

ther-or" (or at least primary-secondary) argument. On the one hand, nature is construed as language-specific predispositions for or constraints on the ways grammars, or, more recently, lexicons, can be conceived by the child; on the other hand, nurture is primarily operationalized as care-giver behavior (especially talk) in interactive contexts with children. More than two decades of research have failed to resolve the old debate about the predominance of one element over the other. Moreover, neither a focus on inherent capacities nor a focus on social interaction has led to uncontroversial explanations of the well-described courses of development that language-learning children display. Progress in building a developmental theory of how nature and nurture function jointly to accomplish language acquisition may require moving beyond the traditional construals of those terms.

Lois Bloom, in *The Transition from Infancy to Language*, takes up this formidable challenge by addressing the need for a theory accountable to the developmental data of lexical acquisition while at the same time providing an alternative to the language-specific-constraints view of the child's mental capacities. She proposes an interactive model of language development—interactive in her scheme both because the child's situation in a social context is essential and because language development is essentially related to cognitive and affective capacities. Although Bloom shares much with others in the social interactionist camp, she creatively extends that perspective by proposing a generally plausible, more specific account of the child's mental abilities that inextricably mesh with the social context to explain lexical development.

The child as depicted by Bloom is guided into language by *mental meanings*—dynamic intentional states, personal meanings represented in consciousness—that the child has available for expression. These states are driven by and based in intersubjectivity; mental meanings are at once a product of and a source for participation in a social world. Moreover, they change in character over time as a consequence of more general cognitive developments, for example, as children increase their ability to construct specific semantic relations between objects.

Bloom proposes three cognitive principles, or as she says, generalizations, to explain the child's development of expression of mental meanings: *relevance* refers to the child learning words for things in mind, typically actions or objects with affective importance; *discrepancy* refers to the increasing tendency to talk about things (objects and events) not immediately discernible from the nonlinguistic context; and *elaboration* refers to the increasing impor-

tance and complexity of relations among objects, actions, and events. Together, these principles describe how the child develops a vocabulary rich in relational as well as object and action terms. The proposal that cognitive development constrains language development is in the tradition of old cognitive-prerequisites-for-language arguments, but Bloom's principles and the way they intimately relate to the specifics of word learning are an original contribution. Bloom argues that her model of the child's mental development in a social context accounts for the facts of lexical acquisition, with no need for specifically linguistic, inherent constraints on word learning.

Bloom deftly interweaves a broad array of others' research (including Piaget's) among her arguments, but the data for the model come primarily from a major longitudinal study by Bloom and her students of 14 children interacting with their mothers in a playroom as they progressed to first words and then through a vocabulary spurt. Details of her study have been published elsewhere; hence in this volume Bloom focuses only on the main findings. Some of the reports, such as those relating changes in vocabulary to developments in play with objects, are convincing and help to clarify the notion of interrelations among areas of development; others seem more tangential to the theoretical claims of the book (for example, the intricate discussion of the analyses concerning displays of emotion and their possible relation to language production). More examples of actual dialogic interactions between parent and child as instances of intersubjectivity and the developing complexity of mental meanings would have been welcome additions.

Despite the importance to her model of intentionality and intersubjectivity, Bloom explicitly denies that the child has command of a full-blown theory of mind. By doing so, she separates herself from the untenable view that the child has broad knowledge of others onto which language can be easily and readily mapped. Although it is not always clear just what Bloom is granting the child in the way of mental understandings, her approach is a sensible one, grounded in a conservative yet comprehensive view of the young language learner's cognitive and social competencies. Thus she provides a persuasive account of the early stages of word learning. It remains to be seen whether the kinds of inherent language-specific constraints that are largely rejected by Bloom will still be required to account for later lexical progress or the acquisition of grammar or whether, as she says, "linguistic assumptions acquired early in language learning can be expected to 'bootstrap' subsequent language learning."

In either case, this book is an important step forward in the attempt to account for early word learning from the perspective of real children faced with the task of acquiring and using a language.

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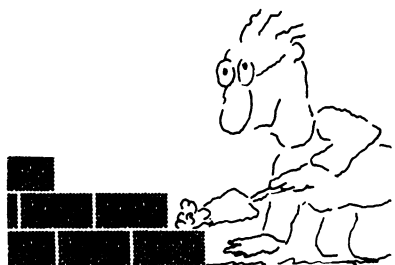
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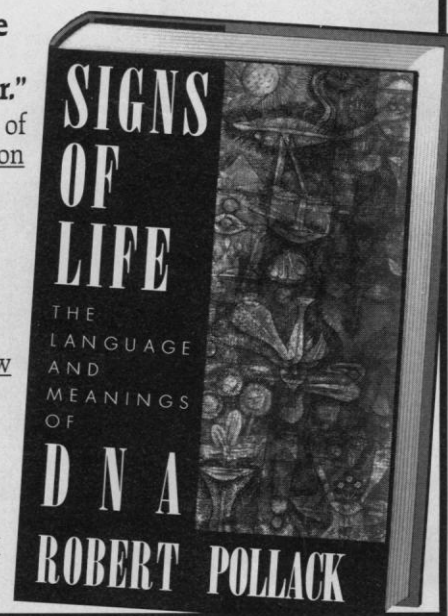
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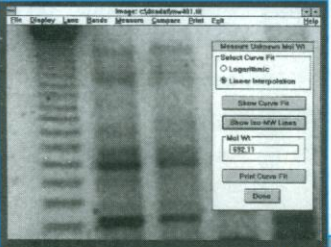
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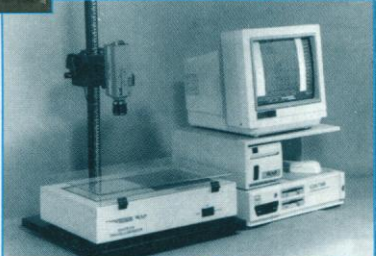
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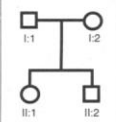


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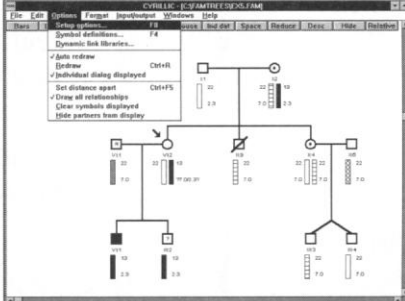
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