

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 449 536

CS 510 497

AUTHOR Mushi, Selina L. P.
TITLE Parents' Role in Their Children's Language Acquisition.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Correlation; *Language Acquisition; Language Research; *Oral Language; *Parent Attitudes; *Parent Role; Preschool Children; Preschool Education
IDENTIFIERS Illinois (Chicago)

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted in 32 families in Chicago, with children ranging from 18 months to 5 years, to examine the role of parents in their young children's language acquisition. Specifically investigated were parents' attitudes on language acquisition, opportunities used to prompt their youngsters to say a new word/utterance, and the utterances learned. Four instruments were used to collect data: a parents' questionnaire which provided background information on attitudes about language and languages used in the family; a word acquisition chart which documented prompts, contexts, words/utterances heard and learned in their complexity; audio-recording which provided parent-child linguistic interaction and complexity in a natural setting; and parent interviews which helped the researcher clarify observations as a way of cross-checking the study's internal validity. Findings suggest that parents used various strategies and prompts to help their children in acquiring new words and structures. A multiple correlation analysis indicated that: parent attitudes and beliefs were related to their children's acquisition of language; and hearing "a lot of language" was positively related to producing "a lot of language." All the parents indicated that school had a strong influence on their children's acquisition of new English words, but family/home played a significant role in nurturing language acquisition and development in general. (Contains 18 references.) (NKA)

Parents' Role in their Children's Language Acquisition.

by Selina L.P. Mushi

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS
BEEN GRANTED BY

S. L. P. Mushi

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

PARENTS' ROLE IN THEIR CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

*Dr. Selina Mushi, Department of Teacher Education,
Early Childhood Education Program
Northeastern Illinois University*

Introduction

There are many approaches to understanding language acquisition and development, but none of them can fully explain how children acquire language, what they need at each stage of language development, and how best to meet those needs. Researchers tend to explore different factors in terms of their contribution to young children's acquisition of language. Studying different factors systematically increases the knowledge available on how language acquisition can be supported and enhanced. This is a summary of a study on the role of parents in their young children's language acquisition. The study was conducted in 32 families in Chicago, with children ranging from 18 months to five years. This age group was important because children need language more and more to get their needs met, especially with the introduction of schooling and other activities outside the home.

Research has documented strategies such as scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1987), "expansion" and "recasts" (Berk 1999:360), "expansion" and "extension" (Hulit & Howard, 1997: 149). While these strategies help children use words and sentence structures they learn, they are not universal (Marcus, 1993; Valian, 1993), yet all typically developing children experience strong urge to communicate and be socially connected. The current study goes further to

investigate parents attitudes on language acquisition, opportunities used to prompt their young children to say a new word/utterance, and the utterances learned.

Conceptual Framework

Research has indicated that children acquire the receptive skills of language before they acquire the productive skills (Krashen, 1981, 1982; Ingram, 1975; Piaget, 1966). This means that children hear and attach meanings to words before they can pronounce them. The two processes, comprehension and production, then support each other. For example, if a child is able to ask "when", the child certainly has acquired a sense of time. Hearing words and attaching some meanings to them implies interaction with other people, usually parents. *How much language do young children hear at home? How much language do they produce? What prompts do parents use to create the need for their children to say a new word?*

It is not surprising that in some cultures linguistic interaction occurs even with newborn babies, who cannot understand the language but react to it in certain noticeable ways. It is documented that linguistic interaction, especially in the form of conversation is consistently related to language progress in early childhood (Hart & Ridley, 1995; McCartney, 1984). Psycholinguists have found that babies are quite competent in perceiving speech sounds. Within the first few months babies were found to be able to distinguish among some consonant and vowel sounds, intonations, pitch, and loudness (Trehub, 1976, Morse, 1972; Bench, 1969; Bridger, 1961). Brain research has also suggested that the

more a child is stimulated by linguistic input the more the brain strengthens synaptic connections and neuron myelination for language development (Johnson, 1998). Neurons that are rarely stimulated lose their connective fibers thus reducing the number of synapses ("Synaptic pruning") (Berk, 1999: 297). Linguistic interaction at an early age is therefore important for cognitive development, especially

for acquiring language. How early do parents or other adults start interacting linguistically with young children?

Evidence has also suggested that young children perceive language differently from other sounds. Newborn babies were found to display more activity in the left side of their brains when they heard language, and more activity on the right side of their brains when they heard music (Molfese, Freeman, and Palemo, 1975). This "natural inclination" to language is in line with the perception that children are "wired" for language (Chomsky, 1968; Hockett, 1960). However, it has been argued strongly that the nativist explanation for language acquisition is far from enough to explain how children acquire and develop language.

Other theoretical approaches to understanding language acquisition, i.e., behaviorist, cognitive, pragmatic, social interactionist and information processing interpretations have suggested other reasonably sound approaches. While theoretical approaches will continue to be debated, practical observations and interpretations of children learning language often draw from the different approaches in the effort to explain the myriad of factors that take place in the process of acquiring language. One such important factor is the role of parents:

What are parents' attitudes towards language acquisition and how do the attitudes practically influence their linguistic interaction with their children?

Children develop "perceptual maps" that direct them towards the sounds of the language they hear most frequently, and away from the sounds of other languages they don't hear as often (Newberger, 1997:24). Naming things and actions at home or school will influence the words a child picks up. Young children are bombarded with toys and

materials to interact with. *Does the selection of toys and materials at home or school influence the words acquired and used? How?*

Method

Four instruments were used to collect data for the study: a parents' questionnaire, a word acquisition chart, audio-recording and parent interviews. The questionnaire provided general background information on attitudes about language and languages used in the family. The word chart documented prompts, contexts, words/utterances heard and learned and their complexity; audio-recording provided parent-child linguistic interaction and complexity in a natural setting; and parent interviews helped the researcher clarify her observations as a way of cross-checking internal validity of the study.

Findings

Some important clues featured from the analysis of data from the parents' questionnaires. Parents used various strategies and prompts to help their children in acquiring new words and structures. It seemed the parents were more active in their children's language acquisition than research has indicated in the past. A multiple correlation analysis indicated that: Parent attitudes and beliefs were related to their children's acquisition of language; hearing "a lot of language" (a word/utterance or two every 5 minutes) was positively related to producing "a lot of language". It was not clear whether the complexity of the language heard from parents was related to the complexity of language produced, and how. Parent interview responses indicated that "meaning shaping" (for lack of better term) by parents seemed to be taking place, selection of toys and materials had some influence on naming of objects and actions.

All the parents in the study indicated that school had a strong influence on their children's acquisition of new English words, but family/home played a significant role in nurturing language acquisition and development in general. Parents, and especially mothers spent a lot of time with their children, communicating through language. It was apparent from the tapes that the mothers used much more advanced language than the children could easily understand. However, repetition and non-verbal gestures helped the children make sense of their mothers' linguistic interactions. Sometimes the mother would say something and at the same time doing it, so the child could relate the mother's action and linguistic production.

Siblings played an important role in helping their younger brothers or sisters acquire new words in the mother tongue. The older children would translate words from English to the other tongue, for the younger children to understand their meaning. It seemed that children that were born other countries had a better grasp of their mother tongue, compared to children born in the United States, age not withstanding.

All the participating parents indicated that it was very important for their children to acquire both English and their mother tongue. English was seen as the language of education and advancement, while the mother tongue was in some cases seen as a tool for social learning within the family and in the community. Parents believed that for their children to understand the important values of their culture, the children would have to be able to speak and understand their mother tongue.

References

- Bench, J. (1969). Audio-frequency and Audio-discrimination in the Human Neonate. *International Audiology*, 8, 615-625
- Berk, L. E. (1999). *Infants, Children, and Adolescents*, Third Edition, Needham Heights, MA, Allyn & Bacon.
- Bridger, W. (1961). Sensory Habituation and Disabituaton in the Human Neonate. *American Journal of Psychology*, 117, 991-996.
- Chomsky, N. (1968). *Language and Mind*. New York: Harcourt Brace & World.
- Hart, B. & Ridley, T. R. (1995). *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*. Baltimore, Paul H. Brookes.
- Hockett, C, Johnson, (1960). The Origin of Speech. *Scientific American*, 203, 89-97.
- Huit, L. M. Howard, M. R. (1997). *Born To Talk*. Second Edition. Needham Height: Allyn & Bacon.
- Ingram, D. (1975). The Acquisition of Fricatives and Affricatives, in Normal and Linguistically Deviant Children. In A. Carramazza & E. Zuriff (Eds.), *The Acquisition and Breakdown of Language*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University press.
- Johnson, M. H. (1998). The Neural Basis of Cognitive Development. In D. Khan, & R. S. Siegler (Eds.). *Handbook of Child Psychology, Vol 2, Cognition, Perception and Language* (pp.1-49) New York: Wiley.
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press
- Marcus, G. F. (1993). Negative Evidence in Language Acquisition. *Cognition*, 46, 53-85.
- McCartney, K. (1994). The Effect of Quality of Day Care Environment Upon Children's Language Development. *Developmental Psychology*, 20, 244-260.
- Molfese, D. I. Freeman, R. B. & Polemo, D. S. (1975). The Ontogeny of Brain Lateralization in Speech and Non-speech Stimuli. *Brain and Language*, 2, 356-368.
- Morse, P. A. (1972). The Discrimination of Speech and Non-speech Stimuli in Early Infancy. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*. 14, 477-492.
- Piaget, J. (1966). Time Perception in Children. In. J. Frazer, (Ed.). *The Voice of Time*, New York: Braziller.
- Trehub, S. E. (1976). The Discrimination of Foreign Speech Sound by Infants and Adults. *Child Development*, 47, 466-672.
- Valian, V. V. (1993). *Parental Replies: Linguistic Status and Didactic Role*. Cambridge, MA, MIT

Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1987). Thinking and Speech. In R. W. Rieber, A. S. Carton, (Eds.) & N. Minick (Trans.). The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky, Vol 1, Problems of General Psychology (pp37-285) New York: Plenum. (Original work published 1934).



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
 (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



Reproduction Release

(Specific Document)

CS 510 497

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: <i>Parents' Role in their Children's Language Acquisition</i>	
Author(s): <i>Selina L. P. Mushi, P.h.D.</i>	
Corporate Source:	Publication Date:


II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, Resources in Education (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign in the indicated space following.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents
<p>PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)</p>	<p>PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)</p>	<p>PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)</p>
Level 1	Level 2A	Level 2B
<p>↑</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>↑</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>↑</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>
Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g. electronic) and paper copy.	Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only	Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only
<p>Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.</p>		

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche, or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Signature: 	Printed Name/Position/Title: Dr. Selina Mushi (Ph.D.), Assistant Professor	
Organization/Address: Northeastern Illinois Univ. 5500 N. St. Louis Av. Chicago IL 60625	Telephone: (773) 442-5382	Fax:
	E-mail Address: S-Mushi@neiu.edu	Date: Jan 01, 2001

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706
Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: <http://ericfac.piccard.csc.com>

EFF-088 (Rev. 9/97)