



Promoting Language and Early Literacy Development for Infants & Toddlers

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Workshop Description: Children seem to acquire their first language almost without effort. What can the latest scientific research tell us about this magical process? And what can clinicians and teachers do to insure a happy outcome for this process?

Talk Outline and Key Points

Introduction	Learning a language is a complicated process, involving learning the sounds of language (phonology), finding words in the fluent stream of speech (segmentation), learning word meanings (semantics), discovering the rules for combining units to express new meanings (grammar), and learning the actual ways we use language to communicate (pragmatics).
Phonology & Bilingualism	Children recognize the sounds of all languages from birth. By 10 months, infants begin to focus just on their language's sounds. We also know that children exposed to a foreign language (even briefly) have less of an accent when they learn that language later.
Segmentation & ID Speech	Even 7-month-olds can find words in the fluent stream of speech. They do this by listening for the stressed portion of each word (metrical stress) and computing the likelihood of certain sounds occurring together (phonotactics). Using infant-directed speech (exaggerated intonation and enunciation) infants can segment the speech stream more easily.
Semantics & Frequency	Infants understand word meaning as early as 6 months. They learn through repetition, social interaction, and by using heuristics to guess at the possible meaning. The importance of frequency cannot be overstated—children's vocabulary will match their linguistic environment. This puts children from low socioeconomic status at great risk.
Grammar & Recasting	Infants understand aspects of grammar as early as 20 months. We also know that recasting children's sentences can help them learn grammar, particularly children with specific language impairment. SEE ALSO: vocaldevelopment.com
Pragmatics and One-on-one time	Although they do know something about turn-taking in speech, children often miss ambiguity and interpret sentences literally. The best way to deal with this is through social interaction, and episodes of joint attention. This also increases vocabulary and IQ scores.
Early Literacy and Pre-Reading Skills	Children's success at learning to read depends critically on their mastery of the prior steps of language, especially phonological awareness and semantics. In addition, reading involves connecting letters with sounds, whole word recognition, social routine, and attention.

Further Reading

- Bloom, P. (2000). *How children learn the meanings of words*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (1996). *The origins of grammar: Evidence from early language comprehension*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hollich, G., & Houston, D. (2007). Language Development: From speech perception to first words. In A. Slater & M. Lewis (Eds.) *Introduction to Infant Development* (revised edition). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. (available on request from ghollich@purdue.edu).
- Jusczyk, P. W. (1997). *The discovery of spoken language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Questions

Since exposure to new languages aids learning, how could you incorporate a second language in your program?

How could you incorporate and practice child-directed speech and intonational modifications in your speech?

Which factors in word learning seem most useful to you, and what activities could work to facilitate this?

What opportunities for recasting and one-on-one interaction could you have in your program?

How could you incorporate more letters, more reading activities, and more practice at reading in your program?

Since overlapping is best both from a time and a learning perspective, what activities could combine learning the sounds, meaning, grammar and words of a language while practicing reading in a fun engaging way?

Notes: