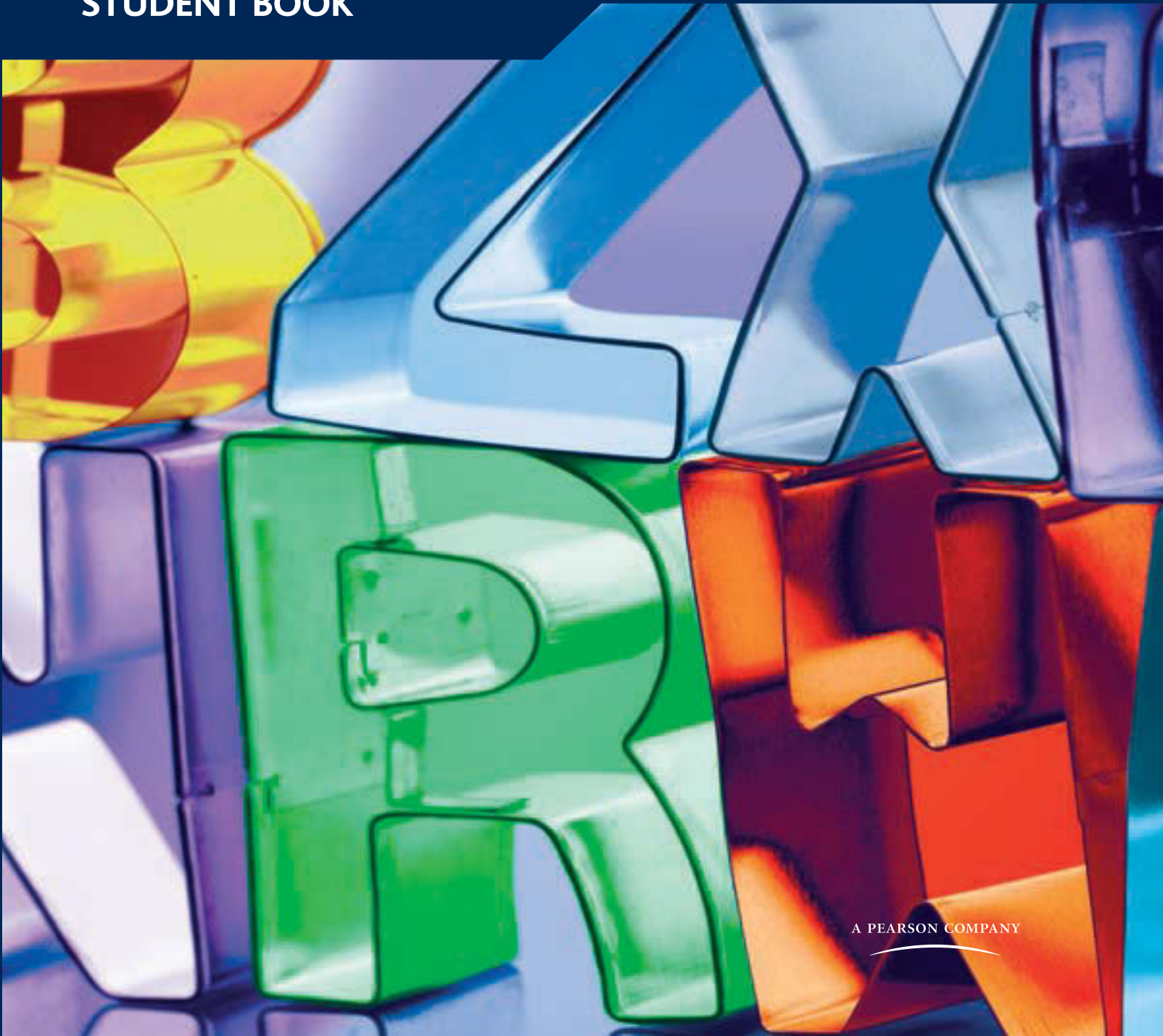# Edexcel GCE English Language: Child Language

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STUDENT BOOK

Edexcel English Language

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Contents

A Level and AS Level Component 2 : Child Language

Child language

This section of the book looks at the way children develop language. In this part of the course you will study two aspects of children's language development – spoken and written. You will explore theories and research relating to those areas.

You will also learn how you can use the skills you have developed in the earlier units you have studied and ways in which you can identify areas you might like to pursue in your own research.

The first part of this section looks at the ways in which children develop spoken language. The second part of the section looks at the development of written language skills, the ways in which children begin to understand and interpret this particular system of meaning.

As they learn to write, children begin to understand the different ways in which the two modes communicate. Quite early in the process of the development of writing, you can see differences between the forms children use in written language and the forms they use in speech. In each section, you are given examples of children's speech and writing, but if you have access to young children, your own observations will help you to understand the processes described more clearly and to develop your own theories about what is happening in these early stages of children's development.

Each part works independently of the other, but possible links between the ways these language skills are developed are identified for you to consider further.

1   Children's spoken language

How do young children learn to speak and understand language? They can't tell us themselves and none of us can remember how it happened. The only way to find answers to this question is to observe young children in action.

No two children are exactly alike, but research into child language development shows that children develop language skills in broadly similar ways. First words are often used to name treasured people, animals or toys, for example. Most children (not only from English-speaking backgrounds) can produce /m/, /b/ and /d/ sounds before they manage to pronounce the tricky 'th' sound in words like 'this'. This section will introduce some key theories from research into child spoken language development. Simply as a means of organising the material, the ideas are divided into two areas. But, of course, these overlap and it is difficult not to stray from one type of question into the other.

- **Theories about learning** – What do we know about the way people develop any skills? What processes are involved in learning language in particular?

- **Theories about language** – What *is* language essentially – a structured system of sounds and words, a means of communicating meanings and functions in interaction with others?

These are 'big' questions and ones that have been investigated over many years. As with all scientific enquiry, as soon as one team of researchers completes their experiments and draws conclusions from the evidence, another challenges their theories by offering new data or a different way of interpreting it.

You do not need to – indeed you *cannot* – know everything about this area of linguistics. What you will need for success in your A-level English Language is an open-minded spirit of enquiry. This writer's curiosity was sparked by the language development of her two grandchildren, Spike and Louise, from the ages of 1 year and 3 years, to 3 and 5 years, respectively. Armed with as much knowledge of research as a busy teaching life allows, I hope to lead you along some intriguing paths of exploration.

Applying the theories to data from only two children has limitations, but the advantages are great: you no longer have to cope with an artificially 'dry' typewritten transcript, but can listen to the live voices and understand the full social context of the talk. **You can access audio recordings of Louise and Spike on www.edexcel.com/cld-mp3**.

In order to enrich the range of data, go to other textbooks for transcripts or – ideally – your own experience of young children talking. Either make notebook recordings of their language or use a digital voice recorder, even one on a mobile phone. This alternative evidence may lead you to challenge some of the ideas suggested.

You should also be able to read and write the accepted symbols for the phonemes of English (IPA) used to represent the child's pronunciation on paper.

The following conventions will be used for the basic transcripts in this section.

Convention	Key
T-Nanny:	children's grandmother, aka Technonanny
Dad:	children's father
Mum:	children's mother
<??>	indistinct words
[xxxxx]	Standard English interpretation of previous representation of pronunciation, e.g. tandi [candle]
(3)	length of pause in seconds
(.)	brief pause
…	omitted words
<laugh>	non-verbal sounds or actions, also called **paralinguistic features**
/dɪs/	IPA transcription of word
(Is it?)	brackets indicate some of the words spoken by adults
?	to indicate rising intonation for question
!	to indicate exclamatory intonation
NO	capitals, to indicate emphatic volume or stress

Theories of learning

This is an area of research where psychology and linguistics overlap, hence the term '**psycholinguistics**'. The questions concern the workings of the human brain in regard to language processes. Some of the research has more in common with medicine and anatomy. For example, research shows that in stroke victims who suffer a loss of language use there is damage to the dominant (usually the left) hemisphere of the brain. Other research leans towards investigating whether any animals can be said to have language, in the same sense as human language.

The fundamental question for this part of the course is: How does a child develop language?

Activity 1

This activity explores what type of activity learning is and whether it involves different processes and skills depending on the situation. How similar or different are these four learning situations?

- Children learning to speak (CSpeak)
- Students learning a foreign language (SFL)
- Children learning to write (CWrite)
- Children learning to ride a bicycle (CBike).

	CSpeak	SFL	CWrite	CBike
It is essential				
Everyone manages it in the end				
It needs a lot of practice				
It just happens naturally				
It needs a teacher				
It is too difficult for some people				

1 For each situation, consider the factors in the table below and add others of your own. Add a tick for yes, a cross for no or a question mark if you are not sure in each column.

2 In groups, discuss your results. Focus on areas of disagreement and situations where you placed a question mark. For example, do you think that writing and the ability to speak a foreign language are absolutely essential skills?

unique about a child learning to speak – it is 'child's play', if we compare it with the struggles involved in studying a foreign language. This is why some people choose the term '**acquisition**' rather than 'learning' to refer to the processes of child language development. Before you decide which term best fits the child's language situation, consider what is involved in the process of 'learning' various sorts of skills or facts.

Activity 2

Which of the following processes do you use and for what types of situation? Try to add other ways of learning.

- Trial and error – pressing any button to see what happens; trying another button
- Drills – repeating the same things over and over again until it becomes a habit
- Carrot or stick – conditioning by rewards or punishments
- Mentoring – providing shining examples to imitate
- Theory – explaining general ideas to apply in practice.

The following activities introduce some important researchers and their theories of learning applied to child language – B.F. Skinner, Noam Chomsky, L. Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner. This list offers you the 'usual suspects' – names that you are likely to come across as you begin your studies of children's spoken language development. It is not an exhaustive list – for reasons of space – so you may decide to take some side paths into the ideas of Piaget, Lenneberg, or others as well. This survey of concepts and theories, inevitably, stops short of the most recent research findings, so bear in mind that child language development is an ongoing debate.

Key term

- paralinguistic features
- psycholinguistic theory
- acquisition

Independent research

Use the Internet to find out about Broca's area and Wernicke's area of the brain and about studies into the language use of primates.
Go to www.TED.com to hear Susan Savage-Rumbaugh's talk on her work encouraging chimpanzees to communicate using symbols for words.

Try to get involved in the debate yourself. You will notice how this section mirrors a common pattern of academic enquiry: as one research team comes up with a theory, another group immediately poses objections and a different explanation, or suggests a slightly different slant. You should use the data in the activities to explore the concepts and theories. Test them against the evidence in front of you. Is the theory convincing? Does the concept help to shed light on the child's language use?

Remember that the first part on theories of learning is followed by activities on theories of language, showing how other researchers approach children's spoken language development from slightly different angles. Here we pose the question: Is it useful to see language as a system of forms and structures, or to emphasise meaning-making and the functions of language in a social context?

The functional approach to children's language was first introduced by the linguist M.A.K. Halliday as he observed his son Nigel. Although this approach is mentioned towards the end of the section, you will find it offers many fascinating insights that have subsequently been taken up by other contemporary researchers. So, don't fix any of your ideas 'in cement' before you have reached the end of the section.

Behaviourism

The psychologist B.F. Skinner is associated with **Behaviourism**, the key principle of which was to base all explanations on observable data, not on intuitions or abstract theories about what *might* be going on in the inner workings of the brain. In the case of the animals that Skinner's team worked with, researchers observed the *behaviour*, the actions made by pigeons or rats as they tried to learn, for example, how to get the food they needed. Their experiments suggested that **conditioning** plays an important role in establishing habits of behaviour: if the pigeon performs a particular action (pecking at the drawer) and it gains a favourable response (food appears), then that action is **reinforced** and the pigeon is more likely to **repeat** it; and viceversa: if hopping on one foot results in no food, the pigeon will not continue to repeat this action.

Skinner then applied this research into animal behaviour to child language learning. According to behaviourist theories, the child tries out all sorts of utterances (behaviour) and is conditioned to repeat certain patterns by positive reinforcement, such as verbal encouragement or rewarding physical reactions.

There is some convincing support for this. At the earliest stages of an infant's vocalisation, if others respond to any cooing or burbling sounds with warm attention, the baby appears to be encouraged to use sounds for interaction. Conversely, a child whose words are consistently ignored or who is told to 'Shut it!' is less likely to see language as an effective skill to be developed.

It is obvious that children use words that they have heard others use. They may even repeat whole phrases, and they tend to pick up similar intonation patterns and pronunciation from language they hear around them.

Take it further

What objections can you think of, if any, to this step – from animal to human behaviour – in the Behaviourists' argument? Consider the related arguments for and against the laboratory testing on animals in medical research.

Key terms

- **behaviourism**
- **conditioning**
- **reinforcement**
- **repetition**

Activity 3

Read the transcript overleaf and listen to the audio file *1. her got her rattle*.

1 Identify evidence for a behaviourist theory of learning, for example:

  a adult's model use of language

  b child's repetition or imitation of adult's utterance

  c adult's positive reinforcement of the child's utterance.

Spike (aged 2 years) is looking at a picture book about Zaza and her giraffe family with his Mum and Dad.

Spike: what dis [this]?

Mum: that's Zaza

Spike: what dis [this]?

Mum: that's a grandmum

5 Spike: di di da

Mum: what?

Spike: her did dot didi [got baby]

Mum: yes she's got the baby oh yes did you say where did her baby go
<looking at the picture book and telling story> … so they can go
10 to the hospital and have a baby …

Spike: her got her rattle

Mum: I think that's for the baby

Spike: her got her rattle

Mum: that's her rattle?

15 Spike: no her got her rattle

Mum: oh she's got HER rattle?

Spike: no her got he [his] rattle

Dad: the baby?

Mum: that's a boy

20 Dad: that's a boy

Mum: she's got HIS rattle?

Spike: yeah

Mum: ah! who's that?

Spike: <??> baby her got her rattle (.) a daddy

25 Mum: that's the daddy that's right

Spike: dat mummy

Mum: yes that's the mummy (.) what did he bring for the mummy?

Spike: fauer [flowers]!

Mum: flowers yeah

Nativism

The linguist Noam Chomsky attacked Skinner's theories in 1959. He put forward the theory that the ability to use language is innate for all humans and used the term '**Language Acquisition Device**' (LAD) to refer to the 'hard-wiring' of the human brain. In other words, he objected to the Behaviourist theory based on the notion that the human brain is a 'blank slate' on which experiences can be imprinted.

Chomsky's notion of a LAD cannot be proved or disproved, for example by dissecting the brain, but his ideas about the creativity of a child's language use are illuminating. If we listen to children speaking, it becomes clear that they do not simply **imitate** language, but constantly create unique utterances. No adult ever spoke the words 'Her not gone', for example, uttered by Spike and actually referring to a boy, not a girl.

Key terms

- nativism
- **Language Acquisition Device (LAD)**
- **imitation**
- **virtuous error**
- **Poverty of Stimulus**

One way of looking at such child language would be to regard it as 'wrong' – a mistake that needs to be corrected by some negative reinforcement. Yet, there is evidence to support the theory that a child's language is not affected by correction before it has reached that developmental stage.

Chomsky used the term **'virtuous error'** to refer to non-standard forms which have their own internal logic that actually displays a greater intelligence than the ability to repeat words and phrases like a parrot.

Common examples of virtuous errors are the child's formation of past tenses in verbs and of plurals in nouns. If a child says 'holded' rather than the standard irregular form 'held', this cannot be the result of imitation of a model. Similarly, the child's use of 'foots' or 'feets' following the standard formation of plurals. It is unlikely that they have ever heard these words, so how and why did the child produce them?

Although it sounds odd to talk about 'data' and 'hypothesis' in an infant's experience, Chomsky's explanation is that the child perceives regular patterns in the mass of sound data and forms a hypothesis about the form used for expressing ideas about the past. The child has worked out that you add the '–ed' morpheme to the base verb. Not in those words, of course, but what other theory could explain such unique language forms?

Another important part of Chomsky's attack on Skinner's Behaviourist theory of learning is what he calls the **Poverty of Stimulus**. A child is not exposed to carefully planned examples of language, delivered clearly in small, regular doses. Instead, there is a cacophony of sounds – various people talking at the same time, possibly fast or inaudible, with interruptions, incomplete utterances and so on. It would be hard for an older person to pick up a foreign language in a matter of years, if that was their only input. So, Chomsky argues, there must be an innate ability for language.

Writing tips

You may wish to refer to Chomsky's theory of a LAD or his concept of virtuous errors in your exam response. But remember that every theory is just that – a hypothesis suggested by one researcher, inevitably to be contested (if not overthrown) by another. Make sure you have also considered the competing ideas of researchers such as Bruner.

Independent research

Find out about the 'wugs' test.

What do such tests reveal about a child's understanding of morphemes (prefixes and suffixes) in English?

Activity 4

Read the transcripts below of Louise (aged 3–4 years) in various interactions.
1 What evidence can you find of creativity in the child's language, that is, utterances that cannot be the result of imitation, as it is unlikely that any adult has ever produced this language?

2 Explain why each utterance is not simply a 'mistake', but a virtuous error.

3 What does each utterance show that the child has understood about either:
   a general principles of morphology (word formation)
   b grammar (structure of phrases and sentences)?

> **Transcript A:**
>
> *<whispers re. 'surprise' etc.>*
>
> Spike: Didi!
>
> Louise: bo! bo!
>
> *<general confusion, feigned excitement, etc.>*
>
> Louise: you didn't <??> we surprised you did you shock?

> **Transcript B:**
>
> Louise: I can open the door on by myself
>
> T-Nanny: can you
>
> Louise: yeah see
>
> T-Nanny: you're very smart

Transcript C:

	Mum:	so what did you do with Didi she babysat you today huh
	Louise:	yeah um danced danced I danced
	Mum:	you danced?
	Louise:	yeah
5	Louise:	and I sellotaped with paper
	Mum:	yeah
	Louise:	to make stuff
	Louise:	and I cutted with a little bit sharp scissors
	Mum:	really
10	Louise:	yeah and they didn't hurt my finger
	Mum:	did she watch you like cut to make sure you were careful?
	Louise:	no

Interactional theories of learning

The arguments and theories about whether learning (or intelligence) is an inborn, natural quality or the product of a person's upbringing is sometimes referred to as the **Nature-Nurture debate**. Jerome Bruner was also interested in the role that a child's environment has on its language development, in particular, the child's interaction with significant others.

To highlight the connection with Chomsky's theory of a LAD, Bruner coined the acronym LASS to refer to a **Language Acquisition Support System**. He disagreed with Chomsky's assertion about the Poverty of Stimulus, from which it is difficult to take models to imitate. Researchers, such as Bruner, agree that there is an innate ability, but add the important point that this natural talent is assisted by carefully structured input from significant people in the child's environment. Some theories use the term **'motherese'** to refer to the particularly supportive way a mother adapts her speech in interaction with a child. In recent years, people prefer the non-gender-specific terms **'caregiver language'** or **'Child-Directed Speech'** (CDS) to refer to any influential person speaking to the young child.

This simple summary of Bruner's theories about features of caregiver language is available on many websites:

- simplified grammar and meaning
- shorter sentences – from eight words per sentence to four (for two-year-olds)
- restricted range of sentence patterns
- expansion and repetition of sentences
- slower speech
- use of special words and sounds (e.g. 'blanky' for 'blanket, 'poopy' for toilet training)
- high pitch
- large number of questions and utterances with high rising intonation, looking for feedback
- embedded in the here and now (e.g. focus on things and events in the child's immediate environment, rather than reference to past, future, imaginary or hypothetical situations).

Activity 5

Read the following transcript and listen to the audio file ***2. spike colours***.

1 What evidence can you find of care-giver language, that is, the parent providing carefully structured input?

2 Try to use any of the categories suggested above to classify each example.

Spike is in his bedroom with his mother. His sister is in the room next door.

Mum:　push <??> come on let's get our pyjamas on do you want me to read you a book?

Spike:　no one more time

Mum:　one more time? one more time after we get our pyjamas on come
5　　　on let's get our pyjamas on and then you can do it one more time before bed

Spike:　no

Mum:　Spike!

Mum:　Daddy's gonna come home tomorrow and we are going to make
10　　　him a lovely dinner do you want chicken for dinner tomorrow with Yorkshire puddings and mashed potatoes?

Spike:　no <??> <??>

Mum:　chocolate?

Spike:　colour

15 Mum:　colours?

Spike:　orange

Mum:　orange? yeah I got you a shirt with that colour

Spike:　colour! colour colour

Mum:　colours?

20 Spike:　blue!

Mum:　blue? there's blue (3) you like colours?

Spike:　*<laughs>*

Mum:　come on

Spike:　look

25 Mum:　wow

Spike:　look yellow

Mum:　yellow! wow

Spike:　look green

Mum:　green? wow

30 Spike:　there green

Mum:　there's green yeah and light green you mean and dark green

Spike:　look brown!

Mum:　brown?

Spike:　yeah brown

35 Mum:　I don't see brown what Winnie the Pooh brown?

Spike:　yeah

Mum:　oh there

Spike:　yeah (2)

Mum:　well I'm sure glad you like your new room like this (1) pretty lovely

There are many directions you can move in from these theories of learning. For example, some researchers suggest that there is a **'critical period'** for language learning – if you haven't managed it by a certain age, you never will. There certainly seems to be an optimum period for learning languages. If you compare young bilingual (or trilingual) children, they speak several languages with far more fluency and accuracy than teenagers or adults manage after years of painstaking study of foreign languages.

Cognitive theories of learning

Piaget was interested in a child's overall cognitive development – their understanding of concepts, such as size and volume – and suggested links with their development of language. For example, the passive form of verbs is not simply a complex language structure, but a concept that children understand at a later stage, the difference between, for example:

> **The red lorry is following the blue one.** and
>
> **The blue lorry is being followed by the red one.**

The psycholinguist L. Vygotsky followed on from Piaget's work, developing theories about the importance of the wider social environment on a child's cognitive and language development. He believed that other people play a significant role in advancing a child's understanding. This might be adults, but could equally be an older child. This theory is applied in classroom teaching, for example, where group work is often used nowadays in the belief that other children can play a part in teaching, as well as the teacher. Vygotsky uses the term **More Knowledgeable Other** (MKO) to refer to this concept.

Activity 6

Read the following transcript and listen to the audio recording ***3. MKO plait crib counting***.

1 What evidence can you find to support the theory that a child's language develops:

a alongside understanding of concepts, for example, the concept of age in numbers of years
and its relation to physical size, power or status

b with the help of a More Knowledgeable Other – the contributions of an older sibling.

> **Spike and Louise have just been left alone in their grandmother's bed to go to sleep. They spend about 20 minutes playing. This is the opening of their interaction. Louise has her hair tied up in two bunches, not actually plaits. Each child has a treasured bedtime toy companion: the Bat (for Spike) and Freddy (for Louise).**
>
> | | | | | |
> |---|---|---|---|---|
> | | Spike: | what is it | Louise: | yeah |
> | | Louise: | aah! | Spike: | <??> |
> | | Spike: | what is it | 10 Louise: | I said it's a plait |
> | | Louise: | it's my bunch | Spike: | is it |
> | 5 | Spike: | what is dis <this> | Louise: | Spike! |
> | | Louise: | I said it's a bunch | Spike: | <??> |
> | | Spike: | is it? | Louise: | that's a these are plaits |
> | | | | 15 | these are plaits |

Independent research

- Read more about the case of Genie. This was an influential case of a young girl who had been so severely deprived of human interaction that she had no means of communication apart from grunts, when she was rescued at the age of eight. Researchers wanted to find out whether she was still capable of developing language or whether she had passed the 'critical period' for development.

- Read more about Lenneberg, who developed theories about stages of development in children's language learning.

	Spike:	sit down	30	Louise:	well you're gonna be three – ee
	Louise:	these are plaits		Spike:	be thirty one
	Spike:	sit down! sit down!		Louise:	you're already two and if you go two one (2) that means you're gonna be no number
20	Louise:	I can do whatever I want to (3)	35		
	Spike:	me in my crib?			
	Louise:	it's gone		Spike:	yeah one (1) one (1) one (1) one two
	Spike:	is it right dere [there] (1) yeah?		Louise:	I got the Bat and the Freddy
25	Louise:	but we're gonna send it away	40	Spike:	three (1) four (3) um six an seven (1) an nine (1) an nine an three (2) an two and three <??>
	Spike:	but me want to			
	Louise:	you're a big boy			
	Spike:	no little			

Theories of the nature of language

Do Activity 42, before reading any further. It asks you to consider the nature of language, so that you can compare your own ideas with more established theories.

Activity 7

1 If someone asked you to explain what language is, or what language is for, how would you reply?

2 Compare your ideas with others in the group.

3 Feed back any ideas that are common to each person's definition of language.

Definitions of language often have two components:

- a phrase or word referring to its structure or form
- a phrase or word suggesting its use as a means of human communication.

For the sake of simplicity, this section will explore these two ways of looking at language. These approaches are not mutually exclusive, but they do indicate a slightly different emphasis:

- the structural approach emphasises the study of forms, such as grammar and phonology. The linguist, de Saussure, famously advised people taking a structuralist study of language to 'forget meaning'!
- the functional approach is sometimes called the 'communicative' approach, as it emphasises the function of language to express meanings. This approach emphasises semantics and pragmatics.

Structural approach

The first activities will ask you to observe the forms of language a child produces, using the familiar concept of the key levels and frameworks of language. One aim of this type of research is to find common patterns that most children follow in their development. You will, of course, notice that there are exceptions to every 'rule'.

Key levels and frameworks of language

phonology	the sounds a child produces
morphology	the roots, suffixes and prefixes a child can combine to form words
lexis	the type of vocabulary a child uses and the meanings understood
grammar	the structures of phrases, clauses and sentences
discourse	structures larger than a sentence – types (genres) of spoken language

Always avoid taking a **deficit approach**, in which you compare a child's language unfavourably against a model of adult competency. Remember Chomsky's concept of virtuous errors and do not use terms such as 'wrong' or 'mistakes'. Remember to take an open-minded, descriptive approach, emphasising what the child can do and bearing in mind the impressive skills shown in acquiring a complex system with comparative ease and speed.

Stages of development

There is a common way of providing a simple, brief overview of Child Language Development and that is to outline the stages of development in this way:

- first stage   –   **babbling** sounds
- next stage   –   single words
- then   –   two-word combinations
- then   –   **telegraphic utterances**
- finally …   –   the child reaches the pinnacle of grown-up language

This sort of account can be an interesting summary, but you should treat this approach with great caution. The reasons for this will become apparent, as you work through the following activities.

In order to explore the processes at work as language develops, however, it is fascinating to start from the very earliest evidence of language. When an infant begins to produce sounds, initially there are simply **reflexive sounds** such as crying, burping and laughter. Then the child seems to play and experiment with certain sounds. This develops into **reduplicated babbling** – a series of repeated consonant-vowel sounds, for example 'ba ba ba ba'. (Apparently, this is where the word 'barbarian' comes from! The Greeks represented foreigners' babbling sounds as 'bar-bar-bar'.)

Around the age of one year, the child produces babbling with expressive sound and intonation. It is, however, very difficult to represent – in the alphabet or in IPA – the sounds that emerge from an infant's voice box.

In this particular 'stages' account of child language development, babbling moves on to the **one-word stage**. Parents often think they have heard their child's first word as something approximating to 'Mummy' or 'Daddy'. But this might be a matter of wishful thinking. In most languages, the sounds for these words are ones that a child can produce early on (see the section on phonology.) It is no coincidence that early **bilabial consonant** sounds (m, b, p, w) are the ones produced with the lips – a part of the anatomy also highly developed for sucking, the infants' method of feeding.

Key terms

- **structural approach**
- **deficit approach**
- **babbling**
- **telegraphic utterances**
- **reflexive sounds**
- **reduplicated babbling**
- **one-word stage**
- **bilabial consonant**

Writing tips

As you work through your English Language course, you might consider which 'camp' you are drawn towards – structural or functional.

However, you should try to approach data from more than one viewpoint. A structural approach will involve close analysis of the key levels and frameworks of language, a functional approach will involve consideration of the wider social context for language use.

1 What were your first words – according to your parents?

2 Compile a list of 10 words that you think might be in a child's very early vocabulary.

3 Compare your list with other students' lists.

    a What word class do most of the words fall into?

    b Why do you think this is?

Because early words are often nouns, we might assume that the child is labelling things in its immediate environment. But that word can appear to mean something more complex. The single word 'teddy' might signify 'Here is my teddy', 'Where is my teddy?' or 'I want my teddy. Give me my teddy.'

Linguists use the term **holophrase** (from the Greek word '**holos**', meaning whole) to refer to the phase in Child Language Development when the child's output is restricted to one word at a time. However, these utterances seem to be capable of conveying as much meaning as a complete sentence. Certainly, adults interpret many single word utterances as fully functional language.

Exploring these potential meanings takes us into the area of functional linguistics – asking not 'What did s/he say?' but 'Why did s/he say that? What did s/he mean?' You will find it difficult to isolate one approach from the other, even though this book organises them into separate sections – structural approach here and functional approach in a later section.

Activity 9

Read the transcripts below and listen to the audio files **5. Holophrase A; 6. Holophrase B; 7. Holophrase C; 8. Holophrase D**. The transcripts only record the child's utterances and can only represent them in an approximate form. You might try your skills in using IPA symbols for a more accurate transcription.

1 Notice the context in which Spike (age 1) utters the single words and their intonation.

2 Comment on how you interpret their function or meaning as holophrases.

Transcript A: 'da-dee'
Spike and his mother are at the meal table.
da
da
dadee

Transcript B: 'da-dee'
Spike and the whole family are at the meal table.
dadee
dadee
da
odadee

Transcript C: 'mamee'
Spike and his mother and sister are at the meal table.
mama
mama
mamee
mameeeee
mameee
mamee

Key terms

• **holophrase**

Staying within the 'stages' approach to analysing child language development, the child begins to combine single words into two-word utterances.

Researchers have examined the early two-word speech of children and suggested that the structure could be described as a **pivot-open grammar.** The rules of this theory of grammar were quite simple, based on two classes of words:

- **pivot word class** – few in number, but occurring often in a child's speech
- **open word class** – a greater number, but occurring less frequently.

Using this theory of structure, an example of pivot words in Spike's speech would be 'more' and 'my'. He combines these useful words to lay claims to all sorts of things: 'my drink', 'more cheese', 'more telly', etc.

Activity 10

Read the following transcripts and listen to the audio files *9. Pivot A; 10. Pivot B; 11. Pivot C*. The transcripts show only the child's utterances.
You will notice that the person transcribing cannot be sure what counts as a word. Do you think that 'dunnit' is one word? Is 'open it' two separate words?

1 Try to analyse the two-word utterances in terms of pivot and open terms.

2 Evaluate the usefulness of these concepts in analysing the child's utterances.

Transcript A: pivot, more, my, mine

Context: Spike (age 1) and his mother

one more	one more	
dat mine	dat mine	dat mine
mine	my blanket	my blanket

Transcript B: pivot, open it, hug, mummy

open it	open it
you open it	
hug hug	hug mummy

Transcript C: pivot - 3 word

hey mine	yeah drink coffee
I dunnit	
dunnit mummy	
drink allit	drink allit

As you work through this section, you should be alert to the tentative nature of theories – they are just that and not statements of fact. Although some linguists and researchers suggested the concept of pivot grammar, others challenged their theories on the basis that the concept did not work well enough to explain the data. Using the concept of 'stages', the next stage is that of telegraphic speech/utterances.

The linguist Chomsky used the distinction between **surface forms (performance)** and the underlying **deep structure (competence)**, which is similar to de Saussure's distinction between **'langue'** and **'parole'**. For example, the same surface form 'open it' might have different interpretations of its function, depending on the context. So, it could mean on one occasion 'Look I opened it' (the deep structure of a declarative). On another occasion, it could mean 'Open it for me' (the deep structure of an imperative).

Key terms

- **pivot-open grammar**
- **pivot word class**
- **open word class**
- **surface forms (performance)**
- **deep structure (competence)**
- **langue**
- **parole**

Telegraphic utterances are a condensed form of sentence structure without function words (auxiliary verbs, pronouns, prepositions, determiners). The term refers to the mode of communication by telegraph or telegram, where the sender had to pay per word used and so kept the message as short as possible.

> Arriving 10 am = I will be arriving at 10 am

Nowadays we might consider the analogy with SMS language structures, though it is important to keep some other factors in mind: such messages are often not 'stand-alone', but form part of an ongoing conversation.

> you coming tonite = are you coming tonight?

Headlines also use this method of keeping the message short:

> Motorway traffic chaos = The motorway traffic is in chaos.

Remember to avoid using a deficit approach as you compare the form of any utterance with an 'ideal' (i.e. which exists in a hypothetical realm), standard form of written grammar – the ability to write headlines, for example, is considered a skill. Similarly, you should investigate the telegraphic speech of children as evidence for their language ability. It tends to support the theory of an innate or inbuilt understanding of grammar. Children are clearly not imitating speech they have heard, but have an intuitive sense of the essential words (**lexical word classes**) for communicating meaning as opposed to the 'disposable' words (**grammatical word classes**).

Key terms

- **lexical (content) word classes**
- **grammatical (function) word classes**

Independent research

Find and analyse other examples of young children talking. Do they tend to omit all forms of the verb 'to be', saying, for example 'Me happy' or 'You having a drink'?

Activity 11

1 Read the following transcript of Louise (aged 3–4). Identify examples of telegraphic utterances and analyse each structure.

a Expand each structure into full, standard grammatical sentences.

b Identify what classes of words are omitted.

c Suggest why these are not necessary to convey Louise's meaning.

> **Louise is chatting to her parents and grandmother over a period of time.**
>
> Louise: it like my movie
> Louise: it running out of batteries (Is it?)
> Louise: it working again I think now
> Louise: I got it now
> 5   Louise: now it your turn
> Louise: what is this? <*her grandmother explains about Tippex …*>
> Louise: can I try it

Often Louise omits the word 'is'. It doesn't take a language expert to notice that. When you begin to analyse, you consider what class of words 'is' comes into: it is a form of the auxiliary verb 'to be'. You could use the linguistic terminology for this particular verb, which is the most commonly used verb in the English language: it is called a copula verb (from the Latin, meaning to join or link), referring to one of its functions.

> I am happy. I = happy.

You should then consider whether children omit all forms of this verb, for example, 'am', 'are', 'were', etc.

Louise also omits the word 'have' (I got it now). Is there any connection? You might know that 'have/has' is another auxiliary verb, so Louise can communicate using only the main verb (got).

It is important to look for trends, but also important to be open to exceptions that prove (meaning *test* or *challenge*, not *support*) the rule. Did you notice that Louise did not omit the copula in the final example: 'What is this?' Can you explain this?

As you read transcripts and listen to other young children talking, identify any use of telegraphic utterances and analyse this feature using the concepts provided above.

After this brief look at child language through the 'lens' of developmental stages, it is time to try a slightly different approach. Using the same metaphor of placing the data under a microscope, we will now focus on each key constituent of language in turn.

Grammar

Certain aspects of grammar have been of particular interest for researchers into child language development. One area is: How do children manipulate structures to turn declarative statements into questions or negatives? Think about how this is done in English by transforming a few examples of declaratives. For example:

> She's going.   Is she going?   She isn't going.

Notice exactly what moves you have to make to change it into:

- an interrogative form – simply reverse the order of the subject and the *first* of two verbs
- a negative form – insert 'not' after the auxiliary verb.

That seems relatively straightforward as a manoeuvre, but then look at sentences in the simple present tense, rather than the continuous aspect:

> I want that.   Do you want that?   I don't want that.

This is more tricky:

- use of a completely new auxiliary verb 'do', instead of a simple reversal 'Want you that?'
- addition of a negative term 'don't, instead of 'I want not that.'

Activity 12

1 Transform a variety of declarative structures, using all the tenses, aspects (continuous and perfect) and modal auxiliaries. For example:

a	Simple past tense	They found it.
b	Future form	We will see.
c	Present perfect	He has finished.
d	Past perfect	He had finished.
e	Past continuous	We were playing.
f	Present perfect continuous	We have been playing
g	Modal auxiliary verbs	I can/must/might/should see it.

2 Explain each transformation as a move or series of moves.

> ### Connections
>
> This aspect of child spoken language development links with language change – these question and negative structures were used at some point in the development of English over time.

You will see that the process is not the same for all types of declaratives, depending on the form of the verb phrase.

Children often develop question and negative structures in stages. They may start by using intonation alone to signal questions. Then they introduce question words: research suggests that 'what' and 'where' tend to occur before 'who', 'why', 'when'. You might reflect on whether this is connected to the language they have heard (Skinner imitation theory), their cognitive development (Piaget *et al.*) or even their particular communicative needs (Halliday's theory of language functions).

Activity 13

Read the transcript below and listen to the audio files *12. Are you open it; 13. Her don't like em*.

1 List all the uses of question and negative forms by adults and children.

2 Analyse the child's formation of questions and negatives. For example:

Child's utterance	Standard written interrogative structure	Analysis
are you open it	will/can/did you open it	The child uses the auxiliary verb 'are'. This is normally used to form interrogatives in present continuous 'are you opening', but in this case it appears that the child is expressing a slightly different meaning, though we cannot be sure which is intended.

Spike is travelling with his mother, father, grandmother and sister in the car with an Easter egg gift.

Spike:	it got egg in it
Mum:	what did you say? it's got another egg inside of it?
Spike:	yeah
T-Nanny:	I think it's got chocolate buttons inside of it if you shake you can hear
Mum:	chocolate buttons inside? Shake it! Shake it up and down! You hear those chocolate buttons?
Spike:	are you open it?
Mum:	you could just bite his head then you could pour some out of his head
Spike:	what head?

Mum:	I think daddy's going to want a button are you going to share a button with daddy?
Spike:	no
Mum:	*<gasp>* you're not gonna give daddy a button?
Louise:	I am
Spike:	but her don't like it
Mum:	he does
Spike:	no her don't

(line numbers in margin: 5, 10, 15)

You may have noticed Spike's use of pronoun to refer to his father. Not only does he use the female pronoun, but in its object form 'her'. This is despite his mother contradicting and using the standard form 'he'. This, incidentally, supports the claim that motherese/caregiver language focuses on the truthfulness of a child's utterances, rather than their linguistic 'correctness'.

This chart of the standard pronoun forms in contemporary English demonstrates just how complex the system is:

	Subject form	Object form	Possessive	Possessive	Reflexive
First person singular	I	me	my	mine	myself
First person plural	we	us	our	ours	ourselves
Second person singular	you	you	your	yours	yourself
Second person plural	you	you	your	yours	yourselves
Third person singular: female	she	her	her	hers	herself
Third person singular: male	he	him	his	his	himself
Third person singular: neutral	it	it	its	its	itself
Third person plural	they	them	their	theirs	themselves

Activity 14

Read these transcripts of Louise (age 3) and listen to audio files *14. pronouns compilation*.

1 Identify the child's use of pronouns.

2 Comment on the forms Louise uses.

3 Add further examples from transcripts and recordings of other children.

> **Compilation from Louise speaking**
>
> I think me love her
>
> her thinks me love her
>
> her take it off
>
> him doing it
>
> don't eat HIS, eat YOURS
>
> me and my car it's actually your car
>
> No no not YOURS it's MIINE

Some of the more complex structures in language are the passive mood and complex sentences using conjunctions. Or, if you take a cognitive approach, these structures express concepts that are more difficult to grasp. Here are some examples:

Passive:	I think this idea <u>might have been assimilated</u> from experience of folk tales.
Active:	Someone <u>assimilated</u> this idea.

Complex:	You should let me have the book (<u>^that</u>) I bought, <u>as</u> it was a special present for my mother.
Simple:	Give me the book.
Compound:	I bought it <u>and</u> it's a present for my mum.

Even at much older ages, students are assessed for their ability to use these structures. In SATS and GCSE mark schemes, higher bands are awarded for the use of the passive voice in formal writing. Lower mark bands are awarded to students who rely heavily on coordinating conjunctions (e.g. and, but, or) to form compound structures.

Activity 15

Read the transcripts and listen to audio files *15. if they blow them up; 16. conjunctions*.

1 Identify the child's use of the passive voice. How do you think she developed this structure – by imitation or by understanding of the grammatical principle?

2 Identify the child's use of complex sentence structures.

   a Which conjunctions does she use?

   b Comment on any non-standard forms.

Transcript A:
Louise was chatting to her grandmother in the car, after dropping her mother at work one morning. They saw the famous Sheffield landmark – Tinsley cooling towers – that Louise's mother had used on a flyer alongside a bottle of Henderson's Relish, not beer as Louise thought.

Louise:	my mummy has a picture of those
T-Nanny:	yes I know, she took a very good picture of those
Louise:	yeah and it has a bear [beer] on
T-Nanny:	and they're going to blow them up, get rid of them. They are going to explode them cos they don't want them any more
Louise:	I do
T-Nanny:	I know I do I think they're part of the scenery
Louise:	If they knock them down the planet will be destroyed
T-Nanny:	do you think?
Louise:	yeah my mummy told me that as a secret
T-Nanny:	did she?
Louise:	yeah
Louise:	I know something what you've forgotten
T-Nanny:	what do you know?
Louise:	you forgot something what I know still
T-Nanny:	mmm?
Louise:	some people are changing every road of Sheffield
T-Nanny:	oh I know

(line numbers: 5, 10, 15 shown in margin)

Transcript B:
(Note: only Louise's (age 3) utterances are transcribed.)

ko why it clicked off

yeah ko why it won't work

I want it (What) that what you have in your hand

the special CBeebies book (which?) what I drawed in with my special CBeebies colour in pens

I found it there when you was asleep on the couch

(line number: 5 shown in margin)

Morphology

The 'Wugs' test demonstrates that a child has an understanding of the way words can be structured, adding prefixes or suffixes to a root word. It cannot be imitation, as the test uses invented words. In English, suffixes can be added to verbs to indicate different tenses:

jump jumping jumped

and to adjectives to express comparative and superlative meanings:

big bigger biggest

Prefixes can indicate concepts such as the negative. It is often the child's virtuous errors that demonstrate their underlying understanding of morphology. Louise, for example, was talking about a picture she wanted to show to her teacher.

Mum: I think Miss Allen will be impressed.

Louise: I hope she won't be unpressed.

Activity 16

Read the transcript below and listen to audio file *17. loud, louder, loudest*.

1 Identify the various suffixes used for the word 'loud' and related adjectives by:

   a Louise

   b her grandmother.

2 Comment on what Louise has understood about morphology.

> **Louise (3) is travelling in car with her grandmother back from a birthday party where she got some party whistles.**
>
> (Note: the key words have been underlined.)
>
> Louise: do you know how to blow a whistle?
>
> T-Nanny: yeah I think so
>
> …………………………………
>
> Louise: did you hear that?
>
> T-Nanny: certainly did it was <u>very loud</u>
>
> 5 Louise: is that <u>pretty loud</u>?
>
> T-Nanny: that is <u>pretty loud</u>
>
> Louise: is that <u>quiet</u>?
>
> T-Nanny: er yeah that was OK
>
> Louise: I love <u>loud and loud and quiet</u>
>
> 10 T-Nanny: do you?
>
> Louise: yeah do you?
>
> T-Nanny: er <u>sometimes I like loud</u> but <u>usually I prefer quiet</u>
>
> Louise: is it <u>funny</u>?
>
> T-Nanny: ummmm … <u>funny-ish</u>
>
> …………………………………
>
> 15 Louise: I love blowing whistles
>
> Louise: do you want to blow yours
>
> Louise: it actually a trumpet
>
> …………………………………
>
> Louise: shall we have another one with only trumpet in?
>
> T-Nanny: um yes as long as you don't play it <u>too loud</u> yeah
>
> 20 Louise: alright this gonna be (?) <u>very (?) loudest</u> that why it <u>funnier</u> that why it <u>loud</u> ko why it <u>funnier</u>
>
> T-Nanny: mmm <*piercing noises*> it's good I like that
>
> Louise: I can do it <u>really loud</u> like this did you hear it?

	T-Nanny:	nearly
	Louise:	do you like that <u>loud</u>?
	T-Nanny:	well it was <u>shrill</u> <u>very high and loud</u>
	Louise:	um do you know what that means?
30	T-Nanny:	no
	Louise:	it means <u>nice</u>

………………………………

	Louise:	is that <u>really quiet</u> or <u>loudest</u>?
	T-Nanny:	<u>very loud</u> <u>loudest</u>
	Louise:	is that it?
35	T-Nanny:	that was <u>quiet</u>
	Louise:	er you s'posed to pretend it was … er you s'posed to pretend it was <u>really</u> <u>LOUD</u> like this <*shrieks*>
	T-Nanny:	oh dear very <u>VERY loud</u> oh

……………………………….

	Louise:	is that <u>loudest</u>?
40	T-Nanny:	yeah can we do something else now?

Lexis and semantics

Although morphology focuses on word formation, it clearly impacts on meaning. This part explores a child's understanding of lexis and semantics – the relationships between words and meanings.

A child has to work out what a word means solely from the context of its use. No one can translate the word or provide a simple enough definition to help the child. This deduction from contextual clues can lead to some misunderstandings.

The term '**over-extension**' refers to a child using a single adult lexical item (e.g. 'daddy') to name all people who share the characteristic of maleness. The term '**under-extension**' is used when a child takes too narrow an understanding of a word's reference. A child might understand the word 'bear', for example, to refer only to their own toy animal.

Important semantic concepts are those that indicate relationships between words and other words. Theories of vocabulary learning suggest the importance of grouping words according to their meanings:

- **synonyms** express similar meanings (e.g. little, small, tiny, young)
- **antonyms** express opposing meanings (e.g. large, big, enormous, old)
- **hypernyms** express 'umbrella' meanings (e.g. family – mummy, daddy, sister, brother)

There are many directions for investigation into child language. You may be interested in researching the influence of television on children's language development. The popular media position is that television is harmful to a child's development and, incidentally, that the amount of television and video-watching is linked to social background.

At an early stage Spike seems to assume a system where there is just one word for each concept and one corresponding opposite. Spike agrees he is a 'little boy', but does not accept 'small' as a valid alternative. He has his own system of opposites: when asked if he was 'sick', he contradicted, explaining 'No, I happy'. This may be the same for other children, at the moment it is hypothesis.

Chomsky's theory of an innate ability for language is really restricted to the grammar of language. Once the child has acquired the ability to form sentences in a variety of structures (simple, compound, complex, declarative, interrogative, imperative), they still need to extend their vocabulary. How is this skill developed?

Social environment debate

Research into the differences between one person's repertoire of vocabulary and another's suggests the vital importance of exposure to external stimulus. At an early stage, this can only be the talk that surrounds a child. This might include TV programmes, but there is debate here about whether television is a malign or benign influence. One important difference between TV language and live language is the absence of interaction from a television. In some people's opinion, television is the sound equivalent of 'wallpaper'.

Activity 17

Read the transcripts below and listen to audio files *18. ghost drink; 19. architecture; 20. fabulous*.

1 Identify interesting uses of vocabulary by Louise.

2 Comment on the influence of the talk in Louise's environment. Do you think she has 'picked up' these words from 'caretaker' adults?

Transcript A: Louise (4) is at the meal table with her grandmother and Spike.

T-Nanny:	Spike have you finished your <??>
Louise:	but I did finish all of it
T-Nanny:	really
Louise:	yeah
5 T-Nanny:	is that just a ghost drink (2) what's that
Louise:	it's a ghost drink
Spike:	<??>
Louise:	it's a ghost drink
T-Nanny:	right let's …

Transcript B: Louise (4) is in the car, her mother and grandmother are commenting on the new buildings they pass.

T-Nanny:	monstrosity of a new building hideous!
Louise:	that is ridiculous
T-Nanny:	is it? I don't like that either
Mum:	it's all very brutalist architecture

Transcript C: Louise (5) is with her mother, getting ready for bed.

Louise:	hey this <??> look in bed
Mum:	oh that would be lovely unbutton your shirt shirt and you're probably gonna need some sort of bottoms
Louise:	yeah but I was looking for the black sparkly pants to go with this to wear to bed
5 Mum:	black sparkly pants those aren't pyjamas?
Louise:	but I wanted those to go with the T shirt they look fabulous together
Mum:	they look fabulous together?
Louise:	yeah do you want to see …

Phonology

You have already noticed that very young infants can produce vowel sounds and some consonants, usually those made by using the lips. Child language research into the development of phonemes in English suggests some general points. Some are to do with the **place of articulation** (in the front or the back of the mouth); some to do with the **manner of articulation** (plosive or fricative).

Consonant sounds

Here are some generalisations about the emergence of consonant sounds in young children:

- **front consonants** (b, d, p, t) come before **back consonants** (g, k)

- **plosives** (b, d, g, k, p, t) come before **fricatives** (f, s, sh, v, z, etc.)

- plosives at the beginning of a word (<u>b</u>ook) come before those at the end (boo<u>k</u>)

- fricatives at the end of a word (Loui<u>se</u>) come before those at the beginning (<u>S</u>pike)

- **consonant clusters** reduced to one consonant (<u>gr</u>anma = <u>j</u>amma)

- consonant clusters at the end of a word (ora<u>nge</u>) come before those at the beginning (<u>gr</u>een).

Activity 18

Read the transcript below and listen to audio file *21. phonology compilation*.

1 Try to use IPA to represent the child's phonemes more accurately than the '**eye dialect**' – the use of the alphabet to represent pronunciation.

2 Use the evidence of the child's speech to refer to the theories above.

> **Spike is with his mother or grandmother (in different sections).**
> (Note: square brackets < > with a consonant inside indicate doubt whether the child produces the phoneme or not.)
>
> Spike: me dive it mummy
> Mum: you drive it brrm brmm
> Mum: look what does she have
> Spike: her dot her own tar
> 5 Mum: she's got a car
> Spike: yeah like mine
> Mum: like yours nice one
> ------------------------
> Spike: loo<k> loo<k> mum
> Mum: teddies <??> you're supposed to count how many teddy
> 10   bears there are
> Spike: dirteen
> Mum: no you start at one
> Spike: one fee
> Mum: you're supposed to start at one
> 15 Spike: no me start at dirteen
> Spike: thirteen sixteen one
> ----------------------------
> Spike: tan tastle
> T-Nanny: sandcastle you're right
> --------------------

Spike:	dot lello dot gee<n> dot lello	
25 T-Nanny:	you've got yellow OK	

T-Nanny:	are those the tweenies	
Spike:	yeah teenie<s>	

Although Spike pronounces /r/ with a marked **rhotic** (rolled sound as in Somerset varieties) after vowels (e.g. car), this sound often occurs late at the beginnings of words (the Jonathan 'Woss' type of lisp). Other late-developing consonant sounds (at average 4 years) are the fricatives at the beginnings of these words see table:

The most tricky consonant sounds are these phonemes:

- /θ/ (thin, thine) virtually unique to the English language
- /ʒ/ (leisure) which never occurs at the beginning of English words, but is common in other languages such as French (je, Jean, Jacques).

Vowel sounds

Although vowel sounds do not present the same sort of problems in articulation, there have been CLA research studies into children's development of vowel sounds. Here is one example. A study of 100 2-year-old children recorded the following:

Vowel type	Phoneme	Example
Short vowels	ɪ	pit
	æ	pat
	ʊ	put
	ɒ	pot
Long vowels	ɪː	peat
	ɑː	part
	ɔː	port
Dipthongs	ɑɪ	pie

Fricatives	
Phoneme	Example word
ʃ	shoe
v	van
z	zoo
tʃ	change
dʒ	jump

You may also come across ideas about other characteristics of a child's emerging speech:

- unstressed syllables tend to be deleted, for example, 'a pen [pretend] story'
- addition of an extra vowel sound between consonants, for example, 'belu' [blue]
- assimilation of consonant sounds and reduplication, for example, 'goggi' [doggy]
- voiced/voiceless consonant substitution, for example, gup [cup].

Functional approach

The linguist M.A.K. Halliday developed a fascinating framework for analysing child language development, which emphasises the function of language as a communicative tool (rather than a system of structures). Some of his evidence came from observing his own son Nigel.

Halliday focused on human communicative goals – physical, emotional and social – even in very young infants in a pre-speech stage. He suggests four primary functions:

- **instrumental** – expressing needs for food, etc.
- **regulatory** – controlling the actions of others
- **interactiona**l – making sociable contact with others
- **personal** – expressing feelings.

These goals, Halliday suggests, motivate children to use language once they are able to vocalise.

Key terms

- **instrumental function**

- **regulatory function**

- **interactional function**

- **personal function**

- **heuristic function**

- **representational function**

- **imaginative function**

- **metalinguistics**

Activity 19

Work in groups or pairs.

1 Using only gestures or non-verbal sounds, find ways of communicating each of Halliday's primary functions.

2 Now express these functions using single words or telegraphic utterances.

At a later stage of development, Halliday suggests (fitting in with Piaget and Lenneberg's cognitive theories) the child needs to achieve further communicative goals. These help the child to interact with – and come to terms with – their environment:

- **heuristic** – asking for information
- **representational** – conveying information
- **imaginative** – telling stories, joking, even lying to create an imaginary world.

At an even later stage, Halliday suggests an informative function, which has no connection with the outside world. It is a sort of **metalinguistics** – language to talk about language. This is an important function of the language used in your course books, your English language lessons and in your own responses to activities and tasks in the exam.

This neat framework is based on the theory of one man. This does not mean that language has eight, and only eight, functions. Can you add some of own?

Activity 20

Read the transcript below and listen to audio files **22. functions**.

1 Comment on the functions for which the child is using language.

2 Try to analyse the child's language behaviour using one of Halliday's functions in each case.

	Louise:	done that one (.) shall I do this one now? The tambourine
	T-Nanny:	the tambourine I think would be very nice to do
	Louise:	then the pirate one
	T-Nanny:	if you like
5	Louise:	colour in the nose brightly pink
	T-Nanny:	mm-hmm
	Louise:	er do you want to draw in the little one
	T-Nanny:	no I don't want to draw I just want to have a rest
	Louise:	hey how about the telly
10	T-Nanny:	I put it on pause because we weren't watching it then
	Louise:	oh, I was
	T-Nanny:	what have you got eyes in the back of your head? How can you watch it when your looking this way and the television is that way?
15	Louise:	I can watch it with this like this see?
	T-Nanny:	but then you can't colour
	Louise:	I can like this um let me just colour see?
	T-Nanny:	well it was getting noisy and annoying

Discourse and pragmatics

The concepts of **discourse** and **pragmatics** often overlap. As you study the overall discourse structure and conventions of certain types of spoken language (phone conversations, anecdotes, stories, jokes, etc.), you may also be drawn into consideration of the underlying assumptions and implied meanings of certain types of language behaviour.

Genre conventions

If you think of all the spoken language exchanges you are involved in over a week, you will be able to add to the list above. Your social awareness of the appropriate language behaviour for each is so instinctive, that you may not be aware that there are conventions (almost 'rules') for each – until someone flouts them!

Children gradually acquire – or perhaps it is more accurate to say that they learn them by imitation and reinforcement – these discourse conventions. Louise used to open telephone conversations with a specific account of whatever was on her mind/in her field of vision at that moment. Now, aged five, she is aware that the conversation needs to begin with some social orientation, for example 'How are you? Fine, thanks.' She also uses some **discourse markers** (also know as a **framing move**, these words are often adverbs, e.g. right, OK, now) to signal a leap into a personal anecdote: 'Granma, do you know something?'

Another handy discourse marker is the word 'actually'. Louise has used it frequently for years and now Spike (aged 3) has just discovered its usefulness.

Fairy stories often follow set conventions for the beginning and end: 'Once upon a time … they all lived happily ever after.'

Connections

Remind yourself of the following terms and concepts.

- Discourse is the study of structures larger than a single sentence (e.g. whole text structure, genre conventions).
- Pragmatics is the study of language in use. Rather than focusing on the surface structure of an utterance – what the *sentence* means – pragmatics is interested in what the *speaker* means in this particular instance.

Activity 21

Read the transcripts below and listen to the audio file *23. knock knock*.

1 Comment on what the child has learned about the conventions of telling jokes and stories.

Louise (4) and her mother and grandmother

T-Nanny: knock knock
Louise: who's there?
T-Nanny: police
Louise: who?
5 T-Nanny: perlease stop telling me knock knock jokes

Louise: knock knock
Mum: who's there?
Louise: pee/pay – piss?
Mum: you shouldn't say piss that's very rude
----
10 Louise: knock knock
Mum: who's there?
Louise: poo poo
Mum: who?

Louise: knock knock
15 Mum: who's there
Louise: poop
Mum: poop who?
Louise: <??> a cow

Louise and her American cousin Lanna are playing alone together in the garden.

Louise: pretend you wasn't normal <??> long long time ago and you wasn't normal…
Lanna: <??>
5 Louise: you wasn't normal <??> big witch
Lanna: who are you?
Louise: I am another witch <??> another witch <??> nice again
10 Lanna: <??>
Louise: no you I told you <??> it wasn't <??> for ever <??> wasn't awake
Lanna: <??> wasn't today
15 Louise: *<singing>*
then we found the witches and made her all to dead her won't wake up for a thousand
20 years till it 60 years
Louise: ha ha ha *<witchy voice>*
<whispering witchy things>

Key terms

- discourse
- pragmatics
- discourse marker/ framing move
- hedging
- mitigated imperative

Politeness conventions

Children need to adjust to the apparent contradiction – in order to fulfil your own selfish desires, you have to fit in with other people's needs. The skills of social interaction are paramount. Call it diplomacy, or the simplest politeness conventions such as 'Please' and 'Thank you', but awareness of the particular needs of a range of social situations is an essential aspect of language skills.

There are several adverbs that are never included in English language textbooks, even though they are used often and very influential. They add little in the way of informative content, but they serve as great social softeners. The linguistic term is '**hedging**'. **Mitigated imperatives** alter the strength of a demand by adding one of these words: 'I just wanted to …', 'Actually I wanted …'. Another word can be added as a hedge: 'It's not going to be possible though'.

Other politeness strategies involve an initial agreement followed by a contradiction (e.g. Yeah but …) or the use of modal auxiliary verbs (e.g. Can I/ you?, Should I?). Phrasing a demand as a friendly suggestion is often effective, particularly in its informal pronunciation, as in 'how 'bout …?' The pleading word is always an option, often used in isolation with stress and a rising intonation: 'Please!'

Activity 22

Read the examples of Louise's use of politeness conventions below.

1 Comment on what the child has learned about language as social interaction.

2 What markers of politeness does the child use – hedges, mitigated imperatives (e.g. please, though, just, how 'bout, can I?, should I?, yeah but), or a few in combination for added effect!

Example A: modal requests

should I do …	should I colour in …	how 'bout …
can I use these	I can't open it though	yes you did
very difficult to open though	can you open it please	just

Examples B: discourse functions

Trying to explain	can you just press this please
Relentless repetition	look look mum I want this one I want... I want a big plate and a knife can I have I just need some bread please
Louise and Spike negotiating at bedtime	yeah but... yeah but... can I just do one puzzle PLEASE spike - No yeah but... I just need can I just...one Spike - No
Arguing (about make up)	can I put no I mean ... just yeah but my mum says
Compilation	let me just go and check

2   Children's written language

This part of the book looks at children's writing: the way children learn to write, the features of their early writing and the processes that lead to competence in the world of written language.

Introduction

Learning to read and write is often seen as a process that is separate from children's acquisition of spoken language. Should this be the case? Do children learn how to read and write when they start school, or do they acquire the skills of literacy long before they enter the formal education system?

As you work through this unit, you might find it useful to refer back to some of the theories about the development of spoken language and consider how they might be applied to the ways in which children develop written language skills.

Activity 23

Make a list of all the writing you have done in the past 24 hours.

a What did you write?

b Why did you write?

Most writing is done for a purpose. We write to record things (e.g. diaries, lecture notes, memos, reminders), we write to communicate with someone who is not present (e.g. letters, notes, notices) and we write to express ourselves or to record the fact of our existence (e.g. creative writing, graffiti).

We don't write for the sake of writing, the same way we don't speak for the sake of speaking. Language is a medium of communication.

So why do young children write? They live in a world of language and signs, and they have a powerful capacity to discover. As you will know already, children acquire language – they are not taught how to speak and listen. Similarly, children experience written language, both reading and writing, long before they enter the education system and formal teaching starts.

Activity 24

1 Two-year-old Jo makes a scribble on a sheet of paper and then identifies it as a drawing when she says, 'Mummy'. What fundamental concept about language has she understood?

2 This picture is Lucy's drawing of her father.

   a What aspects of her father are important to her?

   b What does this picture tell you about the child's view of the human form?

Spoken and written language involve a child understanding an important concept about language – that the sounds people make or marks on paper can mean something, that *this* (a sound, a scribble, an image, a symbol) stands for *that* (some object or concept in the world).

Activity 60

Use the internet to find the painting Ceci n'est pas une pipe (This is not a pipe) by René Magritte. Why did Magritte write this, and why did he call his painting 'The treachery of images'?

Images belong to one of many systems for expressing the world. Language is another. Children will be exposed to all of these from birth. Children have a powerful facility to understand how systems of meaning work, and the world in which they grow up is filled with these systems, all of which they will have to sort out and learn to understand.

Language is a way of coding the world into signs. Babies are often held close to the human face and adults often position themselves so that their faces are close to young children when they talk to them. It isn't surprising that to a child, an adult's face is the most important part. Most children go through a period of drawing people as large heads with the arms and legs attached. This is how they encode the world they see into marks on paper.

When early childhood literacy first began to be studied at the beginning of the last century, it was believed that children could not gain any literacy skills on their own and that literacy was a skill that was taught in schools by teachers. The focus of research was reading and this concentrated on the link between sound (phoneme) and symbol (letter). It was believed that until they reached a certain age, children were not ready to read and there was little point in teaching them.

More recent research has expanded the definition of literacy to observe the different ways children make and interpret meaning, and the way this leads into the understanding of reading and writing.

Activity 25

Discuss in groups the reasons why children at the beginning of the last century, and in previous centuries, were unlikely to read without formal schooling.

A world of signs

The 21st-century urban child grows up in a rich textual landscape in which they will experience a vast range of texts in a multimodal environment. The world offers this child an environment rich with logos, billboards, graffiti, tags, street signs, texts on garments people are wearing, texts on buses and other vehicles, etc. There is also sound – music from a range of sources and a huge variety of language offering the full range of cultural and social diversity.

Activity 26

1 Make a list of as many examples you can think of in one minute of signs that you experience daily.

2 Group these signs into different types, for example, information signs, instruction signs, indoor signs, outdoor signs.

3 How do you understand what they mean?

As your own list will demonstrate, the use of signs to convey meaning is integral to 21st-century life in a way that it wasn't in earlier times. We live in a world of signs. The means we use to communicate are far wider than those used in earlier centuries. We use, and young children are exposed to, a vast range of sign systems in our everyday life. These systems include the language we speak, read and write, the clothes we wear (think about the signals you send out when you choose to wear a particular garment), the traffic signals on our streets, the logos of the different organisations that operate within our culture, the numbers we use to count. All of these carry meaning we can understand and interpret.

These signs are part of a child's environment from the earliest days of its life. Inside the home, the child is exposed to signs in other ways: toys, clothes, TV, food, adult reading materials such as newspapers.

The structure of signs

A sign consists of two parts – meaning and form. Look at this road sign.

Its form consists of a red triangle, an image that represents a car and an image that represents sliding. The images don't resemble the thing they represent – they have picked out what our culture has at some stage agreed are the important aspects of cars and slippery roads. The meaning of the sign is a warning (signalled by the form 'red triangle') that the road ahead is slippery (signalled by the representation of a car skidding). When Lucy draws a picture of her father, she also translates her experience into a sign.

Language is another system of signs: spoken language is formed from sounds that, when put together in certain ways, create meaning. Written language is formed from marks on a page that create meaning when combined in particular ways. In order to write, children have to absorb and understand this code.

Environmental print

Parents often report that children as young as 12 months will recognise the signs they see daily, for example the logo of the supermarket they visit regularly, and respond to them. Children may not give the same meaning to a sign that an adult will give. One mother said, 'I was pushing him along the road near my mum's when he saw the Tesco sign. He got really excited and started pointing and making an *uh uh uh* noise, because he gets sweets when we go shopping.' This child, at this age, had made the reasonable interpretation that the Tesco sign meant 'sweets'.

Signs can be made from many different materials. The **mode** depends on the social and cultural context in which the sign is used. The sign for the Co-op is made from the graphemes (letters) <c> <o> <o> <p> arranged in a square. They are underlined and the logo is blue on a white background. Other signs might contain no writing at all.

Children make signs constantly, from the sounds they make; the toys they play with; from paper, paste, pens, scissors, cardboard boxes, furniture. A chair with a blanket may be a tent, a ship, a car, a house. All the resources of a child's world are available and used to create meaning. It's hardly surprising that they bring this facility to all the signs, including written language, that they see in the world around them.

Independent research

If you have access to a pre-school child or children, show them some supermarket logos and observe how many they recognise and understand.

Key term

• mode

Later studies into children's literacy started taking children's early experience of signs into account. In 1982, two researchers in Buenos Aires, Emilia Ferreiro and Ana Teberosky, argued that children's early writing needed to be seen in the context of their experience of writing in everyday life:

> It is absurd to imagine that four – or five – year old children growing up in an urban environment that displays print everywhere (on toys, on billboards and road signs, on their clothes, on TV) do not develop any ideas about this cultural object until they find themselves sitting before a teacher.

Observing young children quickly demonstrates how much they experience written forms of language through:

- **environmental print**
- being read to by adults
- observing adults reading
- involving themselves in writing tasks (e.g. writing shopping lists, 'writing' their name on cards and notes)
- drawing
- using reading and writing in imaginative play.

What seems to matter to the child is that the activity is meaningful and relevant to them. Observing young children will demonstrate how much they understand about writing.

Key term

- **environmental print**

Activity 27

Bethany, aged 3 years 6 months, is beginning to recognise the letters of her name. Walking home from school with her friend Emma, she saw the sign 'BANK' and said 'Look, that's a B for Bethany'. Later on the walk, she saw the road sign 'ENDCLIFFE') and said 'Looks there's a B for Emma'. Later the same week she said, 'When I'm 4, I won't be B for Bethany any more, will I?' Shortly after this, she made a picture from coloured stickers. When she had finished, she chose a pen, made marks at the bottom of the picture and said: 'This says Bethany.'

What does Bethany understand about written language at this stage?

a Does she understand the writing is different from drawing?

b Does she understand how writing communicates (visually and phonologically)?

c What link is she making between letters and numbers?

Very young children, before the start of formal schooling, can make the distinction between pictures and writing. Bethany's writing of her name is very different from the sticker picture she created. There is a clear indication that she is aware that writing is different from drawing. It looks different and it is used for different purposes.

She also knows that letters stand for something. She hasn't quite grasped the concept of the phonetic link between letter and sound, but she can recognise the initial letter of her own name and that of her friend Emma. She is drawing on her experience not just of print, but all the systems of meaning she has experienced in her day-to-day world.

Modern children interact constantly with their environment and the use of signs to communicate is part of that environment from day one. They will start interpreting this medium of communication and using it long before they start formal schooling. They know that when they put their coat on, they are going out; they know that when they see plates and cutlery being set out, they are going to eat.

Gunther Kress believes that understanding the ways in which children create meaning is fundamental to understanding the way their literacy develops. He says, '(a) we cannot understand how children find their way into print unless we understand the principles of their meaning making. (b) Children make meaning in an absolute plethora of ways, with an absolute plethora of means, in two, three and four dimensions.'

How does written language fit into this broad development of the understanding of signs? In earlier centuries, children were not routinely exposed to all the forms of environmental literacy that they are today. Advertising and logos are largely products of the 20th and 21st centuries. Books were expensive and not accessible to most people. The massive range of children's books that we see today did not exist. If children are not exposed to a specific system, it is unlikely they will develop the use of it.

Early literacy

Lev Vygotsky, working in the 1930s, proposed that 'make-believe play, drawing, and writing can be viewed as different moments in an essentially unified process of development of written language'.

When he was researching children's cognitive skills, he put forward the theory of the zone of proximal development: 'the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers'. In other words, children who seem to lack certain skills when tested on their own may perform more effectively in the social context provided by someone with the necessary knowledge.

For example, when Josie is reading a book with her mother, she shows a clearer understanding of the text than when she is reading it on her own. Another example can be seen in the texts for Activity 73, where the teacher has modelled the form 'train ride' for the children to copy.

Skills the child shows in the situation where they are being supported by a more experienced person (adult or older child), but not when they are working on their own fall within the zone of proximal development.

Early research into childhood literacy failed to take into account all the ways very young children engaged with signs and interpreted (and communicated) the world around them. Even now, formal schooling tends to focus on one set of signs, those of reading and writing. Others tend to be downplayed or ignored.

Activity 28

In groups, discuss your earliest memories of reading and writing.

- Where were you reading?
- Who was reading to you?
- What was being read?

- What were you writing?
- Where were you writing it?
- Why were you writing?

Key terms

- emergent literacy
- emergent reading
- emergent writing

Are your early memories of reading and writing positive or negative? Research suggests that early experience of written text can influence the later development of literacy skills.

This first stage of literacy has been called **emergent literacy**. The term is used by theorists and researchers in the field to describe the early stages of the development of literacy, the stages when children perform reading- or writing-like behaviour. There is no agreed definition of this term, though Alonzo B. Anderson, William H. Teale and Elette Estrada, researchers in the field, have offered the following:

- **Emergent literacy** – Any reading or writing-like behaviour which mimics components of the activities that are generally considered reading and writing. There is no agreed moment when reading and writing may be said to begin. The school system often assumes that children know nothing about literacy and must be taught from scratch.
- **Emergent reading** – Any occasion upon which an individual comprehends (or attempts to comprehend) a message encoded in graphic signs.
- **Emergent writing** – Any occasion upon which an individual mechanically manipulates appropriate tools to produce (or attempt to produce) graphic signs representing oral speech.

As you will have observed earlier, children experience language from the moment they are born, or even earlier, some theorists would argue. As their speech and language develop, they acquire skills that are important in the development of literacy. They communicate though a range of media. They play, they draw, they construct models. They 'read' signs that are meaningful in their lives. They express and interpret meanings in mark-making and drawing as well as in speaking and writing. At some stage in their development, they recognise that speech can be written down.

Sammy, aged 3 years 1 month, sees the packet containing her favourite breakfast cereal on the supermarket shelf. She says, 'Porridge!' (She over-generalises 'porridge' to all breakfast cereals). Later she writes a shopping list as she is waiting to go out with her mother. She makes a series of marks on the paper, points at them and says, 'That says porridge'.

Children understand that language has meaning, and this includes written language. The drive to interpret meaning underlies the development of literacy.

Literacy practices in the home

Studies of literacy in the home environment have demonstrated the importance of this early experience, and the importance of taking it into account when children first enter the school system. William Labov's study of children's spoken language, *The Logic of Non-Standard English*, demonstrates how children's skills can be dismissed by well-meaning educationalists who do not understand a child's background and culture.

In 1983, Shirley Brice Heath studied the language and literacy practices of two small town communities in America – one black and working class (Trackton), one while and working class (Roadville). She also looked at the practices in an urban, middle-class community, which produced the majority of teachers in the community schools. Heath noted that the literacy practices were different across the communities. In Trackton, for example, reading was done for a purpose, for example, children read manuals to know how to mend their bikes. Heath noted that 'dependence on a strong sense of visual imagery often prevented efficient transfer of skills learned in one context to another'.

If the education system doesn't recognise and take account of the ways in which children have developed their early literacy, then their further development may be impaired.

The role of writing in different contexts: writing for a purpose

Children, like adults, write for a reason. They are aware of the adults around them writing for different purposes.

Activity 29

Compare Sammy's two texts.

a What is the purpose of each text?

b How does the graphology of the text indicate its function?

c In the earlier text (A), how can you tell that Sammy is writing rather than drawing?

> **Text A:** Sammy's shopping list; aged 3 years 5 months, she did this while she was waiting for her mother to get ready to go out and she 'read' the items on the list as she wrote them.

> **Text B:** Sammy's book cover: aged 5 years 4 months, she did this cover for a book of instructions on looking after pets, which she decided to write after she had spent some time playing with her grandmother's cats. She involved her grandmother in the project.
>
> **Key:** *Pets author Sammy and illustator Granny*

Children understand quite soon that writing is done for a purpose and that different writing had different functions. Before they can understand and interpret the meanings of individual letters and words, they recognise that writing has a distinctive shape and form, and that this shape and form is important to the purpose of the text.

Awareness of connected discourse in written language

Children understand from an early age that whole texts carry meaning.

Activity 30

Search on YouTube for a clip of a young child (3 or 4 years old) reading a book. Try searching for 'Claudia reading We're Going On A Bear Hunt'.

1 Is the child reading the text when looking at it on her/his own? If not, what is s/he doing?

2 How much knowledge of the text does the child show when s/he is reading it on her/his own?

3 Does the child enjoy reading the book? If yes, which aspects of the text do you think s/he enjoys most? If no, which aspects do you think they don't enjoy?

Josie is clearly aware of the ways in which written text can form a coherent whole – in this case, in a story she enjoys and in which she can participate.

Key terms

- **phoneme**
- **grapheme**
- **phonics**
- **blending**
- **segmenting**
- **digraph**

Independent research

Spend a few hours observing young children interacting with books, and drawing and playing, and look at the ways they create and interpret meaning.

Awareness of the processes involved in interpreting written and spoken language

Children develop understanding within a context, for example, a cereal packet may only convey meaning to a child if the specific cereal (or a similarly packaged one) is part of that child's experience. Parents often report that children will refuse to eat a supermarket 'own brand' because the packaging tells them that this is not their familiar cereal, even though the content might be identical.

Activity 31

Find **examples of the following texts.**

- the front of a breakfast cereal packet aimed at children

- a reading book written for young children

- a picture book aimed at children under 5

1 Discuss the ways in which a young child may understand the texts and the meaning they might draw from them.

2 Which is likely to communicate meaning earliest and why? What meaning is likely to be communicated?

How might a child interpret a text that is about writing, rather than a text that has a clearly identifiable function? The signs on the cereal packet help the child to identify it – they serve a naming function. The story book has a narrative function. The reading book is self-referential. It only exists because reading and writing exist.

Vygotsky's research into children's language identifies the importance of context and meaning. He observed that social interaction is central to language development and thought. A child's early literacy activities are relevant to the child – they have a function – even if the adult is not able to recognise these activities as literacy. As with spoken language, the whole is more important than the part. Evidence suggests that children understand the meaning of a text before they can read or write in the formal sense.

What is a child doing when he/she starts to write?

There comes a point when a child starts to identify letters with meaning and distinguish between their drawing and writing. The basic concepts a child brings to their earliest experiences of literacy are that:

- print carries meaning
- print is different from drawings
- speech can be encoded in print
- print can be read out loud
- print has direction (in English, left to right).

Writing and reading are not translating and deciphering. When children begin to write, they are not simply copying from adult models. It is a process of learning and exploration that can be observed by looking at children's early writing.

Ferreiro and Teberosky carried out some experimental work on the development of literacy. They suggested that progress in literacy 'does not come about by deciphering or copying, but comes about through a long developmental process during pre-school years, from initial conceptions about print to the final sophistications and understandings about function, form and convention.'

It is a recognised phenomenon of spoken language that children will develop forms that are not part of the adult system in the process of language acquisition and will be very resistant to correction. For example, Sammy, aged 3, experimented with a question form 'What because?', which resulted in utterances as her language developed such as 'What can he can't walk because?' She chose eventually to discard this in favour of the standard form, but this was when her own developing system of grammar began to exclude it as a possible option.

In early literacy, a child is also experimenting with signs – in this case, visual symbols that create meaning. This experimentation leads to an understanding of how the system works. Research suggests that children understand about writing, they understand the way it works before they are competent practitioners of the skill.

Phonology and early writing – the development of spelling

When children enter the education system (and frequently before this), they start to learn about the link between sound and symbol, between **phoneme** and **grapheme**, and start to understand that certain symbols represent certain sounds. In a language such as English, where the link between the phonology of the language and the spelling is complex and often counter-intuitive, this is a challenging process. Do you tell a child 'k' is for knee or 'n' is for knee?

Current educational policy focuses on the teaching of **phonics**, using multi-sensory tasks including songs, stories and rhymes. The aim of these programmes is to ensure that children understand the link between grapheme and phoneme in a carefully planned sequence. Written language is seen as a form of code. Children learn how to decode and encode it. They are taught to blend phonemes (merge individual phonemes together into whole words) and to segment words (split whole words into individual phonemes). They are taught that **blending** and **segmenting** are reversible processes: words can be put together and they can be taken apart.

Children are introduced to phonemes and the corresponding grapheme and **digraph** (letter combination) until they are familiar with the 42 main sounds of English and the letters associated with them. The first set of graphemes and digraphs taught is:

The following tables show the correspondence between phoneme and the spelling that children are taught in the early stages of learning to read and write.

| s a t p |
| i n m d |
| g o c k |
| ck e u r |
| h b f ff ll ss |

Consonants									
/b/	<u>b</u>at	dʒ	<u>j</u>et	/s/	<u>s</u>un	ʃ	<u>sh</u>op
/k/	<u>c</u>at	/l/	<u>l</u>eg	/t/	<u>t</u>ap	tʃ	<u>ch</u>ip
/d/	<u>d</u>og	/m/	<u>m</u>ap	/v/	<u>v</u>an	θ	<u>th</u>in
/f/	<u>f</u>an	/n/	<u>n</u>et	/w/	<u>w</u>ig	ð	<u>th</u>en
/g/	<u>g</u>o	/p/	<u>p</u>en	/y/	<u>y</u>es	ŋ	ri<u>ng</u>
/h/	<u>h</u>en	/r/	<u>r</u>at	/z/	<u>z</u>ip	ʒ	vi<u>si</u>on

Vowels							
æ	<u>a</u>nt	eɪ	r<u>ai</u>n	ʊ	l<u>oo</u>k	ɜː	h<u>ur</u>t
e	<u>e</u>gg	iː	f<u>ee</u>t	aʊ	c<u>ow</u>	eə	f<u>air</u>
ɪ	<u>i</u>n	aɪ	n<u>igh</u>t	ɔɪ	c<u>oi</u>n	ɪə	d<u>ear</u>
ɒ	<u>o</u>n	əʊ	b<u>oa</u>t	ɑː	f<u>ar</u>m	ʊə	s<u>ure</u>
ʌ	<u>u</u>p	uː	b<u>oo</u>t	ɔː	f<u>or</u>	ə	corn<u>er</u>

Activity 32

Look at the examples below of early spelling by children aged between 4 years and 5 years 6 months. The children are in their first year of formal education and they have been taught to break words down into phonemes in order to spell them.

Try to identify the links they are making between phoneme and grapheme.

a Try to explain how the children have arrived at the spellings. (The chart above might help you.)

b The children are all from Yorkshire. Try to identify any instances where a child's accent might have influenced their spelling.

c 'They've made a lot of mistakes.' Discuss this comment. How useful is it to think of these spellings as 'errors'?

Text A
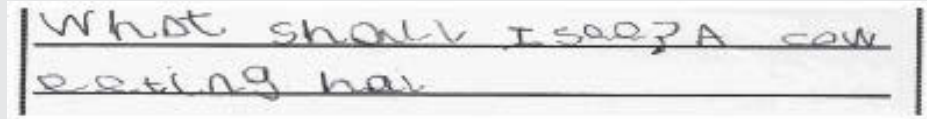
Key: What shall I see? A cow eeting hai (What shall I see? A cow eating hay.)

Text B
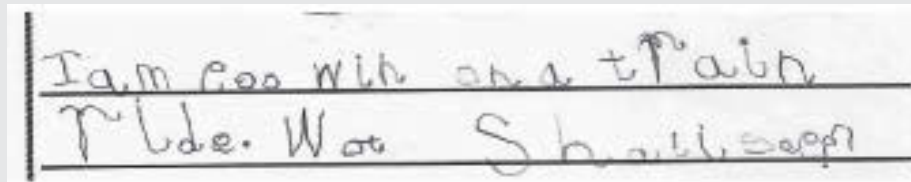
Key: I am goowin on a train ride. Wot shal i see ?? (I am going on a train ride. What shall I see ??)

Text C
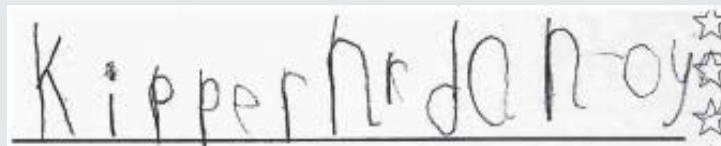
Key: Kipper hrd a noys (Kipper heard a noise)

These children are early writers and are applying the knowledge they have to a system that is new to them. They have worked out spellings from what they have been taught. It's unhelpful to think of these spellings as errors, unless they are thought of as the written equivalent of 'virtuous errors' (see page 51). They represent part of the learning process and they show that the children understand the link between sound and letter, and the way the spelling system works.

Writing in imaginative play

Children very quickly transform their world by creating signs out of the items in their environment. A cardboard box can be a car, a boat, a den – whatever the child's imagination can transform it into. As they become more aware of writing, this can become part of the world of their imaginative play.

Activity 33

Read the following account of Bethany, aged 3 years 10 months, playing in her grandmother's office. She has seen people answering the phone and asking for information. She has also seen her grandmother making notes and working at the computer.

What has she understood about the functions of written language?

Context: Bethany sits at the desk and picks up a ruler.

Bethany: This is my tend (pretend) phone.

Grandmother: Who are you going to phone?

Bethany: Shop *<talks on her phone>*. Er Can I have carrots and … carrots and Readybrek. That's Sammy's

5   Grandmother: OK. Is it Mrs Bethany?

Bethany: It's Bethany! *<She picks up a pencil and starts to 'write' on a piece of paper.>* It's for Daddy.

Later on the same occasion, still playing at 'offices', she uses the keyboard and types letters at random. She finds the letter 'b' and types 'bbbbb'. She says, 'Make it B for Bethany.' She is shown
10 how to use the shift key and types 'BBBB'. She then asks, 'what does it say?'

Writing in early education

Children aged under five start formal learning of the writing system as soon as they start school. They have to acquire a very complex system, but many children are already aware of a range of systems of signs (logos, pictures, environmental writing) and are able to extract meaning from them.

- They need to know what writing looks like and understand that marks on a page relate to spoken words and carry meaning.
- They need to understand that there are lots of symbols and they can be combined in different ways.
- They need to realise that they can communicate in this way too, but there are conventions that need to be followed in order to make this new code work. These conventions include letter forms, use of capitals and lower case, **directionality** (left to right in English), spacing between words and punctuation.

They need to understand that the variation on letter forms they see in the world around them – B b B Ɓ b b b B – can't be extended to the point of inverting them, for example, 'b' and 'd' are different letters.

- They need to understand that the function of the text may influence its form and content, for example, lists run down the page, headings run across and are separate from the main text, crosswords contain one letter in each box.

Writing doesn't only involve understanding. It involves the development of motor skills and the practical tasks of pen control. In the very early stages of writing, children will ignore direction and fit their writing anywhere on the page that suits them. For example, in Activity 64, Bethany has fitted her name across the bottom of her sticker picture, with the letters rising up towards the right-hand side as she runs out of space.

Early writing also shows the beginnings of letter formation. The early texts above both contain letter-like shapes. Sammy's shopping list shows repetition of patterns, circles with crosses in them and also forms that look like the letter 's', the first letter of her name. Even at this early stage, it is possible to see that the writing goes from left to right. She has also written the items running down the page, showing that she has observed lists being written by an adult and has imitated what she has seen.

Key terms

- directionality
- linearity

Activity 34

Texts A–C below come from a set of drawings representing the writing of a small group of children from the September they first started school in Rising 5s to March the following year. Texts A–C are responses to the topic 'My Holiday News' and were done early in the school year.

Text A: by Josh, who told his teacher 'I played with George', produced in September at the start of the school year

Text B: by Daniel, who told his teacher 'I went on my Dad's surfboard', produced in September at the start of the school year

Text C: by Laura, who told her teacher 'I went to the beach', produced in October

Read the commentary below and discuss the questions in small groups. Do you agree with the commentaries? Do you have any further observations?

1 How are these children understanding the basic concepts of writing?

2 What are they communicating with their writing?

3 Is this writing or drawing?

4 Does it carry meaning for the child?

5 What have the children understood at this stage about the conventions of writing?

Commentary

All three children understand that speech can be written down. They have told their teacher what their images 'say'.

Josh hasn't yet separated writing from drawing, but he has created meaning in his drawing. There is a definite head, face, body and legs.

Daniel understands the purpose of writing. He had drawn an illustration and labelled it. He hasn't understood about linearity, but he does understand writing has direction. He has written his words up the page. Letters from his name can be identified – 'd's, 'i's and 'l's are all there.

Laura has a clear concept of what writing is. Hers had directionality and linearity, there are clear letter formations and she has grouped them into 'words'. She is starting to understand about spacing. She is also using upper and lower case letters. She uses her drawing to tell her story as well – there is a child, a flower and a ball.

Laura and Daniel have understood that combinations of symbols carry different meanings. They have not yet mastered the system.

Activity 35

The next set of texts from the same group of children as in Activity 71 were produced in January of the following year. They were all written in response to a story about Kipper. The phrase 'Kipper's Toybox' was written across the paper, and therefore modelled for them by the teacher.

Working in groups, answer questions 1–5 as in Activity 71, then explore questions 6 and 7.

1 How are these children understanding the basic concepts of writing?

2 What are they communicating with their writing?

3 Is this writing or drawing?

4 Does it carry meaning for the child?

5 What have the children understood at this stage about the conventions of writing?

6 What developments can you identify in the children's writing?

7 All these children live in a small, largely working-class town and are local to the school they attend. They have been taught by the same teacher. Decide whether their development of writing skills are at the same level. Suggest reasons why/why not.

Text A: *sfsc*

Text B: *Kipper throod awt his toys and cawt his toys Kipper hrd a noys*

Text C: *kpr fw hz tz to fo his bx*

Activity 36

The final set of texts by the same group of children are taken from the end of the first school year. **Text A** from Activity 69 is part of this set and you can include it in your discussion if you wish.

How are the children handling the conventions of written English now?
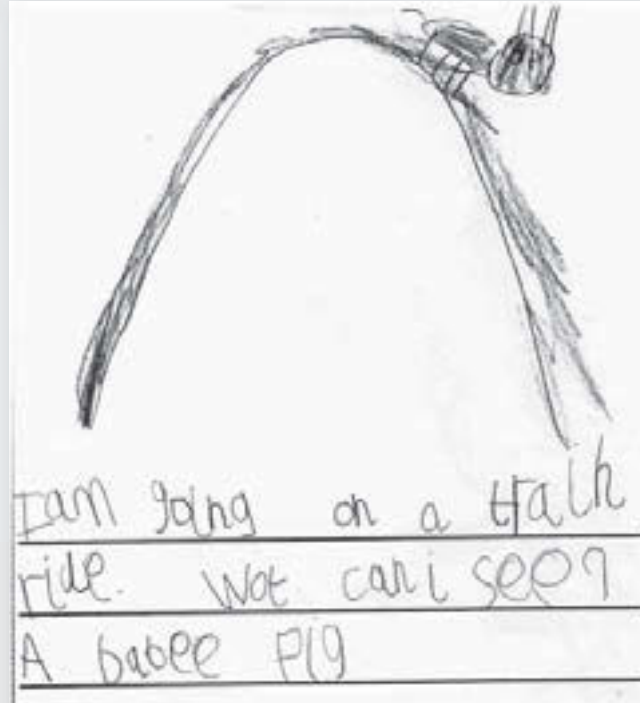
Text G: *Iam going on a train ride. Wot can i see? A babee pig*

Text H: *I am going on a train ride. Wot can I see? Sum ginee pig*

The next stages

Once children have begun to develop the skills of writing, they apply them in a range of ways. They will continue, in a school context, to 'write for the sake of writing' – an activity which may well have little real meaning for a child who is used to their activities having a context and a function. They will also use written language for a range of purposes: to write letters and notes, to write cards, to write notices, to produce lists, to express themselves.

At very early stages, as you have seen above, children understand that they can do things in writing that they cannot do with speech, for example, send messages over a distance in time and space (letters, notices), name and label things, record and report. Some of their writing reflects the way they use spoken language – it tends to be personal, colloquial and context-bound, with a high use of 'and' as a coordinator (a common feature of spontaneous spoken language).

However, even these very early examples of writing have differences from what you might expect to find in children's spoken language.

Activity 37

Source some writing by children aged 5 or 6. In groups:

1 Identify features that you think are unlikely to occur in the children's spoken language. Remember that because spontaneous spoken language takes place in real time, it tends to use a series of clauses that are more commonly linked by coordinating conjunctions (and, but) or simple subordinating conjunctions (so, cos), and context-bound forms such as **deictic words and phrases**.

Key term

- deictic words and phrases

The differences between children's written and spoken language becomes more marked as their skills in writing develop and they begin to make linguistic choices that differentiate between spoken and written forms.

Activity 38

Read text A below, written by 7-year-old Maya. This is an account of an earthquake that hit her home city of Sheffield.

1 Is Maya's account more or less context bound than Marcus's in Activity 76?

2 What devices is she using that are available to a writer, but not to a speaker?

Text A

Key: *The ... earthquake! In the night!*

In speech bubbles:

Frame 1: *Whoooo!*;

Frame 2:
a) *Mummy mummy the house is moving*;
b) *No it is not go back to sleep*;

Frame 3:
a) *I think you were right on the news it said there was an earthquake*;
b) *Told you!*

A pore mans chimney fell down; My mum did not bleeth [believe] me.

Activity 39

Read Texts A and B below, which are two stories written by Sammy at home, ten months apart, without any prompting to carry out a written task. On both occasions, she decided she would write a novel (her grandmother is a novelist).

Note: Text A shows the first two pages of Sammy's first story; the remainder of the text has been represented in type.

1 How does Sammy structure narrative?

2 How are they different from the way she might tell these stories if she was speaking?

3 Is she using any devices to create atmosphere, describe scenes, develop characters?

4 What genres have influenced Sammy's writing style, in your opinion? What features of her text suggests these to you?

5 How is she handling the conventions of written English?

6 Can you identify changes in her writing between the two texts?

Text A The thing made out of blood, by Sammy (7 years 3 months)

Key: *The thing made out of blood Chapter one: The family*

Violet had two sisters and a brother. Her two sisters were called Sharlotte and milley. Her Brother was called Adam. Violet was an <??> Like her two sisters and brothers.

5 *Violet was good. In fact her brother and sisters were good. One sunny day there was as Violet expected 20 pressent's. They were for Her. It was her Birthday. She was 10. She had got a camera, telly and lots of other stuff. 'Wooh.' She said. It was the best birthday she had ever had.*
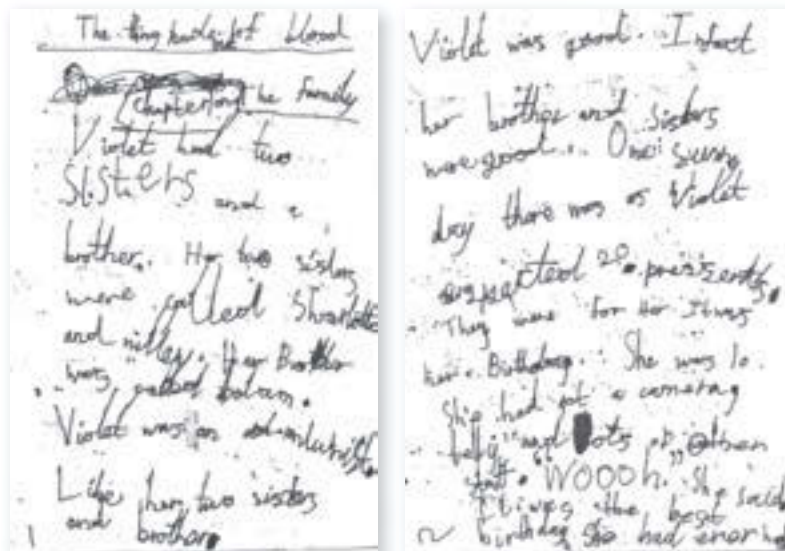
The text continues (spelling, punctuation and capitalisation are presented as they were written, but other aspects of the text are not reproduced here):

Chapter two: The red drip

Violet was walking to school. She suddenly Remembered that she had forgotten something. She plodded back to the house. There to her Right she saw a red drip, She ran inside and told her mum. 'Mummy Mummy I saw a red drip!' said violet 'Oh did you Violet!' said Violets Mum. 'Yes I did!' Shouted Violet. 'For that shouting I wil not bother with it. Said Violets Mum. Violet didn't bother arguing. She Just picked up her school books and off she went.

Chapter 3: The thing made out of blood

After school Violet went home. She was going to play tig with Marcus. He was a friend of Violets. They played tig till Marcus had to go She went to bed She saw a thing made out of blood …

Text B: The Bloodriper (Blood ripper), by Sammy (8 years 1 month)
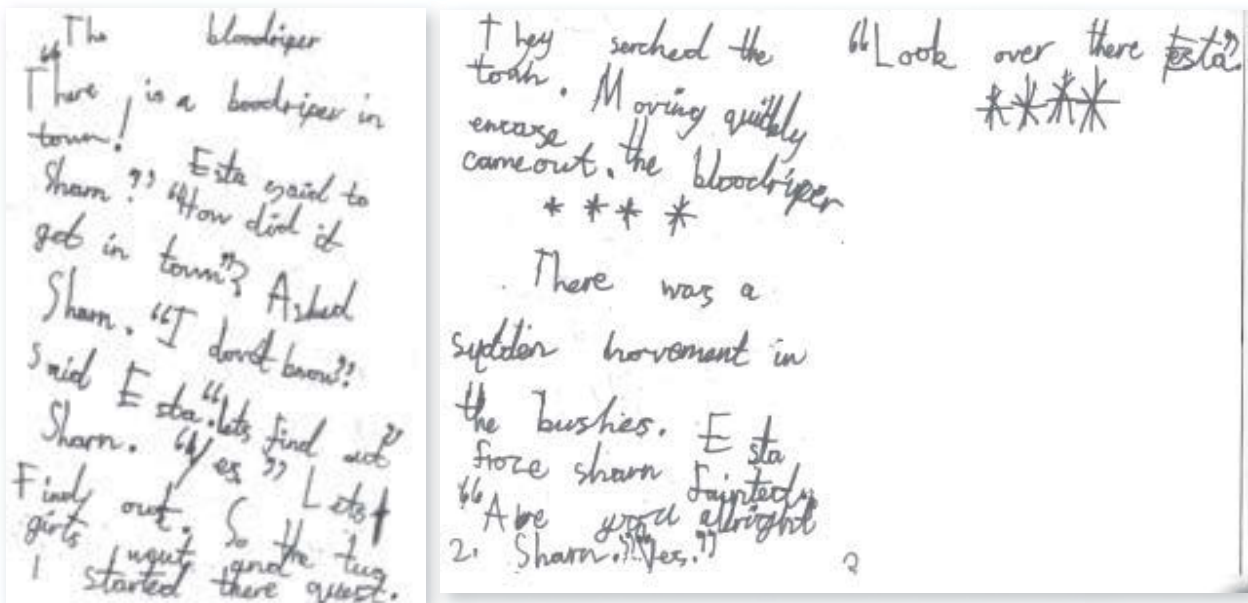
Key: **_The Bloodriper_**

'There is a bloodriper in town! Esta said to Sharn? 'How did it get in town'? Asked Sharn. 'I don't know'. Said Esta. 'Lets find out' Sharn, 'Yes.' Lets find out. So the two girls went and started there quest. (Note the page number 1 at the bottom left of the page.)

They serched the town. Moving quietly encase the bloodriper came out.

_***_

There was a sudden movement in the bushes. Esta froze sharn fainted. 'Are you allright Sharn.' 'Yes.' 'Look over there Esta'. (Note the page numbers 2 and 3.)

Popular culture, new media and digital literacy

In the 21st century, children live in a world of multimedia texts. They experience film, television, print, computer games, video and console games, mobile phones and the Internet. They are aware of and participate in electronic forms of communication like emails, texting and SMS messaging. They also play games, using platforms such as Playstation, Nintendo and XBox. Language is changing and developing in response to a rapidly changing and developing world, and our concepts of literacy, and the ways in which we try to develop these skills in children, needs to change and develop as well.

Kate Pahl has carried out research into the ways in which console games allow children to explore a range of textual practices in relation to the contexts provided by the games. Console games provide a form of narrative structure, but unlike the narrative provided by a book they present the child with a series of challenges – puzzles they must solve, skills they must master, tasks they must perform – before they can move on to the next stage of the narrative. As the child plays the game, they also project themselves into the game, becoming an 'I' who is participating in the action.

Games frequently move between the world of the game console, the world of the television and film (e.g. the Beijing Olympics were covered by a console game that some children played during the same time period the games were being televised; many games are spin-offs from popular TV series or films) and the world of children's play. It is reasonable to expect that these worlds also appear in the narratives that children tell and write.

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