Vygotsky's Theory

Zone of Proximal Development

Scaffolding: Teacher adjusts the level of support as performance rises.

Language and Thought:

Develop independently of each other, then merge.

Have external or social origins

"Private Speech"

Zone of Proximal Development

Upper Limit

Level of additional responsibility the child can accept with assistance of an able instructor

Level of problem solving reached on different tasks by the child working alone

Lower Limit

An Example of Scaffolding

Scene: Mom is helping child construct a puzzle. They have a model that they can refer to. The child tries to place green pieces where they do not belong.

Mom: Did we find any green up here? (points to model)

Child: (looks at model) This one. (points to incorrect place in the model)
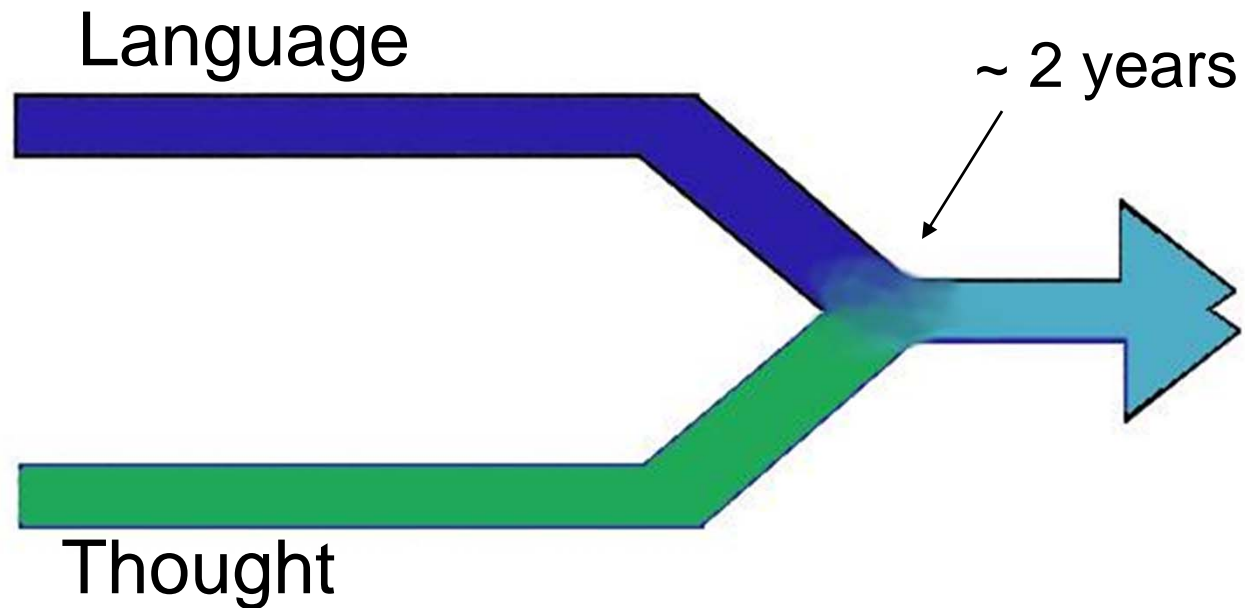
Mom: I think maybe that's a leftover. Do you think so?
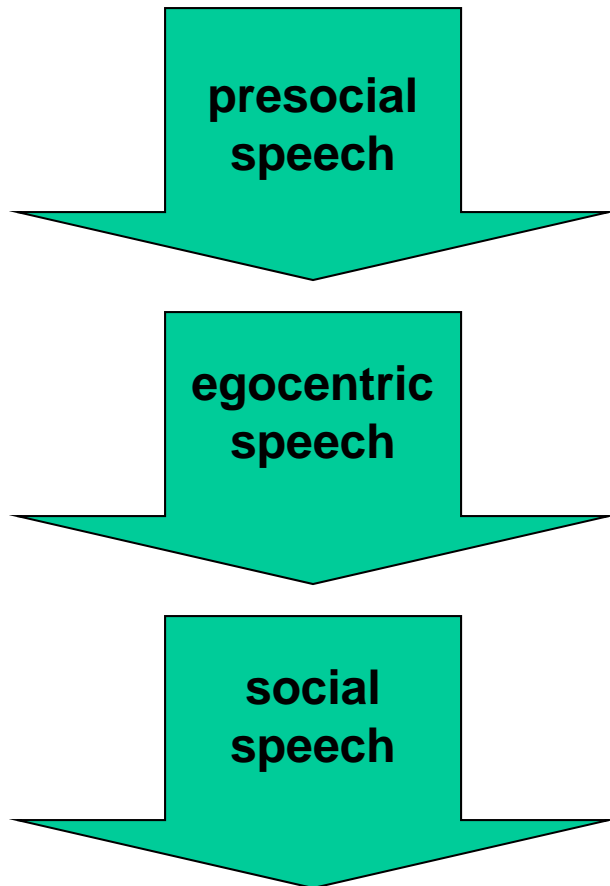
Child: (nods)

Mom: Maybe we don't need the green one, cause there isn't any green one up there, is there. Remember?

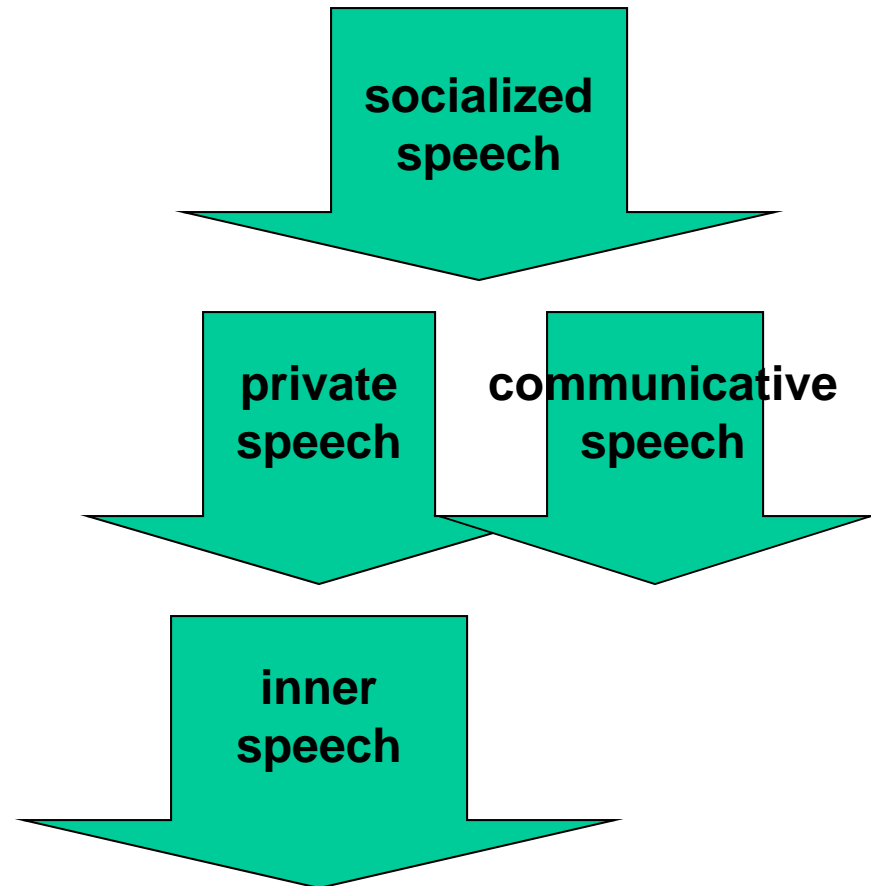Child: (looks at pieces pile, puts green pieces back, chooses two appropriate pieces.

Vygotsky's basic idea of language and thought

Language

~ 2 years

Thought

Piaget

presocial speech

↓

egocentric speech

↓

social speech

↓

Vygotsky

socialized speech

↓

private speech   communicative speech

↓

inner speech

↓

Vygotsky's Key Contribution

Emphasizes the social contexts of learning, and that knowledge is mutually built and constructed

Criticisms of Vygotsky's Theory

- Not specific enough about age-related changes

- There are potential "pitfalls" in collaboration and guidance

Overall Teaching Recommendations - Vygotsky

- Assess child's zone of proximal development

- Provide just enough assistance

- Use more skilled peers as teachers

- Encourage private speech, self-regulation

Cognitive and Language Development
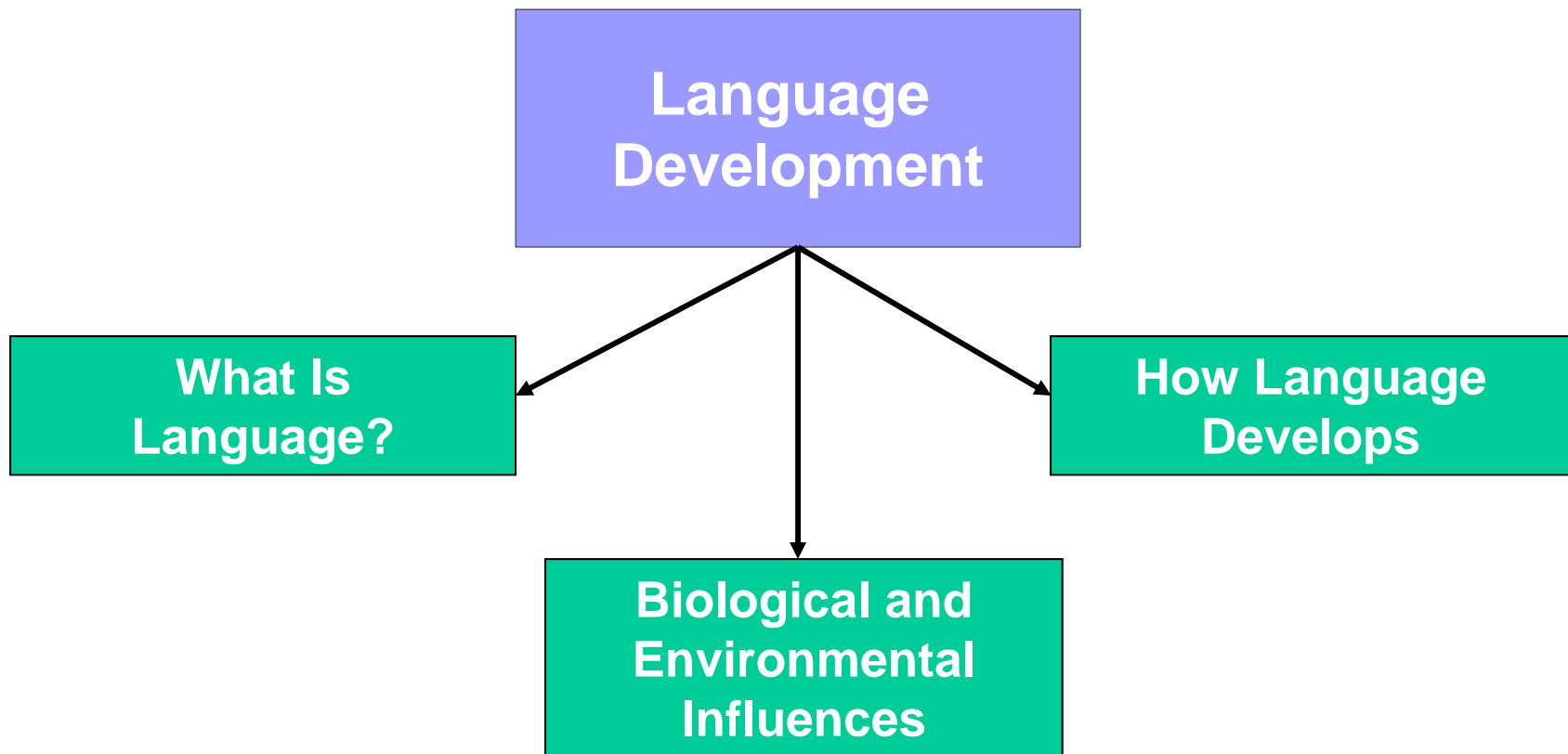
Language is …

...a form of communication, spoken, written, or signed, that is based on a system of symbols.

Phonology ⟶ Sound system of a language

Morphology ⟶ Units of meaning involved in word formation

Syntax ⟶ Rules for combining words into phrases/sentences

Semantics ⟶ Meaning of words and sentences

Pragmatics ⟶ Appropriate use of language in different contexts

Biological and Environmental Influences

Children are **neither** exclusively biological linguists **nor** social architects of language.

Interactionists emphasize the contribution of both.

Key Milestones in Language Development

- Preschool: learn morphological rules like plurals, *-ed* for the past tense

- Preschool: learn and apply the rules of syntax, e.g., how to form *wh-* questions

- Middle Childhood: vocabulary development continues at a breathtaking pace

  6 yr olds: 8,000 – 14,000 words

  12 yr olds: 50,000 words

Key Milestones in Language Development

- Middle Childhood: Development of *metalinguistic awareness* – knowledge of language, e.g., what a preposition is

- Adolescence: Greater understanding of metaphors, satire, and complex literary works

- Adolescence: Writing improves as planning and revising skills are enhanced

Supporting Vocabulary Development

Increase opportunities for reading & writing

Computers

- Relate the new to the known
- Promote active, in-depth processing

Everyday conversations: introduce and elaborate on new words

Give students an opportunity to use words in a variety of contexts

STUDY IN VOCABULARY TRAINING

4th to 6th grade students read the following passage with the difficult or the easy words.

Joe and Ann went to school in Portland. They were *antagonists* (enemies). They saw each other often. They had lots of *altercations* (fights). At the end of high school, Ann *maligned* (said bad things about) Joe. Then Ann moved away. Joe stayed in Portland. He got a job as a *bailiff* (worked for a judge). One day Joe was working, and he saw Ann. Ann did not see Joe. Ann looked *apprehensive* (afraid). She was being *incarcerated* (under arrest).

Students from both groups performed equally well on literal questions, but the students with the difficult words did much worse on inference questions.

STUDY IN VOCABULARY TRAINING
Sample Test Questions

Literal Questions such as:

Joe and Ann saw each other _____ in school.

    (a) never
    (b) not much
    (c) frequently
    (d) often

Inference Questions such as:

Joe works in a _____ .

    (a) school
    (b) hospital
    (c) courthouse
    (d) university

STUDY IN VOCABULARY TRAINING
Sample of Training Format

Experimenter: This word is "altercations." What word is this?

Child: "Altercations."

Experimenter: Correct, "altercations." What does "altercations" mean? *(points to meaning on index card).*

Child: "Fights."

Experimenter: Yes, "altercations" means "fights." Listen do you have altercations with your teacher? *[child responds]* Do you have altercations with a tree? *[child responds].* So what does "altercations" mean?

Child: "Fights."

Experimenter: (after similar questions about "antagonist") Listen, Do you have any antagonists" *[child responds]* Do you have any altercations with your antagonists? *[child responds]*