

EARLY SCHOOL AGE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

COMD 570: Language Development

Sign(s) of the day

- Residential deaf school: American School for the Deaf in Connecticut
 - <https://youtu.be/vUZb75TlCrg>

From preschool to school-age

- Language development in infancy:
 - Rich development of language form (phonology, morphology, syntax)
 - Development of core aspects of language use (e.g. pragmatic turn-taking)
- Early school-age language development: focus on richer content and use
 - Refinement of language form to more complex structures

Pragmatic development

Perspective

- **Egocentrism:** the tendency to view the world from one's own perspective
- Toddlers and preschoolers are egocentric in that they lack the cognitive resources to see the world from alternative perspectives
- This tendency fades in childhood, enabling children to take the perspective of another person (**non-egocentrism**) and be a better communicator

Narratives

- Types of narratives:

1. **Recount:** response to an adult request in which child talks about past experiences
2. **Eventcast:** explanation of some current or anticipated event; may be used to direct others in imaginative play sequences
3. **Accounts:** high individualized spontaneous narratives in which children share their experiences
4. **Stories:** fictionalized narratives; have a predictable pattern/structure

Narratives

- **Story Grammar:** the culturally-defined components and rules that form a narrative framework; the internal structure of a story
- As children mature, their narratives begin to conform more and more to cultural standards of story structure
- They also begin to contain more mental states, psychological causality, motivations, and evaluations

TABLE 10.2 Story Grammar Components

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Setting statement (S)	Introduce the characters; describe their habitual actions and the social, physical and/or temporal contexts; introduce the protagonist.	There was this boy and
Initiating event (IE)	Event that induces the character(s) to act through some natural act, such as an earthquake; a notion to seek something, such as treasure; or the action of one of the characters, such as arresting someone.	. . . he got kidnapped by these pirates.
Internal response (IR)	Characters' reactions, such as emotional responses, thoughts, or intentions, to the initiating events. Internal responses provide some motivation for the characters.	He missed his dog.
Internal plan (P)	Indicates the characters' strategies for attaining their goal(s). Young children rarely include this element.	So he decided to escape.
Attempt (A)	Overt action(s) of the characters to bring about some consequence, such as to attain their goal(s).	When they were all eating, he cut the ropes and
Direct consequence (DC)	Characters' success or failure at attaining their goal(s) as a result of the attempt.	. . . he got away.
Reaction (R)	Characters' emotional response, thought, or actions to the outcome or preceding chain of events.	And he lived on an island with his dog. And they played in the sand every day.

Narratives

- Narratives start out as **descriptive sequences**: a series of statements with no/few causal or temporal links (centering and chaining)
- As children develop, elements of story grammar are gradually added and refined
- By age 9 or 10, all elements of story grammar are being employed (though not always in a single narrative)

Conversational repair

- Preschoolers: simply repeat information to repair miscommunication
- 6-year-olds: repeat but also may elaborate on some aspects during the repetition
- 9-year-olds: provide additional information, define, provide more background information, and acknowledge/address the repair process

Topic maintenance

- 3-year-old: 20% of responses maintain the topic
- 8-year-old: can maintain a concrete topic for a short time
- 11-year-old: can maintain a more abstract topic for a while
- General increase in topic maintenance abilities, with the most improvement occurring from late elementary school to early adulthood

Indirect requests

- Flexibility and variety of indirect forms increases with age
- By 8, most children can recognize and comply with non-literal requests
- By 11, children can integrate context in order to interpret indirect forms and infer a speaker's intent

Semantic Development

Vocabulary growth

- Childhood is a period of continuous, steady vocabulary growth.
- The average high school graduate understands ~80,000 words.

Definitional skills

- **Definitional skill:** ability to provide definitions of words
 - Highly correlated with involvement in an academic culture
 - Highly dependent on metalinguistic abilities
 - Heavily influenced by education, SES, gender, age, and cultural background

Definitional skills

- Major developments throughout childhood:
 1. Slow mapping of word definitions (beyond characteristics such as function and form)
 2. Integration of all the definitions that map onto each word
- By age 11, a child has mastered the ability to acquire adult-like definitions

Figurative language

- **Figurative language:** words used in an imaginative sense, rather than a literal one, to create an imaginative or emotional impression.
 - Idioms, metonyms, metaphors, similes, proverbs
- 5-year-olds interpret most figurative expressions literally, and often misunderstand sarcasm or irony
 - Comprehension increases over time through adulthood
- There is some evidence that figurative expressions are learned and stored as a single lexical item
 - Although they certainly retain their internal linguistic structure

Morpho-syntactic development

Derivational morphology

- **“Inflectional prefixes”** (terminology from the book):
 - Change a word’s meaning (e.g., un-, dis-, non-, ir-, in-)
 - Don’t confuse this with inflectional morphology! (I have no idea why this term was used for *derivational* morphology) 🤔
- **“Derivational suffixes”** (terminology from the book):
 - Change word classes and (mostly) preserve meaning (e.g., -er, -y, -ly, -ment, -hood)
- Some derivational morphology is learned very early, but development is gradual and protracted, extending well into adulthood
 - Many derivational morphemes are much lower in frequency than inflectional morphemes
 - More like learning vocabulary than like learning morpho-syntactic rules

Noun phrase development

- 5-year-olds: 3-element NPs
 - The silly cat, some juicy grapes
- 6-year-olds: 4-element NPs, relative clauses emerge:
 - The boy **who lives in that house** is mean to me
- 7-year-olds: numerical terms (e.g. two) as the determiner; carries pronouns from one sentence to the next
 - Two little dogs who grew up in the cottage...
 - Mary's mother was very sick. Mary knew that **she** must obtain a doctor for **her**

Verb phrase development

- During elementary school, verbal complexity increases
 - Perfect aspect, modal auxiliaries, more irregular past tense forms

TABLE 10.8 School-Age Development of Irregular Verbs

AGE	VERBS
5-0 to 5-5	<i>took, fell, broke, found</i>
5-6 to 5-11	<i>came, made, threw, sat</i>
6-0 to 6-5	<i>ran, flew, wore, wrote, cut, fed, drove, bit</i>
6-6 to 6-11	<i>blew, read, shot, rode</i>
7-0 to 7-5	<i>drank</i>
7-6 to 7-11	<i>hid, rang, slept, drew, dug, swam</i>
8-0 to 8-5	<i>left, caught, slid, hung</i>
8-6 to 8-11	<i>sent, shook, built</i>

Note: Nine words did not reach criterion by 8-5 through 8-11 years. These were *bent, chose, fought, held, sang, sank, stood, swang, and swept*.

Source: Information from Shipley, Maddox, and Driver (1991).

Complex constructions

- Passive sentences (e.g., *the little arrogant puppy was scared by the grumpy cat*)
 - Can be comprehended with context clues at ~5
 - Not consistently produced until ~8, with some forms not emerging until 11
- Conjoined & embedded structures

BOX 10.3

Examples of Embedding and Conjoining

61 months	I think <i>I don't know what this is</i> . (Multiple embedded clauses) The frog could just gulp you up you know cause look how big it is. (Clausal conjoining and embedding)
64 months	Nicky said it wasn't real but mommy said it was because she tried to hit it and she broke it. (Embedded and conjoined clauses)
72 months	I got hit <i>in the eye with a baseball bat from the gym</i> . (Multiple prepositional phrases embedded)
73 months	The people <i>across the street</i> are going too. (Post-noun modifier)

Phonological development

Morphophonemic development

- **Morphophonemics:** phonological alternations in context of morphology
- Inflectional morphology:
 - Plurals /s/ ~ /z/ ~ /əz/
- Derivational morphology:
 - Vowel shifting
 - Div[ai]ne – div[i]nity
 - Expl[er]n – expl[ə]nation
 - Ser[i]ne – ser[ɛ]nity
 - Consonant shifting
 - Electri[k] - Electri[s]ity
- Morphophonological development begins in preschool ages and continues into school age
- In school age, children may struggle with ascertaining the correct phonological forms of morphemes
 - E.g. desk[s] vs. desk[əz]
 - Morphophonemic processes in derivational morphology not fully acquired until age 17!

Stress patterns

- Stress patterns mastered during school years
 - Distinction between modifier-noun and compound words acquired
 - E.g. **hot** dog vs. hot **dog**

Metalinguistic Development

Metalinguistic Development

- **Metalinguistics:** the ability to think about language as a decontextualized object
- Until age 7 or 8, language is a tool for communication, with little focus on the way in which it is used
- After age 8, child can simultaneously focus on the message meaning and the linguistic correctness

Metalinguistic Development

TABLE 10.9 Development of Metalinguistic Skills and Awareness

APPROXIMATE AGE	ABILITIES
Toddler	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Monitors own utterances <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Repairs spontaneously ■ Adjusts speech to different listeners
Preschool	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Checks the result of own utterance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Checks whether the listener has understood; if not, repair or try again ■ Comments explicitly on own utterances and those of others ■ Corrects others
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Tests for reality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Decides whether a word or sentence “works” in furthering listener understanding
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Attempts to learn language deliberately <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Applies appropriate inflections to “new” words ■ Practices speech styles of different roles

Metalinguistic Development

School age

5. Predicts the consequences of using particular forms (inflections, words, phrases, sentences)
 - Judges utterances as appropriate for a specific listener or setting
 - Corrects word order and wording in sentences judged as “wrong”
6. Reflects on an utterance (structure independent of use)
 - Identifies specific linguistic units (sounds, syllables, words, sentences)
 - Provides definitions of words
 - Constructs puns, riddles, or other forms of humor
 - Explains why some sentences are possible and how to interpret them
 - Judges utterance correctness

Source: Drawn from Clark (1978).

Recap

- Much of linguistic form is mastered by school-age, as well as basic pragmatics
- Further development during school-age:
- Pragmatics
 - Reduction of ego-centrism
 - Narrative structure
 - Conversational repair, topic maintenance, indirect requests

Recap

- Semantics
 - Expansive vocabulary development
 - Definitional skills & figurative language
- Morpho-syntax
 - Derivational morphology
 - More complex phrasal and clausal structure
- Phonology
 - Morphophonemics
 - Stress patterns
- Metalinguistic ability develops