

# *two*

## *chapter two*

# **Communication Across the Life Span**

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### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

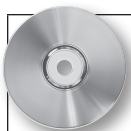
1. To learn about the major processes in communication.
2. To know the definition of language.
3. To understand the processes and systems that underlie speech and language development.
4. To differentiate between language form, content, and use.
5. To learn about important changes in language development that occur during four major periods of development: infancy, the preschool years, the school-age years, and adulthood.

This is a book about communication and the ways that it can be disrupted. **Communication** is any exchange of meaning between a sender and a receiver. This seemingly simple exchange is important because it is the primary means by which humans share their thoughts and feelings, express their identity, build relationships, pass on traditions, conduct business, teach, and learn. Some communication is intentional, as when you tell your friend about your course schedule. Some communication is unintentional, as when your friend interprets your facial expressions or your body language that indicate how you are feeling. Sometimes, a message that you intend to be understood in one way is actually understood differently. Such miscommunication can have negative consequences, such as when a friend takes an offhand comment or an e-mail message as a personal insult even though you did not intend it in that way.

Most of the time, meaning is exchanged via a code, called language. **Language** is best defined as a standardized set of symbols and the knowledge about how to combine those symbols into words, sentences, and texts to convey ideas and feelings. Let's consider the parts of that definition more carefully.

Language is composed of a set of symbols. This means that one thing (a combination of sounds, letters, or hand movements) represents or stands for something else (ideas, feelings, or objects). Groups of sounds, printed letters, or hand movements (as in the case of **American Sign Language**) do not have very much intrinsic meaning in and of themselves. For example, all speakers of English agree that the group of sounds, *t - r - ee*, spoken in succession, represents a tall object with a trunk and leaves. We may not all have exactly the same type of tree in our minds when we hear the three sounds *t - r - ee*, but nearly all speakers of English share the same general concept. This is because language is standardized. The speakers of any particular language share reasonably similar meanings for certain groups of sounds, letters, or hand movements.

Languages need more than just words. Many of our thoughts are so complex that we cannot express them adequately with single words; groups of words are needed. Another important aspect of language is the conventions for grouping words together. For there to be meaningful communication, speakers need to agree not only on word meanings, but also on meanings that are inherent in word order. For example, if I said, "Mary helped Billy." We would all agree that Mary was the helper and Billy was the person who was helped. That isn't the same thing as, "Billy helped Mary" even though



#### BOX 2-1 CD-ROM Summary

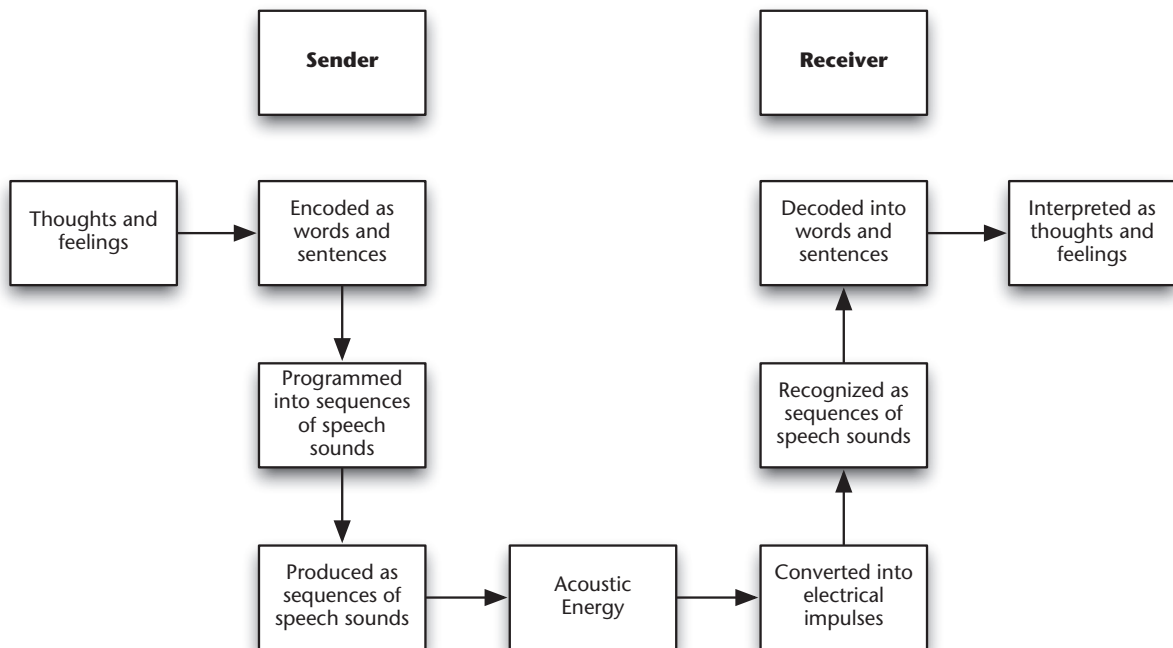
The CD-ROM that accompanies this book contains a folder named Chapter 02. Three movies are in this folder. The first movie (Ch.02.01) shows children of various ages telling a story. We refer to various segments of this movie to demonstrate changes in language development over time. The second and third movies (Ch.02.02 and Ch.02.03) show a 2-year-old boy playing with a graduate student in speech-language pathology. These segments illustrate preverbal and early verbal communication.

the words themselves did not change. Our knowledge of the word-order conventions of our language makes it possible for us to use word sequences to express precise ideas about our environment.

## THE PROCESS OF LANGUAGE PRODUCTION AND COMPREHENSION

Figure 2-1 depicts the primary processes that are involved in spoken language. In language production, senders encode their thoughts into some form of a language code. This code is usually spoken or written, but it can also be signed. In speech, which is the most common means of expressing language, the sounds, words, and sentences that express the speaker's thoughts are formed by sending commands to the muscles responsible for respiration (primarily the diaphragm), phonation (primarily the larynx), and articulation (primarily the tongue, lips, and jaw). Sequences of spoken sounds leave the oral cavity in the form of sound waves.

In listening and comprehension, the sound waves enter the receiver's ear, where they are turned into electrical impulses. These impulses are carried to the brain, where they are recognized as speech and then decoded into words and sentences. Listeners interpret the words and sentences based on their understanding of the meaning of the words in relationship to the other words that were spoken and the speaking context.



**Figure 2-1** A Basic Model of Speech Communication Processes

## THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF SPEECH

Speech production depends on two critical components: phonemes and syllables. The next section explains the roles that phonemes and syllables play in creating spoken words.

### Phonemes

Languages have two basic types of sounds: consonants and vowels. Think about the words *bee*, *key*, and *tea*. Each word ends with the same vowel, the long [ee] sound. They are spelled differently because, in English, sounds in words can be represented by many different letters. But, let's put spelling aside for the moment. In English, these are three words with different meanings because the first consonant in each one differs. The sounds /b/, /k/, and /t/ differ in the way they are produced, and that difference results in a change in meaning. Sounds of a language that cause changes in meaning are called **phonemes**. It is worth noting however, that not all changes in the way a sound is produced result in a change in meaning. The phoneme /l/ has several variants. For example, the "light" /l/ produced in a word such as *lip* is a little different from the "dark" /l/ produced in a word such as *dull*. These variants of a sound are called **allo-phones**. Try saying *light* with both a light and a dark /l/. It's still the same word even though the /l/ at the beginning is not produced quite the same way.

Consonants and vowels differ in their basic manner of production. Vowels are produced with no constriction in the vocal tract, whereas consonants are produced with a significant blockage in the vocal tract. The vowels of English, listed in Table 2-1, are classified by jaw height and placement of the tongue in the mouth. The tongue can move in the front-back dimension (represented across the top of the table) or in the high to low dimension (listed in the left-hand column of Table 2-1). Lip position is associated with the front-back dimension in English. Front vowels are produced with spread lips (i.e., feel how your lips are positioned when you say the word *eat*). Back vowels, such as the /u/ sound in *boot*, are produced with the lips rounded. English also makes use of diphthongs, which are two vowels produced in close proximity to one another. The difference is that the tongue is moving in diphthongs. Some diphthongs that are contrastive or phonemic in English are /ɔɪ/ (e.g., *boy*), /aʊ/ (e.g., *cow*), and /aɪ/ (e.g., *bye*).

The consonants of English are listed in Table 2-2. Notice in Tables 2-1 and 2-2 that many of the symbols for sounds correspond to the English alphabet. Some symbols look unfamiliar. These symbols are from the International Phonetic Alphabet. This alphabet is a special set of symbols that we use to represent the sounds of speech in phonetic transcription. This is useful because there are many written letters that correspond to more than one speech sound. For example the word *garage* begins and ends with two different sounds, even though they are both spelled with the letter *g*. If you look ahead to CD-ROM Box 2-3, you can see an example of phonetic transcription. We talk more about the speech samples themselves a little later.

English consonants are produced by altering the manner and place of articulation or by voicing. **Manner of articulation** refers to the different ways that speakers can block airflow through the oral cavity using different types of constrictions. For example, notice the difference between producing the sound /t/ as in *tea* and the sound /s/

**Table 2-1** The Vowels of English

	Front	Central	Back
High	i <i>key</i>		u <i>loot</i>
	ɪ <i>lip</i>		ʊ <i>look</i>
Mid	e <i>made</i>	ʌ, ə <i>mud</i>	o <i>boat</i>
	ɛ <i>been</i>	ɜ, ər <i>curd</i>	
Low	æ <i>mad</i>		
	a <i>hot</i>		ɔ <i>bought</i>

**Table 2-2** The Consonants of English

		Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	Voiceless	p <i>pea</i>			t <i>tea</i>		k <i>king</i>	
	Voiced	b <i>bee</i>			d <i>dig</i>		g <i>gap</i>	
Fricative	Voiceless		f <i>fig</i>	θ <i>thumb</i>	s <i>sea</i>	ʃ <i>shoe</i>		h <i>high</i>
	Voiced		v <i>vest</i>	ð <i>them</i>	z <i>zoo</i>	ʒ <i>garage</i>		
Affricate	Voiceless					tʃ <i>chew</i>		
	Voiced					dʒ <i>juice</i>		
Liquid	Central				r <i>rug</i>			
	Lateral				l <i>luck</i>			
Glide		w <i>wing</i>				j <i>you</i>		
Nasal		m <i>men</i>			n <i>nose</i>		ŋ <i>ring</i>	

as in *sea*. Different manners of blocking airflow lead to qualitatively different sounds. Another way of modifying speech sounds is to produce blockages at different places in the oral cavity. This is referred to as **place of articulation**. For example, the sound /p/ in *pea* is produced with the lips, and the sound /k/ in *key* is produced with the back of the tongue. Finally, consonants differ in **voicing**. They may be voiced or unvoiced. Voiced sounds are produced with vibration of the vocal folds (e.g., /v/) and voiceless sounds are produced with the vocal folds open (e.g., /f/).

Phonetic transcription of speech is useful when we study the speech production of young children or the speech of persons with phonological disorders. In both of these cases, speech patterns do not necessarily correspond directly to those of adult or mature speakers. By using the symbols from the International Phonetic Alphabet (Tables 2-1 and 2-2), clinicians and researchers can capture in writing precisely how

children produce sounds in words. This is helpful for maintaining records of the child's speech development and to compare child production to standard adult production.

### Syllables

Suppose that you are asked to read aloud an invented nonsense word such as “gigafiber.” Try reading this nonword aloud to yourself right now. How did you go about deciding how this word is to be pronounced? You probably divided the words into shorter chunks or segments. Most likely, you tried to say the word syllable by syllable. **Syllables** are units of speech that consist of consonants and vowels. Vowels are the central component or the nucleus around which the rest of the syllable is constructed. A syllable may consist of a single vowel (e.g., the *a* in *alone*), although syllables usually contain combinations of consonants and vowels. The most common and easy to produce combination is a consonant and a vowel (e.g., *ba*, *si*), but syllabic complexity can be increased by adding consonants before the vowel (e.g., *ri*, *tri*, *stri*) or after it (i.e., *am*, *amp*).

Change in pitch, stress, intensity, and duration of sounds in connected speech production is called **prosody**. Falling pitch and intensity are associated with statements, whereas rising pitch is associated with question forms. Stress patterns distinguish between the multiple meanings of some words. For example, in the sentence *The contrast is startling*, the word *contrast* is a noun, but in the sentence *The red and blue flowers contrast with each other*, it is a verb. The difference in stress pattern helps distinguish the two meanings.

## THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF LANGUAGE

Language is often characterized as having three interrelated components: content, form, and use (Bloom & Lahey, 1978). Content refers to the meaning of language, form refers to the structure of language, and use refers to the way speakers select different forms that best fit the communication context. Any sentence requires an interaction of all three components of language.

### Language Content

**Language content** is the component of language that relates to meaning. Speakers express ideas about objects and actions, as well as ideas about relationships such as possession or cause and effect. Sometimes, these meanings can be expressed by a single word. Other times, these meanings are expressed through groups of words. The linguistic representation of objects, ideas, feelings, events, as well as the relations between these phenomena, is called **semantics**.

Children develop a **lexicon**, which is a mental dictionary of words. Word learning is a lifelong process primarily because there are so many words that make up a language, but also because new words are being added all the time (think about all the computer-related vocabulary that has become part of our daily language during the past 10 years). What makes word learning even harder is that most words have multiple meanings. For example, the word *bark* can refer to something that a dog does or

the stuff on the outside of a tree trunk. Imagine how confusing the sentence *That tree has funny bark* might be to a young child who had only heard the word *bark* used with reference to the noise her dog made.

## Language Form

**Language form**, or the structure of language, involves three linguistic systems: phonology, morphology, and syntax. We introduced the concept of phonology when we discussed writing about the sounds of speech. **Phonology** is the study of the sounds we use to make words. For example, /b/, /r/, and /l/ are English language sounds. In Spanish, there are different sounds, such as the trilled /r/ sound, that do not occur in English. Recall that we said a phoneme was the smallest meaningful unit of speech. Take the words /fæn/, /mæn/, and /kæn/ (fan, man, and can). We know that the sounds /f/, /m/, and /k/ are phonemes in English because putting these different sounds in front of the root /æn/ results in a change in meaning.

**Morphology** has to do with the internal organization of words. A morpheme is the smallest grammatical unit that has meaning. The word *bird* is a morpheme. It cannot be divided into parts that have any meaning in and of themselves (such as “b” and “ird”). *Bird* is an example of a **free morpheme** because it can stand alone as a word. There are also **bound morphemes**, which are grammatical tags or markers in English. An example of a bound morpheme is the final -s in *birds*, which adds grammatical meaning. In this case, -s marks plurality, meaning that there is more than one bird. Other examples of bound morphemes include -ed (which marks past tense as in the sentence “He jumped over the wall.”) and -ing (which marks the present progressive tense as in the sentence “He is running.”). In English, most bound morphemes are placed on the ends of words. However, some are placed on the beginning of words. An example is *un-*, meaning “not” as in *uninteresting*. Some readers may think information about linguistics is uninteresting. However, professionals who assess and treat individuals with communication disorders need to know this information.

**Syntax** refers to the linguistic conventions for organizing word order. Basically, syntax is the formal term for grammar. In English, we say *blue ball*; in French the proper order is *balon bleu*, or “ball blue.” The meaning is the same, but the rules governing word order are different for the two languages. Sentences that are ungrammatical may still make sense. Imagine a young child who tells her mother, “Him holded baby doggie.” The sentence is ungrammatical because an object pronoun is used in place of the subject (*he*), the regular past tense marker is applied to the word *hold* that has an irregular form (*held*) for the past tense, and the child omitted an article (*the* or *a*) before the object noun phrase (*a baby doggie*). Even though this sentence is ungrammatical, we know exactly what the child meant.

## Language Use

Words are combined into sentences to express complex ideas. **Language use** concerns the goals of language and the means by which we choose between alternative combinations of words and sentences. There are sociolinguistic conventions, called **pragmatics**, that help us decide what to say to whom, how to say it, and when to say it. Imagine that

you are telling your friend about a movie you saw recently. You might say, “That had to be the most uninteresting screenplay I’ve ever seen,” or “That film was so dull I could hardly keep my eyes open,” or even “Talk about a boring movie.” We choose different sets of words that we believe will best communicate our meanings to the audience we are addressing.

Effective language requires an interaction of content (semantics), form (phonology, morphology, syntax), and use (pragmatics). Speakers think of something to say and the best words to say it (content) and put those words in sentences (form) that address their goal (use) given the nature of the speaking situation (use). Similarly, listeners interpret the words (content) and sentences (form) they hear with reference to what they already know about the language being spoken (content and form) and the situation they are in (use).

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPEECH AND LANGUAGE

By the time most children are 3 or 4 years old, they can integrate language content, form, and use to understand and produce basic messages. By the time they reach the age of 9 years, most children are capable of understanding and expressing quite complex messages. Communication ability continues to change into adulthood, where it plateaus around age 50. Late in life, communication skills often decline as a result of hearing loss and the loss of mental functions. Some of the basic milestones of speech and language development are listed in Table 2-3.

We describe some of the important milestones in communication development from infancy to very old age in the next section of this chapter. We refer to the period from 0 to 24 months as “from crying to short phrases.” We refer to the period from 2 to 5 years as “from early sentences to stories.” The school-age years start at kindergarten (age 5) and go through high school (age 18). Finally, we discuss language change during adulthood. We discuss important language characteristics related to content (semantics), form (phonology, morphology, syntax), and use (pragmatics) in each of the four developmental stages.

Knowledge of speech and language development is important to speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and deaf educators. To identify atypical development, you must know what is typical. To assist children and adults with communication disorders, you must be able to determine what their communication abilities are. These skills require a solid grounding in speech and language development.

### Individual Differences

It is important for you to understand that there is a fair amount of variation in the *rate* of communication development. That is, some children develop language faster than others do, and some adults’ language skills decline faster than others’ do. There is also some variation in the *way* language develops. Some children are risk-takers; they will try to say words that are difficult for them to produce even if the words are not pronounced correctly. Other children prefer not to produce words that may be difficult for them to say until they are sure they can say them correctly. Some children learn



**Table 2-3** Basic Milestones of Speech and Language Development and the Typical Age Range at Which They First Appear

Speech and Language Milestones	Age Range of First Appearance
Understands simple words ( <i>mommy, daddy, dog</i> )	6–8 months
Reduplicated babbling ( <i>ba-ba</i> )	6–8 months
Variegated babbling ( <i>ba-do-ke-ga-do</i> )	6–8 months
First word	10–14 months
Two-word utterances	16–20 months
First grammatical morphemes	1;10–2;2 years
Multiword sentences	2;2–2;6 years
Combinations of sentences that describe events	3;2–3;6 years
Understood by unfamiliar listeners (95% of consonants produced in adult-like manner)	3;10–4;2 years
Identifies beginning sounds in spoken words	5;0–5;8 years
Decodes words	6;0–6;6 years
Tells complex stories	8–10 years
Written stories are more complex than spoken stories	11–13 years
Combines information from multiple sources into research papers	14–15 years
Refines personal speaking and writing styles	15–20 years
Uses vocation-specific vocabulary	21–24 years
Consistent difficulty recalling names and content words	45–47 years

*Footnote:* Children's ages are represented by the convention years;months. So, 1;10 indicates the age, 1 year, 10 months.

lots of nouns (50 or more) before they start producing two-word utterances; other children learn and use social phrases (e.g., *thank you, see ya later, hi daddy*) some time before they have 50-word vocabularies. Finally, there is variation in communication style. Some children and adults are relatively reticent; they tend not to say a whole lot about anything. Other children and adults are quite gregarious; they tend to say too much about everything!

As a result it is difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint what is “normal.” Neither can we pinpoint what exactly happens in language development at a particular developmental age. Because there is so much individual variation, we talk about *typical* development instead of normal development, and we provide age ranges for the first appearance of the speech and language behaviors that we discuss. We celebrate diversity in language development and use, and we recognize that differences between

speakers make communication more interesting. However, we also know that some children have developmental difficulties that place them at significant risk for social, educational, and vocational difficulties later in life. The well-informed speech-language pathologist knows how to tell when language development is so far outside the typical range that it can result in negative social, educational, or vocational consequences.

## FROM CRYING TO SHORT PHRASES: AGES 0 TO 24 MONTHS

### Content

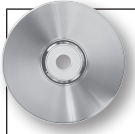
Children do not seem to understand different words until they are around 6 months of age. Then, they begin to wave “bye-bye” when they are encouraged to do so by their parents, or they may hold up their arms when their sister says, “How big is baby? Soo big!” By the end of their first year of life, infants usually understand about 20 different words. They start to say words other than “mama” and “dada” between the ages of 10 and 14 months, and their vocabulary can expand to 200 or more words by the time they reach 2 years of age. It is interesting that children often learn words that contain sounds that they have difficulty saying (Storkel, 2006).

Once children have built an adequate lexicon (a personal mental dictionary), they begin to combine words into two- and three-word utterances. This happens a little before or a little after they are 18 months of age. The ability to produce two-word utterances marks the child’s desire to express relationships between ideas, and it shows that children are learning about word order. For example, children will combine a modifier like “big” or “more” with nouns to create such utterances as “big dog” or “more cookie.” Many of their utterances describe relationships between agents (someone or something that causes an action), actions (the activities), objects (things that are acted upon), and locations (places). These combinations of meanings result in utterances like the following:

Frog go	(Agent + Action)
Frog pond	(Agent + Location)
Go back	(Action + Location)
Daddy shoe	(Agent + Object)

### Form (Phonology)

Even before they are born, young children are actively sorting out and grouping the sounds of the language they hear. In experiments, mothers have repeatedly read the same nursery rhyme aloud to their unborn children. At birth, these infants have been found to listen longer to the nursery rhyme read by their mothers than to a rhyme read by another woman (DeCasper, LeCanuet, Busnel, Granier-Deferre, & Maugeais, 1994; DeCasper & Spence, 1986). At birth, infants prefer to listen to speech than to other types of complex sounds (Vouloumanos & Werker, 2007). Also, newborns listen longer to the sound patterns of their own language than to those of another language (Juszyk, 1997). Thus, from as early as children are exposed to speech, they are beginning to process information about the speech and language patterns of their native language.



### BOX 2-2 Examples of Jargon and Early Words

CD-ROM segments Ch.02.02 and Ch.02.03 show a little boy, Ryan, playing with Meghan, who is a graduate student in speech-language pathology. Listen carefully to what Ryan says in segment Ch.02.02. Can you understand anything Ryan says? He sounds like he is talking, but he is not using any identifiable words in this segment. This is a good example of jargon. Sometimes Ryan uses sentence-ending intonation patterns. Toward the end of the segment, you'll hear Ryan say something that sounds a lot like a question. If you can figure out what the words are, you are a better transcriber than we are.

When you play segment Ch.02.03, you will hear Ryan say the word *cup* pretty clearly. The rest of his utterances are examples of babbling and jargon. Notice that his babbling sounds a lot like English. One longer utterance contains variegated babbling and ends with the word *cup*.

Speech is secondary to biological functions such as respiration and feeding. As infants gain control over these motor functions, speech begins to emerge. The earliest phase of speech development is called **babbling**, in which infants begin to produce a number of types of sounds such as growls, squeals, raspberries, and adult-like vowel sounds. As children gain greater independent control of the muscles that produce speech, they combine different consonants and vowels and string sets of different syllables together in a way that has a speech-like quality. Around the age of 7 months, infants start to use their voice to make syllable-like strings, a process called **canonical babbling**. In babbling they produce rhythmic syllables over and over (e.g., *bababa*), termed **reduplicated babbling**, as well as combining different syllables (e.g., *baw-abedo*), termed **variegated babbling**. Later, their babbling starts to take on adult-like intonation patterns. This type of speech is known as **expressive jargon**, which sounds like statements and questions with the exception that none of the strings of syllables are recognizable words. Children exhibit expressive jargon interspersed with real words until they are 2 years old.

As children approach their first birthday, they begin to use words. Early words contain the same sounds observed in the later stages of babbling. Common first words, such as *mama*, *dada*, or *papa*, contain those sounds that the child regularly uses in babbled speech.

### Form (Morphology and Syntax)

The ability to sequence actions is one of the critical foundations of language, which involves joining sequences of sounds to make words and sequences of words to make sentences. Therefore, sequenced organized behaviors such as combinations of symbolic play schemes (pretending to pour tea into a cup and then pretending to put the cup to a doll's mouth) are important prerequisites of morphology (sequences of morphemes) and syntax development (sequences of words that form sentences).

As most children near 2 years of age, they start to use two-word utterances such as *Billy go* or *go there*. These utterances are best characterized by semantic relations such as “agent + action” and “action + location.” Utterances of this type are the building blocks of syntax because they usually reflect the word order of language.

Language Use (Pragmatics)

In mainstream American culture, we communicate with our children from the first minute we see them. Mothers and fathers hold their infants, look into their faces, and talk to them. When infants make gurgling noises, their parents are quick to say things like, “Yes, I know. You’re all full now, aren’t you?” We build conversations with our children by treating everything they say and do *as if* it was true intentional communication. It is important to remember, parents from some cultures do not treat their young children in quite the same way. Dr. Peña and Dr. Jackson discuss this in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Children communicate without words before they communicate with words. For example, when infants want something they cannot reach, they may point to it and vocalize loudly, “uh, uh, uh!” Even though they are not saying words, they are clearly communicating a form of a command, *Get that for me, Mom!* Other forms of early intentional communication include looking at a parent, and then looking at an object, and then looking back to the parent, and then back to the object, and so on until the parent gets what they want. This behavior is very important because it shows children that communication gives them some degree of control over their environment.

Once children start to produce words, they can communicate many different functions with just a few words. In a famous study of his son’s early language development, Michael Halliday (1975) identified eight communication functions that Nigel used before he was 2 years old. These functions are listed in Table 2-4.

**Table 2-4** Early Communication Functions Evident During the First 2 Years of Life

Label	Function	Words and Gestures
Instrumental	To satisfy needs	“want” + pointing
Regulatory	To control others	“go” (meaning, go away)
Interactional	To establish contact	“hi”
Personal	To express individuality	“mine”
Heuristic	To get information	“What that?”
Imaginative	To pretend	“you batman”
Informative	To explain	“Sara ball” (meaning, that ball belongs to Sara)

Source: Based on Halliday, M.A.K. (1975). *Learning how to mean*. London: Arnold.

## FROM EARLY SENTENCES TO STORIES: AGES 2 TO 5 YEARS

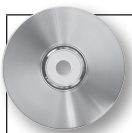
### Content

Children's vocabulary grows almost exponentially during the preschool years. Children *say* approximately 200 different words at 2 years of age, and this increases to approximately 1,800 different words by age 4, when they probably *understand* as many as 3,000 or 4,000 different words. During this period, children continue to expand their noun and verb vocabularies. They also learn prepositions (over, under, in front of, between), words that express time (before, after, until), words that express physical relationships (hard, soft, large, small), adjectives (blue, red, big, little), and pronouns (me, you, they, our, herself).

Children are also busy learning how to create sentences that express complex relationships between words. For example, children say sentences like, "Billy is riding his red bike in his backyard." This sentence expresses at least five different relationships. The basic relationships are agent (Billy) + action (is riding) + object (bike). The words, *red bike* tell about the state (color) of the bike. By adding the word *his* in front of *red bike*, the speaker specifies an ownership relationship. The pronoun makes it clear that it is the agent (Billy) who is the owner. The prepositional phrase *in his backyard* states two important relationships. We know where the event occurs (in the backyard), and we also know that the backyard belongs to Billy. This example shows how many relationships can be expressed in a relatively simple sentence.

### Form (Phonology)

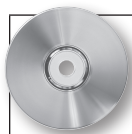
From age 2 years on, children begin to produce speech sounds with increasing accuracy. The earliest set of phonemes acquired by children is /m, b, n, w, d, p, h/; these sounds are often acquired by the time children are 3 years old. The next set of phonemes that children acquire, typically between 3 and 5 years of age, includes /t, ɲ, k, ɡ, f, v, tʃ (ch), dʒ (j)/. The last set of phonemes to be acquired includes /ʃ (sh), θ (voiceless th), s, z, ð (voiced th), l, r, ʒ (ge as in garage)/. These sounds are sometimes referred to as the "late eight" sounds. Children may start to acquire these sounds as early as 4 years of age, but these may not be fully acquired until 7 or 8 years of age. It is important to remember that children will use these phonemes inconsistently for a long time before they are mastered. Thus, children might use a phoneme in places where it doesn't belong in a word, as when they substitute /t/ for /k/ resulting in /tæp/ *tap* for /kæp/ *cap* or distort a sound such as /s/ (e.g., young children may produce a "slushy" sound



#### BOX 2-3 Two-Word Utterances

Watch segment Ch.02.01. Brandi and her little sister Erin are looking at a book together. Listen to Erin's two-word utterances. How might we describe the utterances, "going night-night" and "getting out"?

in which the air comes out over the sides of the tongue instead of /s/ in which the air comes out over the tip of the tongue). Speech sound acquisition is a gradual process.



### BOX 2-4 Examples of Jargon and Early Words

If you look at the transcriptions of the speech samples in parts 1, 2, and 3 of the CD-ROM segment Ch.02.01, you can see that each child uses increasingly more of the sounds that are expected for his or her age. You can also see that individual children differ from the norm. For example, /g/ was in the middle set of sounds acquired for 3 to 5 years, but Erin, who is 2, is already using it in her speech.

#### Part 1: Erin (Age 2) and Brandi

- B:** What is that?  
**E:** A frog. /ə fag/  
**B:** A frog!  
**B:** And what are they in, Erin?  
**B:** Look, what are they in?  
**E:** A room. [ə bum]  
**B:** A room, that's right.  
**B:** And do you know what that is?  
**E:** M-hum. [mhəm]  
**B:** What is that?  
**B:** Is that a window?  
**E:** (nods head yes)  
**B:** Yea. Now what is going on, what are they doing there?  
**E:** Going night-night. [go narnai]  
**B:** They're going night-night.  
**B:** What's the frog doing?  
**E:** Get, getting out. [ge geɪ au]  
**B:** He's getting out!

#### Part 2: Older Erin (Age 4)

There was a little frog. [dɛ wəð ə lɪdəl fag]  
 And then, he, the frog, that frog was mean and that frog was happy.  
 [æn dɛn hi də fag dæ fag wəð min æn dæ fag wəð hæpi]  
 And he would> [æn hi wʊð]  
 And there was a possible thing. [æn dɛr wəð ə pəsəbəl fɪŋ]  
 And the frog look like> [æn də fag lʊk laɪk]  
 And he was mean. [æn hi wəð min]  
 And he, and he was sad. [æn hi æn hi wəð sæd]  
 And he was mad. [æn hi wəð mæd]  
 And they were mad. [æn dɛɪ wə mæd]  
 And he was mad and he was sad. [æn hi wəð mæd æn hi wəð sæd]

## Form (Morphology and Syntax)

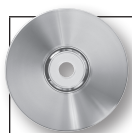
During this period, children progress from producing primarily one- and two-word utterances to producing sentences that may contain up to 10 words. As children begin to express more precise meanings with multiword utterances, the use of grammatical morphology and syntax becomes important.

Some of the earliest grammatical morphemes to emerge include forms such as the plural *-s* (*The boys ride*), the possessive *-s* (*The girl's bike*), and the progressive *-ing* (*The dog's barking*). Around 3 years of age, children begin to mark verb tense using the third person singular *-s* (e.g., *my sister swims*) or the past tense *-ed* (e.g., *The man jumped*). Later, children increase the complexity of their utterances using the copula and auxiliary form of “be” as in “Daddy *is* a clown” (a copula form) or “He *is* running” (an auxiliary form).

As children produce longer sentences, they must use appropriate word order (syntax) if they are to be understood. From the time that children use two-word combinations, changes in word order reflect differences in meaning. For example, a child may say “daddy shoe” to indicate the shoe belongs to daddy and “shoe daddy” to ask her daddy to put her shoes on. Ways that young children (between 2 and 3 years of age) add syntactic complexity include using modifiers (e.g., *want blue ball*) and using new forms such as questions (e.g., *see ball?* with a rising intonation). By age 3, children start to use prepositions (It's *on* my chair), they use *and* to conjoin elements (I want juice *and* cookie), and they use longer question forms (e.g., *Why you not here?*). By age 4, children are using passive sentences such as *The girl was bitten by the snake* and some complex forms like *I know how to cut with scissors*.

## Use (Pragmatics)

Before children can produce short sentences, adults assume most of the responsibility for conversing with them. By age 3, children begin to play a much larger role in conversation. Look at the example of a conversation between Jennifer and her mother. Notice that Jennifer does not have control over all the morphology and syntax necessary to express her ideas grammatically. Nonetheless, she is assertive as she expresses new ideas and asks a question, and she is responsive when she answers her mother's question.



### BOX 2-5 Morphosyntactic Development

Go back to the speech samples in CD-ROM segment Ch.02.01 again and notice how the children's sentences increase in morphosyntactic complexity. For example, when Erin uses a two-word utterance to describe an action, she uses the progressive *-ing* only (i.e., “going night-night”). The older Erin is able to express past tense forms such as *was* and *were*. However, she does not use the past *-ed* on the end of *look* as might be expected. Even after children have begun to use these forms, they may apply them inconsistently.



**Jennifer:** Sara be at school.

**Mother:** She'll be home pretty soon.

**Jennifer:** Can I go school, Mommy?

**Mother:** Some day. Right now, you get to go to Mother's Day Out. Don't you like Miss Sally?

**Jennifer:** Yea, that fun to go there.

One important development during the preschool years is the beginning of narration, the ability to express a chain of events in the form of a story. Children's first stories are personal narratives that consist of one or two sentences. For example, an early personal narrative might go as follows:

*Look, I painted a picture. And it got on me. See my shirt? I washed it and it's not go away.*

Toward the end of the preschool period, children start to tell stories that contain fictional elements. Many fictional stories follow a similar sequence called a **story grammar**. Stories usually contain **setting** information plus one or more **episodes**. To have a minimally complete episode, the narrator needs to say what motivated the main character to take an action (the **initiating event**), what actions the character took in response to the initiating event (**attempts**), and what the result of the action was (**consequence**). As children develop, they produce more complete and complex episodes that include the character's thoughts and feelings about the initiating events (**internal responses**), the character's ideas about the actions he can take (**plans**), his thoughts or feelings about the consequence of his actions (**reactions**), and the resolution or moral of the story (**ending**).

## FROM ORAL LANGUAGE TO WRITTEN LANGUAGE: THE SCHOOL-AGE YEARS

### Content (Semantics)

Children's vocabularies continue to expand dramatically during the school-age years. It has been estimated that children acquire as many as 3,000 different words annually during the school-age years. At that rate, high school seniors may know as many as 80,000 different words (Miller & Gildea, 1987).

School-age children have a greater understanding of relationships between concepts and increasing knowledge about the meanings of words. This is seen in their ability to comprehend and use figurative language such as metaphors and idioms. **Metaphors** are expressions in which words that usually designate one thing are used to designate another. For example, All the world is a stage. **Idioms** are expressions that have literal and figurative meanings. For example, the expression *reading between the lines* could mean looking for words in the white space between the lines of this book. However, you probably know that this idiom really means to comprehend meanings or to make inferences about meanings that go beyond the literal meanings of the individual words.



### Form (Phonology)

Beyond the age of 5 years, children's speech continuously becomes more adult-like. As mentioned earlier, some of the latest sounds are not perfected until children are 7 or 8 years old. Children this age also become more adept at producing consonant clusters such as *str-* and *sl-*. They produce most words accurately, but some **phonological processes** are occasionally observed in the production of complex words or in the production of words containing sounds that are late to be acquired. For example, children may still have difficulty producing multisyllabic words such as *spaghetti* or *pharmacy*.

In the late preschool years and early school-age years, children become aware of and start to mentally manipulate the sound structure of the words they say and hear. This ability is known as **phonological awareness**, and it has been shown to be a skill that is critically important for learning to read. For example, children can tell that *fan* and *man* rhyme. Later, they realize that *hot* and *horse* begin with the same sounds. By the time they are in second grade, children should be able to segment words into all their constituent phonemes (*sun* is /s/ -/ʌ/ - /n/) and to delete phonemes (say *school* without the /s/).

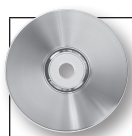
### Form (Morphology and Syntax)

Children use a greater variety of complex sentence forms during the school-age years. That is, they become adept at putting multiple clauses (subject–verb combinations) into single sentences. The earliest and most common complex sentences are formed with conjunctions such as *and* (He came to my party *and* brought me a present). Later, children learn to use adverbial clauses that express time (*After we went to the movie*, we got an ice cream cone) or causality (I want you to come over *because* I don't like to play alone). By the time they are 8 years old, children routinely form sentences that have multiple clauses such as, *We wanted Steve to help us study for our science test, but he wouldn't because he thought he was so much smarter than everyone else*.

An important part of language development during the school-age years is learning literate (more formal) language structures. As they read and write with greater frequency, children's language sometimes takes on a "literate" sound. For example, the sentence *Readers might be pleased to discover that we will not require memorization of the cranial nerves* sounds more like written language than "I'll bet you will be glad to hear this. We are not going to make you memorize the cranial nerves." Near the end of the elementary school years and into the middle school years, children experiment with the kinds of syntactic devices that are required for literate language, and they discover when and how to use these structures.

### Use (Pragmatics)

A number of important changes in language use occur during the school-age years. School-age children engage in longer conversations. They also become more adept at shifting topics and at shifting the style of their speech to match the nature of the speaking context and their relationship with the person they are talking to. Similarly, their narratives become longer and more complex. School-age children can weave multiple

**BOX 2-6 A Fictional Story**

CD-ROM segment Ch.02.01 shows six children who were filmed as they told the story, *Frog Where Are You?* (Mayer, 1973). We spliced sections of their narratives together to create the entire story, starting with Erin (age 2) and ending with her sister Brandi, who is an eighth-grader. Note that as children get older, the length of children's language increases and their descriptions become more complete and complex. Notice that, beginning at age 8, the children's language sounds more literary. The story propositions are named in parentheses following the children's utterances.

*Frog Where Are You?***Part 1: Erin (Age 2) and Brandi**

**B:** What is that?

**E:** A frog.

**B:** A frog!

**B:** And what are they in, Erin?

**B:** Look, what are they in?

**E:** A room. **(Setting)**

**B:** A room, that's right.

**B:** And do you know what that is?

**E:** M-hum.

**B:** What is that?

**B:** Is that a window?

**E:** (nods head yes)

**B:** Yea. Now what is going on, what are they doing there?

**E:** Going night-night. **(Setting)**

**B:** They're going night-night.

**B:** What's the frog doing?

**E:** Get, getting out. **(Initiating Event)**

**B:** He's getting out!

**Part 2: Older Erin (Age 4)**

There was a little frog.

And then, he, the frog, that frog was mean and that frog was happy.

And he would>

And there was a possible thing.

And the frog look like>

And he was mean.

And he, and he was sad.

And he was mad.

And they were mad.

And he was mad and he was sad. **(Setting)**

**Part 3: Trey (Kindergartner)**

**Trey:** Well, he escaped while they were sleeping. **(Initiating Event)**

**Trey:** And then they woke up. And and it was morning, and he was gone.

**Adult:** Oh no.

**Trey:** He looked in the book and the puppy looked in the jar a little bit more closer.  
**(Attempt)**

**Trey:** He stuck his head in there.

**Adult:** M-hum.

**Trey:** And then the little boy, and Tom and Spot looked out the window. **(Attempt)**

**Adult:** Yes, they did.

**Trey:** And Spot fell out.

**Adult:** And then, then what?

**Adult:** Well, what's happening here?

**Trey:** Then the glass broke.

**Adult:** It sure did.

**Trey:** And then they were yelling with, and and see if the frog would come out.  
**(Attempt)**

**Part 4: Ashley (Grade 3)**

Jimmy went outside in the woods with Spot calling, "Mr. Frog, Mr. Frog, where are you?" **(Attempt)**

Jimmy looked in a mole hole and called, "Mr. Frog." **(Attempt)**

And the mole shot up, scolding Jimmy. **(Consequence)**

While Spot was near a beehive shaking a tree, and it fell.

Jimmy was looking in an owl hole calling, "Mr. Frog, Mr. Frog." **(Attempt)**

The owl came out and Jimmy fell. **(Consequence)**

**Part 5: Jorge (Grade 6)**

The boy was surprised to find the owl in the hole and fell to the ground, **(Reaction)**  
while the bees were still chasing the dog.

The owl chases the boy around the rock.

When the owl leaves, he climbs the rock.

And the owl said the frog's name. **(Attempt)**

And then, then a deers, a deer lifted his head, and the boy was on top of the deer's head. **(Setting)**

**Part 6: Jennifer (Grade 6)**

And the moose took off! **(Initiating Event)**

The dog was barking at the moose. **(Attempt)**

Then the moose stopped at a cliff, and the dog and the boy flew over the cliff into a marshy area.

The boy fell in the water. **(Consequence)**

Then the boy heard a sound. **(Initiating Event)**  
 The dog crawled on top of the boy's head.  
 Ribbit, ribbit.  
 Shhhhh, the boy said to the dog.

#### **Part 7: Brandi (Grade 8)**

The little boy told the dog to be very quiet.  
 He was going to peek over to see what was there. **(Plan)**  
 So the boy and the dog looked over the wall. **(Attempt)**  
 They found two frogs, a mother and a father. **(Consequence)**  
 Then they climbed over and noticed a whole bunch of little babies were hopping through some grass.  
 And the little boy said, "There's our frog!" **(Reaction)**  
 So the little boy scooped up their frog, and the dog and him started going back home. **(Reaction)**  
 And they said, "Goodbye" to the little frog family, saying they would come back to see them soon. **(Ending)**  
 The end.

episodes into their stories, and they can tell and write in different **genres** (personal accounts, mysteries, science fiction, horror stories, etc.).

Children also improve at persuasion and negotiation during the school-age years. To be persuasive, speakers need to be able to adjust their language to the characteristics of their listeners and state why the listener should do something that is needed or wanted. Politeness and bargaining are often helpful as well. The first grader's use of persuasion may be limited to getting a friend to share a new toy. However, by high school, students need to use persuasion and negotiation quite well to gain privileges such as use of their parent's car for the evening.

## **ADULTHOOD**

By the end of the school-age years, development in language form, content, and use has reached a very high level of complexity. As young persons transition from high school to higher education or the workplace, their language continues to change in ways that reflect their vocational choices and interests. Later in life, language begins to decline as a result of cognitive, motor, and environmental changes.

### **Content (Semantics)**

Vocabulary continues to expand throughout the adult years. This is especially true for vocation-specific words. Biologists have different vocabularies from pharmacists, engineers, or speech-language pathologists because members of these professions tend

to talk about different things. Shared vocabulary is often used to create social and economic bonds between members of a vocation or people with shared interests.

Late in life, neurological changes may lead to declines in some semantic functions. The ability to comprehend words does not decline much with age. However, the number of different words that are used decreases, as does the speed with which words can be recalled (Benjamin, 1988). There appears to be a “use it or lose it” quality to the mental lexicon. Older adults who have remained mentally active (those who still work, have busy social lives, and read and write frequently) and have better memory have fewer declines in semantic abilities than do older adults who watch more television.

### **Form (Phonology)**

As part of the aging process, muscles atrophy and cartilage stiffens. Physiological changes lead to some changes in the voice. For example, older male speakers may use a somewhat higher pitch and their voice may sound hoarse compared to younger male speakers. In addition, respiratory support for speech diminishes so that it may be necessary for some speakers to pause more frequently. Specifically in regard to articulation, it has been observed that older speakers produce consonants less precisely than do younger speakers. Speaking rate may also slow. Generally speaking, articulatory changes in speech production of older adults are not considered problematic.

### **Form (Morphology and Syntax)**

Older speakers demonstrate some changes in their use and understanding of morphology and syntax. Older speakers tend to use a diminishing variety of verb tenses and grammatical forms. Older speakers also may produce grammatical errors somewhat more frequently than younger speakers do. Some changes observed in the area of syntax are more closely related to changes in the lexicon and pragmatics. For example, older speakers may rely more on pronouns than on specific nouns when telling a story. Errors may be observed in the production of complex structures such as passive sentences or embedded structures that place demands on memory. It may also be more difficult for older speakers to understand syntactically complex utterances such as “I saw the lady who had a rose in her hair that the little girl picked from a garden on her way to school.” This difficulty relates to declines in memory, processing ability, and vocabulary (Waters & Caplan, 2005).

### **Use (Pragmatics)**

Throughout their adult lives, individuals continually refine their discourse to match the needs of the situation. They use persuasion, argument, narration, and explanation in different ways depending on their communication goals, their understanding of the formality of the situation, and assumptions they make about what their listeners already know or think about the topic. Communication style is also related to social and cultural expectations. Manners of expressing oneself are used to create bonds among members of subgroups of society. For example, compare the way newscasters explain

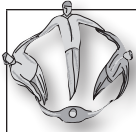
a story on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" to the way the same story might be reported by the newscaster on your local rock-and-roll station.

With aging come shifts in income levels, employment, social status, and leisure time. Many times, older adults relocate to settings like retirement communities or nursing homes where there are few younger individuals. A recent study on perceptions of older persons' communication noted changes in discourse style that included dominance of conversations, unwillingness to select topics of interest to listeners, increased verbosity, failure to take the listener's perspective, and more of a rambling style (Shadden, 1988). Discourse changes like the ones just mentioned could be related to memory loss, a desire for prolonged contact, and decreases in opportunities for socialization with a wide range of people. Once again, it is worth mentioning that there are large individual differences in the degree of discourse change and the ages at which these changes occur.

## SUMMARY

People communicate by exchanging meanings with one another. This can be done nonverbally, through gestures and facial expression, but meanings are usually exchanged through spoken, signed, or written language. Languages are symbolic systems that require the integration of form (phonology, morphology, and syntax), content (semantics), and use (pragmatics). Nearly all children begin to develop language during the first year of life, but there is a great deal of individual variation in the rate of development.

During infancy, children explore the world around themselves with their sensory and motor systems, begin to communicate a variety of meanings nonverbally, and learn their first words. Children begin to produce two-word utterances around age 18 months, and they create their first short sentences around age 2. Language development literally explodes during the preschool years. By the time children are 5 years old, they know more than 4,000 different words, produce nearly all the sounds of speech correctly, use complex sentences, and tell short stories. The development of reading and writing creates many more opportunities for language development during the school-age years. By the time students graduate from high school, they know as many as 80,000 different words; they can create complex stories with multiple episodes; and they know how to weave sentences together to explain, persuade, and negotiate effectively. Language becomes more specialized during the adult years to match career and social choices. There is a gradual reduction in language skills in older adults. Just as there was individual variation in the rate of language growth, there is also a great deal of individual variation in language decline. The most common aspects of language decline involve word retrieval difficulties, difficulty comprehending nuances of meaning, and a tendency toward a more rambling verbal style.



### BOX 2-7 Personal Story by Ron Gillam

One day, when my daughter Jennifer was nearly 3 years old, she and her older sister, Sara, were playing with some toys together. Jennifer had some zoo animals in a small train, and she was pretending to drive the train to another part of their make-believe zoo. She said to Sara, “Move over. I’m going over there.” Sara responded, “You sure are bossy.” Jenn replied, “I amn’t either!” Sara moved, Jenn managed to get her train where she wanted it, and they resumed playing without further incident.

I found Jenn’s use of “amn’t” to be particularly interesting. I was relatively certain that she had never heard anyone say “amn’t” before. Her utterance was ungrammatical, but it showed a great deal of grammatical knowledge about copula verbs and negative contractions. I suspect that she realized that people often used *isn’t*, *aren’t*, *wasn’t*, and *weren’t*. If it was all right for people to add the negative contraction to the copula verbs *is*, *are*, *was*, and *were*, why couldn’t she add the negative contraction to the copula *am*? Her error was consistent with a number of grammatical morphology rules, but it was not consistent with some phonological rules related to connecting nasals in English. The important point is that Jennifer, like nearly all children, was actively re-creating the rules of language that she was exposed to. Her creativity within the learning process resulted in an interesting and amusing error.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between language production and comprehension?
2. What is the critical difference between these terms: *phonemes*, *syllables*, and *morphemes*?
3. What linguistic systems are involved in language form, language content, and language use?
4. Why can’t we pinpoint the language abilities a child should have at 3 years and 9 months of age?
5. Name one important development that occurs in each area of language (content, form, and use) during each of the four major developmental periods (infancy, the preschool years, the school-age years, and adulthood).
6. What are some examples of sounds that may be difficult for children to produce at the time they enter kindergarten?

## KEY TERMS

Allophone	Initiating event	Place of articulation
American Sign Language	Internal response	Plan
Attempt	Language	Pragmatics
Babbling	Language content	Prosody
Bound morpheme	Language form	Reaction
Canonical babbling	Language use	Reduplicated babbling
Communication	Lexicon	Semantics
Consequence	Manner of articulation	Setting
Ending	Metaphor	Story grammar
Episode	Morphology	Syllable
Expressive jargon	Phoneme	Syntax
Free morpheme	Phonological awareness	Variegated babbling
Genre	Phonological processes	Voicing
Idiom	Phonology	

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