

# Language development a debate research paper example

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Language is the fundamental means of communication and social interaction amongst the Homo sapiens. Though human existence is not entirely dependent on language, yet it is considered to be an important constituent for the survival. The process of language development is often considered a common occurrence and taken for granted. The study of language is known as Linguistics. It is estimated that there are more than 6000 spoken languages in the world. Language is not only used to speak, write or interpret; it is a base for communication, and information can also be communicated in the form of sign language. The method of learning human language is basically directed by essential capabilities and trends. Human beings can learn and speak any language if they are exposed to the language model at the right time of their development stages. This paper describes about the language development and the theories involved in the language development.

Keywords: language, theory, linguistics.

## **Language Development – A Debate!**

It is essential for every individual, as a child, to acquire the elementary knowledge about their language. To understand the language to its complexity, it has to be studied taking into consideration, the four characteristics of the language. Phonology, it is the sound element in any language. Syntax, it is the use of combination of words to make a sentence grammatically correct. Semantics, it is the knowledge of the various synonyms of the words put into use and lastly, Pragmatics, is the knowledge of the appropriate use of the language. These all put together make up the

language. There are multiple theories explaining the development of a language, yet the debate on whether it is an innate quality or acquired through learning continues.

The speculation that some features of languages are acquired by human intellect is the characteristic of the “ Principles and Parameters (P &P)” theory. Parameters are supposed to “ reduce the difficulty of the learning problem” (Gibson, Wexler, 1994). Linguists working along the P&P theory conclude on the innate abilities of language development. In 1959, Chomsky implied a theory which purports, child’s native comprehension to any language is inherent. He further argued that all human brains were designed with Language Acquisition Device (LAD) which allowed them to understand the Syntax part of any language. This is also called the Nativist theory.

The validity to this theory is supported by the study of the human brain. The study reflects on areas of the brain, such as the right and left hemispheres of the cerebral cortex, to have associated with comprehension and production of the language. The Broca’s area in left hemisphere of the brain is related to speaking and syntax (knowledge of grammar) and the Wernicke’s area, also in the left hemisphere is related to the production and comprehension of speech. Accordingly, the left hemisphere being predominate chiefly controls the language processing.

The innateness factor is further supported by Lenneberg in 1967. He suggested that every inherent factor had a time constraint and the language learning is confined to a critical period in every human. The brain flexibility is

high before the inception of adolescence, thereby making the comprehension of language effortless. The evidence for this comes from adults trying to learn a new language. Understanding a new language is not unattainable but rather difficult for the adults in comparison with children.

Chomsky's theory was questioned and argued upon, as young toddlers who babble single word utterances have no grammar in them, withdrawing out the Syntax part of the Nativist theory. These utterances are shaped and achieved by correction and social interaction from others. This evidence supports Skinner's theory stating, Conditioning stimulus-response associations through reinforcement and shaping behavior through selective reinforcement. Yet again, to the support of Chomsky, facts that parents do not correct the grammatical mistakes made by their children were presented by Brown, Cazden and Bellugi in 1969. Nelson, in 1973 further added that children who were interfered for their grammatical mistakes, developed rather slowly.

Contrary to the Nativist theory, is the Interactionist theory. It states that language development is both biological and social and is inspired by the motive of the child to communicate with others. It mainly highlights Vygotsky's theory of collaborative learning. Collaborative learning is the idea that conversations with older people can help children both cognitively and linguistically as stated by Shaffer, Wood, & Willoughby (2002). The theory argues that social interaction performs a vital role in cognitive development. All children irrespective of their congenital disabilities have a similar pattern of communication, which is improvised by the people they socialize with.

Piaget, put this as an age and stage process. This is supported by the study conducted on children from birth to their first utterance to much sensible language and then to advanced speech. In 1978, Feldman, Goldin-Meadow and Gleitman, observed that just as the normal children communicated with the help of babbling, the children who were congenitally deaf used gestures and sign language to express them. This observation was again an evidence for the innate mechanism of language development that all children develop the communication abilities at around the same age.

“ In innate factors play a role; that is why all children in a household learn language but none of the pets do” (Gleitman, 1986). With all the theories supportive or controversial to the innateness of the language, Chomsky’s claim endured much of the credibility. Yet it could not prove the extents of its certainty. However it is clear that an innate mechanism alone cannot win all the credit for language development. Social interaction, maturation and environmental aspects also play a significant role. The theories have not emphasized on the memory and attentiveness of the child or any individual comprehending a language. Memory as we know is essential to recollect the words and their meanings in any language where as the attention is required to grasp the language. Thus, innateness, memory and attention and social interaction form the chief factors in any language development.

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