

INTRODUCTION TO LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

SECOND EDITION

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PREFACE

The inspiration for this text began when I was teaching undergraduate language acquisition courses. The goal was to ensure that complex concepts were at the appropriate level for students' understanding. An additional goal was to prepare students for future practice. To address these goals, these are the features of the second edition:

- ◆ Updated to reflect current research
- ◆ Expanded focus on evidence-based practice
- ◆ Improved readability through the use of boxes, explanations, and definitions
- ◆ A greater number of figures and tables for deeper comprehension

To help students better understand the process of language acquisition, this text presents an integrated view of the various factors that play an important role in children's acquisition of language: articulation, syntax, semantics, phonology, morphology, pragmatics, hearing, cognition, and literacy. To prepare students for what follows, an introductory chapter presents them with terminology and concepts that they will encounter in the following chapters. To support students' learning, each chapter begins with a case study and learning objectives. Case studies allow

instructors to involve students more fully in classroom discussion while developing critical thinking and using problem-solving skills. Learning objectives are provided to guide students' learning. Within each chapter, boxes, tables, figures, and examples elaborate and clarify the information presented. Study questions appear at the end of each chapter to ensure that students understand and retain the information presented in the text and classroom lectures. A comprehensive glossary of the key words in each chapter is included to help students locate and grasp the definitions of key terms. On the PluralPlus companion website, multiple-choice questions that address the material in each chapter are available, along with PowerPoint lecture slides for all chapters.

Highlights of the second edition include:

- ◆ A chapter that introduces theories of language development. Understanding the theoretical foundations of language development is an essential prerequisite for future evidence-based practice. This chapter concludes with practical strategies that are drawn from these theories.
- ◆ Several chapters include information on the *differences* that can appear when children are learning a new

language. The goal is for students to be able to distinguish differences from disorders. This information is essential, given that 5 million or more school-age children in the United States alone are English-language learners.

- ◆ A chapter on the brain in relation to speech, language, and cognitive development is an important contribution to students' knowledge, given the frequent interaction between speech-language pathologists and other practitioners (e.g., neurologists, psychologists, doctors, occupational therapists, physical therapists).
 - ◆ A chapter on literacy development offers strategies for the support of children's literacy skills. The importance of literacy goes beyond reading and writing. Literacy skills are intertwined with oral language and
- are used to support success in mathematics skills and other academic subjects in later grades.
- ◆ A chapter on bilingualism introduces students to an important area of knowledge, given the growing number of children in schools who are learning a new language. This chapter describes socio-cultural factors related to bilingual language acquisition, summarizes bilingual language development, applies best practice principles for assessment, and describes cross-linguistic and bilingual approaches to intervention.
 - ◆ A chapter on hearing loss introduces students to the impact of hearing loss on language development. While students do enroll in an audiology course within their study program, this chapter focuses on the consequences of hearing loss for speech and language.



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To Aaron, who has an active interest in learning the definitions of new words; to Micah, who loves to use words to make jokes and riddles; to Marissa, the wordsmith, who creates beautiful and lyrical words and phrases; to Tania, the researcher and writer, who has written a book of her own that examines the impact of words on others; to Daniel, the musician, who loves the language of music; and to David, my husband, for his many years of companionship.



1

An Introduction to Language Acquisition

Sandra Levey

Case Study

Casey is a kindergartner who has communication difficulties. Casey does not initiate conversations with other children in the class, and friends sometimes do not understand her because of her difficulty in producing some sounds and her habit of leaving some sounds out of words (e.g., “top” instead of stop, “tay” instead of

stay, and “pay” instead of play). She also has difficulty understanding directions when the teacher is asking the children to complete a task within the classroom. Identify the areas of difficulty by whether they involve communication, speech, or language.

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

This chapter presents an overview of children’s language development, with a focus on the terminology and concepts that you will encounter in the chapters that follow. This chapter also presents a discussion of *differences*. This is a term that refers to the language factors associated with children

who are learning a second language. There are a growing number of new language learners in classrooms across the world. For example, in one classroom of 30 students, 14 different languages were spoken. The ability to distinguish between a true communication disorder versus a language difference (due to learning a new language) is essential to provide evidence-based

assessment and intervention. After reading this chapter, you should understand:

- ◆ The distinction between communication (the process of information exchange), speech (the production of sounds), and language (meaning conveyed by words, sentences, and longer utterances)
- ◆ The five components of language (syntax, semantics, morphology, phonology, and pragmatics)
- ◆ The role of cognition in language
- ◆ Terminology found in later chapters in this text
- ◆ The differences that may appear when children are learning a new language

We begin this introduction to children’s speech and language development with a discussion of **communication**, followed by a discussion of **speech** and **language**. This chapter also presents a brief review of **cognition** and a discussion of the connection between cognition and language.

COMMUNICATION, SPEECH, AND LANGUAGE

Communication

Communication is the process of exchanging information through a speaker’s ideas, thoughts, feelings, needs, or desires. We possess the ability to communicate using various modalities: verbal, written, gesture, pantomime, drawing, or through sign language. The ability to communicate a message successfully and to understand the concepts being communicated reflects **communicative competence**. Communicative competence involves the appropriate use of language in interaction, while **linguistic**

competence involves the acquisition and use of morphology, phonology, syntax, and semantics (Gleason & Ratner, 2017).

Morphology: In what way words and smaller units can be combined to form other words (*go + ing = going*)

Phonology: In what way sounds are combined to form words (*c + a + t = cat*)

Syntax: The word combinations used to express meaning in sentence structures (*I + see + a + bird*)

Semantics: In what way words correspond to things and events in the world (*It’s raining*), how language reflects a speaker’s intent (*I want to tell you a story*), or feelings (*I’m feeling good today*).

Communicative interaction involves the exchange of information between a sender (speaker) and a receiver (listener). In the exchange of information, the sender transmits information (**encodes**) that the receiver comprehends or understands (**decodes**).

Encoder/speaker *I have a new toy!*

Decoder/listener *Can I play with it?*

Receptive language is the ability to understand others, and *expressive language* is the ability to express and share thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Receptive language is the understanding of spoken language, sometimes referred to as auditory comprehension. It is the ability to understand language (the meanings of words, sentences, stories, and conversation); concepts (e.g., size, color, emotions, and time); and directions (e.g., *Put your books away and open your crayon box*). *Expressive*

language is the ability to convey meaning and thoughts through the production of words and sentences, retelling of events and stories, and engaging in conversation.

In addition to the verbal or spoken features of communication, a listener must learn to interpret the **paralinguistic** cues that accompany spoken language (Table 1–1). Paralinguistic cues accompany spoken language and often help the listener better understand a speaker’s meaning. For example, a speaker can use facial expressions to convey feelings. A speaker can also use intonation to express a question (rising intonation across a spoken utterance) or a statement (falling intonation across an utterance to confirm a fact). Produce each of the sentences that follow to demonstrate the differences in intonation

in the productions of a question, a statement, or to confirm that it is Jason who is coming, and not someone else.

Jason is COMING? Asking a question to determine if Jason is coming

Jason IS coming. Making a statement to confirm that Jason is coming

JASON is coming? Asking if *Jason* is the person who is coming

Prosody is a communicative tool that involves duration (length), intensity (loudness), and frequency (pitch) when producing words or longer utterances. For example, notice that you can express sarcasm by producing the first syllable in the word with greater duration or length than the second syllable (i.e., *REAlly?*). In other words, we can change the meaning of an utterance using paralinguistic cues.

Table 1–1. Paralinguistic Cues

Affect	Facial expressions
Gestures	Head nods that indicate agreement or disagreement
Posture	Body position
Physical	Distance or proximity between a speaker and a listener
Intonation	Voice or vocal pitch that marks the difference between a statement (falling intonation) and a question (rising intonation)
Word stress	Emphasis on a single syllable word or on syllables in a multisyllabic word (e.g., <i>baNAna</i>)
Speech rate and rhythm	Fast, moderate, or slow, and pause or hesitation
Volume or intensity	Louder speech indicates anger or assertiveness
Pitch	High or low pitch used by different speakers
Inflection	Differences related to the context (exaggerated inflection when reading to a child versus natural inflection in conversation with an adult)

Prosody allows us to communicate different attitudes, such as sarcasm or sympathy, by changing the duration, intensity, and frequency of our spoken language.

Another factor in communication is the rhythm of speech. This involves the rising and falling patterns across the production of an utterance. For example, a sentence may consist of the following rhythm pattern (with rising patterns shown in bolded syllables or words):

I **know** you **prefer** the **bigger** cookie.

At times, the rhythm of speech is broken by hesitation as a speaker tries to think of a word. Hesitation is not always the sign of a disorder, as children learning a new language often hesitate while searching for a word in the language being learned. Examples follow of these patterns found

in children learning English as a new language (Hlavac, 2011, p. 3798):

Filled pauses: *Like, you know*

Paralinguistic markers: Laughter, nervous coughing, gestures, facial expressions

Silent pauses: Lasting for a few seconds, which may occur when a new language learner is searching for a particular word

Speech and Articulation

Speech is defined as the verbal means of communicating through articulation. Articulation involves the production of speech sounds by movement of the lips, tongue, and soft palate or velum (Figure 1–1). The

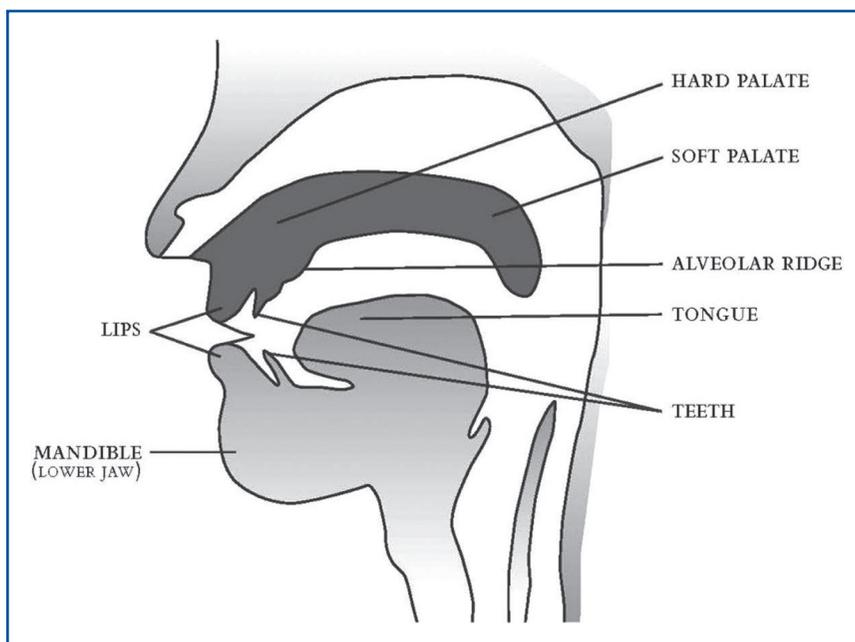


Figure 1–1. The movable articulators consist of the lips, tongue, and velum (soft palate). Reproduced with permission from *Language Development: Understanding Language Diversity in the Classroom* (p. 85), by S. Levey & S. Polirstok (Eds.), 2011, Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

velum plays a role in the production of certain sounds. The larynx is a muscular organ that contains the vocal cords or folds (Figure 1–2). The vocal cords are stimulated by respiration (air from the lungs). The vocal folds vibrate to produce **phonation** or voice (sound produced by the vibration of the vocal folds). The respiratory system provides the support for phonation (Figure 1–3).

Phonemes

Notice that you bring your lips together to produce the sounds “p” and “b” when producing the initial sounds in the words *pat* and *bat*. The sounds “p” and “b,” along with many other sounds in English, are termed **phonemes**. Phonemes are the

smallest units of sound that create a difference in meaning (e.g., /p/ vs. /b/ to distinguish *pea* vs. *bee*). Note that the change of the initial phoneme in a word results in a change in word meaning in the following examples.

Sue-two	/su/-/tu/
Tip-dip	/tɪp/-/dɪp/
Bat-cat	/bæt/-/kæt/

Phonemes are the abstract representation of speech sounds (phones), with phonemes indicated by slashes (e.g., /p/ and /b/), as found in the words *pat* /pæt/ and *bat* /bæt/. Consonant phonemes (Table 1–2) and vowel phonemes (Table 1–3) are types of English phonemes that compose words.

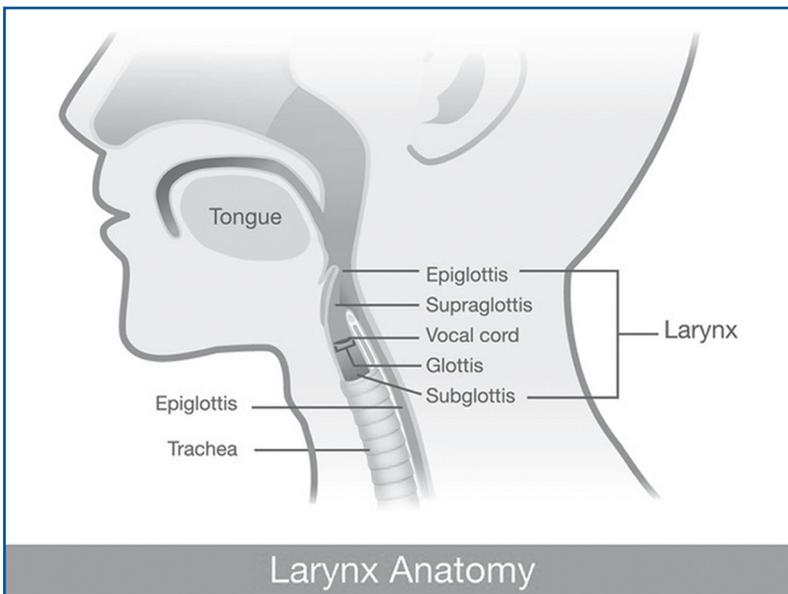


Figure 1–2. The larynx. The vocal cords, also called the vocal folds, are shown. The glottis is the space between the vocal folds. The epiglottis is attached to the entrance of the larynx and is open for breathing and closed during swallowing. The supraglottis is the area above the glottis, and the subglottis is the area below. The trachea is a tube that extends from the larynx to the bronchial tubes in the lungs, allowing air to flow to and from the lungs. Reproduced with permission from Getty Images.