

**Brown R.** *A first language: the early stages.*  
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973. 437 p.

Stage I child speech is made up of contentives expressing a small set of semantic relations primarily by word order. In Stage II the little words and inflections which modulate meanings with respect to number, person, tense, definiteness, etc., evolve in an order of increasing derivational complexity. [The Social Sciences Citation Index® (SSCI®) indicates that this book has been cited over 710 times since 1973.]

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"In the fall of 1962, we began a longitudinal study of the development of English as a first language in the pre-school years of three children whom we called Adam, Eve, and Sarah. The principal data of the study were periodic transcriptions of the spontaneous speech of child and mother in conversation at home. These children were fortunate in their amanuenses: Adam had Ursula Bellugi (now research professor at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies); Eve had Colin Fraser (now university lecturer at Cambridge); and Sarah had Courtney Cazden (professor of education at Harvard). During the first year of the project, a group of students of the psychology of language met each week to discuss the state of the children's construction processes as of that date. The idea was that the members of the seminar would, from close study of the week's protocols,

devise deft little experiments that would choose among hypotheses suggested by the naturalistic data. The children's acquisition processes were, of course, too fast for us. By the time we were ready to pose question 'A,' they were always 'on beyond Zebra.'

"It turned out, however, that a great deal could be learned from meticulous records of spontaneous speech in combination with answers to simple questions. No one at the start had any way of knowing how much because the methods of analysis were all still to be invented. They are, basically, adaptations to the problem of child speech of the methods of distributional analysis devised by anthropological linguists for discovering the structure of exotic tongues never before explicitly recorded. We felt ourselves to be in not dissimilar circumstances.

"In the years of data collection we reported on many subsystems of English grammar (e.g., early negatives, modal auxiliaries, tag questions) and it was not until data collection was over that I felt the full force of an expectation that there should be a report of the stages of English as a whole. *A First Language* was my response to that expectation. I think the book has been often cited because the inductive games one plays with child speech have proved captivating to many scientists and because nature has so arranged matters that many things discovered to be true of three children are true of all children learning English, and a few things may be true of children learning whatever language. The book caused me to be given the G. Stanley Hall Award in developmental psychology and the David H. Russell Award of the National Council of Teachers of English.

"For an excellent review of the field, see *Language Acquisition*<sup>1</sup> by Jill and Peter de Villiers."

1. de Villiers J G & de Villiers P A. *Language acquisition.*  
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978. 312 p.