

Worksheet 6.1: Language Acquisition

Exercise 1: Watch Patricia Kuhl's TED Talk¹ and answer the questions below.

1. What is required to protect an endangered language from extinction?
2. A language cannot be acquired with native competence beyond a certain age. What do we call the period in which the acquisition of certain aspects of language must take place?
3. True or False: The head-turn task is used as an experimental technique to examine the child's ability to comprehend language.
4. At what age is the child's linguistic ability restricted to discriminating only the sounds of their native language?
5. True or False: 'Culture-bound listeners' refers to children's ability to discriminate all sounds in all languages.
6. What are the two requirements for infants to learn the phonemes of their native language?
7. During the critical period, babies can absorb the phonemes of a new language (i.e. they take statistics on the language). How was this tested?
8. In what way is the social brain involved in the process of language acquisition?

¹ https://www.ted.com/talks/patricia_kuhl_the_linguistic_genius_of_babies



Exercise 2:

Based on what you have learned about First Language Acquisition, indicate whether the following statements are **True** or **False**:

	True	False
Children learn a language by storing all the words and all the sentences in memory.		
Children's language is creative which means they can produce sentences they have never heard before.		
Children learn language by imitating the speech they hear.		
Imitation is involved to some degree in First Language Acquisition.		
Children always pay attention to parents' corrections.		
Children have to be taught the grammatical rules of their first language.		
Grammar has to be acquired within a critical period in order to reach native-like fluency.		
Children know more about language than they can hear from the input (i.e. the language that surrounds them). This argument for the innateness of language is called the poverty of the stimulus.		
Because language is innate, you learn it automatically, even if you are not exposed to it during childhood.		
Language acquisition takes place along a predetermined path.		

Solutions to Worksheet 6.1

1. What is required to protect an endangered language from extinction?
You need to speak to babies. (Babies need to learn the endangered language as a native language so that they can pass it on to the next generation)
2. A language cannot be acquired with native competence beyond a certain age. What do we call the period in which the acquisition of certain aspects of language must take place?
Critical Period
3. True or False: The head-turn task is used as an experimental technique to examine the child's ability to comprehend language.
True
4. At what age is the child's linguistic ability restricted to discriminating only the sounds of their native language?
10 – 12 months
5. True or False: 'Culture-bound listeners' refers to children's ability to discriminate all phonemes in all languages.
False: Describing infants as 'citizens of the world' means that they have the ability to distinguish all sounds in all languages. Once the critical period has passed, children become 'culture-bound listeners' – this means that they can discriminate only the phonemes of the language they are surrounded to.
6. What are the two requirements for infants to learn the phonemes of their native language?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Listen intently 2. Taking statistics
7. During the critical period, babies can absorb the phonemes of a new language (i.e. they take statistics on the language). How was this tested?
American babies were exposed to a person interacting with them in Mandarin for 10 sessions.
8. In what way is the social brain involved in the process of language acquisition?
It takes a human being for babies to take statistics (Babies need to interact with people. It is not sufficient to watch TV)

Solution Exercise 2:

	True	False
Children learn a language by storing all the words and all the sentences in memory.		√
Children's language is creative which means they can produce sentences they never heard before.	√	
Children learn language by imitating the speech they hear.		√
Imitation is involved to some degree in First Language Acquisition.	√	
Children always pay attention to parents' corrections.		√
Children have to be taught the grammatical rules of their first language.		√
Grammar has to be acquired within a critical period in order to reach native-like fluency.	√	
Children know more about language than they can hear from the input (i.e. the language that surrounds them). This argument for the innateness of language is called the poverty of the stimulus.	√	
Because language is innate, you learn it automatically, even if you are not exposed to it during childhood.		√
Language acquisition takes place along a predetermined path.	√	