How Children Learn Language

Within three years of birth, children acquire several thousand words, figure out how to build and understand complex sentences, and master the sound system of their language – all before they can tie their shoes.

How do children learn language? How can they be so good and so fast – better even than the most gifted adult?

In this engaging and accessible book, William O’Grady provides a highly readable overview not only of the language acquisition process itself, but also of the ingenious experiments and techniques that researchers use to investigate this mysterious phenomenon. It is ideal for anyone – parent or student – who is curious about how language works and how it is learned.

WILLIAM O’GRADY is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Hawaii. His previous publications include Syntactic Development (1997) and Syntactic Carpentry: An Emergentist Approach to Syntax (2004).
Cambridge Approaches to Linguistics
General editor: Jean Aitchison, Rupert Murdoch
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In the past twenty-five years, linguistics – the systematic study of language – has expanded dramatically. Its findings are now of interest to psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, anthropologists, teachers, speech therapists, and numerous others who have realized that language is of crucial importance in their life and work. But when newcomers try to discover more about the subject, a major problem faces them – the technical and often narrow nature of much writing about linguistics.

Cambridge Approaches to Linguistics is an attempt to solve this problem by presenting current findings in a lucid and non-technical way. Its object is twofold. First, it hopes to outline the “state of play” in key areas of the subject, concentrating on what is happening now, rather than on surveying the past. Secondly, it aims to provide links between branches of linguistics that are traditionally separate.

The series will give readers an understanding of the multi-faceted nature of language, and its central position in human affairs, as well as equipping those who wish to find out more about linguistics with a basis from which to read some of the more technical literature in books and journals.

Also in the series
Jean Aitchison: The Seeds of Speech: Language Origin and Evolution
Charles Barber: The English Language: A Historical Introduction
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Lorraine K. Obler and Kris Gjerlow: Language and the Brain
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