

LII. A CHILD THAT WOULD NOT TALK

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Our third daughter presented a fascinating subject for study because of her unwillingness to try to talk in conventional fashion until after her third birthday. Our eldest daughter (3 and 4) showed a somewhat precocious speech development, saying her first word at 13 months, having 145 words at 18 months, 1139 at 3 years and 1765 at 4 years. Our second daughter (5) started to talk late—at 20 months—and had only 45 words at 2 years, but she learned rapidly from then on, having a vocabulary of 856 words at 3 years and 1506 at 4 years. Our fourth daughter said her first word at 15 months; had 155 words at 2 years and 804 at 3 years.

Our third child said her first two words—"er-er" meaning pig (an imitation of the grunt) and "mamma" when 16 months old; these two words sufficed her for four months. At two years her vocabulary consisting of 5 words, the two already mentioned, "hot," "wawa" for dog, and "baba" which originally meant bunny, then various small animals and birds and at this age chiefly baby. Vocab-

ularies of two year old children range as high as 1227 words, (2) the average of 29 cases being 440 words.

At 3 years this child had about 49 words (it is difficult to know sometimes just what to call a "word" in her vocabulary); the smallest published vocabulary of this age contained 681 words (7) and the largest 2,055 (1); the average of 11 being 1338. (4) Her vocabulary will be summarized here:

NOUNS, 26—Mamma; Dadda; Ma (Grandma); Baba; Cug-gan (both sisters); er-er (fingers); er-er (toes); cocoa; nana (banana); baba (doll); coal; choochoo (any vehicle); choochoo (bed); boo (rifle); bah (sheep); cock-co (all fowls); coo-coo (pigeon); da (deer); er-er (pig); ho' (horse); hoo-hoo (owl); mnow (cat); moo-moo (cow); oor (bear, lion, wolf, fox, tiger); wawa (dog); han (thing).

VERBS, 6—Ah-ah (cry); da (don't); er-her (I can't say); hurt; va (like); whoa (stop).

Pronoun, 1—Ah (I, me, my, mine).

Adjectives, 5—Co' (black, dirty, from coal); da (dear); ker (cold, hence bare); va (good); va (other).

Adverbs, 5—Er (yes); ha (where); ker or ker-her (here); na (no); un (not).

Prepositions, 2—Ker (near, by, with, to); on (meant also off, from).

Interjections, 3—Boo-ba (goodbye); hello; oh.

There were many essential words that this child did not use at all: she had nothing for water or drink, no word for any ordinary article of food, no name for her cousins, uncles or aunts, no genetic word relating to people but "baba," not a single word for any article of clothing, only one household object,—bed—and that called by the all inclusive term of "choo-choo," nothing for bird, rabbit, ball, black, gone, see, etc.

A few samples will give a clearer idea of what her speech at 3 years of age was like.

"Va baba va"—Other baby all right.

"Er-er ker"—(Their) feet (literally "piggies") (were) bare.

"Wawa un ker mamma, wawa ker ah"—Dog (is) not by mamma, dog (is) by me.

"Mamma on choo-choo, baba ah-ah"—(If) mamma (goes) in automobile, baby (will) cry.

As will be seen she was talking what amounted practically to a foreign tongue; no one spoke to her in her language and almost no one understood her. Yet she got along very well indeed, she was a favorite with her cousins and a leader among her small

playmates. It was not until she was 40 months old and her imagination began to be active that she found her means of communication inadequate. So long as she staid on a material basis she could make herself understood with her meager stock of words helped out by gesture, tone of voice and the intelligence of adults, but when she wished to share intellectual experience she found herself seriously hampered.

As to the origin of her vocabulary, 22 of the 41 entirely different words are clearly imitations of English (although half of them have a baby pronunciation) and four are probably derived from English (the two "va's," the preposition "ker," and "ha."). Eleven words are imitations of sounds, most of them learned from her parents and not from the respective animals. Four terms may be original expressions, i. e., "er," "un," "er-her" and "han," the two latter perhaps being crystallizations of baby expressions that were originally meaningless but happened so often to be used in certain situations that they came to function as words for her. Three more of these original expressions took on definite meanings during her 37th month.

In her 38th month she at last became willing to talk like other people. From her 33rd to 36th month she added but 2 words a month to her vocabulary, in her 38th month she added 27; the next, 44, the next, 128, and in her 41st month 257 or 8 a day; this, I believe, is the record for rapid learning so far as published cases go. At four she had a vocabulary of 1135 words; twenty-five times the size of her three year vocabulary; a month before this she used 10511 words in one day (6). A few of her queer expressions lasted until her 47th month but most of them had disappeared by her 42nd month.

There are two conclusions which may be drawn from a study of this child's retarded speech development.

1. Most children learn through imitation to talk earlier than they need to.
2. With this child speech was not primarily for communication but largely a matter of self-expression.

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