



SEMANTIC DEVELOPMENT IN CHILD LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the field of semantic development in children, which examines how children acquire and expand their understanding of word meanings and their relationships during the language acquisition process. Semantic development is a crucial aspect of language learning, as it allows children to construct and comprehend the meanings of the words they encounter.

Introduction. According to Bolinger, this is the most rapid stage of vocabulary expansion, with numerous new additions; there is no babble at all; and the utterances have communicative aim. There is a wide range of youngsters that seem to grasp everything stated to them or aimed at them¹.

According to Fromkin, semantics is the study of the linguistic meaning of words, phrases, and sentences. Children's early utterances, which were mostly single words, were originally thought to carry the meaning of full sentences. They were classified as holophrastic².

Children, on the other hand, anticipated elaborate interpretations of elderly people because to non-semantic reasons such as their limited memory spans Smith and Gleason's field.

According to Gleason, this position was difficult to defend since it involved assigning intention and semantic knowledge to young infants based on little data. It is currently thought that young children increasingly grasp and then encode adult meanings in their language. According to Gleason (1985:90), the processes of concept acquisition and lexicalization, or the attachment of words and meaning, can occur at variable rates and overlap in time. When children's conceptions match those of adults, they may employ incomplete and only partially suitable phrases because they lack better words to describe themselves³.

Words start to form in children around the age of one. Over the course of the first year, more words are gradually added, and by the time the child is 18 to 24 months old, they have a vocabulary of roughly 50 words. Nelson looked at the first 10 words made by kids and

¹ Bolinger D.L.. On defining the morpheme. Word 1948. 18-23

² Victoria Fromkin, Robert Rodman, Nina Hyams " An Introduction to Language " 2018. 394 59

³ Jean Berko Gleason " The development of language" 2001 P-358



discovered that the categories most frequently mentioned were names of famous people, animals, foods, and toys⁴.

Early words can relate to many distinct roles, not simply objects, according to Greenfield and Smith, who also suggested that the initial utterances may invariably specify roles. According to Clark, E. a child should begin language learning with two presumptions: that language is used for communication, and that language makes sense in context. By the age of 18 months, the typical youngster has mastered about fifty words. These might contain noun-like terms like milk, water, juice, and apple. Following that, kids learn 12 to 16 words every day. They learn around 13–14 thousand words by the time they are six years old. Expressions of disapproval and rejection, like "no," are among the most frequently used words. The phrases "please" and "bye" are also included⁵.

There are three stages for learning the meaning of new words:

1. Whole object assumption: A new word refers to a whole object. For instance, when an eighteen-month-old child sees a sheep and his mother points at it and says the word "sheep," the child infers that the word "sheep" describes the animal as a whole and not just certain parts of it (such as color, shape, etc.).
2. Type assumption: A new term describes a category of things rather than simply one specific one. For instance, when a toddler hears the word "sheep," he assumes that it refers to all sheep and not just the one he just saw.
3. Basic level assumption: A new term describes things that share basic features (such as appearance, behavior, etc.). In other words, a youngster who hears the term "sheep" overgeneralizes it to include other animals, such as white, woolly, and four-legged creatures, that resemble sheep from the outside.

The development of a child's vocabulary is greatly influenced by contextual cues. To make deductions about the category and meaning of new words, the youngster uses contextual cues. The youngster learns to differentiate between names and regular nouns in this way. When a youngster is shown an object containing the determiner "a" (a cat, a dog, or a bottle), for instance, he interprets it as a regular noun. But when a word is spoken without a determiner, the youngster interprets it as a name, as in "this is Mary." Most of the time, when adults use words, the children correctly interpret what they mean. Even yet, they occasionally blunder in the semantic sense. Several categories of semantic mistakes, according to Phillip W include⁶:

- Overextension : When a youngster uses or hears a word, they may identify it with a broader notion than the term's actual meaning. For instance, if they use the word "cat," they can use it too broadly to refer to different animals with the same qualities.
- Underextension is the inappropriately constrained usage of lexical terms. In other words, the youngster concentrates on the essential individuals inside a particular group. For instance, "cat" could only relate to the household cat and no other cats, or "dog" might only refer to

⁴ Keith E. Nelson "Children's language" The Pennsylvania State University and Anne van Kleeck The University of Texas in Austin . Volume 6. 74-78. 1987

⁵ Eve V. Clark "First Language Acquisition" Third edition. 2016 171-173 60

⁶ Eve V. Clark 82 "First Language Acquisition" Third edition. 2016 P-260 61



specific kinds of dogs that the child is exposed to. When a preschooler hears the verb "fill," he interprets it as the action "pour" rather than the outcome "make full."

Dimensional terms: Since they fall within the size category, big and small are the first dimensional adjectives learned. The most inclusive category is the one based on size. Later on, kids pick up single-dimensional descriptors like tall-short, long-short, and high-low. Eventually, students learn terms like thick- thin, wide-narrow, and deep-shallow that define the secondary dimension.

Comprehension (the language we comprehend) develops before production (the language we use) from birth to one year. There is a delay of around five months between the two. Infants naturally prefer to hear their mother's voice. Babies are able to make preverbal gestures and understand familiar phrases. Within the first 12 to 18 months, semantic roles such as agent, object, location, ownership, nonexistence, and denial are all represented in one-word speech. Outside of typical games, words are comprehended, but the youngster still need contextual assistance for lexical understanding.

18 to 24 months. The expression of common relations like agent-action, agent-object, and action-location is included. A vocabulary growth spike, which involves quick mapping, occurs between 18 and 24 months of age as well. Baby's capacity to quickly learn a great deal of new information is known as fast mapping. Nouns and verbs that take an action make up the majority of the newborns' new vocabulary.

30–36 months. The youngster is able to utilize and comprehend why questions as well as simple spatial phrases like in, on, and beneath.

34 to 42 months. Basic kinship and color terminology is understood. The youngster is also aware of the semantic connections between conjoined and neighboring statements, especially those that are casual and contrastive.

42 to 48 months. Understanding of fundamental form terminology like circle, square, and triangle as well as when and how inquiries are understood.

48 to 60 months. Along with numbers, knowledge of letter names and sounds develops. Children typically have trouble using words appropriately around the age of three to five. Children sometimes have issues with underextensions, which include applying a general term specifically (for instance, "cartoons" for "Mickey Mouse"), and overextensions, which involve using a particular term too broadly (for instance, "ant" for any bug). Children nevertheless make up terms to replace those that they have not yet learnt (for instance, someone is a cooker instead of a chef since a child may not know what a chef is). Metaphors may be understood by children as well.

Conclusion. Children can grasp word meanings based on their definitions between the ages of 6 and 10. They can also recognize the many meanings of words and employ metaphors and puns to accurately utilise words. Fast mapping keeps going. Within these years, children may now understand links between words with numerous meanings and learn new knowledge from written texts. Additionally understood are common idioms.

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