

MORE TADPOLES, MORE FROGS: DISCOURSE ACQUISITION SURVEY IN CHILDREN AGED TWO AND THREE EXEMPLIFIED

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Abstract

Language acquisition remains a central focus in linguistics and psycholinguistics, offering profound insights into human cognition and socialization. Children acquire language with remarkable speed, yet early research has traditionally privileged syntax and phonology over discourse, treating initial speech as incomplete grammar. This study, therefore, investigated early English language acquisition in two- and three-year-olds through a discourse-functional perspective, conceptualising utterances as communicative acts embedded in social interaction. The analysis drew on functional (Halliday), interactionist (Bruner), and usage-based (Tomasello) frameworks, to demonstrate that even single-word and reduced forms convey varied intentions, regulate interaction, and negotiate meaning within context. Naturalistic observation of two children revealed that repetition, ellipsis, and lexical economy function as adaptive strategies, allowing discourse competence to emerge before fully formed grammar. Early conversational management, turn-taking, and repair sequences illustrate pragmatic sophistication, highlighting that structural development serves communicative goals rather than preceding them. The “tadpole-to-frog” metaphor captures this developmental trajectory: early language is specialised, coherent, and purposeful, not deficient. These findings advance theoretical understanding by situating grammar within discourse, and pedagogical practice by emphasising engagement over correction. Children’s early speech is an internally systematic, socially grounded, and functionally motivated stage in linguistic development. Framing child language as a dynamic, internally consistent

process, therefore, advances the understanding of early discourse acquisition and its implications for theory and practice.

Keywords: *Child language acquisition, Early discourse and usage-based development, Pragmatic language skills, Interactional communicative acts, Functional grammar*

Introduction

Every typically developing child acquires proficiency in at least one language with remarkable speed and without formal instruction. This phenomenon has long fuelled debate regarding whether language is primarily learned from the environment or rooted in innate biological endowment. Early behaviourist accounts, particularly those associated with Skinner (1957), framed language acquisition as a product of imitation and reinforcement. In contrast, Chomsky's (1959, 1965) critique of behaviourism introduced the idea that children possess an innate linguistic capacity enabling them to generate novel utterances beyond their input. This capacity, conceptualised as Universal Grammar, suggested that language development involves rule construction rather than mere repetition. Subsequent research has shown that both positions capture important aspects of acquisition. While children demonstrate creative rule formation, language development also unfolds within richly interactive social environments (Halliday 1975, 1978; Bruner 1983; Tomasello 2003). Language is therefore neither purely inherited nor purely learned, but emerges from the interplay of cognitive predispositions and communicative experience. This study builds upon an earlier investigation by Oduola and Awofolajin (2009), titled *From Tadpole-to-Frog: A Survey of Syntactic Acquisition of English in Children Aged Two and Three*. While that work primarily examined the structural development of children's grammatical systems, focusing on syntactic patterning and rule formation, the present study adopts a complementary but analytically distinct orientation. Specifically, it shifts attention from syntactic organisation to discourse construction, emphasising how young children deploy emerging linguistic resources to perform

communicative functions within interactional contexts. This progression reflects not a departure from the earlier framework but a theoretical deepening, recognising that grammatical development unfolds within broader processes of meaning-making and social communication. By foregrounding discourse acquisition, the current study extends the tadpole-to-frog metaphor beyond structural transformation to include the evolution of communicative competence, situated within this integrative perspective by examining discourse patterns in children aged two and three. At this stage, children's speech reveals not only syntactic growth but also functional communicative strategies that illuminate how meaning, structure, and interaction develop together.

Academic Gulf

Research on child language acquisition has traditionally privileged syntax and phonology, often treating early language development primarily as the mastery of grammatical structures. Foundational studies have extensively documented the emergence of sentence patterns, morphological markers, and rule-governed behaviour in children's speech (Brown and Hanlon, 1970; Brown 1973; Bloom 1970; Pinker 1994; Oduola 1997; Yang 2006; Oduola and Awofolajin 2009). While these contributions remain invaluable, they have inadvertently created an imbalance in the literature by underrepresenting discourse as a central dimension of early language development.

Language, however, is not merely a structural system but a resource for meaning-making, social interaction, and contextual negotiation (Halliday 1978; Bruner 1983; Tomasello 2003). Children do not acquire grammar in isolation; they acquire the ability to participate in communicative events. Even at the earliest stages, children's utterances perform discourse functions such as requesting, clarifying, protesting, identifying, and managing interaction. Yet, much of the existing scholarship continues to interpret early speech primarily through syntactic lenses, often

reducing discourse phenomena to incomplete grammar rather than recognising them as emergent communicative competence.

Again, studies that address discourse development frequently concentrate on older children, narrative competence, or school-age pragmatic skills, leaving a relative scarcity of detailed analyses of discourse organisation in children aged two and three. This developmental window is particularly crucial because it marks the transition from isolated lexical productions to interactionally situated meaning construction.

A significant portion of empirical research has also been conducted within Western linguistic environments, resulting in limited context-sensitive accounts of discourse acquisition in diverse sociolinguistic settings. Given the variability of caregiver interaction styles, cultural communicative norms, and input conditions, discourse development warrants closer examination within specific social contexts.

The problem, therefore, is not the absence of child language research, but the insufficient theoretical and analytical attention given to discourse as a primary developmental construct in early childhood. There remains a need for studies that:

- (i) Treat children's early utterances as discourse acts rather than incomplete syntactic structures,
- (ii) Examine how communicative intentions are organised and interpreted in interaction,
- (iii) Explore the relationship between emerging grammar and functional language use, and
- (iv) Provide contextually grounded evidence from underrepresented sociolinguistic environments.

This study addresses this gap by investigating English discourse acquisition in children aged two and three, focusing on how meaning, interaction, and communicative strategies develop prior to, alongside, and sometimes independent of fully formed syntactic structures.

Scholarly Expectations

This study aims to examine the nature and development of English discourse acquisition in children aged two and three, with particular attention to how young learners organise meaning, negotiate interaction, and deploy emerging linguistic resources to achieve communicative goals. Rather than treating early child language as incomplete syntax, the study conceptualises children's utterances as discourse acts embedded within social interaction. The research, therefore, seeks to illuminate how communicative competence develops through use, context, and interaction. The study is guided by the following objectives:

- (i) To identify the discourse functions performed by children's early utterances, including requesting, labelling, clarifying, negotiating, and regulating interaction.
- (ii) To examine how children construct and convey meaning within context-dependent communicative situations, focusing on the relationship between emerging grammatical structures and discourse organisation in early speech.
- (iii) To discuss how the interactional strategies such as repetition, ellipsis, and reduced forms children employ in managing conversational exchange with caregivers and interlocutors operate as discourse resources rather than merely syntactic deficiencies.
- (iv) To contribute to a functional and usage-based understanding of early language development by foregrounding discourse competence, focusing on the pedagogic and caregiver-related implications of recognising children's speech as communicatively structured behaviour.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding early child language requires a framework that accounts not only for structural development but also for meaning-making, interaction, and communicative function. This study draws on complementary theoretical traditions that collectively illuminate discourse acquisition in early childhood.

Functional Theory of Language

The functional perspective, associated principally with Halliday (1975, 1978), views language as a resource for making meaning rather than merely a system of rules. From this standpoint, children do not first acquire grammar and later apply it to communication; instead, they acquire language through its use in socially situated contexts. Halliday argues that early child language is fundamentally functional. Children's utterances serve communicative purposes such as requesting, protesting, interacting, and regulating behaviour. Linguistic forms emerge gradually as children expand their capacity to express these functions. Language development, therefore, is driven by the need to mean. This orientation is central to the present study. By examining children's speech as discourse acts, the research recognises that even structurally reduced utterances may represent fully meaningful communicative contributions.

Interactionist Theory

The interactionist tradition, influenced by Bruner (1983), emphasises the role of social interaction in language development. Bruner introduces the concept of the Language Acquisition Support System (LASS), highlighting how caregivers structure communicative environments that scaffold children's participation in discourse. Within this framework, language acquisition is inseparable from joint attention, turn-taking, shared routines, and contextual negotiation. Children learn language by engaging in communicative exchanges, not by internalising abstract rules in isolation.

This perspective is particularly relevant to discourse acquisition. Early communication is inherently collaborative, with meaning co-constructed through interaction. Children's utterances must therefore be interpreted within the conversational contexts that give them functional value.

Usage-Based and Constructivist Perspectives

Usage-based theories (Tomasello 2003) propose that linguistic structure emerges from patterns of language use. Rather than

assuming pre-specified grammatical knowledge, this approach argues that children extract regularities from input, gradually forming constructions shaped by frequency, function, and communicative intent.

Language development, from this view, reflects processes of analogy, categorisation, and distributional learning. Grammatical organisation is thus understood as an outcome of discourse experience. This framework aligns naturally with the study's emphasis on discourse. Children's early productions are treated not as incomplete versions of adult grammar but as adaptive communicative strategies shaped by interactional needs.

Discourse and Pragmatic Development

Discourse-oriented models stress that language acquisition involves learning how to use linguistic resources appropriately in context (Hymes 1972; Bates 1976). Communicative competence includes the ability to manage interaction, interpret intentions, organise information, and negotiate meaning. From this perspective, early child language reveals pragmatic sophistication even when syntactic structures remain emergent. Repetition, ellipsis, and single-word utterances function as discourse tools rather than evidence of deficiency.

This study adopts this discourse-centred orientation by analysing how children:

- (i) Perform communicative acts
- (ii) Manage conversational exchange
- (iii) Exploit contextual cues
- (iv) Construct meaning collaboratively

Integrative Perspective

Rather than privileging a single theoretical position, this study adopts an integrative framework. Functional, interactionist, usage-based, and discourse-pragmatic perspectives converge on a key insight:

'Language development is fundamentally communicative'. Grammar, within this synthesis, is not rejected but repositioned. It is

viewed as emerging from discourse rather than preceding it. Children acquire language by participating in meaning-making practices embedded within social interaction. Such an orientation allows early child speech to be understood as organised, purposeful, and developmentally systematic.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, naturalistic observational design. The approach is particularly suited to investigations of early language development, where the goal is to capture authentic communicative behaviour within everyday interactional contexts. Rather than eliciting controlled responses, the study prioritises spontaneous speech as it occurs in natural caregiver–child exchanges.

Participants

The study focuses on two typically developing children aged between two and three years. Such choices of number were made because of the temporal limitation which originally precluded amassing a lot of data. The participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- (i) Normal developmental profile
- (ii) Regular exposure to English in daily interaction
- (iii) No reported speech or hearing impairments
- (iv) Availability for sustained observation

Ethical Considerations

To preserve ethical considerations and conversational naturalness, the children are referred to by their real names as permitted by their parents. However, pseudonyms – ‘**Child A**’ and ‘**Child B**’ are hereby deployed in the present study for publication standards.

Data Collection

Data, extracted from personally stored databank, were collected through naturalistic audio recordings of routine interactions between the children and familiar interlocutors. The original recording sessions, spanning between seven and eight months of observation, captured spontaneous speech produced in everyday communicative situations, including:

- (i) Play activities (lasting for about 3 hours during each visit)
- (ii) Feeding contexts (lasting for about 2 hours during each visit)
- (iii) Object identification episodes (indeterminate)
- (iv) Informal conversations (indeterminate; not quantified)

Naturalistic observation was chosen because it allows discourse phenomena - such as turn-taking, negotiation, repair, and contextual interpretation - to emerge organically.

Field notes supplemented recordings to document contextual variables, including:

- (i) Situational setting
- (ii) Interlocutor roles
- (iii) Non-verbal behaviour
- (iv) Interactional triggers

Analytical orientation

The analysis adopts a discourse-functional framework. Utterances were not treated merely as syntactic units but as communicative acts embedded within interaction.

Each recorded production was examined along the following dimensions:

(i) Discourse Function

Utterances were categorised based on communicative intent, such as:

- (a) Requesting
- (b) Labelling
- (c) Clarifying
- (d) Protesting
- (e) Negotiating
- (f) Responding.

(ii) Interactional Context

Interpretation relied on situational embedding, including:

(a) Preceding turns (b) Non-verbal cues (c) Shared knowledge (d) Conversational goals

(iii) Pragmatic Force

Attention was given to how meaning was achieved through reduced forms, repetition, and ellipsis.

(iv) Structural Development

While syntax was not the primary focus, emerging grammatical organisation was analysed insofar as it contributed to discourse construction.

Principle of Interpretation

The study employs context-sensitive interpretation. Following discourse and pragmatic traditions (Halliday 1978; Bruner 1983; Tomasello 2003; MacWhinney, 1999), children's utterances are understood relative to interactional environments rather than adult grammatical norms.

Single-word and reduced productions were therefore analysed as discourse acts rather than incomplete sentences.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis followed a staged procedure:

1. Transcription of recorded interactions
2. Identification of communicative episodes
3. Functional classification of utterances
4. Contextual interpretation
5. Examination of interactional strategies
6. Description of emerging discourse patterns

Reliability Considerations

Given the interpretive nature of discourse analysis, consistency was ensured through:

- (i) Repeated listening to recordings
- (ii) Cross-checking contextual notes
- (iii) Functional ratification grounded in theory
- (iv) Avoidance of grammar-biased interpretation

Unlike Oduola and Awofolajin's (2009) study, the emphasis here was placed on communicative plausibility rather than syntactic completeness.

Justification of Approach

Early child language is highly context-dependent. Strict grammatical analysis risks misrepresenting discourse behaviour by imposing adult structural expectations on developing systems.

A discourse-functional methodology allows the study to capture:

- (i) Meaning construction
- (ii) Interactional organization
- (iii) Communicative strategies
- (iv) Functional linguistic development

This approach aligns with contemporary perspectives that conceptualise language acquisition as participation in communicative practice rather than mere rule accumulation.

Data analysis and discussion

Overview

The analysis reveals that children aged two and three demonstrate structured discourse competence that cannot be adequately explained through syntactic development alone. Even where grammatical forms appear reduced, the data show systematic communicative organisation, functional precision, and interactional awareness.

Children's productions function as meaningful discourse acts embedded within social interaction.

Single-Word Utterances as Discourse Acts

One of the most salient features of the data is the frequent use of single lexical items. Traditional syntactic perspectives might classify such productions as incomplete structures. However, discourse analysis reveals that these utterances perform fully interpretable communicative functions.

Consider the following interactional sequence:

Lekan: What do you want me to do?

Child A: Pineapple

Superficially, the child produces only a noun. Functionally, however, the utterance operates as a request. The meaning emerges through contextual embedding rather than structural elaboration. The same lexical item performs distinct discourse roles across contexts:

Child A: Pineapple

Depending on interactional conditions, this production conveys:

- (i) A request (“Give me pineapple”)
- (ii) A demand for continuation (“More pineapple”)
- (iii) A declarative identification (“This is pineapple”)
- (iv) A response to inquiry (“I am eating pineapple”)

This variability illustrates a crucial principle of discourse acquisition:

- (i) Meaning precedes structural expansion.
- (ii) Children demonstrate sensitivity to shared situational knowledge, interlocutor expectations, and conversational goals.
- (iii) Repetition as Communicative Strategy

Repetition emerges as a prominent discourse resource rather than a redundancy. In the data, repetition performs emphasis, urgency marking, and clarification functions.

Child A: Pineapple, pineapple

Within the observed interaction, repetition intensifies communicative force. It signals persistence, not lexical limitation. The strategy reflects pragmatic competence - the child modifies delivery to achieve interactional effect.

Such behaviour aligns with functional accounts of language development (Halliday 1975), where linguistic forms are shaped by communicative needs.

Ellipsis and economy in early discourse

Children's utterances frequently omit elements obligatory in adult grammar:

Child B: Your pocket

Rather than representing syntactic deficiency, this production functions as an elliptical directive. Contextual interpretation reveals the intended meaning:

“Bring out what is in your pocket.”

Ellipsis reflects communicative economy. The child relies on shared attention and situational salience to minimise linguistic effort.

Early discourse is, therefore, characterised by efficiency, not incompleteness.

Interactional competence

The data indicate emerging mastery of conversational organisation. Children demonstrate awareness of:

- (i) Turn-taking
- (ii) Question–response adjacency
- (iii) Repair sequences
- (iv) Attention management

Example:

Lekan: Who bought it?

Child B: Is mummy

Although grammatically reduced, the utterance satisfies discourse expectations. The child provides relevant information aligned with the conversational frame. This supports the view that communicative appropriateness develops alongside, and sometimes ahead of, syntactic completeness (Hymes 1972).

Emergence of grammatical relations in discourse

While grammar is not the primary focus, the data show that children deploy emerging structural distinctions in discourse contexts:

“Baby is crying”

“It is mummy”

These productions reveal developing control of relational mapping. Crucially, grammar appears as a tool for discourse organisation rather than an autonomous system.

Structure serves meaning

Reduced Forms as Adaptive Strategies

Across the dataset, children's reduced constructions exhibit systematicity. Omissions are not random but patterned:

“Want biscuit”

“Give it”

Children preserve semantically salient elements while minimising grammatical load. This behaviour reflects adaptive optimisation under cognitive constraints.

Usage-based models (Tomasello 2003) provide insight here: linguistic structure emerges gradually from repeated communicative use.

Discourse before grammar

Perhaps the most significant finding is that discourse competence is already highly functional at this developmental stage. Children successfully:

- (i) Express intentions
- (ii) Negotiate needs
- (iii) Manage interaction
- (iv) Exploit context
- (v) Achieve communicative goals

Grammatical expansion appears as refinement rather than foundation.

This challenges ‘grammar-first’ interpretations of acquisition.

The ‘Tadpole-to-Frog’ revisited

The metaphor of metamorphosis aptly captures the developmental trajectory observed. Early discourse resembles a coherent communicative system appropriate to the child's cognitive and interactional capacities. Like the tadpole, early language is not

defective but developmentally specialised. Thus, transformation, not correction, defines growth.

Theoretical implications

The findings reinforce several contemporary insights:

- (i) Language acquisition is fundamentally communicative
- (ii) Discourse competence emerges early
- (iii) Reduced forms are functionally motivated
- (iv) Grammar develops within interaction
- (v) Context plays a constitutive role in meaning

Functional and interactionist theories receive strong empirical support.

Pedagogic implications

Viewing early child speech through discourse convex has practical consequences. Caregiver responses should prioritise communicative engagement rather than structural correction.

Children benefit from interactional scaffolding, not grammatical policing.

Errors become developmental evidence rather than failure indicators.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that discourse competence emerges as a central organising principle in early child language. Contrary to grammar-dominant interpretations, the data reveal that children aged two and three are not merely acquiring structural patterns but are actively engaging in meaning-making practices. In alignment with the first objective, analysis has shown that early language acquisition extends beyond syntactic development to include the acquisition of discourse strategies, pragmatic awareness, and interactional competence

One of the most striking observations is the functional precision of children's utterances. Even highly reduced productions consistently perform identifiable discourse functions. Single-word

utterances, far from being communicatively impoverished, operate as contextually rich speech acts.

This early communicative intentionality supports the functionalist claim that language development is driven by the need to mean (Halliday 1975). Children's early productions are organised around communicative goals rather than grammatical completeness. Meaning, therefore, appears developmentally primary.

The data strongly underscore the centrality of context in early discourse. Identical lexical forms assume distinct meanings across interactional environments. The interpretation of children's speech is thus inseparable from conversational embedding. Objective two is, therefore, analytically established that meaning in early discourse is heavily dependent on situational context, shared knowledge, and conversational cues. The same lexical item often performed multiple communicative functions depending on the interactional environment.

This context-dependent meaning construction aligns with pragmatic theories of communicative competence (Hymes 1972), which emphasise appropriateness, relevance, and situational sensitivity. Children demonstrate early mastery of these principles, indicating that discourse acquisition involves sophisticated inferential processes.

Rather than reflecting linguistic deficiency, reduced constructions emerge as adaptive communicative strategies. Keeping with the third objective, it is found that constructs as reduced forms, ellipsis, and repetition in early discourse operate as adaptive communicative strategies rather than indicators of linguistic inadequacy. Children systematically preserve semantically salient elements while omitting grammatically redundant components. Such patterns lend support to usage-based accounts (Tomasello 2003), which conceptualise grammar as emerging from communicative use. Economy, efficiency, and contextual reliance characterise early discourse organisation.

Importantly, omissions are patterned, not random - a finding consistent with rule-governed developmental behaviour (Brown

1973; Yang 2006). Repetition, for instance, functions prominently as a discourse device. It marks emphasis, persistence, and intensification of communicative intent. This finding challenges interpretations that associate repetition solely with lexical limitation. Instead, repetition reflects strategic discourse management, that is, an early indicator of pragmatic competence. Children modify delivery to regulate interactional outcomes.

Showing emergence of interactional competence the data reveal notable sensitivity to conversational structure. Children display awareness of turn-taking, adjacency relations, and response relevance. Even grammatically reduced responses fulfil discourse expectations. In line with objective four, the analysis found evidence of turn-taking, repetition, response relevance, and conversational adjustment. This observation reinforces interactionist perspectives (Bruner 1983), which argue that language acquisition is deeply embedded in social participation. Children acquire language by engaging in communicative routines, not by internalising abstract grammatical systems in isolation.

Although grammar is not the analytical focus, its developmental trajectory is clearly observable. Emerging structural distinctions - such as subject–predicate relations - appear as tools for organising discourse rather than as autonomous learning targets. This finding supports integrative models of acquisition, where grammar evolves within communicative practice (Halliday 1978; Tomasello 2003). Grammar thus, become a discourse resource

Collectively, the findings challenge deficit-oriented interpretations of child speech. Early utterances exhibit systematicity, functional coherence, and communicative adequacy. What might appear grammatically incomplete from an adult perspective often constitutes pragmatically complete discourse behaviour. By way reconceptualization, early child language is, found better characterised as developmentally appropriate discourse, that is, learning how to participate effectively in discourse and social interaction rather than incomplete grammar.

Implications from the study

This study, automatically comes with implications presented in the following table:

| Thematic Area | Key Findings | Scholarly Implication |
|--|--|--|
| Reconceptualising Early Child Language | Early child utterances are systematic, functional, and communicatively adequate rather than grammatically deficient. Reduced forms often operate as complete discourse acts within context. | Child language should be interpreted through communicative function and discourse context rather than adult grammatical standards. |
| Developmental Implications | Language development is transformational, involving gradual reorganisation and expansion of communicative competence through evolving discourse systems. | Supports contemporary developmental theories that emphasise variability, adaptation, and progressive restructuring in language acquisition (Yang, 2006). |
| Pedagogic and Caregiver Implications | Meaning negotiation, responsiveness, and conversational participation are more beneficial than excessive grammatical correction. | Encourages discourse-sensitive caregiving and interaction-based language support strategies. |
| Theoretical Contribution of the Study | The study foregrounds discourse, highlights functional organisation in early speech, reframes reduced forms as adaptive strategies, and integrates functional, interactionist, and usage-based perspectives. | Reinforces the view that language acquisition is fundamentally communicative and socially embedded. |

Conclusion, Recommendations and Suggestion for Further Research

This study has demonstrated that English discourse acquisition in children aged two and three is fundamentally communicative, interactional, and context-sensitive. The findings have revealed that children's early utterances, though often structurally reduced, function as meaningful discourse acts capable of expressing intention, negotiating interaction, and sustaining communication.

By foregrounding discourse rather than syntax alone, it is shown that early language development is not simply the accumulation of grammatical structures but the gradual emergence of communicative competence. Features such as repetition, ellipsis, reduced forms, and contextual dependency were found to operate as adaptive discourse strategies rather than indicators of linguistic inadequacy. In this sense, children's speech reflects internally coherent developmental systems shaped by interaction and meaning-making.

The study further reinforces functional, interactionist, and usage-based perspectives which view language acquisition as socially embedded and communicatively motivated. Grammar emerges within discourse practice, not outside it. The findings therefore contribute to contemporary child language scholarship by repositioning early speech as developmentally appropriate discourse behaviour.

Nevertheless, the study has certain limitations. The analysis was based on a relatively small number of participants and relied primarily on naturalistic observations within limited interactional contexts. As such, the findings may not fully capture the diversity of discourse acquisition patterns across broader sociolinguistic or multilingual environments. In addition, the qualitative orientation of the study prioritised interpretive depth over quantitative generalisation.

Future research may therefore expand the scope by incorporating longitudinal designs, larger participant populations, and comparative multilingual settings. Such studies would provide

broader insight into how discourse competence evolves across different social and linguistic environments.

Ultimately, the study reaffirms that children acquire language not merely by mastering grammatical forms, but by learning how to participate meaningfully in discourse and social interaction. In this sense, the metaphor of “more tadpoles, more frogs” captures the dynamic, evolving nature of language acquisition. Development reflects reorganisation, expansion, and refinement - not repair. The journey from “tadpole” to “frog” is, therefore, not simply grammatical maturation, but the progressive development of communicative competence. More tadpoles, inevitably, become more frogs.

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