

Language acquisition theories essay sample

[Psychology](#), [Behaviorism](#)



1. BEHAVIOURISM- BF SKINNER (1904-1990)

B. F Skinner proposed this theory as an explanation for Language acquisition in human. B. F SKINNER'S entire system is based on operant conditioning (learning's a function of change in overt behaviour) A child acquires verbal behavior when relatively unpatterned vocalizations, selectively reinforced, gradually assume forms which produce appropriate consequences in a given verbal community" (Skinner 31) Limitations in Behaviorism

Language is based on a set of structures or rules, which could not be worked out simply by imitating individual utterances Children are often unable to repeat what an adults says

Noam Chomsky says on Behaviorism

Whatever ' behaviorism' may have served in the past, it has become nothing more than a set of arbitrary restrictions on ' legitimate' theory construction . . . the kind of intellectual shackles that physical scientists would surely not tolerate and that condemns any intellectual pursuit to insignificance." (Bjork, 1993, p. 204) 2. Cognitive Theory- JEAN WILLIAM FRITZ PIAGET (1896-980)

The Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget placed acquisition of language within the context of a child's mental or cognitive development. Language is just one aspect of a child's overall intellectual development.

3. INNATENESS- Noam Chomsky (1928-Present)

According to Noam Chomsky, the mechanism of language acquisition formulates from innate processes. This theory is evidenced by children who

live in the same linguistic community without a plethora of different experiences who arrive at comparable grammars. UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR (U. G.)

“ Children are equipped with an innate template or blueprint for language and this blueprint aids the child in the task of constructing a grammar for their language.” This is known as “ Innateness Hypothesis.”

Chomsky says:

The UG does not have the actual rules of each language but it has PRINCIPLES & PARAMETERS. The rules of language are derived from the PRINCIPLES & PARAMETERS. Principles: universal basic features of Grammar e. g.. Nouns, Verbs & Structure Dependency etc. Parameters: the variation across language that determines one or more aspects of Grammar e. g. Pro, Drop and Head Direction. The Parameters are set during Language Acquisition.

UG is hidden unknown somewhere in the brain.

Chomsky thus proposes that “ all children share the same internal constraints which characterize narrowly the grammar they are going to construct.” (Chomsky, 1977, p. 98) NOAM CHOMSKY: (1983) “ Language Development should be described as language growth because the language organ simply grows like any other body organ (in the brain). 4. Jerome Bruner— Interactionist. (1915– Present)

“ The language behaviour of adults when talking to children (known by several names by most easily referred to as child-directed speech or CDS) is specially adapted to support the acquisition process. This support is often described to as scaffolding for the child’s language learning. Bruner also coined the term Language Acquisition Support System or LASS in response to Chomsky’s LAD. He is of the view that while Chomsky suggests a LAD, there must also be a Language Acquisition Support System or LASS. He is referring to the family and the social environment of the child in which he interacts and acquires language. THEORY OF BRUNER (Social Interaction)

Bruner is one of the founding fathers of Constructivist Theory. “ Learners construct new ideas and concepts based upon their existing knowledge.” – Learning goes on and is an active process.

BRUNER’S LASS:

If we look at the child’s early learning environment we can see how: A CHILD INTERACTS WITH THE ADULTS AROUND HIMHER.

CONSTANT & CONTINUAL CHANCES ARE PROVIDED TO THE CHILD TO ACUIRE HISHER MOTHER TONGUE. PARENTS & ADULTS PROVIDE A LEARNIG ENIRONMENT TO THE CHILD.

In 1991, Bruner published an article “ Critical Inquiry” entitled “ The Narrative Construction of Reality.” In this article, he argued: “ the mind structures its sense of reality using mediation through “ cultural products, like language and other symbolic systems“. He focuses on the idea of narrative as one of these cultural products. Bruner’s Concepts have been explained further by John McNamara (a linguist): “ Children, rather than having an in-built language device, have an innate capacity to read meaning

into social situations. It is this capacity that makes them capable of understanding language, and therefore learning it with ease, rather than an LAD.”

CONCLUSIONS:

BEHAVIOURISM focuses on language learning mostly by social and environmental interaction and conditioning & reinforcement of BEHAVIOUR whereas Mentalism focuses mainly on language learning by hidden MENTAL ABILITY. Piaget focuses on the Cognitive, Conceptual & Intellectual Ability of children as useful in Language Acquisition Learning and focuses on “Cognitivism”. Whereas Bruner focuses mainly on language learning acquisition by social interaction and teachings of the care givers care takers of the child or “ Social Interaction.”