

FLA—FIRST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

HERMENEUTIC THEORIES OF CHILD LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

1. NATURE VERSUS NURTURE

The ancient theories of child language acquisition explore the dilemma of nature versus nurture; that is, whether language is inherent and God-given or learned from environment.

2. BEHAVIORISM. ENVIRONMENTALIST THEORIES

Behaviorist studies both in psychology and linguistics originate in the beginning of the 20th century. They claim that child language acquisition is governed by habit forming and reinforcement by imitation, repetition, and analogy. The newborn's mind as a blank slate 'tabula rasa' is borrowed from the era of Illumination. It was a still progressive phenomenon in comparison with solely religious explanation of child language acquisition on one hand, and on the other, with persons' classification through their social origin, otherwise, with a genealogical identification and evaluation of one's mental capacities by their birth in a social class.

The most eminent representative of behaviorism, B.F. Skinner came up with the concept of operant conditioning.

Language acquisition is a learned set of habits.

Structural linguistics:

Languages differ from each other without limits. A linguist observes and describes only the speech, performance, parole, i.e., the 'publicly observable responses' analyzing language units till they become inseparable (sentence diagramming, words, affixes, endings, phonemes, and phoneme distinguishing features).

Leonard Bloomfield

Edward Sapir

Charles Hockett

Charles Fries

Freeman Twaddell

Pavlov

Skinner

Charles Osgood

Classical behaviorism:

Stimuli and responses create human behavior on 'tabula rasa.' A psychologist should rigorously describe only what is objectively perceived, recorded, measured. Concepts of consciousness, innateness, intuition, thinking processes were outside the domain of observable, hence any research.

3. INNATISM OR NATIVISM

The nativistic approach to child language acquisition originated as a direct antipode to behaviorism in the late 50ies of the 20th century and dominated the field until the last decade. Nativists claim that children are born with an innate ability to acquire language because they do have language innately. The Universal Grammar [UG] is hard-wired in brain, which contains a language acquisition device [LAD]. UG is the grammar of the human language, that is, the universal principles of organizing all languages. This is the reason children can accomplish cognitively a very challenging

task of language acquisition even though they are still unable to do some simpler, cognitively less demanding things.

Chomsky, the most eminent representative of Nativism claims that language is the organ of the mind and it develops like other organs. Humans are designed to speak.

Language acquisition is an internalization of systematic rules of a language due to LAD. All languages have universal traits which makes them dialects of the human language.

Generative Linguistics, UG, TG. A linguist's task is to differentiate the surface level, i.e., performance, speech and the deep structure, the competence, language. Not only to describe separate languages, but more to explain the human language on competence level.

Chomsky

McNeil

Krashen

4. INTERACTIONISM, COGNITIVE STUDIES

Modern Cognitive studies recognize the nativist precondition of child language acquisition as a species-specific ability, as well as the behaviorist significance of exposure to language, imitation, and repetition.

Additionally, the cognitive development of children is taken into huge consideration. They claim that children cannot acquire language about concepts they do not understand yet. The development of cognition matches language acquisition; the thought and language develop parallelly. Another significant aspect in cognitive studies is the interaction. Children comprehend the social role of language for communication and their desire to communicate becomes an intensive motivation factor for language acquisition.

Summary

Social interaction + cognitive development

Predisposition to discover the units that serve to express linguistic meaning. Creative discovery and use of productive grammatical rules depending on the language input.

COGNITIVIST MENTALIST THEORIES

Cognitive Psychology: examine and explain the deep structures of human behavior with the underlying motivations beneath it.

Cognitive linguistics: explore the relationship between language, the mind and reality, cognition and thinking mechanisms, the role of the language in shaping the thoughts, organizing and reflecting the extra-linguistic reality. Culture/reality and language/logic.

Parallel Distributed Processing (Rumelhart and McClelland, 1986)

Connectionism

Ausabels' Meaningful Learning Theory

Schumann's Pidginization Hypothesis and Acculturation Model

Rogers's Humanistic Psychology

INTERACTIONIST FUNCTIONALIST THEORIES

Jean Piaget

Dan Slobin

Holzman's Reciprocal Model

Givon's Functional-Typological Theory

Multidimensional Model - ZISA group

Nomothetic Theories of First Language Acquisition

Natural observations and/or experimentation in regard to comprehension and production

1-4 MO	Babies respond to phonetic contrasts with no phonemic value in their language. But they ignore voice differences, unlike computers, which can't identify say, [u] spoken by a male and a female as the same sound. Cooing and crying the sounds of the human language.
4-7 MO	Babbling and gurgling sounds of the human language. Responding to sounds specific to household language. Prosodic features of L1 appear. If exposed to more than one language, children acquire those with prevailing social functions. Deaf babies hand 'babble'.
~ 8-24 MO	Human speech begins with sound strings with meaning. <i>Holophrases</i> —one word multimeaning sentences to express ideas, feelings, and social contact. Meaning is defined and differentiated in the context of <i>here and now</i> . Higher comprehension than production. Practice drills while playing in self-controlled situations. Vocabulary growth and parent imitation if parents expand on toddler utterances.
~ 15 MO	10 words in active vocabulary
18 mo	Vocabulary spurt, 1-2 new words per day
18-24 MO	50 words in active vocabulary Two word sentences. No markers. Pivot grammar Irregular form use. Self talk in imaginary settings, pleasure practice.
24-36 MO	Telegraphese—three and more word sentences consisting of content words. Grammaticality through word order and intonation. Overgeneralizations and undergeneralizations of meanings and grammatical forms. Regularization of irregular verbs, nouns.
3-5 years	Competence begins to match performance. Grammaticality, complete syntactic structures. Complex sentences.
4 years	10-15 new words per day
7 years	20 new words per day, academic vocabulary. Registers and styles appear.
12 years	Overgeneralizations may continue
Adolescence	Strive for "correct" or "cool" forms for social identity and ego enhancement.
Adult	40-60,000 words in active voc

Motherese Caregiver speech Foreigner talk 1	Here and now topics Clear enunciation Exaggerated intonation Distinct pitch Loud volume Brief sentences Active voice
Foreigner talk 2	Aggrammatical telegraphese

