

Children the years,
phonology,
morphology, syntax
and



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Children are learning and developing their lexicon from birth.

- At 2 years old, a typically-developing child can use 50-600 words- By 6 years old, their lexicon is about 14000 words (Galdes, 2017). This lexicon is highly dependent on the environment and on the experiences that the child may have in this environment. With dysphasia, for example, it would be completely different : no words before 18 months, less than 30 words at 24 months... (Maillart, 2007 as cited in Radelet & Caldeira, 2015). Over the years, phonology, morphology, syntax and pragmatic keep developing and are generally acquired by the age of 6, whereas meaning, which is the object of study of semantics, is a lifelong learning. First words are important and reflect the actual cognitive skills, language ability and understanding of the world of children. They start using words as soon as they start associate some meaning to those words.

Tomasello, in 2003 (as cited in Galdes, 2017), introduced the social-pragmatic theory of words learning in order to explain and highlight the prerequisite (segmenting speech, conceptualizing referents), foundational (joint attention, intention reading and cultural learning) and facilitative (lexical contrast, linguistic context) processes. Indeed, in order to link forms to meaning, children need to segment the speech stream and identify linguistic units such as phrases, words, morphemes, sounds so that they can understand and communicate their intentions. Conceptualizing referents refers to the fact that children refer to the concepts of the object they are talking about in order to make the others understand. It evolves with time. For example, at the beginning, the child will only say « car » to talk about his red car that he plays with. He will not generalise. His perceptual experience helps him to

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identify abstract word meaning related to his particular toy at this particular moment. This is only later, that this capacity of form-meaning mapping becomes less context-dependent.

As for the foundational processes, joint attention is a communicative interaction between the child and someone else. It is the fact that the child look at the same thing (person or object) as the others during an interaction. Joint attention is very important because it allows the child to learn new words by associating a mental image to the spoken word. A child who would not develop this capacity would have less opportunities to extend his lexicon because of the missing opportunity to associate the word with the right object. This is associated to intention reading which is the faculty to make attempts at trying to understand the communicative attentions of others.

Thanks to those foundational processes, around 3, children with typical development have a new approach to learn words. They start to make groups of words designating the same thing or with a similar signification. They develop a new capacity to link the hearing word and its meaning in the real world (Carey & Bartlett, 1978, as cited in Bee & Boyd, 2011), they become able to make quick guesses about the words they hear. This is called fast mapping. Those new meanings will be compared to those already stored in the lexicon in order to improve it. Later, children use facilitative processes, such as lexical contrast and linguistic context, in order to improve the previous process of intention reading. It guides their inferences on word meanings.

SLPs have to understand the basic processes that enable a child to give a meaning to a word so that during a session they can assess this link between thinking and language. · Assessment Usually, children with specific language impairment are concerned with semantic difficulties such as new word acquisition difficulties, finding word difficulties, organization or words. Assessment of children requires that the speech pathologist is aware of the limitations of the test such as the child's age. Indeed the assessment will be different for a child who doesn't have spoken language yet. The same precaution must be taken during the assessment of a child with a developmental delay. With children, SLPs use standardized tests, like the expressive vocabulary test which assesses expression, parental reports such as checklists or inventories for example, picture naming, categorisation or language sampling (Galdes, 2017).

This last one can give the SLP an idea of what the lexicon's child would be during an interaction.