

Introduction to Language Development

Introduction to Language Development

Key concepts, stages, and factors that shape how children acquire and use language.

1. What Is Language Development?

Aspect	Description
Definition	The progressive acquisition of the ability to understand (receptive) and produce (expressive) spoken, signed, or written language.
Scope	Includes phonology, vocabulary, grammar, pragmatics (social use), and literacy skills.
Goal	To become a competent communicator within a cultural and social community.

2. Major Theoretical Perspectives

Theory	Core Idea	Evidence
Behaviorist (Skinner)	Language learned through imitation, reinforcement, and conditioning.	Parent-child “talk-time” studies showing increased utterances after positive feedback.
Nativist (Chomsky)	Children possess an innate “Language Acquisition Device” (LAD) and universal grammar.	Rapid acquisition of complex syntax despite limited input (“poverty of the stimulus”).
Interactionist (Vygotsky, Bruner)	Language emerges from social interaction; cognitive development and cultural tools shape it.	Joint-attention episodes and scaffolding boost vocabulary growth.
Connectionist	Language emerges from statistical learning of patterns in the input.	Infants track frequency of sound combinations; neural network models replicate word-learning curves.

Most researchers adopt an *integrative* view, recognizing biological predispositions, environmental input, and social interaction.

3. Stages of Language Development (Typical Timeline)

Introduction to Language Development

Age	Milestones (Receptive)	Milestones (Expressive)
0?3 months	Turns head toward voice, distinguishes speech from non?speech sounds.	Crying, cooing, vowel?like sounds.
4?6 months	Recognizes own name, shows preference for native?language rhythm.	Babbling (canonical “baba, dada”).
7?12 months	Understands “no,” simple commands with gestures.	First words (?50?100 words by 12?mo).
13?18 months	Follows one?step directions, points to named objects.	Vocabulary spurt (?200?300 words), combines two words (“big truck”).
18?24 months	Understands simple questions, can label pictures.	Three?word sentences, use of pronouns (often incorrectly).
2?3 years	Follows two?step commands, understands prepositions.	Rapid grammar growth, use of plurals, past tense, basic morphology.
3?5 years	Answers “why” questions, tells simple stories.	Complex sentences, correct use of articles, can retell events.
5?7 years	Understands abstract concepts, jokes, sarcasm.	Narrative skills, refined grammar, increased vocabulary (?10?k words).
7+ years	Uses language for academic tasks, meta?language (talks about language).	Mastery of complex syntax, idioms, figurative language.

Note: Individual variation is normal; some children may reach milestones earlier or later.

4. Key Components of Language

Component	What It Involves	Typical Development
Phonology	Sound system; ability to discriminate and produce phonemes.	By 12?mo infants can differentiate native phonemes; by 3?yr most consonant