

How do adults contribute to infant lexical development



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In order to fully answer the essay question the antithetical question of ' how do adults not contribute to infant lexical development? ' should be answered. How adults contribute requires a response based on the child's acquisition of empirical knowledge (knowledge existing outside of the individual) compared to innate knowledge (that which exists within us, independently of our environment). Holistically, though children seem to develop speech on their own initiative, interaction with adults provides them with the nuances of their cultural lexicon. Trevarthan (1974a) found that babies from birth to six months behaved in a way which was termed pre-speech, or pre-lexical communication. They seemed to move their mouths in what appears as an imitation of speech.

When they are about two months, they make almost indistinct vowel sounds to communicate with others. Which is probably the foundation for the turn taking skills found in later conversations. Gelman & Shultz (1977) found that adults and older children (+4 years) simplified their speech to talk to younger children, for instance by using shorter sentences, placing greater emphasis on certain words and speaking in a higher pitch. The Baby Talk Register is thought to enhance language acquisition. Cazden's (1965) 3 month studies on effective language acquisition in children showed that it was nearly enough for language to be expanded upon and corrected, but that the child acquired more complex syntax if the child's language was corrected in the context of a reply to what the child was trying to communicate.

So for instance if the child uttered, ' Doggy run' then the adult responding ' Where was the dog running to? ' would be more effective in aiding language

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acquisition than replying ' The dog was running. ' There are two schools of thought on the development of lexicon, the nativist position (e. g. Chomsky, Pinker and Piaget,)- which states that lexical development is universal because it is innate, and that syntax and lexicon, are cognated by universal devices within the brain.

However the empiricist position, (e. g. Skinner, Vygotsky and Bruner) which is not pitted against the nativist position but rather complements the nativist position is that the most important factors that govern linguistic structure are learnt- so generally they an empiricist position would be one which would emphasise the environment in the acquisition of language. Chomsky argued that humans had an innate ability to acquire language through a mechanism called the language acquisition device (LAD.) He argued that the existence of linguistic universals was evident of the LAD.

This McNeill thought was a theory which ' describes the internal structure of LAD, and, thus of children. ' (McNeill, 1970/151). He distinguished between deep structures in language and surface language structures. The surface language structures present the differences in language that are found cross culturally. Children soon learn to use transformational rules- translating the deep meaning into a surface meaning (and if they are listening to speech- visa versa) this was called generative grammar, because the ability to transform grammar resulted in the ability to generate comprehensive sentences.

EXAMPLE There is much supportive evidence for an LAD (Brown & Bellugi, 1964; Herriot, 1970; McNeill, 1966.) There seems to be an underlying ability

to comprehend rules, which is partly responsible for utterances such as 'I swammed' or 'She ated. Though it has been suggested that this might partly be due to prelinguistic knowledge, the ability of children to understand kinesthetic non-verbal communication such as facial expressions or gestures is evident of a more complex understanding of communication. More so, though children might lack a rich lexicon, or over/under extend grammatical rules, they never produce jumbled sentences.

For instance a child might say 'Me wear hat' but only with the odd exception would a child say 'Hat wear me. Pinker (1994/32) argued 'complex language is universal because children actually reinvent it. ' His theory was that children were able to use some innate ability to understand and construct grammatic rules, even in environments where fixed rules were lacking, such as is the case where pidgin languages after a generation are transformed into creole languages, this is evident wherever people from different linguistic backgrounds are made co-operate in whatever context on a regular basis. Read also about the role of cognition in learning He cited the work done by Bickerton on the (1990) as an example of new settlers from China, Korea, Puerto Rico, Japan, Portugal and the Phillipines as an example of a pidgin language being transformed by children of the next generation into a creole language. Chomsky's theory has been accused of marginalising the role that the environment has on successful language acquisition. For instance, the way parents modify language by using baby talk register and through scaffolding. The theory also seems to suggest that LAD is divorced from other intellectual mechanisms, therefore simplifying what language is.

The learning theory is empirically slanted, and emphasizes the role of the environment and therefore the adult in the child's lexical development. The learning theory stresses the way children are operationally conditioned to learn, through reinforcement and imitation. Skinner (1957) identified three key ways that children learnt speech: echoic responses, production of mands and tact responses. Echoic responses were the result of a child imitating sounds, which would elicit a positive response, therefore reinforcing this behaviour. A mand was a random sound that a child would produce, but which, if having some meaning for the parent, would be encouraged for future use. A tact is where a child uses an imitated word in front of a given object or entity and is rewarded.

Eventually, the child's language is conditioned to be like those of the parents. However there are many flaws in with the theory, for instance, Language acquisition occurs at a high rate, the child far longer however, if they were only reinforcing and imitating what they had heard. More so, as Herriot (1970) argued children make ' virtuous errors' when applying grammatical rules which were unlearnt but creative uses of language, such as ' I swammed' or ' I ated', this he believed, was probably a result of trying to learn irregular morphemes. 3 Generally the most comprehensive theories on child learning come from Vygotsky and Piaget. Piagetian theory is more nativist than Vygotskian theory as the adult is seen as playing a minimal and role in developing child cognition.

Vygotsky argued that adults fostered lexical development by encouraging the child to ' stretch' the realms of their knowledge. Vygotsky's writings, once translated into English by Wood et al (1988), proved highly influential in <https://assignbuster.com/how-do-adults-contribute-to-infant-lexical-development/>

cognitive development research, and are seen as providing a good theoretical framework that to some extent counters Piaget's nativism. Vygotsky's most influential theory is his zone of proximal development (1978)- which is what the child can do by itself and what it can achieve with others. This includes the development of new conceptual ideas, and transmitting cultural ideas. In this way, the child learns new skills from the guidance of a tutor.

His work was of seminal importance to Bruner et al in constructing a scaffolding theory. Like Vygotsky, Bruner believed that the child was able to complete difficult tasks if there was the right facilitator, who using language and action, would guide the child in completing tasks, this Bruner, called scaffolding. Bruner called this learning process, the spiral curriculum- which was the deeper understanding of knowledge the child could develop.

Complex ideas, as long as they were correctly taught, contrary to Piagetian thought, can be acquired by a child, ' any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development.

' Even a young child can grasp complex ideas, which though not manifested at the time grasped, are intuitively understood- so that later on the ideas are more consciously understood. Bruner also believed that supporting Chomsky's LAD, was the Language Acquisition Support System (1982) which was the cultural knowledge that determined how the nuances of language. For instance, the sociocultural rituals of communication that the child garners cultural peculiarities as well as linguistic peculiarities. The environment in this way helps the child distinguish between the different semantics underlying lexicon and it's syntax.

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This is important in later communication as the child is then able to participate within communication of that culture. Piaget wanted to understand child development in terms of stages. Piaget was a nativist though not in the usual sense, as he did not believe that neonates had innate thoughts. Instead he believed that the neonate had very basic cognitive structures that allowed it to process information in universal ways- however, this processing of information could not be accelerated by a facilitator- the child had to learn everything at it's own level and could not be forced to adopt more complex knowledge.

Some of the cognitive processes he mentioned were accommodation, assimilation and equilibration. Accommodation was the alteration of old, psychological perspectives to fit new ones. Assimilation was the child's ability to categorise new objects with those which are similar. Within this there are subcategories of assimilation- reciprocal assimilation, where maturation in different schemes feed off each other. So for instance, vision and language would feed off each other as the child is more able to create a semantic schema from visual stimuli.

Recognition assimilation would be based on the child's ability to discriminate between objects- so for instance, linguistic objects might include being able to discriminate between plural and singular forms through mental or visual representations of objects. Reproductive assimilation is the child's ability to interact with objects and then distinguish their characteristics. When objects were being accommodated and assimilated a balancing act took place called equilibration, which much resembled homeostasis. Developmental language disorders, show that linguistic structures are to some degree innate and that <https://assignbuster.com/how-do-adults-contribute-to-infant-lexical-development/>

a child with normal linguistic skill will benefit more from tutoring than a child who has a language disorder.

However, as not all children have fixed linguistic ability, it is a mistake to assume that all children will benefit from the same types of tutoring.

Therefore adults will most positively influence lexical development if they are able to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of a child in question, in this way, the Piagetian approach to recognising the limitations of a child is not wrong. However, as Vygotsky sought to show, nor is wrong to try and challenge the child with tasks that are not usual for them, as this can accelerate language development. Though it still proves controversial, it is generally acknowledged that there are some innate lexical mechanisms that manifest themselves with increased maturation. However, though an organized lexicon can be found in all human societies, there are differences, such as in dialect, and vocabulary, which are considered culture specific. This suggests that those who have already mastered a comprehensive lexicon transmit their knowledge to those who are learning, such as infants.