

# The critical period



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6 months babbling begins and becomes variable and language specific by 12 months  
10-15 months first words are produced, for many children word learning accelerates dramatically around 18 months called the vocabulary explosion  
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2.5 years complex morphology appears on words  
15 months - 2.5 years two word utterances  
2.5 - 3.5 years function words and longer utterances  
3.5 - 6 years more complex syntax (transformations) stages not ages  
many people associate speech milestones with age, but there is much variation in the ages that children hit milestones for language  
all children who are learning a language go through the same stages in the same order, all children go from first word utterances to two word utterances in that order, but they may do it at slightly different speeds  
typical language acquisition occurs from birth - 6 years old  
critical period for language acquisition is up until puberty, after the critical period is over language acquisition changes. people are less successful at language acquisition after puberty.  
Genie girl kept in isolation until she was discovered at age 13 who had absolutely no language input. after she was rescued she works with psychologists and linguists to learn everything she had missed. by age 17 she had the language ability of a five year old, but never passed this and acquired language normally. why was Genie unable to learn language? she was discovered after the critical period began to close, and no longer was able to acquire language correctly  
Isabelle discovered at age 6, and was locked in a room with her deaf mother for 6.5 years and had no language. unlike Genie, Isabelle made remarkable progress. by age 9 she had learned an extensive vocabulary, had acquired complex syntactic constructions and was scoring in the normal range on IQ tests. why was Genie unable to learn

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language but Isabelle was? The difference appears to be a difference in age of first exposure to language. Genie was found after the critical period began to end, and Isabelle was in the middle of the critical period. Hawaiian Pidgin English is a system of communication that had the following properties:

1) one dominant language contributed most of the words, although the other languages also contributed some words

2) the grammar of the communication system was a comprehensive mix of grammatical properties of the contributing languages

3) the system had a lot of variation from speaker to speaker in terms of both word choice and grammar. Over time the system becomes more rigid, but some amount of individual variation is maintained. Lexifier: the language that contributes the most words to the language. In Hawaiian it's English. Pidgin is a general process that happens wherever large communities of adults who speak different languages are put into close contact and have to find a way to communicate, but are past the critical period of language acquisition.

Properties of pidgins

1) the lexifier is the language that contributes most of the vocabulary

2) the grammar of the pidgin is a simplified compromise mix of grammatical properties of the contributing languages

3) the pidgin shows variation from speaker to speaker in terms of both word choice and grammar. Over time, the pidgin becomes more and more rigid, but maintains some amount of individual variation.

4) there are no native speakers of pidgins. Pidgins are only spoken by the adults who speak other languages natively. Pidgins are learned by adults who are too old to learn a new language natively. What happens when children are exposed to a pidgin as a first language? They acquire and create

a creole properties of a creole 1) larger vocabulary

2) regular rules for phonology, morphology and syntax

3) very little variation between speakers of the creole

4) is the native language of the speakers Hawaiian Creole English

The language created by the children who were exposed to Hawaiian Pidgin

English during their critical period. HCE is a full language spoken by 600,000

people today. Hawaiian Creole English is a full language; it is a rule-based

language and has a set of phonemes, lexical items and syntactic rules that

are similar to standard English, but are different. Where does the complexity

and regularity of the creole grammar come from? The children who create a

creole are hearing pidgin being spoken around them which is less complex

than a full-fledged language and also shows much more variation, so the

complexity and regularity of the creole cannot come from the pidgin.

Possible theory? It comes from substantial innate knowledge, modern

nativism. Creole and modern nativism: it looks like these properties are

brought by the children, if modern nativism is true, they have substantial

innate knowledge about how languages should work. They appear to take the

simple and variable input from the pidgin, and turn it into a complex, regular,

full-fledged language. Why can't adults create a creole? Adults that speak the

pidgin are unable to create the creole, they are also unable to learn the

native languages of the other immigrants. Adults can't learn another native

language and cannot turn a pidgin into a full language (a creole) because of

the critical period. Humans only have access to their innate language

learning mechanisms for a short period after birth (approx birth until

puberty). After the critical period is over, language acquisition no longer

proceeds the same way.

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