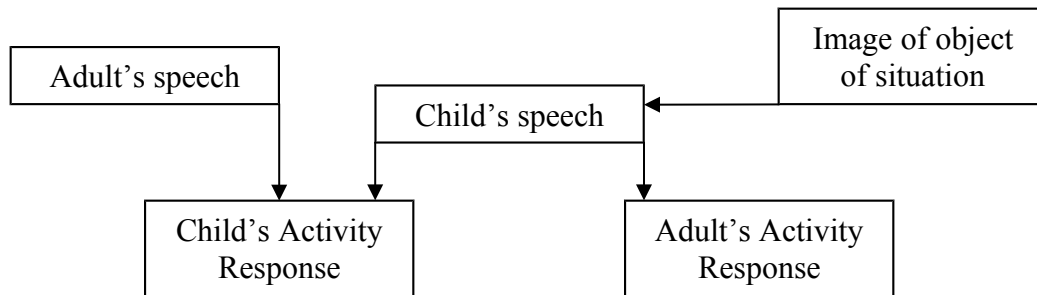


LANGUAGE & SPEECH

A child's understanding of (or being controlled by) the speech of others develops earlier, separately from, and in an entirely different manner from his use of speech to influence others.

The two processes evolve largely independently of one another at first, the child's own speech coming secondarily to elicit action responses in himself and so favour an integration between the two systems.



His understanding of speech develops out of his own physical activity (bodily movement) which, at first pursued and enjoyed for its own sake/in its own right (the pleasurable sensations which accompany it and the 'rewards' it brings), comes to be induced from without by a process of passive imposition (mother's manipulation e.g. undressing the child etc.) then by direct 'imitation', by abbreviated gesture and finally by speech from the mother.

All early understood ('appropriately responded to') speech represents inducement to physical activity and, when effective, elicits active bodily movement in the child.

Primarily the (same) emotional reinforcing energy which accompanies bodily movement and encourages/drives perceptual development generally, also reinforces and energises the motivating process for speech comprehension development.

Just as the reinforcing/rewarding accompaniments of active movement evolve and develop in parallel with the evolving haptic perception creating motivatory/motivational pressures/drives which in turn lead to reward by achievement etc., so the reinforcing energy develops in association with an evolving understanding of the speech of others.

The child's own communicational expression also has its origins in his own physical activity, in this case however it is his vocalisations which appear as innate postural reactions, are repeated and proliferated under the influence of the pleasure which primarily accompanies such activities and the learned associated sensations of pleasure which accrue from their exercise. Nevertheless just as the child's normal hepatic development depends to a large extent on stimulation within the social situation so the normal vocal-articulatory proliferation requires social 'facilitation' and encouragement for its proper and full realisation.

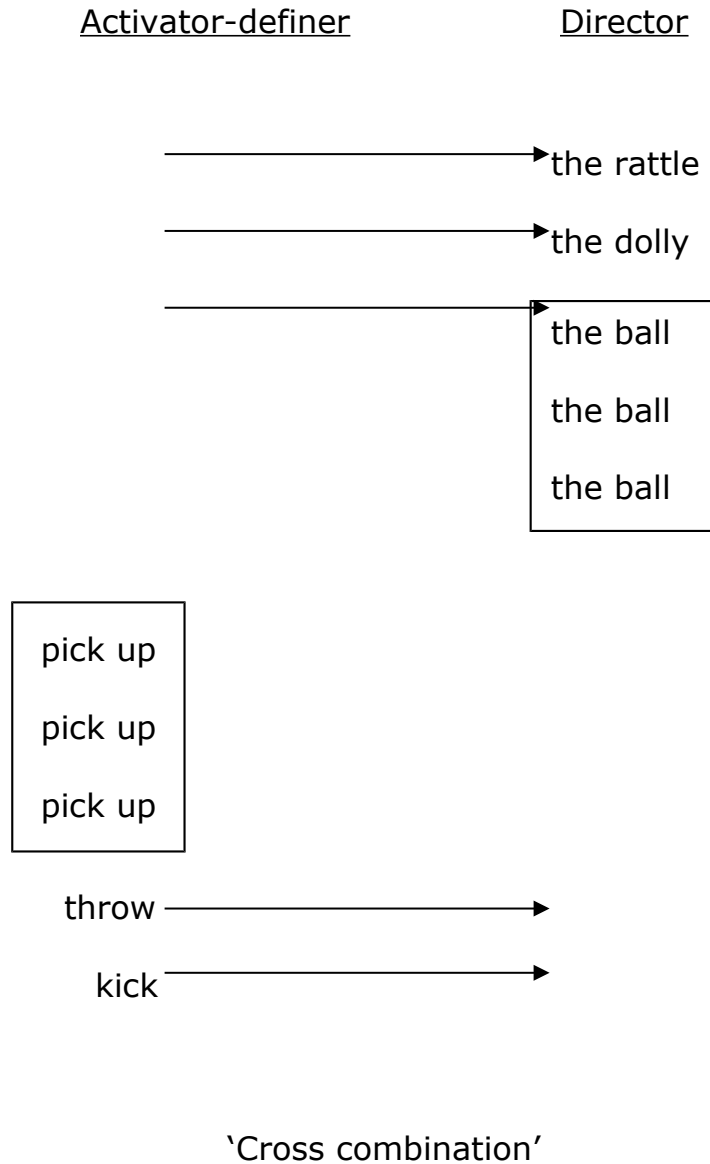
Two divergent processes appear to derive from this social interaction. The less important of the two results directly from the child's use of echoed speech. Being stimulated simultaneously by a speech pattern and an object (or situation) the image of the object becomes associated with the child's reiterated/echoed 'speech', so that the image of the object comes to be capable of eliciting a vocable.

This process which is frequently referred to as 'naming' can readily be seen to have no communicative function at first and hardly merits its inclusion at this stage under the heading of 'speech', however as the child begins to respond actively to his own utterances as if produced by another, the two speech systems become inextricably mingled, eventually appearing to be two aspects of a single process. The traditional terms 'verb' and 'object' are, I feel, rather inappropriate for the functions seem to me to be incitement to action (an 'activator cum definer') with a definition for that action and indication of direction or goal ('director'). It is not possible or relevant to distinguish between direct and indirect object at this phase and the subject (you) is implied much of the time. Later the child's name or the pronoun 'you' may sometimes be used. Either component might in practice be omitted in the early stages, its sense being supplied by the situation and/or an accompanying gesture.

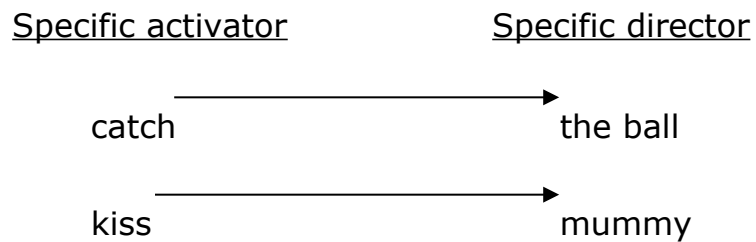
The action (activator cum definer) and direction (director) significations gradually evolve for the child, I suggest, as a result of what we might call 'cross-combination' during the use of injunctive speech in association with the child's activities.

In this way a particular 'activator' comes to be associated (in a combinatorial relationship) with a variety of 'directors' whilst a particular 'director' comes to be associated with a number of 'activators'.

e.g.

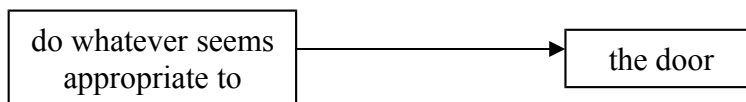


This pattern quickly crystallises into the simple idealised form in which both activator and director carry specific signification for the child-listener.



As has already been pointed out either component might at some stage be omitted without seriously affecting the meaning of the utterance; however either component can in virtue of its presence provide information even when its full significant import is not understood – as for example utterances such as ‘open the door’ or ‘close the door’ may induce an action directed towards the door plus whatever operation is appropriate even when ‘open’ and ‘close’ are not sufficiently significant as to be readily interpreted semantically, at a time when the ‘door’ given alone or ‘where’s the door?’ may produce only a turn to visualise the object.

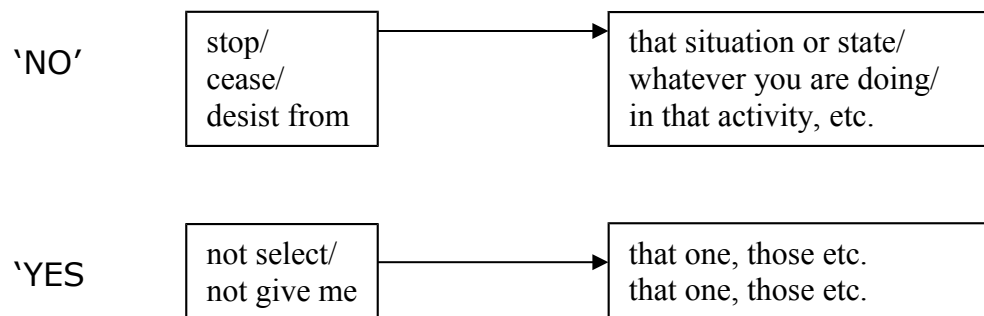
The utterance would appear at this interim stage to be interpreted as:



A pluripotential activator presumably being supplied by the utterance pattern in the absence of a specifically recognised one such as the usually more familiar form ‘Where’s.....?’

(Note. In practice at this stage the alternative response to ‘open/close the door’ may well be closing an open door or an attitude of bewilderment if the door is already shut and vice versa. This presumably results (as does an earlier understanding of ‘close the door’ than ‘open the door’) from such factors as the relative difficulty of the task for a small child and a secondary tendency for a parent to reinforce the ‘closing’ type task).

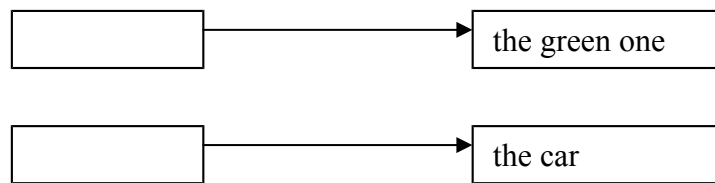
Injunctions may be deliberately apocopated for conventional or other reasons:



Negative activator

Universal or pluripotential director

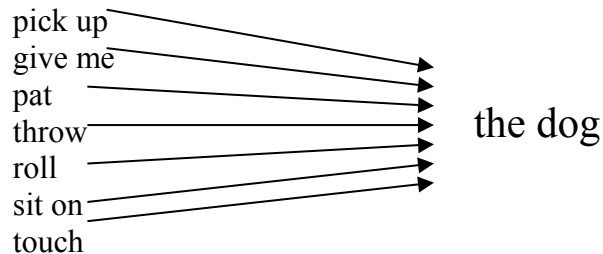
Or the activator (e.g. ‘give me’) may be omitted in repetition as implicit for subsequent injunctions



At this stage language is action-tied that the general structure of a child's linguistic understanding is probably virtually independent of his native tongue.

Use of nouns (or directors). My observations long ago led me to the view, doubtlessly expressed several times in these old papers, that 'things' represented as nominal forms in speech understanding derive their 'spheres of understanding' from their active associations with the body and with other objects as a result of the child's continually acting upon them in differing ways and under differing conditions.

Similarly the 'sphere of reference' of a 'noun' develops in parallel from the use of many 'action', 'verbal' words or, what I call definers used in conjunction with the noun to direct attentive action towards the object ('director').



However not only might 'dog' be replaced by innumerable other 'nouns' (directors) some of these could be synonymous with or near synonyms of 'dog' or may be qualified by a different article pronominal form or adjectival qualifier 'the dog', 'a dog', 'the animal', 'hound', 'beast', 'Rover', 'that dog', 'big dog', 'little (small) dog', 'your dog', 'black dog', etc. Even at a language level roughly equivalent to that of a two years old (twenty four months) child appropriate variations may be and should be used freely. Used properly they never 'confuse' the child, as an uncritical appraisal might suggest, and anticipate to prevent a child's entrapment in too narrow word and phrase references later in life.

A doll can be... a doll, a dolly, a baby, a child,
a big baby, a small baby etc.
the girl (big or small), the boy etc.

as long as it is not contrasted with another doll in size, sex, colour etc.

Inflexion. In some ways early linguistic understanding appears to be more inflected or to pass through a more inflected phase when viewed from the recipient child's point of view than when the utterance itself is examined.

For example 'mmm-the-cup' and 'mmm-the-table' become 'in the cup' and 'on the table' and subsequently reduce to the relatively free forms of an analytic language 'in', 'the', 'cup', 'on', 'table' etc. 'your legs' – 'your' and 'legs', etc. which are then available for weaving into fresh variations on now established themes or for language experiment.