



LINGUISTICS IN THE WORLD

Introducing Second Language Acquisition

Perspectives and Practices

Kirsten M. Hummel

Second Edition



WILEY Blackwell

Introducing Second Language Acquisition

Linguistics in the World

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*To the memory of my father
Louis E. Hummel*

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Preface

This second edition of *Introducing Second Language Acquisition: Perspectives and Practices* has been undertaken in order to update and expand on topics presented in the first edition. Research in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) is growing at an exponential pace and regular updating of what we know about aspects of SLA is warranted.

While the basic structure of this edition conforms to that of the first edition, one major difference in response to reviewer suggestions is the division of the previously quite large chapter on Theoretical Perspectives into two separate chapters: “Theoretical Perspectives: Past and Present” and “Theoretical Perspectives: Cognitive Approaches.” This division should allow for a better pacing of presentation of this theoretical content.

In addition, to a considerable extent, each original chapter has been updated to reflect current research and practices. An example of considerable chapter expansion is that of Chapter 7, “Second Language Development,” which now includes separate subsections on “reading” and “writing” within the section on “The Development of Literacy-Based Skills.” Another example is Chapter 10, “Bilingualism,” which is now titled “Bilingualism and Multilingualism” to reflect the ongoing considerable research attention drawn to situations of language acquisition and use of three or more languages.

An added feature at the beginning of each chapter is the presentation of concise “Learning objectives.” Also, additional “Language learning in practice” textboxes have been created or expanded throughout the book to allow more concrete examples of aspects of language learning. Illustrative tables have been added in some chapters. Furthermore, the supplemental material at the end of each chapter has been updated, with the addition of self-assessment questions, and updating and additions to the further reading and viewing suggestions. The rapid increase in web resources allows substantial updating of viewing material in particular. The fictional characters and their trajectories remain in the text as examples of language learners in various language learning contexts. The book continues to highlight occasional cartoons to add artistry and humor to the text.

Despite efforts to update content, due to the rapid ongoing expansion of research in the field, along with space limitations, inevitably some recent findings may not have found their way into the book. Similarly, space restrictions limit the extent to which a number of issues could be examined at length; I hope the further reading and viewing recommendations go some way toward allowing a more in-depth understanding of those issues.

Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to the staff at Wiley for their impeccable skill and constant support throughout the development of this second edition: Tanya McMullin, commissioning editor, for her assistance from the beginning of this latest project and for her consistently helpful guidance; Mohan Jayachandran, project editor, for his diligent help throughout this process; Merryl Le Roux, senior editorial assistant, for her help including advice for the cover artistry; Rachel Greenberg, commissioning editor during the later part of production; and Belle Mundy for her attentive copy editing expertise.

For this second edition, I want to continue to acknowledge my thanks to scholars who offered advice for the first edition: Carol Chapelle, Joseph Galasso, Nicholas Groom, Shaozhong Lui, and Sebastian Rasinger. A special thanks goes to Michel Paradis for his careful reading and characteristically perceptive feedback, and to Nick Ellis for reading a section relating to his expertise for that edition. I also want to thank colleagues, Barbara Bacz, Leif French, and Susan Parks, for their generous feedback and pointed advice. The thoughtful remarks and advice from all these scholars were enormously helpful in developing the first edition. Gratitude goes as well to Robert DeKeyser who generously offered advice on the section “Skill Acquisition Theory” in this new edition. I hope I have not misinterpreted or poorly conveyed the advice these many individuals have offered, but if so, the fault lies with me alone. I also wish to acknowledge the native-speaker advice and intuitions of Mariem Boukadi, Zélie Guével, Khader Jum’a, Ivan Maffezzini, Hongling Wang, and Vera Sarić. I also owe thanks to the artistry of the cartoonists, and in particular to Rod Maclean, Terry Mosher, and John Crowther, as well as to Carla Romanelli Crowther, all of whom generously gave permission to use cartoons in this second edition. I am grateful to François Grosjean for taking the time to provide an updated citation. I also thank Sharif Alghazo who spotted text errors that needed fixing from the first edition, as well as three anonymous reviewers who gave suggestions for this revised edition. I hope I have adequately addressed their thoughtful remarks for improvements.

I continue to owe a wealth of gratitude to the second language research community. The published material that second language scholars have produced has been an endless source of knowledge and inspiration.

The many students enrolled in my courses at Laval University deserve special thanks. The comments and questions of each undergraduate and graduate cohort over the years have been fundamental in providing invisible guidelines behind the scenes, for both the first edition and this second edition,



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

of what I hope is an accessible and accurate overview of the field of second language acquisition.

A big personal thank you goes to my favorite balanced bilinguals, my two daughters, Louissa and Marlyse. Finally, I am grateful for the legacy of both my parents; special gratitude goes to my father, Louis Hummel, in memory of his unwavering support and for generously sharing with me his passion for languages and language learning from my earliest years.

About the Companion Website

This book is accompanied by a companion website:



www.wiley.com/go/hummel_2e

The website includes:

- Flashcards
- Self-Assessment Questions
- Glossary
- Video Links

1

Introduction



Welcome to this introduction to second language acquisition (SLA). What is SLA? In brief, this term refers to beginning the learning of another language after a first language (L1) has been acquired.

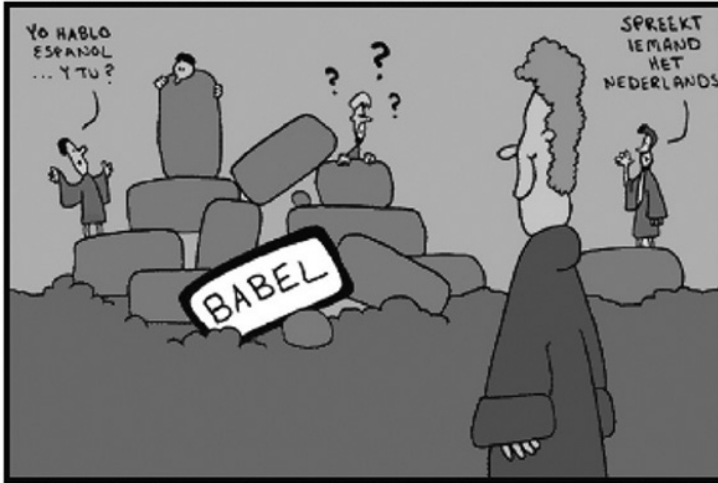
Note that opinions vary about what might be considered the earliest age from which second language (L2) learning would be differentiated from simultaneous language acquisition or bilingual L1 acquisition (two languages learned at the same time). In general, however, SLA describes learning another language after the early years of childhood. (Note that the importance of age in acquiring another language will be discussed in Chapter 8, and issues related to bilingual acquisition and bilingualism will be discussed in Chapter 10.)

Second language acquisition (SLA) is a phenomenon found among people from all parts of the world and all walks of life. The well-known biblical story about the Tower of Babel is one of the earliest references to the importance and urgency of knowing another language. According to the biblical account, in order to prevent people from cooperating in their goal of building a tower in the town of Babel that would reach heaven, God commanded “Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” The tactic was successful and different language groups abandoned their project and moved to separate areas of the world.

Of course it is not necessary to believe the biblical story of Babel to understand the importance of being able to communicate with one’s neighbor or with an individual on the other side of the globe. The desire to learn another language might stem from a personal choice to broaden one’s horizons or from a more complex set of life circumstances, such as an urgent need to find a job in a new country. In addition, the growing ubiquity of international travel, along with electronic means of communicating across time zones, has

increased opportunities to interact with speakers of other languages and, for many, may trigger the desire to undertake the learning of another language.

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Thanks to Nick Hengeveld (See Genesis 11:1-9) 02-15-2000

SUDDENLY...RUPERT REALIZED THAT ALL THAT TIME SPENT EARNING A LANGUAGE DEGREE WAS FINALLY ABOUT TO PAY OFF

Cartoon 1.1 2/15/2000, <http://www.reverendfun.com/needyreverendfun.com>.
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Second language acquisition is a phenomenon that millions of individuals worldwide are engaged in, and it is also a distinct field of study. The principal aim of this book is to provide an overview of the main concepts, issues, and debates in the field of SLA, referring to past and current research to illustrate these issues. There has been a huge increase in empirical research in the past few decades on a wide variety of topics related to SLA. Discussions throughout the book will refer to this research by highlighting specific studies to clarify important concepts and themes.

Research into SLA is a truly multidisciplinary endeavor. Some of the major disciplines that contribute to SLA include

theoretical linguistics, education, psychology, and sociology. In the past several decades, the field of SLA has increasingly come to be recognized as a discipline of its own, supported by an abundant research literature. Universities now regularly offer courses in “second language acquisition” whereas in earlier years the subject was only briefly reviewed in the context of a basic introductory linguistics or second language pedagogy course, if at all. Today, disciplines as varied as theoretical linguistics, speech pathology, and educational psychology refer to aspects of the SLA research literature in their own fields, and in some instances data from SLA are used in testing theoretical models or describing concepts in other disciplines.

Note that an additional distinction between “second” language acquisition and “foreign” language acquisition is an important one in some contexts. In such cases, “second language acquisition” applies to circumstances in which the language learned (the target language) is generally the dominant language used in the learner’s environment (such as an immigrants learning English in the United States), while “foreign language acquisition” indicates that the learner lives in the L1 environment and contact with target language speakers is not widely available (such as learning English in Beijing, China). In the context of learning English, a frequent abbreviation is “ESL” to refer to “English as a second language” and “EFL” for “English as a foreign language.” The use of the term “second language acquisition (SLA)” throughout this book generally includes

foreign language acquisition, although the latter term will be used when it is important to make a distinction between the two circumstances.

The study of SLA also generally encompasses the acquisition of a third or additional languages (sometimes referred to as the study of multilingualism), although research specifically devoted to describing how third (or more) language acquisition might resemble or differ from SLA is increasing.

In addition, this book uses the terms “acquisition” and “learning” interchangeably as this usage has been generally adopted by scholars in the field (see, for example, Ortega 2009, p. 5).

Why study second language acquisition? To start, here are a number of questions that one might want some answers to:

- Is second language acquisition like first language acquisition?
- Does the first language help or get in the way of second language learning?
- What are some of the circumstances in which people learn a second language?
- Do innate capacities play an important role in second language acquisition?
- Why do we make mistakes in a second language?
- Do learners need their errors to be explicitly corrected?
- Are there any universal processes affecting second language acquisition?
- Is there a teaching method that has proved to be more successful than others?
- Can adults learn to speak a second language as well as native speakers?
- What about individual differences? Are there factors that enable some people to learn aspects of a second language better or faster than others?
- Are there certain learning strategies that seem particularly useful?
- What happens when children learn two languages at the same time? Do they end up confused and does one or both of their languages suffer?
- Can bilinguals “turn off” or ignore one of their languages?

Our exploration throughout the field of second language acquisition will offer some responses to the preceding questions. We begin in Chapter 2 by examining L1 acquisition. A basic understanding of this universal process, noting ways in which it resembles or differs from SLA, should be useful for gaining a clearer view of SLA. In the following chapter, Chapter 3, the reader is introduced to a selection of contexts, both naturalistic and classroom-related, associated with the learning of a second language. Chapter 4 presents an overview of some past and present theoretical views underlying the field. Chapter 5 continues this theoretical overview with attention to relatively recent views primarily based within a cognitive processing approach. Chapter 6 recognizes the importance of SLA applications to language teaching, an area of interest for a growing number of practitioners: predominant teaching approaches and methods are presented, followed by a look at some current instructional issues. Development of the learner’s L2 language is the focus of Chapter 7. Chapter 8 begins an exploration into individual difference factors, by focusing on the effect of the learner’s age on SLA. Additional individual difference factors, such as aptitude and motivation, are discussed in Chapter 9. Finally, in Chapter 10, the overlapping disciplines of bilingualism/multilingualism are explored, with a look at characteristics of simultaneous



language acquisition along with issues related to bilingual lexical representation and access and possible cognitive effects of bilingualism.

To help illustrate concepts and issues, starting with Chapter 3 on language learning contexts, we will follow six fictional language learners who are profiled throughout the book. These individuals each have their own unique backgrounds and experiences with SLA. The learners profiled are:

- Mila, a woman with two teenage sons, who immigrated to the United States from her native war-ravaged Bosnia during the early 1990s;
- Steve, an American university student who chose to study abroad in Beijing for a year;
- Linda, a Boston schoolteacher who followed her passion for Italian opera to Tuscany, Italy;
- Alberto, growing up bilingual in English and Spanish in Southern California;
- Walid, also bilingual, but in Arabic and English, living near Detroit, Michigan;
- Xia Mei, a native speaker of Cantonese who is learning English in an immersion program at her high school in Hong Kong.

In addition, to clarify connections between research and practice, throughout the chapters the reader will encounter “Language learning in practice” text-boxes illustrating the more practical applications of discussed research and theoretical approaches. Other features have also been included to aid in understanding the book’s material. For example, new terms which may be unfamiliar to readers are bolded throughout the text and defined in the margins as well as in the end-of-book glossary. Also, readers can test their own knowledge after reading each chapter by doing the “Self-assessment questions” and by checking their answers at the online site (www.wiley.com/go/hummel). Classroom discussions can be stimulated after each chapter using the “Discussion questions” feature and students can undertake projects with reference to the “Exercises / Project ideas” section. Each chapter also contains an annotated “Further reading and viewing” section which allows students to follow up on subjects treated in that chapter.

Since SLA is an area of study that is increasingly recognized as relevant to a number of disciplines, I have attempted to write this book so that it will be accessible to any undergraduate or graduate student needing a basic introduction to the field. I hope it is also accessible to the general reader without a specialized academic background who is simply interested in learning more about SLA.

We will begin this exploration by looking at L1 acquisition. I hope you enjoy the journey!

reference

Ortega, L. (2009). *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. London: Hodder Education.

2

First Language Acquisition



Anyone concerned with the study of human nature and human capacities must somehow come to grips with the fact that all normal humans acquire language, whereas acquisition of even its barest rudiments is quite beyond the capacities of an otherwise intelligent ape.

Source: Chomsky, N., *Language and Mind*. © 1968, Harcourt.

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Learning objectives

Gain a basic understanding of:

- The L1 acquisition process and underlying theoretical views
- Contrasts and similarities between L1 and L2 acquisition

2.1 chapter overview

The term “second language acquisition” suggests that a first language (L1) has already been acquired. Having a basic knowledge about L1 acquisition, an ability that is an essentially universal aspect of the general human condition, can be considered as fundamentally important in order to better understand second language (L2) acquisition. This chapter will begin by providing a basic description of L1 development and by presenting theoretical views proposed to explain the processes underlying that development. The second part of this chapter will present some of the dimensions along which L2 acquisition differs from or parallels the L1 acquisition process.

2.2 from sound to word

Babies are born into the world unable to linguistically articulate specific desires, needs, feelings, or intentions. However, as anyone who has had any experience with infants realizes, babies do manage to communicate in very vocal and physical ways, through various forms and intensities of crying, cooing, other sounds, and by using physical movements and gestures. In the space of a few short months, such responses come to be gradually replaced by more language-like sounds and by 12 months of age many children are already uttering their first words.

Considerable research has gone into examining the L1 acquisition process and much of this information reveals that infants appear to come into the world equipped to acquire the language they are exposed to in their environment. Linguists often use the term “prewired” to describe this state of

readiness. In fact, many linguists argue that innate structures are the only reasonable explanation for the rapidity of development and universality of stages that characterize L1 acquisition. Noam Chomsky, the pre-eminent linguist of our times, uses the analogy of a child “learning” to walk: the child does not need to be taught to walk, he or she simply begins to put one foot ahead of the other, as soon as the child is able to stand erect (Searchinger 1995). Similarly, acquiring the language used in one’s environment unfolds in the same way: children do not need to be deliberately “taught” to speak, they simply begin to do so.

Substantial evidence supports the idea of a genetic predisposition for language. For instance, a number of studies have shown that infants show a preference for the human voice, and in particular for the mother’s voice, as young as three days old (DeCasper and Fifer 1980). The preferences of very young infants can be measured using a technique known as

high amplitude sucking (HAS). In this technique, infants are exposed to sounds while their sucking rate on a pacifier is measured; an increase in rate is thought to indicate increased interest as well as the infant’s detection of a stimulus difference. This technique therefore capitalizes on several facts: babies like to hear sounds; they lose interest when a sound is presented repeatedly; and they regain interest when a new sound is presented. The HAS technique is reliable from approximately one to four months of age.

The HAS technique has revealed that newborns prefer speech sounds to non-speech sounds (Vouloumanos and Werker 2007). Young infants also prefer looking at the human face, and prefer gazing at mouth movements that move in synchrony with the speech produced by those movements. The groundwork for conversational interaction is apparent in the early gaze-coupling, or eye contact, behavior between the caregiver and the infant. Even at early pre-verbal stages, interactional patterns characterize infant–caregiver communication; for example, infants wait for adult vocalizations in response to their own, and their sounds become more speech-like following adult speech addressed to them.

Another remarkable finding is that young children from many different cultures and languages of origin are able to perceive a multitude of sound differences, even those not occurring in the language of their environment, an ability known as “sound” or “auditory discrimination,” while adults are often unable to differentiate those same sounds if they are not used in the native



“This is a good one. It means, ‘Until my every need is met, your life will be hell.’”

Cartoon 2.1 Mike Baldwin/CartoonStock.com.

high amplitude sucking (HAS) A technique used to study infant perceptual abilities; typically involves recording an infant’s sucking rate as a measure of its attention to various stimuli.

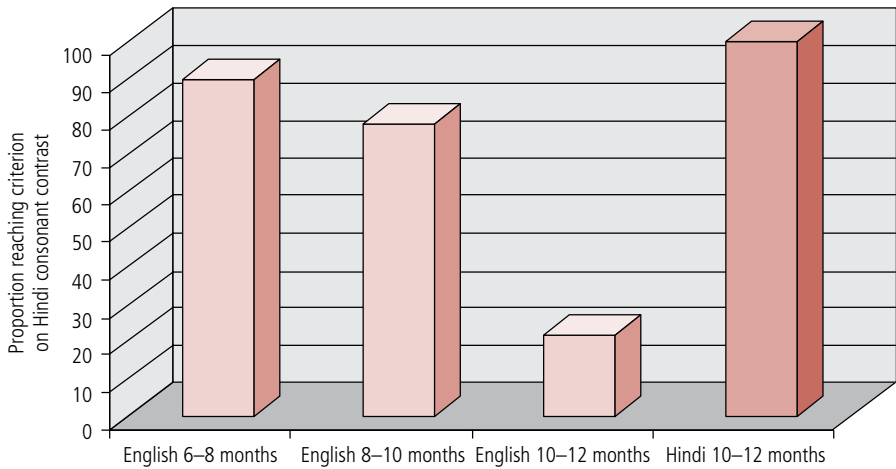


Figure 2.1 English L1 and Hindi L1 infant perception of Hindi consonant contrasts.
Source: Based on Werker, J., & Tees, R. (1984).

language. However, by the ages of 10–12 months, this sound discrimination ability already begins to disappear if the distinction is not reinforced as a part of the language spoken in that child’s environment. For instance, in a study involving adults and infants, researchers (Werker and Tees 1984) examined a contrast occurring in Hindi which involved dental (tongue against the teeth) and retroflex (with the tongue curled back in the mouth) variants of the sound “t” (/t/ vs /t̪/), a contrast that does not occur in English. While Hindi-speaking adults are able to perceive this sound difference without difficulty, English-speaking adults generally are unable to do so. Werker and Tees examined children’s perceptual abilities for the Hindi contrast, as well as for a Salish (a language spoken by First Nations people in British Columbia) contrast between two consonantal sounds produced in the back part of the mouth: velar /kʰ/ and uvular /qʰ/. This experiment focused on head-turning responses of young infants (infants are found to turn their head when they detect a novel stimuli), and the researchers found that six- to eight-month-old English-speaking infants were able to perceive the Hindi contrast, as well as the Salish contrast. However, by 8–10 months, the infants could no longer perceive the Salish contrast. And by 10–12 months of age, the children no longer perceived the Hindi contrast either. In contrast, children from native Hindi- and Salish-speaking families continued to perceive the contrasts occurring in their native languages. The results for English L1 and Hindi L1 infant perception of Hindi contrasts are illustrated in Figure 2.1.

Numerous other studies examining other sound distinctions and languages of different types have found similar results (Estonian vs Finnish vowels: Cheour et al. 1998; German vowels: Polka and Werker 1994; Catalan vowels: Bosch and Sebastián-Gallés 2003). It appears that certain sound contrast perceptions are not maintained if those contrasts are not used in the infant’s language environment. It is thought that this winnowing out of unnecessary

Table 2.1 Development of babbling.

4–6 months onset	Marginal babbling
6–8 months onset	Vocal play (low and high sounds). Babbling: reduplicated babbling (bababa) predominates first, followed by non-reduplicated, or variegated babbling (badagu)
8–12 months onset	Jargon, or conversational babbling

Source: Based on Davis, B.L., & MacNeilage, P.F. (1995). The articulatory basis of babbling. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research*, 38, 1199–1211.

perceptive distinctions allows the child to reserve mental space for those contrasts that are important in his or her language.

Another argument that children come “prewired” for language is the fact that despite significant geographic and cultural differences, babies all over the world appear to go through similar linguistic stages and reach linguistic milestones at similar ages, although at the same time, there is also a certain amount of individual variation associated with the specific ages for those milestones. The first recognizable pre-linguistic stage is that of “babbling,” occurring as early as three to four months of age, when the infant begins to produce a certain number of distinct sounds, usually taking the form of a consonant-vowel (CV) sequence (see Table 2.1 for stages of babbling). Studies (e.g. Davis and MacNeilage 1995) have shown that certain combinations are more frequent than others cross-culturally.

For instance, bilabial stops (sounds like p, b, and m, produced using the lips) tend to be quite frequent in babbling, and are often associated with the low, back vowel “a,” giving a sequence such as “ba-ba-ba.” Sounds not frequently found in babbling across languages include the liquids /r/ and /l/. An early phase of babbling is sometimes referred to as **reduplicated babbling** since the CV sequences tend to be repeated. Later on, **nonreduplicated** or “variegated” babbling begins to predominate since infants begin to vary the particular CV sequences they produce (e.g. “ba-ga-da”). Nor is babbling restricted to the vocal channel; interestingly, it has been found that deaf children raised by signing parents tend to engage in manual babbling from approximately seven months of age (e.g. Petitto and Marentette 1991). Their manual babbling has its own distinctive rhythm and occurs in the same “signing space” that is normally used for sign languages.

Some correspondence has been found between babbling and later language. For instance, in a study of French, English, Japanese, and Swedish L1 infants, beginning at 10 months of age, the proportion of labial (produced with one or both lips) vocalizations was found to be related to the proportion of those used in the child’s language environment (Vihman et al. 1994).

Children seem able to comprehend their first words between 7 and 10 months, although some children are in advance of, or behind, their peers. A landmark in linguistic development occurs at approximately one year of age, at the same time that many young children are beginning to take their first step, when a first recognizable word may be heard (e.g. “mama” or “da”

reduplicated babbling

Babbling in which CV combinations are repeated, such as “ba-ba-ba.”

nonreduplicated babbling (variegated)

Babbling in which young children vary the CV sequences used; for example, “ba-da-ga.”

for dog). This “first-word” stage is sometimes called the “holophrastic” stage, derived from the Greek words “holo” (one) and “phrastic” (phrase or sentence), referring to the idea that the single words appear to substitute for the thought conveyed in a full sentence.

First words are often produced in a form somewhat different from the target adult word. Phonological processes, such as assimilation, in which a sound is produced in a similar manner to a neighboring sound (e.g. “z” which is voiced, instead of voiceless “s” before a voiced vowel) or substitution of sounds (e.g. “t” instead of “s”) may be applied unconsciously by the child, facilitating the child’s articulation of the target word. Another common process occurs when an initial consonant cluster (sequence of two consonants, as in “kl”) is simplified by omission of one of the consonants, as in “keen” for “clean.”

The transition from babbling to single words is not abrupt: children continue to babble sounds at the same time as they begin to produce early words. However, eventually, fewer babblings occur and single words come to predominate in the child’s speech.

First words tend to name people and objects common in the child’s universe: mama, papa, cat, juice, cookie, etc. Nouns tend to predominate, forming close to 50% of word types for young children. Other word categories consist of verbs or action words (“go,” “up,” etc.), modifiers (“big,” “fast”), and social/personal words (“hi,” “bye”).

Another common occurrence in early word learning is the child’s use of a word beyond its usual sphere of reference, known as **overextension**. An example of this is a child’s use of the word “cat” while pointing to any four-footed creature in the local pet shop: dogs, mice, or even furry ferrets. **Underextension**, when a word is used less broadly than its true domain of reference, also occurs, although it is more difficult to detect, since it is not as obvious if a child is failing to provide a label as when actually mislabeling as in overextension. An example of underextension is a child using the word “dog” only for his or her pet collie, but not for the neighbor’s pet poodle. Various estimates suggest as many as 30% of words are overextended at least some of the time during the first two years of the child (e.g. Clark 1993; Rescorla 1980). By 2.5 years of age, however, only rare occasions of over- or underextensions are thought to occur.

overextension

A child’s use of a word for objects or items that share a feature or property; for example, using “dog” to refer to all animals with four legs.

underextension

A child’s use of a word with a narrower meaning than in the adult’s language; for example, “dog” to refer only to the family’s pet.

2.3 from word to sentence

At the time that children have about 50 words in their vocabulary and are about 18 months old, they often begin to put two words together in the same intonational phrase unit. While previously words were uttered as isolated units, parents may begin to notice that their child is attempting to communicate a desire or intention by using two-word units, such as “mama juice” (“I want Mom to give me some juice,” or “baby up,” meaning “Pick me up!”).