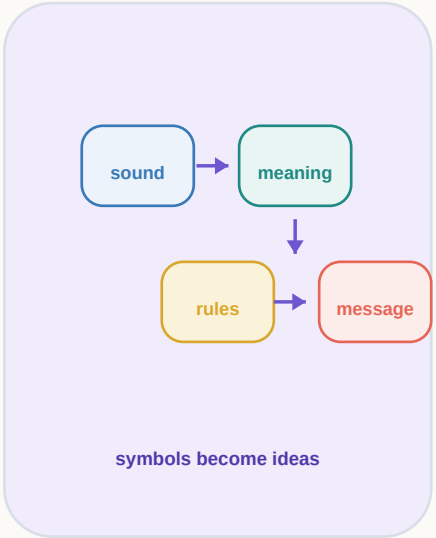
AP PSYCHOLOGY | UNIT 3

TOPIC 3.5

Communication and Language Development

Language combines shared symbols, sounds, meanings, and rules so people can generate new messages.



FROM SOUND TO GENERATIVE LANGUAGE

SOUND	MEANING	RULES	MESSAGES
phonemes	morphemes	grammar + syntax	unlimited ideas

BY THE END, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO...

1. Distinguish phonemes, morphemes, semantics, grammar, and syntax.
2. Sequence major milestones from gestures to telegraphic speech.
3. Use overgeneralization as evidence that children learn rules.

BIG IDEA

Children do more than repeat speech: they discover patterns and use them to create messages they have never heard before.

1 The structure of language

Language is shared, symbolic, rule-governed, and generative: a finite system can create unlimited messages.

FIVE BUILDING BLOCKS

PHONEME

smallest sound unit

sound

MORPHEME

smallest meaning unit

meaning

SEMANTICS

meaning in language

meaning system

GRAMMAR

system of language rules

all rules

SYNTAX

rules for word order

sentence order

HOW THE PARTS WORK TOGETHER

THE CATS PLAYED

Phonemes build the sounds. Cat and -s are morphemes. Semantics supplies meaning. Grammar organizes the system, and syntax places the words in order.

GENERATIVITY

Speakers combine symbols and rules to express new ideas rather than memorizing every possible sentence.

DO NOT CONFUSE

Phoneme = sound. Morpheme = meaning. Syntax = word order. Semantics = what language means.

2 Language develops in recognizable steps

The order is broadly similar across cultures, while exact timing and individual pathways vary.

A DEVELOPMENTAL SEQUENCE

GESTURES → pointing

COOING → vowel-like sounds

BABBLING → repeated sounds

ONE WORD → single-word meaning

TELEGRAPHIC SPEECH

short key-word phrases: "want juice"

OVERGENERALIZATION REVEALS RULE LEARNING

"GOED"

The child applies the regular past-tense pattern to an irregular verb.

EVIDENCE

The error suggests the child inferred a rule instead of only copying adult speech.

WHAT SHAPES LANGUAGE?

LEARNING

experience + feedback

READINESS

biological capacity

INTERACTION

children + caregivers

SCENARIO CLUE

If a child uses a rule too broadly, name overgeneralization and explain how the error shows active rule learning.