Language Development

- Background: Western Education and Symbolic competence: What is assumed? What is valued?
  - Humans use many forms of representation.
  - Some are required/emphasized/fostered by schools: math and language

- Language: What makes it distinctive?
  - Abstract, arbitrary symbols
  - Unlimited combinations (decomposable; synthetic)
  - Potential for decontextualization from context
What Teachers Should Know About Language Development

*Is language the same as literacy?*

- Changing challenges to language development:
  - Early experience shapes later development. Parents are major vehicles of early language and literacy learning…but not in the same way!
  - Emerging group differences:
    - LEP; various difficulties of ESL learning (spoken & written)
    - Language problems sometimes reflect other deficits.
Why does this matter?

- Spoken language is primary medium of teaching; written language is primary medium of assessment.

Culture, schooling, and language development:

- Increasing number of bilingual students in CA: What do teachers need to know about L1 vs. L2 learning?
- Different cultures value, practice different language skills.
Course of Language Development

By 1st birthday, infants have learned…

- ...which speech sounds occur in their language, and how these sounds go together in words, phrases, & sentences.
- ...some common words; might produce a few.
- ...conventions of social interaction:
  - Games (e.g., “peekaboo”)
  - Showing; following gaze
  - Turn-taking (“protoconversations”)

During the second year they will…

- ...start combining words
  - enormous expansion in range of communication
- ...grow vocabulary
Emerging language

- **1-year-olds:**
  - "uh-oh," "ba" [bottle], "dada"; "mama"; "no"; "up"; "teddy"; "hello"

- **2-year-olds:**
  - “mine ball,” “no wanna go in dere,”
  - “men…ride…horsies…fast!”

- **3-year-olds:**
  - "I'm going to be the angry devil, and I'm going to scare you. I'm gonna come out of the mountain, and... sing da music to scare you....But this mountain is annoying!"
Learning structure

- “Mice-eater” and “rats-eater”: How can children learn structure without instruction?
  - Negative evidence: Does it reveal abstract patterns?
  - No corrective feedback, but parents sometimes expand:
    - *Child*: “Milk.” *Adult*: “You want some milk?”

- The growth of syntax:
  - First 2-word combinations: 18-24 months:
    - “Daddy sit”; “Mommy sock”; “sit chair?”; crayon big”
  - Multiword speech by 2-year-olds:
    - “I want some eggs”; “What cowboy doing?”; “I watch it”
  - Later acquisition: *Wh*- questions, passives, reflexives
  - Inflections vs. word order: a cross-language difference
The “miracle” of word learning?

WE'RE PACKING UP?

YEP. I'VE HAD ENOUGH. WHAT A ROTTEN WEEK!

WAP

DID YOU KNOW WHAT ANY OF DAD'S WORDS MEANT?

NO, BUT I WROTE THEM DOWN SO WE CAN LOOK 'EM UP WHEN WE GET HOME.
What is an “average” vocabulary?
Learning words

- Why is word learning important?
  - Vocabulary is the single best predictor of reading ability

- How do children learn words?
  - Ostension, definition, stories, games…but how so easily?

- Are some meanings are “privileged?”

- What about the context? (e.g., gaze monitoring)

- Then again, they make lots of mistakes
  - Overextension, underextension
  - Failure to learn semantic relations even with lots of reps

*What can schools do? Reading vs. direct instruction*
Language and Literacy revisited…

(Hemphill & Snow questions)

- Assumptions of WL approach about similarity of spoken language and literacy…
  - What *is* the WL approach, anyway??

- Are children’s school narratives good reflections of their verbal/narrative skills?
  - How do they differ?

- What factors determine content & quality of children’s early written products (i.e., stories)?

- Implications of differences of reading-learning for classroom practices?
Summary: Children’s Language

By age 3, most children are fluent speakers, but...
  Word meaning continues to be very important (e.g. some 5-year-olds still confuse color words)
  Syntactic errors still occur
    “Where milk go?” “The dog was bitten by the cat”
  Egocentrism in child speech…
Spoken language: primary mode of school communication
  Communicative disorders, LEP, and socio-linguistic factors can complicate teaching and learning
Written language is related but distinct from spoken