



How Language Comes to Children: From Birth to Two Years

By *Bénédicte de de Boysson-Bardies*

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That children learn to speak so skillfully at a young age has long fascinated adults. Most children virtually master their native tongue even before learning to tie their shoelaces. The ability to acquire language has historically been regarded as a "gift" -- a view given scientific foundation only in the present century by Noam Chomsky's theory of "universal grammar," which posits an innate knowledge of the principles that structure all languages.

In this delightful, accessible book, psycholinguist Bénédicte de Boysson-Bardies presents a broad picture of language development, from fetal development to the toddler years, and examines a wide range of puzzling questions: How do newborns recognize elements of speech? How do they distinguish them from nonspeech sounds? How do they organize and analyze them? How do they ultimately come to understand and reproduce these sounds? Finally, how does the ability to communicate through language emerge in children? Boysson-Bardies also addresses questions of particular interest to parents, such as whether one should speak to children in a special way to facilitate language learning and whether there is cause to worry when a twenty-month-old child does not yet speak. Although the author provides a clear summary of the current state of language acquisition theory, the special appeal of the book lies in her research and "dialogue" with her many young subjects.

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