

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

Analytic Language Development

- Analytic language development was recognized through research in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.
- It has come to be known as 'typical language development.'
- Meaning is first derived from single words.
- Single words are the first 'units of meaning' (A. Peters, 1983/2021).
- Language develops from single words to two-word combinations.
- Language then develops into phrases and sentences.
- Sentences include more complex grammar.

Gestalt Language Development

- Gestalt language development was recognized through research in the 1970s and 1980s (B. Prizant, 1983; A. Peters, 1983/2021).
- It has often been referred to as 'echolalia,' i.e., language chunks that are heard, stored, and used later.
- Meaning is first derived from language 'chunks' (gestalts).*
- Language gestalts can be of any length; each is a 'unit of meaning' (A. Peters, 1983/2021).
- Language develops from whole chunks to smaller chunks (mitigated gestalts).



- Language then develops from small chunks to single words and two-word combinations.
- Language naturally develops into phrases and sentences.
- Sentences include more complex grammar.

Citations:

The Units of Language Acquisition- Ann Peters 1983, 2021; <https://communicationdevelopmentcenter.com/>
Language Acquisition and Communicative Behavior in Autism: Toward an Understanding of the 'Whole' of It- Barry Prizant, 1983; <https://barryprizant.com/>



Citations:

Finding the Words: To Tell The Whole Story- Marge Blanc 2005; <https://communicationdevelopmentcenter.com/>
Natural Language Acquisition on the Autism Spectrum: The Journey from Echolalia to Self-Generated Language- Marge Blanc 2012

NATURAL LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

- Natural language acquisition describes and details the four stages of gestalt language development identified by the researchers cited above, and includes two more stages of grammar development.
- NLA is supported by clinical research spanning years of language development in children (M. Blanc, 2005/2012).
- NLA supports the communicative intentions of gestalt language.
- NLA describes how language chunks / gestalts are broken down and recombined into new, more flexible language.
 - It describes how language is then broken down into single words, which are later combined with emerging grammar.
- NLA presents the stages of language development, explains assessment, and, more importantly, explores supports at each level.

* GESTALTS

- Gestalts can be of any length ('Wow!' 'Come on!' 'I can't believe it!' 'To infinity and beyond!' 'Abcdefg' 'Happybirthdaytoyou')
- Long gestalts may be unintelligible and mistaken for babbling.
- Gestalts do not need to be spoken to be part of language development.
- Gestalts can be language heard at home or school ('Hihowareyoulmgood' 'Itstimetogoyougottacleanup').
- Gestalt scripts can be derived from songs, movies, advertisements, YouTube clips, stories, nursery rhymes, and other media, including sources in another language ('c'estlavie' 'vamonos').
- Gestalt language processing is common in both neurotypical and neurodivergent language development.
- Gestalt language processing can co-exist with analytic language processing in very young children.



Handout created by:
Blanc, M., Elias, P., Pichette, D.,
Johnston, L., & Witters, I.

Stage	Examples	Description
<p>Stage 1: Gestalts</p> <p>Language heard in one situation and used in another. This language can be songs, sentences, scripts, or parts of media.</p>	<p>ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZnowlkno wmyabcsnexttimewontyousingwithme</p> <p>Ifyourehappyandyouknowit Happybirthdaytoyou ---</p> <p>(a) <i>Let's get out of here!</i> (b) <i>Want some more?</i></p>	<p>Language gestalts are part of the experiences of life. These could be lived experiences or those enjoyed via media. They carry personal meaning, often emotional, and should not be interpreted literally.</p>
<p>Stage 2: Mitigated Gestalts</p> <p>Language from Stage 1 is broken down into smaller parts, which are then combined in new ways.</p>	<p>ABCD + to you You're happy + with me LMNOP + you know it ---</p> <p>(a) <i>Let's get + out of here!</i> <i>Want + some more?</i> (b) <i>Let's get + some more?</i> <i>Want + out of here!</i></p>	<p>Mitigations communicate more specifically than the original gestalts and express more communicative intentions.</p>
<p>Stage 3: Isolation & Combination of Single Words</p> <p>Mitigations are further broken down into single words that are combined without grammar.</p>	<p>(a) <i>Get...more!</i> (b) <i>Want...out?</i> ---</p> <p>Ball + red, Blue + ball, Table + chair, Up + ball, Red + blue, Table + under, Here + there, Mom + home, Home + me, Me + Mom, Outside + tree, Tree + leaf, Rock + mud, Water + duck, Fast + car, I + fast, It + good, I + OK, OK + you?</p>	<p>'Get...more!' and 'Want...out?' demonstrate emergence into Stage 3.</p> <p>Stage 3 presents the opportunity to increase single word vocabulary and explore two-word combinations of nouns, attributes, and locations.</p>

NLA STAGES

Stage	Examples	Description
<p>Stage 4: Self-generated phrases and simple sentences</p> <p>The child is experimenting with meaningful word combinations and emerging grammar.</p>	<p>Get up, Mom. Mommy, need up. Got milk snack? I play friends now! All my friends are playing outside! We need milk and cookies for our snack.</p>	<p>Early phrase types and combinations. Emerging grammar. All basic grammatical structures (pronouns, verbs, conjunction 'and').</p>
<p>Stage 5: Self-generated sentences used in everyday situations</p> <p>The child is adding more advanced grammar to their basic sentences.</p>	<p>Can you help me with my homework? Why doesn't this work? I want to go outside because my friends are waiting.</p>	<p>All basic conjunctions. More advanced verb tenses. More advanced sentence structures.</p>
<p>Stage 6: Self-generated sentences used in more complex situations</p> <p>The older child is using sophisticated grammar correctly.</p>	<p>I have to finish early but I don't want to make any mistakes. If I can't find the answer, do you think we could google it? Before we make a decision, we should review what the teacher was asking for.</p>	<p>All advanced verb tenses, conjunctions, and clauses needed to participate in a growing number of academic situations.</p>

Resources:

- Links to NLA book and NLA courses: <http://www.communicationdevelopmentcenter.com>
- New Jersey Autism Center of Excellence webinars on NLA: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwzkwkyjSLY>
- ASHA description of echolalia: <https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/clinical-topics/autism/echolalia-and-its-role-in-gestalt-language-acquisition/>
- Natural Language Acquisition Study Groups on FaceBook
- Natural Language Acquisition: A Guide To Gestalt Language Processing by Marge Blanc, 2022

Handout created by:
Blanc, M., Elias, P., Pichette, D.,
Johnston, L., & Witters, I.

SUPPORTING NATURAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AT ANY STAGE

Take the time to see what the child is doing: Watch and listen; provide plenty of silence

Comment on what you and the child are doing

Follow the child's lead in play and interests (all are opportunities to learn and grow)

Consider co-regulation always

Honour the child's play by joining in or 'parallel-playing'

Treat every interaction as an equal opportunity for language development

Earn the child's trust and focus on your connection. Only then does your language matter

Understand that language development 'in context' is already 'generalized'

Keep your connection with the child—it's a privilege

Remember that every child's play is different and legitimate

Think about the variety of functions the child is communicating

Use the child's language and support it becoming more flexible



Pay attention to each expressed thought, discover the meaning and honour the communicative intention

Respond to the child's own language

Provide language models that the child can use later without changing them

Allow the child to make new language 'their own'

Gestalt thinkers process life experiences as gestalts

Treat all communication types as valid (gestures, AAC, singing, signing, intonation, etc.)

Adopt a flexible and supportive communication style

Add personal language to robust AAC systems

Handout created by:

Blanc, M., Elias, P., Pichette, D., Johnston, L., & Witters, I.