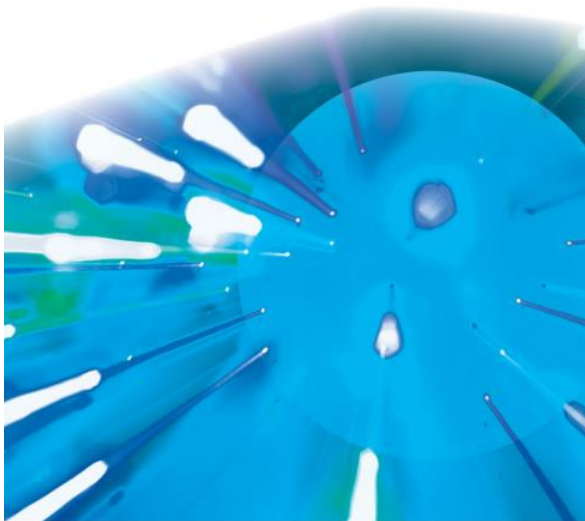
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Helen Goodluck

**Language Acquisition
by Children**

A Linguistic Introduction



EDINBURGH ADVANCED TEXTBOOKS IN LINGUISTICS

*Language Acquisition
by Children.
A Linguistic Introduction*

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Language Acquisition by Children tries to explain and describe, based principally on Noam Chomsky's Universal Grammar Theory, how children develop language self-correction performance. Author, Helen Goodluck, has written books related to first and second language acquisition, language in special populations, and adult sentence processing. In this book, she explores and contrasts, through seven chapters, different studies about language acquisition and sound production; describes theories about how linguistics are trying to trace morphological and syntax paths that help to understand how children produce sentences, and finally the author describes the different ways children learn to correct their own error in order to produce an adult language performance.

Chapter 1 works as an introduction of the different topics the book is going to cover. Author presents Universal Grammar Theory and how important it has been to open the field for other authors, against or in favour, whose studies have helped to pay attention to how children produce language, not only when they can produce words, but since the very first contact they have with their context, sounds and language.

Then, chapter 2 *The Acquisition of Sound Systems* explains how, during the learning of the sound system, children preferred sequences where sounds are similar. Studies show that it is natural for children to learn new sounds from others that are similar. They use as an example how children in an English-speaking environment preferred sequences in which syllables with alveolar consonants -de or te- preceded sequences with labials -me- or velars -ge-. According to this, they mention that it is important for the children to not be forced to produce difficult or "more adulting" sounds in order to a quick development of the language, because it can be detrimental for the child learning process.

It is important to notice that the language used by the author is a specialized language. Therefore, it is recommended that the reader has a slight knowledge of phonetics and phonology, in order to notice how the author combines natural development of the child when producing sounds and these studies that try to establish rules or the path that the children flow from their first production of sound until they express complex sentences.

In chapter 3 *Morphological Development*, experts analyze two forms of morphological rules: derivational and inflectional. They explain that inflectional morphology does not create new words, but it has a regulated form to inflex nouns, verbs or to mark possession. On the other hand, derivational rules permit the creation of new words by adding affixes or by joining words together

in order to form a compound word. On this matter, the author discusses about how young children are sensitive to the distinction between regular and irregular nouns when they form compounds. In their spontaneous speech children notice the difference between a plural noun, and, despite the fact that they could use overgeneralized rules, such as adding an -s at the end of the noun in English speaking, they understand that compound nouns work with different rules, and they apply a different logic for these ones. Despite a correct or incorrect use of the morphological rules, researchers conclude that these productions that repeat in different languages, like German or Spanish, are evidence on how children employ different strategies to produce new words, and it is not just a simple stripping or adding words strategy.

Chapter 4 *The Acquisition of Syntax*, summarize different results of language acquisition studies. One of them reveals the systematic nature of children's pronunciation errors. They compare how different children produce early utterances around the turn of their first year, from one-word utterances, and how these turns into a fifty word by the twenty months, entering to a two-word stage and later into a stage called "telegraphic speech". The studies propose a set of rules from which the child's output could be derived, and they mention that by predicting this speech development could be helpful to guide children's utterance on their construction of correct syntactic patterns.

Chapter 5 *Aspects of Syntactic and Semantic Development*, analyzes child's knowledge on tenses and syntactic distinctions, and they found that children at the earliest stages lack functional categories, but not because they are not capable or they have a limitation. They found that Telegraphic Speech works on children as a grammatical real category in their grammar, and they use it for communicative purposes. This does not mean that children cannot develop a correct distinction between present or past tenses copulas -like verb be-. They are very capable of doing it, but they want to communicate effectively with the environment, so they use a simplified way to do it. Studies show that children will learn the use of different syntactic structures at the same time they acquire more complex grammatical categories such as adverbs or prepositions that help them to distinguish the differences between tenses. In the same vein, the author explains that children can learn and distinguish grammatical aspect and Aktionsart. The first one refers "to morphologically and syntactically represented properties of the situation described, such as whether the action is ongoing or completed" (p.82) and Aktionsart "refers to properties of the situation that are inherent to the verb involved, particularly whether a change in situation is

involved” (p.82). Studies found that children have no problem understanding the semantic difference, and their errors are related to other structures.

In chapter 6 *Cognition, Environment and Language Learning* is interesting how the author shows studies that imply language can develop independently from input. They use as an example creole language which come from pidgins that normally are not close to native speakers from the original language, and they believed that these derivations come from the mind, the universal grammar, of the speaker who created them. To explain this, they propose the learnability theory, giving examples of how authors study conditions that permit learning a language within a limitation such a time span. They analyze how Universal Grammar and input are fundamental for children to prevent the error during the construction of correct grammar and analyze grammar constructions in different languages to help the reader to comprehend how learnability theory works.

Finally in chapter 7 *Performance Development*, the author focuses on two aspects of children's grammar competence: adult and child processing mechanism, and sentence processor. She describes studies that show child processing mechanisms are not that different from adults, they have similar patterns, but child deficiency occurs because they don't have the same amount of vocabulary in their rule store, and they are learning to process the information according to the context. Something similar happens in children's utterances of sentences. Studies compare how adults use to plan an utterance before expressing an idea, and children begin the planning process at the age of three in order to develop adult grammar.

As has been explained, the author describes the different aspects that influence language acquisition by children. In addition, the author shows the importance Noam Chomsky has had in promoting the discussion on the subject, since the book does not take Chomsky's theories as granted, but contrast them with other authors, and analyzes and compares the studies that have been done in the past century with the results of recent years. In many cases, as it has been discussed, there are great advances in terms of the authors' intention to propose the steps to follow in order to understand language development, however, there are also studies that are still in progress, seeking a methodology that fits with the needs of the modern world.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the information is quite up to date. The number of studies to which the author refers helps to better comprehend the theories she analyzes, and the

examples used throughout the seven chapters are quite clear and contextualized to the environments where the studies were conducted. This can be very helpful to everyone who is involved in the children's normal speech development process such as pediatricians, kindergarten teachers, even parents. Therefore, it is recommended to approach the reading with an open mind to discussion and to understand that the process explained may not be, as the author herself mentions, suitable to all languages, but they serve to identify patterns that will help in the future to postulate the most appropriate process for language acquisition by children.

Reference

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