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**Salahaddin University – Erbil**

# Looking at Mechanisms of First Language Acquisition

Research Project

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# Dedication

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

Language acquisitions implicate the most profound questions about our understanding of the human mind, and its subject matter, the speech of children, is endlessly fascinating. But the attempt to understand it scientifically is guaranteed to bring on a certain degree of frustration. Languages are complex combinations of elegant principles and historical accidents. We cannot design new ones with independent properties; we are stuck with the confounded ones entrenched in communities. Children, too, were not designed for the benefit of psychologists: their cognitive, social, perceptual, and motor skills are all developing at the same time as their linguistic systems are maturing and their knowledge of a particular language is increasing, and none of their behavior reflects one of these components acting in isolation (Pinker, 1994, p. 19).

Language acquisition is a process that can take place at any period of one's life. In the sense of first language acquisition, however, it refers to the acquisition (unconscious learning) of one's native language (or languages in the case of bilinguals) during the first 6 or 7 years of one's life (roughly from birth to the time one starts school). First language acquisition actually refers to infants' acquisition of their native language. They acquire language through a subconscious process and are unaware of grammar rules. Children do usually not require explicit instruction to learn their first language. They just pick up the language, the same way they learn how to roll over, crawl and walk. First language acquisition is the acquisition of the mother tongue and the process of learning the language. Everyone learns from birth or even before birth when infants acquire their native language. Children learn their mother tongue at a fast pace and very efficiently with "a rapid and effortless transition from the "initial state" to the "final state" (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2014, p. 370).

Language acquisition has been a contentious and hotly researched topic as people seek to understand how language is acquired. There are four major theories that have largely shaped our understanding of language acquisition. The earliest theory was behaviorism (Skinner, 1957), the second one was the cognitive theory

(Piaget, 1923), and the third one was the nativist theory (Chomsky, 1957). The fourth and most recent is the interactionist theory (Jerome, 1961).

Many studies have looked at the mechanism of first language acquisition and how the child learns their first language or mother tongue. For example, (Meniado, 2016) focuses on the process of first language acquisition of a 3- year old, Lebanese child of a 3- year old and also for a duration of almost four months observed and recorded the subject's produced sounds, words, and sentences. Meniado also observed how the learner interacts with various linguistic inputs to see how he internally processes them. The subject acquired his first language (Arabic) largely biologically (nature). The child is also helped by the environment to activate his innate capacity to acquire the language. Observations and interviews with his parents confirm that he also acquired through imitation and learned through correction and reinforcement, analogy, and structured input. Clearly, nature and environment play significant roles in a child's first language acquisition. Another study presents the theories and stages of first language acquisition (Joel, 2016).

The aim of this research is to investigate the mechanisms of first language acquisition. To do so, in chapter two, the main theories of first language acquisition will be shown. Through chapter three, the stages of first language acquisition, and its input will be presented by explaining positive and negative evidence, motherese, prosody, and context. Then, the critical period for first language acquisition will be explained. Afterward, in chapter four, the differences between first-language acquisition and second-language learning will be shown. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn.

# Chapter Two

# Theories of Language Acquisition

## 2.1 Introduction:

Language acquisition is a fascinating and complex process that has been the subject of study by linguists and psychologists for many years. In this section, we will explore the various theories of language acquisition, including the noun paradigm and the ethereal theories of behaviorism, cognitivism, and nativist.

We will begin by examining the noun paradigm theory of language acquisition, which posits that children learn language by forming a mental template of nouns and using that template to recognize new nouns they encounter. This theory has been influential in the field of linguistics, and we will explore its strengths and weaknesses in the context of current research. Next, we will turn our attention to the ethereal theories of behaviorism, cognitive, and nativist. These theories offer different explanations for how children acquire language and have been the subject of much debate in the field of psychology. We will examine the key tenets of each theory and consider their implications for our understanding of language acquisition. Finally, we will explore the ongoing debate between these theories, evaluating their relative strengths and weaknesses, and considering how they might be integrated or reconciled. By the end of this section, we will have a better understanding of the major theories of language acquisition and their implications for our understanding of language development.

### 2.1.1 Theories of language Acquisition Noun Paradigm

There are several scientific theories of language acquisition that attempt to explain how humans acquire the ability to use language. One of the main areas of study within language acquisition is the acquisition of noun paradigms, which refers to the various forms and inflections that nouns can take in different languages. In the noun paradigm theory of language acquisition that has recently gained particular attention, it has been suggested that children acquire language by identifying and categorizing individual words based on their sound and meaning. According to this theory, children are able to learn the meanings of words through

a process of trial and error, in which they use context and other cues to deduce the meaning of a word, and then refine their understanding of that word over time as encounter it in different contexts. The noun paradigm theory is based on the idea that language is composed of discrete units, such as words and phrases, which can be analyzed and categorized by children as they learn to communicate. Proponents of this theory argue that the ability to identify and categorize words is innate and that children are able to recognize and distinguish between different sounds and word meanings from a very early age. They also suggest that children learn language through a process of "hypothesis testing," in which they form initial hypotheses about the meaning of a word, test these hypotheses through repeated exposure to the word in different contexts, and refine their understanding of the word over time (Gentner, 1982).

Research on the noun paradigm theory has provided support for the idea that children are able to categorize words and acquire language through a process of trial and error. For example, studies have shown that children as young as six months old are able to distinguish between different sounds and phonemes in language and that they use these distinctions to identify and categorize words as they learn to communicate. Other research has shown that children are able to use context and other cues to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words and that they are able to learn and retain new vocabulary at a remarkable pace. While the noun paradigm theory has received support from some researchers, it is not without its critics. Some argue that the theory places too much emphasis on the role of individual words in language acquisition and that it does not adequately account for other aspects of language, such as grammar and syntax. Others suggest that the theory is too simplistic, and that it fails to fully explain the complexities of the language acquisition process (Gentner, 1982).

Despite these criticisms, the noun paradigm theory remains an important and influential theory of language acquisition and has helped to shape our understanding of how children learn to communicate. Through ongoing research and analysis, we can continue to refine our understanding of the mechanisms of language acquisition and develop new insights into the nature of human language and communication (Gentner, 1982).

### 2.1.2 Behaviorism theory

Behaviorism is a prominent theory of language acquisition that emphasizes the role of environmental factors in shaping language development. The behaviorist approach, introduced by B.F. Skinner posits that language is a set of habits that are acquired through a process of operant conditioning (Chomsky, 1959; Pinker, 1994).

According to Skinner, children learn language through reinforcement which occurs through positive feedback, such as praise or rewards, or negative feedback, such as criticism or punishment. Through repetition and reinforcement, children are able to learn the correct sounds, words, and structures that make up their language, and this learning becomes automatic with continued use. Parents and caregivers play a crucial role in this process, as they provide feedback and reinforcement to the child during their language acquisition period. This feedback can include praise, positive reinforcement, and modeling of the correct language structures. For example, if a child correctly asks for food by saying "mama, dinner," they may receive positive reinforcement by being given the food they requested or being praised by their caregiver (Chomsky, 1959; Pinker, 1994).

In contrast, if a child uses language incorrectly, they may be corrected by their caregiver or simply ignored, which would be considered negative reinforcement. According to Skinner's theory, children have no innate ability to learn the language and rely solely on operant conditioning to develop their language skills. This perspective views children as "tabula rasa" - a blank slate. Skinner's behaviorism theory emphasizes the role of environmental factors in language acquisition, suggesting that language is not innate, but rather is acquired through the environment and the interaction between the child and their surroundings. Critics have argued that Skinner's Behaviorism theory oversimplifies the complex process of language acquisition and ignores the role of social interaction and innate mechanisms in language development (Chomsky, 1959; Pinker, 1994).

### 2.1.3 Cognitive theory

Cognitive theory is a psychological outlook that prioritizes the internal cognitive processes involved in thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and acquiring language. It highlights the significance of cognitive processes in shaping conduct and comprehending the world.

Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist, introduced the cognitive theory of language acquisition in the 1920s. Piaget's theory spotlights the function of cognition or mental processes in language development. Piaget put forth the notion that children construct knowledge proactively through their experiences and interaction with their surroundings (Papalia & Feldman, 2011; Waite-Stupiansky, 2017).

According to Piaget's theory, language development is closely connected to cognitive development and the growth of mental processes. A key component of Piaget's cognitive theory is the concept of schema, which refers to a mental structure for comprehending and organizing information. Piaget suggested that language development necessitates the formation and adaptation of schemas pertaining to language usage and understanding. As youngsters encounter new words and ideas, they either assimilate them into existing schemas or devise fresh schemas to accommodate them (Papalia & Feldman, 2011).

Another significant aspect of Piaget's cognitive theory is the notion of egocentrism or the tendency of young children to perceive the world from their own standpoint. Piaget proposed that this egocentric thinking is reflected in young children's early use of language, which often concentrates on their own experiences and perceptions. Piaget's cognitive theory emphasizes the role of social interaction in language acquisition. According to his theory, social interactions and meaningful communication with others aid language development. Through these interactions, children learn to use language to express their thoughts, feelings, and intentions, and comprehend the language used by others. Piaget contended that cognitive development advances through a sequence of stages, each marked by a distinct way of thinking and viewing the world, with language serving as a means of organizing and conveying ideas (Papalia & Feldman, 2011).

Piaget proposed that children's cognitive development can be divided into four distinct stages, namely the sensorimotor stage, pre-operational stage, concrete

operational stage, and formal operational stage. The initial stage, the sensorimotor stage, occurs during infancy and focuses on the development of motor skills and basic cognitive structures called schemas, which help organize and understand the surrounding environment. The pre-operational stage, which spans from two to seven years of age, is characterized by the emergence of language skills and the ability to use symbols for representing ideas and objects. In this stage, children start to think abstractly and develop more sophisticated schemas but remain egocentric in their thinking. The concrete operational stage, from seven to eleven years of age, is marked by the development of logical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and understanding of cause-and-effect relationships, including the concept of conservation. Finally, the formal operational stage, starting from age twelve and beyond, is when individuals become capable of abstract and hypothetical thinking and metacognition (Papalia & Feldman, 2011).

According to Piaget, cognitive development and language acquisition are closely intertwined, with children's ability to comprehend and use the language being dependent on their stage of cognitive development. The theory highlights the role of mental processes such as schema creation and modification in language development, as well as the importance of social interaction and communication in language acquisition. Although some have criticized the theory for its focus on individual development and cognitive processes, it remains a significant contribution to the study of language acquisition and cognitive development. (McLeod, 2018; Baillargeon, & Devos, 1991)

### 2.1.4 Nativist theory

The perspective known as the Nativist theory, which exists in the fields of cognitive psychology and linguistics, asserts that humans possess an inherent ability to acquire and learn a language. According to this theory, the process of language acquisition is a natural and automatic one that does not rely on external factors like instruction or reinforcement. Nativist theory emerged gradually over the course of the 20th century as various linguists and cognitive psychologists developed and refined their ideas about the innate basis of language acquisition (Pinker, 1994, p.43).

Many linguists and cognitive psychologists, including Noam Chomsky, who is regarded as the father of modern linguistics, have conducted research on the Nativist theory. Chomsky proposed the concept of a language acquisition device (LAD), which is a hypothetical mental module present in all humans that accounts for their innate ability to learn a language. The LAD is believed to come pre-equipped with a set of rules that allow individuals to learn their native language grammar without conscious effort. Chomsky maintained that the LAD is unique to humans and cannot be found in other animals, which is why only humans can communicate through language (Pinker, 1994, p.43).

The Nativist theory suggests that children are born with universal grammar (UG), it is a set of inherent linguistic principles and structures common to all human languages. The idea of universal grammar, for example, was first introduced by the linguist Noam Chomsky in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This universal grammar enables children to acquire the specific grammar of the language they are exposed to during their early years quickly and easily.

According to Nativists, language acquisition is not merely a matter of imitation and reinforcement, as suggested by behaviorist theories of language acquisition. Instead, they propose that children can create an infinite number of grammatically correct sentences, even if they have never heard those sentences before. This ability to generate new sentences is thought to arise from the inherent linguistic principles and structures of the UG.

The Nativist theory also emphasizes the critical period hypothesis, which proposes that there is a limited period during childhood when language acquisition can occur. According to this hypothesis, if children are not exposed to language during this critical period, they will not fully acquire a first language.

Although the Nativist theory has been influential in the field of linguistics, it has also faced criticism. Some researchers argue that the theory overemphasizes innate factors and underestimates environmental and social factors' role in language acquisition. Others suggest that the theory is not well-supported by empirical evidence.

In conclusion, the Nativist theory asserts that humans have an innate capacity for language acquisition based on a biologically determined language acquisition device and universal grammar. This theory has been influential in the field of linguistics, but it has also been subject to criticism and debate. (Chomsky, 1959; Pinker, 1994; Tomasello, 2003)

### 2.1.5 The debate among theories of language acquisition

There has been a long-standing and controversial debate among linguists, cognitive scientists, and psychologists regarding theories of language acquisition, with the nature versus nurture argument being the focal point of the discourse. While some believe that language is primarily acquired through innate mechanisms that are hardwired into the brain, others suggest that environmental factors such as language input and social interaction play a more significant role.

Proponents of the nativist or nature-based approach, including Noam Chomsky, argue that humans possess an innate capacity for language that is encoded in the brain, allowing them to learn a language quickly and accurately, even without explicit instruction. Critics of this approach, however, contend that it does not adequately account for the impact of environmental factors on language development, such as exposure to language input and interaction with others (Chomsky, 1959; Pinker, 1994; Tomasello, 2003)

B.F. Skinner's behaviorism theory posits that language is acquired through reinforcement and conditioning, with children learning through imitation and positive feedback. Nevertheless, critics argue that this theory does not fully consider the complexity and creativity of language use or the innate mechanisms involved in language acquisition (Chomsky, 1959; Pinker, 1994; Tomasello, 2003)

In contrast, Jean Piaget's cognitive theory argues that language acquisition is linked to the cognitive development of children, with language acquisition and other cognitive processes sharing similar mechanisms. However, critics argue that this theory fails to account for the role of environmental factors in language acquisition.

In summary, language acquisition theories remain a contentious topic, but it is clear that both nature and nurture factors play crucial roles in shaping language abilities. To understand language acquisition comprehensively, one must consider both approaches and assess their strengths and limitations critically (Chomsky, 1959; Pinker, 1994; Tomasello, 2003)

## 2.2 Summary

To summarize, the section covered the subject of language learning by exploring the noun paradigm and presenting detailed examinations of three notable hypotheses: behaviorism, cognitive, and nativist. Every theory provides a distinct viewpoint on how language is obtained, and the argument between them is continuous.

The noun paradigm is a linguistic phenomenon that underscores the significance of cognitive procedures in language acquisition. It refers to the way in which children usually overgeneralize rules when learning to use nouns, such as saying "gooses" instead of "geese." This occurrence proposes that language learning involves both inborn cognitive processes and education from the surroundings.

Behaviorism posits that language is learned through reinforcement and conditioning. However, this hypothesis does not entirely account for the complexity of language and the imaginative nature of language use. The cognitive hypothesis suggests that language acquisition results from cognitive growth, but they do not fully acknowledge the social and environmental factors that influence language acquisition. The nativist theory proposes that language acquisition results from inborn mechanisms, but they fail to explain the role of environmental factors.

To conclude, the ongoing and multifaceted debate among language acquisition theories is presented in this section. Each hypothesis provides a unique perspective on language acquisition, but a comprehensive understanding necessitates the consideration of the interplay between nature and nurture.

# Chapter Three

## Mechanisms of First Language Acquisition

### 3.1 Introduction

This section of the research delves into the complex processes involved in first language acquisition. It discusses the various mechanisms that contribute to language development, such as imitation, reinforcement, feedback, input, learner age, and motivation. Additionally, the section covers the stages of first language acquisition, including the prelinguistic stage, babbling, one-word stage, and two-word stage.

The role of input in language acquisition is also examined, with a focus on the importance of positive and negative evidence, motherese, and prosody

Furthermore, the section discusses the critical period of first language acquisition, during which children are most sensitive to language input and are able to acquire language effortlessly. Finally, the role of context in language processing and acquisition is explored.

Overall, this section provides a comprehensive overview of the various factors involved in first language acquisition and highlights the complexity of this process.

### 3.2 Mechanisms of First Language Acquisition

First language acquisition, or the process of learning a first language, is an incredibly complex process that has been studied extensively. In order to understand how a language is learned, it is important to understand the mechanisms that are involved in the process. In this paper, I will discuss the four primary mechanisms of first language acquisition: imitation, reinforcement, feedback, and input, and how they work together to help a language learner acquire their first language.

Imitation is one of the earliest and most fundamental mechanisms of language acquisition. From a very early age, infants start imitating the sounds they

hear from their parents and caregivers. This process is known as babbling, and it involves the production of a series of repetitive consonant-vowel combinations (Oller, Eilers, & Neal, 1999). As infants continue to develop their language skills, they start to imitate the words and phrases they hear around them, which helps them to learn new vocabulary and sentence structures (Feldman & Tomasello, 2006).

Reinforcement is another important mechanism of first language acquisition. Children learn through positive reinforcement, where they are rewarded for using language correctly. For example, when a child says "mama" or "dada," parents may react positively by smiling, laughing, or hugging the child. This encourages the child to repeat the behavior and learn new words and phrases. Similarly, negative reinforcement, such as correcting the child's language use, can also help them to learn the correct way to use language (Skinner, 1957).

Feedback is an essential component of language acquisition because it helps children to correct their mistakes and improve their language skills. Corrective feedback can come from parents, caregivers, or teachers, and it can take various forms, such as repetition, rephrasing, or explicit correction. Self-correction is also an important form of feedback, where children recognize their own errors and try to correct them. Feedback helps children to understand the rules of language and use them correctly (Ellis, 2012).

Input is crucial for language acquisition because children need exposure to language to learn it. The quantity and quality of language input can affect the rate and depth of language acquisition. Children who are exposed to rich and varied language input from an early age are more likely to develop stronger language skills. Similarly, children who are exposed to language in different contexts, such as at home, at school, and in social settings, are more likely to acquire language more quickly (Hart & Risley, 1995).

These four mechanisms work together to help a language learner acquire their first language. Imitation helps the learner learn the sounds and meanings of words, reinforcement helps the learner understand that they are doing something right and encourages them to continue using the language, feedback helps the learner understand what they did wrong and encourages them to make the correct

choice next time, and input helps the learner understand the structure and grammar of the language and encourages them to use it in their own speech.

In conclusion, the four primary mechanisms of first language acquisition are imitation, reinforcement, feedback, and input. Each of these mechanisms plays an important role in helping a language learner learn a language and become proficient in it, but input is arguably the most crucial for language acquisition.

### 3.2.1 Stages of First Language Acquisition

The stages of first language acquisition are typically divided into five main phases: **prelinguistic**, **babbling**, **one-word**, **two-word**, and **telegraphic speech** (McLaughlin, 2010).

**The prelinguistic phase:** begins at birth and lasts for approximately the first six months of life. During this phase, infants produce sounds such as crying, cooing, and laughter, but these sounds are not yet recognized as language. Infants also start to develop the ability to distinguish between different speech sounds, which is known as phonemic awareness (Kuhl, 2010).

**The babbling phase**: starts around six months of age and lasts until approximately 12 months. During this phase, infants produce a series of repetitive consonant-vowel combinations, such as "bababa" or "dada." This babbling is not yet language, but it is an important step in the development of language because it helps infants to practice the movements of their mouths and vocal cords (Oller, Eilers, & Neal, 1999).

**The one-word phase**: also known as the holophrastic stage, begins around 12 months of age and lasts until approximately 18 months. During this phase, children start to produce single words that represent whole ideas or concepts, such as "mama" or "juice." Children at this stage are able to understand more words than they can produce, and their vocabulary grows rapidly (Bloom, 2002).

**The two-word phase**: starts around 18 months of age and lasts until approximately 24 months. During this phase, children start to produce two-word phrases, such as "more juice" or "big dog." These phrases are typically made up of

a noun and a verb or an adjective and a noun. Children at this stage are able to understand more complex sentence structures than they can produce (Brown, 1973).

**The telegraphic speech phase**: starts around 24 months of age and lasts until approximately 30 months. During this phase, children start to produce longer phrases and simple sentences. However, their speech is still limited to only the most essential words and grammatical elements, such as "want cookie" or "daddy go car." Children at this stage are able to understand much more language than they can produce (Gathercole & Hoff, 2007).

In conclusion, the stages of first language acquisition are an important part of language development. Understanding these stages can help parents, caregivers, and educators to support children's language development and help them to acquire language more effectively.

### 3.2.2 Input

Input is an important factor in first language acquisition as it refers to the language that a child is exposed to during the language acquisition process. Input can include verbal language as well as nonverbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions. According to research, input plays a crucial role in shaping a child's language development (Hoff, 2006).

During the prelinguistic stage, infants start to develop the ability to distinguish between different speech sounds through the input they receive from their caregivers. Infants are able to recognize the phonetic structure of their native language and begin to differentiate between the speech sounds that are important in their language (Kuhl, 2004). This process, known as phonemic awareness, lays the foundation for further language development.

In the early stages of language development, infants and young children rely heavily on the input they receive from their caregivers to learn new words and phrases. Studies have shown that the quantity and quality of language input can have a significant impact on children's language acquisition (Hart & Risley, 1995).

For example, research has shown that children who are exposed to a greater quantity of language input tend to have larger vocabularies than children who are exposed to less language input (Hoff, 2006). Additionally, the quality of the input, including the complexity and variety of the language, can also influence language acquisition. Children who are exposed to more complex language structures and a variety of vocabulary words are more likely to acquire language more quickly (Ellis, 2012).

Furthermore, input can also affect the development of language processing skills. Studies have shown that children who are exposed to a rich language environment from an early age are more likely to develop strong language processing skills, which can benefit them in a variety of academic and social settings (Hoff, 2006).

In conclusion, input is a critical component of first language acquisition. The language that children are exposed to during the language acquisition process can have a significant impact on their language development, including phonemic awareness, vocabulary acquisition, and language processing skills. Understanding the importance of input can help parents, caregivers, and educators to support children's language development and help them to acquire language more effectively.

#### 3.2.2.1 Positive Evidence

Positive evidence is a type of linguistic input that play a role in first language acquisition. Positive evidence is an important component of first language acquisition, as it provides children with examples of correct language usage. This type of evidence allows children to learn the rules and structures of their native language by being exposed to language that is used correctly in context (Gleitman & Newport, 1995).

Positive evidence can take many forms, including naturalistic speech and adult-directed speech. Naturalistic speech refers to the language that children hear in their everyday environments, including conversations between adults, television shows, and other forms of media. Adult-directed speech, on the other hand, is a type of speech that adults use when speaking to children. This speech is

characterized by a slower rate of speech, a higher pitch, and exaggerated intonation, making it easier for children to parse and understand the language (Newport & Gleitman, 1977).

Research has shown that positive evidence is critical for language acquisition, as children use the language they hear to build their own internal models of their native language. Positive evidence allows children to learn the meanings of words, the rules of grammar, and the social conventions that underlie language use (Gleitman & Newport, 1995).

However, positive evidence alone may not be enough for children to learn all aspects of their native language. For example, children may struggle with learning irregular verbs, which do not follow the regular rules of verb conjugation. In these cases, children may rely on other sources of information, such as analogy, to learn the correct form of the verb (Pinker, 1989).

In conclusion, positive evidence plays a crucial role in first language acquisition by providing children with examples of correct language usage. Children use the language they hear to build their own internal models of their native language, allowing them to learn the rules and structures of language. While positive evidence alone may not be sufficient for all aspects of language acquisition, it is an essential component of the process.

#### 3.2.2.2 Negative Evidence

Negative evidence refers to the correction that children receive when they produce incorrect language forms, such as grammatical errors or pronunciation mistakes (Wexler, 1998). In other words, negative evidence provides children with information about what is incorrect or ungrammatical in their speech, allowing them to refine their language skills over time.

Negative evidence can take many forms, such as explicit correction by adults or more subtle cues, such as a confused or questioning look. For example, when a child says "I goed to the store," an adult might say "No, you didn't goed to the store, you went to the store." This type of feedback provides the child with

information about the correct form of the verb, allowing them to adjust their language production accordingly (Chomsky, 1959).

There is some debate in the field of language acquisition about the effectiveness of negative evidence. Some researchers argue that negative evidence is necessary for children to acquire a full understanding of the grammar of their language (Bloom, 1994). Other researchers argue that negative evidence may be unnecessary, as children are able to deduce the grammar of their language through positive evidence alone (Berko, 1958).

However, most researchers agree that negative evidence plays some role in language acquisition (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1986). In particular, negative evidence may be useful in helping children to acquire more complex grammatical structures that are not easily deduced from positive evidence alone (Bloom, 1994). Negative evidence may also be useful in helping children to overcome persistent errors in their language production (Saxton et al., 2019).

It is important to note that negative evidence must be used judiciously in order to be effective. Excessive negative feedback may be counterproductive, leading to decreased motivation and anxiety in children (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1986). Furthermore, negative feedback must be accompanied by positive feedback in order to maintain children's motivation and self-esteem (Berko, 1958).

In conclusion, negative evidence plays a role in language acquisition by providing corrective feedback to children when they make errors in their language production. While the effectiveness of negative evidence is debated, most researchers agree that it is necessary to some extent. However, negative evidence must be used carefully to avoid negative effects on children's motivation and self-esteem.

#### 3.2.2.3 Motherese

Motherese, also known as infant-directed speech (IDS), is a style of speech that adults naturally adopt when speaking to infants and young children. Motherese is characterized by a high pitch, exaggerated intonation, and a slow tempo (Fernald, 1985). This style of speech is believed to be important for language

acquisition because it captures infants' attention and facilitates their learning of the phonological, syntactic, and semantic structures of their native language (Snow & Ferguson, 1977).

The use of motherese is widespread across cultures and has been observed in many different languages. Researchers have found that motherese is universal in its features, such as its high pitch and slow tempo, although there are some variations in the way it is used across different cultures (Fernald, 1985).

Studies have shown that infants prefer motherese over adult-directed speech and that exposure to motherese is beneficial for their language development (Snow & Ferguson, 1977). Infants who are exposed to more motherese tend to have larger vocabularies and better language comprehension skills than infants who are not exposed to as much motherese (Weisleder & Fernald, 2013).

Furthermore, motherese has been shown to be effective in facilitating language acquisition in children with developmental delays or language disorders (Paul & Shriberg, 1982). These children may have difficulty processing speech sounds and syntactic structures, but the exaggerated intonation and slow tempo of motherese can make these linguistic features more salient and easier to process.

In conclusion, motherese is an important aspect of language acquisition that is believed to facilitate infants' learning of the phonological, syntactic, and semantic structures of their native language. Motherese is universal in its features and is beneficial for language development in both typically developing children and those with developmental delays or language disorders.

#### 3.2.2.4 Prosody

Prosody refers to the rhythm, intonation, and stress patterns of speech. It plays an important role in language processing and communication, influencing how we convey meaning and emotion through spoken language. Prosody is present in all languages and is an integral aspect of language acquisition and development.

One of the key functions of prosody is to convey emotion and attitude. For example, a rising intonation at the end of a sentence may indicate a question, while

a falling intonation may indicate a statement. Similarly, changes in pitch, volume, and tempo can signal excitement, anger, or sadness. Prosodic cues are critical in conveying social meaning and regulating conversation (Crystal, 1997).

Prosody also plays a crucial role in language acquisition. Infants are sensitive to the prosodic patterns of speech from a very young age, and use them to discriminate between different languages (Nazzi, Jusczyk, & Johnson, 2000). As they develop, children use prosodic cues to learn about the structure and meaning of language. For example, stress patterns and intonation can help children identify words and understand sentence structure (Shattuck-Hufnagel & Turk, 1996).

In addition to its role in language acquisition and communication, prosody is also important in diagnosing and treating speech disorders. Individuals with speech disorders may have difficulty with prosodic features such as stress patterns, intonation, and rhythm. Treatment programs often target these features to improve speech production and comprehension (Yorkston, Beukelman, Strand, & Bell, 1999).

In conclusion, prosody plays a crucial role in language processing, acquisition, and communication. It conveys emotion and attitude, regulates conversation, and helps children learn about the structure and meaning of language. Prosodic features are also important in diagnosing and treating speech disorders. Understanding the role of prosody in language development and communication can improve our ability to communicate effectively and support individuals with speech disorders.

#### 3.2.2.5 Context

Context plays a crucial role in language processing, as it provides the necessary information to understand the meaning of words and sentences. Context can help disambiguate words with multiple meanings, fill in missing information, and activate relevant semantic information while suppressing irrelevant information (Kutas & Hillyard, 1980).

For example, the word "bank" can refer to a financial institution or the edge of a river, but the meaning becomes clear when used in context. Similarly, the

sentence "She wore a long dress to the party" requires context to determine the meaning of "long."

Context is also important in language acquisition, as children use context to learn new words and understand sentence structure (Nelson, 1973). In addition, context can help children acquire new words by providing additional information about their meaning (Rice, Buhr, & Nemeth, 1990).

In conclusion, context plays a crucial role in language processing and acquisition, helping to disambiguate words, fill in missing information, and activate relevant semantic information. Understanding the importance of context can improve communication and support language development.

### 3.2.3 Critical Period for Language Acquisition

The critical period for language acquisition is a period during a child's development when they are most receptive to learning language. According to the theory proposed by Eric Lenneberg in 1967, this period occurs between birth and puberty, during which a child's brain is most malleable and able to acquire language skills rapidly and with relative ease (Lenneberg, 1967).

Studies have shown that children who are exposed to language during this critical period are more likely to develop native-like proficiency in that language, while those who are not exposed during this period may have difficulty acquiring language later in life (Newport, 1990).

In fact, research suggests that there may be a specific window of opportunity within this critical period, during which language acquisition is most optimal. For example, one study found that children who were adopted from China before the age of six months had better Mandarin language skills than those adopted after six months of age (Klein, Chen, & Kovelman, 2014).

However, the critical period hypothesis has been debated in recent years, with some researchers suggesting that there may be more flexibility in language acquisition than previously thought. Nevertheless, it is still widely accepted that early exposure to language is critical for successful language acquisition, and that

the earlier a child is exposed, the better their chances are of achieving native-like proficiency in that language (Johnson & Newport, 1989).

Overall, the critical period for language acquisition is an important concept in understanding how humans acquire language, and has implications for language education and language policy.

## 3.3 Summary

To summarize, In this section of the research, we explored the various factors that contribute to first language acquisition. We first discussed the mechanisms involved in language acquisition, including imitation, reinforcement, feedback, input, learner age, and motivation. These mechanisms work together to facilitate the process of language acquisition.

We then examined the stages of first language acquisition, which include the prelinguistic stage, babbling, one-word stage, and two-word stage. Each stage builds upon the previous one, leading to the development of more complex language skills.

The role of input in language acquisition was also explored, including the importance of positive and negative evidence, motherese, and prosody. Positive evidence provides clear and unambiguous examples of language usage, while negative evidence includes correction or feedback on incorrect language usage. Motherese is a specialized form of speech used by adults when speaking to infants, and prosody plays a crucial role in language acquisition.

We also discussed the critical period of first language acquisition, during which children are most sensitive to language input and are able to acquire language effortlessly. This critical period typically ends around puberty, after which language acquisition becomes more difficult.

Finally, we examined the role of context in language processing and acquisition. Context provides necessary information to understand the meaning of words and sentences, and helps children learn new words and understand sentence structure.

In conclusion, first language acquisition is a complex and multifaceted process that involves various mechanisms, stages, and factors. Understanding these factors can help us support language development in children and improve communication.

# Chapter Four

## 4.1 Introduction

Language acquisition is an innate ability that humans possess, which enables them to learn and use language. However, there is a significant difference between the acquisition of a first language and the learning of a second language. First language acquisition refers to the process of acquiring the language that is spoken in the individual's environment since birth, while second language learning refers to the process of learning a new language, which may or may not be similar to the first language. This research paper aims to explore the differences between first-language acquisition and second-language learning.

## 4.2 Differences

Language acquisition and learning are two different processes that involve distinct cognitive and neurological mechanisms. First language acquisition refers to the process of acquiring the language that is spoken in the individual's environment since birth, while second language learning refers to the process of learning a new language, which may or may not be similar to the first language. (Brown, 2000)

The primary difference between first language acquisition and second language learning lies in the cognitive and neurological processes involved. Children learn their first language through exposure to their environment and the people around them, without any explicit instruction. The human brain is naturally wired to acquire language during early childhood, and this process is mostly automatic, unconscious, and effortless (Krashen, 1982).

On the other hand, second language learning requires conscious effort, attention, and instruction. It involves the explicit learning of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation rules. Moreover, second language learning can occur at any age, but it becomes more difficult with age due to a decline in neuroplasticity. (Brown, 2000)

Another significant difference between first language acquisition and second language learning is the age factor. First language acquisition occurs during the critical period, which is the period between birth and puberty. During this period, the brain is highly plastic and can absorb language easily. However, second language learning can occur at any age, but it becomes more difficult with age due to a decline in neuroplasticity. (Pinker, 1994)

Furthermore, first language acquisition and second language learning differ in terms of motivation and context. Children acquire their first language out of a natural desire to communicate and interact with their environment. In contrast, second language learning is often motivated by external factors such as career advancement, travel, or social interaction. Moreover, the context in which the language is learned plays a significant role in language acquisition and learning. First language acquisition occurs in a natural and immersive environment, whereas second language learning can occur in a classroom setting or through immersion. (Brown, 2000)

In conclusion, it is essential to understand the differences between first language acquisition and second language learning to effectively teach and learn a second language. First language acquisition occurs naturally during early childhood, while second language learning requires conscious effort and instruction. Age, motivation, and context also play a significant role in these processes. (Krashen, 1982; Pinker, 1994)

### 4.3 Summary

To summarize, The process of language acquisition differs between first language acquisition (FLA) and second language learning (SLL). FLA is a natural process that occurs during childhood, whereas SLL is an intentional process that typically occurs during adolescence or adulthood.

FLA is characterized by the acquisition of language through exposure and interaction with the environment and caregivers. Children acquire language through a process of imitation, reinforcement, and generalization. In contrast, SLL involves conscious learning, which is influenced by the learner's motivation, cognitive abilities, and learning strategies.

One key difference between FLA and SLL is the role of input. In FLA, children are exposed to language through natural and meaningful communication, whereas SLL learners often have to rely on explicit instruction and artificial language input. Additionally, FLA is a relatively effortless process, whereas SLL often requires a great deal of effort and practice.

Overall, while both FLA and SLL involve language acquisition, they differ in terms of the underlying processes and the contexts in which they occur. Understanding these differences can help educators and language learners develop effective language learning strategies and programs that support successful language acquisition.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, This research has provided an in-depth analysis of the mechanism of first-language acquisition and has differentiated between first-language acquisition and second-language learning. The results of this research suggest that Language acquisition has always attracted attention from various disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience This review has shown, the mechanism of first language acquisition is still not fully understood, but several theories and hypotheses attempt to explain how children acquire language, including the nativist theory, social interactionist theory, and cognitive-functional theory. These theories provide useful frameworks for understanding the different factors that contribute to language acquisition, such as innate abilities, social interaction, and cognitive development.

Furthermore, this research has also highlighted the differences between first-language acquisition and second-language learning. It is important to note that first language acquisition is distinct from second language learning, as the latter typically involves more conscious effort and explicit instruction. While there are some similarities between the two processes, such as the importance of exposure and practice, second language learning often involves additional challenges, such as overcoming interference from the first language and adapting to new cultural norms.Overall, a better understanding of the mechanism of first language acquisition has important practical applications in fields such as education, speech therapy, artificial intelligence, marketing, and cultural understanding. By continuing to study this fascinating topic, we can gain new insights into the complex and dynamic process of language acquisition, and develop more effective strategies for teaching and learning languages

As educators, researchers, policymakers, and members of society, we have a shared responsibility to support and promote research on first language acquisition. By doing so, we can help to advance our understanding of language development and to develop more effective strategies for supporting language learning and communication. So let us continue to explore the fascinating and complex process of first language acquisition, and to work together to ensure that every child has the opportunity to learn and communicate effectively in their native language.

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