

## Language development theories review

Those theories attempt to explain how children go about learning their native language.

- Allow predictions of continuing course of language development across all children within the particular culture
  - Language development theories: nurture inspired and nature inspired
  - Nurture-inspired theories (empiricist theories-behaviorist)- humans gain all knowledge through experience
  - Behaviorists have differing opinions about exactly how the process of learning occurs; they all agree that environment is the critical and most important factor in the acquisition formula
  - Nature-inspired theories (nativist theories)- knowledge is innate and genetically transmitted rather than learned by experience
  - The environment provides raw materials that are assimilated and structured by the child according to an inborn program

### Nurture –inspired Theories

#### Skinner's Behaviorist Theory (B.F.Skinner 1904-1990)

- Operant conditioning (skinner,1957)
- An operant is any behavior whose frequency can be affected by the responses that follows it
- target behavior's frequency of occurrence increases as a consequence of reinforcement
- The frequency decreases, the target behavior is punished
- reinforced behaviors [(smiles, attention and approval) which are pleasant to the child] become strengthened, punished behaviors become suppressed
- Reinforcement --- child asks for a book, Dad gave her the book, and praised that she asked him to
- Punishment--- child asks parents repeatedly to take him to the park, parents decided to take him to the park every Sunday and if he asks for more trips to the park, he will not be able to go at all the next day
- Language is a behavior like any other behavior humans can learn
- Operant principles can't account for the creativity that is a dominant characteristic of language, and fail to account for the acquisition of meaning in novel utterances

#### Intentionality model of language acquisition (Bloom, 2000)

- Children learn language when what they have in mind differs from what other individuals around them have in mind because they must express themselves to share this information
- A young girl can't assume that her mother will always know when she is thirsty and offer her drink, she must learn how to express this intention by using language

#### Competition model (MacWhinney,1987)

- Children acquire language forms that they hear frequently early in life
- Later in life, they acquire forms that they hear rarely or inconsistently
- Multiple language forms compete with one another until the input strengthens the correct representation and the child no longer produces an incorrect form
- Overgeneralization, "I goed" instead of "I went" , with exposure to an irregular forms e.g. went, the correct past tense representation of the word is strengthened, and incorrect form "goed" dies out

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### Conclusion

- The behaviorists stress on the importance of environment.
- Child is like an empty vessel to be filled by the experiences provided by the important people in his life
- Those people provide models that the child imitates
- "Daddy goed work", "that mine milk" – child inventions, not imitation of adults
- The frequency of imitation decreases dramatically after the second birthday

### **Nature inspired theories**

#### Modularity theory (Fodor, 1983)

- Language is organized in highly specific modules in the brain
- Language modules perform dedicated functions but can interact with one another to produce combinations of functions
- Views language as an innate capacity localized to domain-specific processors that are encapsulated in their functions from other processors
- This phenomenon is most obvious in children who have an impairment in one or more language areas (e.g., receptive, expressive language)

#### Universal grammar (Chomsky, 1965)

- Children are born with general grammatical rules and categories common to all languages
- Children use input to discover parameters their language uses to satisfy the general grammatical rules and categories they are born with
- all languages share a similar deep structure despite the differences in their surface structure
- The knowledge children have about language is called linguistic competence
- The actual comprehension and production of language in specific situations is called linguistic performance
- Children are born with linguistic competence and that mistakes and omissions in their speech indicate performance difficulties and not a lack of competence
- Children are born with language acquisition device (LAD), a neurophysiological entity filled with language knowledge which provides children with the knowledge they need to understand any language at the deep structure level and provides them with the ability to acquire easily and quickly the surface structure rules specific to the language they will speak

#### Interactionist Interpretations

- Language itself is not innate, even though the cognitive precursors for language are innate
- Language emerges as a product of cognitive organization and development

#### Piaget's Cognitive Theory

- Jean Piaget (1896-1980)
- Hypothesized a series of cognitive stages that children experience, achievement in one stage must occur before a child can move on to next stage
- Children's cognitive development precedes their language development
- Children's speech begins as egocentric because children can view the world only from their own perspective
- Children do not replace egocentric speech with true dialogue until they develop the ability to see others' perspectives

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### Social-interactionist Theory

- Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1962)
- Stress the importance of social interaction for children's language development
- Language emerges through social interaction with peers and adults
- The child is able to make a request before he has any language, and he is able to interact with other people before he can speak
- However, his communicative and interactive abilities improve
- These theories focus on the language use (Pragmatics)
- Unlike behaviorist theories, the child here is not a passive recipient of language
- In comparison to the nativists, here children come to language acquisition process with innate cognitive and linguistic abilities. Children's interactions – more important factors in acquisition of language
- Interactionists believe that Baby talk is ideally designed to help children acquire language- interaction...!!
- Finally, we can say that language, like many other human abilities, is acquired by as a genetic gift shaped by environmental forces