

Language Strand

Unit 3: Language as a Social Practice

Module 3.2 Language Development in a First and Second Language



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Acknowledgements

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Layout and diagrams supported by Nick Lauer.

Date: 29 October 2002



Primary and Secondary Teacher Education Project

Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)
GRM International

Papua New Guinea-Australia Development Cooperation Program

Unit outline

Unit	#	Modules
Unit 3 Language as a Social Practice	1	Language as Social Practice (Core)
	2	Language Development in a First and Second Language (Core)
	3	Language at Home and At School (Core)

Icons



Read or research



Write or summarise



Activity or discussion

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Module 3.2 Language Development in a First and Second language

Rationale

Children learn their first language without any apparent effort, and without any apparent teaching. They learn the 'ways with words' of their community and ways of interacting with members of the community through meaningful and purposeful interaction while doing things with their family members.

Further, some children in Papua New Guinean societies learn more than one language before they commence their schooling. They may, in fact, be learning two languages as a 'first language'. Such ability with language leads us to believe that children are born with a natural aptitude for learning language.

Through studying the interactions through which children become speakers of one or more languages before they begin schooling, we can learn a lot about how children learn the language(s) of their community. This knowledge can then help us to develop classroom practices that build on their language knowledge as they move from the language of everyday interaction to the language necessary to succeed academically.

How to use this module

The transcripts are given as examples of children's interactions with their caregivers in a range of different contexts, of the ways in which children are becoming speakers in their family and community groups. If at all possible, you are encouraged to record the language behaviours of young children in your family or the college community. This could be done either through tape recording the speech of children talking together, or with their parents. Or, it could be a notepaper and pencil exercise. The talk could be of just a short meaningful interaction or it could be taken over a longer passage of time, say an hour.

In both cases, it is important for you to make a note of who the child is speaking to, what the speakers are paying attention to, what the context is, what the time and date are. Any notes that put the speech in context will assist in comparing it with other speech records such as the ones in this module. A comparison could be made with the transcripts in this module, and the ones you are able to produce.

One objective of this module is to encourage you to become language observer/analysts yourselves. An activity such as this will help you learn the basic tools of recording children's speech as well as helping you to develop some skills in analysing the similarities and differences in the speech of very young children.

Learning a first language

'The most impressive intellectual achievement that any of us ever accomplishes is the learning of our first language ...What seems more remarkable is the fact that we do it all without being directly taught'.

Emmitt & Pollock, 2000.

3.2 Activity 1: Focus questions

In groups, discuss the following questions.

- *What does it mean to 'learn language'?*
- *How do children in your cultural group learn their first language?*
- *At what age do adults believe that toddlers begin to use language?*
- *At what age do parents in your cultural group think their children become speakers of their language?*
- *Do adults consciously teach children to speak their language?*
- *Is there a milestone by which parents can judge when their child first becomes a speaker of their language? Describe the milestone (e.g. a certain age, a certain word etc.).*
- *Give reasons why you think children learn to talk.*
- *What are the features in the child's environment that encourage children to want to talk?*
- *Are children in your cultural group learning more than one language before they start schooling?*
- *Why is it important for teachers to understand how children learn their first language?*

Write your answers on butcher's paper. Put them up in the classroom. Test out your understanding as you move through the information in this Module.

1. Introduction

The term most commonly used in the literature to describe how children become speakers of their first language is that of '*language acquisition*' or '*first-language acquisition*'. The term '*language learning*' is usually reserved for second-language learning.

How do children learn their first language? This question has interested and puzzled researchers for centuries, and still does so today. Below, we examine theories that various researchers developed, to explain how children learn to speak the language of their community.

Keep in mind that a *theory* is an attempt to explain a phenomenon (*a remarkable thing*) that we don't understand. When a researcher develops a theory, or an explanation of how they think things are, others test the theory against the available evidence. Sometimes the theories have to be abandoned or at least modified in the light of new knowledge coming from further research.

That is what has happened in the field of theorising about child language development. In what follows, we look at several theories that have been popular over a long period of time, along with contestations of those theories by other researchers. As you read, you will note that each theory has some positive aspects to it, information you could agree with. Yet each theory has turned out to provide only part of the story of how children learn their first language. Each theory or the research on which it was based, often turns out to be inadequate, and as researchers attempt to learn more about what it is that children learn to do when they learn to use language, an ever more complicated picture emerges. Let us begin with Behaviourism and language learning.

2. Behaviourism and language learning

B. F. Skinner developed what has come to be known as the 'behaviourist' theory of language. Researchers who supported Skinner's theory maintained that language should be thought of as verbal behaviour, and the main aim of their research was to show how words and their meanings were learned through patterns of behaviour.

Behaviourism built on the notion that language learning was the result of imitation, practice, reinforcement (feedback on success), and habit formation. That is, Behaviourists believed that children imitated the sounds and patterns in language that they heard around them, and received positive reinforcement (either praise, or the success of the communication) for doing so. When they received positive feedback, they continued imitating and practising these sounds and patterns until they formed 'habits' of correct language use. If the children heard lots of language used well, it was believed that they would learn the language of their community.

Children learned language, then, through a combination of imitation of adult language, and practice at using the language under certain conditions. For two decades, this theory of language learning affected classroom practice. The key concepts of:

- motivation;
- reinforcement of correct responses; and
- repetition of responses,

could be clearly seen in teaching methods and materials. For example, learning to read was thought of as a process of learning to make the correct verbal response to a visual stimulus (e.g. a flash-card). Errors were ignored and correct responses praised (*reinforced*).

Jane, an eighteen-months-old child was beginning to talk to her mum, Lucy. This was their communication.

Lucy: (*feeding Jane mashed egg*)
Jane: (*after a couple of minutes*) wa
Lucy: (*pretending as if she has heard nothing, takes another spoon of egg and tries to feed her again*)
Jane: (*eyes full of tears, pushes the spoon away and says*) wa
Lucy: (*confused, throws the spoon on the feeding bowl and sits still*)
Jane: (*cries more loudly; points to the freezer and says*) wa again
Lucy: (*opens the freezer and holds out an apple*)
Jane: (*shakes her head and continues to cry*)
Lucy: (*holds out a pail of water*)
Jane: (*nods her head, smiles and holds out her hands to take it*)
Lucy: (*hugs her and says*) Oh lewa yu laikim wara. Sori tru, tok 'wara' I no 'wa'

Note: Jane continued to say 'wa' until she was two years old. Then she began to say 'wala' and later she was able to use the adult word 'wara'.

(Adapted from child talk observation – Joshua Kuri)



3.2 Activity 2

Discuss

- Does this example of a child learning language, support Behaviourist theory or not?
- Why do you think the child was not able to pronounce the correct word at first?
- Is there anything wrong with the child?

3. Chomsky's cognitivist (or innatist) theory of language learning

Skinner's theory was seriously criticised and rejected by an American linguist, Noam Chomsky, in the early '60's. You have read above that Skinner maintained that language was learned through children imitating the speech they heard in their environment, and feedback. Chomsky, on the other hand, claimed that children were biologically programmed for language and that language develops in the child in just the same way that other biological functions develop, such as learning to walk. Children do not need to be taught to walk. When they are physically ready, they begin to walk. In just the same way, said Chomsky, children did not have to be taught to talk. When they were ready, they began to talk. They paid attention to adult language around them, and built up personal theories or sets of rules about how language was used, and then tested out these theories as they interacted with mature speakers in their environment.

Chomsky argued that the reason for this exceptional language learning ability in human infants was that they had a *natural predisposition*, an *innate capacity* to learn language. That is, each learner had an inbuilt capacity for language learning that enabled them to construct their personal theories about how language works, with very limited exposure to the adult language. He proposed that the foundation of the innate capacity was a 'Universal Grammar', a 'wiring' deep in the brain that lays the foundation for the human language learning capability. Chomsky related this 'universal grammar' to an underlying 'deep structure' that was the same for every language that existed, but which was *transformed* into the surface structures of individual languages. The researchers referred to this innate ability as a 'Language Acquisition Device' (LAD), and argued that it was common to all humans.

Chomsky argued that children came to know more about the structure of their language than they could reasonably be expected to learn from the faulty samples of language they heard around them. He believed that the language the child heard in the environment was full of confusing information, including false starts, incomplete sentences, and slips of the tongue. Because of this faulty language model, they would not hear enough correct language to imitate and be rewarded for. Thus they could not be successful learners of the adult language if learning depended on the stimulus/response model Skinner proposed.

In refuting Skinner's theory, Chomsky maintained that:

- *the language children overheard* would not provide enough input for them to develop the kind of language they actually do develop. If they were not already disposed to learn language, through their natural predisposition, they would not hear enough examples of accurate language to be able to develop the connections proposed by the behaviourists.
- *parents only sometimes correct* their children's speech and instruct them on the language they are using. Therefore, children do not always receive the feedback or reinforcement Skinner's theory depends on. When corrected, young speakers may ignore the correction, and continue with their own ways of saying things.
- *children often say things that they could not have heard anyone else saying.* How, then, did they learn to say these things given Skinner's theory that emphasised the strategy of imitation?
- there was no easy explanation for *how children could understand sentences they had never ever heard anyone say*, but which they could understand when they heard them for the first time.

Below is a summary of some kinds of evidence that has been used to support Chomsky's theory.

- Before the age of five years, most children have successfully learned their first language even when they are too young for other kinds of complicated learning.
- Children successfully master the structure of their language even when conditions for learning are not particularly favourable. Some children live in families where a lot of interaction takes place with adults, while other children may not have the same amount of language input, yet they still learn the structure of their language with seemingly little effort. ('Seemingly', because children spend a lot of time in their waking hours experimenting with, practising and using language).
- The language children hear in the environment does not contain examples of all the linguistic rules and patterns which they eventually know.
- No animals, even those that are intensively taught by humans, can learn to manipulate the symbol system that is language, as quickly and as well as young children.
- Children tend to learn the correct forms of their language, even without someone helping them to learn which sentences are correct, and which are not.

However, there were also some problems with the innatist (inborn - not acquired from experience) position. These included:

- Studies of the human brain have not been able to identify the 'Language Acquisition Device'. Thus, the term is more often treated as a metaphor, a way of visualising and talking about a process that we don't fully understand.
- There was little attention paid to the context in which the language that was being analysed, was used. Later studies showed how important it is to consider context and participants and purposes for using language. More recent studies have turned to a consideration of these features of the language learning context. Because they take into account aspects of interaction, these theories are known as 'interactionist' theories.

One aspect that researchers could agree on was that human infants seemed to be especially tuned to language. For example, even very young babies seem to respond much more readily to human voices than they do to other sounds around them. This does not mean that they know human language, for they still have much to learn, such as which sounds are meaningful in their language, which combinations of sounds are possible and not possible in their language, and how to use intonation contours. They need to know how to put all this knowledge together into systems to express meanings and this process will take them a long time. However, it does indicate that human infants are tuned to human language from very early in life.

4. Stages in language development

Researchers studying the speech of infants have identified several stages through which the infants move as they learn to interact with language users in their community. These stages are general guidelines, since children develop language abilities differently, and there is a wide range of what is considered 'normal'. They are useful when identifying whether a child is language-delayed.

The stages are listed below.

a) *The pre-speech stages*

Pre-speech stages, so-called because the stages refer to what children do before they begin to produce words at around 12 months of age.

- Crying – from birth
- Cooing – begins about three months of age
- Babbling – begins by about six months. The infant's sound production at this stage includes what is called 'sound play'.

The changes in the sounds the infant makes can be related to the gradual physiological changes in the child's speech organs. What might these changes be?

3.2 Activity3

Think about these questions in relation to your own cultural group of speakers

- *Do you think the infant is interacting with an adult in the pre-speech stages listed above?*
- *Give a reason for your opinion.*
- *How would an adult, for example the mother, learn to interpret what the infant means, if anything?*
- *What does the infant learn about language in the babbling stage?*
- *What importance does your cultural group assign to these stages? That is, does the family of the baby believe he or she is communicating something to them? What kind of response do they make to the baby's cooing, crying or babbling?*
- *Can toddlers understand more than they can say? Give a reason for your opinion.*

b) *The speech stage*

- *One-word sentences, or 'holophrastic' speech* – between 12 – 16 months ; the child understands some words and can produce single-unit utterances. There is a big gap between what the child can understand, and what he or she can produce.
- *Two-word sentences, or 'telegraphic' speech*, when the child can combine some known words into utterances; the growth of vocabulary is very rapid at this stage. Many of these two-word utterances are examples of what has been called

a ‘Pivot Grammar’, made up of a class of words known as Pivot words and others known as Open class words. It was thought that a child notices that there are a small number of words which appear often, and in fixed positions. These words usually occur before or after other words. From this knowledge, the child builds up a theory of word classes. There are two such classes: pivot-class words; and open-class words. Different children included different words in each class. However, pivot grammar could only explain the utterances of children who are at the very beginning of sentence use, and they quickly move on to using more than two words.

- *More than two-word grammars.* When children start stringing together more than two words, their utterances do not show grammatical inflections and function words.

For example, a child will say, “Daddy go work” for “Daddy is going to work”. This kind of speech has been labelled ‘telegraphic speech’ because it is like the kind of speech adults used when they sent telegrams. Around two years of age, child speakers start adding morphemes to words to show finer changes in meaning. The child’s language develops from this stage very rapidly and in complexity. In fact, by the time a child reaches school age, he or she is able to use language for a wide range of purposes and for many interactions with different people in their environment.

5. A functional child grammar

Halliday, a sociolinguist, constructed a theory of language which emphasises system and function in language (systemic functional linguistic theory, or language as a system). That is to say that

- Language is a system of meaning along with other systems of a culture, such as art and craft, song and dance, religion, law etc. He called them *semiotic systems*.
- In the adult language, these meanings fall into clusters of functions, called ‘*macro-functions*’. There are three of these macro-functions in adult language:
 - the **experiential** or **ideational** macro-function
Theorists writing from a systemic theoretical point of view argue that we use language in our everyday lives to talk about things, to make reference to the world of *experience*; to refer to objects, events, relations of time, place, cause. This is the *experiential* function of language.
 - the **interpersonal** macro-function
As human beings, we use language to talk to each other to achieve certain social goals such as getting things done for us, or doing things for others (*exchange of goods and services*) and exchange of information. This function of language focuses on different kinds of utterances as interaction with others. Thus it is called the Interpersonal function.
 - the **textual** function
The third function recognised within systemic theory is the one that serves to bind texts together into a coherent whole. This includes texts that are both spoken and written. This function makes connections between text and *context*.

These three macro-functions operate simultaneously in all texts, whether spoken or written.

Halliday wanted to discover how children learn these functions and become effective adult speakers. He conducted an in-depth study of his son over several years from which he formulated his theory of child language development.

Instead of working from the adult language, Halliday examined how the child was able to act on his world through certain strategies that involved simultaneous gestures and sounds (that were not yet 'words').

He referred to the child's process of developing language as a process of '*learning how to mean*'. He maintained that the child began to create a system of meanings for himself from the age of nine months, that is, during the pre-linguistic stage identified by others. Halliday identified a series of functions the child created over time, through which he was able to do get things done for him. These are included as Appendix 1.

Halliday argued that, in child language, the systems of meaning developed by the child are related to the functions that language serves for the child; he also demonstrated through studying his son how the child moves from these seven functions of child language development to the three macro-functions of the adult language.

Halliday has identified three main *phases* in children's developing language . These are:

- Phase 1: from approximately 10 months to 15 months
During this phase, what the child means makes sense to the adult in the interaction, and is understood by the adult. Yet the spontaneous expression of the child at this stage is not at all like the adult language.
- Phase 2: from approximately 16 months to 22 months
During this phase, the child moves from simple sound/gesture single functions to a much more complicated set of functions using intonation patterns that enabled him to make a distinction between utterances demanding a response and utterances that did not. This important step, Halliday argued, was the one that led directly to the distinction between the experiential function and the interpersonal function that lies at the heart of the adult linguistic system. Also during this phase, there was rapid vocabulary growth, structure and the ability to engage in dialogue.
- Phase 3: from approximately 22 months onward
This phase, by which time the child has mastered the adult system, lasts for the rest of the speaker's life.
To date, this fine-grained study of how a child 'learns how to mean' has been followed up by only one or two other Australian researchers with their own children; at this stage no study conducted by means of systemic functional theory with the child of another cultural group is available for us to learn from.

6. The years following

One striking fact from all the studies of children's early language development was that:

- In the early years, the children were constructing a language that was different in quite systematic ways from the language they heard people around them using
- each child's language followed a general pattern of development, yet each child's construction of language was also different from that of other children
- children seemed to be able to understand much more than they could produce
- they used language that increasingly came to resemble the language that they heard spoken by the people around them.

Further, it was clear that children were applying some kind of systematic process to the task of learning language, but it was difficult for researchers to identify the processes children were using. Thus, they questioned,

- was language learning due to a special capacity of the human mind, or
- was language learning part of the general learning capacity that all humans had?

The research that followed on from these questions turned from the study of the individual and focused closely on the social and cultural environment in which children learn language and of the way children learned to become part of the language community into which they were born.

However, the early studies were productive in demonstrating how children developed language that was ever more complex and how they could use their language for expressing ever finer ranges of meaning, more difficult vocabulary and how their self-confidence grew as they became more competent.

As we have seen, many of these early studies concentrated on how children learned the grammar of their mother tongue. And a lot of the research into children learning the syntax (or grammar) of their mother tongue has been carried out in English. It is interesting to speculate how children learning the syntax of their language in communities around PNG would go about the task, under what conditions and with which participants.

7. Social-interactionist theories of child language learning

A criticism that has been made about the early studies was that they concentrated on how children were supposed to learn the rules of grammar of their language, but they did not refer to the *meanings* the child was trying to convey, nor to the environment of speakers in which the child was growing. One of the gains of this research was that more attention was paid to the situations in which children were talking and learning, and to the people they talked to. A positive step toward understanding more about how children learn their language was taken when linguists and other researchers turned their attention to the speech that was actually spoken to babies and children.

One researcher has described the process of language development as being 'profoundly social' (Edelsky 1989). By this she means that what children learn is learned as part of the social process of doing things with other human beings. Study the transcript below for evidence of this social nature of language learning.

Basama, (18 months old) is sitting near the fireplace near Angara, her mother. A few minutes earlier, Angara had handed a plate of sago to Masambe, her husband, who is sitting nearby. Now Angara is sitting, washing water around in an empty sago pot.

Angara:	<i>(handing Basama a spoon)</i>	Mm, Basama. Kisim spun i go givim papa (Mm, Basama. Take this spoon and go give it to Papa)
	<i>(points spoon at Masambe)</i>	<i>spun. Papa</i> (Spoon Papa)
	<i>(attempts to lift Basama to her feet)</i>	Kirap nau (Get up now) Ap. Kirap. Kirap Up. Get up. Get up.
Masambe:		Ndakukuwe Bring it now
Angara:		Aop <i>(lifts Basama to her feet;</i> <i>Basama walks over to Uup Masambe with the spoon and hands it to him)</i>
Masambe:	<i>(taking spoon)</i>	Ta. <i>(Basama goes back and stands near Angara)</i> Taa kukuwe <i>(to Basama who does not respond)</i> Bring the knife
Angara:	<i>(looking at Basama)</i>	Taa. naip. naip. Knife. Knife . knife
Masambe:	<i>(pointing to the floor near Basama's feet)</i>	Em ia There it is
Angara:		Kisim taa Take the knife
Masambe:	<i>(pointing)</i>	Klostu long lek bilong yu. Em i stap. Close to your leg. There it is.
	<i>(Basama looks at the knife, then at Masambe)</i>	Em. Kisim kam. Take it and come Angide tarak kukuwe. Take that and come.
Angara:	<i>(picks up knife, points at Masambe with it. Pushes knife towards Basama)</i>	Uh, papanana Uh, for papa Taa, taa. Em ia, naip ia. Knife, knife. Here, knife here Angode, taa angode. Taa, kisim. Here knife here. Knife, take it.
	<i>(Basama takes the knife from Angara, walks over to Masambe and hands it to him)</i>	

 **3.2 Activity 4**

Read the transcript, then discuss these issues.

- *Which language is Basama learning as her first language?*
 - *What stage of language development do you think Basama has reached? What evidence supports your findings?*
 - *How are Basama's parents helping her to become a language user?*
 - *Can you say that Basama's parents are teaching her how to talk?*
 - *Is Basama learning more than language in this conversation?*
 - *What other kinds of learning can you identify?*
 - *After reading the transcript above, do you think it is reasonable to say that some children learn more than one language as their first language? Are there many young children in PNG who might be in a similar situation as Basama?*
 - *Is it likely that the kind of interaction of Basama with her parents is more likely to take place in the urban area than a remote area of PNG?*
-

We could say then, that children learn how to mean in their language and cultural group in every-day, ordinary interactions such as the one above. The meanings that are important to each cultural group are learned through interaction with mature speakers of the language. These ordinary interactions are the fundamental language learning situations for children.

 **3.2 Activity 5**

- *Consider ways in which the scene in Basama's household might be different in another cultural group*
 - *Consider whether learning language in households is likely to be different from language learning in classrooms*
 - *Think about and note the implications for teaching of some of these differences*
-

What else do children learn as they learn language?

The speech sequence in Episode 1 below took place one afternoon when grandmother and granddaughter were looking through the 'junk' mail. They had come to a section where babies were modelling baby clothes. The baby that grandmother was referring to was a twin who had gone back to the Torres Strait with her mother.

Episode 1

G = Grandmother; E= Elsey, the granddaughter (5 yrs old) V= Vera the twin (18 months old); not present at the time of the conversation between Grandmother and Elsey)

- G eh, luk luk luk luk (looking at picture of baby in newspaper)
- E (laughs)
- G yagar (expression of affection)
Was-e Vera dha pat peis
(just like Veras' fat face)
- E tok wantaim
Prapa olgeta ya ya/thatwan/pat peis
Yeah, just like her fat face, that one
Prapa Vera gar
So like Vera (speaking from the heart)
- E luk dha beibi peis (laughs)
Look at that baby face
- G prapa Boni bo ais
She's got eyes just like Boni's
- G oh, mai gel klos gar
Oh, my girl's clothes (said with intense emotion)
Yagar prapa was-e
(oh my goodness, just like her)
Vera dha peis
Vera's face exactly
- E no, i bin ranawei nau
No, she's left you now (i.e. your pity is wasted on her)
Em bin ranawei mama
She has run away, Mama

Episode 2

J = researcher; G = grandmother; Giya and Sali = the two girls

In this episode, we were travelling in the car and talking about family members. Two young women Giya and Sali who were related to one another, had gone shopping. The elder of the two was held to be responsible for looking after the younger girl. They had not returned by afternoon.

- J Giya went to town this morning with Sali ... and still not back.
- G praise the Lord!
Oh don't teach that girl like that!
Sali never been that kind of girl before ... a good girl.

Episode 3

Grandmother was cross with Elsey for going shopping and on other social outings with her father and his new companion. This is how the conversation went.

- E Tok wantaim
Go ahead and say it!
- G yu ranawei tumas dhis taim
You are always going out these days
Yu ranawei lot from aus dhistaim
You're away from home a lot these days

In these short exchanges, we can see one example of how children are socialised into the world view of their cultural group at the same time as the culture organises social interaction. Culture is framed by and through language, just as language is shaped by and through culture.

In some Torres Strait cultures, girls and women have responsibilities of care to both older and younger family members. The behaviour of girls or young women who stay close to the family, fulfilling responsibilities toward them and not "running away" or "playing around" is admired and praised by both women and men of the older generation.

- In Episode 1, Elsey tries to win her grandmother's praise by suggesting that the young child Verra had run away and left Grandmother (not that she had much choice in the matter, being so young).
- In Episode 2, which Elsey also overheard, Grandmother was setting out what "good behaviour" for girls was, that they should not be away from home without good reason.
- In Episode 3, Elsey braves her grandmother's rebuke about neglecting her duty of being Grandmother's constant companion and daily helper.

In these episodes we can see how the child is learning the appropriate behaviours expected of women and girls in this cultural group. This is one example of how children learn 'gendered behaviour'. Children listen in on conversations between adults; they also interact with members of their own community of speakers. In conversational instances such as these, children learn to build up their own "identity kit" of how to become and be members of their cultural group, engaging in the same social practices and believing and valuing as do the adult members of their group.

What are some of the things that they learn?

- they learn language
- they learn the ways of talking of their group
- they learn the appropriate behaviours that go with being a member of their group
- they learn the ways of "looking at the world" that go with being a cultural member.

And all of this learning takes place by means of language!

 **3.2 Activity 6**

- *What is Elsey learning about her own cultural group's expectations of her as a girl child?*
 - *How is everyday conversation which she overhears or takes part in, helping her to build up her knowledge about how she should behave?*
 - *Can you recall an example from your own cultural group where a child is learning how to behave like a member of that group, through interacting with older speakers?*
 - *If we want to be effective 'agents of change' in relation to gender issues, what do the conversations above tell us about WHEN we should start talking about gender roles and behaviours?*
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8. What is the role of adults in child language development?

One outcome of the new focus of research on *the contexts* of children's language learning was the discovery that the language addressed to children was, in fact, effective language. It was not full of hesitations, false starts, and obscure meanings that Chomsky, for one, had argued. Instead, it was found that mothers used clear, well-structured utterances, worked very hard at understanding what the children were saying to them, and supported the children's efforts to be understood.

In addition, it was found that some adults speak to babies and young children in such a way that they believe makes it easier for the child to learn to speak. In the research on child language learning in English-speaking homes, such as Britain, USA and Australia, this is known as '*motherese*', '*baby talk register*', *care-taker speech*, or *care-giver speech*. Features of this speech are:

- high pitch,
- slow speech
- exaggerated intonation patterns
- a special simplified vocabulary
- simple, short sentences
- repeating what the young child says
- talking about topics that are related to the child's experiences.

However, even in these groups, there are adults who do not use features of baby talk to their infants, and yet the children still learn to be speakers of the adult language. There are many ways of talking to children that helps them to become speakers of their language.

We could ask: what are the beliefs and values of the mothers referred to above, about how and why their children learn to speak? We would discover something like -

- The mother believe her baby has *the intention to communicate* almost from birth, that is, the baby intends to interact from a very early age. Therefore she addresses the baby continually through conversational interactions.
- The mother perceives her baby to be a person like herself, who wants to interact socially, so the mother reads the baby's movements and sounds as having meaning. For example, in response to a baby's babbling, the mother may say "Ha, that's a long story. You really enjoyed your trip to Grandma's, didn't you?"
- The mother assumes meaning in what the child is uttering, in keeping with what is going on at the time, and sometimes expresses what she thinks the child is feeling. This is because she believes the child has the *intention* to mean something!

It was also found that some mothers 'fine-tuned' their speech to match the *changing level of competence* of their toddlers. As the child's command of language advanced, the mother used ever more complex language and repeated and rephrased less and less of what the child said.

However, keep in mind that the ways adults respond to their infants' early speech and relate to the baby socially are shaped by the adult's cultural beliefs about babies and their abilities. We can see this point of view reflected in the Kaluli case study below.

In various groups, what the infant utters is given cultural meanings that are responded to in culturally significant ways. The responses of the adults shape the infant's behaviour towards what is acceptable and relevant in that culture. It is important to remember this, because it warns us against imagining that the way a family in one culture responds to its infant members will be the way other families respond to infants and young children. Also, the *reasons* why people respond to their infants and young children in certain ways, are the result of beliefs about young children and their capabilities that in turn are shaped by their cultural beliefs and values, as we can see from the study of the Kaluli children.

9. Processes of socialisation: A case study of Kaluli children and their carers

The process of learning how to belong to a social group is known as the *socialisation* process. And learning to be socially competent in one's own society, that is, learning how to be and behave, to value and believe as do other members of the group, is inextricably tied up with language learning. Further, becoming a language user (which is one way of acting socially), is constructed by one's culture. Children become members of their own social group through a process that is shaped largely by and through language. It seems that one major concern of adults of any group is to make sure that the children they are raising are able to demonstrate and understand behaviours that are appropriate in each social situation important to the culture.

As we have noted, every society, in PNG and elsewhere, has ways of explaining how children develop as competent language users. These explanations are grounded in the way the group is socially organised, and its particular values, beliefs and attitudes toward what it means to be a socially competent person in that cultural group. Thus different cultural groups have different ways of organising the care of babies and young children, and firmly-held beliefs about their reasons for doing so. Below is one case study of a group in PNG and information about how they effectively use language – everyday talk – to socialise their children into the ways of the group.

The Kaluli people live in the southern highlands of Papua New Guinea. They are subsistence farmers who hunt in the mountain forests and fish in the streams. Two or more extended families live in one house, although the traditional long-house is also maintained. Sometimes, up to 20 members of an extended group live together.

Kaluli people think of and use talk as a means of control over others, manipulation of others, expression, assertion and appeal. Talk gets members of the Kaluli social group what they want, need or feel that someone owes them. A person who is a highly competent and effective talker is regarded as being also very highly socially competent and thus highly respected. So, learning how to talk and become independent is a major goal of adults in socialising the young Kaluli child.

In Kaluli families, the mother has the main responsibility for looking after the baby. Mothers do not leave their babies alone when they are awake or asleep, or in the care of someone else. When the mother is gardening, fetching firewood or sitting talking to other people, the baby sleeps in the bilum next to the mother, or hanging from her head. Kaluli mothers are responsive to their babies' physical needs, offering them the breast when they cry. But they do not talk with them about how they feel. This is consistent with their belief that a person cannot tell how another person is thinking or feeling. Once the child can crawl and walk, older siblings may be given some responsibility for caring for them, but these siblings are supervised by the mother. As the babies get older, different family members share responsibility for caring for them, so babies are surrounded by and immersed in language as they are carried around by older siblings or other family members.

Different cultural groups have different ideas about when language begins and how children become speakers of their language. Kaluli families, for example, describe their babies as helpless, 'soft' and 'having no understanding'. They take care of the babies because they 'feel sorry for them'. Because mothers believe their babies 'have no understanding', they never treat them as conversational partners, that is, they never talk directly to very young children. They greet them and call them by name, but that is all. Nor do mothers and infants gaze into each other's eyes in the way that some Australian mothers and their babies do. This is because, as adults, Kaluli people do not look directly at one another when talking. So even very young babies are having modelled for them the acceptable social behaviours of adults of their group when interacting.

At about six months of age, Kaluli mothers hold their babies facing out toward others, who can then greet the baby. The mother uses a 'baby-talk' register, a high-pitched nasalised voice to answer 'for' the baby, modelling the response the baby ought to give. This is not for the baby's benefit, for babies 'have no understanding' as noted above. Therefore they cannot be expected to speak. Rather, the mother's speech is for the person who has spoken to the baby, perhaps an older brother or sister. It seems that the mother does this in order to create a relationship between the two children. By this age, the baby is entering the babbling stage, and Kaluli adults recognise this stage, calling it *dabedan*'. However, they do not consider that the baby is trying to talk to them. Further, they consider that it has no relationship to the language that the child eventually learns to speak.

As well, Kaluli mothers do not simplify their language for the baby in any way, but use well-formed sentences that are appropriate for older children.

In taking this speaker role for the baby, she does for the baby what it cannot do for itself, that is, appear to act in a controlled and competent way with language. In this way she encourages others of her group to interact with the baby so that they accept the baby as a member of their social group. Of course, babies hear lots of language going on

around them all the time, so they are immersed in rich and varied, well formed language used by adults and other children for a range of purposes.

It is interesting to note that Kaluli mothers have no expectations that their babies and young children can understand any talk that is addressed to them. They 'have no understanding' – therefore, how could they use language meaningfully? Up until the child is 18 months of age, there is very little talk exchanged between mother and baby, or other speakers and the baby.

An important milestone for Kaluli babies is when they can use the two words 'mother' and 'breast'. When these two words are used, the child is recognised as a speaker. This generally occurs at the beginning of the second year of life (12-16 months). After that, adults begin to 'show the child how to speak'. The adult (usually the mother) provides a spoken model for what the child needs to say, followed by: "say like that".

For example, if a child does not want to play with an older sibling, the mother will talk to the older child, but say what the younger child might say. That is, she takes the baby's part:

" 'I am unwilling.' Say like that."

If an older child takes something from the baby, the mother will take the baby's part, but address the older child for the younger one, saying,

" 'Is it yours?' Say like that."

The Kaluli refer to the process of a child's development, including language development, as a 'hardening' process. As part of this 'hardening' process, the mother does not simplify her language so the young child can understand. Rather, she uses talk that is well formed and appropriate for the older child-speaker. In this way, of course, she provides well-formed utterances for the young child to hear and emulate. At the same time, she encourages the older child to relate well to the baby. This behaviour is consistent with the Kaluli high opinion of cooperative behaviour, strong relationships and effective speakers. So we can see from these examples that language constructs culture as culture constructs language.

Because Kaluli people highly value competent and independent speakers, they correct young children's utterances that do not conform to adult speech. In this way, using adult language, mothers direct their young children, teaching them what to say so that they in turn can become competent speakers, and participants in their social group.

 **3.2 Activity 7**

Answer questions from the reading

- *Would you say that Kaluli babies are ‘immersed in’ well-formed language from birth? Justify your answer.*
 - *What are some of the main purposes of talk in Kaluli society?*
 - *Why do Kaluli mothers and other adults not hold conversations with their infants?*
 - *Do Kaluli mothers use a baby-talk register? Give evidence for your response.*
 - *Is the baby-talk register they use, the same as or similar to that for middle-class Australian mothers? Mention some similarities/differences.*
 - *Why doesn’t the Kaluli mother simplify talk to the baby?*
 - *When is the baby considered to be speaking the Kaluli language?*
 - *What is the Kaluli baby’s ‘hardening’ process?*
 - *Do Kaluli adults correct young children’s speech errors? Why/Why not?*
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 **3.2 Activity 8**

Think about and answer these questions in relation to your own cultural group. Discuss your answers with your peers.

- *What does your primary social group (family, clan) believe about very young babies and children as conversationalists?*
 - *Do caregivers talk with the baby/young child, and expect a response? At what age?*
 - *What kind of conversations do they have with babies and young children?*
 - *What kind of response or reply do they expect?*
 - *At what age do they expect young children to be able to answer them?*
 - *How much attention is paid by the adult to correct pronunciation and/or grammar, i.e. do adults correct the young child’s mistakes?*
 - *If they correct the child, what reasons do they give for doing so?*
 - *What topics do they talk about with young children?*
 - *What is the significance of the first birthday (bondei) of a baby in P.N.G. societies?*
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10. What of children who are bilingual?

"Children learn to do what others demonstrate for them"

Emmitt and Pollock, p.173.

Lightbown and Spada (p. 3) suggest that many children in the world hear and use more than one language in early childhood. In fact, there is a lot of research that focuses on the ability of young children to learn more than one language in their earliest years.

From this research, we learn that where these young children are in contact with both languages in a variety of settings, there is every reason to expect that they will develop both their languages at a rate and in the same way as children who speak only one language from birth.

Some researchers working in the field of early childhood bilingualism found some results that seemed to show that children who were learning more than one language in their childhood years were slower in their cognitive development. Further, that they developed both their languages more slowly than children who only spoke one language in their earliest years.

However, we can now see more clearly that this is not completely accurate. Where problems may arise is when a child is cut off from the first language and spends most of the day in a language over which he or she has very little control. This happens sometimes in schooling situations. We will be introduced to the terms 'subtractive' and 'additive' bilingualism and 'submersion' and 'immersion' in the next Module.

3.2 Activity 8

Discuss the following questions

- *In your experience, what are some possible situations in which children in PNG become bi- and multilingual? (Refer back to Unit 2, Module 1 Language Families)*
 - *In situations where very young children are learning two or more languages at the same time, which is their first language?*
 - *Do speakers of more than one language use each language in exactly the same way as the other? How do children who speak more than one language, know when to use each one?*
 - *What are some possible differences in the ways they use their different languages?*
 - *Some children in PNG learn more than one language as a first language. What are the situations where this might happen?*
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11. Is learning a second language like learning a first language?

3.2 Activity 9

Working in a small group discuss the following questions

- *What does it mean to learn another language? What does a learner need to know to speak another language well?*
- *In what ways is learning a second language like learning a first language?*
- *Are some languages easier to learn than other languages? Give examples to support your answer.*
- *A person learning a second language has already learned a first language first. What is the significance of this statement?*
- *How do people who speak more than one language, know when to use each one?*
- *Do speakers of more than one language use each language in exactly the same way as the other? (i.e. when, where, why)*
- *What are some possible differences in the use of their different languages?*

Learning a second language is both similar to and different from learning a first language. Think about some of these differences.

- Learners are better informed about language and how it works the second time around; they know what language can do for them; they *expect* to be able to *do things* with language, and to have an effect on the people they are speaking to.
- They may be older when learning the second language, especially if they are learning it in school.
- A significant difference between learning a first language and learning a second language is whether the second language is being learned inside the classroom or under natural conditions in the community. We will examine some of these issues in the next Module.

Why, then, do children who come to school speaking one language have so much difficulty in learning the second language, generally the language of the classroom? This question will be developed in the Unit (Language as Social Practice) Module 3 Language at Home and at School.

Children (or adults) learning a second language (L 2) are learning to participate in, and to become co-members of, another social/cultural group.

Learning to participate in another language/cultural group involves developing all the linguistic abilities, social skills, knowledge and competence in the new language that enables them to *be* a member of the social group that owns the new language the children are learning.

They are developing all the linguistic and social skills, competences and knowledge in the new language that they already know in the L1.

Module summary

Learning language statements

- learning to talk means becoming a social being and being able to take one's place in one's cultural group
- language learners act as scientists who learn the rules of language, even when quite immature cognitively
- different theories have been used to explain young children's language learning
- interaction with significant others is the most influential factor in children's language development
- children still have much to learn about language and language use when they come to school
- second language learning involves many processes and strategies similar to first language learning.

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Appendix 1: Halliday's Functions of Child Language

INSTRUMENTAL	the 'I want' function, by means of which the child satisfies its material needs
REGULATORY	the 'do that' function, by means of which the child regulates the behaviour of others
INTERACTIONAL	the 'me and you' function, by means of which the child interacts with others
PERSONAL	the 'here I come' function, by means of which the child expresses its own uniqueness
HEURISTIC	the 'tell me why' function, by means of which the child learns about and explores the environment
IMAGINATIVE	the 'let's pretend' function, whereby the child creates an environment of its own
INFORMATIVE	the 'I've got something to tell you' function of language, as a means of conveying information. This function appears much later than the others, probably around the child's second birthday