Over the last fifty years, several theories have been put forward to explain the process by which children learn to understand and speak a language.In Verbal Behaviour (1957), he stated: "The basic processes and relations which give verbal behaviour its special characteristics are now fairly well understood. Much of the experimental work responsible for this advance has been carried out on other species, but the results have proved to be surprisingly free of species restrictions. Recent work has shown that the methods can be extended to human behaviour without serious modifications."Limitations of Behaviourism While there must be some truth in Skinner's explanation, there are many objections to it. Language is based on a set of structures or rules, which could not be worked out simply by imitating individual utterances.For example, a child who says "drinked" instead of "drank" is not copying an adult but rather over-applying a rule. The child has discovered that past tense verbs are formed by adding a /d/ or /t/ sound to the base form. The "mistakes" occur because there are irregular verbs which do not behave in this way.Chomsky Language is just one aspect of a child's overall intellectual Piaget Cognitive development.Although Behaviourism is now seen as offering only a very limited explanation, each theory has added to our overall understanding, placing emphasis on different aspects of the process.(cited in Lowe and Graham, 1998, p68) Skinner suggested that a child imitates the language of its parents or carers.They can be summarised as follows: Theory Central Idea Individual with Behaviourist Children imitate adults.Before we do, it is important to recognise that they should not be seen simply as conflicting theories, replacing each other in a sequence.Behaviourism The behaviourist psychologists developed their theories while carrying out a series of experiments on animals.They observed that rats or birds, for example, could be taught to perform various tasks by encouraging habit-forming.This theory emphasises the interaction between children and their Bruner care-givers.Successful attempts are rewarded because an adult who recognises a word spoken by a child will praise the child and/or give it what it is asking for.theory Skinner Innateness when they get what they want or are praised.Researchers rewarded desirable behaviour.Undesirable behaviour was punished or simply not rewarded-negative reinforcement.The behaviourist B. F. Skinner then proposed this theory as an explanation for language acquisition in humans.Successful utterances are therefore reinforced while unsuccessful ones are forgotten.The mistakes made by children reveal that they are not simply imitating but actively working out and applying rules.Such forms are often referred to as intelligent mistakes or virtuous errors.Their correct utterances are reinforced.A child's brain contains special language-learning mechanisms at .birth.Interaction We shall consider each of these in turn.This was known as positive reinforcement

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