From the time of birth through the early school years, young children rapidly acquire two complex cognitive systems: They organize their experiences into concepts and categories, and they acquire their first language. How do children accomplish these critical tasks? How do conceptual systems influence the structure of the languages we speak? How do linguistic patterns influence how we view reality? These questions have captured the interest of such theorists as Piaget, Vygotsky, Chomsky, and Whorf, but until recently very little has been known about the relation between language and thought during development.

*Perspectives on language and thought* presents current observational and experimental research on the links between thought and language in young children. Chapters from leading figures in the field focus on the acquisition of hierarchical category systems, concepts of time, causality, and logic, and the nature of language learning in both peer and adult–child social interactions.

Four major themes are presented. First, children honor constraints or biases that limit the possible meanings they consider when learning new words. Second, the conceptual systems underlying language use are intricately subtle and complex. Third, children’s “naïve theories” about the world may be integral to their early word meanings. Fourth, studying the nature of social interaction can be a potent tool for disentangling the roles of parent, child, and context during language learning.

The chapters in this volume provide a detailed discussion of the multiple relations between language and cognition in the course of children’s first language acquisition. This book will be of special interest to researchers in developmental and cognitive psychology, linguistics, cognitive science, and education.
Perspectives on language and thought
Perspectives on language and thought
Interrelations in development

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Preface

The goal of this book is to explore the multiple relations between language and cognition in the course of first language acquisition. Children learn an enormous amount during the few years between birth and the time they reach school age. Among their accomplishments are the organization of their experiences into categories and the acquisition of a native language. How do they accomplish these critical tasks? How do their conceptual systems influence the structure of the languages they speak? How do linguistic patterns influence how they (and we) view reality? These questions – and the explorations of their answers in this volume – should be of interest to professionals and advanced students in the fields of language development, cognitive development, and cognition more generally.

We are grateful to many people for making this volume possible. The authors of the chapters deserve special thanks and congratulations for their outstanding contributions. Donna Pineau at the University of Michigan spent many hours typing portions of the book and ferrying manuscripts to the post office. Helen Wheeler, Julia Hough, Katharita Lamoza, Mary Racine, and the staff at Cambridge University Press were unfailingly helpful and patient in creating a book out of what had begun as just a thought. We thank Gail Gottfried and Erin Hartman for their careful help with proofreading and preparing the indexes. We also acknowledge the generous assistance of NICHD Grant HD-23378, a Spencer Fellowship from the National Academy of Education, and an award from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation through the Presidential Intiatives
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