

Conclusions and advice:

Possible problems with Piaget's account:

- Ignores social environment
- What about child's social skills?
- What about the child trying to communicate ideas to others?

Problems with the empiricist's account:

- The novel sentence
- Over regularisation of rules by young children  
My teacher held the baby rabbits and we patted them  
I love cut-upped egg. (Pinker, 1995)
- Speed of learning.

Possible problems with Nativist's account:

- Has a "universal grammar" really been identified?
- Does cognition and the environment play a bigger role than Chomsky believed?

Socio-cultural approach:

- Emphasis on interaction as essential for language development
- Language is cultural conventionalised, and optimum entry into the culture is by social interaction (often initially by the mother)
- Internal "push" force (driving child to learn language) & external pull "force" (presence of a supportive environment to assist this learning)
- Language Acquisition Support System (LASS)
- Interaction approach



# The Multi-cultural resource Centre MCRC



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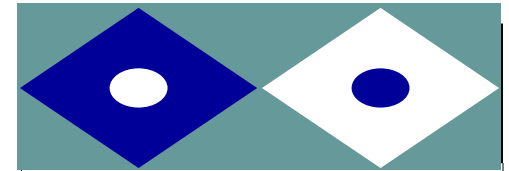


## Language for Life Project Multi-Cultural Resource Centre.



What you need to  
know about:  
*Language development.  
Theories and contra  
versions.*

*Bilingualism can increase oppor-  
tunities and choices. Bilingualism  
has definite benefits for all chil-  
dren... Two languages: twice the  
choice*



How does a new-born child develop language and What is Language?



**Language is:**

• “An arbitrary system of symbols which taken together make it possible ...to transmit and understand an infinite variety of

messages” (Brown, 1965)

- “A system of symbols which are arbitrary and shared for communication which is intentional” (Bancroft, 1995)

**Main areas of language development:**

- Phonology
- Semantics
- Syntax
- Pragmatics
- Sequence of language development

Children progressively master the rules of sounds (phonology), meaning (semantics), grammar (syntax), and learn to combine words to elicit understanding (pragmatics)

**Sequence of language development from birth to**

**child’s first word:**

- Babies cry from birth, but crying is not language
- Babbling: child produces sounds – combinations of vowels and consonants, e.g., “ba” “da” Possibly phonological preparation for speech.
- Before first word, child would be using much non-verbal communication – gesturing and facial expressions
- First word: 7 months to 2 years of age

**Early word comprehension**

- 7-8 months olds. Typical early understood words: mummy, daddy, clock, drink, teddy (Harris, et al., 1995)
- Vocabulary spurt: total number of words grow fairly steadily until 12 months of age, when there will typically be a sharp increase in vocabulary

**Empiricist approach**

**Skinner (1957):**

- Stresses the importance of the environment
- Children learn language through **association** and **reinforcement**
- Babbling reinforced into words, and reinforcement shapes word combinations into sentences
- Empirical research: Brown et al. (1969) tape-recorded mothers talking to their young children
- Little evidence to suggest mothers shaped their children’s syntax. Thus, statements such as “want cup” or “Ben cup” were accepted.
- Content was corrected rather than grammatical structure, e.g., child indicates “that pig” (to indicate sheep) would be corrected by the mother, “No, that’s a sheep”

**Nativist approach**



**Chomsky**

- Language acquisition device (LAD)
- Universal set of rules for grammar
- Specific brain areas with localised functions of language
  - e.g., Broca (production) and Wernicke’s (comprehension) area
- Sensitive period for language development
- Language is creative
- Language is not finite yet we learn language from an environment that is finite
- Pinker (1994) Pidgin and Creole – children constantly reinvent languages

**Language and cognition**

**Piaget:**

- First 2 years of life children’s intellectual skills do not rely on symbols (words/ images) but on sensori-motor experiences (seeing/ hearing etc.)
- Children develop a series of rules for language from a wider cognitive system – thus, children’s talk is similar because language is facilitated by the sensori-motor schemes of early infancy
- Cognition hypothesis (Cromer, 1974):
  - We understand and see particular linguistic structures only when our cognitive abilities enable us to do so
  - Even once our cognitive abilities allow us to grasp an idea, we may see it in a less complex way because we have not acquired the grammatical rules for expressing it freely, e.g., “have you looked?” “did you look yet?”