

CHILDREN HAVE AN INNATE PREDISPOSITION TO ACQUIRE LANGUAGE

They claim that the child does not come to the language learning task with a blank mind but has an innate disposition to learn language.

Evidence for the nativist approach comes from observations and hypotheses but so does the evidence from behaviourists. One such example is that of a chimp called Washoe which was taught sign language. It is thus inconclusive. And even if the data are messier than this figure suggests, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the vast weight of grammatically well-formed utterances would easily swamp any residual noise. However, more recent findings have uncovered evidence indicating that failures of understanding occur with some regularity, and that there is a wealth of feedback about correct usage in the language-learning environment. Skinner claims that language is learnt and not innate. First, it is not all that surprising to discover that if language learners employed a method of conjecture and refutation, then language could not be learned from the data. Sampson which has recently been renewed with some vigor by Pullum and Scholz , Scholz and Pullum , and Sampson First, she could use H1 in her own speech, utter a sentence like 3b , and be corrected by her parents or caregivers; second, she could hear a sentence like 3c uttered by a competent speaker, and realize that that sentence is not generated by her hypothesis, H1. There have been several attempts to teach chimpanzees human language but with little success. Crain ; Crain's experiments and their implications are discussed in Cowie ; Cf. Pinker, Nonetheless, learning a first language is something every child does successfully, in a matter of a few years and without the need for formal lessons For now, considerations of space demand a return to our topic, viz. Opinions on whether humans are born with some kind of innate equipment to learn language are divided. In response, Chomsky e. However, what is more interesting, and yet a stronger proof that language is innate, is when we look at the second generations of the Pidgin speakers. However, suppose that the learner finds herself in situation iv , where her hypothesis generates all of the target language, L, and more besides. Language does not just mean the spoken language used in everyday life to express intent, ask questions, identify objects and convey feelings, but includes body language, such as facial expression and hand gestures, and written language. But clearly, children do generalize, else they'd never succeed in learning a language. Morgan and Travis and Morgan et al. Pullum and Scholz helpfully survey a number of ways in which nativists have made this point, including: Finiteness: the pld primary linguistic data are finite, whereas languages contain infinitely many sentences. The behaviourist approach says that when a child learns their first language they receive positive feedback when they make a correct utterance, but receive negative feedback from their environment when making a mistake. For as we have seen, the pld is mostly just a sample of sentences, of positive instances of the target language. Non-occurrence of structural types as negative evidence: Suppose that a child's grammar predicted that a certain string is part of the target language. For instance, Crain constructs a poverty of the stimulus argument concerning children's acquisition of knowledge of certain constraints on movement. Negative data vs. A recent book by Michael Tomasello Tomasello addresses the nativist's demand for an alternative theory directly. So in answer to the question: how do we learn that H2 is better than H1, Chomsky argued that we don't learn this at all! Suppose, for example, that based on her experience of 1 and 2 , a child were to adopt H1. One would be never to generalize beyond the data at all. Hespulates that the construction is not idiomatic even in adult language, and that speakers learn to form and decode such questions much later in life, after encountering them in written English. An example again comes from Tomasello They were looking for interpreter.