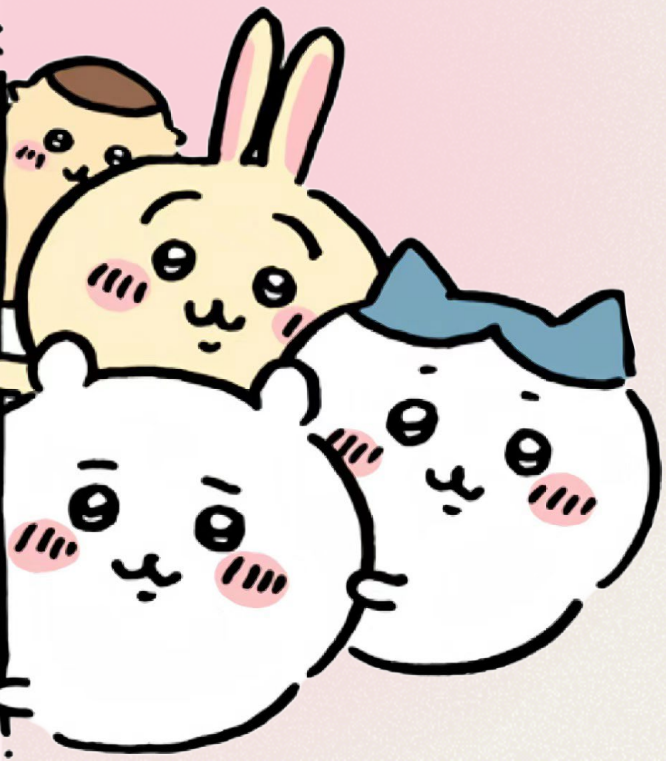


Children language

Acquisition

linguistic D – Science Tokyo

Yi (Vera) Wu



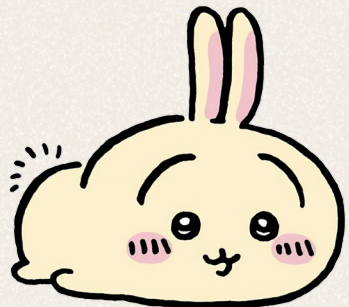
Why Language Acquisition Matters



leonard Bloomfield. language (1933)

The acquisition of language "is doubtless the greatest intellectual feat any one of us is ever required to perform."

Understand how children learn it and improve my methods for learning languages.



Stages of language Development



Babbling

(6–12 months):
Universal
consonants/vowels



Two-Word Sentences

(18–24 months):
Telegraphic speech



First Words

(12–18 months):
Simple meanings



Grammar Explosion

(2.5–3.5 years):
Complex sentences

Kind reminder: Everybody sitting here has already missed the chance to learn a language to native level.

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01

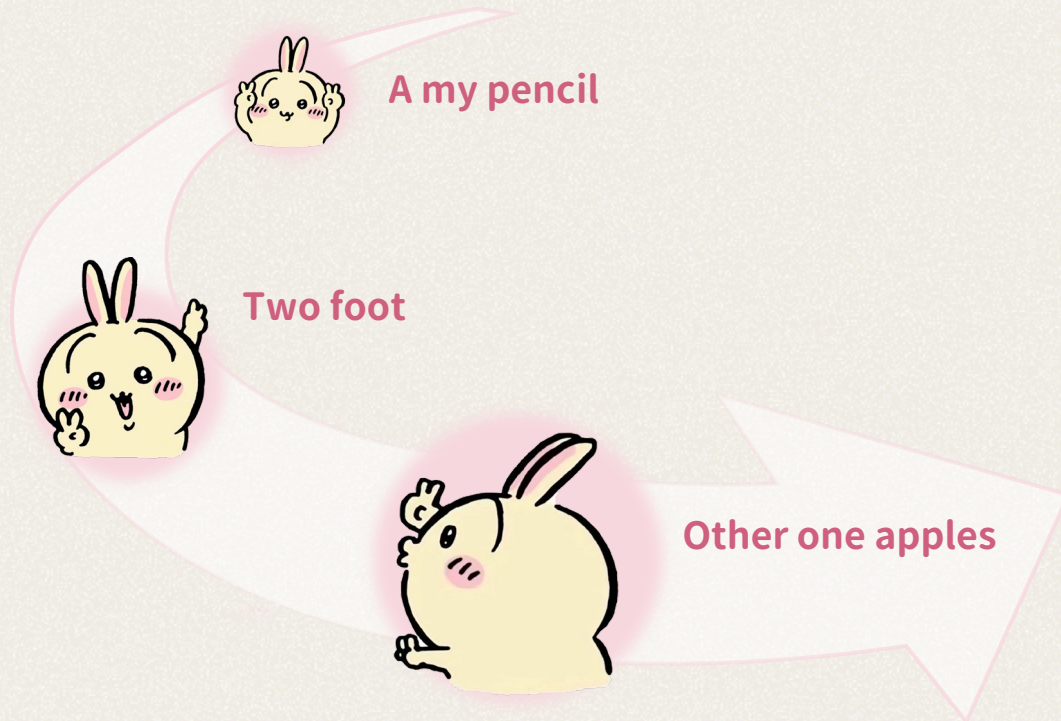
PART ONE

Do Children learn through Imitation?

A common assumption is that children learn language by imitating adults. On the surface, this seems logical—children often echo what they hear. However, this explanation quickly falls short.



01 Imitation Examples



01

Children's creative errors.

"My teacher holded the baby rabbits" (held)

02

When adults try to get children to imitate precise sentences, children often revert to forms they can naturally produce.

Adult: "Where can I put them?"

Child: "Where I can put them?"

03

Imitation alone cannot explain the complex, creative process of language learning.



02

PART TWO

Do Children learn through Reinforcement?

Another theory is that children learn correct language through reinforcement—being praised for correct grammar and corrected for errors. While this seems reasonable, research shows that reinforcement has limited impact.

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?

02 Reinforcement Examples



Parents often focus on correcting factual errors rather than grammatical ones

Additionally, most parents find their child's speech lovely and rarely correct grammar. Even when corrections are made, children often don't catch the changes being suggested. This indicates that reinforcement is not a primary mechanism driving language acquisition.

Child: Nobody don't likes me.

Adult: No. Say "Nobody likes me"

(dialogue repeated 100 times)

Adult: Now, listen, say "Nobody likes me"

Child: Nobody don't likes me.



03

PART THREE

Do Children learn language through Analogy?

For example, if a child hears, 'I painted a red barn,' they might generalize to say, 'I painted a blue barn.' While this works in simple cases, it breaks down with more complex structures.



CS101397

"He knows a few words, but he can't really process them yet."

03 Analogy Examples



“The boy who is sleeping is dreaming about a car”

“Is the boy who sleeping *is* dreaming?”



“The boy who is sleeping is dreaming about a car”

“Is the boy who *is* sleeping dreaming?”

Studies show that children don't make these errors. Instead, they seem to naturally follow structure-dependent rules—moving the auxiliary verb of the main clause to form the correct question.

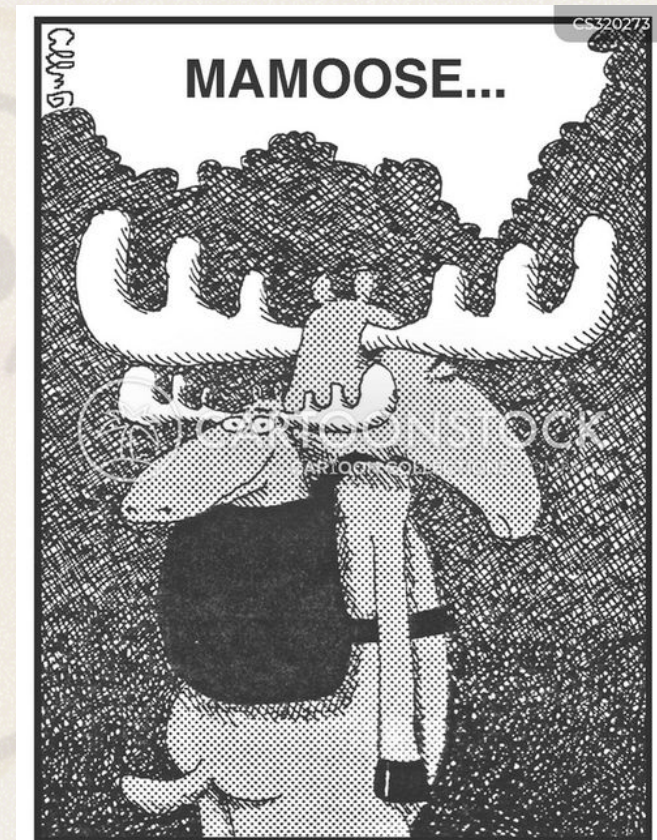


04

PART FOUR

Do Children learn through Structured Input?

Finally, let's consider the role of structured input, often called 'motherese' or child-directed speech (baby talk). This is the simplified, exaggerated way adults speak to young children. It seems helpful, but is it essential?



04 Motherese



Structured input is not a pre-condition for language acquisition

- Children in cultures where adults don't use baby talk still acquire language fluently
- Motherese might capture a child's attention and help comprehension
- The ability to learn language seems to come from within the child, not from external adjustments





Summary



None of these mechanisms—imitation, reinforcement, analogy, or structured input—fully explains language acquisition on its own.

Research suggests that children have a natural ability to acquire language. They use the input they hear to construct grammar creatively, rather than simply imitating or responding to corrections. This natural ability highlights the remarkable nature of human knowledge and development.



Thank you for listening
Q & A Session

Yi (Vera) Wu

