
Week 3: Language Acquisition & General Features

Practice Problems

- (1) Consider the following exchange taken from Braine (1971:161). Discuss the effectiveness of the father's strategy in teaching the child.

Child: Want other one spoon, Daddy.
Father: You mean, you want the other spoon.
Child: Yes, I want other one spoon, please Daddy.
Father: Can you say "the other spoon"?
Child: Other...one...spoon.
Father: Say "other."
Child: Other.
Father: "Spoon."
Child: Spoon.
Father: "Other spoon."
Child: Other...spoon. Now give me other one spoon.

- (2) You are part of a research group investigating the Kikuyu language in Kenya. Your team has confirmed adult Kikuyu speakers cannot distinguish between /ba/ and /pa/, a contrast not present in Kikuyu. You want to know whether Kikuyu-learning babies can distinguish these sounds.

- (a) How could you determine whether Kikuyu-learning babies hear the difference between /ba/ and /pa/? Describe your research method.
(b) What results would you predict for 6 month old babies? Justify your answer.
(c) What results would you predict for 12 month old babies? Justify your answer.
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- (3) For each pair of sentences, which of the two would an adult most likely say to a young child? Justify your answer.

- a. Timmy, see the bird?
Do you see the bird?
b. You are taking a bath now.
Timmy is taking a bath now.
c. Look, the girl is eating. And now she is playing with the ball.
Look, the girl is eating. And now the girl is playing with the ball.
d. That's a birdie.
That's a robin.
e. No, that's a kitty, not a doggy.
No, say went, not goed.

(4) Considering children's tendency to overgeneralize morphological rules, what might we expect a young child to use in the place of the following adult words?

- (a) fish (plural)
- (b) went
- (c) mice
- (d) ate
- (e) has
- (f) geese
- (g) brought
- (h) hit (past tense)
- (i) himself
- (j) women

(5) Consider the following utterances (a-n) from a child named Krista. Krista uses the past tense twice — do you think this is evidence she has acquired the English past tense rule? Why or why not? Do you think she has acquired possessive '-s'? Why or why not?

<i>Intended meaning</i>	<i>Krista's utterance</i>
(a) My name is Krista.	Mine name Krista.
(b) My last name is Pegit.	Last name Pegit.
(c) The tape is right there.	Tape right there.
(d) Daddy's book.	Daddy book.
(e) I've got a book.	I'm got a book.
(f) Read me a story.	Read me story.
(g) I'll do it.	I'm do it.
(h) He went outside.	He went outside.
(i) Open the gate please.	Open a gate, please.
(j) Gramma's house.	Gramma's house.
(k) Smell the flowers.	Smell flowers.
(l) Shoes on	Shoes on
(m) The wee boy fell down.	Wee boy fell down.
(n) That's my ball.	That's mines ball.

(6) Twenty undergraduates were shown the picture to the right and heard the word *mawg*. When asked what *mawg* means, all 20 said 'lion'. What do you think would happen if you conducted this same experiment with a group of 3 year-olds? What would they think *mawg* means? Explain why.



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- (7) Linguist Derek Bickerton studied a pidgin language that developed in Hawaii at the turn of the century. The pidgin lacked many of the grammatical structures of a full language, but combined with context, speakers could often be understood. Some children then learned the pidgin as their native language. Describe how learning a pidgin would impact (1) a child's language acquisition process and (2) the language itself.
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- (8) Rebecca is an 8 year-old child who was born deaf. Her parents are native speakers of English but began learning American Sign Language (ASL) when Rebecca was born. No one else in their family or neighborhood knows ASL, so Rebecca's only language input is from her parents. Rebecca's parents have had a hard time mastering ASL movement morphemes. Her Dad uses the correct morpheme 65% of the time and her Papa only 55% of the time. In comparison, adult native signers almost never make mistakes (94% correct) and children acquiring ASL from native signers are also quite good (81% correct).

Given her limited input, how often do you think Rebecca uses the correct movement morphemes? Do you think her performance most closely matches her Dad, her Papa, adult native signers or Deaf children learning from native adults? Justify your answer.

- (9) In the *Language Instinct*, Pinker points out that the Cherokee pronoun system "distinguishes among 'you and I', 'another person and I', 'several other people and I', and 'you, one or another persons and I', which English crudely collapses into the all-purpose pronoun *we*." Does this suggest that Cherokee is a more complex language than English? Why or why not?