

# Acquiring the human language-playing the language game

[Linguistics](#), [Language](#)



1. What arguments in support of language as an innate ability are brought up in the film?

This video is about a great mystery; how do children acquire language without seeming to learn it and how do they do so many things with so little life experience.

2. Explain the ambiguity of the question asked by Jill de Villiers to both children and graduate students: "When did the boy say he hurt himself?" Why is this question ambiguous and why is it interesting to note that this question is ambiguous?

Question was "When did the boy say he hurt himself?" and there are 2 answers to this question. If focus on When said, the answer is "in the bathtub." However when it focus on When fallen, the answer is "climbing the tree" And it is very interesting because they found that children will give only 1 answer when given unambiguous sentence "When did the boy say HOW he hurt himself", "in the bathtub." By this experiment, we can conclude that a child must have some kind of knowledge of syntactic structure because nobody had ever taught the child about this.

3. List some of the fundamental questions regarding language learning/language acquisition that are discussed in the film and explain how are linguists trying to answer these questions. (What questions do linguists ask and what kind of evidence do they look for to answer them?) The original theory on how languages are learned was it is learned by imitation. However, linguists found that child not only imitate adult but produces brand-new

sentences. And the fundamental questions were raised, if we don't learn by imitation, how do we learn? So linguists try to prove that acquiring language is different from learning other things by some experiments.

4. Mention some of the evidence in the film presented as evidence AGAINST the imitation theory of language learning.

Child can produce brand-new sentence and they make errors. They can understand quite complex sentence in early age.

5. The film (Chomsky) claim that acquiring language is different from kinds of learning. What does he mean?

It means we seem to learn language with different way from learning other difficult things such as playing the trumpet and riding bicycle. It is not learned by practice, or by imitation.

6. What proof is there that analogy is not the explanation for first language learning?

With the sentence "I painted the red barn", we can substitute color word, and it is acceptable. If we switch the last two words, it is still acceptable. So by analogy, child will extend this to other verb "see" and create new sentence. "I saw a red barn." And a concept of analogy doesn't work for switching last two words, since I saw a barn red is broken sentence. And also, with sentence "Taro ate" it means he ate something but this something is not his shoes or hat. Another proof that analogy is not the explanation of first language learning is the verb "grow" can mean

differently in the sentence such as “ John grows tomatoes” and “ John grows.” Analogy is wildly broken and cannot explain first language learning.

7. Observe the details of the experiment with the 16-month old babies who are shown Cookie Monster and Big Bird. Explain the experiment’s design, including the question posed by the researchers and the conclusions they reach regarding children’s acquisition of syntax based on the results of this study.

The experiment design is showing two films simultaneously to babies. And asks to find the same scene with the explanation, Cookie monster washing Big Bird and Big Bird feeding Cookie Monster. The questions behind the study was will the child look more at the screen that matches the language that they are hearing. And the result surprisingly show that they understand the order of the information.

8. An extended section of the film discusses how children learn new words. Explain the point(s) illustrated by the following examples: -The child who calls his own dog “ Nunu”, then applies the word Nunu to several other things (another dog, cow, slippers, salad) : Overgeneralization - “ The Gavagai Problem” (the big rabbit on a billboard) : Assumption

- Child labeling an item a flimmick, a closed flimmick and a spud : Child expects object labels to refer to the whole object - Children discussing the meaning of the word “ alive” and the one child deciding that a car must be “ alive” A child picks out a category that is relevantly alike

9. The film moves to Papua New Guinea (home of 750 languages spoken by 3, 000, 000 people) and discusses language universals and then Universal Grammar. -What aspects of language are candidates for language universals? Subject, Object, Verb

- What are examples are presented in the film as evidence of Universal Grammar? There are certain kinds of mistake that children never seem to make. (ex. What did you eat your egg and?)

10. Explain what Chomsky means when he says that “ all children are pre-programmed in advance of experience; they know fixed, invariant structural principles of language”.

Capacity to learn language is deeply engraved in the mind and children are not taught language, they just do it.