

# Language Development

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## WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson is going to cover how language develops by looking at:

1. Language Development
2. Language Milestones
  - a. Signals
  - b. Motherese

## 1. Language Development

Language is important to humans as social creatures. In psychology, the linguistic development, which is to say the **language development** of people, is tied closely to development and maturation, especially cognitive and social development.

There are several important milestones to take note of when it comes to development of language. Development of language occurs even before the child is born, in the prenatal stage. Children begin to understand and recognize the rhythm and the cadence of a particular language.

➞ **EXAMPLE** A child will recognize and respond to English if English is spoken around them more than they will respond to, say, Chinese. This is because it recognizes it even within the womb at a prenatal stage.

It is important to note at this stage that children can understand before they're able to produce. Especially at these early stages, being able to physically produce something can be difficult, because the child hasn't developed the necessary motor skills.



### DID YOU KNOW

This is why sign language has become very popular for babies, recently, because children are able to communicate things through sign language that they aren't actually able to vocally communicate.



### TERM TO KNOW

#### Language Development

One of the most important events in development; closely tied to cognitive development; important to humans

## 2. Language Milestones

- **~5 months of age:** Around this time, a child begins to do what's called babbling. This starts off initially as single sounds, like "uh." Eventually, it becomes more complex forms like reduplicated babbling or repeated syllables. It might sound like "buh buh buh buh." Variegated is the next step in babbling where a child starts to mix syllables. They might say: "buh duh puh kuh."
- **10-13 months of age:** Around this time is when a child finally says their first word. These are usually single-word phrases; they're very simple and the child knows very few of them. They might know things like "mama," "dada," "up," or "mine." Shortly after that, they begin two-word phrases or what we call telegraphic speech, where they combine nouns and verbs together. These are generally very concrete things.

➦ **EXAMPLE** An example of telegraphic speech is "want puppy" or "where daddy."

- **After 2 years of age** Around this time there is what's called a language explosion. The vocabulary and the grammar of a child expands greatly over a short period of time. This is also when they begin to use multi-word sentences.
- **6 years of age:** By this time, a child can generally understand up to 8,000 words and produce 4,000. Up to 5 years of age is what we generally call a sensitive period for language, meaning that after this time, it's much harder to acquire a new language. This is why, when a person tries to learn a foreign language later on in life, it's a lot more difficult.

### 2a. Signals

Throughout the course of all these milestones in linguistic development, the parents play an important role in helping the children to acquire language. Even before they're able to verbally talk, parents help by creating **signals**. Signals are early language development, and include any kind of behavior like touching, vocalizing, gazing, or smiling that allows for nonverbal communication on the child's part.

Turn-taking between the parent and the child begins as well. This usually takes the form of certain types of games or routines that start to develop with parents. This is why you see a lot of repetition occurring when parents interact with their children. It is very helpful for children early on.



#### TERM TO KNOW

#### Signal

Babies can make early nonverbal interactions that mimic later verbal interactions before they learn to speak (examples: touching, smiling, gazing, early vocalization)

### 2b. Motherese

Now, around the time that the child first begins to talk, parents also begin to assist them by using what's called parentese, or **motherese**. This is a way of adjusting a person's speech when they're talking in front of an

infant. They change the way that they're speaking in a way that assists the child in understanding and being able to use the language that they're hearing. This generally occurs without a parent even being aware of it and is a natural instinct.



#### TERM TO KNOW

#### Motherese

Parents often use a speech pattern that helps babies learn to speak in their native tongue faster. This kind of shaping includes simple phrases, high pitched vocalization and exaggerated inflections.



#### SUMMARY

**Language development** is one of the most important events in development that is closely tied to cognitive and social development. People are often able to understand language before they are able to produce it. There are several important **language milestones** that occur as a person develops. Babbling begins around 5 months of age, and between 10 to 13 months old, children start to say their first words and simple phrases. At around 2 years of age the child experiences a language explosion. The sensitive period for language ends at around age 5.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Erick Taggart.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Language Development

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##### Motherese

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##### Signal

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