

ENG 200
Journal Assignment #2

- 1) How do we know that when children acquire their L1 they are not just imitating what they have heard? What evidence supports your conclusion?

The biggest piece of evidence against children simply imitating their input is that children produce new speech all the time. They are able to put together completely new utterances based on how they have deduced to the language to work.

If it were the case that children were only echoing back what they have heard, then it should not be possible for them to build variations on the input. In other words, claiming that children are only imitating implies that they do not have any understanding of the language or its structure, much like a parrot. For example, if they have heard the phrase, "the bottle is on the table", and they also know the word for "box", then under this assumption, the child is unable to produce the sentence "the box is on the table".

Furthermore, we actually do know that children are rapidly building an understanding for the language soon after they are born (once they reach the point where they are not sleeping all the time at least). Far before children can utter a couple words, they are listening. The child's speaking ability has just not caught up yet. This is demonstrated by children understanding and parsing complex sentences like "get papa his water bottle". Children learn by building up an internal grammar and producing new speech based on these inferred rules.