

THE “VOCABULARY SPURT”: UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD’S WORD LEARNING

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WHAT IS THE “VOCABULARY SPURT”?

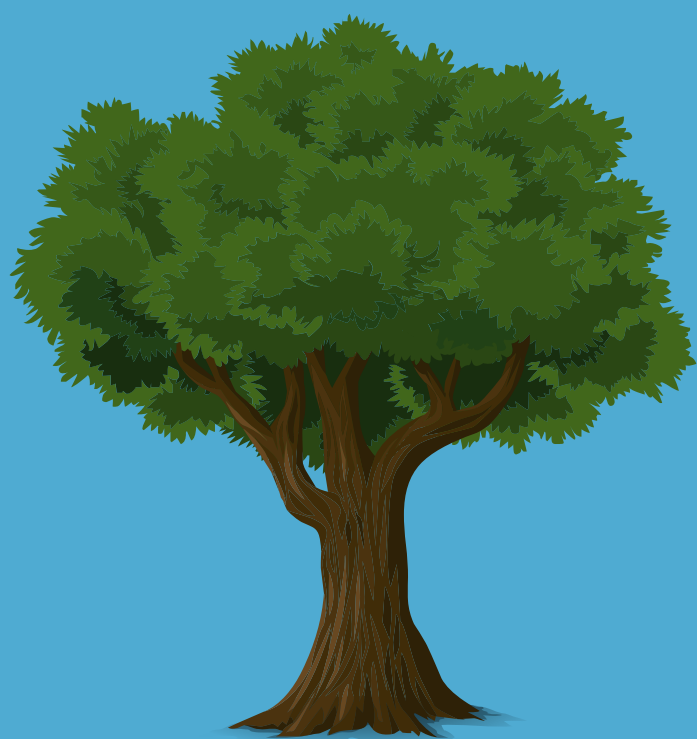
Acquiring vocabulary is a complex process that children perform starting at infancy! By their first birthday, children are often producing their first words. You may start to hear your child say simple words like “Hi,” “Bye,” and “Baba.” However, this is just setting the stage!

Often referred to as the “vocabulary spurt,” at around **2.5 years old** children are typically producing around **250** words. Children commonly acquire nouns first, followed by verbs and adjectives. For example, your child may say the following nouns earlier in their development:

- *dog*
- *ball*
- *book*
- *car*

HOW DO CHILDREN LEARN WORDS?

- In the sentence “I saw the cat,” how does a child know that “cat” is a word rather than “thecat” or “sawthe”?
- You might not realize, but your child is **listening** to the pauses in your speech, the lengths of syllables, and when your pitch rises and falls.
- Studies have found that infants are also analyzing the sounds that they hear— which sounds are likely to be said together and which sounds are not.
- Keeping track of this information helps your child figure out what sounds **combine** to form words.
- As a child hears more speech, their brains can make **connections** between the sounds that they hear and what they see in the environment.



THINK ABOUT IT...

When you hear “tree,” what makes you think of a tall, leafy plant? This occurs as the result of your brain making a connection between the visual image of a tree and the sounds that make up the word “tree.”

DOES LANGUAGE EXPOSURE IMPACT WORD LEARNING?

Well, the answer is complicated. The process is not linear, but researchers have found that more adult input has been associated with earlier word learning, which suggests that language exposure does help with vocabulary development.

Some things to remember:

- Children initially understand more than they can produce.
- Pronunciation and labeling errors are common as children learn words.
- Children develop at all different rates! **Variation** is normal during language development.



HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD GROW THEIR VOCABULARY?

Children are adorable, social people! While they may not be talking up a storm just yet, they enjoy social interaction with others. Some easy at-home ways to help your child's word learning are:

- Engage with your child through **conversation**, and be sure to **ask** them related follow-up **questions!**
- **Label** and **explain** things to them when they point to something.
- **Read aloud** to your child! Flip through the pages and **point to the pictures** as you go along. This can help them with the assimilation of sounds, and words, with objects.
- Play **word** games! Charades and vocabulary scavenger hunts are fun ways to help your child grow their vocabulary as toddlers.