

Syntactic Development in First Language Acquisition

(A case study of a child between 32 and 48 months)

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Abstract

In this research paper, the researcher prominently discusses the process of syntactic development in first language acquisition by casting light on the fact that how a child internalizes and composes flawless syntactic rules and structures out of incomplete and insufficient corpus of data (Language Input). What sort of mechanism (built-in-device, Chomsky's term) enables a child to fabricate complex structures before knowing the rudiments of syntax? The study investigates the syntactic developmental process of an Iranian child during 32 and 48 months of life. By observing and recording language production, the writer analyzed and compared the results with some related theoretical assumptions concerning Generative Grammar. The main question being answered in the research is the indicative of the syntactic development of an Iranian child as to be compared with those of other children acquiring other languages to

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approve or disapprove of the universality view of generativists like Chomsky, Lenneberg, Lebaux, Ingram, and Fletcher. The results of the study approves of the regularities and systematic ordering of the universals of language acquisition because there are a great number of similarities between the processes of the Iranian child language development with those of Chomsky's theories.

Key terms

Realism, Reader – based critique (criticism), novel, Interpretive Society, Formalism, Post Structuralist.

1- Introduction

This research paper prominently thrashes out the processes of syntactic development in first language acquisition by throwing effulgent light on the fact that how a child internalizes and composes flawless syntactic rules and structures out of incomplete and insufficient corpus of data (Linguistic Input). What sort of mechanism (built-in-device, Chomsky's term) enables a child to fabricate complex structures before knowing the rudiments of syntax? The study investigates the syntactic developmental processes of an Iranian child during 32 and 48 months of life. By observing and recording language production, the researchers analyzed and compared the results with some related theoretical assumptions concerning Generative Grammar. The main question being answered in the research is the indicative of the syntactic development of an Iranian child as to be compared with those of other children acquiring other languages to approve or disapprove of the universality view of generativists like Chomsky, Lenneberg, Lebaux, Ingram, and Fletcher. The results of the study approves of the regularities and systematic

ordering of the universals of language acquisition because there are a great number of similarities between the processes of the Iranian child language development with those of Chomsky's theories.

2- Significance of the study

First language Acquisition has always been a matter of dispute for a great many scholars in the field of psychology as well as linguistics and philosophy. In this article, the researcher has attempted to elucidate the universality view of language, innateness hypothesis of Noam Chomsky, universal properties of human mind, the relationship between language acquisition and thought variations. Language acquisition-one of the most remarkable characteristics of human beings-has been a subject of interest to linguists, from different aspects, say; theoretical and practical results help us develop general linguistic theories. Linguists hope to know more about the nature of language by investigating different errors children commit during the acquisition process of language. As the days go by linguists and psychologists find more evidence about the mental characteristic of human mind. From the functional point of view, i.e. teaching different languages, literacy, and developing language skills by investigating syntactic development and the acquisition of syntactic theory, we may hope ultimately to be able to give further details about the fundamental questions which any theory of language acquisition seeks to address, the extent to which children's syntactic structure is shaped by innate linguistic principles, the point at which different principles become operative, and the ways in which the relevant principles interact with the child linguistic experiment.

This investigation leads to find a lot about universals of language and so helps teachers to develop language teaching planning (by considering

that children can acquire and progress teaching methods for building up second language as well as first language successfully.

3- Statement of the problem

One of the most significant characteristics of human being is that virtually every single one acquires language at very young age. This fact is even more remarkable considering the full complexity of the system, which is acquired. This is going to approve of the universality of language that any child can acquire any language. The universality of language is perplexing, because it stands in contrast with other cognitive abilities, such as the ability to paint, or to play music or to perform complex mathematical calculations. Such abilities are hardly universal and fail to be mastered, by but any one masters a language. This is one of the mysteries of the book language that any theory should attempt to explain.

Syntacticians now analyze and sometimes even quantify child language data, and they use this kind of evidence along with the traditional adult data to test these theories.

The present research also investigates the development of syntactic structure in Persian based on a longitudinal data collection and research by observing an Iranian child (Case study). Arshia between 32 and 48 months (2:8 and 4 years).

4- Questions of the study

The questions of the present research are as follows:

1. Are syntactic structures programmed to come *ON LINE* at different stages of maturation and is there any sequential order in acquiring such structures between 32 to 48 months? Or are all parameters *ON LINE* immediately from the very early stages of children's syntactic development.

2. If there is any order, what is the order of developing syntactic structures of different stages?
3. Is syntactic acquisition in Persian children like other children systematic or accidental and imitative?
4. Do the processes of Persian Language (as the First language of a child) go with those of other languages to approve of the **UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR?**

5- Hypotheses

The conceived hypotheses of this research are presented as:

1. It seems that the acquisition of syntax and syntactic constructs of a Persian Child follows a **RULE-GOVERNED HIERARCHICAL ORDER** which differs outwardly from one child to another from the temporal point of view. Nevertheless, any child should pass through the same **RULE-GOVERNED HIERARCHICAL ORDER** to acquire the first language.
2. Simple structures tend to emerge before complex ones during the acquisition process in an Iranian child.
3. The Iranian child is assumed to develop syntactic rules of his mother tongue by resorting to a peculiar rule-governed system rather than a random or imitative language development.
4. It seems that the syntactic development of a child approves of the linguistic universals and the Iranian child is not an exception.

6- Goals and Philosophy

Developmental psychologists are engrossed in investigating the processes of language change in children and consequently explaining the nature of the mental processes of human being. The researchers are pondering how it is possible that a child who cannot yet tie his

shoe lace is able to construct very complex structures which are to a great extent similar to those of the adults. The ultimate goal of the study is to investigate the pros and cons of syntactic development in an Iranian child during 32 and 48 months of life. The present research has been concerned with the preliminary nature of initial syntax developed by young children. There are some reasons to this. Firstly, the early pattern speech period is a point at which children sentences are different from the adult counterparts and so represents the most intrinsically interesting stage of development. Secondly, an investigation of children's syntax in this period is the logical point for any serious investigation of acquisition processes by which children develop successive syntactic structures of their native language and also the period at which children perform and represent more and more than before. Thirdly, this is the point at which the hypothesis that different principles of universal grammar come *ON LINE* at different stage of linguistic maturation can most obviously be tested. Finally, the aim of generative syntacticians is to develop a theory of language that is a model of the acquisition of language.

7- Background of the Study

The first research done concerning the developmental processes of L1 acquisition, back in the 4th century, focused on the language production of children without having real contact with the speakers of the Phrygian language. The word *BEKOS* was the first morpheme formed by child, meaning *BREAD* in phrygian, proved the idea that the Egyptian language was not the oldest language but the second one after phrygian. The main sources for the modern study of children language acquisition can be categorized into School of Empiricism and Rationalism, being approved by the works of John Locke, and Descartes consecutively. Carol Chomsky (1969), in her book, *The*

Acquisition of Syntax in Children from 5 to 10, indicates her goal as to answer the pros and cons of syntactic development and the possible practical device to enable the child to go through such a complex mental process. The research indicates that children at the age of 5-10, are actively involved in the process of constructing very complex structures.

Herrick and Jacobson (1955) in “children and language Arts” have discussed the functions of linguistic arts in the first years of school in children. In this book they investigate language skills and the function of language in children’s learning.

Lenneberg (1968) in “*Foundations of language development*” has investigated phonological and grammatical development, function of cognitive structure in acquisition and linguistic similarities in two stages of syntactic development. Producing negative and interrogative constructions have also been discussed. Brown (1973) in his book “A first language: the early stages” has investigated semantic and grammatical aspect of language development of three cases. In this book Brown has compared his finding with some recent researches on psychology and linguistics. Bowerman (1973) in his book “Basic syntactic Development” has investigated syntactic development in Finnish. His work is a longitudinal study on two Finnish children and a comparison with American Samoan and Luo children. He has also discussed Universal Language, Generative Grammar, case grammar and pivot grammar in these languages. Romain (1984) in his book “language of children and Adolescents” has compared language syntax of children and adults. He has also discussed different linguistic theories in language acquisition, psychological aspect in learning relative clause and passive constructions. Fletcher and Garman (1986) in his book “language Acquisition” have provided a complete explanation on language development. Crystal (1988) in

“child language: learning and linguistics” has investigated linguistic and cognitive development. He has also considered imitation as the first step of language acquisition.

Ingram (1988) in his book “language Acquisition: method, Description and Explanation” has discussed some points on *phonomorphosyntagmatiz* development in language acquisition.

Frazier (1990) in his book “language processing and language Acquisition” has considered the function of language processing and grammatical acquisition.

Radford (1990) in “syntactic theory and the acquisition of syntax” has investigated initial period in syntactic acquisition. Linguistic introduction has investigated syntactic Acquisition according to Chomskyan Generative Grammar. Clashen (1991) in his book “child language and developmental Dysphasia” has investigated morphological and syntactic development in normal and dysphasic children. He has considered grammar of children in their 3 years old.

Eliot (1994) in “child language” has investigated children Grammar and syntactic acquisition especially by focusing on the system of word order, acquisition of interrogative, passive and active constructions.

Clashen (1996) in his book “Generative perspective of acquisition” has considered the relationship between language acquisition and theoretical linguistics by focusing on syntactic acquisition in the framework of Chomskyan Generative Grammar.

Hoff-Ginsberg (1997) in his book “language development” has provided some important questions:

- Is language acquisition the result of nature or nurture?
- Is human faculty for learning language the result of linguistic Knowledge or cognitive one?
- What’s the relationship between communicative function of formal construction in children?

Barret (1999) in his “language development” has considered different aspect and stages of language development. Barret has also referred to the theories of Tomasselo and Brook in grammatical development in children between 3 to 5 years old.

8- Methodology

In the present research the method of longitudinal case study has been used. The data was collected from the natural conversation of a child during 18 months (32-48 months) in the from of writing or recording his daily speed. Comparing different theories in language acquisition in generative grammar has done data analysis. For analyzing data, the information of per month was classified and analyzed according to theoretical framework of different theories on syntactic analysis, the child’s new productions and errors comparing to adult’s production have been considered.

9- Data Analysis and Interpretation

The researchers have investigated and analyzed the syntactic development of the Iranian child per month starting from the month 32 to 48, say; from 2/9 to 4 years old. The procedural monthly development of the research is represented as follows:

Months of Age

Following, you will find the step by step (monthly) procedures for analyzing the child’s syntactic structures.

A. From 32 to 33

Arshia has produced simple structures rather than complex ones, content words more than function words, and finally he

showed omissions of function words. At this month the baby is well aware of the nouns, but is not able to use them as the object or subject of the sentences he may produce.

B. From 33 to 34

Arshia still uses some simple structures in his speech, but in some cases he has shown the emergence towards producing some compound structures as well as simple ones but it is not very eye-catching.

C. From 34 to 35

This month is the emergence of longer utterances and Arshia shows more tendencies to produce longer utterances. Compound sentences are produced with the absence of connective words.

D. From 35 to 36

Compound sentences have proven to grow more in number and occurrence and for the first time the child has produced a compound sentence consisting of three sentences. Still there is no sign of connective word, except “Ke” in Persian which is equal with **THAT** of English.

E. From 36 to 37

Simple sentences have proven to be much more in number and mostly involve statements and declaratives. Arshia’s utterance is still devoid of any interrogatives and negative sentences are so scant.

F. From 37 to 38

At this age Arshia started forming interrogative sentences using question words. The range of questions is so high because he asks questions about anything he touches, smells, sees and hears. Arshia is curious about everything at this age.

G. From 38 to 39

Simple and compound sentences have started to become longer and some sporadic negative and question forms tend to emerge. The frequency of the question word *CHERA* meaning *WHY* in English was more than other question words.

H. From 39 to 40

The frequency of compound sentences has gone up at this age, and the absence of connectives was quite eye-catching.

I. From 40 to 41

Simple sentences are more frequent and function words like *determines* are added to the sentences.

J. From 41 to 42

No serious changes were observed.

K. From 42 to 43

Arshia has produced more complex compound sentences without any connective word. Overregularization has started to emerge.

L. From 43 to 44

No serious changes were observed.

M. From 44 to 45

Arshia is approaching the adult's speech, although the theme of his speech is quite childlike.

N. From 45 to 46

The sentences are simple but longer than before. There is a sign of adverbs, and adjectives along with the complement roles. Arshia's language is becoming very similar to that of the adults.

O. From 46 to 47

Noun phrases, prepositional phrases and finally adverbial phrases tend to emerge at this phase. Arshia has problem with plural suffix.

P. From 47 to 48

The analysis of the last month of the study indicates that Arshia has developed syntactic rules to a great extent. He can now tell a story if he is being asked to. The *SHAPOLLO* instead of *APOLLO* is a nice way Arshia has used to call a small toy missile he plays with.

10- Findings and Implication

The present research presents several findings on the acquisition of the structures of the Persian language. The allotted period, say sixteen months of language development, is divided up into three major

stages. The first stage is from 32 to 37, the second stage is from 38 to 42, and the last stage is from 43 to 48. This is done to help the researchers to conveniently come up with more categorized and tangible results. In stage 1, gradual structural building of the sentences is observed. Sentences of English speaking children in the first period of structural development are like small clause in adult language, Radford 1990. Missing arguments, one of the best known characteristics of early child speech, is that certain obligatory constituents of the adult sentences are sometimes missing from the child's counterpart so that early child speech may seem to have a peculiarly elliptical character. This is in harmony with the Hymes theory of language acquisition, 1985. There has been a burgeoning literature in the past few years on the syntax of missing arguments in early child's speech. A number of linguists have argued that children's missing arguments should be analyzed as empty categories, Radford 1990. The potential interest of empty category analysis of missing arguments lie in the fact that the syntax of early categories in child grammars might be argued to provide a direct window on to the contribution which UG makes to the nature of the earliest grammar developed by young children. As Chomsky, 1982, p.63 notes; the property of empty pronouns can hardly be determined inductively from observed phenomena and therefore presumably reflect inner resources of mind. The last months of the first stage some compound and longer compound sentences are observed as being mentioned earlier. It is interesting that most sentences are declarative affirmative and interrogative negative constructions are not sensibly observed, that is in harmony with what Hoff Geinzberg (1990) has declared. Persian speaking children produce adult like affirmative statements while at the same time negative constructions contain many errors specially in producing negative forms of compound verbs.

The second stage, interrogative WH questions are emerged more than Yes/No questions. Scrambling is used by children maybe because the child might not yet be familiar with the word order of his language. The relative clauses are less frequently used by the child. The third stage indicates the development of more structures like relative clauses, interrogatives, negatives, compounds, and affirmatives. The relative clauses prove more consistency and frequency than the previous stage. Sentences are more complete and indicate a complete meaning. The child has embarked on telling very simple stories specially the time and logical sequence. The sentences are logically sequenced in time coordinated with the rest of the sentences being used by the child. At this stage the child is very close to acquiring word order like those of the adults. Concerning coordinate relative clause, we have found a contradiction with the English speaking children (Pre-school children). This is at variance with what Limber (1973) and Menyuk (1971) proposed concerning the coordinate clauses. Iranian children use CRC not only for objects but for subjects as well.

11- Summary

The study investigates the syntactic developmental processes of an Iranian child during 32 and 48 months of life. The results of the study approves of the regularities and systematic ordering of the universals of language in term of Chomsky's theories. This investigation leads to find lot about universals of language and so helps teachers to develop language teaching planning (by considering that children can acquire and progress teaching methods for building up second language as well as first language successfully. It seems that the syntactic development of a child approves of the linguistic universals and the Iranian child is not an exception. Herrick and Jacobson (1995) in

“children and the language Arts” have discussed the functions of linguistic arts in the first years of school in children. Brown (1973) in his book “A first language: the early stage” has investigated semantic and grammatical aspect of language development of three cases. The study shows that compound sentences have proven to grow more in number and occurrence and for the first time the child has produced a compound sentence consisting of three sentences. Arshia has produced more complex compound sentences without any connective word. The present research presents several findings on the acquisition of the structures of the Persian language. Sentences of English speaking children in the first period of structural development are like small clause in adult language, Radford 1990. Scrambling is used by children maybe because the child might not yet be familiar with the word order of his language. The relative clauses are less frequently used by the child. Concerning coordinate relative clause, we have found a contradiction with the English speaking children (Pre-school children).

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Realism and the Reader's Effect

Realism is a controversial term and a multilateral concept which came into existence in the late nineteenth century as a distinct school of thought. Since then, it has been criticized by many approaches. Taking a glance at Realism according to the such a paper in which it will be tried to investigate into three critics different views about Realism and Realist works.

Key terms

Realism, Reader – based critique (criticism), novel, Interpretive Society, Formalism, Post Structuralist.

پیشرفت نحوی در فراگیری زبان اول

(مطالعه موردی کودکان ۳۲ تا ۴۸ ماهه)

اسماعیل باقری دوست^۱

مرجان طاهری اسکویی^۲

در تحقیق حاضر بطور مشهود فرایند پیشرفت نحوی در فراگیری زبان اول بررسی می شود تا با این شیوه این واقعیت روشن شود که چگونه کودک ساختار و قوانین نحوی را بدون داشتن اطلاعات کافی و کامل (داده های زبانی) می سازد و ملکه ذهن خود می کند. کدام مکانیسم (براساس اصطلاح شناسی رایج چامسکیایی) کودک را قادر می سازد تا ساختارهای پیچیده ای را پیش از دانستن اصول نحو بسازد؟ این تحقیق فرایند پیشرفت نحوی کودکان ایرانی ۳۲ تا ۴۸ ماهگی را بررسی می کند. با مشاهده و ضبط تولید زبانی، نتایج با فرض های نظری با توجه به دستور زایشی تحلیل و مقایسه می شود. سؤال اصلی که در این تحقیق به آن پاسخ داده می شود، حاکی از پیشرفت نحوی کودکان ایرانی در مقایسه با فراگیری کودکان زبان های دیگر است تا نگرش همگانی های زبانشناسان زایشی نظیر چامسکی، لبرگ، لباکس، اینگرام و فلچر را تایید یا رد نماید. نتایج این تحقیق با نظم و قاعده جهانی های فراگیری زبان موافق است زیرا تشابه های زیادی بین فرایند پیشرفت زبانی کودکان با نظریه های چامسکی وجود دارد.

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