

## Lecture 2 ( Chapter 1 ) - Studying Language Development

- **How do you define language**

- Consciousness
- Self-expression
- Communication
- Rule governed - share (make sure others understand you)
- Symbolic representation
- Cultural, influences, thoughts
- Subjective (different words have different meanings) / arbitrary (develop new words)
- Productive (combine in infinite ways - combine words, sounds)

### BOX 1.1 Components of Oral Language Development

COMPONENT	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Pragmatics	The transmittal of information to others in socially appropriate ways	Being able to make requests, to comment, to be coherent in conversation and narrative
Phonology	The sound system of the language	Being able to distinguish between /vat/ and /bat/, recognizing that /narg/ could be an English word but that /ngar/ could not
Lexicon	Vocabulary and processes of derivational morphology	Knowing the meaning of words and how to form new words (e.g., if <i>narg</i> is a verb, then a <i>narger</i> is someone who nargs)
Morphology and syntax	The systems that govern inflectional morphology and word combination	Knowing the difference in meaning between <i>Man bites dog</i> and <i>Dog bites man</i> , knowing that <i>Man bite dog</i> and <i>Bite man dog</i> are both ungrammatical

- **Many components**

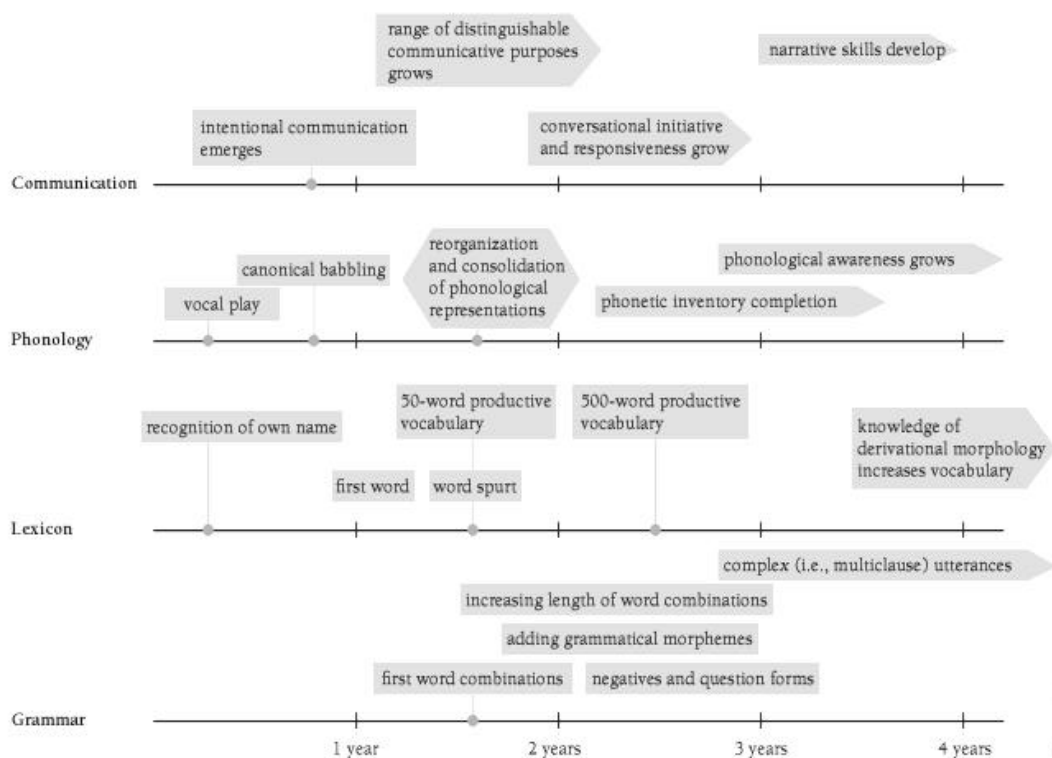
- Semantics / lexicon
  - morphemes
- Syntax
- Pragmatics
  - sociolinguistics
- Phonemes (oral)
- Literacy

- **Major patterns in language milestones (see Fig.1-1)**

- Prenatal
  - Learning patterns

- 1st year
  - Pre-linguistic → understanding → production
- 2nd year
  - vocabulary ( kids start to develop, rapidly learning new words in each day )
- 3rd year
  - grammar (start to use the word they have learned)
- Generally milestones are met naturally with typical input, although we can have some influence on how well/quickly they develop

**FIG-1-1 Major Milestones of Language Development**



- **Big Question: Impact of Nature and Nurture**

- How can we tell what part of language development comes directly from the child (nature) and what part depends on their experiences with language (nurture)?
  - Can look for children who have received no exposure to language and see what kind of linguistic skills they developed on their own
    - Neglect cases
    - Deaf children of hearing parents (Goldin-Meadow et al.)
- The different contribution based on the aspect you focus on
- Why kids can learn language more easily than adults
- There is environment component and input component - both sides of stimulation
- **How to study language development (History-related)**

➤ **Baby biographies**

- An approach to investigating “the nature of humankind ” is simply to observe what emerges in the course of normal development. several investigators in the late 1800s and early 1900s kept diaries of their own children’s development. The most famous of these “baby biographers” was Charles Darwin - description of his son’s communicative development
- Diary studies are not entirely a thing of the past. Some child language researchers have kept detailed records of their children’s language development

➤ **Normative studies** (what normally happen at certain age - what is typical)

- In the period between the end of World War I and the 1950s, the goal of most research on language acquisition was to establish norms - Several studies were undertaken to provide data on when children articulate different sounds, the size of children’s vocabularies at different ages, and the length of their sentences at different ages
- The goal was not to ask theoretical questions about either the nature of humankind or the nature of language development but simply to describe what could be observed

● **The current study of language development**

➤ **Current Topics**

- New methods have also become part of the enterprise of trying to understand the nature of the human language capacity. Researchers now search for the basis of language in images of brain activity during language processing and in maps of the human genome]. Cross-cultural and cross-linguistic research has become central to the field. The relation of language to thought and of language development to cognitive development has become a major topic. The study of bilingual development & the study of literacy have burgeoned

● **Current conceptions of language**

➤ **Social behaviour**

- Study influence of social variables on language and language on social variables

➤ **Complex mapping system of symbols to meaning**

- Study how this mapping happens

- Language is also a complex system that maps sounds (for oral language) to meanings

➤ **Biological, linguistic, social, domain-general cognitive...see brief explanations in Box 1.2**

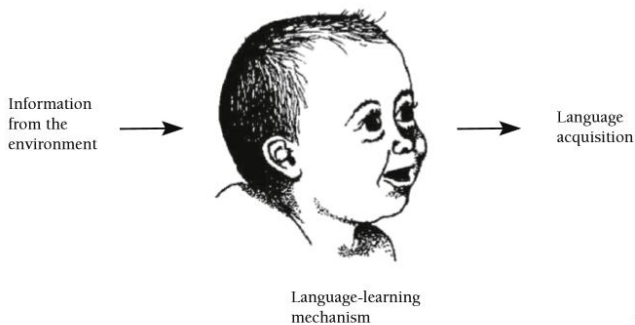
- Current research on language development can be usefully organized in terms of four different approaches that researchers take—each motivated by a different premise regarding the nature of the LAD and the language development it produces

## BOX 1.2 Current Approaches to the Study of Language Development

APPROACH	RESEARCH GOAL
Language socialization	A description of children's language use in social contexts and an account of the social processes by which children come to use language in the manner of their culture
Biological	A description of the genetic bases of the human language capacity and its disorders; a description of the structures and processes in the brain that serve language development
Generative linguistic	A description of children's innate linguistic knowledge and how it interacts with experience to produce knowledge of a particular language
Social	A description of the social-cognitive abilities and social-communicative experiences relevant to language development
Domain-general cognitive	A description of the domain-general learning capacities that serve language development and of the sources of information in input that those learning procedures use
Developmental systems	A description of how genetically based characteristics and environmental influences interact over time and across developmental domains to shape language outcomes
Dynamical systems theory	A description of the self-organizing processes that give rise to developmental changes and moment-to-moment variability in children's language performance

### ● Basic model for studying language development

- What is the mental capacity that underlies the human ability to learn to talk?
- The human capacity for language is a device residing in the human brain that takes as its input certain information from the environment and produces as its output the ability to speak and understand a language



Courtesy of the Author

- Everything that is part of adults' knowledge of language (i.e., the output of the device) must be in the input, be in the internal device, or somehow result from the way the device operates on the input it receives. Noam Chomsky termed this capacity the **Language Acquisition Device (LAD)**