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Review Article

The Language Development of Children with Relation to Socio-Cultural Factors

Xanthippi Foulidi^{1*}, Evangelos C. Papakitsos²

¹Department of Pre-school Education and Educational Design, University of the Aegean, Rhodes, Greece

²Department of Industrial Design & Production Engineering, University of West Attica, Athens, Greece

***Corresponding Author:**

Xanthippi Foulidi

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Abstract: This work focuses on the crucial contribution of the cultural and social environment and especially of parents, through their interactions and relationship that they have developed with young children, to achieve their language development by the age of three. The aim of this study is to determine the socio-environmental factors that contribute to the development of language ability and the role of parent-infant interaction, as a factor in language learning.
Keywords: infant language development, sociolinguistics, parent-infant interaction, biological theories, sociocultural theories, gender approach.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the main genetic and biological theories, humans have the innate ability to be causally linked to the function of the human brain to use language. With Chomsky [1] as the main advocate of this notion, it is argued that linguistic development is due to biological factors, that is, innate abilities [2].

Along with the genetic-biological theories, there are also socio-cultural ones. Supporters of the sociocultural interaction theory [3-6] have shown that language development is achieved, not so much by a universal mental process of maturation, related to cognitive and psychological factors, but mainly by broader social factors. Thus, they are researching not the pre-existing innate knowledge, but mainly the contributive degree of other important factors in language development [7-10], such as the interaction of children with other people, and especially with their parents [11].

The term "language development" is defined as generally referring to various aspects of speech acquisition. Thus, it is used to describe the developmental course, in which a child gradually exhibits and develops his/her language-communication skills. In this case, we are talking

about and for the acquisition of first/mother language or more than one language, as in the case of bilingualism/multilingualism [9]. It is therefore necessary to point out that the relation of language with the social and cultural environment is the subject of research in a separate branch of linguistics, which in recent years has been called "Sociolinguistics" [12].

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

Undoubtedly, the socio-cultural environment interacts with a child in language development [3, 4, 13, 5, 14, 6, 15, 11]. It has been shown now that the learning of mother tongue is neither autonomous nor passive, but it is an interactive process, in which school, society and parents are involved in a decisive manner. It is notable that children who live in poverty or belong to lower classes, with a low financial level, although they gain common experiences, they still have significant differences in the frequency, quality and intensity of acquisition [16-19].

The parental interaction

Of crucial importance for the language development of children is their interaction with their parents, who emerge as valuable assistants. In addition, time, quantity, consistency, coordination

and the way of communication are taken into account during the interaction. Regarding the latter, it should be noted that parents apply different techniques, sometimes effective and sometimes not, for the language development of their infants, such as verbal games, simplified speech with limited vocabulary and frequent infant-directed speech or "motherese" [20, 21]. The correct perception and accurate interpretation of the infant's messages by parents and their immediate and clear reaction has positive effects on his/her language development. The same results are obtained from the existence of qualitative characteristics, such as diversity, complexity, relativity and enrichment.

It has been accepted that increasing the duration of parental contact, the educational level of the parents, the socio-economic environment of the family, but also the variety and abundance of stimuli, have a positive effect on the language development of infants [22, 23]. Observing speech, mothers, who lived in rural and urban areas of Mozambique, found that the outer-linguistic and extra-linguistic elements, used by infants aged 1.5 to 2 years, were of limited duration. In fact, mothers in urban areas used fewer gestures in their interactions with infants. As a result, infants in rural areas have limited vocabulary [24]. The same conclusion is reached by a study of Bornstein & Cote [25] with infants aged 20 months, living in Argentina and the United States, after finding that infants in rural areas have limited vocabulary, compared to infants of urban centers in those countries. A similar research by Farkas & Beron [16] has shown a correlation between the higher educational level of parents and the developed language skills of children. In fact, even children with hearing problems, if they were able to communicate directly and effectively with their mothers, achieved more important language development, compared to those children who did not have good communication skills [26]. Children whose parents speak less tend to have a poorer vocabulary by the age of three. This difference is largely related to the socioeconomic status and educational level of their parents [17, 19]. The parent-infant interaction needs to be interpreted with social rather than biological theories of gender. Modern linguistics and the (critical) analysis of speech do not discover any differences in the linguistic behavior of men as a result of substantial construction (i.e., biological differentiation) but as a result of social one. This means that as social formations and roles evolve, this will be reflected in specific language practices [27]. Although according to Freud's psychoanalytic theory, it was argued that the attachment of infants to their mothers had a decisive effect on their development [28], achieving substantial gender equality presupposes the fathers' equal participation in the children's upbringing [29].

Suggestions for improving language development

From the afore-mentioned, the need arises to formulate proposals for improving the language development of infants. Dimitriou [30] suggests the elimination of all stressful elements, in order to achieve better language development, but also the social support of parents, in order to improve the quality of their relationship with their infants. The value of the various and many stimuli from the socio-cultural factors is pointed out, as well as the equal participation and interaction of parents in the education of their children. Finally, it is not so much the clear rewards that are suggested but the enhancement, as it causes pleasure that is created by the success of language acquisition [31].

CONCLUSIONS

Concluding the critical assessment of the social factors in language development, it is found that they are related to school, the wider socio-economic environment, parents and their educational level, but also the area of residence of the family. These factors complement each other and do not exclude each other [32]. In order to improve language development, it is necessary for parents to have substantial social support, in order to have meaningful relationships with their children, which is a prerequisite for language development, but also for the enrichment of stimuli to the infants' environment.

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