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## **Language Development In Children**

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### **Abstract:**

Language development in humans is considered a process through which an individual's ability to use, employ, and understand language evolves, with the aim of communicating with others to meet various needs. This development encompasses all aspects of language, including vocabulary, grammatical structures, rhetorical devices, and other elements, leading up to pronunciation and understanding of meanings. It begins in the early stages of childhood and continues throughout the different stages of life. Language development is influenced by many factors, such as the environment—particularly the individual's interaction with family members including parents and siblings—as well as heredity, which includes the child's innate abilities. Additionally, learning experiences and supportive educational tools play a role in the process of language acquisition.

This study addressed several points, including: the concept and manifestations of language, the characteristics of language, language comprehension and meaning perception, the stages of language development in individuals, the factors affecting language development, and finally, the theories that have discussed language.

**Keywords:** stages – development – language – The child.

### **Introduction :**

Language is a complex and unique phenomenon that distinguishes human beings from all other creatures. It represents a conventional symbolic system used for meaning, expression, and communication. As such, it forms an essential aspect of daily life and a prominent element in individuals' lives. In addition to being a means of expression and dialogue, it permeates all branches of knowledge and science. It can be regarded as the heartbeat of human civilization, as it is the only means through which generations communicate and through which experiences, knowledge, and civilizational achievements are passed down. A human does not cease to exist with biological death alone; rather, their thoughts, culture, and achievements endure through language, which carries this legacy to future generations.

So, what is the concept of language? And what are the theories that explain its development?

## **1 – Defining the Concepts:**

### **A / Speech:**

It is a type of individual behavior manifested through everything a person expresses whether spoken or written. When a researcher studies speech, they aim to uncover individual differences in linguistic behavior, asking questions like: Does the person use many synonyms? Do they prefer long or short sentences? Does their speech include stuttering or hesitation?

### **B / Language:**

Language is social behavior—it is a social phenomenon and a tool through which members of a community communicate. The researcher attempts to identify the common features in individuals' speech rather than the differences, to conclude that the presence of these shared traits among people justifies stating that they have a common language they use to communicate.

### **C / Tongue (Lisan):**

This refers to the social model that the language has stabilized upon or the normative form of behavior for the vast majority of members of society. Every individual strives to make their speech as close as possible to the standardized model—i.e., classical or standard language.

To clarify the differences between speech, language, and tongue:

The tongue of every nation includes multiple languages, i.e.: Tongue = Language 1 + Language 2 + Language 3 + ...

A language is made up of the speech of individuals: Language = Speech 1 + Speech 2 + Speech 3 + ...

(Hanafi Bin Isa, 1980, pp. 69–73)

## **2 – The Concept of Language:**

Language is one of the most widespread and common phenomena among various societies. Every community develops a linguistic system suited for communication and interaction. One cannot imagine a society without a language. Additionally, language represents a special kind of thinking, shaped by the nature of relationships, interaction styles, and dominant thought patterns within a community.

Because of its distinctive importance in the life of nations, language has been extensively studied by specialists in various fields, leading to multiple definitions depending on the discipline:

Some define language strictly as spoken symbols, ignoring non-verbal means. Linguists emphasize grammar, morphology, and syntactic structures, focusing only on spoken linguistic symbols. Sociologists stress language's interactive social function and consider non-verbal symbols. Psycholinguists focus on acquisition, development, language production, meanings, semantics, and related psychological processes. (Rafi' Al-Nasir, 2003, p. 221)

Charles Hockett (1960) proposed sixteen features that characterize human spoken language:

1. Vocal-auditory channel: Language is simultaneously spoken and heard.

2. Broadcast transmission and directional reception: The message spreads in all directions, but the listener can determine its source.
  3. Rapid fading: Speech signals disappear quickly after utterance.
  4. Interchangeability: The speaker can switch roles between speaker and listener.
  5. Complete feedback: The speaker can hear themselves just as the listener does.
  6. Specialization: The energy used to produce speech does not affect its meaning, whether whispered or shouted.
  7. Semanticity: Linguistic signals are tied to the environment.
  8. Arbitrariness: Linguistic signs are abstract; e.g., the word "chair" is just a symbol agreed upon to refer to that object—it is not the object itself.
  9. Discreteness: Human language consists of distinct units.
  10. Displacement: Language can convey information beyond the here and now (i.e., across time and space).
  11. Productivity: The ability to create new messages.
  12. Traditional transmission: Language can be taught and learned.
  13. Duality of patterning: Meaningful units are formed from meaningless sounds.
  14. Prevarication: Language allows for deception and lying.
  15. Reflexiveness: We can talk about language using language itself, as in this research
  16. Learnability: A person who speaks one language can learn another.
- (Muwafaq Al-Hamdani, 2004, pp. 18–19)

From the above perspectives, it is evident that most definitions of language focus on spoken symbols, or speech. However, language in reality is not limited to vocal sounds; it includes all other means of communication such as gestures, signals, and expressive body movements.

Thus, language can be considered all spoken and non-spoken symbols used by members of a community as a means of communication to express feelings, events, opinions, thoughts, and desires.

### **3 – Aspects of Language:**

#### **A / Verbal Aspect:**

This is represented in spoken language. Any language manifests in various forms; it cannot be limited to the spoken form only. It extends to include other non-verbal means, which may serve as effective tools for communication and interaction without the need for spoken or written language. Through this, individuals express experiences, knowledge, needs, and emotions. It is also a tool for thinking, imagination, and memory. Despite the importance of written language and its unique advantages such as:

Its ability to be transmitted over long distances.

Its permanence and immunity to the changes that affect spoken language, Spoken language is more important because it is more widespread in human communication. Both literate and illiterate people can produce and understand it. Spoken language relies on the use of agreed-upon vocal symbols that form speech to convey ideas, desires, and emotions from speaker to listener.

Written language, on the other hand, is a form of linguistic expression through which ideas and experiences are conveyed visually rather than audibly. This suggests that spoken language facilitates a much greater degree of communication than written language.

### **B / Non-verbal Aspect:**

This includes the means we use to communicate with others without using spoken or written vocal symbols. It includes gestures, signs, and body movements. Such means are culturally based and vary from one society to another.

(Rafi' Al-Nasir, 2003, pp. 222–223)

### **4 - Functions of Language:**

**Expressive/Performative Function:** It enables the individual to express their needs, desires, and emotions from an analytical perspective. This function helps in psychological relief through expressing internal feelings and emotions.

**Social Regulatory Function:** Through this, the individual becomes familiar with the customs and values of the society. Adhering to these ensures social harmony with others, whether through spoken or written laws and directives.

**Communication and Interaction Function:** Achieved through oral or written communication, where individuals interact based on their understanding of word meanings, leading to appropriate responses, and thus communication is established.

**Educational Function:** Through language, knowledge, and science are acquired. It plays a vital role in facilitating the transmission of knowledge to individuals.

**Cultural Function:** Language allows the transmission of cultural and civilizational heritage among societies. It documents the history of peoples and civilizations and enables interaction among cultures globally. (Hassan Mostafa, 2000, p.155)

### **5 – Characteristics of Language:**

Human language has the following features:

- A) A communication system that translates thoughts into symbolic, vocal, and non-vocal forms for others to understand.
- B) It links culture to society, reflecting the unique traits of each community.
- C) It has three main components:
  1. Vocabulary Set: The conventional associations between sounds and meanings.
  2. Grammar: Rules that organize relationships between sounds in word and sentence construction, including syntax and morphology.

3. Phonetic Medium: The space through which vocal messages are transmitted between speaker and listener.

D) Language includes non-verbal communication tools such as gestures, signs, pictures, and body movements. (Rafi' Al-Nasir, 2003, pp. 229-230)

## **6 – Language Comprehension and Meaning Perception:**

Understanding language and meaning involves mental processes used by the listener, ranging from distinguishing sounds to interpreting the speaker's intent based on memory, especially semantic memory. This includes two stages:

**A) Formulation Process:** Involves cognitive procedures used to interpret the speaker's sentences, including decoding the surface structure of utterances and linking them to previous experiences to derive meaning.

**B) Utilization Process:** Involves cognitive mechanisms used to apply the interpretation, such as retaining the information, answering questions, following instructions, or providing information.

Semantic comprehension involves processing word and sentence meanings by accessing the mental lexicon. Sentence understanding is achieved through examining verbal memory and using cognitive models for interpretation, and it is influenced by repetition, recency, prior knowledge, context, and the listener's expected role. Other factors include tone, stress, and intonation.

(Rafi' Al-Nasir, 2003, pp. 238-239)

## **7 – Stages of Language Development:**

### **A – Infancy Stage (Birth to 2 Years):**

Language development starts with the birth cry. Wolff identified three types of cries in early infancy: hunger, anger, and pain cries. This is followed by cooing (random syllables like "da", "ga", "ba") to train vocal muscles, then automatic sounds, imitation, and eventually single words and basic sentences. (Abdul Majid, 1998, p.199)

### **B – Early Childhood (3 to 5 Years):**

Characterized by rapid vocabulary acquisition and the ability to use words meaningfully. Language grows from simple to complex sentences:

Short Sentence Phase (Age 3): Functional but grammatically limited sentences.

Complete Sentence Phase (Age 4): More precise and grammatically accurate sentences.

### **C – Middle and Late Childhood (6 to 12 Years):**

Coincides with entry into primary school. The child begins with about 2,500 words, varies by individual, and transitions from oral to written expression. Sentence complexity increases. Interest in illustrated books emerges, indicating reading readiness. Reading develops through:

1. Associating words with images.
2. Comprehending phrases, words, then letters.
3. Mastery in pronunciation and punctuation.



#### 4. Developing literary appreciation.

Vocabulary expands to include synonyms, antonyms, and abstract terms like "freedom" and "justice". (Mahmoud Abdul Halim Mansi, 2001, pp.144-145)

### **8 – Factors Affecting Language Development:**

Language growth is systematic and influenced by other developmental aspects. Key influencing factors are:

#### **1. Personal Factors:**

- Gender: Girls generally have higher language abilities during early development.
- Intelligence: Intellectual capacity correlates with early and more complex language use.
- Health: Physical health and intact senses, especially hearing, are crucial.

#### **2. Family Factors:**

- Family Atmosphere and Size: A nurturing, communicative home fosters language development, while stress and parental absence hinder it.
- Economic Level: Higher income allows access to language-enhancing tools (books, media).
- Parental Education: Educated parents foster richer linguistic environments.

#### **3. Educational Factors:**

- Teacher Quality: Influences students through their language use and teaching methods.
- Textbooks: Must match developmental levels and introduce rich language gradually.
- Teaching Methods: This should involve visuals, role-play, and storytelling for better learning.
- Multilingual Exposure: Early exposure to multiple languages may delay language mastery in both.

#### **4. Media Influence:**

TV and other media can enrich vocabulary if content is appropriate. However, media can also harm language development if it relies on dialects, lacks interaction, or replaces imaginative play. Other media like radio and print also influence language acquisition. (Thanaa Youssef, 2001, p.55)

### **9 – Theories of Language Development:**

#### **1. Learning/Conditioning Theory:**

Pioneers like John Watson (1878–1958) viewed language as observable verbal responses to stimuli. B.F. Skinner considered language a set of verbal habits learned via reinforcement. Albert Bandura emphasized imitation. However, critics argue this theory neglects abstract meanings and mental processes; thus, it best applies to early stages. Language acquisition techniques include modeling and shaping. (Hassan Mostafa, 2000, pp.403–408)

#### **2- The Mentalist or Innatist Theory:**

Among the pioneers of this theory are Noam Chomsky (1928) and Eric Lenneberg. Chomsky believes that the human nervous system has a mental structure containing inherited linguistic concepts. Thus, the child possesses a genetic predisposition that enables them to learn any human language. In his theory known as "Transformational Grammar," Chomsky distinguishes between surface structure and deep structure. The mentalist approach views language as a tool for expression and thought, in contrast to the behaviorist view, which sees language as equivalent to thought. Some of the key principles of this theory include:

Language is a uniquely human trait: It has a creative aspect and is not merely a series of responses to stimuli. Every human being, as a rational and speaking creature, is capable of understanding and producing an infinite number of sentences in their language, many of which they may have never heard before.

Inborn tendency to acquire language: This means that children have an innate readiness that enables them to understand meanings and words. A child does not simply acquire language from their environment; rather, they engage in a significant mental process, using their own capacities to discover the surface and deep structures of the language.

Linguistic Universals: Studies of human languages reveal shared features such as:

A defined set of phonemes (consonants, vowels, etc.) from which a vast number of sounds (words and sentences) are derived.

Common grammatical relationships (e.g., adjectives, subjects).

Children go through similar developmental stages with age (e.g., pre-linguistic sounds, individual words, two-word stage, etc.).

It should be noted that Lenneberg links language development with overall physical maturity, especially with motor development. This idea is illustrated in the following table:

At the end of	motor development	Speech and Language
12 Weeks	Supports his head when placed on his stomach.  He does not have a grasping reflex.	Cries less than 8 weeks old, smiles when spoken to, and makes babbling sounds that last from 15 to 20 seconds
20 Weeks	Sitting with support	The production of babbling resembles some letter sounds, and from an aural point of view, all the meanings of the pronunciation are radically different from the mature language in the environment.

Some argue that the most significant contribution of psycholinguists who support this approach is the establishment of a relationship between meaning and cognitive development. (Mustafa Achoui, p. 90)



### **3-The Cognitive Theory:**

Among the contributors to this theory is Jean Piaget (1896–1980), who believed that the development of linguistic competence results from interaction between the child and the environment. This view opposes Chomsky's idea of innate structures aiding in language acquisition and rejects conditioning theory, which attributes language learning to imitation, reinforcement, and other principles of behaviorism. In Piaget's view, language acquisition is a creative function, not merely a conditioned process.

The Russian scholar Lev Vygotsky posited that language and thought emerge from two different stages:

Pre-linguistic thought

Pre-intellectual speech

As development progresses, the lines of thought and language gradually converge, especially as the child approaches the stage of mental operations. Eventually, thought becomes verbal, and speech becomes intellectual. According to this theory, the growth of thinking and language occurs in a developmental, staged manner, until they become interlinked. When a child first learns a word, it has a primitive form. As they advance developmentally, this primitive form is replaced by more advanced generalizations, and eventually by real concepts. During this conceptual development, several cognitive functions evolve as well, such as perceptual attention, logical memory, abstraction, and other processes.

Thus, from the perspective of this theory, language acquisition is a complex process that requires a creative function and is not as simple as indicated by the conditioning or mentalist theories.

Given the existence of multiple theories explaining the process of language acquisition, a comprehensive and integrative perspective is needed.

### **4- Integrative theory :**

Previous theories have taken an extreme stance in clinging to their own interpretations of language development and have criticized opposing viewpoints. However, the better approach in this case is to adopt an integrative perspective, as language acquisition is a complex process. We cannot affirm one factor while excluding or disregarding another in our explanation of this process. Hence, the integrative direction is often associated with proponents of interactionist theories such as Jean Berko, Ervin, and Edward Brown. These scholars focus in their linguistic studies on the ways in which children acquire concepts.

This approach emphasizes that the human species has innate predispositions for learning languages, yet experience remains a fundamental condition for its acquisition. Genetic predisposition is also considered an essential condition, but it is not sufficient on its own. Most modern theorists stress the importance of the child playing an active role in language acquisition, contrary to the behaviorist view.

Finally, it goes without saying that it is important to benefit from these theories in order to find useful ways to acquire language, thus helping to develop children's linguistic skills. (Mustafa Achoui, pp. 94–96)

## **Conclusion:**

After this modest presentation on the topic of language in humans in which we addressed the concept of language, stages of language development in humans, and the theories that attempted to understand the mechanisms of language formation and use we can ultimately point out that language is closely linked to personality. In fact, delving into the depths of personality requires, first, a study of all speech produced by the individual, and second, an analysis of that speech from all aspects.

Language oscillates between the conscious and the unconscious; linguistic behavior receives its raw materials, so to speak, from the conscious mind initially, when the ego begins to emerge as an active and reactive self. At the same time, it receives signals and guidance from the unconscious. Thus, emotions are formed through the influx of information and signals from both the conscious and unconscious realms.

From the above, we conclude that language is a broad and rich topic, offering many opportunities for diverse and varied research approaches depending on the angles from which it is studied.

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