

Preface

The study of language development has had periods of great activity and excitement, and the past fifteen years has been such a period. Much of this interest and excitement was generated by a "new" linguistic theory, generative grammar, and the writings of its creator and proponent, Noam Chomsky. Chomsky challenged the then-current theories of language development on two grounds. He suggested that learning was not based on the establishment of stimulus-response chains and that language learning was not simply a part of learning in general. The hypothesis of an innate mechanism for language learning, which involved hypothesis testing, was one of the products of this challenge. Other products were attempts to describe the language behavior of the developing child in terms of rule-governed behavior, that is, determination of the grammars that children used at the beginning of the word combination stage and changes in these grammars over time.

Most of these grammars were based on the language produced by the child and observations of the structural consistencies in these utterances. Few studies examined children's comprehension of utterances or what was considered to be grammatical or nongrammatical at this period of development. The evidence was insufficient to claim that children had knowledge of the rules of these grammars and used them to generate utterances. Attempts at testing the psychological reality of derivational complexity (number of transformational rules) as described in generative grammar in the sentence analysis and recall of adults also led to a questioning of the notion that such a grammar was an appropriate model of the speaker-listener's knowledge of the language. That the speaker-listener at any period of development organizes language input and output was clear, but the basis of this organization, and therefore the appropriate description of this organization, was not. It is still not clear. Although efforts are being directed toward finding an explanation of development and processing of language in the cognitive and social functioning of the human being, the way to describe adequately these behaviors has not been determined.

Because of the excitement and interest, which is still at a peak, the literature on language development and processing is an enormous one. Clearly a discussion of language development over the life span should fill many volumes, not just one. There-

fore, the discussions in this book are attempts to summarize some of the findings on the language behavior of children and adults during periods of development that seem to be somehow different from each other and to summarize some of the findings concerning the possible causes of these differences. To introduce this discussion, the current theories of language behavior in the adult and of language acquisition in the child are described. The developmental course is then divided into the periods of infancy, early language development, and language development in middle and late childhood. Finally, the question of "adultlike" and "childlike" language behavior is discussed. Because research on possible differences in language use in the later years of life, or late adulthood, is practically nonexistent except in terms of physiological changes (such as voice quality) and pathology, there is no discussion of this period. This is only one of the lacunae that exist in the literature. Introducing each chapter are those questions that seem most germane in an examination of that period of development. Some of the partial answers conclude sections of the discussion.

This book is addressed to students who are preparing themselves to be psychologists, educators, and therapists. I hope that those who are interested in language development and processing will find both the questions and answers so intriguing and challenging that they themselves will become engaged in in-depth studies of the questions of language and maturation. My own students have made substantial contributions to my thinking on this subject and I am grateful to them.