



وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي

جامعة تكريت

كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية

قسم اللغة الانكليزية

المرحلة: الرابعة

المادة: علم اللغة

**عنوان المحاضرة: First Language Acquisition**

اسم التدريسي: م. م. جميلة حسين عليوي

First Language acquisition in Yule's *The Study of Language*

## Introduction

In the chapter on first language acquisition in George Yule's "The Study of Language," the focus is on how infants and young children acquire their native language. This chapter explores the processes, stages, and theories associated with language development, offering a comprehensive overview of how individuals come to understand and produce language from early childhood.

## Stages of Language Acquisition

### 1. Pre-linguistic Stage

The pre-linguistic stage occurs before children begin to use recognizable words. During this period, which spans from birth to about 12 months, infants engage in various forms of vocalization. Yule

describes how babies produce cooing sounds around 6-8 weeks, characterized by pleasant, repetitive vowel sounds. Around 4-6 months, babbling begins, where infants produce repetitive consonant-vowel combinations like "bababa" or "dadada." This stage is crucial for the development of the articulatory and auditory skills necessary for later language acquisition.

## **2. One-word Stage**

The one-word stage, or holophrastic stage, typically occurs between 12 and 18 months. During this stage, children start to use single words to convey whole sentences or complex ideas. For instance, a child might say "milk" to mean "I want milk" or "There is milk." Yule explains that these one-word utterances often serve various functions, including requests, labels, and exclamations. The meaning of these words is highly context-dependent and usually understood by the child's caregivers.

## **3. Two-word Stage**

The two-word stage usually begins around 18-24 months. At this stage, children start to combine two words to form simple sentences, such as "want cookie" or "big truck." Yule notes that this stage marks a significant leap in language development, as children begin to grasp basic syntactic structures. The combinations reflect an early understanding of word order and relationships between words.

## **4. Early Multi-word Stage**

Following the two-word stage, children enter the early multi-word stage, which typically starts around 24-30 months. During this period, children start forming longer sentences with more complexity, such as "I want to go park" or "Daddy read me a book." Yule emphasizes that although these sentences are often grammatically imperfect, they

demonstrate an emerging grasp of syntax and the ability to combine multiple words into coherent utterances.

## **5. Later Multi-word Stage**

By around 30-36 months, children enter the later multi-word stage, where they refine their language skills further. They begin to use more complex sentence structures, including the use of auxiliary verbs, negation, and various sentence types. Yule highlights that children at this stage develop a better understanding of grammatical rules and the ability to produce more nuanced and grammatically correct sentences.

## **Theories of First Language Acquisition**

### **1. Behaviorist Theory**

The behaviorist theory, associated with B.F. Skinner, posits that language acquisition is a result of imitation, reinforcement, and conditioning. According to this view, children learn language by mimicking the speech they hear and receiving positive reinforcement from their caregivers. Yule discusses how behaviorist theory emphasizes the role of environmental stimuli and feedback in shaping language development.

### **2. Nativist Theory**

Nativist theory, famously advanced by Noam Chomsky, argues that language acquisition is driven by an innate biological ability. Chomsky introduced the concept of the "universal grammar," suggesting that all humans are born with an inherent understanding of the basic principles of language structure.

Yule explains that nativist theory emphasizes the idea that children have a natural predisposition for language learning, which helps explain the rapid and consistent acquisition of language across different cultures.

### **3. Interactionist Theory**

Interactionist theory, which includes perspectives from both social interactionists and cognitive theorists, highlights the importance of social interaction and cognitive development in language acquisition. Lev Vygotsky's work, for example, emphasizes the role of social interactions and the zone of proximal development in language learning. Yule describes how interactionist theories suggest that language acquisition is a dynamic process involving the interplay between innate abilities and social experiences.

## **Factors Influencing Language Acquisition**

### **1. Social Interaction**

Social interaction plays a critical role in language development. Yule notes that the frequency and quality of interactions between children and their caregivers significantly impact language learning. Responsive and engaging communication, including the use of child-directed speech (motherese), supports vocabulary growth and grammatical understanding.

### **2. Cognitive Development**

Cognitive development is closely linked to language acquisition. As children's cognitive abilities mature, they become better equipped to understand and use language. Yule discusses how cognitive theories propose that language development is intertwined with broader cognitive processes such as memory, problem-solving, and symbolic thinking.

### **3. Input and Exposure**

The amount and type of linguistic input children receive influence their language acquisition. Yule explains that rich and varied linguistic input helps children develop a more extensive vocabulary and better grasp of grammatical structures. Exposure to diverse language experiences, including conversations, storytelling, and reading, contributes to language development.

### **Conclusion**

George Yule's chapter on first language acquisition in "The Study of Language" offers a thorough examination of how infants and young children acquire their native language. By exploring the stages of language development, key theories of acquisition, and influencing factors, Yule provides a comprehensive understanding of this fundamental aspect of human development. The chapter highlights the intricate interplay between innate abilities, social interactions, and cognitive growth in shaping the acquisition of language, illustrating the remarkable process through which individuals learn to communicate effectively.