

The three-year-old, then, is a grammatical genius—master of most constructions, obeying rules far more often than flouting them, respecting language universals, erring in sensible, adultlike ways, and avoiding many kinds of errors altogether. How do they do it? Children of this age are notably incompetent at most other activities. We won't let them drive, vote, or go to school, and they can be flummoxed by no-brainer tasks like sorting beads in order of size, reasoning whether a person could be aware of an event that took place while the person was out of the room, and knowing that the volume of a liquid does not change when it is poured from a short, wide glass into a tall, narrow one. So they are not doing it by the sheer power of their overall acumen. Nor could they be imitating what they hear, or else they would never say *goed* or *Don't giggle me*. It is plausible that the

basic organization of grammar is wired into the child's brain,