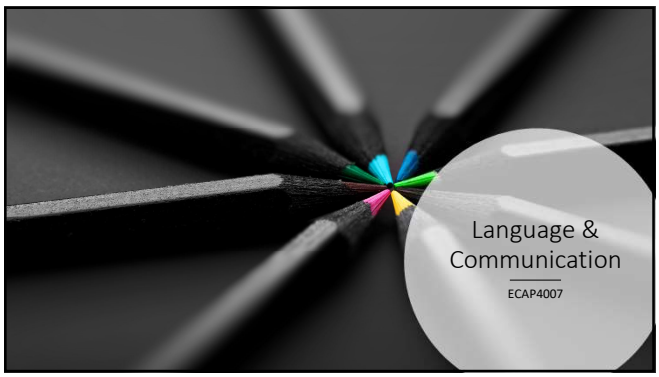

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TERMS

- **Communication**: the exchange of information or ideas.
- **Language:** a symbol system with rules that govern the use of the symbols.
- **Speech**: the production of vocal sound patterns.

2

The Importance of Language Development

- Language skills are related to academic performance.
- Language delays or disorders may be the earliest indicator of other problems.
- Most young children with disabilities have a need for intervention in the area of speech or language.
- Preschool environment offers (almost) continuous language learning opportunities.

3

Human Language

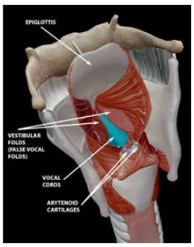
Complex communicative system.

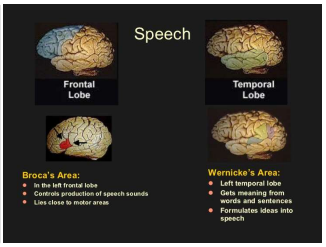
Yet infants typically master language with surprising ease.

How is this possible?

4

Biologically Prepared for Language…





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Biologically Prepared for Language…

- Speech sounds through the first months (cooing and babbling).
- Experiment with sounds.
- Innate disposition.

6

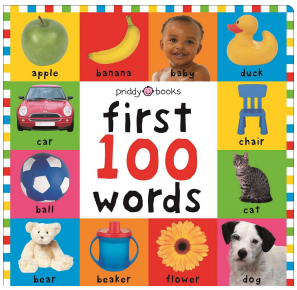
Shared Attention

- 9 months - *sharing attention.*
- Looking where the other looks, pointing to draw the other's attention
- Vital to the discovery of word meanings.
  E.g., I point at a .....; you say "banana". I can learn the word banana, and its meaning.

7

Words

- Word meanings are discovered long before the baby produces words.
- The first word is typically produced at 10 to 15 months.
- 18 months - vocabulary takes off
- End of infancy - typically know hundreds, or even thousands of words.
- We go on learning new words throughout life, albeit more slowly (e.g., COVID-19)



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Theories of Language Development

Studies of language are dominated by two approaches:

- Learning theory – Skinner (1957); Bandura (1989)
- Nativist theory – Chomsky (1959)

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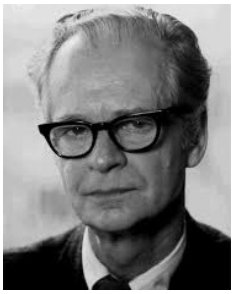

Learning Theory

Skinner (1957)

- Language is acquired through operant conditioning.
- Children gradually begin to use only the words that have been reinforced.
- Children chain together words to produce grammatically correct speech.

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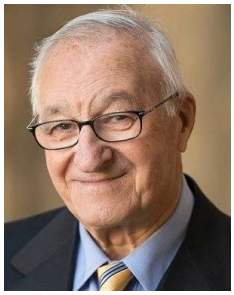
Learning Theory

Bandura (1989)

- Children's learning takes place through imitation (observational learning).
- Through reinforcement and generalization the child will apply their learning to new situations.



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Nativist Theory

Chomsky (1959)

- Language is the product of unlearned, biologically-based internal mental structure.
- Language must be innately specified – that is some parts of our language are a part of our biological heritage.

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Nativist Theory

Shares three main elements:

- Grammatical concepts are common to all languages (so are innate).
- Children are biologically predisposed to learning language.
- Children come to acquire language with a set of innate hypotheses that guide attempts to abstract the principles governing their language

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Nativist Theory

Structures

- Language Acquisition Device - Chomsky (1968)
- Parameter setting
- Hoff-Ginsburg (1997) - there is a 'Critical Period'.

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Interactionist theories recognize that language is acquired as a result of biological and social factors

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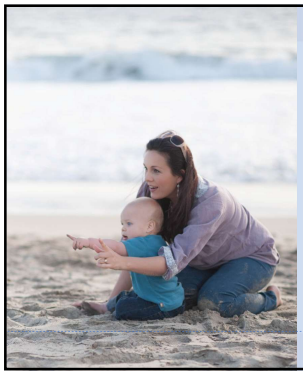

Gestures, such as pointing, are important preverbal methods of communication.

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