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The Semantic Development in Child Language Acquisition

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا ۗ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ (٣٢)

صدق الله العظيم

سوره البقرة ايه (32)

Dedication

To my heaven in life my dear mother

*To who was the reason for my arrival at this stage to the
source of bond and safety, my dear father*

To my heart, my husband

*I dedicate to you the fruit of my hard work and graduation,
which was not achieved without your efforts and
encouragement*

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 The Problem

Language acquisition of early childhood is closely associated with the flow of the sounds of language, which the sounds are mixed each other. The place where the children live may influence their language acquisition and adults around them also could influence their acquiring the language. For example, close emotional relationship among children and their mothers can give them positive effect to acquire the language. In this case, relationship does not only happen in children and their mothers but also people around them. Most of the children have different abilities in learn some skills to acquire the language, those differences also can give them positive and negative effect in acquiring the language like the ability to pronounce some words, to memorize words, to spell and to write words.

This paper tries to answer the following questions:

- 1- What is meant by child language acquisition?
- 2-What is the stages in child language acquisition?

3.What are the semantic development in child language acquisition ?

1.2 The Aim

This paper aims at presenting a theoretical study about the semantic development in child language acquisition.

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1.3 The Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that :

- 1.There are four stages in child language acquisition.
2. There is a semantic development which take, place after the four stages in child language acquisition .

1.4 Procedures

The following steps will be followed:

- 1- Presenting a study about language acquisition and the stages in child language acquisition .
- 2- Presenting a comprehensive theoretical study about the semantic development in child language acquisition.

1.5 Limits

The present study is limited to the semantic development in child language acquisition

1.6 Value

It is hoped that this study will pave the way for further research .

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Chapter Two

The Semantic Development in Child Language Acquisition

2.1 Language Acquisition

According to Varshney (2003:307), language acquisition is defined as the process whereby children achieve a fluent control of their native language . Children acquire a language not because they are subjected to a similar conditioning process, but because they have an inborn capacity which permits them to acquire a language as a normal maturational Process This capacity is universal the child has an innate language acquiring device. He acquires a language by exposure to it in society and by unconsciously forming certain hypothesis about language, which he goes on modifying till he comes to the adult model to which he is for the most part exposed. So the child goes on constructing an innate grammar, operating over generalized rules .

According to Chomsky (2009:101-102), language acquisition is a matter of growth and maturation of relatively fixed capacities, under appropriate external conditions. The form of acquisition and use of language the language that is acquired is largely determined by internal factors; it is because of the fundamental correspondence of all human languages, because of the fact that "human beings are the same, wherever they may be", that a child can acquire any language.

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The functioning of the language capacity is, furthermore, optimal at a certain "critical period" of intellectual development. In addition to that, language acquisition" is normally used without qualification for the process which results in the knowledge of one's native language or native languages .

It is conceivable that the acquisition of a foreign language whether it is learned systematically at school or not, proceeds in a quite different way. Indeed as we have seen, the acquisition of one's native language after the alleged „critical age“ for language acquisition may differ, for neurophysiological reasons, from the normal child's acquisition of his native language Lyons (1981:252) claimed that language acquisition is the process whereby children achieve a fluent control of their native language . The ability to get and understand the language is inherited genetically but the particular language that children speak is culturally and environmentally transmitted to them. Children all over the world acquire their first language without tutoring. Whereas a child exposed to speak to an English speaking community begins to speak English fluently, the other

one exposed to a community of Arabic speakers, begins to use Arabic fluently. Language acquisition thus appears to be different in kind from the acquisition of other skill such us swimming, dancing, or gymnastics .

According to Chomsky (2009:101-102), native language acquisition is much less likely to be affected by mental retardation than the acquisition of other intellectual skill activities. Every normal human child acquires one or more language unless he is brought up in linguistic isolation, and acquires the essentials of his language by a fairly little age, say by six.

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2.2 Stages in Child Language Acquisition

There are four stages in child language acquisition:

2.2.1 Babbling Stage (6-8 months)

Babbling is the sounds which infants produce as consonant-vowel combinations. The sounds which are produced by infants but not all the .speech sounds are same in language of the world. (Steinberg, 2003:147)

2.2.2 Holophrastic Stage (9-18 months)

Fromkin (1983:328) defines holophrastic from holo “complete” or “undivided” plus phrase “phrase” or “sentence”. So holophrastic is the children’s first single word which represent to a sentence. Children using one word to express particular emotional states ..

2.2.3 The Two-Word Stage (18-24 months)

It is two-word stage, the mini sentences with simple semantic relations. Fromkin (1983:329) states that children begin to form actual two-word sentences with the relations between the two words showing definite syntactic and semantic relations and the intonation contour of the two words extending over the whole utterance rather than being separated by a pause between the two words.

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2.2.4 Telegraphic Stage (24-30 months)

Telegraphic is merely a descriptive term because the child does not deliberately leave out the noncontent words, as does an adult sending a telegram. When the child begins to produce utterances that are longer than two words, these utterances appear to be “sentence-like”; they have hierarchical, constituent structures similar to the syntactic structures found in the sentences produced by adult grammar. (Fromkin ,1983:330)

2.3 The Semantic Development in Child Language Acquisition

According to Bolinger (2002:283), this is the fastest stage in increasing the vocabulary with many new additions; there is no babbling at all; the utterances have communicative intent. There is a great variation among children, that seems to understand everything said within hearing and directed to them.

Semantics is defined by Fromkin (1983:164) as the study of the linguistic meaning of words, phrases, and sentences. Children's early utterances, consisting primarily of single words, were once considered to carry the meaning of whole sentences. They were labeled holophrastic. It was thought that children intended elaborate meanings of older individuals, non-semantic factors, such as their insufficient memory spans Gleason and Smith. Gleason (1985:152) stated that this position was difficult to support because it required attributing intention and semantic knowledge to young children on the basis of a little evidence. It is now believed that young children come only gradually to understand and subsequently encode in their words the adult meanings

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Gleason (1985:90) also said that the processes of concepts learning and lexicalization, or attachment of words and meaning, may occur at varying rates and overlapping in time. At times children's concepts might match those of adults, but the children might use imperfect and only partially appropriate words because they lack better words to express themselves.

Words are produced from the age of about 1 year. New words are added slowly in the first year, so that by the age of 18–24 months the child has a vocabulary of about 50 words. Nelson (1973:90) examined the first 10 words produced by children and found that the categories most commonly referred to were important person names, animals, food, and toys. Greenfield and Smith (1976:54) found that early words may refer to many different roles, not just objects, and further proposed that the first utterances may always name roles. Clark (1977) argued that, in the very

earliest stages of development, the child must start with two assumptions about the purpose of language: language is for communication, and language makes sense in context.

The average child masters about fifty words by the age of eighteen months. These might include words such as, milk, water, juice and apple (noun-like words). Afterwards they acquire 12 to 16 words a day. By the age of six, they master about 13 to 14 thousand words.

The most frequent words include adjective-like expressions for displeasure and rejection such as 'no'. They also include social interaction words, such as "please" and "bye". (Tomasello M, 2003:43)

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There are three stages for learning the meaning of new words:

1. Whole object assumption:

A new word refers to a whole object. For example, when an eighteen-months old child sees a sheep and his mother points at it and says the word 'sheep', the child infers that the word 'sheep' describes the whole animal and not parts of it (such as color, shape, etc.).

2. Type assumption:

A new word refers to a type of thing, not just to a particular thing. For example, when the child hears the word 'sheep' he infers that it

is used for the animal type and not only for that particular sheep that he saw.

3. Basic level assumption:

A new word refers to objects that are alike in basic ways (appearance, behavior, etc.). (Ibid)

In other words, when the child hears the word "sheep" he overgeneralizes it to other animals that look like sheep by the external appearance, such as white, wooly and four-legged animal.

Contextual clues are a major factor in the child's vocabulary development.

The child uses contextual clues to draw inferences about the category and meaning of new words. By doing so, the child distinguishes between names and ordinary nouns.

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For example, when an object is presented to the child with the determiner "a" (a cat, a dog, a bottle) he perceives it as an ordinary noun.

However, when the child hears a noun without the determiner, he perceives it as a name, for instance "this is Mary".

Children usually make correct meaning associations with the words that the adults say. However, sometimes they make semantic errors.

According to (Phillip W, 1995:65) there are a few types of semantic errors:

Overextension: When a child says or hears a word, they might associate what they see or hear as more generalized concept than the real meaning

of the word. For example, if they say "cat", they might overextend it to other animals with same features.

Underextension: It involves the use of lexical items in an overly restrictive fashion. In other words, the child focuses on core members of a certain category. For example: 'cat' may only refer to the family cat and no other cat, or 'dog' may refer to certain kinds of dogs that the child is exposed to.

Verb meaning: when a pre-school child hears the verb 'fill', he understands it as the action 'pour' rather than the result, which is 'make full'.

Dimensional terms: the first dimensional adjectives acquired are big and small because they belong to the size category. The size category is the most general one. Later children acquire the single dimension adjectives, such as, tall-short, long-short, high-low. Eventually they acquire the adjectives that describe the secondary dimension, such as thick-thin, wide-narrow and deep-shallow. (Ibid)

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From birth to one year, comprehension (the language we understand) develops before production (the language we use). There is about a 5-month lag in between the two. Babies have an innate preference to listen to their mother's voice. Babies can recognize familiar words and use preverbal gestures.

Within the first **12–18 months** semantic roles are expressed in one word speech including agent, object, location, possession, nonexistence and

denial. Words are understood outside of routine games but the child still needs contextual support for lexical comprehension.

18–24 months Prevalent relations are expressed such as agent-action, agent-object, action-location. Also, there is a vocabulary spurt between 18–24 months, which includes fast mapping. Fast mapping is the babies' ability to learn a lot of new things quickly. The majority of the babies' new vocabulary consists of object words (nouns) and action words (verbs).

30–36 months The child is able to use and understand why question and basic spatial terms such as in, on or under.

36–42 months There is an understanding of basic color words and kinship terms. Also, the child has an understanding of the semantic relationship between adjacent and conjoined sentences, including casual and contrastive.

42–48 months When and how questions are comprehended as well as basic shape words such as circle, square and triangle.

48–60 months Knowledge of letter names and sounds emerges, as well as numbers.

By **3–5 years**, children usually have difficulty using words correctly. Children experience many problems such as underextensions, taking a general word and applying it specifically (for example, 'cartoons' specifically for 'Mickey Mouse') and overextensions, taking a specific word and applying it too generally (example, 'ant' for any insect). However, children coin words to fill in for words not yet learned (for example,

someone is a cooker rather than a chef because a child may not know what a chef is). Children can also understand metaphors.

From **6–10 years**, children can understand meanings of words based on their definitions. They also are able to appreciate the multiple meanings of words and use words precisely through metaphors and puns. Fast mapping continues. Within these years, children are now able to acquire new information from written texts and can explain relationships between multiple meaning words. Common idioms are also understood.

2.3.1 The Emergence of Early Words

Linguistic development must follow cognitive development. The first words emerge out of situations where an exemplar of the category referred to by the word is present in the view of parent and child ostensive model of learning the first words (Quine, 1960;76). Ostensive means pointing—this conveys the idea of acquiring simple words by a parent pointing at a dog and saying “dog”, and the child then simply attaching the name to the object. The problem is simply that the child does not know which attribute of input is being labelled. This is often called the mapping problem.

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2.3.2 Constraints on Learning Names for Things

The developing child makes use of a number of lexical principles to help to establish the meaning of a new word . The idea of lexical principles as general constraints on how children attach names to objects and their properties is an important one. Four main constraints have been proposed.

First, the cognitive system may be constrained so that it tends to treat ostensive definitions as labels for whole objects. The taxonomic constraint is that a word refers to a category of similar things. A third possible constraint is mutual exclusivity assumption, whereby each object can only have one label (Loewer, Barry, 1997;90): that is, (unilingual) children do not usually like more than one name for things. Fourth, as children acquire words, new strategies become available.

2.3.3 Other Solutions to the Mapping Problem

First, there might be an innate basis to the hypotheses children make (Fodor, 1981;43). Joint attention between adult and infant is an important factor in early word learning. The problem of labelling objects would be greatly simplified if the adult and child establish through any available communicative means that the discourse is focusing on a particular dimension of an object. Taxonomic hierarchies begin to develop only after the constraint biasing children to acquire basic-level terms weakens. Finally, there are syntactic cues to word meaning. Brown (1958;54) first proposed that children may use part-of-speech as a cue to meaning. The general capacity to use syntax to infer meaning is called syntactic bootstrapping .

Chapter Three

Conclusion

Language acquisition is the process by which children become fluent in their native language. Children acquire a language not because they have undergone a similar conditioning process, but because they have the innate ability to enable them to acquire the language as a normal maturity process. This ability is universal and children have a natural language acquisition device. The child is exposed to it in society and unknowingly masters it by making specific hypotheses about it. He continuously modifies it until he reaches the adult model to which he is heavily exposed. Therefore, the child continues to build the innate grammar by manipulating it according to generalized rules.

There are four stages in child language acquisition. The first is called Babbling in which the sounds that an infant produces is a combination of consonants and vowels. Not all speech sounds, but the sounds that babies make are the same in the languages of the world. The second is called Holophrastic or one-word stage in which the first word is produced which stands for a sentence. Children use words to express specific emotional states. The third stage is called the two-word stage in which Children begin to form a real two-word sentence. Here, the relationship between the two words has a clear syntactic and semantic relationship, and the intonation outline of the two words spreads throughout the utterance rather than being separated by a pause between the two words.

The last stage is called telegraphic which is just a descriptive term, in which children omit the function words that adults do when sending telegrams. The child begins to make utterances longer than two words.

Semantic acquisition is the fastest level of expansion of Vocabulary with many new additions. There is no murmuring. The utterance has the intention of communication. There is a great variety among children who seem to understand everything that is said and directed in listening. There are three stages of semantic development : the first is called whole object assumption which means a new word refers to a whole object. The second stage is called type assumption which means a new word refers to a type of thing, not just to a particular thing. The third stage is called basic level assumption which means a new word refers to objects that are alike in basic ways (appearance, behavior, etc.).

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