

Infants don't produce their first words until age one or later, but by three or four, they can talk quite fluently about some topics. Language use is an integral part of communication; it goes along with gesture, gaze, and other nonlinguistic means used to convey attitude and affect as well as speaker intentions. As children learn to talk, they go through a series of stages, beginning with infancy, when they are unable to converse and do not yet understand any language. Do children try to express similar notions at successive points in development – whether issuing one word at a time, longer word combinations, or adultlike phrases? This is followed by the production of ever more complex, adultlike utterances, as they become active participants in conversation, taking turns and making appropriate contributions. The same holds true for a first language: Comprehension remains ahead of production, but once production reaches a certain level, speakers tend to no longer notice any mismatch (yet it is still there). At the same time, mismatches play an important role in the process of acquisition: Children's representations for comprehension provide targets for what their own production should sound like. Talking plays a major role in social communication and demands a grasp of all the local conventions of use in each speech community. They begin to use language for a larger array of functions – telling stories, explaining how a toy works, persuading a friend to do something, or giving someone directions for how to get somewhere.