

The Nexus Between Psycholinguistics and Language Acquisition

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Abstract

This paper aims at revealing the relationship between psycholinguistics and language acquisition. Psycholinguistics examines the human mind and its relationship to language acquisition on comprehension and use; while language acquisition involves unconscious manner through which children are able to become speakers of a given language usually the first language. The researchers have considered the interaction theory for the analysis of this study. Ideas from the empiricist and innateness theories of language analysis have been combined to form the interaction theory which is the brain child of Richard and Bell (1968). This theory established the claim that language acquisition rests on the interaction of human's innate biological capabilities to acquire language with the exposure to language environment where the child is born to enable formation. It is a compromise between the Nativist and the Behaviourist theories. A descriptive method has been adopted; data collected is sourced from the secondary source. The evaluative and analytical, approaches have been used for the analysis of the data, collected. The Psycholinguistics is an asset to child's language acquisition. In that their connected in many ways. The knowledge of psycholinguistics lays a precedence upon which the language acquisition and behavior is generally interpreted. It provides models that describes and predict language behavior that is so relevant in language acquisition process. The study recommended that parents, guidance and teachers should be exposed to the knowledge of psycholinguistics which is enable understand, interpret and help the children at various language acquisition stages.

Keywords: Acquisition, Comprehension, Interaction, Language, Psycholinguistics

Introduction

Psycholinguistics and language acquisition are critical aspects in linguistic analysis. It contains various models which seek to reveal, describe and predict language behaviour. Language acquisition serves as the platform for the application and interpretation of these models. Human language is generally a very complex phenomenon which contains many branches. Some of these branches are core language areas, while some of these have vital relationship with language such that language studies will experience some level of imbalances' if such areas are neglected in linguistic discipline. Their importance to language study springs from the relationship they have either to human language directly, or language related issues.

As a result, the various aspects are carefully studied so as to be able to clearly understand language which is a major tool for human interaction through communication in the human society. There are linguistic units like

sounds, words phrases on syntax among others which are real language units. These however deal with the language structure. But there also, aspects of sociolinguistic, multilingualism, psycholinguistic among others which have to do with language related issues. They are however language issue as they are all connected to language and can be regarded as subsets in linguistic studies. (Lyons, 2009)

This study aims at revealing the nexus between psycholinguistics and child language acquisition. In an attempt to effectively achieve this goal, the concepts will be explained separately; the study will examine challenges of child's language acquisition and thereafter take a look at the relevance of psycholinguistics in the study of child's language acquisition.

Conceptual Clarifications

Psycholinguistics

Psycholinguistics is one of the subsets in linguistic studies that deal with issues relating to language behaviour. These issues may vary one to another; they are however, able to determine language expression, perception or its entire functionality. Crystal (2011) views psycholinguistics as “a branch which studies correlation between linguistic behavior and the psychological processes thought to underlie that behaviour”. Psycholinguistics houses two disciplines, which is psychology and linguistics. Psychology is the study of the human mind and how it affects behavior. Linguistics on the other hand is the empirical study of language. O’Grady et al (2011) maintain that, linguistics is the study of how language works – how it is acquired, used, changes over time, represented in the brain, and so on. It is concerned not only with properties of the world’s languages, but also with the abilities and adaptation that have made it possible for our species to create and use language in the first place.

From the opinion of Crystal (2011), psycholinguistics study deals with issues which determine the effective or ineffectiveness in language activities though it does not study linguistic element or properties, its relevant to language acquisition has made it important to scholars. For example, sounds, words, meaning among others, it looks at the process within, the abilities which are able to influence these linguistic properties. Language as a part of human behaviour is an aspect of psychology which psycholinguist considers.

Linguistics, according to O’Grady et al (2011), is concerned with how language works. There are expectations and convention about language acquisition and practices that gives concern to researchers at each given time or situation. Psycholinguist studies to establish whatever should be and explain whatever affects the desired result in linguistic matters. For instance, the cooing stage of language development is considered as a stage between 0-3 months. Omachonu (2011) is of the view that, “the child vocalizes involuntarily in response to his body states that is hunger, pain, wetness among others”. However, when a child fails in these responses at this stage, it becomes obvious that the

child has a linguistic challenge.

Language

The concept of language has been considered by Scholars from various perspectives. Language is seen as a human attribute which is a basic for interaction amongst men. For Ogah and Amos (2009) “Language is such a buzz-word but difficult to define. There are misconceptions about what it really stands for, many people confuse dialects for language; many confuse it for gestures and other noises made by animals and involuntary sounds made in belching, hissing, yawning and the like”. This entails that the human language is used consciously or intentionally by human beings. Mathew (2007) on the contrary views language as a phenomenon of vocal and written communication among people generally. Swande and Shima (2012) admit that language is the means of communication used by a man, a means through which man expresses feelings and thoughts within his environment. From the above, it is obvious to establish that language is an instrument with which interaction is made possible among the people in the society. And language can be expressed in various ways as verbal, written among others.

Language Acquisition

Language acquisition could mean a process through which children acquire or receive the language they use in their life time. Agbede (2009) opines that the term “Language acquisition” is commonly used to describe the process whereby children become speakers and competent users of their native language or first language. Language is said to be extremely complex. Yet very young children below the age of five already know most of the intricate system that contains the grammar of their language. The children do not undergo the learning process of just memorizing the sentence of such a language. But they acquire a system of grammatical rules of such a language (Fromkin and Rodman, 2011). For example, children at ages: 2-5 are able to differentiate the word go from come. They can say yes to what they want, and no to what they dislike among others. Language acquisition is not a spontaneous experience but a process through which various activities take place both internally and externally. However, Yule (2007) observes that first language acquisition is remarkable for the

speed with which it takes. Many children become sophisticated in language use about the age of elementary school level.

Theoretical Framework

There are many theories accounting for language acquisition, linguists or researchers have generally disagreed on this point in linguistics study. Some researchers maintain that, language acquisition is based on imitation. This is where a child is faced with the task of imitating the adult until the child becomes perfect in language; others maintain that language acquisition is completely based on the innateness ability where an innateness theory is upheld. The researchers however chooses to identify with the interaction theory which has combine both the aspects of empiricist and that of the innateness theory of language acquisition to provide a middle ground on the matter of child language acquisition. Interactionism is a brain child of Richard and Bell (1968), this theory establishes the claims that language acquisition rests on the interaction of human's innate biological capabilities to acquire language with exposure to language in the environment in which the child in developing. This theory is a compromise between Nativist and Behavioural theories in linguistic analysis. The problems associated with language acquisition in most cases become more real when the child in question interacts practically with language situations in the environment.

Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive approach for the analysis of the topic under research. According to Gyuse (2012) "descriptive studies are also often referred to as exploratory". Descriptive research simply codifies the available facts about a particular phenomenon to provide understanding to student readers among others. In doing this the researchers have used secondary means of data collection. Evaluative and analytical methods were used for explanation of the phenomenon. These methods were used to evaluate and analyse the concept of psycholinguistics, child's language acquisition.

Child Language Acquisition

Centuries have proven beyond reasonable doubts that children undergo a process through

which language is acquired. Language acquisition is not the same with language learning. Denham and Lobeck (2013) observed that:

The process of language acquisition is different from the process of language learning. Acquisition takes place unconsciously, without direct instruction. Any of us who has studied a second language in school knows that learning a language is a conscious and often difficult process requiring practice and study.

Therefore, learning and acquisition are at variance in their activities and processes. Though both undergo a procedure, the former is more consciously, planned and carried out in a more formal manner than the latter. Agbedo (2009) reveals that, "the term language acquisition is commonly used to describe the process whereby children become speakers and competent users of their native language or first language". Unlike a conscious effort which calls for several teaching method to pass unto a learner the linguistics knowledge, the process of acquisition is passive and requires no particular method. The children usually pick linguistic items without a particular learning procedure.

Issues Concerning Child Language Acquisition

A close look at language acquisition reveals that there are many factors which militate against the smooth acquisition of language among children. These factors Varies from biological to sociolinguistics challenges. For example, a child's level of acquisition may be affected as a result of bilingual parents who are the first people who happen to create the linguistic environment the child will encounter to help in language developmental processes. In this case, the child will be faced with multiple linguistic expressions that are in consistent which can affect the linguistic growth of the child in question. According to Akindele and Adegbite (2005), a speech community where two languages constitute a speech repertoire of the members of the society is complex in nature. Multiple language situations may not create a healthy atmosphere for child language acquisition. This is because the parents are bound to use the languages interchangeably at

the family level where the child has first contact with the language input.

Lack of motivation can be a challenge in child language acquisition. This factor has to do with the attitudes of the people in the society where the child is situated, example; parents neighbours and friends among others. If the child is not motivated through encouragement by either the parent or people around him or her, the child may be faced with disappointment from the comments of people around him. This is because the growth of the language device inside has to match with a positive input at the environmental level for effective language acquisition.

Most importantly, biological factor plays a critical role in child language acquisition. The biological factor is very important in child language acquisition because it looks at the language related issues within a child. This approach deals with what happen within a child or children that either enhances/hinders language development and maturation and the ability in children to be able to acquire a language. Agbedo (2011) observes that, there are structural and physiological properties that are uniquely human predispose attribute that determine the acquisition of language". Lenenberg (1967) as cited in Agbedo (2009), agreed that, these properties show many characteristics of maturational-controlled behaviours. The effectiveness in child's language acquisition is largely motivated and actualized when all the linguistic related properties are able to grow and function the way and manner they are designed. Any malformation will lead to a malfunctioning which could limit child's language acquisition.

The above explanation does not intend to look at the biological factors in details but just to point to the fact that they could also hinder or enhance the language behavior of a child. Studies have revealed how language is represented and processed in the brain. O'Grady et al (2011) argues that, the brain is composed of nerves cells or neurons that are the basic information-processing units of the nervous system. The human brain contains about 10 billion neurons that are organized into networks of almost unimaginable complexity. These complexities result from the fact that each neuron can be directly linked to up

to ten thousand others nervous. The inability of this brain network to function well can also affect language acquisition. And their functionality can be limited if a child happens to involve in an accident that affect these parts of the brain. Some accidents may be caused by environmental factors like excessive sound which may result to hearing impairment. The end result would be acquisition deficiency and this account for the validity of the interactionist theory, when the environmental factor would affect language acquisition negatively.

Relevance of Psycholinguistics to Child's Language Acquisition

Psycholinguistics is an aspect of linguistics which deals with what happens within a man in relationship to language acquisition and output. It studies the mental process which allows the linguistic behavior of man. According to Agbedo (2015), psycholinguistics is a hybrid term deriving from psychology and linguistics. It examines the psychological and neurobiological factors that predispose human to acquire, use, comprehend and produce language competently. Child's language acquisition is a branch of psycholinguistics which is technically called developmental linguistics. This aspect of psycholinguistics hinges on first language acquisition as it focuses on human speech. The perception, development sequence isin both first and second languages, language processing and others.

According to Burns and Seidlhofer (2020), "Learning speaking whether in first or other language, involves developing subtle and detailed knowledge about why, how and when to communicate and complex skills for producing and managing interaction such as asking questions or obtaining a turn". The detail knowledge of how and when to communicate as express variously in the human society is not only determined on the premise of external linguistics factors. The composition, maturation, and expression in language have a biologically based principle. The critical period or age hypothesis assumes that language is biologically based and the ability to learn a native language develops within a fixed period from the birth to middle childhood. While language acquisition within this time is swift and

easily, after this period, the acquisition of grammars is difficult, and for most individuals never fully achieved (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2011). Consequently, a child who lacks the necessary exposure or the linguistic environment which interplay with the biological human components for the formation and development of language ability is bound to experience in communicating ineffectiveness.

Mayer (1996) speaking on voice articulation in language analysis assert that, we associate a certain kind of voices with a character type but psychologists have also revealed that the voice of children changes greatly at certain age (puberty age). Especially for the boys when a developmental phase brings about the action of hormones as part of the maturation process. This change can affect a child's voice, and voice is a component of language. When this happens the voice of a child adopts an abnormal and unfriendly quality so that it is difficult to associate the voice with the child you have known before. The language of such a child therefore experiences some exceptional influence as a result of developmental phase. This and the above stated knowledge from psychology have been replicated in psycholinguistics which has become assets to the study of child's language acquisition.

This accounts for why psycholinguistics is so relevance to the study of child's language acquisition, it gives additional insight to the study of child's language acquisition. The knowledge of what behaviour children display in language acquisition is best interpreted or understood by a psycholinguist. For example, the understanding of the various stages of language development is general. But a psycholinguist goes beyond to study what happens within children through the process of language development that could either ensure the accuracy in language function or not. Their studies include the mind process that reveals the right or abnormal experience of a particular child that is capable of giving a particular result.

Bot and Kroll (2010) reveal that in psycholinguistics, researchers try to develop models to describe and preferably predict linguistic behavior. The aim is to capture all aspects of language use. The goal is to explain how language is processed in the brain. It studies

language processing mechanisms (O'Grady, Archibald & Katamba, 2011) in human beings this knowledge serves us the basis for understanding why children behave in various in the process of acquiring language. The interpretation helps to understand positive and negative behavior in child language acquisition experiences.

Psycholinguists study the relationship between the mind and language. It therefore, gives them an understanding into certain problems affecting the mind that is also capable of affecting the linguistic output in children. Moreover, psycholinguists in studying the mind have established through their knowledge of the child's innate ability that they are relevant or indispensable for acquiring language. This linguistic predisposed ability undergoes a process of maturation and other processes for a child to be able to acquire the human language. The psycholinguist is fully aware of whatever process the human mind engages to ensure acquisition of language.

Psycholinguists are furnished with linguistic disorder a child may be passing through at a given time. For example, a child the necessary knowledge to identify a particular with a voice disorder may be disregarded or laugh at by others including his or her parents. But a psycholinguist could easily identify that the child has experienced biological changes in the body that has led such a change in voice Patten. This knowledge is able to help him provide a solution or counseling that would be relevant to the child or people around him.

As a result of the above knowledge of psycholinguists, they may also proffer a solution to enable a child to overcome a linguistic disability. Betterstill, with the knowledge of psycholinguistics one cannot only discover a linguistic disability in children but can also call for an intervention of specialized medical people who may have what it takes to help such children out of the disabilities. From the above and many further reasons, psycholinguistics is so relevant to the study of child's language acquisition in the contemporary linguistics study.

Conclusion

A close examination of psycholinguistics and the study of child's language acquisition have

proven that both concepts have a common relationship. Psycholinguistic is relevant to the study of child's language acquisition as it provides additional insights into understanding both language and language related issues which are able to help the child in acquiring language. It also, captures the challenges that may lead to

disabilities or limitations in language acquisition among children. The same knowledge of psycholinguistics is capable of providing either a solution or direction on what can be done to help the child who is undergoing challenge in acquiring language.

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