

Problems of Language Acquisition in Psycholinguistic Perspective

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Abstract

Language acquisition theory (LAT) is developing very rapidly. There are hundreds, even thousands of language assessment theories, but the ones that often appear in language study literature are twenty-four which are summarized in four groups, namely Behaviorist, Cognitive, Nativist, and Huanistic. The LAT Operant Conditioning Model is one of the behaviorist groups proposed and developed by B.F. Skinner, a very famous behaviorist psychologist in his time. Many new LATs have emerged that strengthen and weaken previous LATs, but do not mean eliminating or destroying them. Most new LATs criticize or weaken previous LATs. The Nativist Language Acquisition Device (LAD) of LAT Model is strongly supported by transformational generative linguistics and Descartes' rationalist philosophy which believes that language is a reflection of human thought and intelligence and is always reproduced by individuals with operations that underlie the range of human desires and consciousness. Language is considered as something created by the dynamism and abilities of the human organism that focuses on its creative abilities. The Creative Construction Model of LAT emerged almost simultaneously with the Monitor Model of LAT.

Keywords: language acquisition theory; problem; psycholinguistik

INTRUDUCTION

Language acquisition theories (LAT) are developing rapidly. There are hundreds, even thousands of theories of language study. The terms that are often used are first language (hereinafter referred to as L1), second language (hereinafter referred to as L2), and LAT. LAT has many types, but the ones that often appear in the language study treasury. There are 24 that are summarized in four groups, namely Behaviorist, Cognitive, Nativist, and Huanistist. This grouping is in accordance with the books that the author read. Other authors may differ in their groupings, depending on the different philosophical foundations, paradigms, approaches, and mindsets of these experts.

According to Tarigan, language acquisition is largely determined by the complex interaction of biological, cognitive, and social maturity aspects. Language acquisition has a sudden, abrupt beginning. Children's language acquisition can have the characteristics of continuity and a series of units that move from simple single-word utterances to more complex word combinations (syntax). Language independence begins around the age of one year when children begin to use loose words or separate words from linguistic codes to achieve their various social goals.¹

Language acquisition is a complex and crucial process for a child's development. Most children can learn language naturally, but there are various problems that can hinder it. Problems can come from internal factors, such as developmental delays, or external factors, such as the social environment and support from adults.

Language development delays can be caused by a variety of factors, including hearing loss, general developmental delays, or certain medical conditions. Children who are hearing impaired, for example, may not receive enough linguistic input, making it difficult for them to develop language

skills. Developmental delays can also indicate larger cognitive problems and can affect a child's ability to understand and use language.

The social environment plays an important role in language acquisition. Children who grow up in less stimulating environments, not exposed to rich language interactions, are at risk for language learning difficulties. For example, children who are rarely spoken to by adults or who do not have opportunities to interact with peers may face challenges in developing vocabulary and speaking skills. Exposure to a variety of languages and diverse communication contexts is essential for optimal language development.

Cultural factors contribute to language acquisition. Children may not receive contextually appropriate language models in some cultures and different communication norms. For example, in cultures where speaking directly is considered impolite, children may receive fewer opportunities to practice speaking and interacting. This can affect a child's confidence in using language, and in turn can hinder a child's language development.

Another problem that is often faced is the difference in language use, especially in multilingual environments. Children who grow up in families that use more than one language may experience confusion in determining which language to use in a particular context. Although bilingualism can provide advantages, children can also face difficulties in mastering both languages simultaneously, especially if there is not adequate support from the surrounding environment.²

Psychological factors, such as anxiety and low self-confidence, can also hinder language acquisition. Children who feel anxious in social situations or who feel insecure about speaking may be reluctant to practice using language. This can lead to delays in language acquisition and potentially lead to greater communication problems later in life.

Addressing language acquisition challenges in children requires a holistic approach, involving parents, educators, and health professionals. It is important to create an environment rich in linguistic and social stimulation, provide appropriate support, and address the child's individual needs. By understanding and addressing these challenges, we can help children reach their full potential in language acquisition, which is a critical foundation for their future communication and social development.

LAT is very important for learning in Grade IV of Madrasah Ibtida'iyah Darussalam. Understanding how language is acquired can be used to understand the overall process of cognitive development. Language is the main tool for thinking and communicating, so the process of language acquisition is closely related to the intellectual development of children.³

Understanding language acquisition is essential in the development of language technologies, such as speech recognition systems and natural language processing. Understanding and knowledge of how humans process language can be used to create more sophisticated and intuitive technologies. Psycholinguistics studies the relationship between psychological and linguistic aspects in language acquisition, including cognitive, social, and environmental factors that influence the language acquisition process. In the formal education environment, there are various factors that can hinder or support children's language development. This literature study aims to analyze the problems of language acquisition at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Darussalam Ngrembang from a psycholinguistic perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Madrasah Ibtida'iyah Darussalam Darussalam Ngrembang is a religious-based school with a curriculum that emphasizes learning Arabic, Indonesian, and Javanese. Many students experience difficulties in language acquisition, especially in Indonesian language skills which are the main language of instruction in formal learning. A study is needed to identify the problems faced by students in language acquisition, as well as the factors that influence the Language Acquisition process from a Psycholinguistic Perspective. The study of the language acquisition process is based on four groups of learning theories, namely the nativist group, the behaviorist group, the cognitive group, and the humanistic group.

Nativism theory

Nativism argues that during the process of first language acquisition, children (humans) slightly open their lingual abilities that have been genetically programmed. This theory does not consider the environment to have an influence on language acquisition, but rather assumes that language is a biological gift, in line with the so-called “natural gift hypothesis”

Nativists argue that language is too complex and complicated, so it is impossible to learn in a short time through methods such as “imitation”. So, there must be some important aspects of the language system that already exist in humans naturally. According to Chomsky, humans have “intellectual plots” in their minds or brains. According to him, one of these plots is language. The natural plot that Chomsky has had since birth is called the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) which has been translated into Language Acquisition Device.⁴

Behaviorists emphasize that the process of acquiring the first language is controlled from outside the child, namely by stimuli given through the environment. The term language for behaviorists is considered inappropriate because the term language implies a form, something that is owned or used, and not something that is done.⁵

Behaviorism theory

This theory was popularized by B.F. Skinner, who emphasized the role of the environment in language learning. According to Skinner, children learn language through a process of reinforcement, where they repeat words or phrases they hear often. When they use language correctly, they are praised, which motivates them to continue learning.⁶

In the context of Madrasah Ibtida'iyah, teachers can apply positive reinforcement, such as praise or rewards when children succeed in using language well. In addition, creating an environment that supports verbal interaction between students is also very important.

Cognitive theory

Jean Piaget argued that language acquisition is related to children's cognitive development. According to him, language develops along with the development of children's thinking and understanding of the world. Children understand language through experience and interaction with the environment. This approach invites teachers to link language learning with concrete experiences that are relevant to children's lives. Using games, stories, and activities that involve children directly can enrich the language learning process.

Humanistic theory

This theory was developed by Lev Vygotsky, who emphasized the importance of social interaction in language acquisition. According to Vygotsky, language develops through communication with others. This process involves social and cultural support that helps children understand and use language. In Madrasah Ibtida'iyah, collaboration between students in language activities is very important. Group discussions, collaborative projects, and role-playing can help children learn language more effectively through humanistic social interaction.

RESEARCHERS' STATEMENT

Children in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah have an innate ability to learn language, as seen from their ability to understand and produce complex sentences despite only being exposed to the language for a relatively short time. Providing positive reinforcement (such as praise and rewards) for appropriate language use will increase the frequency of correct language use among children in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. Children who are involved in active social interactions with adults and peers will experience more rapid language development compared to children who are less exposed to such interactions. In this context, social interactions involve not only the use of spoken language, but also non-verbal cues, facial expressions, and situational contexts that provide additional meaning. By participating in dynamic dialogues, children can observe, imitate, and get direct feedback, which enriches their understanding and use of language. Children who are exposed to a rich linguistic environment, which includes a variety of vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and different

contexts, will show better language acquisition abilities. This diverse exposure provides children with the opportunity to adapt to different ways of using language, allowing them to develop more flexible and responsive language skills. In this context, the frequency and diversity of interactions play an important role in shaping children's language skills.

Children's cognitive development has a significant influence on the process of language acquisition. Children who demonstrate better abstract thinking and problem-solving skills tend to understand and use complex language structures more quickly. In other words, good cognitive skills will support children in digesting linguistic information and relating it to everyday experiences, thus accelerating the process of language learning.

METHOD

The study used qualitative method, intends to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by research subjects such as behavior, perception, motivation, action, etc., holistically and descriptively in the form of words and language in a specific natural context and by utilizing various natural methods. The nature of this study is descriptive analysis, which is a regular breakdown of the data that has been obtained, then given an understanding and explanation so that it can be understood well by the reader. Descriptive analysis is an analysis method that aims to describe or explain something as it is. The descriptive study carried out by the author is centered on natural objects, namely making research the main key data, using interview techniques, observation, and analysis as well as some additional methods required for direct interviews and observations in the classrooms. The study respondents involved language teachers and students in grades 3 to 5. In addition, a simple test was conducted to assess students' language abilities in speaking, writing, and understanding Indonesian

RESEARCH RESULTS

Psycholinguistic Theories in LAT can be classified as nativism, behaviorism, cognitive, socio-cultural, and input hypothesis theory.

Nativism theory (Noam Chomsky)

The nativist theory proposed by Noam Chomsky states that humans are born with an innate ability to acquire language, through what is known as the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). According to this theory, individuals have a genetic predisposition to understand and produce complex language structures, with a universal grammar underlying all languages.

Although this theory explains children's natural ability to acquire language, the problem that arises is that the nativist theory does not fully take into account the role of the environment and social interaction in language acquisition. Research shows that some children experience delays in language acquisition due to less supportive environmental factors or lack of exposure to language at critical ages. In addition, nativism does not fully explain individual variations in second language (L2) acquisition, which is often influenced by motivational factors, experience, and formal education. Although the LAD provides a biological basis, language acquisition requires strong environmental support. Therefore, lack of language stimulation or limitations in social interaction can lead to problems such as speech delays or other language disorders.

Behaviorism theory (B.F. Skinner)

Behaviorism argues that language acquisition is the result of a process of learning through repetition, imitation, and reinforcement. In this view, language is learned like any other skill, with children imitating adult speech and being reinforced (rewarded) when they use language correctly. The behaviorist approach often fails to adequately explain how children produce new sentences that they have never heard before. Furthermore, the theory does not explain how children can learn complex grammatical rules without direct instruction. In children with language delays or specific language disorders, behaviorism is also inadequate to explain why language learning through repetition and

reinforcement is not always successful. In some cases, children who are raised in environments with little language stimulation, for example due to a lack of verbal interaction with adults, may have language delays. Although behaviorism emphasizes repetition and reinforcement, not all children develop through this method alone.

Cognitive theory (Jean Piaget)

Jean Piaget suggested that language development is closely related to an individual's cognitive development. According to him, language develops along with a child's cognitive growth in understanding the world. Children gradually learn to understand more abstract concepts, and their language development reflects progress in this cognitive understanding. In children with cognitive developmental disorders or learning disabilities, language acquisition is often hampered. Research shows that some children with disorders such as dyslexia or developmental delays may have difficulty connecting cognitive development to their language abilities, resulting in difficulties in understanding sentence structures or processing complex vocabulary. Children with cognitive disabilities require a special approach to language acquisition, where interventions should focus on developing logical and conceptual thinking skills to improve their language abilities.

Socio-cultural theory (Lev Vygotsky)

The socio-cultural theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky emphasizes the important role of social interaction and cultural environment in language acquisition. According to Vygotsky, language develops through interaction with others, and scaffolding (support from adults or peers) helps children acquire language skills. Language is seen as a primary tool for thinking and developing cognitive concepts. In the context of children who are less exposed to meaningful social interactions or who grow up in environments with limited communication, language acquisition can be hampered. Research shows that children who are raised in environments that are poor in verbal interaction often experience language delays, because they do not receive enough scaffolding needed to enrich their language development. A less supportive social environment or minimal interaction with competent language speakers can cause problems in language acquisition. Children need strong social support from the environment to accelerate language acquisition, especially in second language acquisition.

Theories Input Hypothesis (Stephen Krashen)

Stephen Krashen suggests that language acquisition occurs when learners receive language input that is comprehensible, but slightly above their current proficiency level (referred to as "i+1"). According to Krashen, continued exposure to comprehensible language is a key factor in language acquisition, while explicit grammar instruction has little effect. The challenge that arises in this theory is that not all educational or social environments provide the right input. Some students may not receive input that is appropriate to their level, either because it is too simple or too complex. In addition, in second language acquisition, the output factor or the ability to produce language is also often ignored in Krashen's theory, although other studies emphasize the importance of language practice. It is important for the learning environment to ensure that students receive the right language input and support language acquisition. Difficulties can arise if students are only exposed to a language that they cannot understand well, or if the language used in learning is too difficult. Less Supportive Language Environment Based on observations, the language environment at Madrasah Ibtida'iyah Darussalam tends to be bilingual or even trilingual, with the use of Indonesian, Javanese, and Arabic. Javanese is used more dominantly in social interactions outside the classroom.⁷ This causes the Indonesian language input received by students to be limited to classroom learning only, which is one of the causes of the slow acquisition of Indonesian as a formal language. According to the input hypothesis theory of Stephen Krashen, language acquisition requires sufficient exposure to the language being learned. Because the use of Indonesian is limited to formal environments, students do not receive enough comprehensible input to improve their Indonesian language skills.

Cognitive Factors and Children's Abilities Tests conducted on students showed that some children have cognitive difficulties in understanding more complex Indonesian grammatical structures.

They tend to have difficulty using correct grammar in writing and speaking. Common errors include inappropriate use of affixes and lack of ability to distinguish between standard and non-standard words. Psycholinguistic Analysis: The theory of processing limitations suggests that limitations in children's working memory and processing capacity can affect their ability to understand language. Students with cognitive limitations are slower to process new languages that are different from their mother tongue, in this case Javanese. Influence of Mother Tongue (Javanese Language Interference) Mother tongue interference, namely Javanese, often appears in students' language production. This can be seen in sentence structures that follow Javanese language patterns, such as the use of vocabulary and grammar that do not comply with Indonesian language rules. For example, many students use Javanese vocabulary when they have difficulty finding equivalents in Indonesian. Language interference is a common phenomenon in second language acquisition. From a psycholinguistic perspective, this negative transfer occurs when students apply the rules of their first language (Javanese) to their second language (Indonesian). According to the contrastive analysis theory, the differences between the two languages exacerbate the errors produced by interference. Lack of Motivation and Learning Strategies Interviews with teachers showed that some students lacked motivation to learn Indonesian, especially because they felt more comfortable using Javanese at home and in everyday interactions. Teachers also noted a lack of variation in language teaching strategies in the classroom, which tended to be based on traditional methods such as lectures and memorization without a more interactive communicative approach. Based on the socio-affective factors theory, motivation and attitudes toward language greatly influence the success of language acquisition. If students do not have strong motivation or do not see the relevance of language in their lives, language acquisition will be hampered. In addition, the communicative language teaching (CLT) theory suggests that effective language learning must involve interaction and use of language in real contexts.

DISCUSSION

The psycholinguistic theory above, the problem of language acquisition can be understood from several perspectives. Some of the main factors that influence language acquisition include environmental support (Vygotsky), cognitive ability (Piaget), and the quality and amount of language input (Krashen). Problems such as language delay, mother tongue interference, and lack of motivation can be attributed to the role of each of these factors. Learning theory and language acquisition are closely related, because the learning process greatly influences how individuals acquire and use language. Language acquisition is considered a mental process in cognitive learning theory. Language learning involves understanding the structure and rules of language through observation and experience. For example, according to Jean Piaget, children learn language by building mental schemas based on their interactions with the environment. While Behaviorist theory emphasizes reinforcement and response. In the context of language acquisition, children learn through repetition and reinforcement. For example, if a child pronounces a word correctly and gets praised, they will be more motivated to repeat it. On the other hand, the Nativist theory, pioneered by Noam Chomsky, argues that humans are born with an innate ability to learn language. Nevertheless, experience and environment remain important in the language acquisition process.

Enrichment of the Language Environment: It is important to create an environment that is more supportive of Indonesian language acquisition in schools. This can be done by increasing exposure to Indonesian through the media, extracurricular activities, and more interaction in Indonesian outside the classroom. **Use of Varied Teaching Methods:** Teachers are expected to use more communicative and contextual methods, such as role-playing, group discussions, and creative writing activities. These methods will help students engage more actively and gain more meaningful language input and output. **Handling Language Interference:** Teachers need to pay special attention to errors caused by Javanese language interference, by emphasizing the differences between Javanese and Indonesian language structures in grammar teaching. **Development⁸ Student Motivation:** Using an approach that is based on real context and relevant to students' daily lives can help increase their motivation in learning Indonesian. This can be done through materials that interest students and the use of technology and digital media in learning.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the problems of language acquisition at MIS Darussalam Ngrembang involve several key factors, including an unsupportive bilingual environment, students' cognitive limitations, mother tongue interference, and lack of motivation and variation in learning strategies. From a psycholinguistic perspective, these factors hinder the acquisition of Indonesian as a second language. This study recommends improving the language environment, improving learning strategies, and developing student motivation to improve Indonesian language acquisition at this school. Language acquisition is a complex process that involves interactions between biological, environmental, and social factors. Each theory provides different insights into how children learn language, and a combination of these approaches often provides a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon. The study of language acquisition continues to evolve, along with new research and advances in understanding the brain and human development. This study suggests that approaches to language acquisition pay attention to the role of the environment, social interaction, and appropriate input. A combination of environmental support, appropriate teaching, and an approach that takes into account the child's cognitive development is essential to effectively address language acquisition problems.

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