

Concepts of Language Development and Language Disability With Evidence Base Analysis

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Abstract: Language and communication are important parts of every human being to function well in a civilised society he or she found himself or herself. Any disruption of these needs could amount to impairment of “normal” functioning of the individual in the society or community. This article sought to look what is meant by language and its development at various stages of child’s development. The article evidently looked at form or grammar; how it is developed in a neurotypical child or “normal” child. Attention is also paid to how children could be confronted with difficulties. The write up illuminates what is referred to as language disability and specific language impairment.

The write up explore cross cultural patterns of grammar development or formation. The dominant aspect of English grammar is the word order. In other languages the dominant aspect is the morphology and the grammatical inflections. For example, Italian language gives a lot importance to bound inflections. Thus, it depends on where a language focuses and the origin of that particular language.

However, this work main focus is on concept of English language development and language disability but being an evidence based work, an example of Italian language has been mentioned to support few points. This work is organized in thematic areas and literature in form of books, articles and journals related to this topic were reviewed as well.

Key words: language development, language disability, grammar Specific Language Impairment (SLI), holophrases.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is something that separates human beings from the animals, but also from our fellows. To learn to speak a language, you have to learn the rules that govern this language. Nevertheless, language is not only rules, it is creativity acquiring and using the rules. (Tomasello, 2000) definition of the language is not so simple, as saying that children make babbling and cooing, so they learn to speak. (Dockrell and Messer, 1999) These are only samples of language development.

Language is a code which is used to express ideas about the world through conventional system of arbitrary signals for communication (Halliday 1975) or disseminating ideas from encoder to decoder thus from a speaker to a listener.

Language is used to express thought patterns of the individuals, their belief systems and desires. The thoughts

express in language result from our perception which comes from aspect of what we see hear and feel at the moment. Usually these thoughts come from the knowledge stored in the individual’s memory about event and relations in the world.

Language as code is a way of representing one thing by another. Thus given an object, event or relationship which can be represented schematically with a picture a map a graph a word or a sentence.

Language is more complex and at the same time more understandable term. It is a puzzle, with a lot of different “pieces”. According to Lahey (1988). Language consists of three dimensions: content, form, and use. Each of these aspects of language interact with each other, therefore, a possible disruption of one of this, will cause problems. All of them are necessary for the development and the right function of the language. This essay, will focus on these components: which are; three major components of language. These components are form, content, and use. Form involves three sub-components syntax, morphology, and phonology Grammar is behind form. So, how does all above mentioned influence language development? And how on the other hand, these could lead to children having language delay, language impairment and specific language impairment in children.

1.2 Language development

The development of the language from the children is something incredible and inexplicable. Many discussions have been done and many theories have tried to explain how children, soon, after birth, manage to develop their language. Some people believe that language development is inherent, or it is as result of imitation. Others, attribute the child’s language development to their relationship with their mothers, known as “motherese” or “infant-directed speech”. (Dockrell and Messer, 1999) Mothers adapt the style of their speech to their children’s age, and the result of this communication is language development.

1.3 Language disability

If one of the components of language is disturbed, then is known as language disability or disorder. Unfortunately, there is not only one term to describe this disruption. These terms can be used to describe the condition; “language disorder”, “language disability” and “delayed language”. (Chitra Badii

2018). Language disorders or language impairments that include processing of linguistic information, problems that may be experienced could involve grammar (syntax and/or morphology), semantics (meaning) and other aspects of language. The term disorder might be more adequate, because it refers to language that is different from what it is considered as typical. Children with language impairments normally difficulties understanding what is being communicated to them and difficulties expressing themselves. These difficulties could be verbal, nonverbal, or written. Language impairments may be:

- Expressive- difficulty expressing ideas or needs.
- Receptive-difficulty understanding what others are communicating
- Mixed-a combination of expressive and receptive (Mary, 2014).Function of language Children with language impairments normally difficulties understanding what is being communicated to them and difficulties expressing themselves. These difficulties could be verbal, nonverbal, or written. Language impairments may be:
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1.4 Grammar

The term grammar refers to the study of the two basic components: morphology, that is the study of the morphemes, the smallest units of word which can either stand alone in a sentence and are called free morphemes, such as “play”, or cannot stand alone and are attached to other morphemes, such as plural –s, or past tense –ed and are called bound morphemes. The second component is syntax, the study of the word order inside the sentence. Syntax and morphology interact with each other. The term grammar refers to both of them. It also the study of the word structure and of the rules that govern a sentence (Barrett, 1999).

1.5 Phonology as one of the sub components of form, actually looks at speech sounds and how syllables are generally shape. For instance the sound for /p/ is different depending on its placement in a word and the vowels near it. For example, /p/ can vary in sound in such words as pea, poor, and soup. Each word contains /p/ but the sound (educationalresearchtechniques 2015).

3. Stages

1.6 Language development-language disorders:

All children make speech sounds from very early age, like babbling, and their parents consider these sounds as an indication of language development. However, every child has a different method of learning language and its rules. Age is not always a good predictor of language development. There

is a specific grammar progression that parents expect from their children to follow. Children who develop their language and learn to talk a little bit late from typically developing children, refer to as having Specific Language Impairments (SLI). They do not have any cognitive or mental difficulties, however they present some problems, specifically in morphology: the way that function the words and the syntax: the order of the words.(Joanisse & Seidenberg 1998) Everyone who speaks English, knows grammar, intuitively and unconsciously. But not everyone who speaks English knows about grammar. The development of grammar is not an easy process and its acquisition depends on each child’s potentials. In general, the difference between the typically developing children and the children with SLI is that they have problems in acquiring the 14 grammatical morphemes. (Brown, 1973).

1.7Phonological processes- word utterances:

Children normally start to pronounce and to use their first 50 single words at the age of 9 months-1 year. Nouns have the predominant position throughout the first several months of linguistics development. The fact that children acquire first nouns, can be explained for two reasons: firstly, English language has many inflections and verbs with irregular forms, and secondly, children at this stage “communicate” with the others by pointing things. Usually these things are objects and nouns. (O’ Grady, 1952) The most common words are *mama*, *papa*. Only with this small amount of words, children are capable of producing requests and expressing different things. *that*, to express existence, *big*, *cold*, to express statement, *allgone* to express non-existence, *up*, *on*, *in*, *there*, to express locative action, *that?* questions with intonation and pointing(Lahey, 1988). Negatives are also very common. Children may reject an object or an activity, simply by saying *no*. (Dale, 1972) One- word utterances are considered for many as sentences. They refer to a situation as a whole. For example, they may say *daddy*, and by this they mean the car or the food or the clothes of their dad. This words are known as holophrases, because they enclose the meaning of a whole sentence. Instead of *that’s my daddy’s car*, they just point the car and say *daddy*.(Bloom, 1976; O’ Grady, 1952; Dockrell and Messer, 1999) Typically developing children do not produce a lot of grammatical morphemes at this stage, only nouns and adjectives. Thus, their MLU is about 1.5 morphemes. MLU is very important because it shows the differences between a typically developing child and a child with language deficit. From the moment they reach stage II and two-word utterances, they will acquire their first grammatical inflections, progressive present –ing, and plural –s, and the MLU, will reach almost 2.0-2.25. As it was mentioned above, children with SLI do not have any cognitive or mental disorder. They just have a slowly and mistaken production of grammar. One word-utterance is not an indication that a child has language delay, because every child has different “rhythms” for acquiring language and its rules. As age is not the best indication for language delay, MLU

allows the parents to understand the developmental level of their children. (W. Miller & Ervin 2012). If the MLU of typically developing children is at this stage about 1.0-2.0, children with SLI have a lower level. They utter words, but usually they do not pointing and naming all the objects around them, because they cannot describe the relationship between the word and the object. One-word utterances are considered as “holophrases”. They hide a whole meaning under one word. Furthermore, because most of times, comprehension of a word precedes the production, children with SLI cannot produce single-word utterances (Bloom, 1976). Comprehension does not mean that they have cognitive problems. It means that they have poorly phonological awareness. Thus, if their parents just ask them: *what's this?* showing to them their teddy, and expecting to hear this word, they will respond to their question, by saying *peddy* or even hugging themselves, meaning: *this is teddy, my teddy* (Sachs & Truswell 2008, Lahey, 1988)

2.1 Two-word utterances:

As they approach the two-word utterances, they typically begin to form their language. They increase the number of the words they use. From 50 single words, now they use 150 words. They now use all the relational words from the previous category and adding next to them new words, they create new relationships among them, they give new semantic meaning to them. (Lahey, 1988) Two nouns together, *daddy car*, express possessor+object, *allgone food*, express nonexistence+noun or even verb and noun, *want ball*, express action+object. As they move from stage I to stage II, they might become more creative by increasing the length and the complexity of the utterances, however, their speech is really simple. Its simplicity has to do with the fact that they avoid using inflections and functions words, such as articles, prepositions, conjunctions. This is called “telegraphic speech” (Dale, 1972). The first grammatical inflections make their appearance. The progressive present *-ing* and the plural ending *-s* are acquired first, and the prepositions *in* and *on* as well. These two-word utterances are related not only with the syntactic structure of the language and how children learn syntax, but also with the semantic, the meaning. They put the words into categories, thus, once they start to understand and use words relative to the categories, automatically words begin to have semantic significance with one another. (Bloom, 1976) Usually children learn a word through observation, and when they understand the meaning of the word they make multi-words with these words. As their understanding of the two-word utterances develop, they produce more complex two-word utterances, agent+preposition+object: *baby no ball* (Skipp et al. 2002) For example, they say: *mommy sock*. Having acquired the meaning of the morpheme *sock*, their mother understands, either they want to wear their *sock*, or they see in front of them a *sock* and they recognize it as theirs. (Bloom, 1976) They give to the word a “possessive” meaning. The relationship between children and objects begin to be conceptual. Therefore, to develop a language does not only

mean to have knowledge of the grammar and the syntax of the language, but to be capable of using all three components of the language: form, content, use. (Lahey, 1988) Most function words and helping verbs, such auxiliaries are missing from children’s initial two-word utterances, but some of the more salient do occur, such as *more*, *no*, *off*. For instance, *more milk*, *more read*, *no food*. Further, as the two-word utterances are not random combination of words, children express with the two-word utterances a meaning. Therefore, that means that, *more milk* and *no food* are related to the existence and/or non-existence of an object or subject (Bloom, 1976). Their MLU is about 2.25. On the other hand, children with SLI find it difficult to make meaningful word combination. Language can be described as a system with three components: form, content and use. The disruption of one of these, may cause problems, as there is an interaction among them (Lahey, 1988). For example, they say: *mommy dar*, instead of *mommy car*. Morphology interacts with phonology, so the difficulties in their language development will be inevitable. The meaning will be different and the word combination will reflect another relation than the normal: *Kick+ball*

Kick is an *action*. The inanimate *object* in this two-word utterance is obviously the *ball*. Now, the exact connotation the child intends when uttering a phrase like *kick ball* needs to be understood from the context in which it is uttered.

For instance, if the child is kicking a ball then this utterance may be envisioned to mean, ‘I’m kicking the ball’. Besides, if the ball is on the ground in front of the mother and he points to the and says, ‘kick ball!’ then this may could intended as, ‘you kick the ball now’.

The first interpretation is more like the child describing what he or she is doing and the second more like giving an instruction Buckley, B. (2003).

Typically developing children when they make two-word combination, it is like they play a game. Create something with many different meanings. This “game” is extremely difficult for the children with SLI. They do create combinations, but with the wrong words, and with the wrong meaning. Children with SLI also have problems with inflections, but not with all of them. It is extremely difficult for them to acquire the past tense *-ed*. What is weird is that they do not have problem to acquire the irregular past tense of the verbs, although, after a while and with no specific reason, they tend to use the past tense *-ed* in all regular and irregular verbs. For instance, *go=goed*, *come=comed*. Moreover, they have the same difficulty with the present third person *-s*. for example, they say, *daddy write*, instead of *daddy writes*, or *mummy sing*, instead of *sings*. (Lahey, 1988) However, they acquire quite easy the progressive present *-ing*. In the progressive present *-ing*, children learn individual words, not a specific rule. It has no irregular forms, so its meaning it is declared through the *-ing* suffix. However, progressive present *-ing* can be tricky. They learn it early and use it almost with every word or they omit it.

2.2 Three-word utterances

as they grow up the acquisition of the grammatical inflections becomes more productive. At the age of 2.5 - 3 years old they learn past tense irregular forms, auxiliaries, possessive nouns and the uncontractible copula. Children have developed the progressive present *-ing*, plural ending *-s*, possessive *-s*, third person present *-s*, past participle and with this three new inflections, they can produce small sentences even if the syntax is not completely right yet, but they start to put the words in the right order. The most common word order in English is S-V-O (subject-verb-object). English language does not have case endings to show the change in the meaning of a sentence, word order undertakes this role. Their first wh-words are *where* and *what* or *why*, for example *where my mummy going?* because children point out things and make questions for everything around them. Although they At this stage children will begin to envisage things and start to express empathy. Children also use a lot of 'what', 'why', 'where', 'who' and 'how' questions to discover more about their world.

Raising Children Network Australia Limited, (2006-2021) have learnt the copula form, when they make questions, they omit it. Children with SLI, acquire the irregular past tense and auxiliaries with the same accuracy as their MLU matched peers. In their three-word utterances it could be observed a form like, *I went out, daddy left home*. On the other hand, the uncontractible copula, creates a lot of problems to them. They cannot recognize it or they totally omit it from their sentences. For instance, *daddy sleeping?* Instead of *is daddy sleeping?* (Lindfors, 1987; Reed, 1994) Apart from this, possessive nouns and wh-questions are considered very tough for them. For example, in the sentence: *that is her car*, his is a possessive noun which is used to describe to noun car. There is a difference in saying: *that car is hers*. Children with SLI, cannot understand the difference between a possessive pronoun and possessive noun. (O' Grady, 1952) Typically developing children have a s-v-o structure basis before they reach three-word utterances stage. Having this knowledge it is easy for them to identify the difference between *the boy kisses the girl* and *the girl kisses the boy*. Children with SLI cannot do this, apart from the fact that they omit obligatory grammatical inflections, they violate and the syntactical rules.(Chapman & Miller, 1972)

2.3 Four-word utterances:

2 years and 5 months- 3 years. Most accomplishments in language development happen at the age of 3. Typically developing children, as they have developed fully stage III, slowly and steadily move to produce 4 word utterances. Their sentences are full of verbs, nouns and adjectives. They start to produce questions with verbs and subjects inside, *why is the sky blue?* , or make negative sentences, *I don't want to eat*. They also start to add pronouns *him, me, her* and all the previous grammatical inflections that they have acquired to form their sentences: *My daddy's car*. They put the words in

the right order and start to communicate with others. Their sentences are richer, as now they develop the past tense *-ed*, the articles and the third person *-s* and have consistency. However, the past tense *-ed*, provokes difficulty to them. The most usual phenomenon that is related with the acquisition of past tense *-ed*, is the overgeneralization(Gleason, 1985;Dale, 1972;Townend and Walker, 2006) While they have acquire the irregular past tense, it is noticed that suddenly in the irregular form they add the regular past tense inflection *-ed*. For instance, *come=comed, go=goed*.

Children with SLI, seem to acquire grammatical morphemes in a similar

order with their typically developing peers, but their difficulty is that, either they omit basic morphemes, such as third person *-s*, or they apply the wrong inflection.(Paul, 1993) Their biggest problem is to acquire suitably the past tense *-ed* and the third person *-s*. These inflections are very important because they show the grammaticality of the word. According to past tense *-ed* inflection, a frequent mistake, for children with or without SLI, is that they apply to the irregular form of verbs, the past tense *-ed* inflection. For instance, *come=camed, go=goed, take=taked*. They overgeneralised the past form. (Gleason, 1985; Dale, 1972) As far as with the third person *-s*, it is pretty much the same. *Mommy go out* or *daddy want food* or he *comes to play* are few examples. Even if they acquire the irregular past tense and are aware of the pastness, they add the wrong grammatical inflection. They cannot understand the use and the concept of these morphemes.(Joanisse & Seidenberg 1998;Paradis, 2005)

2.4 Stage V- complex sentences: 3 years and 5 months. Typically developing children recognize and produce all the grammatical morphemes, all the verb tenses. (Moyle et al. 2011)The language development beyond this stage is not anymore word production, but what matters is how the sentences are structured. This period usually ranges from birth (0) to five year (5years), children develop language at a very rapid pace. This milestone of language development is unique to each child and goes hand in hand with the maturation of the brain.

It is faster in girls than boys thus, language development. Receptive language development is the ability to comprehend language.

Expressive language development is type, children first speak in long unintelligible babbles that mimic the pace and rhythm of adult speech.

During three (3) years to five (5) years the following happen during the language development process:

- 3years has a vocabulary of 900–1000 words. Uses more verbs, some past tenses, and some plural nouns. Children easily handles three-word sentences and can give their own name, sex, and age. About 90% of speech is understandable.

- 5years children can count to ten. Speech is totally comprehensible, though articulation might not overly be perfect.
- The child at this level should have all vowels and consonants m, p, b, h, w, k, g, t, d, n, ng, y.
- He or she can repeat sentences as long as nine words(healthofchildren.com/L/Languag-Development).

This is the stage at which the structure of the sentence changes. They join single clauses to form complex sentences with all the functions words (prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliaries, pronouns) or entrenched sentences. (Child Development Institute. 2004). For example, *I went to the school and I played with my friends, or the lady we saw yesterday, is my teacher.* After 3 years and 5 months they continue to enrich their complex sentences with more difficult morphemes, such as modal verbs. They are capable now to make questions like may I have this T-shirt mummy, please? Till the age of 5 years they have mastered the syntax rules, but they still develop their language. Shortly before they reach the school-age years, passive and inversion, along with contractible and uncontractible copula questions make their appearance. Although their language is not fully developed, they continue to developing it at this stage. At school age, they will be ready to make sentences and use words inside, either to emphasize what they are saying, or make inversion correctly. Having imperfect acquisition of almost all the basic grammatical inflections they are incapable of producing sentences with cohesion. Usually they do not have an agreement between the agent and/or the verb. Further, without the function words and the conjunctions they cannot create compound sentences, even simple complex sentences. For example, if they want to say *today, i went to school and played with my friends, which were in the school yard*, instead of that they say, *i goed school, and i played with friends, and were in school yard*. Their speech won't have a consistency. Inversion is another issue. One rule of inversion is that the sentence starts with the auxiliary or the modal verb and the subject follows afterwards. They start with the subject and then the auxiliary. As for the passive, they do not manage to acquire it properly. They omit the past tense, the function words (by), they do not understand the relation between agent and the truncated.

II. CONCLUSION

The article can be concluded with summary of few points which were discussed from the essay which are worth noting.

From the points raised above, it is true, that language and communication needs are integral parts of every human's wellbeing in the environment he or she found himself.

It is obvious that normal language is developed from successful interaction of form, content and use.

Also from the literature reviewed above, it is undisputable fact that, impaired language is any disruption in the learning or use

of language content, form or use in the interaction among the three components.

Besides, according to the literature, it is evident that, there is no medical diagnosis to see if a child has specific language impairment.

It is indicative from the write-up that language is acquired and develops through certain developmental stages in life. It is the rules for sentences that make up grammar and it is grammatical rules that specify, how linguistic units are combined to code meaning. Thus morphology and syntax come together to form grammar which is grammatical rules of a language and the rules that governs the use of morphemes. Brandone et.al (2006).

Morphology usually talks about word structure. Such as prefixes, suffixes compounds and word endings. Crystal (1976).

Looking at SLI children, it is indicating from the literature that they do have difficulties with grammatical morphemes, bound morphemes such as English past tense, third person singular, inflections, articles and auxiliaries.

Language is also seen as a code in which the views or ideas of the entire world are expressed mostly through a conventional system of arbitrary signals for communication.

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