* **Licture 12**
* **Basic requirements**

During the first two or three years of development, a child requires interaction with other language-users in order to bring this general language capacity into operation with a particular language. A child who does not hear or is not allowed to use language will learn no language (Genie).

The crucial requirement appears to be the opportunity to interact with others via language.

* **The acquisition schedule**
* All normal children develop language at roughly the same time, along much the same schedule. Language acquisition schedule has the same basis as the biologically determined development of motor skills. This biological schedule is tied very much to the maturation of the infant’s brain.
* We could think of the child as having the biological capacity to cope with distinguishing certain aspects of linguistic ‘input’ at different stages during the early years of life.

**The acquisition schedule**

What this acquisition capacity then requires is a sufficiently constant type of ‘input’ from which the basis of the regularities in a particular language can be worked out. In this view, young children are seen as actively acquiring the language by identifying the regularities in what is heard and then applying those regularities in what they say.

* **Caregiver speech**

Under normal circumstances, human infants are certainly helped in their language acquisition by the typical behavior of older children and adults in the home environment. The characteristically simplified speech style adopted by someone who spends a lot of time interacting with a young child is called **caregiver speech.**

Salient features of this type of speech (also called ‘**motherese**’ or ‘**child-directed speech**’) are the frequent use of questions, often using exaggerated intonation, extra loudness and a slower tempo with longer pauses

* **Cooing and babbling**
* The earliest use of speech-like sounds has been described as **cooing.** Duringthe first few months of life, the child gradually becomes capable of producing sequences of vowel-like sounds, particularly high vowels similar to [i] and [u]. By four months of age, the infant creates sounds similar to the velar consonants [k] and [g], hence the common description as ‘cooing’ or ‘gooing’ for this type of production. By the time they are five months old, babies can already hear the difference between the vowels [i] and [a] and discriminate between syllables like [ba] and [ga].

**Cooing and babbling**

Between six and eight months, the child produces a number of different vowels and consonants, as well as combinations such as *ba-ba-ba* and *ga-ga-ga.* This type of sound production is described as ***babbling.*** Around nine to ten months, there are recognizable intonation patterns to the consonant and vowel combinations being produced, as well as variation in the combinations such as *ba-ba-da-da. Nasal sounds also become* more common and certain syllable sequences such as *ma-ma-ma and da-dada* are produced

During the tenth and eleventh months, more complex syllable combinations (ma-da-ga-ba), a lot of sound play and attempted imitations. This ‘pre-language’ use of sound provides the child with some experience of the social role of speech because adults tend to react to the babbling, however incoherent, as if it is actually the child’s contribution to social interaction.

* **The one-word stage**
* Between twelve and eighteen months, children begin to produce a variety of recognizable single-unit utterances. This period, traditionally called the **one word stage**, is characterized by speech in which single terms are uttered for everyday objects such as ‘milk’, ‘cookie’, ‘cat’, ‘cup’ and ‘spoon’ (usually pronounced [pun]). Other forms such as [ʌsæ’] may occur in circumstances that suggest the child is producing a version of *What’s that, so the label ‘one-word’* for this stage may be misleading and a term such as ‘single-unit’ would be more accurate.

We sometimes use the term **holophrastic** (meaning a single form functioning as a phrase or sentence) to describe an utterance that could be analyzed as a word, a phrase, or a sentence

* **The two-word stage**

Depending on what we count as an occurrence of two distinct words used together, the **two-word stage** can begin around eighteen to twenty months, as the child’s vocabulary moves beyond fifty words. By the time the child is two years old, a variety of combinations, similar to *baby chair, mommy eat, cat bad,* will usually have appeared. The adult interpretation of such combinations is, of course, very much tied to the context of their utterance.

By the age of two, whether the child is producing 200 or 300 distinct ‘words’, he or she will be capable of understanding five times as many.

* **Telegraphic speech**

Between two and two-and-a-half years old, the child begins producing a large number of utterances that could be classified as ‘multiple-word’ speech. This is **telegraphic speech** which is characterized by strings of words (lexical morphemes) in phrases or sentences such as *this shoe all wet, cat drink milk* and *daddy go bye-bye.* The child has clearly developed some sentence-building capacity by this stage and can get the word order correct.

By the age of two-and-a-half years, the child’s vocabulary is expanding rapidly and the child is initiating more talk. By three, the vocabulary has grown to hundreds of words and pronunciation has become closer to the form of adult language. At this point, it is worth considering what kind of influence, if any, the adults have in the development of the child’s speech.

* **The acquisition process**

As the linguistic repertoire of the child increases, it is often assumed that the child is, in some sense, being ‘taught’ the language. A more accurate view would have the children actively constructing, from what is said to them, possible ways of using the language. The child’s linguistic production appears to be mostly a matter of trying out constructions and testing whether they work or not. One factor that seems to be important in the child’s acquisition process is the actual use of sound and word combinations, either in interaction with others or in word play, alone.

* **Developing morphology**

By the time a child is two-and-a-half years old, he or she is going beyond telegraphic speech forms and incorporating some of the inflectional morphemes that indicate the grammatical function of the nouns and verbs used. The first to appear is usually the ‘*–ing’ form* in expressions such as *cat sitting* and *mommy reading book.* The next morphological development is typically the marking of regular plurals with the *-s form, as in boys and cats.* The acquisition of the plural marker is often accompanied by a process of **overgeneralization.**

At the same time as this overgeneralization is taking place, some children also begin using irregular plurals such as *men quite appropriately for a while, but then try out the general* rule on the forms, producing expressions like *some mens and two feets, or even two feetses. Not long after, the use of the possessive inflection -’s occurs in* expressions such as *girl’s dog and Mummy’s book.* The appearance of forms such as *was and, at about the* same time, *went and came should be noted.*

These irregular past-tense forms precede the appearance of the *-ed inflection.* Once the regular past tense forms (*walked, played) begin appearing in the child’s speech, the irregular* forms may disappear for a while, replaced by overgeneralized versions such as *goed* and *comed.* Finally the regular *-s marker on third-person-singular present-tense verbs* appears. It occurs initially with full verbs (*comes, looks) and then with auxiliaries* (*does, has).* The use of forms such as *goed and foots* is a clear evidence that ‘imitation’ is not the primary force in first language acquisition.

* **Developing syntax**
* Similar evidence against ‘imitation’ as the basis of the child’s speech production has been found in studies of the syntactic structures used by young children. One child, specifically asked to repeat what she heard, would listen to an adult say forms such as the *owl who eats candy runs fast* and then repeat them in the form *owl eat candy and he run fast*. It is clear that the child understands what the adult is saying. She just has her own way of expressing it. There have been numerous studies of the development of syntax in children’s speech.

In the formation of questions and the use of negatives, there appear to be three identifiable stages. Stage 1 occurs between 18 and 26 months, stage 2 between 22 and 30 months, and stage 3 between 24 and 40 months.

* **Forming questions**
* In forming questions, the child’s first stage has two procedures. Simply add a Wh-form (*Where, Who)* to the beginning of the expression or utter the expression with a rise in intonation towards the end, as in these examples:
* *Where kitty? Doggie?*
* *Where horse go? Sit chair?*

In the second stage, more complex expressions can be formed, but the rising intonation strategy continues to be used. It is noticeable that more Wh-forms come into use, as in these examples:

*What book name? You want eat?*

*Why you smiling? See my doggie?*

In the third stage, the required inversion of subject and verb in English questions appears (*I can go → Can I go?), but the Wh-questions* do not always undergo the required inversion. Apart from the occasional lack of inversion and continuing trouble with the morphology of verbs, stage 3 questions are generally quite close to the adult model

* **Forming negatives**

In the case of negatives, stage 1 seems to involve a simple strategy of putting *no* or *not* at the beginning, as in these examples: *no mitten, not a teddy bear, no fall, no sit there.*

In the second stage, the additional negative forms *don’t and can’t* appear*,* and with *no* and *not,* are increasingly used in front of the verb rather than at the beginning of the sentence, as in these examples:

*He no bite you I don’t want it*

*That not mommy You can’t dance*

The third stage sees the incorporation of other auxiliary forms such as *didn’t* and *won’t* while the typical stage 1 forms disappear. A very late acquisition is the negative form *isn’t,* with the result that some stage 2 forms (with not instead of *isn’t)* continue to be used for quite a long time, as in the examples:

*I didn’t caught it He not taking it*

*She won’t let go This not ice cream*

* **Developing semantics**

It seems that during the holophrastic stage many children use their limited vocabulary to refer to a large number of unrelated objects.This process is called **overextension** which is the use of a word to refer to more objects than is usual in the language (ball used to refer to the moon).

The semantic development in a child’s use of words is usually a process of overextension initially, followed by a gradual process of narrowing down the application of each term as more words are learned.

* **Conclusion**
* Despite the fact that the child is still acquiring aspects of his or her native language through the later years of childhood, it is normally assumed that, by the age of five, the child has completed the greater part of the basic language acquisition process. According to some, the child is then in a good position to start learning a second (or foreign) language. However, most people don’t start trying to learn another language until much later. The question that always arises is: if first language acquisition was so straightforward and largely automatic, why is learning a second language so difficult?