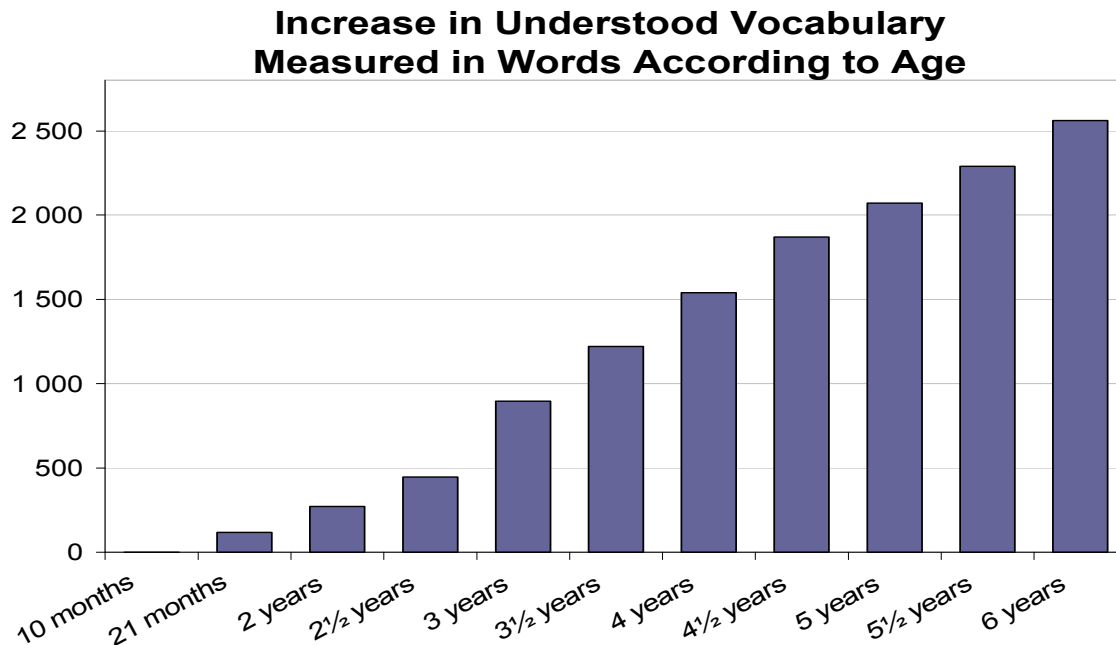


Vocabulary

The graph illustrates the normal increase in the number of words understood according to the child's age (data source: *Votre enfant apprend à parler*, Jean-Adolphe Rondal, Éditions Mardaga, 1998). This is what is called the receptive vocabulary, as opposed to the expressive vocabulary (the words pronounced).

From the age of 10 months old (his/her first word) to the age of 20 months old (with a vocabulary of about 20 words), the increase is relatively slow. But from 20 months old to six years old, the rate of increase in vocabulary is surprising: it's about one word and a half *per day*.



Note: The age intervals in the graphic above are presented according to the normal increase in vocabulary, for illustrative purposes. They are not a series of mathematically regular observations.

The bilingual child first retains the words in the language in which they were learned. For example, the child may go to bed in French with his “*toutou*” but play in English with his/her “trucks.” The bilingual child’s vocabulary may seem to be smaller than that of a unilingual child, but it must be remembered that this vocabulary is distributed in both languages and it is therefore equivalent, or even larger than that of a unilingual child. (The words “*chien*” and “dog” come to represent a single concept.)

Vocabulary is the main cause of mixing languages. Typically, the child can distinguish well between the two languages (especially around the age of three), but the child may not necessarily know the word in the language in which he/she expresses himself/herself. This mixing is a NORMAL stage that reflects the development of the child’s vocabulary. If a three-and-a-half-year-old child says to you “*jouer outside maman ?*” the child probably doesn’t know the word “*dehors*.” Teach the child: “*Outside, c’est le mot anglais. Le mot français, c’est dehors. Peux-tu le répéter, stp?*” You will help develop his/her vocabulary. And reduce mixing languages.

Reading is well suited to developing and enriching vocabulary because it usually involves images. The ideal? Photos.