Jacob Monash
Language Acquisition Project

Introduction

The toddler I chose to observe for my language acquisition study was named

Aria Ottinger. She was born on July 21st, 2012, making her 2 years and 3 months

old at the time I spent time with her on Friday, October 10th. She is the youngest

member of my extended family, as she is my cousin Jessi's first child. I had two

sessions with her on the same day. The first lasted roughly forty minutes when she

stopped by my house in St. Louis as her mother ran errands. My sister Molly and

my mom watched her and played with various toys. The second was later that night

when she went out to a restaurant with my mom, my sister and brother, my

grandma, and my other cousin and her child, Aria's older cousin Alice. She is mostly

a quiet kid, and took a while to warm up to speaking to me, although this may

have been more because I'm away from her at college and she is not used to my

company, or because it was early in the morning when we began talking. I also

sometimes had difficulties understanding the words she was saying to me. After a

while, though, and especially by the time dinner came around, she began speaking

more to me and was excitedly laughing and telling really imaginative stories.

Many of her utterance were over two words long, meaning she had already

passed both the one-word and two-word thresholds in her acquisition process. That

being said, I believe she is in the telegraphic stage of language acquisition, but not

very far in to it. The following page tries to summarize how she spoke to me and

provides both her utterances and the phonetic transcriptions of how she said them.

Jacob Monash
Language Acquisition Project

Data

	Utterance in IPA	Meaning	Context
1.	ay ple kIk ba	I play kick ball.	
2.	fri fays sɛzɛn	Three/ Five/ Seven	When asked to count one through ten, these were the numbers she could not quite pronounce.
3.	wɛd	Red	
4.	ə wɛcəm	You're welcome.	She was receiving food.
5.	wən səm dæ	Want some that.	
6.	arwia ple pəl	Aria play pull.	We played tug-of war.
7.	ni dæ	Need that.	She pointed at a box of toys we had in my house.
8.	may su fa daw	My shoe fall down.	
9.	may sæI. aym həŋgi	My salad. I'm hungry.	
10.	məŋgə	Grandma.	
11.	ay ni dæ lay	I need that light.	She pointed at a chandelier that she thought was pretty.
12.	wa u dun	What you doing?	
13.	ay gɛ ay kwim	I get ice cream?	
14.	braki	Broccoli	This was an appetizer at the restaurant.
15.	mai	Molly	My sister hung out with us as well.
16.	ple kæts	Play catch.	She tossed a ball at me and wanted us to toss it back and forth.
17.	no	No.	Refusal.
18.	no brəs	No brush.	She hated getting her hair brushed.
19.	arwia sI məŋgə	Aria sit grandma.	She wanted to be put into her grandma's lap to be held at dinner.
20.	Isi bIi sayr	Itsy bity spider	When we asked her to sing this, she very excitedly rushed through it.
21.	jekəb	Jacob	We asked her to pronounce my name.

Jacob Monash
Language Acquisition Project

Discussion

The reason I believe her to be in the telegraphic stage of language acquisition was because she would often speak in sentences three or four words long. These sentences often only included a noun and a verb, with the occasional preposition, article, or direct object.

One thing I noticed was her stage of acquiring negatives. She hardly ever spoke in negatives. The few times she used the word "no," as seen in #17 above, she used it alone to simply refuse a food for lunch or a game for us to play. That is to say if she said anything at all, instead of just shrugging or turning away. She did, however, use "no" in a sentence with other words one time when my sister tried to brush her hair. This rare occurrence happened because she seemed to absolutely hate getting her hair brushed. She cried as a result. I wonder if she forced an extension of her use of negatives in hopes that vocalizing it would it would stress her point even more to her older family. Of course, my time observing her speech was too limited to fully draw this conclusion. Judging by her very limited use of negative sentences, I would assume she is in the very beginning of the first stage of acquiring the rules for them.

Aria's speech was typical of some of the phonetic trends we discussed in class. She frequently reduced consonant clusters in her words. This is best seen when she said "doing" in #12, "Molly" in number 15, and "light" in number 11. Perhaps her most frequent phonetic faux pas was her deletion of final consonants. This most often occurred when saying words ending in alveolar stops, such as "that" in

numbers 5 and 7; "want" in number 5; "light" in number 11; "sit" in number 19; and "salad" in number 9. Her word for grandma, [məŋgə], is a prime example of reduplication of consonants. Rather than pronouncing each consonant, Aria seemed to reduplicate the nasal sound of the [m] throughout the word and eventually place the [g] back in at the end. The [ə] also gets reduplicated in the word. As for the order in which she acquired her use of phonemes, Aria was in some instances able to use more difficult sounds like the [j] and the [z], like when she said my name and "seven," respectively; however, she struggled to use the [l] sound in words like "Molly" in number 15, "welcome" in number 4, and "salad" in number 9. Other than these exceptions, her acquisition of phonemes seemed typical.

I did not observe her using many plurals or inflections. Most of her speech was done with statements in the present tense. These statements worked as commands, requests, and questions. There was one point at which she utilized the "-ing" inflection to express a question in the present progressive tense. This example, seen in number 12, makes me assume that the "-ing" rule is new to her repertoire, and she will soon begin to overgeneralize the rule.

As far as semantics went, I was disappointed to not observe any overextensions of meaning. From what I saw of her, her semantic library seemed fairly comprehensive for a toddler. This could simply be due to my limited observation of her.

My mother made it a point to let me know that Aria's mother speaks to the child as an adult without caretaker speech. However, Aria spends a large amount of time with other adults, like my mother and my grandma, who frequently use shorter sentences and very expressive pitch changes while talking to her. If anything, I think the use of caretaker speech encourages Aria to be responsive and excited. It did not change her speaking patterns and she did not respond with change when corrected.

Aria used gestures frequently when speaking. At one point, she made up a silly, nonsensical story about a monster and waved her hands repeatedly around in circles to show her excitement about the story. When she thought something was funny, she would laugh and then either place her palm to her forehead or clap repeatedly on her legs. She also pointed very often to emphasize what she was talking about at the time. Once I had her talking, her arms and hands did not stop moving along to add context and emotion to her statements.

Conclusion

As stated previously, I believe Aria is in the beginning of the telegraphic stage of language acquisition. She uses short sentences that often are longer than two words to convey her thoughts. She was not following 100% the prescribed path to language acquisition; her semantic abilities and some of her available phonemes surpassed my expectations. I did, however, anticipate more utilizations of negatives and inflections.

Studying Aria after learning the processes of language acquisition has put her in a new light for me. I have loved her since she was born, but watching her acquire language before my eyes astounded me. Seeing what I have been leaning in class brought appreciation the process a child goes through just to learn to communicate. It almost made me wish I had her brain so I could actually learn Spanish in the classes I am taking.

As I go home to St. Louis in the future for various holidays, I hope I get the chance to watch as her speech develops further. I want to see her go through the stages of using negative sentences, and I would like to see her overgeneralize

inflectional rules as she gains a grasp on how to use them. These processes are

exciting and will soon be integral to building her entire grasp of language's

complexity.