

Representations of First Language Acquisition in the Speech of a 30 -month- old child

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Abstract:

First language acquisition (FLA) describes the process by which children acquire their native language or languages in infancy without formal instruction. FLA occurs in a series of predictable phases, beginning with prelinguistic vocalizations (e.g., cooing, babbling), followed by one-word utterances around 1 year of age, and culminating in a base level of grammatically structured speech that approximates adult use by 4 or 5 years of age. FLA theorists such as Chomsky (nativist perspective), Skinner (behaviorist), and Bruner (interactionist), have offered different competing or complementary explanations of how the child learns phonology, vocabulary, and grammatical syntax. The rate and trajectory of acquisition are also influenced by a variety of factors, including caregiver input, cognitive development, and the child's environment. However, these points in the child's development appear to be relatively similar across cultures, with children exhibiting these same stages of development, regardless of their culture. FLA is therefore representative of the human brain's inbuilt predisposition or capability and places FLA in the context of early development as a dialectical process between biology and experience. This research is descriptive qualitative research with the stages of data collection, data analysis, and data presentation. The sources and data in this study are transcriptions of recordings of the verbal speech of a 30-month-old child named Benjamin. The results show five syntactic forms used by Benjamin: plurals, possessives, basic verb tenses, pronouns, and question words.

Keywords: first language acquisition, child language development, words, advanced words.

Introduction

Child development is deeply connected to language progression, which functions not only as a tool for effective communication but also plays a crucial role in enhancing a child's ability to express and understand emotions (AlHassan et al., 2022). Additionally, language development is a key contributor to cognitive growth, supporting the formation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships (Alqy & Mukminatus, 2022; Chen et al., 2023).

One of the primary processes involved in a child's development is conversational engagement with them. More frequent conversation sharpens their language skills and promotes greater social interaction. During the 18-to-36-month timeframe, the parent should take every opportunity to communicate with the child. By this stage, toddlers should have developed enough basic vocabulary so that they are able to comprehend and develop a response to language in a verbal form. Language development is one of the major determinants of children's global development and success in several areas of their lives (Al-Hassan et al., 2012; Dulaj, 2023). Ramnath (2021) asserts that a child's language skills are important in many areas of their development, including literacy, communication, socialization, confidence and self-esteem, and emotional and behavioral development, and their ability to make meaning of the world.

Responsive verbal interaction with their caregivers is the first key step in a child's language development. From birth, babies acquire language by listening to speech, participating in turn-taking with coos and babbles, and linking sounds to meaning. This early bonding through talk lays the foundation for all future language skills. Language development in children involves their ability to respond to sounds, understand directions, and use language (Arsa et al., 2019). Moreover, good verbal skills not only can promote a child's language skills, but also influence a child's self-confidence and view of self. The multiple intelligences theory described by American psychologist and educator Dr. Howard Gardner (1989) explains that there are eight intelligences, and linguistic intelligence, which relates to mastery of the spoken and written word, is one of the primary intelligences.

From early childhood onward, individuals rely on language acquisition to build social and professional relationships. Language acquisition involves the ability to process and produce linguistic information. This is regarded as the key in forming cordial and amiable terms and relationships with each other. This is essential with all the individuals in one's personal and professional lives. The individuals in the case of honing language acquisition need to be well-informed in terms of various factors, i.e. making use of polite language and decent words; treating each other with respect and courtesy; making provision of factual information; depicting the traits of helpfulness and co-operation and possessing an approachable nature and an amiable attitude (Thill, 2018). As a consequence of acknowledging and implementing all these factors, one will render an important contribution to honing language acquisition. Therefore, language acquisition is considered important in leading to the upgradation of overall personality traits and standards of living.

The study of first language acquisition (FLA) during early childhood is an important area of research in linguistics and development, focusing specifically on ways in which toddlers create and represent language in these critical developmental periods. By 30 months, toddlers display the most rapid linguistic development and show complex speech displays consistent with the cognitive and social development of toddlers (Hoff, 2013; Tomasello, 2018). Recent literature emphasizes this point when describing what happens to the spoken language mark; they will move from telegraphic speech to a more grammatical proclivity to mark their spoken language. They thus become instrumental in understanding innate language mechanisms as well as the environment (Lieven, 2022; Clark, 2016).

In the area of language acquisition, representational theories indicate that toddler speech reflects their input and the organization of grammatical rules they are engaging in (Ambridge & Lieven, 2015; Pine, 2020). Studies of 30-month-old children show they were using multi-word utterances, some simple syntax, and sometimes appropriate vocabulary to fit the context, which provides insight into how early speech systems are established (Rowland, 2013; Saxton, 2024). Recent studies in psycholinguistics show the role caregivers play, but also the frequency of input and cognitive work involved in their representations (Huttenlocher, 2018; Fernald & Marchman, 2023).

In this article, we analyze the representations of FLA in the speech of 30-month-old children in terms of how their lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic competences can be observed at this crucial age. We draw on data from longitudinal studies and experimental research (1989–2025) and examine how the universal language acquisition patterns interact with the 'individual' aspects of language learning. Finally, we contribute to the discussion relating to the nature v/s nurture debate of early language development and provide updates on toddler speech development across a variety of learning environments.

Methodology

This research follows a descriptive qualitative design and includes data collection, analysis, and presentation stages. The sources and data in this study are transcriptions of recordings of verbal speech of a 30-month-old child named Benjamin Haratizadeh. He resides in Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi province, Iran. This research subject is the last child. The research subject is the son of the researcher, making it easier for the researcher to collect data. The subject has Farsi as his first language (Farsi) and has active behavior in communication. This research focuses on children's language acquisition at the age of 30 months, because at that age, children are in a productive period in language acquisition, and errors often occur in the language process. Verbal speech data was obtained when Benjamin was playing with his older brother. The transcription of speech is presented and analyzed based on the level, which refers to plurals, possessive pronouns, basic verb tenses, pronouns, and question words. The data collection technique used is through recording and then converting it into writing. Recordings were made primarily during Benjamin's play activities using a smartphone.

The data analysis stage in this study went through three stages, namely (1) reduction, (2) presentation, and (3) conclusion drawing (Miles, 2014). First, the reduction stage is carried out in four ways, namely (1) transcribing the speech data into written text (2) the transcribed data is then identified in accordance with the research objectives, (3) classifying based on the research objectives, namely, the representation of plurals, possessive, basic verb tense, pronouns, and question words, and (4) interpreting the data that has been classified. Second, the presentation stage, which presents the data that has been classified into a table. Third, the conclusion drawing stage is the final stage by re-verifies the initial data.

Result and Discussion

Based on the data that has been found in this study, the research results are as follows. There are 5 types of words in terms of syntactic form produced by a 30-month-old child named Benjamin Haratizadeh. This can be seen in the following discussion.

Plurals:

At 30 months old (2.5 years), children are typically at a language development stage where they begin using simple plurals, but they haven't yet fully mastered plural rules. At this age, their use of plurals might look like this:

a. "Miou ha" means: Cats

Benjamin attempted to pluralize the word 'miou'—his representation of 'cat'—by adding a plural marker, mimicking the sound cats make

b. "Miou" means: cats, but they omit "S" (skip plural markers).

At this stage, while he was playing with his 5-year-old brother, he wanted to say cats, but he skipped the plural marker "s". And he said "miou".

c. "Ab ha"

Benjamin attempted to pluralize the word for 'water,' which is an uncountable noun and does not take a plural form.

Possessive:

Toddlers are developing their language skills and starting to use possessive forms to show ownership. They typically do this in simple ways, often by:

a. "Car`s mommy", "Cat`s tail"

At this stage, Benjamin started to use "s" to show ownership. For example, instead of saying "Mommy`s car," he said "Car`s Mommy".

b. "Benjamin teddy bear"

While he was playing with his brother, he wanted to say that this teddy bear is mine and you cannot hold it, he said: "Benjamin teddy bear" instead of "it is Benjamin`s teddy bear".

Imperative sentence representation

They are those kinds of sentences that Benjamin uses so that his family or his friends follow his will. They can be identified through these:

"No eat" means: Don`t eat that

"Park now" means: let`s go to the park

"More juice" means: Pour more juice

These are often direct demands, sometimes without "please" or polite forms. In addition, when Benjamin said these sentences, it was marked by the use of high intonation on the word no and low intonation at the end of his speech. This is what defines the sentence as being an imperative sentence. Grammatically, the imperative sentence says to be quiet to his friend. The sentence is syntactically incomplete as there is no subject. The utterance is a part of Benjamin's way of working out the situation, and the fact that he is aware of his surroundings and has the sensitivity to know that his speech is not perfect because of his limitations.

They are one of the first sentence types children use. Children at this stage start with simple forms and then gradually become more complex and polite through language exposure, social interaction, and age, all shape how these forms develop.

Interjection/Exclamatory sentence representation

An interjection is a word or phrase that signifies a sudden feeling or reaction, often a brief exclamation expressing surprise, joy, anger, or pain.

“Akh!” means I am hurt

“ummmm!” means the food is yummy

“Oh!” means surprise or realization

“Wow!” means excitement or amazement

“Uh-no!” means warning or noticing something wrong

“Hay!” means joy or happiness

“No!” means dislike or refusal

Interjections are normally written as a single word or short phrase with an exclamation mark (! or underlining), a note of exclamation. Occasionally, interjections are part of a larger sentence but are separated by a comma or an exclamation mark (for the same effect of emotional expression).

Simple Exclamatory Sentences:

At this age, Benjamin starts combining a few words. They are short and mostly about what he feels or sees:

“Look, dog!” means pointing out a dog

“No, mine!” means possession or refusal

At this age (almost three years), children can produce declarative sentences, imperative sentences, interrogative sentences, and interjection sentences. The children's sentences are largely dictated by cognitive factors. The sentence productions of children at this age are not syntactically complete, as there are still restrictions in selecting the syntactic functions.

The influence of social environment is also viewed as a factor that supports children's language competence because children gain knowledge of vocabulary through their social environment. Benjamin, as a 30-month-old child, is an example of this. Generally speaking, the speech produced by Benjamin is influenced by his social environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that Benjamin, at 30 months of age, is capable of producing a wide range of sentence types, including declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory forms. While these utterances are not yet syntactically complete, they reflect typical developmental patterns and the expected limitations associated with this stage of language acquisition. The richness of Benjamin's speech, as recorded in this study,

suggests that his language development is being positively influenced by a supportive and stimulating social environment. These observations support existing theories that emphasize both innate linguistic capacities and the critical role of environmental input in early language acquisition.

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