

Language Learning Theories: Whether It Is A Good Idea To Raise Bilingual Children Or Monolingual Children

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Abstract: *This work aims to investigate the theories behind child language learning and teaching. The main focus of this work is to discuss whether it is a good idea to enable children to be grown up as bilinguals before the age of puberty or is it better to teach as soon as they have acquired their mother tongue. The results of this investigation work indicate that learning a foreign language seems better when learned at earlier age. The results prove most agreed view by majority of the researchers such as Lightbown and Spada who confirms that language learning at early age is better for child language acquisition. We also came to conclusion that even if children may have some trial difficulties in switching from one to another language, in general, the advantages of learning more languages at the earlier age outweigh its disadvantages.*

Keywords: Logical problem, behaviourism, semiotic, cognitivism, Structuralism, bilingual environment, communicative skills, unconscious assimilation.

I. Introduction

Language acquisition is considered to be “logical problem” that attracts many attention by many people and researchers. Language learning is studied by many researchers in case of children and adults or other age groups. The language itself may be learned as the first and foreign language. Various researchers such as Bloomfield, Skinner, Chomsky and Halliday have conducted researches on four different theories: Structuralism, behaviourism, cognitivism and social semiotic. All of these series have greatly contributed to the study of language learning. Specifically, child language acquisition is quite interesting as children can learn better at their early ages. There exists adequate research on how children acquire languages. For instance, Lightbown and Spada (1999) state that there exist enough body on the children’s capacity to learn more than one language in their previous years. Their evidence suggests that in case that children are interacting with both languages in several situations, there is a possibility that they are likely to thrive in their progress of both languages. They also concluded that in case children have opportunity to learn more than one language, parents need to be encouraged to raise children in bilingual environment.

II. Literature review

2.1 EARLY CHILDHOOD BILINGUALISM

One of the important ideas is but forward by Crystal (2003) who claims that children at young age can achieve acquirement of more than one language unconsciously and in a straightforward way. In other words, children can have much easiness in acquiring first or other additional language in their early periods without making much effort within even short period of time. He also asserts that children tend to have readiness for bilingualism and most children all over the world are grown up in a bilingual environment and encourage capacity in it. On the other hand, there are also researchers who claim that children who learn more than one language at early age, they become mentally confused. That is why parents and children are in hesitation to whether encourage children to learn one at early ages and then encourage the second after they have acquired the first fully or encourage both language at the same time. Opponents of children’s bilingualism at early ages opine that, firstly, it reduces the first language learning. Secondly, Steinberg (2001) claims that this would impact the children’s cognitive progress and his competence of reading, arithmetic and other mental procedures. Thirdly, it would mix the child by affecting the mastery of either language because of child’s incompetence to differentiate two different and challenging appearing grammar and systems. Nevertheless, proponents of bilingualism also state that bilingual children have ability to sort out two different languages from each other when they need to but with some time for differentiation. In contrast with Steinberg (2001), Lightbown and Spada (1999) claim that children who possess the chance to learn more than one language from earlier time are fortunate and they need to be encouraged to maintain learning bilingualism and parents also need to be stimulated to do so. The above debate on how children learn language and whether it is of advantage or disadvantage is a controversial one that has not been fully answered or agreed yet. However, it is more likely that children who have exposed to more than one language at early ages tend to be more intelligent and have broader outlook rather than monolinguals. Their minds seem to be developed quite well as they have the capacity to switch to both language within a short period of time. Bilinguals are also more creative than monolinguals as they need to make their brain work more within more than one language at the early periods of brain development.

III. Materials and Methods

3.1 LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

How actually languages are learned has been an intriguing question for many generations for a long time period. One of the researchers, Dan (1994) claims that language learning is also instilled in human species like the abilities to speak, walk. It is also stated that child language acquisition and competence of building his own meaning is an extremely remarkable process. Brown (2000) states that children's language acquisition consists of stages like other skills such as walking, standing and others. For example, at the very early stages of life, children babble and then start saying one or two words by imitating and then small sentences consisting of two words and then by the age of three, children have acquired enough words to be able to speak and by the school age, they have already developed communicative skills and have expanded their vocabulary at a better level. As can be seen from the above opinion, child language learning is staged and nearly all the children go through the same process in spite of the nation and language they learn which makes one conclude that language learning is a universal process that is followed by. Some language experts only emphasize the role of environment in language learning while others only concentrate on the children's innate characteristics of language learning (Lightbown and Spada, 1999). A middle position is taken by Halliday who states that language learning is "environmentally fashioned and evolving". This definition means that human beings possess an innate competence in learning a language and this skill needs to be encouraged by the environment. In other words, the brain is programmed for language acquisition and this program needs to be functional in real life.

It can be concluded that learning a language at an early age and making it a continuous one is important for a child and his cognitive and mental ability. In real life, there can be experienced that bilingual people whether in their childhood or in their adulthood, tend to have a broader outlook and well-developed cognitive skills in comparison to monolinguals. The reason might be due to the fact that knowing another language or even a word means knowing a notion and meaning of some kind. As soon as a meaning is acquired and a brain accepts it, this becomes knowledge for a person, resulting in more understanding of the world and other cases better and from a broader viewpoint.

3.2 LEARNER'S PROFILE

According to my observation, participants are different. Yet, I would like to discuss about my 12-year-old pupil, a language genius, who started working hard on herself from the age of 4. Despite being young enough, she amazes people by her upper-level communication in foreign languages. Her mother has a language barrier at work so she decided to apply her for different beneficial courses for her future. She has been learning English, Russian, Arabic languages since the age of four. Presently, she is professional in a language environment. She has been participating in different competitions being number one. From the very beginning, she was taught English based on different approaches, methods and techniques. By applying these ways, she has achieved in her targeted languages. She was very young when she first went to an English educational course, hence, she was taught based on the series method directly without using any translations and conceptually which means without grammatical rules and explanations. During her learning "series" of connected different sentences, which were easy to perceive, was introduced to her. For the first lesson, she was given fifteen sentences to repeat, and the result was very satisfactory because she had the ability to learn a language both implicitly and explicitly while teens have failed in implicit learning. Having a good memory processing capacity positively has affected her fast learning. Furthermore, in fact, principles of youth language acquisition were very essential so she was taught using total physical responses. As Asher (1977) stated "children do a lot of listening activities during learning the first language, before they learn speaking, listening is accompanied by physical responses such as grabbing, moving, searching and reaching". "The instructor is the director of a stage play in which the students are the actors" according to Asher (1977, p. 43), and this method was helpful for her. Moreover, she learned using the natural approach that was aimed at the goal of basic personal communication skills, that is, everyday language situations—conversations, shopping, and listening to the music on the radio. Hence, thanks to these different methods and approaches, she is now a master among her peers. She, currently, studies at 5th grade and already conducts international concerts at school. On condition that people come from Ministry or abroad, she is figured as one of the most talented pupils at school, in other words, "tongue" of the school. She has been rewarded many times and she wants to be a responsible citizen who can give contribution to the development of her motherland.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

I obtained different data regarding the training process. I used three approaches to identify how she was taught using different methods and how learning at an early age helped her to be talented in other aspects also. In the first, I made an interview with her in order to be aware of her level of speaking and check her horizon.

In the second, I would prefer her to choose the multiple choices which include the tenses and related grammar. The reason grammar helps the learners to correct the mistakes in their work, at an early age the learners are focused on more vocabulary and

speaking so in order to check how effect the age to her grammar I did the grammar test. By this, I had a chance to know current level of grammar because students cannot learn a foreign language accurately only depending on unconscious assimilation.

In the third, I ask her to read the text and retell the story, after retelling fill the questions which are related the topic by this I would like to know her comprehension skills and what she reads challenge her and I would rather her organize text information in order to provide a personal interpretation. Moreover, knowing more languages' effect on mental development.

IV. Discussion

4.1 DATA COLLECTION

I did this kind of case study for the first time so I tried to get sources that are more credible from internet. I have read one more time the article, which is given by professor. After obtaining enough information, I follow the rule and start writing my research purpose. I found suitable participant in order to compare the information, which is given in the articles. To get information I decided to do interview first. After interview, I had clear picture what to do the next. Hence, I make different tests and activity in order to know what aspect influences her participation during the lesson. Moreover, I tried to know how environment affects her learning process and how she had overcome difficulties when she faced at an early age, and also it was really interesting to know her learning history because although she is young she knows three languages. The script is provided in the Appendix A to give background information about the participant.

My next observation was grammar test. I gave it in order to know what kind of weakness has in her grammar in fact when students learn from young age they have gap in grammar because they are taught only based on vocabulary and speaking. There is given grammar tests in Appendix B with her answers, I tried to demonstrate her skills of grammar and in order to observe how the age influences her grammar.

Last observation was based on reading skill in order to know her process of cognitive progress and her competence of reading, arithmetic and other mental procedures. The text is given in Appendix C. In this section She had read the story and retell it and based on this text she did related tasks. Hence, I had a chance to check her critical reading. The result was awesome although she is not old enough she easily understand intermediate context and do tasks.

V. Conclusion

Overall, child language acquisition is one of the critical issues in today's modern world as the life at present is requiring everyone to be intellectually developed, widened outlook possesses as well as owning adequate knowledge to meet the needs. As I am interested in learning languages but had many difficulties in learning at later age, I became interested to grow up bilingual children who knows and speaks more than one language at early age. As I looked through the theories, I found out that majority of the researchers and authors agree that children need to be brought up as bilinguals as it helps them to develop many cognitive and communicative skills. Rather than being mentally confused due to bilingualism, children tend to be more creative and active in comparison to monolinguals. The results from practical viewpoint show that it is better when children are taught more language at earlier years. In this way, children learn how to communicate and how to speak, in general they learn the language orally and then later focus on the written version such as grammar or reading parts. In this way, this becomes much easier in not only earlier years of language learning but also later when they are actually involved in the more formal way of language learning and usage. In my research when children learn different languages at an early age, they have a chance to be cleverer in any field. Their intellectual will be enhanced because of practice. They become to understand easily what is going on around them. When I observe my participant I obtained different useful information how age affect her learning and development. I realized she widens her horizon by communicating and sharing ideas with course mates. Moreover, she is interested in other activities also, She can solve mathematics problem easily, which comprises learning at an early age help her as a whole.

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