INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND TRANSLATION STUDIES (IJELR)
A QUARTERLY, INDEXED, REFEREED AND PEER REVIEWED OPEN ACCESS INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
http://www.ijelr.in

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 4. Issue.3., 2017 (July-Sept.)

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBER INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

DIFFERENT DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES IN FIRST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION A CASE STUDY

PEYMANRAJABI[1], SHIMAGHIABI[2], KHADIJEHREZAEENASB[3]

[1]ELT Dept, Malayer Branch, Islamic Azad University, Malayer, Iran
Corresponding author: paymanrajabi2002@yahoo.com
[2]PhD. Student, Malayer Branch, Islamic Azad University, Malayer, Iran
e-mail: Shivagh67@yahoo.com
[3]PhD. Student, Malayer Branch, Islamic Azad University, Malayer, Iran
e-mail: khadijehrezaeenasb@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to trace the language development of the two daughters Mehrsa and Atena from two Farsi-speaking home, from their first vocal sounds to the first sentences. The present study which is based on "naturalistic observations" covers the developmental stages and chronological succession of different in the acquisition Farsi as the first language will be presented. The study was carried out by maintaining the proper records of the children utterances in the form of a 'diary' and the traditional method of phonetic transcription was used to record utterances. It was found that they acquired Farsi at different stages from vocal sounds to first sentences because of their different nature and nurture. Thus, children acquire language not at the same rout. The whole study will be confined to different stages of language acquisition in different children with their individual's differences.

Keywords: First language acquisition, language development, stages in language acquisition, developmental stages, nature and nurture.

1.1 Introduction

All children around the world learn the immediate language they hear in their environment. When children are very young they have to learn many things that will last them for the rest of their life, such as walking and socializing, and for socializing they need to learn the language that is spoken around them. Language is what distinguishes humans from other life forms on earth and to think how easy it is for such young children to acquire language in all its complexity in such short time, is remarkable. In just a few years, children learn the basic components of their native language, in which they learn the phonology, morphology, semantics and syntax of their native language. The style and rate at which children acquire a language have universal characteristics although there are individual variations in the process of language development. These differences in language development can often be seen between one and three-year-old children, concerning, for instance, when the first words are uttered, if they are early or late talkers and what kind of

words the children are learning. The second year presents the most variability in the early lexicons children acquire according to researchers. Research on first language acquisition is relatively recent. In the 1960's, the American linguist, Noam Chomsky, introduced the idea of an innate competence that all children have, in which he argued that the language development of a child is largely based on an innate system. "He argued persuasively that behaviorist learning principles could not account for the rapid acquisition of an infinitely productive language faculty" (Gleason and Ratner 36). He claimed that children could not possibly learn all they need to know about language by only hearing the speech around them, because the linguistic input to young children is very poorly structured. Since then linguistic studies on first language acquisition have mainly focused on the psychological part of the development and much less on the social factors and individuality. First language acquisition still remains a mystery and researchers are still debating on how much of it is innate, or nature, and how much is learned by nurture.

2.The history of child language studies

David Ingram has divided the history of child language studies into three major periods: (1) The period diary studies (1876-1926) (2) The period of large sample studies (1926-1957) (3) The period of longitudinal studies (1957- present) In the absent of appropriate names, we would call these periods as old, middle and modern periods old child language studies respectively. The old period is characterized by the language studies of single children whereas the middle period is marked by the language studies of large number of children or subjects. In the modern period the focus of attention was shifted towards the "rule based description" of child language. 3.1 Old Period of Child Language Studies Studies on language acquisition were carried out in the second half of nineteenth century. According to Ingram (1989:7), "the first studies on language acquisition began to appear over one hundred years ago. These were a part of a general interest in child development that occurred at that time". At the beginning of the twentieth century, there appeared Clara and Wilhelm Stern's German work Die Kindersprache (1907) which has been described as "the first classic work devoted exclusively to child language"(Ingram 1989:8). Studies on language acquisition, in the form of diaries were also taken up in the USA. The American psychologist and educationalist G.Staley Hall (1846-1924) of Clark University was the main focus behind such studies. Further he encouraged people to publish articles on language acquisition in the Pedagogical Seminary of which he was the editor. Consequently, a large number of studies on various aspects of language acquisition appeared in the journal. Of these, Bateman (1916), Brandenburg (1915), Chamberlain and Chamberlain (1904, 1905), Pelsma (1910) and Nice (1917, 1920) are worth-mentioning. 3.2 Middle Period of Child Language Studies The first study was made by Madorah Smith (1926) who concentrated on vocabulary growth, sentence length and correctness of articulation. Similar studies were made by McCarthy (1926). Like Smith, McCarthy also dealt with normal children. Following these studies, Day (1932) and Davis (1937) analyzed twins, Fisher (1934) studied the gifted children and Young (1941) made the comparison of lower and middle class children. The best of these studies, i.e., large sample studies that of Templin (1957) which "marks the end of these studies as conducted over 31-year period" (Ingram, 1989:15). 3.3 Modern Period of Child Language Studies This period is characterized by "longitudinal language sampling". It is a method of collecting data on language acquisition in which as Ingram (1989:21) states, "the child is visited at predetermined intervals for a reasonable length of time with the purpose of collecting a representative sample". The longitudinal studies began in the late 1950s and the investigators like Martin Braine (Wlater Reed Hospital in Bethesda, Mary Land), Susan Ervin and Wick Miller (University of Calrifonia) and Lois Bloom (Colombia University) developed their interests in theses studies. Braine investigated three children Andrew, Gregory and Steven for "two-word" utterance produced. In case of Steven, he also used tape-recorder for systematic collection of the data. Miller and Ervin (1964), Bloom (1970) and Brown (1973) all investigated their subjects on the basis of systematic visits-by visiting them on "a regular schedule at predetermined times for the predetermined amount of time".

3.Language Acquisition and Language Learning

According to Crystal (1985:5), "Language acquisition refers to the learning of a linguistic rule", i.e., the rule of grammar, phonology or semantics, and language development implies the further use of this rule in an increasingly wide range of linguistic and social situations. Many scholars, theorists and researchers make

distinction between "language acquisition" and "language learning". Language acquisition means acquiring a language as a mother tongue or the first language. According to Corder (1973:109), "Language acquisition takes place during the period when the infant is maturing physically and mentally". Language learning, on the other hand, refers to learning a second language which "normally starts at a later stage, when language performance has already become established and when many other physical and mental processes of maturation are complete or near completion" (Corder, 1973:107). Learning a second language differs in many respects from the acquisition of the mother tongue. Firstly, the conditions under which acquisition and learning take place are different. Language acquisition takes place in childhood when a child grows physically and mentally and language learning occurs at a later stage after the first language or mother tongue has been mastered. Secondly, the motivation for the processes of acquisition and learning also differ. Language acquisition comes quite "naturally", whereas language learning takes place, "as a result of the discovery of its practical utility" (Corder, 1973:110).Thirdly, the language learning also differs from language acquisition on the basis of data. A child acquiring his mother tongue is exposed to a different kind of data which are unorganized, ungraded and unsystematic. These are not "carefully planned or logically ordered set of data" (Corder, 1973:110). Moreover, these cannot be treated as "teaching syllabus" in any sense of the word. Fourthly, the second language learning in most cases takes place formally, i.e., through formal instructions for which the instructional materials are "carefully planned and logically ordered". These are also highly graded, systematized and need based. 5. Stages of Language Acquisition is one of the most fascinating facets of human development. Children acquire knowledge of the language or languages around them in a relatively brief time, and with little apparent efforts.This could not be possible without two crucial ingredients: a biologically based predisposition to acquire language, and experience with language in the environment" (Frenandez & Cairns, 2011:97). "Studies of linguistic development have revealed that children pass through a series of recognizable stages as they master their native language. Although the age at which children will pass through a given stage can vary significantly from child to child, the particular sequence of stages seems to be the same for all children acquiring a given language" (Akmajian, 1995:456).

4.1Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to trace the language development of two children Mehrsa and Atena from two different families of the Iranian-speaking home, starting from the production of their first vocal sounds to the first sentences. The study aims at identifying the most important factors that influence the child's process of acquisition of their mother tongue which is based on "naturalistic observations" covers the acquisition of Farsi during their pre-school age.

4.2Scope of the Study Language acquisition

It means acquiring a language as a mother tongue or the first language. According to Corder (1973:109), "Language acquisition takes place during the period when the infant is maturing physically and mentally". Language acquisition comes quite naturally. A child acquiring his mother tongue is exposed to a different kind of data which are unrecognized, ungraded and unsystematic. These are not "carefully planned or logically ordered set of data (Corder 1973:110). The whole study will be confined to the stages in language acquisition: early vocalization, holophrastic, and the first sentences.

On the whole, the study was carried out by maintaining the proper records of the children utterances in the form of a 'diary' and the traditional method of phonetic transcription was used to record utterances.

4.3Stages of Language Development

Language acquisition is one of the most fascinating facets of human development. Children acquire knowledge of the language or languages around them in a relatively brief time, and with little apparent efforts. This could not be possible without two crucial ingredients: a biologically based predisposition to acquire language, and experience with language in the environment" (Frenandez & Cairns, 2011:97). "Studies of linguistic development have revealed that children pass through a series of recognizable stages as they master their native language. Although the age at which children will pass through a given stage can vary significantly from child to child, the particular sequence of stages seems to be the same for all children acquiring a given language" (Akmajian, 1995:456). The case reported traces the language development of the two children

Mehrsa and Atena from farsi-speaking home, from their first vocal sounds to the first sentences. Since their birth, the study was carried out in the form of "diary" and the traditional method of phonetic transcription was used to record utterances. It was found that they had acquired farsi by the time they were five age.

Action Object State of Object Associated Object Possessor Location

Down, (when she sits or steps down) Ball, (having just thrown it) Down, (having just thrown something) Cracker, (pointing to the door room where crackers are kept) Lauren, (upon seeing Lauren's empty bed) Box, (putting crayon in box)

Thus, "Dada" when used in a context in which the child's father has just arrived home would express the agent relationship. If instead, "Dada" were said when the infant pointed at the father's chair, it would be an example of the possessor relationship. Greenfield and Smith conclude that children in effect use the environment as the rest of their sentence. Owens (2001) maintains that although single word utterances are basically structure-free, they still demonstrate some of the underlying cognitive concepts. Nomination or naming is signaled by words such as "see", "this", or "that". Recurrence is marked by "more" and "nuther". Nonexistence markers are phrases such as "all gone", "no more" and "no".

Holophrases: The Concept Formation Knowledge structures of two types are assumed to guide word acquisition: taxonomic knowledge and event-based knowledge (Sell, 1992). Taxonomic knowledge consists of categories and classes organized hierarchically. New words are compared categorically and organized for retrieval. Until a child has a label for a concept, he relies on overextensions such as calling all men "Daddy" or novel words, such as ""go-boom" for "gun" (Owens, 2001, p.199). Event based knowledge or representation consists of sequences of events or parent-child routines used to separate events from non events. Event based knowledge is temporal in nature and is organized toward a goal, contains actors, roles, props, and alternatives, and may include embedded sub-events (Fivush, 1984; Nelson, Fivush, Hudson and Lucariello, 1983, cited in Owens, 2001).

5.1 Early Vocalizations

5.1.1 Crying: "Birth cry" was the first vocal response the children Mehrsa and Atena made . In later period, crying was used to convey the basic physiological needs, such as hunger and thirst. Crying sounds were also produced when she was in pain, discomfort, or when frightened. After a couple of months, the crying started diminishing and developed "cooing".

5.1.2 Cooing: Cooing is the next stage of vocalization. It refers to the production of non crying sounds. In case of Mehrsa and Atena, the period of cooing continued up to the seventh month. During this period their vocalization mainly consisted of the following:

(1) Long vowels, such as a:, u:, i:. (they went on lengthening these vowels).

(2) Short vowels /a/ and /u/ (combined with/m/, such as "am". At this stage, both of them also used to make gurgling sounds. Cooing normally conveyed her being comfortable and contended.

5.1.3 Babbling: When they became around seven months, the quality of their vocalization changed and they started babbling. Babbling, compared with cooing, included a wider variety of sounds richer in both consonants and vowels. The voiced bilabial plosive /b/ was the first consonant uttered by children. Then acquired another consonant /m/, the bilabial nasal. After these two consonants, they also acquired the alveolar nasal /n/. During the babbling period, they acquired the front consonants /t/ and /d/. These consonants were uttered forming syllables, such as, "ba", "ma", "ima", "mama", "ta", "da da da da" gha gha" "taa", etc. This actually started around the eighth month of her age. It was found that though these were meaningless utterances and seemed to serve no communicative function, but resembled their first meaningful words of the holophrastic stage. Janda and Hamel (1982:169), regarded babbling as " a necessary step in language development". Ingram (1989: 39) is of the view that "babbling occurs because the child is innately disposed or programmed to babbling".

5.2 The Holophrastic Stage

The term "holophrastic" comes from the "holophrase" which is defined as "When a single word stands for a phrase in a sentence, it is referred to as a holophrase" (Janda and Hamel 1982:170). In case of Mehrsa, the meaningful word she uttered, at the age of 11 months, was "ab:" (water). This word served a

communicative function and was used in holophrastic sense. i.e., 'I want water' or 'give me water'. Her mother used to produce this word "ab" when the child Mehrsa showed signs of being thirsty. The expressions like "ab mikhay", 'shir mikhay, (Do you want water or milk?) were used by the mother while addressing Mehrsa or simply talking to her. During this period, the socialization of the child started the moment she uttered "ab" meaningfully. 0n the contrary, Atena couldn't express words till she was 14 months. She uttered "ba" (dadi) and "ma" (momi) The next word Mehrsa uttered was "mama" 'mother'. At this point in time she was at the age of one year. Some other words were uttered by Mehrsa in the next few months with meaning in appropriate situations were:" am" (food), "lala (sleep), "mi mi" (milk), "bay" (goodbye), "han" (car), , "jojo" (hen), "alo" (cell phone)" , "Haji" (grand father)," bofa" "pain", "Mehrsa" (her name) "be" (give me). Some of these words were constantly repeated by the mother. When her production of words with her comprehension skill, it was found that she comprehended more than she produced. Mehrsa had around 100word items in her comprehension while she could produce only 20words at the age of 1.2. The following points are worth mentioning: (A) Mehrsa used to respond correctly to the following utterances produced by her mother: 1. Where is mother?, /mama kojast?/ (points out to the kitchen). 2. Where is father?, / baba kojast ?, (pionts at the bedroom). Mehrsa uttered the following words and sentences at the age of 1.3.5 "lala kon" (sleep), "nakon" don't , "ab bede" (give me water), "am bede" (give me food), "bokhor" (eat), "maman jon" (grand ma)," sard" (cold), "dagh" (hot), "baba ko " (where's dad), "mi mi bokhore" (I want milK). Although Atena uttered just three words meaningfully "b aba" (dadi) , "mama" (momi) and "bacheha" (children). Although Atena could utter just three words "baba" (dadi), "mama" (momi) and "bacheha" (children) at the .

Mehrsa kept increasing her vocabulary in the next few months and at the age 1.7 , the size of her vocabulary had increased to more than 100 including the following new word items: "bezaresh" put it: "bezaresh" (put it), "kitab" (book), "atish "(fire)," biron" (out side), "boro" (go), "shokolat" (choclate), "gaz "(gas), "pato" (blanket), "aroosi "(wedding) , "hale "(aunte), "oftad" (fall)," bede man" (give me), "goshi "(cell phone), "salam" (hello), "are" (yes). In addition, she uttered sentences such as "maman pasho" (get up mami)," maman beshin" (sit down mami)," kie?" (whose that?) ," roshanesh kon" (turn it on), hamosh kon (turn it down), baghalesh kon (hugh me). The above mentioned words developed by Mehrsa were of different variety, i.e., name of persons, animals, objects, action words, modifiers, pronouns, and adverb of negation. On the other hand, Atena kept increasing her vocabulary in the next few months and at the age 1.7 slower than Mehrsa. The size of her vocabulary had increased to more than 10 words. Mamajoo: dear mom, babajoo: dear dad, dadash: brother, aji: sister, ab: water, am: food, bal: yes, madar: mother, nagoo: don't say, boro: go. In adition, she uttered sentences at the age 2 such as: mama bia: come in mom, mama boro: go mom, baba bede: give me dad.

These findings also show that it is not only comprehension precedes production but there is also substantial difference between comprehension and production. This fully supports the assumption that children comprehend language before they actually produce the language. Many studies of language development suggest that a child first word appears at the age of one year. Some other studies show that gifted children are advanced in speech, whereas retarded children are slow in developing it (Johnson & Medinnus, 1969). The available data suggests that Mehrsa was advanced in developing her speech habits compared with other children like Atena. Furthermore, according to the available data, Mehrsa at the age 11 months produced few words and comprehend more than 50 words. When she reached 18 months, she was able to produce 50 words and comprehend about 80 words. Around the age of two years, she could produce more than 100 words and she had the capacity of comprehending more than 300 words. Janda and Hamel (1982:170) agree that "although the child's first word sentences are quite simple, they are novel and creative and not merely a copy of the speech the child hears". The following are some of two-word utterances produced by Mehrsa that do not exist in farsi such as "daresh kon" (take it out), "dast kon" (clap).

Findings and Conclusion

The process of how children learn their native language is hard and complex but young children make it seem so easy. But there are variations when it comes to the speed of development in word production and first word combinations. Typical development in infants seems pretty straight-forward in their first year where

their first word should be uttered around their first birthday but after that things become unclear. The next stage is somewhere around eighteen months old where the child should have around fifty words in their vocabulary, but according to research that is not always the case. The age at which young children utter their first words and acquire their first fifty words of vocabulary can vary just as the development of motor skills can vary, such as, crawling and walking. But the time-frame in which children acquire their vocabulary of fifty words can be much broader than the time-frame given with motor skills, such as walking, where the age at which young children acquire a vocabulary of fifty words can range between fourteen months old up to twenty-four months old. The ones that have a vocabulary of fifty words around twenty-four months old are labeled late-talkers. Normally however, by the time they are three years old they should have caught up to their peers. This gap in vocabulary growth can be the result of many factors, e.g. social class, birth order, input from caregivers, genes and gender, personality and culture and cultural models. Environmental influences can influence the vocabulary growth considerably when keeping in mind that no child has the exact same upbringing. Caregivers can influence the vocabulary growth in their children's language development by using child-directed speech, giving their children and their language development a lot of attention, and also naming objects around their children as frequently as possible. These children, as a result of this, often develop a referential style. They sometimes also fall under the category of being early-talkers whereas the late-talkers tend to lean towards the expressive style.

The present study, which covers the different stages of Farsi language acquisition by two children Mehrsa and Atena during their pre-school ages, has revealed the following facts;

1) It was found that Mehrsa had acquired farsi by the time she was three, but Atena had acquired at age four.
2) The available data, however, suggests that Atena was somehow less advanced in developing her speech habits, compared with other children of her age.
3) They acquired first, the names of objects, persons and animals, then imperative and question verbs and sentences in order to give commands and make request.
4) Mehrsa and Atena acquired Farsi more rapidly when they were admitted for kindergarten.

The above cited findings may clearly indicate the extreme importance of the environment in the enhancement of language acquisition. This factor must be taken into consideration in the language learning process of a second tongue. The presence, or even the creation of an environment that uses the target language in question or at least encourages its use on the part of the learner/s may prove vital. Besides, the findings also show that normal children are quite ready to grasp linguistic habits at such an early age as three or four. Finally, individual differences are not only to be found among different children or language learners, but also within the different linguistic skills of the one and same child or learner, as with regard to Mehrsa and Atena's speech habits.

It is a fact that, first language acquisition needs to be practiced in the environment. On the other hand, learners' physical and mental maturation is also vital. Since language acquisition is human specific and one of the most complex phenomena in the world is human's mind so we can say that language acquisition is one of the most complex and mysterious parameters that all of the children encounter.

On the whole, we can conclude that developmental stages in first language acquisition vary significantly child to child because of the individual's differences in their nature and nurture as we found this case about Mehrsa and Atena.

References

Akmajian, A., Demers, R., Farmer, A., & Harnish, R. (1995). Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication. The MIT Press.

Bateman, W. G. (1916). The Language Status of Three Children at the Same Ages. Pedagogical Seminary, XXIII, 211-240. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08919402.1916.10534708

Blumenthal, A. R. (1970). Early Syntactic Development: Across-Linguistic study with special reference to Finnish. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Carroll, J. B. (1961). Language Acquisition, Bilingualism, and Language Change. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. Chamberlain, A., & Chamberlain, L. (1904). Studies of a Child. Pedagogical Seminary. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08919402.1904.10534101

Corder, S. P. (1982). Introducing Applied Linguistics. Harmond-Sworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books. Crystal, D. (1985). A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Fernandez, E. M., & Cairns, H. (2011). Fundamentals of Psycholinguistics. Wiley-Blackwell Publication.

Ingram, D. (1989). First language acquisition: Method, description, and explanation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ingram, D. (1997). Phonological development: Production. In P. Fletcher, & M. Garman (Eds.), Language acquisition : Studies in first language development (pp. 223-240). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ingram, E. (1989). First Language Acquisition: Method, Description and Explanation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lehmann, W. P. (1976). Descriptive Linguistics: An Introduction. New York: Random House.

Waston, J. B. (1919). Psychology from the Standpoint of a Behaviorist. Philadelphia: Lippincott.