

# LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LANGUAGE LEARNING: THE PLACE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

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## **Abstract**

The paper attempted to consider the place of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in language teaching and learning with particular reference to language acquisition and language learning. It was noted that the use of Information and Communication (ICT) in support of teaching and learning has been computer assisted learning (CAL). This Computer assisted learning was seen as the way forward in the 1970s and considerable effort was devoted, particularly in the USA, to the development of a wide range of Computer Assisted Learning Systems. The language teacher concerned about how children acquire and learn language derives wonderful assistance from the services of the Computer which among other things increases the speed at which language is internalized. It ensures accuracy, versatile, storage of teaching and learning information, which is usually saved. This allows the teacher time to arrange learning activities for all learners to participate language learners this way, gain insight into modern technologies which they may rely on for future life endeavours. One can then conclude that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilitates language acquisition and language learning. It is therefore, recommended that every resourceful teacher of language should integrate the computer into his/her language lessons for optimum performance. Optimum performance here, does not only refer to the performance of the language teacher but also to the performance of the children either acquiring or learning language in tiring of the quality and quantity of achievement in internalizing the rudiments of the morphology and syntax (Grammar) and the semantic nuances of the language under study.

## **Introduction**

Language acquisition and language learning are two concepts about how control of language can be gained. 'Control' here means how a person either acquiring or learning the language comes to have that language under his command such that he can look at himself as having known the rudiments of that language. When this happens, the person can now make proficient uses of that language without constraints. By this too, he should have had enough knowledge and information about the language, especially being able to speak, write and comprehend speeches amongst others. And as time goes on, this proficiency in the language can be extended to the areas of the structures of the language-the phonemes, morphemes, word, phrases, clauses and sentences of the language.

## **The Distinction between Language Acquisition and Language Learning**

It may well, be appropriate to make clear from the onset that the tendency has been for people to use the terms, "language acquisition" and "language learning" interchangeably, thereby giving the impression that they stand for one and the same idea. But this is a misconception. Once we mention, "Language acquisition." We refer to all the processes that take place for a child to learn the language of his mother, otherwise known as the child's mother tongue (L1) with particular reference to a child

who is learning to speak for the very first time. But when we talk about “language learning” we mean any other language one learns to speak other than one’s mother tongue. The language one learns after acquiring the mother tongue, also known as the child’s first language (L1) (Crystal 1991) becomes the child’s second language (L2). There is also the target language (TL) which is any language one makes attempt to either acquire or learn. Following these, language learning presupposes that a mother tongue has been acquired. So, in practical terms, language acquisition must take place before language learning.

Following the distinction between language acquisition and language learning, Crystal (1997: 234-235) recognizes imitation, innateness and cognition as a methods of language acquisition while he talks about theories of language learning as a separate topic, Crystal (1997: 372-373). But Wilkins (1972: 161-178) considers the topics under one heading – the psychology of language in this article, it has been decided that it adopts approach of an integrated approach having drawn clear distinction between language acquisition and language learning above.

### **Language Acquisition and Language Learning: The Behaviourism and the Mentalism Theories**

For linguistics to account for how language is acquired and learned, they elide on two language theories propounded by Psychologists. The first theory is called the behaviourism theory while the second is called the mentalism theory.

#### **Behaviourism**

This is the theory propounded by skinner, Pavlov and Thorndike – all psychologists whose works are strongly rooted in empiricism i.e. data that can be observed, described and explained. This theory of language acquisition and learning is based purely on the believe that child’s brain is blank or what psychologists refer to as tabula-rasa, meaning that from birth, that the child’s brain does not contain any equipment specially designed for capturing language. According to them, whatever the child learns, is based on imitation and formation or habits. According to the behaviourists, the child principally acquires language by imitating people’s speech in its immediate environment. Another method through which they grow in the language is through memorization. As they imitate, so also do they commit the structures of the language to memory. They also content that that the child’s immediate environment (the people it interacts with and the physical and non-physical objects) constitute a stimulus to which the child responds. (Stimulus – response criterion). Here, any utterance the child makes is triggered off by some kind of stimulus and the utterance forms the child’s response. The child for instance, may be finding its cup, the child may have the desire or stimulus to call the name of the object.

And this desire, according to the proponents of this theory, will cause the child to respond to the stimulus by calling the name of the object which as in this case, is cup.

The behaviourists firmly believe that it is very important to reinforce the child’s very first attempt at making the utterance. The child’s speech may be reinforced by giving approvals by parents. Parents or anybody around can also move towards a target to comply with what the child was understood to have wanted. This is a very good way of encouraging the child to make more of such utterances. Wilkins (1972: 162) agrees with this and concludes that:

*Parental approval acts as a powerful reinforcer. A physical need in the child may be met as a result of his utterance. His own language may act as a stimulus to action or language on the part of someone else. If such reinforcement does not take place, as when the child*

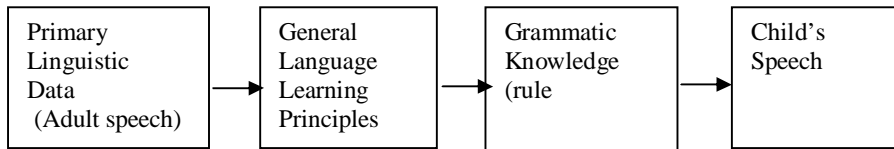
*says something which is not understood by those around it, the piece of language, the response, is not learned.*

The Behaviourists also contend that a child learns language more it is made to repeat utterances a number of times. To them, repetition provides enough practice which leads to perfection in acquisition of mother tongue. It however, as is usually the case in practice that the child utters incorrect word, the behaviourists do not worry. They insist that so far as the incorrect ones are not reinforced, that with maturity, the child will judge for itself and then drop all incorrect forms.

The proponents of this theory also attach great importance to speech rather than to writing since writing is not vital in the developmental process, moreso, when writing is still absent from the beaviour of many grown up adults.

### **Mentalism**

This is the second theory of language acquisition and language learning which is diametrically opposed to the behaviourist theory. It was propounded by Noan Chomstry and Jean Piaget and other adherents in the 1960s. this view was proposed with increased in the doubt of the behaviourists who see acquisition and learning as imitation and mere formulation of habits, imitation, memorization ad contextual generalization. These rationalists contend that every child has the innate capacity for language as a normal maturation process. This means that all individuals from birth are ready for language because in their thinking, Crystal (1997: 234), “when children are exposed to speech, certain general principles for discovering or structuring language automatically begin to operate. These principles constitute what is called the child’s language ‘language acquisition device’ (LAD). It is this language acquisition device that the child uses to decode meanings of utterances it hears around it, deriving from the this ‘Primary linguistic data’ hypothesis about the grammar of the language – what the sentences are, and how they are constructed. This knowledge is then used to produce sentences that after a process of trial and error, correspond to those in adult speech. By this, the child learns a set of generalizations, or rules governing the way in which sentences are formed. The above can be represented in the sequence below:



These Psychologists agued that everything about language cannot be observable; there are some mental mechanisms in human language such as the one represented above which cannot all be observed – hence their name, mentalists.

In line with the child’s innate capacity for language, Chomsky and others have discoursed that children begin to show sings of language when they coo, babble and cry ever before any utterance which can call language can be made.

The mentalists agree that all languages are rule-governed, and for anyone to acquire or learn language, he should learn the rules of the language.

The learners construct rules, try them out, and alter them if they prove to be inadequate. Language learning, in this account, proceeds in a series of transitional stages, as learners acquire more

knowledge of the L2. At each stage, they are in control of a language system that is equivalent to neither the L1 nor the L2- this is the language situation called an interlanguage.

### **Behaviourism or Mentalism?**

The computer has been noted to have started around 1842 by a French philosopher called Blaise Pascal but has become popular recently in this part of the world. It has become popular because of its inherent characteristics of speed, accuracy, versatility and ability to repeat an output of an instruction sent to it. The computer stores information which is usually save the computer also processes information. It is also used to communicate in form of the E-mail (electronic mail), GSM (mobile phone) and fax. It is also used for typing, designing and for computation of numbers. Language teachers should avail themselves of the opportunities provided by these technologies while teaching language at the classroom level.

### **Advantages of the ICT language Teachers**

- It give the teacher chance to plan short, timed, lightly focused activities
- It enables the teacher to plan activities across a member of sessions to allow sufficient time for all pupils/learners to take part
- Up to date and real world technologies prepares the children linguistically for the modern world.
- It helps learners research topics they are learning using a wide range of sources other than just books from their libraries
- It helps the language learners to get an insight into technologies that they may later rely on in future life.
- Using word documents, it gives the pupils a chance to present their work in a style that suits them.
- ICT equipment can aid children with language learning difficulties. However, some of the problems with ICT in language learning and teaching may be in the area of cost of equipment, training needs of staff, distractions, damage, safety measures, hacking.

### **Conclusion/Recommendation**

Children need to acquired and learn language to be able to interact with the rest members of the society. Children learn by imitation, reinforcement, repetition and by memorization. They also have innate abilities which make it possible for them to commit language to memories using their brain. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has remained a wonderful breakthrough in educational technology since the invention of the chalkboard ICT has introduced recount development in mobile computing and increasing developments in open source software. Objects to be learned can scanned into the computer or pasted for learners to study. This, makes language learning concrete which would have otherwise been abstract. It is therefore, recommended that teachers of language should integrate the computer into their teaching for the teacher' work to be more comprehensive and for the pupils acquiring or learning language to do so most progressively, deriving the benefits of the ICT as they do this. ICT is a Sine-qua-non these days for teaching and learning language for effective communication.

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