

3.5 Communication and Language Development

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 12 marks

KEY WORDS language 语言 • babbling 咿呀学语 • nativist 天赋论 • overgeneralisation 过度概化
• language development 语言发展

Objective

Build the skills to answer exam questions on **language development** 语言发展.

You must be able to:

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

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ 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.

■ 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.

■ 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.

■ 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.

2 Practice

2.1 Name three stages of early language development in order. [3]

2.2 Explain what overgeneralisation shows about how children learn grammar. [2]

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

- (a) State whether this is a step backwards. [1]
- (b) Justify your answer. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Babbling in early infancy includes [1]

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

3.2 The nativist argument rests mainly on the claim that [1]

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

- (a) State what this pattern supports. [1]
- (b) Explain why vocabulary and grammar may differ in this respect. [2]
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Solutions

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

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

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

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

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

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