Unit 9

Language Development: Learning to Speak

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Language is a system that consists of symbols (i.e. words) that stand for particular objects, relationships, actions and feelings, and through which we can transmit and understand a large variety of messages.

We use language for communication.
Functions of Language

- We use language for communication.
- Language is the quickest and most effective way of communication.
- Language plays an important role in the development of thinking. Thinking also in turn influences language.
- Our memory and perception are also influenced by language.
- Language also helps in concept formation as it gives a label for things.
Processes Involved in Language Production

- Ability to communicate with each other using a language system is unique to human beings.

- The ability to talk involves three basic processes:
  - the ability to produce sounds,
  - the ability of the ears to pick up these sounds and
  - the ability of the brain to understand the meaning of these sounds.
Development of Language

- To learn language, the child must hear people speak and be able to discriminate between the different speech sounds and words.
- She must also be able to produce sounds and gradually learn to combine these sounds to produce words, i.e. acquire language.
How do Infants Discriminate Speech Sounds

- Infants can hear sounds and locate sound source at birth itself.

- Newborns can discriminate the mother’s voice from other voices as early as the first week of their life.

- Infants are more responsive to human speech as compared to any other sound. Newborn infants move their body in rhythm with adult speech as early as 12 hours after birth.
Infants have remarkable ability to discriminate sounds.

By three months of age, infants can associate a particular voice with a particular face.

A six months old child can respond to simple questions though she cannot speak.

It is important to talk to babies right from the time they are born.
Beginning of Speech

- Language development of all children follows a certain sequence.
- All children go through the same stages while acquiring language, at approximately same ages, irrespective of the language they speak.
- Turn taking is critical for social interaction.
Stages of Language Development

- **Crying**: The earliest form of communication. From birth to one month of age, the baby cries to communicate her distress and discomfort.

- **Cooing**: Around one month of age, babies make cooing sounds in addition to crying. This stage lasts 4-5 months after birth. Cooing is a vowel-like sound particularly like ‘oooooooo....’.
- Babbling: Between 6-10 months, the infants begin to babble.

- The First Words: The infants say their first word by the age of 10-12 months. Some first common words are mama, papa, ball, come, bye-bye. The infant’s single words do the work of an entire sentence.

- Stages of language development are not rigid.

- There are individual differences among children in the rate of development.
Influences on Language Development

- BIOLOGICAL FACTORS: include the genetic makeup and maturational timetable of the child.
  - Human body biologically predisposed to acquire language.
  - All newborns are most responsive to the sounds of the human voice.
  - All children go through same stages while acquiring language.
  - No child can be taught to speak in sentences unless maturationally ready for it.
ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS:
- Rich language environment required.
- Caregivers keep their language simple when they are talking to infants.
- When the infant is around 4-5 months of age, the caregivers begin to show them toys and household objects.
- By the time the infant is 7-8 months old, the family members begin to talk about what is going on around the child.
- Lullabies and songs are a delightful part of the caregiver-child relationship.
- When children are around 9-10 months of age, parents and relatives begin to play language games with them.
Increasing competency in language helps the baby to interact with more people and form relationships with people.

Language also helps the child to learn about the people and objects.

Thus language influences cognitive development, social development and emotional development as well.

This shows how development in one area influences development in other areas as well.