Stages of Language Development
Before Birth

In utero, babies:

✓ hear the pitch and rhythm of the mother’s voice (but not individual words).

Image courtesy of summerbl4ck, flickr [CC-BY-NC-ND: https://www.flickr.com/photos/summerbl4ck/].
Newborns:

✓ recognise their mother’s voice
✓ use the melody of language to find words in speech

Image courtesy of danna § curious tangles, flickr CC-BY-NC-ND: https://www.flickr.com/photos/curioustangles/
Newborns:

✓ Can discriminate very different languages (like English and Japanese) but not very similar languages (like English and German)

Image courtesy of muse rosli, flickr CC-BY-SA https://www.flickr.com/photos/muse_rosli/
Babies:

- Watch your face when you talk to them.
- Smile and laugh when other people smile and laugh.
- Make sounds to themselves, like cooing, gurgling and babbling.
Babies

- Pay more attention to objects that are presented with language.
- Recognise their name and the names of familiar objects like ‘apple’ and ‘shoe’.

Image courtesy of Palmer House Photography, Flickr CC BY-NC-ND: https://www.flickr.com/photos/slinky789/
Babies

✓ Understand how your mouth matches the sounds you make.

✓ Can tell the difference between British English and American English.
Babies

✓ Listen carefully and turn to someone talking on the other side of the room.

✓ Babble strings of sounds, like ‘no-no’ and ‘go-go’.

✓ Understand that how you say words (happy or angry) means something.
Babies

- Make noises, point and look at you to get your attention.
- Show you objects to engage in conversation about the object.
Babies

✓ Take turns in conversations, babbling back to an adult.
✓ Start to understand the meaning of common verbs (e.g. dance, kiss)
12-18 months

Toddlers

✓ Use up to 20 simple words, like ‘cup’, ‘shoe’ and ‘daddy’.

✓ Understand simple instructions like ‘kiss mummy’, ‘kick ball’ and ‘give me’
12-18 months

Toddlers

✓ Point to things when asked, like familiar people or objects.
✓ Start to enjoy simple pretend play, e.g. pretending to talk on the phone.
✓ Copy lots of the things that adults say and gestures they make.
18-24 months

Toddlers

✓ Understand between 200 and 500 words.
✓ Understand simple questions and instructions: ‘where’s your shoe?’ and ‘show me your belly button’.

Image courtesy of Charlie Brewer, Flickr CC BY-NC-ND https://www.flickr.com/photos/charliebrewer/
18-24 months

Toddlers

✓ Use a limited number of sounds in their words—often these are p, b, t, d, m and w.

✓ Often miss the ends of words off.
18-24 months

Toddlers

✓ Sit and listen to simple stories with pictures.
✓ Start to put short 2-3 word sentences together: ‘bye nanny’, ‘more juice’.
For more information about ages and stages of language development, visit:

https://ican.org.uk/i-cans-talking-point/