

## **The Concept of Language and Its Acquisition Stages**

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### **Abstract**

Modern linguistics interests are no longer limited to the theoretical and analytical aspects of language, but new interests have been added to them, especially after the emergence of applied linguistics aimed at serving the community, and among these tasks are: the interest in studying articulation defects, speech problems, the child's linguistic development, language acquisition, and communication skills besides other topics that have a close relationship to language and society. Language is a very complex system, and although children use their first language effectively before they even enter school, they acquire the complex system of language without teaching because they should not be taught how to speak. The present study aims to investigate the concept of language and its acquisition stages besides its forms and conditions.

**Keywords:** Language, Acquisition, Stages, Child, Language Forms

### **Introduction**

Teaching children the language is one of the most amazing things in all times, and it is also one of the things that distinguishes man from other nonhuman beings. The fact that some animals such as the chimpanzees and some other mammals have some human-like sounds that are used in some special situations, but the human language is much more than that. It is a remarkable achievement during various eras. The language that humans understand is called the mother tongue, which indicates that language acquisition takes place in the early stages of life and because learning the language is related to the mother who praises her child and raises him on the linguistic voices until his tongue is level and the outlets of his letters are upright. Generally, the language is the all possible means of understanding between people or between other living beings. Therefore, the movement of the hand to salute is a language, and the nodding of the head in a specific situation is language where all these signs enter the language in its general sense as they are signs that lead to an understanding of a meaning. For the language in its own sense, it refers to well-known verbal forms of words, sentences, grammar and meaning...etc. It is also a manifestation of the mental development and human urbanization and a means of thinking, remembering and imagining. Actually, the language is that particular set of symbols which helps in the intellectual communication between the members of the one community. It includes linguistic skills, the ability to speak, write, and understand the symbols found in the language of the group to which an individual belongs. The present study aims to investigate the concept of language and the stages of its acquisition

### **Related Literature**

Language acquisition is not only an innate process, and it does not come from language faculty alone, but it is a process whereby children achieve a fluent control of their native language is due to a complex interaction of input and internal system, together with many other factors such as the biological and environmental factors (M. Pd, 2017:11; Meniado, 2016:109; Varshney, 2003:307). Language acquisition is one of the most fascinating facets of human

development because children acquire knowledge of the language or languages around them in a relatively brief time, and with little apparent efforts (Salim & Mehawesh, 2014:19). Language acquisition is a matter of growth and maturation of relatively fixed capacities, under appropriate external conditions and it is acquired by stages when children typically acquire their native language naturally and spontaneously at a very young age (Chomsky ,2009:101-102; Hutauruk,2015:51; Rami'rez et al., 2013:391).

## **Discussion and Analysis**

### **Language Acquisition**

The language is one of the means of communication between people through which the individual expresses his thoughts, feelings and emotions, so that others can communicate with him and understand what he wants. It also expresses his needs, problems and directions and helps him understanding the people and the environment around him. The language is also an important means to develop the individual's thinking, knowledge and personality, besides being an important means of social interaction. The child learns the language automatically without complication despite its complexity through the process of learning which takes stages and differs from one child to another. Actually, most children are able to use and control the linguistic symbols of their mother tongue before entering school. There are many factors affect the child's acquisition of language such as environmental, mental, physical, social and psychological factors. Linguistic development involves the skills of reception (understanding) and expression (production), knowing that the skill of reception matures before the skill of expression.

### **The Concept of Language**

The language is a set of verbal and non-verbal symbols represent different meanings, a means of social communication, and a means of mental development, social formation and emotional compatibility. It is a strong manifestation of the mental, sensory and motor development. The language is the essence of the social interaction and having it is the biggest achievement in the child's mental development framework. The language is a set of voices and symbols that are gathered in the form of words and sentences that are placed in linguistic structures to give meaning. It is an oral or written system of sounds that the individual uses to communicate with others in his community. According to Dewy language is a necessary condition for the existence of individual consciousness because men without speech would be animals unable to think-dumb in both senses of the word and that communication is a condition for consciousness (Black,1962). Sternberg & Sternberg (2012) defined it as the use of an organized means of combining words in order to communicate with those around us to it possible to think about things and processes we currently cannot see, hear, feel, touch, or smell. It can be concluded that the language is "A group of spoken and written phonemic symbols that are governed with a specific system, which have specific connotations recognized by individuals of a certain culture and they use them to express their personal needs and the needs of the society in which they live, and by which they communicate with each other.

### **The Characteristics of Language**

There are many characteristics of the language which are agreed upon by the scholars such as: the language is one of the most important means of communication between people. The language has specific and clear meanings in the society in which its members use that language. The language is an expression of the human being's experiences and knowledge. It is affected by genetics and the integrity of speech devices. The language expresses the strong cohesion between the members of the nation. The language is divided into two types: a receptive language that requires hearing and understanding, and another expressive language that

requires the production of spoken and written language according to the rules of language synthesis and formulation. The language is subject to change and evolution. It is governed by rules. The language is the means of communication between the generations because it is the means of transmitting national culture and heritage. The language has symbolic meanings where it can describe absent things and it is complex tool of communication because it begins from the letter to the word and then to the sentence.

### **Language Acquisition Conditions**

One of the most signs of human intelligence is the acquisition and learning of the language that occurs during a child's development, not only because the use of language represents one of the unique human characteristics but because it serves as an essential component in all stages of academic achievement. The ability to acquire and use language is one of the most distinctive features of a person. Without language, an understanding of mutual meanings, values and traditions would be impossible. Therefore, the scholars identified five basic conditions for language acquisition: biological capabilities, linguistic environment, social environment, cognitive abilities, and the need for communication. The biological capabilities include the safety of the sensory capabilities, especially the auditory system which enables the individual to receive speech and monitor his words through feedback, and the visual ability through which the child can monitor the communication of others through gestures, signs and facial expressions. The linguistic and social environment which refers to the environment in which the child learns the language regardless of the language of his parents and their culture where adequate opportunities must be available to listen to the language from the members of the society and the home which is the first language environment that provides important language models for the child, particularly in the early stages of its development. The cognitive abilities which constitute an important basis for language acquisition because the child does not pronounce his first word until he develops the concepts that enable him to visualize the things, actions and events in the world. The need for communication because the child cannot develop his language unless he has a need for that. In short, we talk because we want to influence the listener's actions, concentration, or feelings. Most of what the child speaks daily refers to two reasons, one of which is his need for things and the second is his love for reconnaissance.

### **Language Forms**

The language appears in various forms, such as speaking, listening, reading and writing. Listening is the most visible form of language, then speaking. By time the experiences accumulate to reach the written language. The early language experience forms the solid basis for reading and with accumulative and continuous experience, the child becomes familiar with the linguistic structure and the circle of his vocabulary expands and he has knowledge of the different patterns of the sentence. Children learn the language from their environment by listening to those around them and by practicing what they have listened to. They usually start learning the language through their ability to pronounce a word or two clearly and sufficiently to know their meaning from their parents. They can implement simple requests and respond to some questions. In his second year, the child can formulate simple sentences consisting of three to four words and respond to two consecutive requests. Usually, they develop linguistic skills which continue from the nursery to kindergarten. During this period the child can tell a story in a logical sequence and in better cases he can count the numbers and know the letters. It is noted that the language for the child at this period consists of listening and speaking and when he enters school, his language experience increases to include reading and writing where he becomes able to put the words in meaningful phrases where he acquires the linguistic competence. When the child moves on during the early stages of education, he will acquire linguistic competence if he develops his inner language, receptive language as well as his

expressive language. The inner language is the language of ideas through which the child builds a bridge between the ideas and the spoken language that directs him to the environment around him and provides him with a verbal conception of words and concepts. As the child acquires it, it gives him the appropriate language proficiency of speaking, reading, spelling and writing.

The receptive language is the child's ability to understand spoken and written symbols and a solution to the linguistic symbols to do some mental operations. The receptive language enhances developing the internal language and it is a prerequisite for the expressive skills of the language. The expressive language is the ability to encode or transmit ideas and opinions through written or spoken symbols. The language skills develop when the child learns converting spoken symbols into visible symbols. In order for the child to develop his competence in these skills and the skills of understanding and using the spoken language, he must first master the primary components and elements of the language: the phonetic, the morphological, the syntactical, the semantic elements of the words, and the pragmatic element. The phonetic elements refer to the phonetic units that form the language, so the child must first learn how to identify the sounds (i.e. the awareness of the sounds of speech), then learn matching these sounds to the letters (the phoneme) in order to be able to produce individual phonemes to develop the natural language clearly. If the phonemic element indicates the individual's ability to produce phonemic units and match them with the letters that indicate them, the morphological element will indicate the individual's ability to divide the language into phonemic units, i.e. into syllables. The ability to break up the sentences into words and then break up the words or cut them into sounds is an important component of mastering reading skill. Actually, children are expected to find the words that have the same sounds or rhythms in early reading exercises, and by understanding the grammar and the language systems children can perform such tasks. The syntactical element refers to the arrangement of words in meaningful sentences, where the child must learn the importance of the appropriate arrangement of words within sentences to facilitate the receptive and the expressive language. Grammar plays an essential role in producing and understanding the language, and if the child has difficulty in acquiring or using them, the development of the oral language will be disorganized, and the child will have difficulty in understanding. As for the semantic element of words and sentences, the child makes connections between words and common things in the environment around him where many children quickly show knowledge of the meanings of words by learning the common verbal symbols. As for the pragmatic element, it shows the child's ability to use the forms and the content of the language.

### **Stages of Language Development**

The linguistic development stages are divided according to age into two basic ones: the pre-linguistic and the linguistic stages where each one has several important sub-stages. 1 - Pre-linguistic Stage which mostly includes the first year of the child's age where he does not use real language (i.e. sectional language) but rather forms of the non-sectional language such as voices, screams, laughter, gestures, signs and others. A - Shouting Stage usually begins from birth to about the third month in which the child expresses his needs by shouting and screaming and it is a general stage for all children and is considered a very important because it helps training the vocal and auditory system of the child even though it does not produce any expressive or receptive language, so some scientists urge to let the infant cries for 15-20 minutes to strengthen the muscles of the chest and lungs where crying or screaming in itself is a means of communication that has a message to the mother to reduce the crying or screaming of the child as she can distinguish between crying or screaming from hunger, pain, anger or other emotional stages. B - Babbling Stage usually starts from the third month to the eighth one, as from the third or fourth month, the signs of the babbling appear in a long chain of experimental automatic vocal distinctions contribute in the audio-vocal regulation for the

child's verbal devices and linguistic habits. The voices that appear at that stage are soft and spontaneous emitted by the child depending on the position of his body and the organs of his speech where these voices are not imitations to the language of the adults because the deaf has them, in addition to the presence of sounds alien to the language that the child hears in his surrounding environment. Babbling is a universal and unlearned linguistic behavior that has nothing to do with culture or the type of language, but people usually understand it in different ways, so they reinforce and take care of it and show pleasure and approval of it. Imitation stage is one of the most important stages in building the foundations of language learning for the child, as it transforms babbling into words with meaningful and phonemic consistency. It is a stage that prepares the child to learn the mother language from his surroundings by imitating and repeating some words. Gesture stage precedes the stage of uttering words, that is, the stage of real speech. The stage of gestures appears clearly before the child reaches his first year or shortly before it in the ninth month where he tries to resort to gestures by consent or rejection, for example the infant child tries to transfer his mouth from his mother's breast or the bottle feeding as a gesture of his feelings of fullness, as well as his smile and arms extended towards his mother or an adult near him as gestures to express the child's desire that the mother carries him or screaming and hitting his hands or feet as gestures for refusing bathing.

### **Language Stage**

The first linguistic pronunciation by the child is single words and not sentences as the child is able to pronounce the first word between one year, or a year and a half after birth. The average child begins using single words in about a year where they increase to about fifty words during the second year. The frequent use of speech and the pronunciation of names and words make the child gradually getting rid of the stage of imitation and strengthening the ability of expressing, awareness and using the language as an expressive means for dealing with adults. The child at his linguistic development and ability to talk speaks in a language of his own coping with his linguistic development and his influence by the linguistic environment created by his parents in the family and the nanny in the nursery. The child is trying to produce new sentences with simple language organization such as: I drink ... I play ...and I ring the bell. The child's acquisition of the language at this stage is not only through education, but rather through his hearing, and by an internal interaction in his brain that is directed to express his need, therefore he only learns the language in the linguistic environment around him. The two-word sentence stage begins in the middle of the second year to the end of it and may extend to the beginning of the third year. These two words are prevailed with names, and sometimes verbs where the expression is right functionally (i.e. expressing the needs) but it is not sound structurally (i.e. the linguistic rules). In this stage, the child's ability to group individual words into meaningful sentences is shown the matter that enables him of more positive interacting with everyone.

### **How Words Acquire Their Meanings?**

The first word is a term that has meaning. The child who pronounces (papa) while his father is absent, must have a mental image of the father. Actually, the child acquires the meanings of words in the following stages: First: the meaning of the child's first words is related to one specific thing or event where this meaning is not generalized to things or events of the same class for example, the word "dog" is related to only one dog, and the word "shoe" is related to a particular shoe. Second: the child then begins noting the similarities that combine things. For example, he notices the similarities between dogs, so he has a general concept of "the dog", but in his use of the word "dog", he generalizes about everything that walks on four. Third: at this stage, the child reaches the correct generalization and starts reducing his excess generalization until he approaches or matches with the generalization of adults.

## Conclusion

When the child born, he becomes a member of the family, where he is subject to the environmental conditions that surround him. The child always responds to the various influences he receives from the environment where his response is subject to the type of the external influences and their strength on the one hand, and his capabilities, motivations, preparations and innate tendencies on the other hand. The growth of the language for the child as a social, mental and emotional development, is influenced by the factors of environment and genetics, and the language development is strongly related to the different types of growth. The present study aimed to explore the concept of language and the stages of acquiring it.

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