Vocabulary comprises all the words a person “knows,” both those a person understands and those a person uses appropriately. New experiences add new words to the vocabulary and refine or elaborate the meanings of known words.

Unlike other aspects of language, vocabulary continues to grow throughout life, increasing with each gain in experience and understanding.

Children from poverty have approximately \( \frac{1}{2} \) of the vocabulary words that children from advantaged homes use at age 4. Children from advantaged homes use 6 times more nouns, verbs and modifiers than children in poverty.

The differences in vocabulary growth continue to widen. This gap seems to predict the reality that high school students from poverty do not have the vocabulary used in advanced textbooks.

Children from poverty and from advantaged homes talk about the same things in the same ways. Specific words may be different but the functions are the same. Children ask questions, make demands, and describe what they are doing.

One big difference is in the amount of talking. Kids from advantaged homes talk more about what they do. They ask more questions about how things work and why.

A large majority of the words children use are the same words used by their caregivers. (86%- 98% of the words recorded in children’s vocabulary were the same as used by caregivers in Hart & Risley studies.)

Children in poverty have 6 times fewer opportunities to just talk with caregivers.

What occurs in casual interactions results in practice. The practice is what makes a difference in learning. Children in poverty have fewer opportunities to practice.