

Worksheet 7.2: Stages of children’s language production

Table 7.1: Stages of language production in First Language Acquisition

<p>First few months of life</p>	<p>Non-linguistic vocalisations and cooing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Infants are already sensitive to perceiving speech sounds straight after birth. ● However, their production abilities lag as their vocal apparatus is not yet fully developed to produce speech sounds. ● During the first months, infants’ vocalisations consist of cries, vegetative sounds and isolated vowel sounds. ● Around the age of four months, babies start producing the consonants [g] and [k] (this is often referred to as ‘cooing’ or ‘gooing’).
<p>6 months</p>	<p>Babbling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● During the early ‘babbling stage’, children mainly produce repeated consonant vowel sequences (e.g. <i>baba, mama, dada</i>). ● Initially, babbling is universal; this means that children produce sounds that can be found in any language. They are ‘citizens of the world’. ● Sequences of sounds are not yet linked to meaning, so when a child says <i>dada</i> or <i>mama</i> at 6 months, they do not refer to their ‘dad’ or ‘mum’. ● From 10 months onwards, the types of syllables infants produce become more varied and the vocal patterns start to sound like words (e.g. <i>mamadada, maduka, kadabupa</i>). ● Children become sensitive to the set of sounds that are used in the language spoken around them (we might say they become ‘culture-bound babblers’).
<p>12 months</p>	<p>One-word stage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Children begin to use their first words. ● They usually produce single terms for everyday objects (e.g. <i>milk, cat, cookie, cup, spoon</i>)



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This stage is often referred to as the Holophrastic stage. This means that the child uses a single word to express a more complex idea. For example, if the child points to a banana and says <i>nana</i>, they might want to say 'I want the banana' or 'I can see the banana'.
18 months	<p>Two-word combinations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children begin to produce their first multiword utterances. They follow word order rules of the target language from early on. Initially, children's utterances are restricted to content words. A content word is a word that has meaning (e.g. a noun or verb). Content words are the most important words for communication.
2 – 2 ½ years	<p>Early multi word utterances: <i>Telegraphic speech</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The child begins to produce a range of multiple word utterances. Children's utterances at this stage still lack function words and inflections (e.g. grammatical endings on words such as <i>-ed</i> for past tense). A function word is a word that has no meaning but has a grammatical function such as <i>the, in, can, is</i>). Children's utterances often resemble language used in telegrams. This stage is therefore referred to as the <i>telegraphic speech</i> At this stage, the first grammatical morphemes start to appear in the child's speech.
18 months – 4 years	<p>Development of Brown's 14 morphemes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Around this time, the child's vocabulary expands very rapidly (children learn 20 – 30 new words a day) Development of first 14 morphemes (see Table 6.2) The sentences gradually become more complex.

Table 7.2: The Acquisition of Grammatical Morphemes (based on Brown, 1973)

Once children start using grammatical morphemes, they develop in a certain order:

	Morpheme	Example	Age
1	Present progressive affix on verbs	Mommy <i>driving</i>	19 – 28 months
2	The preposition <i>in</i>	Ball <i>in</i> cup	27 – 30 months
3	The preposition <i>on</i>	Doggie <i>on</i> sofa	27 – 33 months
4	Regular plural -s	Toys Forms: /s/, /z/ and /iz/ Cats, Dogs, Classes, Wishes	27 – 33 months
5	Irregular past tense	It <i>broke</i>	25 – 46 months
6	Possessive 's	Jake's apple	26 – 40 months
7	Uncontractible copula (to be verb as a main verb)	He <i>is</i> . (In response to the question <i>Who is there?</i>)	27 – 39 months
8	The articles <i>a</i> and <i>the</i>	A blue truck	28 – 46 months
9	The regular past tense form -ed	He jumped high	28 – 46 months
10	Regular third person present tense -s	Suzie drinks	26 – 48 months
11	Irregular third person present tense	Kitty <i>has</i> a toy	28 – 50 months
12	Uncontractible auxiliary verb	He <i>is</i> (In response to <i>Who is wearing your hat?</i>)	29 – 48 months
13	Contractible copula verb to be	It's cold outside	29 – 49 months
14	Contractible auxiliary verb	Daddy's eating	30 – 50 months

Brown, R. (1973). *A first language. The early stages*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.



Linguistics: Topic 7 Morphology

Exercise 1: Based on the outline of stages of early language production (Table 7.1) and the sequence of morpheme acquisition (Table 7.2), how would you classify the following utterances? Assign the following child utterances to one of the three columns in the table below¹:

Want crayons. (Jem)

Baby talking. (Hayley)

No go shops. (Claire)

Stones. (Leila)

Hayley draw boat. (Hayley)

Picture Gia. (= 'a picture of Gia') (Gia) (Bloom 1970, Bloom et al 1975)

Mouse in window. (Hayley)

Lisa naughty. (Hayley)

These are red flowers. (Holly)

Sausage bit hot. (Jem)

Down. (J.P.)

Allison cookie. (Allison is using *Allison* to refer to herself – an adult would use a pronoun *my*) (Allison)

Where helicopter? (Stefan)

That broke. (Claire)

Mummy car. (Stefan)

I'm pulling this. (Holly)

Want piece bar. (= 'I want a piece of the chocolate bar') (Daniel)

Colour new shoes. (= 'The colour of my new shoes') (Anna)

Baby Allison comb hair. (Allison is using *Baby Allison* to refer to herself – an adult would use a pronoun *I*) (Allison)

Eat Mommy cookie. (Allison)

Shoe. (J.P.)

Sausage bit hot. (Jem)

Dog. (J.P.)

That's teddy. (Daniel)

Found it. (Bethan)

Mommy doing dinner. (Daniel)

¹ Child data in these exercises cited in Radford (1990). Data from J.P. cited in Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams (2003)



Holophrastic	Telegraphic	Development of grammatical morphemes

Exercise 2: Based on Table 7.2, determine which grammatical morphemes the child has acquired in each of the examples below:

Child utterance	Name of child (Age in months)	Which morpheme(s) acquired
Red wheels.	Leila (23)	
Reading book.	Hayley (20)	
Mouse in window.	Hayley (20)	
Off he goes.	Jem (21)	
This is a light.	Rebecca (26)	
He splashed me.	Tony (27)	
I've got it.	Jem (26)	
Does that go in there?	Hannah (26)	
Did that happen there?	Hannah (26)	
Mommy's milk.	Kathryn (21)	
That one does.	Adam (26)	
It doesn't work.	Adam (26)	
Bubble on dungaree.	Daniel (21)	
Those are pink and yellow.	Holly (24)	
Mummy doing dinner.	Daniel (22)	
Going down slide.	Daniel (20)	

Linguistics: Topic 7 Morphology

Where's the world?	Jem (26)	
Jem has one.	Jem (26)	
Jem wanted to see moon.	Jem (26)	
Jem's mummy.	Jem (26)	
A red lovely car.	Jem (26)	
I saw it on telly.	Robert (26)	
What are you saying?	Elizabeth (26)	
We goed somewhere.	Jem (26)	
Jean wants a green one.	Penny (27)	
I'm trying to wriggle it.	Jonathan (27)	

Exercise 3: Consider the adult sentences below. What might a child at the **telegraphic stage** say? You need to strip the adult sentences of all function words (e.g. inflections, pronouns, etc.)

Adult sentence	Predicted child sentence during the telegraphic stage
I want a biscuit.	Want biscuit.
The dog has a tail.	
What is that?	
The duck was stuck.	
Where did the milk go?	
Where is daddy's car?	
The house is pink.	
This is a funny story.	
Daddy bought a book.	
The truck is in the box.	
The man is driving the car.	
Where are the books?	
Mummy plays cards.	
Paul is here.	
Cian is doing homework.	
The cat sat on the mat.	



Solutions Worksheet 7.2

Exercise 1

Holophrastic	Telegraphic	Development of grammatical morphemes
Dog Down Shoe	Hayley draw boat. Picture Gia. Lisa naughty. Sausage bit hot. Allison cookie. Where helicopter? Mummy car. Want piece bar. Baby Allison comb hair. Eat Mommy cookie.	Want crayons. Baby talking. No go shops. Mouse in window. These are red flowers. Stones. That broke. I'm pulling this. Colour new shoes. That's teddy. Found it. Mommy doing dinner.

Exercise 2

Child utterance	Name of child (Age in months)	Which morpheme(s) acquired
Red wheels.	Leila (23)	Regular plural -s
Reading book.	Hayley (20)	Present progressive affix on verbs
Mouse in window.	Hayley (20)	The preposition <i>in</i>
Off he goes.	Jem (21)	Irregular third person present tense
This is a light.	Rebecca (26)	Uncontractable copula The article <i>a</i>
He splashed me.	Tony (27)	The regular past tense form <i>-ed</i>
I've got it.	Jem (26)	Contractible auxiliary verb
Does that go in there?	Hannah (26)	The preposition <i>in</i> Irregular third person present tense
Did that happen there?	Hannah (26)	Irregular past tense

Linguistics: Topic 7 Morphology

Mommy's milk.	Kathryn (21)	Possessive 's
That one does.	Adam (26)	Irregular third person present tense
It doesn't work.	Adam (26)	Irregular third person present tense
Bubble on dungaree.	Daniel (21)	The preposition <i>on</i>
Those are pink and yellow.	Holly (24)	Uncontractable copula
Mummy doing dinner.	Daniel (22)	Present progressive affix on verbs
Going down slide.	Daniel (20)	Present progressive affix on verbs
Where's the world?	Jem (26)	Contractible copula The article <i>the</i>
Jem has one.	Jem (26)	Irregular third person present tense
Jem wanted to see moon.	Jem (26)	The regular past tense form <i>-ed</i>
Jem's mummy.	Jem (26)	Possessive 's
A red lovely car.	Jem (26)	The article <i>a</i>
I saw it on telly.	Robert (26)	The preposition <i>on</i>
What are you saying?	Elizabeth (26)	Present progressive affix on verbs
We goed somewhere.	Jem (26)	The regular past tense form <i>-ed</i>
Jean wants a green one.	Penny (27)	Regular third person present tense <i>-s</i> The article <i>a</i>
I'm trying to wriggle it.	Jonathan (27)	Contractible auxiliary verb Present progressive affix on verbs



Linguistics: Topic 7 Morphology

Exercise 3: Consider the adult sentences below. What might a child at the **telegraphic stage** say?

Adult sentence	Predicted child sentence during the telegraphic stage
I want a biscuit.	Want biscuit.
The dog has a tail.	Dog tail.
What is that?	What that?
The duck was stuck.	Duck stuck
Where did the milk go?	Where milk go?
Where is daddy's car?	Where daddy car?
The house is pink.	House pink.
This is a funny story.	Funny story.
Daddy bought a book.	Daddy buy book.
The truck is in the box.	Truck box.
The man is driving the car.	Man drive car.
Where are the books?	Where book?
Mummy plays cards.	Mummy play card.
Paul is here.	Paul here.
Cian is doing homework.	Cian do homework.
The cat sat on the mat.	Cat sit mat.