

# Why Low Socioeconomic Status Negatively Impacts Language Development

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## Introduction

- Language is a complex, rule-governed system consisting of sounds, signs, or written symbols that allows one to communicate (Hoff, 2014).
- Interacting with and understanding others is necessary for human connection.
- If language is not developed properly, we would not be able to communicate our needs, wants, thoughts, and ideas with one another as effectively.
- Many factors influence how one acquires and develops language.

## Thesis

- Low socioeconomic status negatively affects language development because certain aspects of living in low socioeconomic status provide an unfit environment for learning and acquiring necessary language skills.
- These aspects include less input from caregivers, lower quality of interaction with their children, poor physical conditions of households, and less access to resources.

## Defining Socioeconomic Status (SES)

- SES is an individual or group's social standing (APA, 2021), usually divided into high, middle, and low categories of economic differences
- Low SES is typically associated with low educational achievement, poverty, and poor health (2021)



(APA, 2021)

- Adverse effects on well-being and quality of life
- Research defines SES in many ways, including:
  - Whether the primary caregiver of the household received a high school diploma or not (Levine et al., 2020)
  - Level of education of the primary caregiver (Luo, 2021)
  - Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Socioeconomic Status determines weighted average of both parents' education and occupation (Fernald, 2013)

## The Process of Normal Language Development

### Separating the Speech Stream

- Infants get introduced to language by listening to caregivers and their environment (Sedivy, 2020)
- Caregivers only use single-word utterances 10% of the time and speak in sentences the other 90% of the time (2020).
- Babies must use cues to carve up the speech stream.
  - Prosody: rhythm, stress, and intonation of speech (APA, 2014)
  - Familiarization: recognizing a familiar word within a sentence so they can determine where one word ends, and another begins (Sedivy, 2020)
  - Phonotactic constraints: determine which sounds can appear next to each other or be combined to form a proper word or syllable (2020)
  - Statistical learning: probabilities to predict words or syllables (Eghbalzad, 2021)

### Mapping Meaning Onto Words

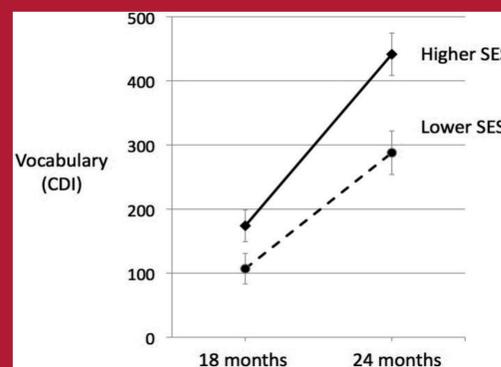
- Children usually start speaking at twelve months old.
- They need to map meaning onto words to build vocabulary.
- Lexical representations are used to remember concepts (Sedivy, 2020).
- Social cues help babies link the word to an actual object or concept in the world (2020).

### Acquiring Syntax

- Babies must combine words in a sensical, specifically ordered way to form sentences.
- Syntax provides structure and rules for putting together linguistic elements (2020).
- Telegraphic utterances show understanding of appropriate word order (2020).
- Sorting words into syntactic categories helps babies establish proper sentence structure (2020).
- Rules must be applied to social situations to create productive conversations.

## Relationship Between Low SES and Language Development

- Research shows low socioeconomic status has a negative impact on language development.
- Six-month disparity in vocabulary size and language processing proficiency between children of higher and lower SES (Fernald, 2013).
- 24-month-olds of lower SES performed at the same language processing level overall as 18-month-olds of higher SES (2013)
- Children ages 3-5 of low socioeconomic status did much worse on vocabulary product, syntax product, and language learning process evaluations than children of high SES (Levine, 2020)
- Infants of low SES scored lower on Total Language, Auditory Communication, and Expressive Communication composites (Betancourt, 2015).



(Fernald, 2013)



(Gibbs, 2022)

## Factors of Low SES that Impact Language Development

### Impact of Caregivers

- Infants of lower SES had lower expressive vocabularies because their caregivers engaged them in less contingent talk (McGillion, 2017).
- Twenty-month-old children with well-educated mothers demonstrated better language production skills compared to those whose mothers were not as well-educated (Eghbalzad, 2021).
- Children in higher SES households have a higher home literacy environment that children in low SES households (2021).

### Physical Conditions of Low SES Households

- Household chaos is negatively related to the development of language skills, and socioeconomically disadvantaged families have greater household chaos overall (Lecheile, 2020).
- A general lack of stability and disorder within the home may impact a child's ability to learn language.

### Access to Resources

- Lower SES families have less access to necessary resources or health support.
- Children in families that have adequate resources and consistent support are more likely to reach their developmental potential because they are more likely to be sheltered from adverse circumstances (Fernald, 2013).
- Speech-Language Pathologists help children with speech or language difficulties, but the parent may not be able to afford these services or have the time or means to get their child there.
- School systems in low SES communities are often under resourced, which negatively impacts students' academic progress (APA, 2021).
- Lack of healthy food options results in negative impacts on learning, memory, and cognitive development (Wilder Research, 2014).

### Dual-Language Learning

- Children learning two languages commonly live in low socioeconomic status households (Luo, 2021).
- A study using the Quick Interactive Language Screener: English and Spanish (QUILS:ES) revealed that children of a higher SES learned new language items better than children of low SES (2021).
- This gap exists between both languages. Effects of low SES are prominent across all languages.

## Mitigating the Effects of Low SES on Language Development

- Caregivers must give their children lots of input by engaging in conversation and reading with them.
- Caregivers who received language interventions saw their children's expressive vocabulary increase (McGillion, 2017).
- Effortful control (self-regulation) can help children focus beyond the chaos of their environment (Lecheile, 2020).

## Conclusion

- Low socioeconomic status has negative effects on a child's development of language.
- Many qualities of low SES, such as less attention and lesser quality input, poor physical conditions in the household, and lack of access to resources impact the ability to learn and acquire language.
- If caregivers utilize whatever interventions they can or if the child utilizes statistical learning and effortful control, they may be able to mitigate some effects.
- Overall, language is a crucial part of the human existence, and we must study the negative impacts of low SES so that people can achieve success and have equal opportunities to do so.

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