History of Child Language Studies

Three Major Periods
Diary Studies (1876 to 1926)
Large Sample Studies (1926 to 1957)
Longitudinal and Experimental Studies (1957 to Present)

Diary Studies
1. Method: Parent Observer; Inductive; Unsystematic; Atheoretical
2. Major Studies: Taine 1877; Darwin 1877; Stern & Stern 1907 Der Kindersprache; Pedagogical Seminary (G. Stanley Hall); Leopold, 4 vols, 1939 to 1949 on daughter Hildegard
3. Theoretical Orientation : Nativist, if any (e.g. Taine, 1877)
4. Assessment:
BAD because unsystematic, biased
GOOD: rich data, first insights to how children acquire language
Example from Piaget on meaning of “bowwow”; Sample transcripts

Large Sample Studies
1. Method: Large numbers of subjects; Cross-sectional; Systematic; Small samples per child; Quantitative analysis
2. Major Studies: Madorah Smith (Iowa); Dorothea McCarthy & Mildred Templin (Minnesota); Templin (1957) 480 children, 3;0 – 8;0 Vocabulary, MLU, Speech Sound
3. Theoretical Orientation
Behaviorist, if any (e.g. Bloomfield, 1933)
Child vocalizes [da]; Child imitates words will similar sounds, e.g. “doll”;
Child associates sound to context
4. Assessment
BAD: linguistically naïve; grouped data; superficial; atheoretical
GOOD: norms; extensive group data; measurement
Example from Templin: mean length of utterance

Longitudinal & Experimental Studies
1. Method: 3 children; Regular longitudinal visits; Audio recorded
Transcribed: handwritten in early studies; now entered into computer files
3. Theoretical Orientation
Child Language: data oriented, lean interpretations; constructionist
Language Acquisition: theory oriented, rich interpretations; maturationist
How do children learn? Innate knowledge; Linguistic input; Correction
Example from Braine on “other one spoon”
4. Assessment: New data (CHILDES database); Focus on theory
Split of field into CL vs. LA