



Electronic lectures on
Linguistics

Adapted from Yule's The Study
of Language

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جامعة تكريت

Lecture 10

First Language Acquisition

1. Introduction: The Greatest Human Achievement

Every healthy child, regardless of culture or intelligence, successfully masters their first language (L1) within the first few years of life. Unlike the effortful process of learning a second language as an adult, L1 acquisition is rapid, unconscious, and seemingly "magical." This lecture explores the biological and environmental requirements for this development.

2. Core Requirements

Input: The child must be exposed to language. However, "baby talk" or Caregiver Speech (simplified, high-pitched, slow, and repetitive) plays a crucial role in providing manageable input.

Interaction: Language is not learned from television or audio recordings; it requires social interaction. The child must be a participant in the communicative process.

Biological Capacity: Humans are born with an innate predisposition for language. The *Critical Period* is vital here—if a child is not exposed to language during their early years, their ability to acquire a complete linguistic system is severely compromised.

3. Stages of Acquisition

1. *Cooing and Babbling (0–6 months)*: Developing the ability to produce physical sounds; practicing the muscular control of the vocal tract.
2. *The One-Word Stage (12–18 months)*: Using single words (holophrases) to express complex thoughts (e.g., "Milk!" to mean "I want milk").
3. *The Two-Word Stage (18–24 months)*: The beginning of syntax (e.g., "Mommy eat," "Big doggie").
4. *Telegraphic Speech (2–3 years)*: Stringing words together without functional morphemes (articles, prepositions, verb endings). e.g., "Daddy go work" instead of "Daddy is going to work."
5. *Developing Morphology and Syntax*: By age 4, children begin mastering complex rules, including the "overgeneralization" of rules (e.g., saying *foots* instead of *feet* or *goed* instead of *went*). This proves they are learning rules, not just imitating adults.

4. Key Discussion Points for Students

1. *Overgeneralization*: Why is it a positive sign when a child says "I goed to the park" instead of "I went to the park"? (Hint: It proves they have internalized a grammatical rule).
2. *Nature vs. Nurture*: Is language programmed into our DNA (Innatism), or is it purely a product of imitation and reinforcement?
3. *The Critical Period*: What does the case of "feral children" (children raised without language) tell us about the biological necessity of early exposure?

Lecture Supplement: Key Terms (Glossary)

Caregiver Speech: The simplified speech style used by adults when talking to infants.

Holophrastic: A stage where a single word acts as an entire sentence.

Telegraphic Speech: A stage characterized by stringing content words together, omitting function words.

Overgeneralization: Applying a grammatical rule to an irregular word (e.g., runned instead of ran).

