

SPEECH COMPREHENSION

Understanding of speech is fundamentally responding to spoken instruction. This arises as an activity comes to be associated with the speech pattern which frequently precedes it by a short interval of time. The association is not initially a conscious one, the child at first passively allowing his movements to be compelled from without, later responding to a gestural abbreviation and conventionalisation of the earlier physical imposition at which stage communication has progressed from the stage of plastic acquiescence or compliance to a more active phrase requiring interpretation.

Finally, responding to arbitrary spoken utterances begins to usurp the conventional, basically activity-tied gesture, usually before this itself takes on a symbolic signification.

Just as the initial acceptance of the physical moulding was reinforced by the pleasurable experiences resulting from the movements themselves, so the agreeable sensations deriving from the physical activities reinforce the functional association which evolves between the instruction and the physical response.

At first the speech pattern simply excites a 'set' or pro-activity state which may still require both situational support, in the form of an environment itself conducive to an appropriate kind of behaviour, and a gestural or even physically imposed initiator; however as the strength of the association grows the activity becomes less dependent for support on specific situational support and visible gesture. The speech itself comes to initiate a response concerned with scanning the environment for the necessary supplementary information (e.g. 'close the door' may lead to actively looking for or towards the door followed by an activity directed, defined and guided by the situation as interpreted).

Geoffrey Waldon