

Exercise walk-through

Communication and Language Development ■ 3.5

eXercise

You must be able to

- name the stages from **babbling** 咿呀学语 to sentences
- state what **overgeneralisation** 过度概括 shows about learning
- contrast a **learning** account with a **nativist** 天赋论 account
- explain the evidence for a **sensitive period** for language

Method — The sequence

Babbling includes sounds from many languages and narrows to the ambient one. Then single words, then two-word combinations with consistent order, then longer sentences with grammar.

Method — Overgeneralisation

A child who has said “went” begins saying “goed”. This is not forgetting: the child has extracted a **rule** and is applying it too broadly. Errors of this kind are evidence of rule learning rather than imitation.

Method — Two accounts

A **learning** account emphasises imitation and reinforcement. A **nativist** account argues that children acquire grammar too fast, from input too incomplete, for imitation alone, and that the capacity is innately structured.

Method — A sensitive period

Children exposed to a language early acquire it fully; those first exposed much later typically do not reach the same grammatical mastery. This supports a sensitive period rather than an unlimited window.

Practice 2.1 ■ 3 marks

Name three stages of early language development in order.

Solution 2.1

Method: A sensitive period

Worked steps

babbling **B1**; single words **B1**; two-word combinations and then longer sentences **B1**.

Practice 2.2 ■ 2 marks

Explain what overgeneralisation shows about how children learn grammar.

Solution 2.2

Method: Two accounts

Worked steps

the child is applying an extracted rule too broadly (B1), which shows rule learning rather than simple imitation (B1).

Practice 2.3 ■ 1 mark

A child who said “ran” now says “runned”.

- (a) State whether this is a step backwards.
- (b) Justify your answer.

Solution 2.3

Method: Overgeneralisation

Worked steps

(a) no **B1**. (b) it shows the child has learned the regular past-tense rule and is applying it to an irregular verb **B1**.

Exam-style 3.1 ■ 1 mark

Babbling in early infancy includes

- A** only sounds of the surrounding language
- B** sounds from many languages, narrowing later
- C** no consonants
- D** complete words

Solution 3.1

Method: The sequence

- A only sounds of the surrounding language
- B sounds from many languages, narrowing later 
- C no consonants
- D complete words

Worked steps

- B. babbling narrows toward the ambient language over the first year.

Exam-style 3.2 ■ 1 mark

The nativist argument rests mainly on the claim that

- A** children imitate adults exactly
- B** grammar is acquired too fast from too little input for imitation alone
- C** language is learned only after age seven
- D** reinforcement explains all errors

Solution 3.2

- A children imitate adults exactly
- B grammar is acquired too fast from too little input for imitation alone** 
- C language is learned only after age seven
- D reinforcement explains all errors

Worked steps

- B.** the poverty of the input relative to the speed of acquisition is the nativist argument.

Exam-style 3.3 ■ 1 mark

A person first exposed to a language at 30 achieves fluent vocabulary but persistent grammatical errors.

- (a) State what this pattern supports.
- (b) Explain why vocabulary and grammar may differ in this respect.

Solution 3.3

Method: A sensitive period

Worked steps

(a) a sensitive period for grammar **B1**. (b) vocabulary can be added throughout life as new items **B1**, while grammatical structure appears to depend on early exposure **B1**.