1.11 Language: Child Language Acquisition: 2-hour Pack

AQA 7702 · about 120 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

Child Language Transcripts: Aaliyah and Kai (Original Data, Extracts A-D)

Source written for Revision Library (original, copyright-free). These are invented transcripts composed specifically for A-level English Language study; they do not represent real children, families or recordings, and no identifying details are genuine. Lines are numbered within each transcript for ease of reference in the questions that follow.

Transcription key: round brackets ( ) show non-verbal actions or context; ages are given as years;months (e.g. 1;10 = 1 year 10 months). All names are pseudonyms; none of the material below represents a real child, family or recording.

TRANSCRIPT A: Aaliyah (1;10) playing with a toy farm set with her father (Dad) at home.

A1. Aaliyah: (pointing at the toy cow) "tow!"

A2. Dad: "That's a cow, well done. Can you say cow?"

A3. Aaliyah: "tow."

A4. Aaliyah: (picking up the toy dog) "dat woof-woof."

A5. Dad: "Yes, that's the dog. What does the dog say?"

A6. Aaliyah: "woof woof."

A7. Aaliyah: (pointing at the toy sheep) "doggy!"

A8. Dad: "It's a sheep actually, not a doggy. Sheep say baa."

A9. Aaliyah: "baa baa."

A10. Aaliyah: (picking up the toy tractor, then dropping it) "utoh. tacto falled down."

A11. Dad: "Oh no, the tractor fell down. Shall we pick it up together?"

A12. Aaliyah: "pick up. more tacto."

A13. Aaliyah: (reaching for her drink) "more dink peas."

A14. Dad: "More drink please, here you go."

A15. Aaliyah: (drinking) "tank oo."

A16. Dad: (offering a different cup from the one Aaliyah usually uses) "Here's a cup for you."

A17. Aaliyah: (pushing it away) "no! not cup! Aaliyah cup!" (pointing at her own cup on the table)

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A18. Dad: "Oh I see, you want your own cup."

TRANSCRIPT B: Kai (4;6) telling his mother (Mum) about his school trip to the park, at school pick-up.

B1. Kai: "Mummy, guess what! We goed to the park and I seed three gooses!"

B2. Mum: "Wow, three geese! What were they doing?"

B3. Kai: "They was eating bread and one of them runned after Freya cos she dropped her sandwich."

B4. Mum: "That sounds funny. Were you scared?"

B5. Kai: "No! I not scared. I telled it to go away and it goed away."

B6. Mum: "Good boy. What else did you do?"

B7. Kai: "We builded a den with sticks and it was the bestest den ever."

B8. Mum: "That's brilliant, Kai."

B9. Kai: "Can we go to the park again tomorrow? Please can we, please?"

TRANSCRIPT C: Aaliyah (1;6), playing with building bricks with her mother (Mum). Only Aaliyah's utterances are given, numbered C1 to C10, for the Mean Length of Utterance task in Question 5.

C1. "brick."

C2. "more."

C3. "mummy look."

C4. "brick fall."

C5. "uh oh."

C6. "more brick."

C7. "big brick."

C8. "no."

C9. "mummy help."

C10. "there."

TRANSCRIPT D: Aaliyah (3;6), playing with the same building bricks with her mother (Mum), twenty-four months after Transcript C. Only Aaliyah's utterances are given, numbered D1 to D10, for Question 7.

D1. "I'm building a tower."

D2. "It's falling down!"

D3. "Help me pick it up."

D4. "This goes on top."

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D5. "I want the red brick."

D6. "I'm fixing it."

D7. "My tower is the biggest."

D8. "Where's my brick gone?"

D9. "I found it under the sofa."

D10. "Can we build another one?"

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1 Refer to Transcript A in the source material (Aaliyah, 1;10, playing with a toy farm set with her father). Aaliyah produces several non-standard pronunciations during the interaction.

(a) Aaliyah says "tow" for "cow" (line A1). Identify the phonological process shown and explain the change that has occurred. **(2)**

(b) Aaliyah says "dat" for "that" (line A4) and "tank oo" for "thank you" (line A15). Identify the shared phonological process and explain, using appropriate terminology, why this pattern is common in early child speech. **(3)**

(c) Explain, with reference to lines A10, A12 and A13, how Aaliyah's pronunciation of 'tractor' as 'tacto' and 'drink' as 'dink' illustrate consonant cluster reduction. Refer to specific sounds in your answer. **(3)**

(d) Aaliyah's speech in Transcript A shows several different phonological processes rather than one. Using your wider knowledge, explain what this variety suggests about the systematic (rule-governed) nature of phonological development in young children. **(4)**

(Total for Question 1 is 12 marks)

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2 Refer to Transcript B in the source material (Kai, 4;6, telling his mother about a school trip to the park).

(a) Identify three examples of overgeneralisation in Kai's speech in Transcript B and state which grammatical rule has been overapplied in each case. **(3)**

(b) Kai says "the bestest den ever" (line B7). Explain what process has produced this form and why examples like this are described by linguists as 'virtuous errors'. **(4)**

(c) Kai says "they was eating bread" (line B3). Explain what this shows about Kai's current stage of grammatical development, with reference to subject-verb agreement. **(3)**

(Total for Question 2 is 10 marks)

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3 Refer to Transcript A in the source material.

(a) Define the terms 'overextension' and 'underextension' in child language acquisition. **(2)**

(b) With reference to line A7 ("doggy!" said of the toy sheep), explain how Aaliyah's use of "doggy" is an example of overextension. Suggest one possible reason for this pattern. **(3)**

(c) With reference to lines A16 to A18, explain how Aaliyah's use of "cup" illustrates underextension, and explain how you would expect this to change as she develops. **(3)**

(Total for Question 3 is 8 marks)

4 Refer to Transcript A in the source material.

(a) Identify three features of child-directed speech (CDS) used by Dad in Transcript A, giving one example (with line reference) of each. **(3)**

(b) Explain, using Bruner's concept of the LASS (Language Acquisition Support System), how Dad's turns in Transcript A support Aaliyah's language development. **(4)**

(Total for Question 4 is 7 marks)

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5 'Children's grammatical development is best explained by their exposure to caregiver input and social interaction, rather than by an innate biological mechanism.'
Using your wider knowledge of theories and evidence relating to child language acquisition, discuss the extent to which you agree with this view. You may refer to the transcripts in the source material as illustrative examples, but this question chiefly assesses your wider theoretical knowledge.

(Total for Question 5 is 25 marks)

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6 Refer to Transcript B in the source material and to Halliday's model of the functions of children's early speech.

(a) Identify one utterance from Transcript B that fulfils an instrumental function and one that fulfils an interactional function. Justify each choice. **(4)**

(b) Kai's speech in this transcript is far more complex than the proto-linguistic utterances Halliday originally described. Explain, with reference to the transcript, how a single utterance can now perform more than one function at once. **(4)**

(Total for Question 6 is 8 marks)

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7 Refer to Transcript A and Transcript B in the source material and to your wider knowledge of theories of child language acquisition.

(a) Explain, using Skinner's behaviourist theory of language acquisition, how imitation and reinforcement could account for Aaliyah's language development in Transcript A. **(5)**

(b) Evaluate one weakness of Skinner's theory, using evidence from either Transcript A or Transcript B to support your evaluation. **(5)**

(Total for Question 7 is 10 marks)

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Mark scheme · 1.11 Language: Child Language Acquisition: 2-hour Pack

Question 1

(a) Names the process as (velar) fronting (oe) **B1**

(a) Explains that the velar plosive /k/ is replaced by the alveolar plosive /t/, produced further forward in the mouth (oe) **B1**

(a) Answer: Velar fronting: the velar consonant /k/ in 'cow' is replaced by the alveolar consonant /t/, produced further forward in the mouth, giving 'tow'.

(b) Names the process as stopping (oe) **B1**

(b) Explains that the 'th' sounds (dental fricatives) in 'that' and 'thank you' are replaced by the stop consonants /d/ and /t/ (oe) **B1**

(b) Explains that fricatives require more precise articulatory control (continuous, narrowly channelled airflow) than plosives, which are acquired earlier, so children substitute an earlier-acquired stop consonant (oe) **B1**

(b) Answer: Stopping: the 'th' sounds in 'that' and 'thank you' (dental fricatives) are replaced by the stop consonants /d/ and /t/, because fricatives require more precise articulatory control than plosives, which are acquired earlier.

(c) Names the process as consonant cluster reduction (oe) **B1**

(c) Identifies that the two-consonant clusters /tr/ and /dr/ are each simplified to a single consonant ('t' or 'd') (oe) **B1**

(c) Explains that producing two consonants in sequence is articulatorily demanding before the relevant motor control has developed, so one element of the cluster is omitted (oe) **B1**

(c) Answer: Consonant cluster reduction: the two-consonant clusters /tr/ and /dr/ are simplified to single consonants ('t' and 'd'), because producing two consonants in sequence is articulatorily demanding before the relevant motor control has developed.

(d) Explains that Aaliyah is not simply failing to pronounce words at random, but applying consistent, rule-governed simplification processes (oe) **B1**

(d) Explains that each process (fronting, stopping, cluster reduction) recurs across different words, showing systematicity rather than isolated errors (oe) **B1**

(d) Links this to the view that early phonology follows universal, predictable patterns of acquisition seen across many children (oe) **B1**

(d) Explains that this suggests production lags behind perception/comprehension, since Aaliyah can presumably discriminate the correct adult sounds even though she cannot yet produce them (oe) **B1**

(d) Answer: The recurring, patterned nature of the processes (not random errors) shows that Aaliyah's phonology is rule-governed and predictable, and that production abilities lag behind the perceptual/comprehension abilities that let her recognise the adult-target forms.

Question 2

(a) Correctly identifies one valid example with the overapplied rule named, e.g. 'goed' (lines B1, B5): regular past tense -ed overapplied to the irregular verb 'go' (oe) **B1**

(a) Correctly identifies a second valid example with the overapplied rule named, e.g. 'gooses' (line B1): regular plural -s overapplied to the irregular plural 'geese' (oe) **B1**

(a) Correctly identifies a third valid example with the overapplied rule named, e.g. 'builded' (line B7): regular past tense -ed overapplied to the irregular verb 'build' (oe); accept any three of goed, seed, gooses, runned, telled, builded **B1**

(a) Answer: For example: 'goed' (line B1) - regular past tense -ed overapplied to the irregular verb 'go'; 'gooses' (line B1) - regular plural -s overapplied to the irregular plural 'geese'; 'builded' (line B7) - regular past tense -ed overapplied to the irregular verb 'build'.

(b) Identifies double marking/overgeneralisation of the superlative morpheme: 'best' is already an irregular superlative of 'good', and the regular superlative suffix -est has been added again (oe) **B1**

(b) Explains this could not have been produced by simple imitation of adult speech, since adults do not say 'bestest' (oe) **B1**

(b) Explains that a 'virtuous error' describes a mistake that reveals the child is actively applying an internalised grammatical rule, rather than making a random or careless error (oe) **B1**

(b) Links this to evidence for an internal, generative grammar system (productive rule application) rather than rote learning (oe) **B1**

(b) Answer: Kai has overapplied the regular superlative rule (add -est) to an already-irregular superlative (best), producing 'bestest'. This is a 'virtuous error' because it could not be the result of imitating adult input (no adult says 'bestest'); it shows Kai has internalised and is productively applying a grammatical rule, which is evidence of active, rule-governed language learning rather than mere copying.

(c) Identifies that standard English requires plural subject-verb agreement ('they were'), but Kai has used the singular form 'was' (oe) **B1**

(c) Explains this shows subject-verb agreement for number is not yet fully/consistently acquired at this stage (oe) **B1**

(c) Explains that such errors are typical and temporary, resolving as the child receives more input and continues to test grammatical hypotheses, without needing direct correction (oe) **B1**

(c) Answer: Kai has not yet consistently mastered subject-verb agreement for number (using 'was' instead of 'were' with a plural subject), which is typical of this developmental stage and is expected to resolve without direct correction as Kai's grammar develops further.

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Question 3

(a) Overextension: a child extends the use of a word beyond its adult target meaning to cover a wider range of referents (oe) **B1**

(a) Underextension: a child restricts the use of a word to a narrower range of referents than the adult target meaning (oe) **B1**

(a) Answer: Overextension: using a word to refer to a wider range of things than its adult meaning allows. Underextension: using a word to refer to a narrower range of things than its adult meaning allows.

(b) Identifies that 'doggy' is being used to refer to the sheep, which is not a dog, so its meaning has been extended beyond the correct referent (oe) **B1**

(b) Identifies a plausible shared perceptual feature triggering the overextension, e.g. both are four-legged, furry farmyard animals of similar size (oe) **B1**

(b) Explains that children often overextend on the basis of shared perceptual similarity when their semantic categories are not yet fully differentiated (oe) **B1**

(b) Answer: Aaliyah has extended 'doggy' to cover the sheep as well as dogs, most likely because the two animals share salient perceptual features (four legs, fur, similar size); at this stage her semantic categories for animals are not yet fully differentiated along adult-defined boundaries.

(c) Identifies that Aaliyah restricts 'cup' to her own specific, familiar cup, rejecting the label for a different (but still valid) cup (oe) **B1**

(c) Explains this is narrower than the adult category, which covers any object of that type/function (oe) **B1**

(c) Explains that with further exposure to a wider range of exemplars, her category will broaden until it matches the adult semantic range (oe) **B1**

(c) Answer: Aaliyah restricts 'cup' to her own particular cup rather than the whole category of drinking vessels, which is narrower than the adult meaning. As she encounters more examples of cups in different contexts, her category will broaden to match the adult range.

Question 4

(a) Expansion, e.g. line A11 expands Aaliyah's 'tacto falled down' into 'the tractor fell down'; or line A14 expands 'more dink peas' into 'More drink please, here you go' (oe) **B1**

(a) Recasting/correction, e.g. line A2 reformulates and corrects 'tow' as 'That's a cow, well done. Can you say cow?' (oe) **B1**

(a) Elicitation questions to prompt further talk, e.g. line A5 'What does the dog say?'; accept positive reinforcement/praise (e.g. 'well done', line A2) as a further valid feature (oe) **B1**

(a) Answer: For example: expansion (line A11, 'the tractor fell down' expands 'tacto falled down'); recasting with correction (line A2, 'That's a cow... can you say cow?'); elicitation questions to prompt further talk (line A5, 'What does the dog say?').

(b) Identifies Bruner's LASS as the social/interactional framework of support (scaffolding) that caregivers provide around the child, working alongside any innate mechanisms (oe) **B1**

(b) Identifies scaffolding in the transcript, e.g. Dad breaking the interaction into a predictable routine (naming the animal, asking what sound it makes, lines A2, A5, A8) which Aaliyah can join with increasing independence (oe) **B1**

(b) Identifies that Dad adjusts his support to Aaliyah's current level, e.g. accepting 'baa' (line A9) as a full turn and expanding her telegraphic utterances rather than demanding full grammar (oe) **B1**

(b) Links this to Bruner's claim that such supportive routines/formats give the child repeated, structured exposure to grammatical patterns before being asked to produce them independently (oe) **B1**

(b) Answer: Dad provides a LASS by scaffolding the interaction into a predictable format (naming the animal, asking what sound it makes), by expanding Aaliyah's simplified utterances into full grammatical models, and by adjusting his contribution to her current level, repeatedly exposing her to correct forms within a supportive routine that Bruner argues is a necessary complement to any innate language capacity.

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Question 5

Level 0 Nothing worthy of credit.	**0**
Level 1 Simple, generalised assertions about theories of acquisition; terminology largely absent or inaccurate; no coherent line of argument.	**1-5**
Level 2 Some relevant knowledge of at least two theoretical positions, largely descriptive rather than evaluative; basic terminology used; limited discussion of the debate.	**6-10**
Level 3 Clear knowledge of at least three of behaviourist, nativist, cognitive and interactionist positions; a reasonable attempt to discuss the given view, with accurate terminology, though development may be uneven across the response.	**11-15**
Level 4 Detailed, well-substantiated discussion of the given view, integrating secure theoretical knowledge with a clear, sustained line of argument reaching a supported conclusion; terminology used accurately and consistently.	**16-20**
Level 5 Sophisticated, wide-ranging discussion synthesising theoretical knowledge into a coherent, convincing argument, showing awareness of the limitations of individual theories and of competing interpretations; assured, precise use of terminology throughout.	**21-25**

Indicative content:

- Outline of Skinner's behaviourist theory (imitation and reinforcement) as the input-driven explanation the quotation broadly supports.
- Outline of Bruner's social interactionist theory (LASS, scaffolding, formats) as a more nuanced input/interaction-driven account, distinct from pure behaviourism.
- Outline of Chomsky's nativist theory (LAD, Universal Grammar, poverty of the stimulus) as the key challenge to the quotation's view.
- Use of 'virtuous errors'/overgeneralisation (e.g. 'goed', 'gooses', 'bestest') as evidence often cited for innate rule application, difficult to explain by input alone.
- Consideration of Piaget's cognitive theory as a third position: development is neither purely input-driven nor purely a dedicated linguistic innate mechanism, but dependent on general cognition.
- Reference to hybrid/usage-based positions (e.g. Tomasello) which argue grammar emerges from powerful general learning mechanisms operating on rich social input, without requiring a dedicated innate grammar module, a middle ground between the extremes.
- Evaluation of the poverty of the stimulus argument itself, some linguists dispute how impoverished child input really is, given caregivers' use of child-directed speech, expansions and recasts.
- A supported conclusion, e.g. that most current theory favours an interactionist position combining innate predispositions with essential social input, rather than either extreme alone; credit any well-argued alternative conclusion provided it is substantiated with secure theoretical knowledge.

Question 6

(a) Identifies a valid instrumental example, e.g. "Can we go to the park again tomorrow? Please can we, please?" (line B9) (oe)	**B1**
(a) Justifies this as instrumental: language is being used to obtain something the child wants, a want-satisfying function (oe)	**B1**
(a) Identifies a valid interactional example, e.g. "Mummy, guess what!" (line B1) (oe)	**B1**
(a) Justifies this as interactional: language is being used to initiate/maintain social contact and engage the listener's attention (oe); accept other well-justified matches, e.g. an informative function for the narrative recount	**B1**

(a) Answer: Instrumental: "Can we go to the park again tomorrow? Please can we, please?" (line B9) - used to get something Kai wants. Interactional: "Mummy, guess what!" (line B1) - used to engage Mum's attention and open the interaction.

(b) Identifies an utterance doing double duty, e.g. "We goed to the park and I seed three gooses!" (line B1), which is both informative (reporting an event) and interactional (opening/sustaining the shared conversation) (oe)	**B1**
(b) Explains that as syntax becomes more complex (subordination, coordination), a single clause can encode more propositional content while still carrying an interpersonal/social purpose (oe)	**B1**
(b) Links this to a general developmental principle: functions that were separated into single-word/single-function utterances in infancy become combined or layered as grammatical and pragmatic competence increase (oe)	**B1**
(b) Notes this reflects growing communicative competence beyond Halliday's original model, which was designed to describe pre-linguistic/early one-word functions rather than complex, multi-clause speech (oe)	**B1**

(b) Answer: By age 4;6, single utterances such as 'We goed to the park and I seed three gooses!' (line B1) combine an informative function (recounting events) with an interactional one (engaging Mum and inviting a response), showing that as grammar becomes more complex, functions that were once separate in one-word speech now merge within a single utterance, a level of pragmatic layering beyond Halliday's original infant-focused model.

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Question 7

(a) Explains Skinner's theory: children learn language through operant conditioning, imitating the language they hear and being reinforced for correct or approximate use (oe) **B1**

(a) Identifies imitation in the transcript, e.g. Aaliyah attempting Dad's modelled forms (line A2 'cow' prompts her attempt 'tow'; line A8 'baa' is repeated back at line A9) (oe) **B1**

(a) Identifies positive reinforcement, e.g. Dad's praise 'well done' (line A2) following a successful attempt, which Skinner would argue increases the likelihood the word is repeated (oe) **B1**

(a) Identifies correction/extinction processes, e.g. the incorrect 'doggy' for the sheep (line A7) being corrected rather than reinforced (line A8), which should reduce that behaviour over time (oe) **B1**

(a) Notes that under Skinner's model, language is essentially learned behaviour built up through repeated stimulus-response-reinforcement cycles, with no need for innate grammatical knowledge (oe) **B1**

(a) Answer: Skinner's behaviourist account holds that Aaliyah is learning language by imitating Dad's modelled words (e.g. attempting 'cow', repeating 'baa') and through reinforcement: Dad's praise ('well done') rewards successful attempts and makes repetition more likely, while his correction of errors (e.g. 'doggy' for the sheep) withholds reinforcement and should reduce that error over time, with all of the learning explained as stimulus-response conditioning, without needing any innate grammatical mechanism.

(b) **L1** Identifies a weakness of Skinner's theory in general terms, with little or no reference to transcript data. **1-2**

(b) **L2** Identifies a valid weakness and links it to relevant transcript evidence, with some clear explanation of why the evidence challenges Skinner's theory. **3-4**

(b) **L3** Gives a well-developed evaluation, clearly explaining a specific weakness of Skinner's theory and using precise, well-selected transcript evidence to show why imitation/reinforcement alone cannot account for it. **5**

(b) Indicative content:

- Virtuous errors (e.g. 'goed', 'gooses', 'bestest' in Transcript B) could not have been produced by imitating adult speech, since no adult models these forms; this challenges the idea that all language is learned purely through imitation.
- Such errors show the child applying a grammatical rule productively and creatively to novel forms, which behaviourism struggles to explain without invoking some form of internal rule system.
- Reinforcement in the transcripts is inconsistent (not every error is corrected, e.g. some non-standard forms pass without comment) yet children still eventually correct these errors, suggesting reinforcement is not necessary for correction to occur.
- Skinner's model would also struggle to explain the speed and universality of grammatical development given comparatively limited and imperfect input, though this specific 'poverty of the stimulus' critique is more closely associated with Chomsky.

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