

## Discussion Guide for Module 6: Language Development: Learning the Sounds of Language

**Module run time:** 25 minutes

**Estimated time to complete the module with discussion guide:** 45-60 minutes

Below are recommended stopping points and suggested questions to use in your group's discussion. Please feel free to follow your group's lead and discuss topics and questions that are of greatest value to the group. If you're working with a larger group, you may find it useful to discuss these questions in smaller groups and then reunite to summarize.

### Key points:

- Language learning begins before birth. A young brain is particularly ready to learn language.
- When listening to language, infants engage in **statistical learning**. This helps them become sensitive to the specific sounds of their native language.
- Face-to-face interactions are critical for language learning. In the first year of life, social interactions expose children to language. They also prepare the infant brain for speaking.

### Module synopsis:

Page 1: *Language Development: Learning the Sounds of Language*

Page 2: *Acknowledgments*

Page 3: *The Linguistic Genius*

Page 4: *Sensitive Period for Language*

#### ⊕ Recommended stopping point

- Children's language acquisition begins in the womb. How is language acquisition in infancy different from language acquisition at a later age?
- The graph on Page 4 shows that language learning becomes more difficult with age. But, as you heard, it is always possible to learn a new language. Why might language learning be easier at a younger age? What are some factors, besides age, that might determine how well we learn language?

Page 5: *Language Learning Begins Before Birth*

Page 6: *Learning the Sounds of Language*

Page 7: *Becoming a Native Language Specialist*

Page 8: *Speech Categorization*

#### ⊕ Recommended stopping point

- Think back to the pacifier study. How do we know that babies like to listen to novel sounds?
- Each language uses its own unique subset of sounds. If you've ever tried to learn a foreign language, think of a time you had trouble hearing or pronouncing some of the sounds. What were they? Why do you think it was challenging to hear or pronounce these sounds?
- What English sounds might be difficult to hear or produce for non-native speakers? What do you think would be a helpful strategy in teaching these sounds to non-native

speakers? If you tried to learn a new language, what strategies helped you to learn difficult sounds?

Page 9: *Infants Compute Statistics (video)*

Page 10: *Infants Compute Statistics*

Page 11: *Statistical Learning*

**⊕ Recommended stopping point**

- Imagine listening to speakers of a foreign language that you don't understand. It likely sounds like a stream of noise. This is what language sounds like to infants. It is difficult to determine where one word ends and the other one begins. What strategies can adults use to make it easier for babies to "take statistics"?

Page 12: *Does the Source of Language Matter?*

Page 13: *Does the Source of Language Matter? Videos*

Page 14: *Babies Learn from Live Interactions*

**⊕ Recommended stopping point**

- Nine-month-olds did not learn foreign language sounds from TV or audio recordings. Did that surprise you? Based on this study, what can caregivers do to help infants' learning?
- Why do you think live interactions are more powerful than screen media when it comes to language learning?

Page 15: *The Importance of Social Interactions (Video)*

Page 16: *Coordination Between Brain Areas*

Page 17: *From Listening to Speaking*

**⊕ Recommended stopping point**

- Think back to the puzzle video on Page 11. How could you use each of the puzzle pieces in your interactions with children? What other features of live interactions promote language learning?

---

To learn more about emotional development, take a look at these resources:

Zero to Three | Early Language & Literacy

<https://www.zerotothree.org/early-learning/language-and-communication>

<https://www.zerotothree.org/early-learning/early-literacy>

Parenting Counts | Developmental Timeline: Communication

<http://www.parentingcounts.org/information/timeline/#tab-communication>

TED | Patricia Kuhl: The linguistic genius of babies

[http://www.ted.com/talks/patricia\\_kuhl\\_the\\_linguistic\\_genius\\_of\\_babies?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/patricia_kuhl_the_linguistic_genius_of_babies?language=en)

We are constantly working to improve our materials. Do you have suggestions about topics to add to this guide? Did your group discuss something we didn't suggest? We'd love to hear from you! Please email your thoughts to us at [ilabsout@uw.edu](mailto:ilabsout@uw.edu).