Examining Three Crucial Second Language Acquisition Theories and their Relationship in the Acquisition Process by a Six-Year-Old Nicaraguan Girl[1]

Julio César Roa Rocha[2], National Autonomous University of Nicaragua,
UNAN-Managua, FAREM-Matagalpa

Abstract

Some theories of second language acquisition have had a major influence on the teaching and learning of a second language. This study reports the acquisition of English as a second language over a six-month period by a six-year-old Nicaraguan girl. Findings are based on a cross-sectional study and data that come from observation, journaling, and video recording. There are many beliefs, arguments, and controversies about the importance of being exposed to a language at an early age and the roles that these three vital theories play: behaviorism, innatism and interactionism. Hence, this study sought to investigate the importance of an early start in language acquisition and the role these three core second language theories played in the process. The data collected adds evidence to the theory that age plays a significant role in acquiring a language. The three theories used in this study were found to be present in the process of how this child learned or acquired a language. The use of these theories could serve as a basis for teaching English to children.

Resumen

Algunas teorías sobre la adquisición de una segunda lengua han tenido una influencia predominante en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua. Este estudio reporta la adquisición del inglés como segundo idioma d2urante un período de seis meses por una niña nicaragüense de seis años. Los hallazgos se basan en un estudio transversal y datos que provienen de la observación, el registro en un diario y la grabación de video. Existen muchas creencias, argumentos y controversias sobre la importancia de estar expuesto a un idioma en una edad temprana y los roles que juegan estas tres teorías vitales: conductismo, innatismo e interaccionismo. Por lo tanto, este estudio buscó investigar la importancia de un comienzo temprano en la adquisición del lenguaje y el papel que estas tres teorías centrales de la segunda lengua jugaron en el proceso. Los datos recopilados indican que la edad juega un papel importante en la adquisición de un idioma. Las tres teorías utilizadas en este estudio tienen una fuerte presencia en el proceso sobre cómo un niño aprende o adquiere un idioma, y pueden ser utilizadas como rutas para iniciar la enseñanza de inglés para niños.

Introduction

There are many theories and hypotheses that state the earlier a child is exposed to a language the better it is. Lenneberg (1997) mentions the sensitive period in order to refer to a specific time period where babies start building language skills. During this journey, they undergo different stages, which are temporary and vital for their language development. Noam Chomsky (1965), places emphasis on the innate ability a child possesses to pick up languages, which is nurtured along their lives.

Given this notion, there is a growing interest in learning or acquiring another language at early ages. Parents are interested in having their children learn another language due to the young mind's flexibility and the countless hypotheses, which favor the learning of a language at an early age. There is also a growing interest on behalf of teachers, parents, and researchers for seeking effective ways of teaching children.

While there is no formal research on this, personal observation has shown that in Nicaragua, there is a growing interest in exposing children to a second language at early ages. Many parents enroll their young children at private academies whose purpose is to produce bilingual children. It is worth mentioning, as part of the background, that the English language in Nicaragua is taught in public high schools from first year to fifth year. The age students normally arrive at high school ranges between 12 and 13. In the case of private schools, there are many that offer English in elementary school as well. Based on my personal experience, students who take English at elementary schools have an uncomplicated transition to their English class when they get to secondary school compared to those students who do their studies at public schools.

Despite the fact that most of English learners in Nicaragua start at the age of twelve, there has been a growing concern by some parents in having their children learn a second language at early ages.

---

[2] juliorn27@yahoo.com

Unfortunately, as mentioned above, second language learning has been a neglected area in Nicaragua in terms of research, and there is no previous work that addresses this field specifically. This study seeks to fill that gap and serves as a guide for parents, researchers, and teachers, who want to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.

In spite of shortcomings in second language learning in Nicaragua, it is imperative to address the issue and investigate the second language learning process. Hence, this study investigates whether a child can learn a second language better when exposed it at an early age .

Krashen (1988) makes a distinction between second language acquisition process and second language learning. Language acquisition is defined as a subconscious process and language learning is mostly a procedure, in which the person is aware and sensitive to what is happening. This paper used the term "second language acquisition" during this investigation, given the nature of how data were collected.

To sum up, this qualitative research study seeks to describe the process a child undergoes when acquiring a language, the importance of age, and the value of the role that these well-known linguistic theories play during the process: behaviorism, innatism and interactionism.

Literature Review

Children and the learning/acquisition process

The process of how children learn or acquire a language has been a significant issue in disciplines such as psychology and linguistics. Both have contributed to the field due to their close relationship and paradigms. For example, psycholinguistics is a hybrid term of psychology and linguistics, that focuses on linguistic behavior and the psychological process (Crystal, 1985). Psycholinguistics, as Lehmann (1976) points out, "is the study of the relation of language and behavior" (p.27). On the other hand, Chomsky (1968) defines "linguistics as the study of human language" (p.100). An example of this is second language acquisition (SLA), which has contributed significantly how languages are learned or acquired from multiple perspectives. Gass and Selinker (2008) provide an ample definition of SLA, which "refers to the process of learning another language after the native language has been learned, regardless of whether it is the second, third, fourth, or fifth language" (p.7). Corder (1973) states that "language acquisition takes place in childhood when a child grows physically and mentally and language learning occurs after the first language has been mastered" (p.107).

To give an example, an issue in second language acquisition is the existence of the "critical period," which states that certain aspects of language need to be learned within a specific time limit and with little effort (Lenneberg, 1967). Johnson and Newport (1989) hold two different viewpoints regarding critical period: "first, humans have a superior capacity for acquiring language that need to be exercised or it might disappear. Second, humans have a superior capacity for acquiring language that might decline with maturation" (p.64). Chomsky (1957) defends the position that children hold innate knowledge that facilitates the development of language grammar. There are many theories that attempt to explain the fascinating facets that children go through, as they learn or acquire a language.

Three fundamental theories

The following discussion provides information of the three fundamental theories, which will guide this study: behaviorist learning theory, innatist theory, and interactionist theory.

First, psychologist Skinner (1957) associates language development with the environmental influence, in which learning takes place by imitating and repeating adults' speech. The child is expected to learn behaviors encountered in the environment and eventually form habits. The behaviors learned will be based on stimuli and responses that will become strong in the way they are reinforced. Positive reinforcement has a high value. A child's successful attempt is rewarded and an unsuccessful utterance is not.

An objection to Skinner's theory is that language is not only about imitation, positive or negative reinforcement, but a set of structures and rules that need to be applied. This theory was criticized by Noam Chomsky (1965), who argued that the process of learning may not only depend on the input and language the child receives from adults, but also on their own innate ability. Although it is important to point out that most of Chomsky's work was based on grammar explanations and language. However, it must be mentioned that did not specifically discuss the parents influence on their child's acquisition of language.

Second, the innatist theory, proposed by Chomsky (Pinker, 1994) argues that children's brains have a special innate ability to learn a language. He called this the language acquisition device (LAD). It is an inborn predisposition that they bring with them from birth, which guides them in the language acquisition process. Chomsky argued this innate capacity, which contains knowledge that helps them learn languages while they listen to and interact with the environment (Pinker, 1994).

Lenneberg (1967) provided support for Chomsky's claim by putting forward that there is a biological period of life during which language can be acquired easily. He named this the critical period hypothesis (CPH). He suggested that language becomes difficult to acquire beyond this optimal period. From these points, Dunn (1984) established three important stages related to oral communication in young learners: silent period, intermediate period, and breakthrough period. First, the silent period is considered a passive stage in learning, which the child stores information received. Second, the child moves periodically to a stage, in which they attempt to produce language, mostly based on prefabricated language, imitation, and repetition received from interaction with adults. Third, the breakthrough period is the stage, in which the child puts all learning together to add more information to the existing body of knowledge and subsequently express meaning.

It is important to point out that not all second language learners follow these stages because there are other factors that may affect the order and process as well. Clark (2009) stated that "even if children are born with a learning mechanism dedicated to language, the main purpose is to focus only on syntactic. The rest has to be learnt" (p. 2). Even if the LAD exists, children require social interaction to develop their linguistic skills. There is still a controversial viewpoint regarding Chomsky's theory, which defends that language is rule-governed built around the existence of a universal grammar. To some extent, both theories, the behaviorist and innate theories, seem complementary.

Third, the interactionist theory was presented by Vygotsky (1980), a Russian psychologist and constructivist, who defended the point that social interaction is fundamental in the development of cognition and learning process, and who saw learning as the result of interaction and socialization. From that point, Vygotsky (1962, 1978) introduced the hypothesis of the Zone of Proximal Development defined as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance of and in a collaboration with more capable peers" (p.86). This theory puts emphasis on the fundamental role that adults and peers play in the co-construction of knowledge while children engage and interact altogether. For example, Hatch (1978) defended the point that learners develop syntactic structures when they verbally interact and use the language in conversation.

Gass (1997) concluded that negotiation that occurs during the social interaction pushes learners to go beyond their current language level. For example, in his study, Day (1984) found that the high-input generator group (learners whose very actions stimulated communication) started much of the interaction that occurred with the teacher and their peers compared to the low-input generator group that remained passive in activities that required interaction and avoided interaction. Although the subjects of the study were limited to three in each category of high-input generator and low- input generator, it had interesting implications.

Lightbrown and Spada (1999) argued that learners become more proficient when they interact with their teachers and peers who possess a higher-language proficiency. The fact of having a higher-proficiency level provides teachers and peers with an opportunity to scaffold structures and provide support to learners.

Krashen (1988) developed the input hypothesis, which claims learners make progress as long as they receive comprehensible input just beyond the level of their linguistic competence. In addition to Krashen's hypothesis, Swain (1993) suggested that to be a successful learner, comprehensible output was also necessary. That is to say, failure in communication leads the learner to see that there is a space between his linguistic knowledge and production that needs to be filled. The importance of noticing these two aspects is that learner is able to be aware of what he can say and needs to say, eventually adjust his output and add new knowledge.

Undoubtedly, many theories have attempted to analyze and examine the process of language learning and language acquisition. In brief, understanding these three theories gives a better understanding of second language acquisition. These theories provide ample knowledge of the nature of language and the mystery of how humans learn or acquire languages. They can also provide a better explanation of the learning

process to be a successful learner and to avoid failure. There are many theories that have attempted to explain how children learn or acquire language, but they have failed to precisely clear up some doubts.

This study attempted, somehow, to add to these three important theories, offering the case of a six-year-old Nicaraguan girl acquiring English as her second language.

Research Questions

1. Is it possible to identify any evidence of the importance of age on early language acquisition through the study of one child?

2. What is the relationship between the child's language acquisition process and behaviorism, innatism, and interactionism?

It is hoped that the results of this study may add to the existing information about the acquisition of a second language. This study could also serve as a guide for parents who want to have more understanding and awareness of the process their children may follow toward the acquisition of English in a country where this language is not the official. Teachers could also use this study as a guide to help them prepare their lessons.

Methodology

This research study was conducted using a qualitative research method: A case study. Given the fundamental role case study has played in studying first and second language acquisition, it was decided to use this research approach. For the purpose of this research, case study is defined as the study of one case, as it occurs in its natural environment (Johnson, 1992). Besides investigating a single individual or entity, a case study is longitudinal. That is to say, the researcher has the opportunity to focus his attention on a single unit for a long period of time, which is the main strength of this approach.

Duff (2008) states that a longitudinal case study "examines development and performance over time" (p. 40). To give an example, Celce-Murcia (1978) documented the process of bilingualism of her daughter between French and English. Conducting a study on one single unit provides the researcher with the opportunity to examine a particular case thoroughly and obtain an ample understanding of the phenomenon, if possible, including participants who may provide their point of view of the case and eventually triangulate the information (Duff, 2008).

My role in this study was that of researcher participant-observer. The research process began exploring the phenomenon and formulating two questions to guide the inquiry. Then, important literature related to SLA was examined and some important points were selected. The research techniques used were unstructured observation, journaling, and video analysis.

Participant

The participant in this study was Phoebe, my daughter. Phoebe was born on July 4, 2012, in Nicaragua, and, by the time the study began, she was six years old. Phoebe's native language was Spanish. This study was based on regular observation and recording of her verbal behavior while learning a second language. For the purpose of this research, a thematic unit containing topics of interest for children (see Appendix 1) was created. This thematic unit provided a list of topics to follow during the research process. Music videos from *YouTube* were used for her to sing while reinforcing topics. Other techniques were also utilized to elicit language production, such as role play, flashcards, singing, and interactive games.

I became interested in investigating Phoebe's second language acquisition after reading important SLA theories that created in me some intrigue to understand and explore them. In the beginning, I was not sure this idea was going to work. However, I decided to embark on this new journey. In this research study, the interaction between my daughter and I were part of the natural relationship as learner and teacher.

Having developed knowledge of theories and approaches related to the second language acquisition process, being a teacher-trainer, and being a parent provided me with the curiosity and interest in attempting to understand, in depth, the process and development children undergo when they acquire a second language.

I decided to publish my study in a professional journal to provide parents and educators with a guide to help their children in the journey of acquiring a second language. Especially, with this study, I wanted to

motivate parents who speak a second language to take advantage of it as a catalyst to help their children take the journey of acquiring a new language.

As I conducted this study, I wondered how many teachers teach a language other than their children's mother tongue, but, due to all the required tasks as educators, they miss the opportunity to encourage and assist their children in the acquisition of another language. With my study, I hope to strongly motivate parents to teach their children a foreign language. Though I will not be providing a precise recipe to follow, hopefully, I will share some insights of how to begin and what existing theories may guide you during the process.

Data collection

This study was designed using qualitative research methods. Qualitative research deals with collecting and analyzing non-numerical to understand concepts, opinions or experiences. As human beings interact with their environment, they explore their real world (Cropley, 2015). In order to collect this data, the instruments used were unstructured participant-observation, journaling, and video analysis.

Observation is considered a hallmark in collecting research data, especially participant observation. According to Ñaupas Paitán et al. (2018), participant-observation permits researcher to come close to the problem under investigation and understand it in depth. This means the researcher has two functions in the research process, that of participant and observer. In this particular case, observation is focused on the participant's verbal behavior and interaction with the material provided. The other research technique used was the journal. Journaling is an excellent tool that provides opportunity to have an internal dialog between the researcher and the setting over a period of time (Bartel, 2005). Finally, video recording was used to catch spontaneous information. Video recording is considered an authentic form of obtaining data in qualitative research because it catches important moments that can be used later for examination in great detail (Jankowsky, 1992).

Data analysis

In the process of the data analysis, the oral production from the videos and the notes gathered from observation and journaling were clearly examined. The analysis process was guided using three fundamental theories: behaviorism, innatism and interactionism. These three theories were contrasted with the findings from the video, observation, and journaling to provide data about the strengths and weaknesses of the theories presented, as well as to understand their relationship within the acquisition process. It is worth mentioning that some teaching techniques (e.g., flashcards, *YouTube* videos, role play, and interactive games) were used to elicit language. Also, a thematic unit was created to guide the interaction between the researcher and participant. This thematic unit was developed using important topics in English language learning (see Appendix 1). Finally, data obtained was analyzed, using the systems proposed by Rubin and Rubin (1995): mark ideas in the data, group similar ideas into categories, and relate different ideas one to another.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the observations carried out, it was found that the participant successfully reacted successfully to the learning activities presented. This may support the theory that children are biologically predisposed to learning a language, as long as they are exposed to it while young. Even though children have an inborn talent to learn a language, it is still necessary to activate that innate knowledge, often by explaining and practicing different concepts. For example:

> *The participant was able to differentiate between nouns and verbs. When the researcher said a noun, she pointed, but when the researcher said a verb action, she did the movement.*

This is a language teaching method based on physical movement. For example, the researcher gave commands to the participant in the target language, and she responded with body movement and physical action. Total Physical Response (TPR) was used at the beginning of this research. This method was developed by James Asher (1977) and is very popular in the teaching of young learners due to physical action obtained from instructions. The left side of the brain becomes activated with physical movement.

The observed behavior seems to illustrate that LAD exists and this enabled the participant in this research to acquire language. It is amazing to observe how the participant learned the language spontaneously.

Nevertheless, even though have innate language abilities as Noam Chomsky said, interaction also plays a crucial role in the child's language experience and cognitive development (Pinker, 1994). Children can

successfully develop their linguistic skills successfully, as long as they have interaction with other children or adults, which permits them to hear and use language (De Houwer, 2009; Tomasello et al., 1993).

For example:

> I noticed that the interaction between me and the participant was always followed by a physical response. Based on this observation, language was learned from listening primarily and followed by a physical movement. I dare say that listening was the main means of interaction between the participant and language.

Human learning also stems from social experience that influences when children attempt to interact with adults. The physical movement may be understood as means of communication between the participant and researcher. Based on this study, It can be suggested that the child's language development is determined by their experience with the language and their innate ability to learn. Through the experience and socialization with the language, the child has the opportunity to interact, imitate and reconstruct knowledge by herself. For instance, Vygotsky, as cited in Lightbown and Spada (1999), saw interaction as the main pillar for language development.

Second, after analyzing the video, it was found that the participant responded successfully to each of the activities. In repeating review of the videotapes, patterns were found to display aspects of the natural process. The patterns found are discussed below, supporting the idea that children comprehend language before they actually produce it. For example:

> Singing was one of her favorite activities. She enjoyed singing and doing the movements. Singing provided her with language segments which allowed language construction. One day we sang together "Head and Shoulders." On the next day, I heard the participant singing "Head and Shoulder" using different words of the lyrics. She sang "mouth and lips" and "hair and head." When I watched this, I really wanted to laugh.

Inserting different words to the original lyrics manifested that the participant is becoming creative in the use of the language. This also implies that she is developing intellectually. This is an excellent example of what Chomsky called "the creative aspect of language use," (Chomsky, 1972), the ability to produce language new to her previous experience.

On analyzing the journal, it was seen that many notes were related to imitation. This insinuates that imitation, repetition, socialization, interaction, and the child's language predisposition played a vital role during this study. However, imitation served solely as the main connection between the researcher's and the participant's speech. This did not assure the participant would use language correctly and know what the language used meant. For example:

> When using flashcards to teach vocabulary, I asked the participant to repeat after me. I pointed to the flashcard and said the word slowly. She liked repeating. One day, I found her repeating words by herself. It seemed to me she was acting like the teacher. Something I noticed was that she enjoyed repeating after me while I was lowering and raising my voice. Later, I said the word quickly. It was like playing with her but learning at the same time.

Something interesting about imitation is that children decide, which words to imitate. For example:

> She liked to imitate and repeat words related to body movements, such as: jump, sit down, touch your eyes, open your eyes…

When using flashcards, the participant could not use present progressive and preferred using simple present. For instance:

Researcher: *Look, what is this boy doing?*

Participant: *He read.*

Researcher: *Oh, he is reading (I said).*

Participant: *He is reading (she repeats).*

Researcher: *What is this girl doing?*

Participant: *I don't know. She eat.*

Researcher: *She is eating apples (I said).*

Participant: *Apple (she answered, avoiding a long answer).*

The participant grasped new vocabulary easily. It is important to mention that the participant, by the time of this research, she was quite literate in Spanish. The fact that she picked up English vocabulary easily concurs with Palermo et al. (2014) study. This study was conducted with 100 Spanish-speaking preschoolers and found that preschool children who developed strong Spanish skills from their home environment and inside the classroom also improved their English vocabulary skills.

Another important observation is that the participant enjoyed creating her own learning material. When preparing flashcards, she enjoyed cutting and gluing pictures. As we prepared the flashcards, I taught her English. For instance:

> Researcher: *Let's cut this one now.*
>
> Participant: *This one?*
>
> Researcher: *How do you feel?*
>
> Participant: *Great. You?*
>
> Researcher: *A little tired.*
>
> Participant: *Me, a little. I like cut paper.*
>
> Researcher: *Really. Why?*
>
> Participant: *I like.*

Regarding the importance of age when learning a language, age plays a significant role in acquiring native-like pronunciation, as was predicted by Chomsky's LAD. When I had the participant watch videos from *YouTube*, I asked questions and noticed that she answered with clear pronunciation. She picked up unconsciously the pronunciation from cartoons and used it when answering. For example:

> The word "father" was pronounced by the participant using the voiced th /ð/ correctly. I was really surprised because it is difficult for Spanish speakers to make this sound when we learn English. In Spanish, we do not have the voiced th /ð/ sound.

Finally, I want to share that people from the neighborhood knew my daughter was learning English with me, so they asked her things, such as: *¿Cómo se dice 'Buenos días'?* [How do you say *"Buenos días"* in English?]. She replied, *No sé. No sé* [I don't know. I don't know.] The fact that she was being taught without translation may be the answer to this phenomenon. I only spoke English with the participant and did not translate from English into Spanish or vice versa. I tried to create a learning atmosphere in which language was naturally acquired. However, two native-English speakers, who are friends of mine, said 'Good morning' to her and she replied, 'Good morning.' I personally think children know who they can talk to, or a comfortable talking to, in a foreign language. This example can also be linked to the necessity to communicate with someone whose native language is English.

Interpretation of results

Although this study did not search to offer refutation or refinement of earlier theories in applied linguistics, there is no doubt that the three theories used to guide this study play a significant role in how children learn or acquire a language. For example, the participant enjoyed repeating and imitating adult language. Imitation and repetition was always followed by positive reinforcement, praising. I usually praised the acquisition process during the interaction between me and the participant, but I avoided overpraising. I always tried to strike a balance between positive reinforcement and participant's language progress. In brief, I dare say that imitation and repetition are the first tools to begin interaction with children. This study presents examples in the findings that seem to back up the presence of behaviorism (Skinner, 1957).

However, language is not only about imitation and repetition. Language needs to be activated through interaction, even adding a space though the theory says children have an innate language learning ability. Interaction also plays a crucial role in learning. Through interaction, the child observes how language is used in the environment. The input the child receives from the parent (teacher or peers) is picked up unconsciously, and used spontaneously later. For example, the participant changed the lyric of the song "head and shoulder." It may be said, based on this case, that Phoebe activated her linguistic creativity and the language she picked up from the researcher to build her own language chunks. Therefore, there is strong presence of innatism (Chomsky, 1965) and interactionism theory (Vygotsky, 1980) in the illustration provided.

In this study, the three theories were identifiable during the development and progress of the participant under investigation. These theories can provide one with an ample picture of what options teachers or parents can make implement when teaching their children. I have to admit the three theories intertwined spontaneously and go hand-in-hand. Additionally, the participant's age allowed her to be part of this process naturally and unconsciously. These two factors permitted Phoebe to act actively and increase capability for imitation and repetition. Although this study had no control group of older learners for us to compare to, it seems age might be significant in the language acquisition process. The participant was always opened to new experiences and willing to communicate. Phoebe never manifested a fear of making mistakes, allowing her to interact with the English language freely. She was not aware that she was acquiring a language. This evidence may be related to the fact that Phoebe was acquiring English unconsciously during this study, a process Krashen (1982) referred to as a subconscious process.

Researcher personal reflection

In the subsequent paragraphs, I would like to share personal understanding of what I learned during this process from a father's viewpoint. As mentioned earlier, I really believed this idea of teaching English to my daughter was not going to work out. I doubted at the beginning and wanted to quit. As I began the interaction, I noticed my daughter was reluctant to be part of the lesson. At that moment, I felt that I was not going to be successful. However, as I started using realia from the kitchen and playing, she began enjoying the class.

As one can see in the Appendices, as we moved forward in the research process, I added different topics and used those techniques that worked well, such as the use of flashcards. For example, pointing to the flashcard and asking her to repeat with me worked quite well at the beginning. I have to admit that, based on this experience, working on vocabulary is the best first approach to initiating a child`s second language journey. As I interacted a little bit more, and she gained experience acquiring language through vocabulary, I started using the TPR, in which I said commands and my daughter enjoyed following them. For instance:

> Researcher: *Jump twice.*
>
> Participant: *She jumped twice.*
>
> Researcher: *Stand up.*
>
> Participant: *She stood up.*

In order to give my daughter the opportunity to participate in the research, we reversed roles. I asked her to give commands to me, in English, which was really fun. This activity allowed her to practice language using language segments. After having worked for two months on vocabulary using realia, with basic commands and games, such as *Simon Says*[3] I decided to use role plays. In the role plays, something I noticed is that Phoebe picked up "language segments" easily and was able to use and pronounce them without difficulty.

One of the challenges I faced in this investigation was not to use Phoebe's native language and have her only use the English language. This experience is extremely noteworthy, given that when teachers teach children they usually say that they need to do it in both languages in order to make children understand and be part of the activities. With this short qualitative study, I can say that it is possible to teach the new language without using students` mother tongue, as long as the teacher is well equipped with games and realia. Although Phoebe's English language vocabulary was limited, this fact did not hinder her interaction in the different activities.

To sum up this interpretation of results, I can say that following these four magic steps can help one's child start acquiring a second language: teach vocabulary using realia, use repetition and imitation, play games, and utilize role plays.

Limitations of the study

It was a huge challenge acting as a researcher and participant of this investigation. I missed some important points that occurred during the process of this research. However, I tried to do my best gathering information from the instruments used and capturing the data collected. Most of what I did with

---

[3] Simon says is a game in which one person tells a group to do something (jump, raise their right hands, etc.), always preface by the phrase: "Simon says...". The leader then randomly gives the command without prefacing it with "Simon says..." and those who do the action anyway must leave the game.

Phoebe may not be replicable in the classroom, due to the fact that the information was gathered in a natural setting. It is vital to point out that this study followed a naturalistic approach, in which reality may be seen from multiple standpoints, given its nature. This study goes along with a naturalistic approach, which seeks to understand people's experiences as they take place in their natural environment (Malterud, 2001).

Another challenge we experienced was the limited exposure and lack of practice Phoebe had using the English language with other kids her age. Nonetheless, I can say that her language production showed significant progress despite the limited period of exposure.

Conclusion

This study was successful in providing documentation on the relationship between the child's learning process and these three crucial theories. There are still many controversies, regarding how children learn/acquire a language and multiple arguments against or in favor of the existing theories. However, not all educators are aware of the theories presented. On the other hand, it is difficult to refute or refine these three theories due to the limitation of a small sample study. However, I hope some observations found on specific behaviors can inspire further research studies.

Finally, there is no doubt that these three theories studied can serve as a guide to teach or to create a program for teaching English to children. The age is perhaps an indispensable component in learning or acquiring a language. The implementation of teaching English at an early age can be considered a huge advantage. I would like to motivate, with this short-scale qualitative study, parents who speak English or any other foreign language, to teach their children while playing or interacting at home. Their young age is a great opportunity to grasp the language easily. Besides, these three theories presented in this study can help serve as a beneficial guide in the process.

References

Asher, J. (1997). *Learning another language through actions: The complete teacher's guidebook*. Sky Oaks Productions.

Bartels, N. (2005). Researching applied linguistics in language teacher education. In N. Bartels (Ed.), *Applied linguistics and language teacher education* (pp. 1-16). Springer.

Celce-Murcia, M. (1978). The simultaneous acquisition of English and French in a two-year old child. In E. Hatch (Ed.), *Second language acquisition: A book of readings* (pp. 38-53). Newbury House.

Chomsky, N. (1957). *Syntactic structure*. Mounton and Company.

Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of theory of syntax*. MIT Press.

Chomsky, N. (1968). *Language and mind*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Chomsky, N. (1972). *Language and mind* (2nd ed.). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Clark, E. (2009). *First language acquisition* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Corder, S. (1982). *Introducing applied linguistics*. Penguin Books.

Cropley, A. (2015). *Qualitative research methods: A practice-oriented introduction for students of psychology and education*. Zinätne.

Crystal, D. (1985). *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics*. Basil Blackwell.

Day, R. R. (1984). Student participation in the ESL classroom or some imperfections in practice. *Language Learning, 34*(3), 69-98. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1984.tb00342.x

De Houwer, A. (2009). *Bilingual first language acquisition*. Multilingual Matters.

Duff, P. (2008). *Case study research in applied linguistics*. Lawrence Earlbaum.

Dunn, O. (1984). *Help your child with a foreign language: A parents' handbook*. Hodder and Stoughton.

Gass, S. (1997). *Input, interaction, and the second language learner*. Lawrence Earlbaum.

Gass, S., & Selinker, L. (2001). *Second language acquisition: an introduction course*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hatch, E. M. (1978). *Discourse analysis and language acquisition*. Newbury House.

Jankowsky, K. (1992). Foregrounding foreignness in teaching German unification: Video as a tool for processing interviews with Berliners in a study-abroad course. *ADFL Bulletin, 24*(1), 23-29. https://doi.org/10.1632/adfl.24.1.23

Johnson, D. M. (1992). *Approaches to research in second language learning*. Longman.

Johnson, J. S., & Newport, E. L. (1989). Critical period effects in second language learning: The influence of maturational state on the acquisition of English as a second language. *Cognitive Psychology, 21*(1), 60-99. https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0285(89)90003-0

Krashen, S. D. (1988). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Prentice-Hall International.

Malterud, K. (2001). The art and science of clinical knowledge: evidence beyond measures and numbers. *The Lancet, 358*, 397-400. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(01)05548-9

Lenneberg, E. (1967). *Biological foundations of language*. Wiley.

Lightbrown, P., & Spada, N. (1999). *How languages are learned*. Oxford University Press.

Ñaupas Paitán, H., Valdivia Dueñas, M., Palacios Vilela, J. & Romero Delgado, H. (2018). *Metodología de la investigación cuantitativa–cualitativa y redacción de la tesis* [Quantitative-qualitative research methodology and writing a thesis]. (5th ed.) Ediciones de la U.

Palermo, F., Mikulski, A. M., Fabes, R. A., Hanish, L. D., Martin, C. L., & Stargel, L. E. (2014). English exposure in the home and classroom: Predictions to Spanish-speaking preschooler's English vocabulary skills. *Applied Psycholinguistics, 35*(6), 1163-1187. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0142716412000732

Pinker, S. (1994). *The language instinct*. Clays

Rubin, H. & Rubin, I. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Sage.

Skinner, B. (1957). *Verbal behavior*. Copley.

Swain, M. (1993). The output hypothesis: Just speaking and writing aren't enough. *The Canadian Modern Language Review, 50*(1), 158-164. https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.50.1.158

Tomasello, M., Kruger, A. C., & Ratner, H. H. (1993). Cultural learning. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 16*(3), 459-552. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X0003123X

Vygotsky, L. (1962). *Thought and language*. MIT Press.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society*. Harvard University.

Vygotsky, L. (1980). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

APPENDIX 1

THEMATIC UNIT

August 1, 2018 to February 25, 2019

TOPICS	TARGET GRAMMAR	LANGUAGE FUNCTION
UNIT 1: August – September 2018		
The kitchen	Simple present	Talk about what's in the kitchen
Cooking actions	Present progressive	Talk about the action going on
The bedroom	There is/there are	Identify objects in the bedroom
The living room	There is/there are	Identify objects in the L.R.
The bathroom	Prepositions: in–on-under-next to-	Identify objects in the bathroom using preposition of place
Review		
My house		Describe 4 parts of my house using there is or there are.
UNIT 2: October – November 2018		
The fruits	Simple present negative	Talk about likes and dislikes
The vegetables	Simple present (how much- the market)	Talk about likes and dislikes
Food	Simple present question	Talk about food habits
Drinks	Would like	Talk about preference
The restaurant	Would like	Talk about your favorite fruit, vegetable, food and drink.
Review		Talk about fruit, food, vegetables and my favorite drink. (role-play)
UNIT 3: December 2018		
Clothes	Simple present/present progressive How much?	Describe what I am wearing Talk about favorite colors Talk about price
Women's clothing		Describing clothes and colors
Men's clothing		Distinguish between men and women clothing
Review		Describe what you wear/wearing
UNIT 4: January –February 2019		
Days of the week	What day is today?	Talk about days of the week.
Months of the year	What month is it?	Talk about the months of the year
Family	Simple present	Identify members of the family
Body parts	Simple present verbs	Identify parts of the body
The school- classroom	There is/there are	Describe what it is in the school
The park	There is/there are	Describe the park
Animals	Who am I?	Identify the animals
Review		

APPENDIX 2

Phoebe