

ADULTS' DISCOURSE AND CHILDREN SPEECH DEVELOPMENT RELATIONSHIP

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The children's language and the adult's language are very different, especially in the grammatical features. The child's language has its own pre-linguistic rules, it has morphological and syntax problems.

As the child grows up he masters the features of his language community becoming a part of it, making these peculiarities part of him. The child masters the language through this language community, so it's obvious that while he learns the first words he also receives these particular features, turning into a transmitter of these language distinctions.

The process of recognition is a very important step for the language acquisition. The child, in order to learn how to talk, has to be able to adapt and to master the signal and then pass to the symbol and sign. The steps of recognition are directly related to the language acquisition.

As the child goes through the pre-linguistic phase he starts talking its first language. The child firstly starts to articulate some simple sounds, repeats them and then starts the pronunciation of a whole word. In this phase the stress of the word plays a great role because the child tends to catch the stressed syllable. In this phase, the child's lexicon is enriched.

We have observed a considerable number of children until the age of three during their language acquisition and we have reached the conclusion that there are lots of nonlinguistic factors which influence the linguistic formation of the children. We have reached the conclusion that the language acquisition of the children has the shape of a spiral circle. During the study of the way children learn to talk, the role of the social environment in which these children are grown up is obvious.

1. Linguistic Stimuli Received from Mother and Adults

The linguistic stimuli that the child receives from the mother or other adults surrounding him, is a matter that must be thoroughly studied. Researches in this field were initiated as a reaction towards the persistent assertion of Noam Chomsky that children listen to partial and grammatically wrongly constructed conversations of adults surrounding him.¹ It is true that adults' discourse is full of errors and hesitations, for the reason that the spoken discourse (i.e. execution) partially reflects the speaker's linguistic knowledge (the competency), as the spoken discourse is influenced by factors such as: attention restricting and wavering, thus he is subject to many errors. However, the discourse direct specifically towards the children might not be that imperfect or incomplete, as the adults do not necessarily speak to children in the same way the talk to adults. In the relationship child/language, the social context plays a major role, as it is this context that provides the linguistic information, the matter which the individual-child will process and which will define the linguistic variant that he will use (in our case the Geg variant).

¹ M. Harris & M. Coltheart, *L'elaborazione del linguaggio nei bambini e negli adulti*, Bologna 1991,pg. 47.

- **Adults' Discourse and Children Speech Development Relationship**

The above mentioned issue must be extended to native speech and non-linguistic environment relationship, in order to observe whether the type of conversation heard by children affects the pace speed of discourse acquisition. Although the Chomsky's concept of the child's linguistic stimuli nature is opposed, this does not necessarily mean that the children are in essential need of simplified conversations to acquire the discourse. The child's linguistic development pace is not related to the length and complex nature of adults' oral expressions, addressed to him, but to the styles quantitative variations and the parents' discourse arguments. Children, who are developing faster, take more ample knowledge of their verbal expressions, by plethora of instructions and questions, thus supplying and strengthening the child's feedback. To the children's linguistic development corresponds the Bruner's² concept according to whom the discourse is acquired in a more familiar context, which facilitates the linguistic code deciphering, as is accorded to the native discourse description. Bruner's hypothesis on discourse development and experimental researches suggest that the acquisition of discourse is not favored as much by syntactic simplicity of the motherese, rather by the simplified relationship of the discourse with the child's world. The syntactic simplicity, characteristic of motherese, is rather as a result of limited nature of conversations made generally with children.

From a research on the linguistic development of a children's group aged 20-22 months, it appears that in this stage they show similar degree of discourse development, but the recordings of each of the children have shown three conversation models (in collaboration with mothers) distinctive of each other.³

During recordings was noticeable the fact that the mother rarely initiated conversation with information request, rather she replied to the children's comments by extended it with additional information. This kind of response is called by scholars as "extended" ("e shtrirë"), as the example depicts. The child taken as a model for this case is named Enad and is 20 months old.

The child and his mother play with dolls-animals

The mother, while speaking to the child using Geg variant, says: "*Shife nji mic*". (Providing information to the child)

The child, after listening to the mother, pronounces in his way: "*mic*". (He hints that he has recognized the previous information)

The mother replies in approval and simultaneously extends the information: "*Po, po, po munohet me kap minin apo ja?*" (Extended response)

The child, focusing on conversation, says: "*E kapi, e kapi.*"

The mother persists to reinforce: "*Pa e kap ë ë ë...*"

The child confirm again: "*E kapi mininnnn*"

In a second group, mothers often initiated a conversation by requesting information from the child, but rarely gave extended responses to his comments. The following conversation between the child (in our case Klesti) and his mother confirms this:

The mother asks the child, while holding a toy in her hand, trying to know the amount of information the child possesses: "*Çar ngjyret ka?*" (In this case we have information request).

The child replies: "*E verdhë*" (Provided information)

² M. Harris & M. Coltheart, *L'elaborazione del linguaggio nei bambini e negli adulti*, Bologna 1991, pg. 43.

³ M. Harris & M. Coltheart, *L'elaborazione del linguaggio nei bambini e negli adulti*, Bologna 1991, pg. 53.

The mother confirms: “*Asht nji makin e verdh.*” (the mother’s response is minimal). The mother retries to request information: “*Çar ngjyret ka kja tjetra?*”

The child replies: “*T’ verdh*” (the minimal response is wrong).

The mother: “*Jo, e kuqe.*”

The child: “*E kuqe.*”

In a third group of mothers and children were present both aspects of other models, thus the mother initially providing information and the second model where the mother requested information. They often requested information and replied to the children’s comments by extending responses, as shown in the following example, where the child is 22 months old and named Elvia.

The mother and her child watch illustrated images

The mother, while points at a picture, asks: “*Ça jan kta?*” (Information requesting)

The child replies: “*Pula*” (Information providing)

The mother confirms the child’s words and simultaneously provides additional information: “*Po, pula. Pulat bajn vë.*” (Thus giving and extended response)

The illustrated examples, taken from observations on children, show the manner on how the child initially learns the linguistic variant to which he belongs, in our case the Geg. This is the only information provided to him and as such the child does not have the opportunity of “*choice*”, but to only speak Geg.

Children benefit more from the information requesting and extended responses to their comments, thanks to syntactic and semantic development.

We may assert that the presented theoretical hypothesis and experimental trials highlight the importance of social context in which children learn to speak. If they are isolated, they cannot acquire the discourse. They learn to speak when they acquire knowledge of persons, objects and events of their world.

The discourse acquisition theories acknowledge these fundamental phenomena and try to explain the complex relationship of the child inner processes and linguistic and non-linguistic experience acquired from the surroundings.

2. The Recognition Process

Children are not passive beings. They are active in their surroundings. The ability of children to present something through something else is considered as one of the first steps of arbitrariness, as one of key steps of recognition related to language acquisition. Thus, a child uses a piece of wood as a chair for his doll. At this moment he relates *piece of wood / chair*. (Similarly the word “*chair*” symbolizes the object *chair*. For the first time the child is faced with the fact that the actual might be used to show something else actual, which in fact does not directly relate to the object it represents. From this kind of arbitrariness, the child gradually passes into linguistic arbitrariness, where the direct relationship of the word and what the word means is lacking. Initially, they learn this arbitrariness in midst of objects, to later use in language, as it is one of main characteristics of the language. Linguistic arbitrariness means the lack of a systematic and visible relation of a message form with its meaning. So, if the message is conveyed in a pure arbitrary way, then it is impossible to guess its meaning only on the bases of what appears - the relationship between the message form and its meaning must be understood.

Children are intuitive, and through this intuition they *adapt to*, thus fitting to the surroundings.

Adaptation is a tendency of all organisms to fit to the environment around them. According to Piaget, from the moment of birth, the human starts to adapt. The adaptation happens as a result of

two other processes: *assimilation* through which is recognized the use of existing cognitive structures in acquiring new structures, thus the adaption of new information through existing schematics, and *accumulation*. By accumulation is meant the change of existing schematics (mental systems or perception and experience categories) or creation of new schemes in response to new information.

Assimilation and accumulation are processes that help the child in the act of knowing the world. All life forms have the ability of adapting to the environment. The adaptations are intellectual, physical and cognitive.⁴

It must be clarified that the recognition, as a process, does not depend on biologic development alone. Intelligence is a special degree of biological adaptation. Developments of cognitive structures help the child in understanding of the world and language acquisition. What should be understood by development?

It is those qualitative changes that happen to existing structures. If comparing the brain structures of a child with that of an adult the difference is very large. Cognitive structures of adults are developed through experience. Similar development has happened to cognitive structures as well.

Development goes through several phases. Each phase has its own structure and each structure has relevant characteristics. Of importance is the fact that the phases are hierarchically organized and each phase is of importance in preparation of the advent of next phase.

Piaget has identified four phases of recognition process.⁵ Among the four phases defined by Piaget, the phase that helps in language acquisition is the first phase 0-2 years old, which Piaget calls it as *sensitivity phase*.⁶ Scholars define this phase as “*paralinguistic period*”.

During this phase, children’s intelligence structures start to evolve. Thus, at age of 2 years, the child is capable of symbolic thinking. At the beginning of second year of life, the child’s participation in social interaction is enriched through symbolic gestures.⁷ Meanwhile, during this period, the child is able to solve many situations through language. The intellectual sensitivity phase is very important. It can be defined as the original phase of recognition.

- **The signal, the symbol, the sign.**

It is exactly the intellectual sensitivity mentioned above that introduces the child to relate with others. This is the first moment of the child’s interaction. To illustrate the fact we are giving an example:

The experiment involves children of similar age. A doll is in front of them. They are requested to point where is located the *nose*, *ear*, *mouth* and *eyes* of the doll. Although, none of the children can pronounce *nose*, *ear* and *mouth*, thus to linguistically name those, they are able to correctly point at them. The more the experiment is repeated, the faster is the response speed. Somehow, this is one of the first conversations that children have with others. At the same time, children show them how much they know. For all of observed cases, to the child is told: *syni* (*eye*), *huna* (*nose*), in Geg variant and as a result the child acquires this variant.

Children early in their life create schemes and models that are further perfected. Children reflexes vary enormously, even with a difference of one month, e.g. between two children, one is 1 month old and the other 2 months old. Collected information, sensitivity and reflexes are

⁴ J. Piaget, *Psikologjia e inteligjencës*, Tiranë, 2004, pg. 21.

⁵ J. Piaget e B. Inhelder, *La psicologia del bambino*, Torino, 2001, pg. 14.

⁶ J. Piaget, *Lo sviluppo mentale del bambino*, Torino, 2000, pg. 16.

⁷ Gj. Shkurtaj, *Etnografia e të folurit të shqipes*, Tiranë, 2004, pg. 178.

normally developed leading to inner schemes changes. At the age of 18 months, the child has a new way of understanding. The child achieves this through mental combinations. The child starts to solve problems by thinking.

Sensory-motor intelligence is found at the source of thought and continues to influence through perceptions and practical inner constructions.⁸

If prior to this phase an object was placed in front of the child, e.g., *a doll*, the child is able to say *doll*. While, an 18 months old child is able to say the word *doll* even in the absence of the object. Thus, gradually the child moves from intellectual sensitivity to symbolic thinking. It is precisely the symbolic intelligence that enables the communication with others. Symbols can transmit messages only to those who are developed enough to understand those symbols.

One of the language features is its symbolic nature. The sensory intellectual development culminates with the development of symbolic thinking. According to Piaget, *the symbol and the sign are related*. For a child that plays with foodstuff, a pebble that represents a toffee is consciously recognized for what it symbolizes and the toffee itself for what it is symbolized for. *“When the same child, “loyal to the sign”, considers a name as inherent of the named thing, he considers this name as expressive, as if he sees it as an attached label on the defined object”*⁹. The acquisition of language, the collective signs system in children coincides with the formation of symbol. *With symbol is understood a similarity agreement between the expressive and what it means.*¹⁰

However, it should be clear that there is no close relation (one on one) between the language and recognition. The organization of language recognition attributes and the relations between them are considered in core concepts. Thus, the children learn the functions of objects by using those objects, and later on their characteristics serve to relate classes of objects.

Children’s language sensory development should be understood as a process of signal to signs. When the child is approximately 5 months, he learns to respond to signs.¹¹ What does signal means?

The signal is an indicator that promotes an action plan, with which there is no difference between the form and the substance of action, e.g., to the child *a bottle is the signal for food*. If we show a bottle to a child of several months old, he becomes ready to feed, because now the bottle signals food. Likewise, different child and parents sounds and movements are able to turn into signals.

The important crossover from signal to sign roughly happens when the child is 9 months old. It is the sign that the child and others use to understand each other. The child is capable to choose main features, essential to interpret the actions of others.¹² Thus it is of no importance that action be an immediate part of context, as it previously was. If the mother puts on the coat in front of him, he understands that the mother is leaving and thus reacts (regardless whether the mother is leaving or not). If this experiment is repeated with a child less than 9 months old, we will observe that he does not react by wearing of the coat. To him, coat wearing means nothing. He will realize the mother’s departure only if she steps out the door. So, at this age, less than 9 months old, the child cannot grasp the sign.

Action distinguishing features help the child’s learning process. The process of imitating is reflected in the use of signs. The child starts to imitate the adult’s sound at about 9 months.

⁸ J. Piaget, *Psikologjia e Inteligjencës*, Tiranë, 2004, pg. 144.

⁹ J. Piaget, *Psikologjia e Inteligjencës*, Tiranë, 2004, pg. 149.

¹⁰ J. Piaget, *Psikologjia e Inteligjencës*, Tiranë, 2004, pg. 149.

¹¹ R. M. Golinkoff & K. Hirsh-Pasek, *Il bambino impara a parlare*, Milano, 2001, pg. 112.

¹² P. Bloom, *Language Acquisition*, Cambridge 1994, pg. 121.

Here starts the confrontation with dialectal characteristics of the social community to which the child belongs. In our work, we have surveyed children of Shkodra region and observed the impact that this speech has. At first the child is confronted with phonetic differences of Geg, namely, the Shkodra speech (shkodranisht). The language of adults has such characteristics, thus the child, growing up in this environment, starts to imitate these models and becoming their carrier. At precisely this age, the child passes from the signal to the inner system. Symbols appear at the first words that child says. The symbol is a reality that child use to represent another reality that has similar features. Thus, a remote control can be used instead of telephone receptor. This kind of presentation assumes an understanding of the object use and features. The child who uses the remote control as a telephone has understood very well the first objects, thus telephone. He has identified its main features: Its use, form, size, etc. likewise, this child is able to compare this object features with another object. After the analysis, the child understands the similarities and pursues in doing a symbolic use of an object to represent another object. Experiments show that, in general, those children who had developed symbolic play, have been faster in language acquisition, this due to the fact that the child is capable of understanding faster that what is called language arbitrarily. If the remote control is used as telephone, then it is easier for a child to understand the fact that the telephone might be labeled with something else that has no direct relation with the telephone as an object, thus can be named in words.

In this period, the symbolic play is very developed. The children use a fork to symbolize a comb, a plate to symbolize a hat, a chair to symbolize a car etc.

Later on, the symbol is replaced with the sign. Real signs represent thoughts of a reality or event. A sign or a word represents the cognition structure and not the reality or the actual event. Thus the child can talk about objects that are not present.

3. The role of language acquisition cognition phases

To understand the importance of the language acquisition cognition process we must consider the fact that this process in children goes through 5 phases: *the imitation, the concept of permanence, the cause, the request expression and the play.*

- **The imitation**

Many scholars have defined the imitation as a pre-acquisition of speech, language and communication. Through imitation the child penetrates into the behavior of others and tries to decipher them. Imitation relates to symbolic representation. So, a child uses a sign of a known object starting from the typical action associated with it.

The child's ability to imitate increases over the months. This is the first moment that the child begins to adapt. The child is able to imitate an action of the father, relating the father's action with what he does. If the child asks: *Si bën babi?* he will react by imitating the action. This means that the child has managed to relate between symbols.

- **The concept of permanence**

During the sensory-motor period, babies learn the continuity of object as well. Up to age of 8 months, they do not request an object that is removed from their view field. They act as if the object ceases to exist. As soon as they learn the continuity of the object, so to be able to understand that objects continue to exist even though cannot be seen, the children will request the missing object. So, if a toy is hidden under the pillow, the child has the ability to search/request for the hidden object, and he will remove the pillow to get the toy. Piaget

considers it as a very important phase in the development of cognition. This shows that the child has begun to use the image.¹³

When the child begins to understand the concept of “*permanent object*”, he has the cognition basis to understand that an object that leaves the room might return again and its perception is stored. Such a method of the object reappearance is achieved through speech. By naming a being or an object, the speaker enable the object to symbolically exist to him and to the listeners. Two people can discuss about something or someone even when the objects or the persons discussed about are not present. Thus, it is the language that makes those objects permanent.

- **The cause**

The cause sensory notion is a pre-acquisition in regard to communication and language. The child understands that other and he might be a source of action and cause to make happen something else. Through this function he starts to solve problems. The child realizes that he must not do an act, e.g., to touch the stove, because he understands that will get burned. This ability is a part of the language symbolic function. It is believed that there is a very close relation between the cause and the understanding of words and semantic relations.

- **The completed wish**

The presentation of a completed wish is considered to be very important in the language development. This ability is related to the language development starting from age of 9 months. This is a very important fact, as it is during this time that the child starts to use signs to communicate. Are precisely those signs that the child uses in communication to present a completed wish or the end of the wish. Thus, when a child wants to take something, a toy for example, faces it, points the finger towards the objects and attracts the attention of adults with sounds such as (ė, ě, ě...). Thus the child is able to express his desire through an action. The first signs and words respond to the same context. The signs sequences start approximately at the same time with the first pronunciations. Efforts to retrieve an object help the child understand that an object might be used to benefit something else. The words have a similar function.

- **The play**

The play has an important role in language acquisition. At the age of 10-13 months, the child is able to genuinely relate between the language and the object being played with. From the simple play is passed on the symbolic play. The later develops many symbolic functions. The symbolic play happens when the child uses an object to represent another object, e.g., a child might use a spoon to demonstrate a microphone. (While the words are used only to indicate reference, hence for what is named.)

The symbolic play emerges in children after one and half years. The children who want to drink water from a cylinder, which to them represents a glass, are more, linguistically, developed than those children who do not do such relation (that do not tend to drink water from a cylinder, which looks like glass).

The symbol appears only when there is a representation of the action of subject itself, e.g., when the child puts the doll in bed to sleep. *Precisely the moment in which the symbol in its full meaning appears in play, is the understanding of signs.*¹⁴

It is proved that the number of schemes that the child demonstrates during symbolic play is related to the number of schemes the child uses in language.

*The speech starts in children once the symbol is set.*¹⁵

¹³ T. F. Pettijohn, *Psikologjia*, Tiranë, 1996, pg. 90.

¹⁴ J. Piaget, *Psikologjia e Inteligjencës*, Tiranë 2004, pg. 150.

4. The knowledge and linguistic system

According to Piaget, the knowledge is very important and is responsible for language acquisition, and as well the knowledge development process is a base of word understanding. According to him, the knowledge and its development impacts on language.

To achieve normal speech and language development, the child should be able to:

- Have as purpose the desire to speak;
- Recognize mother tongue phonemes;
- Provide a sounds sequence;
- Recognize intonation schemes.

The loss of these abilities in a speaker, usually impact on the results of language speaking.

The child, as a human being, is born and grown up among people. This close coexistence of the child with the family, the friend and the wider social environment has a great impact on the child's linguistic forming.

According to Chomsky: *"In principle, the source of such knowledge can be found in the child's environment or in the predefined biological versatility of mind/brain, and in particular in that integral part of mind/brain that can be named as the language ability; the interaction of these factors produces the system of knowledge used to speak and to understand."*¹⁶

Thus, in principle, must be considered three factors:

5. Genetically defined principles of language abilities,
6. Genetically defined mechanisms of general knowledge acquisition,
7. Language experience of the child growing up in a speakers' community.

The issue is in the choice and the identification of these factors.

The interaction of these factors produces a knowledge system represented in the mind/brain as a mature state of language ability. This knowledge system provides the interpretation of language expressions, including expressions that the child who is learning the language, has never heard of. Of course, this sketch affects only some of the included elements, while their general characteristics are being illustrated.¹⁷ An Albanian speaking child, while learning Albanian language, is confronted with its grammatical issues. The child unconsciously becomes part of a language community that possesses a specific language variant (in our case the North-West Geg). This causes that the linguistic information that the child receives to be predefined by this community. Thus the child initially learns to name an object, e.g., *the Bulb (të llampës)*. From the observations we have encountered this phenomenon: the child is requested to repeat the name of an object previously pronounce by a parent from Shkodra. Being of Shkodra origin, of Muslim belief in this case, the parent pronounces the word wrongly. It is not pronounced as */llampa/* but */dhampa/*. This is because in Shkodra, in residents of Muslim population, we have opposing (kundërvënie) of consonants *ll/dh*. On the other hand, the child has as a model the pronunciation of the parent, thus the wrong variant */dhampa/*. He learns to say "*dhampa*", and step by step places this word in sentences in various grammatical forms (morphological and syntactical).

• Conclusions

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ N. Chomsky, *Gjuha dhe problemet e njohjes*, Tiranë, 2008, pg. 16.

¹⁷ N. Chomsky, *Gjuha dhe problemet e njohjes*, Tiranë, 2008, pg. 27.

Different views on the way of language acquisition by children have led to the continuation of debates. The immense difficulties that language acquisition itself has, in one hand, and the fact that all normal children are capable of using language when they are still young, has prompted great interest in discovering the truth.

Now, we will have a closer look at how the child is confronted with the language acquisition. The language begins when the child is at about 1 year old, with appearance of the first word. Since the age of 9 months, the child can say “*ba-ba, da-da, ma-ma*”. In order for the pronounced word by the child to be considered as real (true), must phonetically relate to the words pronounced by adults. The child might use a word to express a situation or an object.

The first step to speech is the pronunciation of a single word or the pronunciation of phrases that the child represents as a single word, e.g., “*natën e mirë*” is pronounced as “*e mir*” or the phrase “*ndeze dritën*” is pronounced as “*dita*”. The words that the child pronounces are phonetic convergences of the adults’ words. In this stage the child uses “*holophrases*” (single words that express complex ideas), thus begins to pronounce a single word to communicate a variety of complex ideas. A child say “*mam*” instead of saying “*dua të ha bukë*” (“*I want to eat*”).

The child, at about 18 months old, enters the phase of two words otherwise known as “*telegraphic language*” phase. The child use key words as in a telegram. If the child attempts to say “*Dua të ndez prap dritën*” he will produces this linguistic expression “*pap ditën*”.

As a result of linguistic and non-linguistic process development, and as a result of experience, the children gradually improve their words.

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