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**(SOUND OF BABY SUCKING A DUMMY LINKED TO A COMPUTER)**

**Rob:** Hello, I'm Rob and this is 6 Minute English and that was a very unusual sound. Do you know what that sound was? Finn is with me today and I think he can help. Hello Finn.

**Finn:** Hello Rob. That was the sound of a baby sucking a dummy – that's the rubber thing you put in a baby's mouth to stop it crying.

**Rob:** Very useful! But it sounded strange.

**Finn:** It did. That's because the dummy was connected to a computer.

**Rob:** Connecting a dummy to a computer is a strange thing to do?!

**Finn:** Yes. It is part of a test to understand how unborn babies – called **foetuses** – learn language. That is what we are talking about today: What babies learn before they are born.

**Rob:** I know we start learning from when we are very young – but I didn't know it was from that early on! Shall we find out how much you have learnt in your life Finn by asking you a question? This is about the English language. According to a survey by the National Literacy Trust, which one of these words was discovered to be the most common first word for a baby to say – not including Mummy or Daddy?

- a) dog
- b) eat
- c) bus

**Finn:** I think the answer is a) dog.

**Rob:** I'll tell you the answer later on. Now Finn, this study we are talking says babies learn language in the **womb** – so, inside the Mother before they are born?

- Finn:** Yes. When babies are born they can identify – or recognise – familiar sounds and language patterns. Ten weeks before they are born, they are listening to their mothers **communicate**.
- Rob:** Communicate – so they are listening to their mother talking to other people. And it is remembering and learning these sounds.
- Finn:** Yes. And if a baby's mother is **bi-lingual** – speaking two languages – the baby can remember sounds from both of these languages. But Rob, you have children, don't you? Do you think they learnt to recognise your voice before they were born?
- Rob:** That's difficult to know. After they were born they responded to different sounds but I don't know if they linked the sounds to a particular person. And now, they don't listen to me at all!
- Finn:** I don't believe that! How have they learnt to speak since they were born?
- Rob:** Through listening and copying people. And now my three-year-old son learns French at nursery and I hope that means by the time he starts school he will be very good at it – or we could say, **fluent**.
- Finn:** Très bien!
- Rob:** Excuse me?
- Finn:** That's French for very good! Of course, when the baby is in the womb, it is not learning words, it is learning the rhythm of the language. These are the patterns of the sound. It can hear when sounds go up and go down and when they are loud and soft. That is something I try to do when I learn a new language. I listen to the sound patterns of the words – the ups and downs. How do you learn Rob?
- Rob:** Through **repetition** – by hearing something again and again and then saying it. But here is another question: even though we both speak English we sound different.
- Finn:** Well of course, that is our **accent** – that is how we say words depending on which country, region, or social class we come from. I have a soft Scottish accent because I am from Scotland! One difference is the **intonation** – that means the way your voices rises and falls when you speak.
- Rob:** But it is also about the way we pronounce our vowel sounds – like a and o.

**Finn:** That's true. Some people think we learn our accents before we are born. Here is a little test. Can you tell if this baby is French or German?

### **SOUND OF BABY CRYING**

**Rob:** That just sounds like a regular baby crying. Can I hear another one please?

**Finn:** OK...

### **SOUND OF BABY CRYING**

**Rob:** Hmm. That sounds different but I couldn't tell you where he was from.

**Finn:** The first baby was born to German-speaking parents and the second one was born to French-speaking parents. They picked up the intonation in the voice before they were born.

**Rob:** OK, so the French baby's cry goes up – it rises - and the German baby's cry goes down – or drops - just like the intonation of both languages. Fascinating. Anyway, it's time to find out how much you have learnt Finn. Earlier I asked, according to a survey, which one of these words was discovered to be the most common first word for a baby to say – not including Mummy or Daddy?

- a) dog
- b) eat
- c) bus

**Finn:** And I thought it would be a) dog

**Rob:** You are right. Dog is one of ten words that babies in the UK say first. Well, that's all we have time for today. Please join us again for another 6 Minute English soon.

**Both:** Bye.

## Vocabulary and definitions

<b>foetuses</b>	developing, unborn babies
<b>womb</b>	place inside a woman's body where a baby grows before it is born
<b>communicate</b>	speak or talk to other people
<b>bi-lingual</b>	speaking two languages
<b>fluent</b>	speak very well
<b>repetition</b>	doing something again and again
<b>accent</b>	way of saying words that shows what country, region, or social class someone comes from
<b>intonation</b>	the way our voice goes up and down as we speak

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