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HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN LANGUAGE!

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From Little Learners to Big Achievers

It is essential for caregivers to understand how children learn language. Knowing the basics behind it prepares the caregiver for how a child's thinking flourishes. It also supports caregivers in developing methods to enhance a child's language skills. These young learners typically start by learning nouns (person, place, or thing), and soon after, they establish verbs (actions), and adjectives (descriptions)!

The research presented in this news article focuses on how children acquire **verbs** and **adjectives**. While including formal methodologies and tests, we include simple steps for you to try at home. Children most actively engage in the process of language acquisition through activities; the more they interact, the more their vocabulary grows.

Familiarity with language learning principles is essential when recognizing skill improvements. This ensures children will continue exploring and expanding their vocabulary. Every new word a child learns marks a significant step forward in not only their vocabulary, but also their mental development as a whole!

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Verb Acquisition

Verb acquisition is an integral part of a child's language development.

Theories of Verb Acquisition

The Universal Early Noun Advantage

Concepts of objects - aka nouns - are more easily acquired and fixed than verbs, which are actions.

Language-Specific Early Noun Advantage

An infant's noun and verb acquisition are a reflection of the attributes in their language. In languages like English and French, nouns are acquired at an earlier stage than verbs, but in others like Mandarin or Hindi, the noun advantage is reduced or entirely absent.

How can I help teach my kid?

There are many activities that parents can do to help their children acquire verbs! Including, but not limited to:

- Watching videos
- Storytelling, including picture books
- Games such as pretend play and flash cards
- Engaging in conversation

These are some of many easy ways for **you** to get involved in the development of your child's vocabulary learning!



Landau & Gleitman (1985): Syntactic Bootstrapping

- **Participants:** 36 15-month old infants were split into three groups of 12: Transitive, Intransitive, and Neutral conditions (examples given below)
- **Experiment:** Children look at TV screens of a woman's monologue. She uses the novel test verb "krad." Each group heard different sentences according to what their condition is. For example, those with the transitive condition heard the verb with a transitive sentence. Half of the infants in neutral condition heard transitive, the other with intransitive. Infants' looking preferences to sentences are tracked.
- **Transitive:** He's kradding him!
- **Intransitive:** He's kradding!
- **Neutral:** Which is your favorite?
- **Results:** According to the infants' looking preferences, they preferred transitive sentences to intransitive sentences.



Adjective Acquisition

Adjective acquisition is also an important part of a child's language development, but the process is hard to master.

Why So Difficult?

Any given noun can be ascribed many adjectives depending on its various qualities. For example, the butterfly on the right may be **red**, but it's also **BIG** and pretty! Which quality does **red** refer to? Or could **red** even refer to the butterfly itself? A child just learning the word **red** has to figure that out!



The Pewter Problem

In 1988, E.M. Markman and G.F. Wachtel conducted an experiment where they introduced a bunch of 3-year-olds to the nonsense adjective “pewter”. The kids were split into 2 groups; one was told that a pair of tongs (an unfamiliar item) was “pewter”, while the other group was told a cup (a well-known thing) was “pewter”. When quizzed later, the tongs kids thought “pewter” referred to the tongs themselves, while the cup kids thought “pewter” referred to the glass the cup was made of! In other words, when “pewter” was used to describe a thing the kids knew well, they correctly figured out that “pewter” was an adjective.

Three Underlying Principles

Concrete Noun Bias

Concrete, definite, and tangible objects (such as mama, apple, or bottle) are first in line to get assigned a new word.

Whole Object Bias

Words in general get mapped to objects as a whole; for example, an “apple” refers to the whole fruit (as opposed to the flesh, skin, stem, or seeds that comprise the apple.)

Mutual Exclusivity

Each item gets one and only one label. Multiple labels and synonyms are not an option.

Adjectives Are Unprincipled

- Adjectives necessarily refer to less tangible attributes than nouns (“sweet”, “red”, “yummy”, and even “juicy” are less concrete and definite than “apple”.)
- A single adjective doesn't describe an object in its entirety (for instance, sugar is both white and sweet.)
- A single adjective can describe multiple things (apples, sugar, and even the baby can all be called sweet!)

Tips and Tricks

- Try using and introducing adjectives **in relation to objects your child already knows well**. Instead of saying that a fire hydrant is red, try saying that an apple is red instead! (Assuming, of course, that your child knows what an apple is.)
- Avoid pairing adjectives with vague referents (phrases like “that one” and “this thing” come to mind.) Rather, **always specify the noun that the adjective describes!**





CONCLUSION



Embedded links
for further
reading are
underlined!

What Next?

AND WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

It has been proven that language skills are closely linked to cognitive, or mind, development. By engaging in language learning activities like those above and educating yourself on the mechanics behind language acquisition, you can help your little one's development grow. Aiding in your child's cognitive development can help stimulate their brain, improving their problem-solving skills, memory, and more.

Language acquisition is not simply about learning new words. It is about cultivating your child's ability to communicate their needs, thoughts, and emotions. When you are attuned with this aspect of your child, you foster a deep bond with them, supporting their emotional and intellectual growth.

Being able to recognize the milestones, or stages, of child language development outlined in this brochure will also help you in recognizing early on if your child is facing learning difficulties. Early intervention in these cases is imperative, and it can help to prevent future behavioral problems.

All in all, the first step in providing a nurturing environment that supports your child's development is being an informed and proactive part of their language learning process. This sets the stage for a life of learning and success for your child!

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