

Stages of Language Development

What is a Stage?

Plateaus, e.g. “one word stage” 1;0 to 1;6

Transitions, e.g. “two word stage” 1;6

Accelerations, e.g. “word spurt” 1;6

Co-occurrences, e.g. “telegraphic stage” 2;0

Rules, e.g. “overregularization stage” ‘foots’ instead of ‘feet’

Conclusion: Researchers have used the term ‘stage’ in many different ways

Ways to Define Stages

Age; Milestones; Mean length of utterances (MLU)

Stage Models

Diary Studies: William Stern (1924)

Large Sample Studies: Margaret Nice (1925)

Longitudinal Studies: Roger Brown (1973)

1. Prelinguistic Stage 0;0 to 1;0

Onset of speech perception

Cooing in first months

Onset of Babbling around 0;6

Prepares the child to understand and acquire words

2. Single Word Stage 1;0-1;6

Onset of words around 1;0

Mostly object-like words initially

Holophrases: single words with meaning of a sentence

Slow acquisition of approximately 50 words

3. Early Sentence Stage 1;6 to 2;0

Word Spurt: sudden increase in word acquisition

Onset of multiword utterances, e.g. “mommy sock”

Telegraphic stage

Stages of vocabulary: substance > action > relation-attribute

4. Short Sentence Stage 2;0-2;6

Onset of grammatical development

Onset of inflections, e.g. plural, past tense

Onset of grammatical structure, e.g. pronouns, prepositions, auxiliaries

Stable ratio (Nice)

5. Complete Sentence Stage 2;6-6;0

Advanced grammatical development

Onset of subordinate clauses, e.g. relative clauses, complement clauses, adverbial clauses

Completion of basic grammar by 6;0

6. School Age 6;0 -
 Infrequent complex aspects of grammar
 Reading & writing
 Expansion of constructions through reformulations
 Reformulation: repeating meaning with a change in structure

Brown's Stages

Brown, Roger (1973) *A first language*.
 Study of Adam, Eve, Sarah
 Longitudinal visits every two weeks for one hour
 Data on CHILDES database
 Based on MLU in morphemes
 e.g. 'dogs coming in' = 'dog/s come/ing in' 3 words vs 5 morphemes
 Each stage has: 1. Range of MLU values; 2. Midpoint; 3. Upper Bound

Stage	Range	Midpoint	UB
I early	1.0 to 1.49		
I late	1.5 to 1.99	1.75	5
II	2.0 to 2.49	2.25	7
III	2.5 to 2.99	2.75	9
IV	3.0 to 3.99	3.50	11
V	4.0 and up	4	13

I: Semantic roles, e.g. "actor + action"
 II: Modulation of meaning: 14 grammatical morphemes
 III: Modalities of the simple sentence: auxiliary acquisition
 IV: Embedding sentences
 V: Coordination and propositional relations

Purpose of Stages

Description: identify something that is changing, e.g. word spurt
 Explanation: give and defend a reason for the change
 Example: "word spurt" at 1;6
 Descriptive stage: measure rate of word learning
 Explanatory stage: reason for change
 1. Cognitive advance with symbols
 2. Phonological advance with sounds

Summary

Traditional stages
 Brown's stages based on MLU
 Mostly descriptive stages
 Goal is to expand knowledge of explanatory stages