



A First Language: The Early Stages

By Roger Brown

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A First Language: The Early Stages By Roger Brown

For many years, Roger Brown and his colleagues have studied the developing language of pre-school children--the language that ultimately will permit them to understand themselves and the world around them. This longitudinal research project records the conversational performances of three children, studying both semantic and grammatical aspects of their language development.

These core findings are related to recent work in psychology and linguistics--and especially to studies of the acquisition of languages other than English, including Finnish, German, Korean, and Samoan. Roger Brown has written the most exhaustive and searching analysis yet undertaken of the early stages of grammatical constructions and the meanings they convey.

The five stages of linguistic development Brown establishes are measured not by chronological age--since children vary greatly in the speed at which their speech develops--but by mean length of utterance. This volume treats the first two stages.

Stage I is the threshold of syntax, when children begin to combine words to make sentences. These sentences, Brown shows, are always limited to the same small set of semantic relations: nomination, recurrence, disappearance, attribution, possession, agency, and a few others.

Stage II is concerned with the modulations of basic structural meanings--modulations for number, time, aspect, specificity--through the gradual acquisition of grammatical morphemes such as inflections, prepositions, articles, and case markers. Fourteen morphemes are studied in depth and it is shown that the order of their acquisition is almost identical across children and is predicted by their relative semantic and grammatical complexity.

It is, ultimately, the intent of this work to focus on the nature and development of knowledge: knowledge concerning grammar and the meanings coded by grammar; knowledge inferred from performance, from sentences and the settings in which they are spoken, and from signs of comprehension or incomprehension of sentences.

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Editorial Review

Review

A unique and impressive book in terms of both content and style. It is a scholarly work, part history, part review, but more than just a chronological or even critical survey of the research and theories of a particular group of people during a particular period of time. Brown discusses the major issues in depth and presents new analyses of the available naturalistic data. He questions each interpretation but always remains close to the data when deciding the adequacies of any particular characterization. (*Language Learning*)

A fascinating record...Linguistic and behavioral description has never been accomplished so meaningfully. (*Journal of Communications*)

An important landmark that should serve as an exciting introduction to the field, as well as a model for students on how to do rewarding exploratory research...A splendid source book for future students and researchers. (*American Scientist*)

About the Author

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Rouzbeh Yassini is the founder and CEO of YAS Broadband Ventures LLC of Andover, Massachusetts, a venture capital firm that provides capital financing, consulting services, and academic insight into the broadband industry. In 1990, he founded LANcity, which introduced the first high-speed residential communications modem that was designed to integrate with cable television networks. LANcity's successful introduction spawned a new consumer electronics technology category known as the cable modem, which is used today in millions of households worldwide. He has gained an international reputation as a broadband visionary and has established cable modem technical standards through his support of industry initiatives at Cable Television Laboratories, Inc. In 1998, CED Magazine named Rouzbeh Yassini its Man of the Year, recognizing his contributions to the industry. He has been quoted in numerous business and trade periodicals and newspapers and is a frequent speaker at international conferences devoted to digital services and the broadband infrastructure.

About the contributors

Stewart Schley is a writer and publishing executive with more than 21 years of experience. He has written and edited numerous business magazines and telecommunications industry reference books.

Roger Brown is the editorial director of Reed Business Information's Telecom Group and a 17-year-veteran journalist in business and technology.

Leslie Ellis is a writer and author who has covered cable television technology and industry economics since 1987.

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