

A Psycholinguistic Study of the Language of Under-Five Users of English

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Abstract

This research is a psycholinguistic study of the language of Nigerian children under the age of five years. The purpose of this investigation is to explore the process through which the under five children acquire and use language including their cognitive development. A review of related materials formed the basis of our procedure. Data was collected from informants through spontaneous speeches, personal interviews and oral test. Two nursery schools provided the data for this study. They are Delta State University Staff School, Abraka and Awaiké Primary School, Abraka. The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Chomsky's Transformational Generative Grammar. Data collected was grouped and built into tables for analysis based on the hypotheses tested. The results of the analysis revealed that both innate and environmental factors are responsible for the acquisition of language by children under-five years of age. The research therefore, recommends that since language acquisition by children is greatly influenced by adults' utterances, adults should be mindful of how words are pronounced since children learn by imitation.

Keywords: Psycholinguistics, Language, Under-Five Children, Grammar, Phonology.

Introduction

Psycholinguistics refers to the study of the correlation between linguistic behavior and the psychological processes that underlies such behaviour. It is concerned with the mental processes that take place as people acquire and use language. The Free Dictionary Online defines psycholinguistics as the study of the influence of psychological factors on the development, use and interpretation of language. It covers the cognitive processes that make it possible for humans to generate useful utterances. Summarily, it is a sub-discipline of linguistics which is essentially, an intersection of psychology and linguistics.

What is known about child's acquisition of language is largely derived from the work of psychologists, who have sometimes employed tools offered by linguistic study, though not always by the accuracy or refinement which might be possible. A great deal is still unknown. The broad facts are observable, and apparently follow much the same pattern in all children regardless of whether a language is acquired as first or second.

Explaining children's acquisition of language involves looking at the psycholinguistic factors responsible for such acquisition. This paper will therefore, look at the psycholinguistic basis for children's phonology. It will proceed to analyse the significance of the phonology of the under-five children and whether or not they reproduce what is modeled by an adult.

Statement of the Problem

Since the human child does not spring from the womb as a fully articulated language-user, there is the need to find out what processes are involved in enabling the child acquire language.

This study is therefore, aimed at investigating children's verbal behavior especially with a particular focus on the phonology of the under-five user of English.

Theoretical Framework

Language Theory: This model owes its insight to Noam Chomsky (1957). Chomsky's theory of language acquisition argues that human brain structures naturally allow for the capacity to learn and use languages. Chomsky believed that rules for language acquisition are innate (inborn) and strengthen naturally as humans grow and develop. He published a groundbreaking book titled "Syntactic Structures" in which he proposed a novel idea that all human beings may be born with an innate understanding of how language works.

According to Legg T. and Stanborough (2019), there is no doubt that we acquire our native languages, complete with their vocabularies and grammatical patterns. To Chomsky, we can acquire language because we are genetically encoded with a universal grammar – a basic understanding of how communication is structured. Chomsky's theory of language acquisition as Sydney, B. et al (2022), puts it, views language acquisition as a biologically determined process that uses neural circuits in the brain which have evolved to contain linguistic signals. Chomsky concludes that language acquisition requires an inborn faculty in children, a concept known as the language acquisition device (LAD) that enables them to learn any human language. Prior to Chomsky, it was widely agreed that language was acquired through experiential learning, but his theory argues that human brain structures naturally allow for the capacity to learn and use languages.

According to Chomsky, humans acquire language by unconsciously storing information in the brain which can later be used for many types of written and oral communication. He also believes in the importance of children acquiring and developing effective language skills during early critical developmental stages. This is because language helps the child to function in society, teaching them how to socialize and learn (Sydney B. et al (2022).

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been propounded to facilitate the search for solution to our research problem:

- (a) H^0 : Under-five children may not be phonologically competent even though they possess an innate capacity for language.
- (b) H^1 : Under five children acquire language through imitation of adult speech and correction by the adult user of the language.

Literature Review

According to Jodai H. (2011), Psycholinguistics or psychology of language is the study of the interrelation between linguistic factors and psychological aspects. The discipline is mainly concerned with the mechanisms by which language is processed and represented in the mind and brain. That is, the psychological and neurobiological factors that enable humans to acquire, use comprehend and produce language Nordquist R. (2019).

Language and Linguistics

All human beings have developed languages that are suitable to their everyday needs. Language enables humans to communicate with one another.

Language Development

Language acquisition: Acquisition is considered more neutral term in psychology -linguistic circles because of the many implications of the term 'learning.' Acquisition itself is not so neutral because of the implication that one is coming to have something that one does not previously have. The use of the phrase therefore, should be understood to mean the process, which results in the knowledge of one's native language or (Languages) in its normal sense – a process whereby children become speakers of their native language or languages (Osakwe, 1999).

Language development in humans is a process starting early in life. Infants start without knowing a language, yet by 10 months' babies can distinguish speech sounds and engage in babbling. Some research has shown that the earliest learning begins in utero when the fetus starts to recognize the sounds and speech patterns of its mother's voice and differentiate them from other sounds after birth (Graven, 2008 Wikipedia on line).

Cognitive Development

According to the Wikipedia on line (2023) cognitive development is a field of study in neuroscience and psychology focusing on a child's development in terms of information processing, conceptual resources, perceptual skill, language learning, and other aspects of the developed adult brain and cognitive psychology. As sellers, P.D. et al (2018) put it, qualitative differences between how a child processes their waking experience and how an adult processes their waking experience are acknowledged (such as object permanence, the understanding of logical relations, and cause-effect reasoning in school – age children). Cognitive development is defined as the emergence of the ability to consciously cognize, understand, and articulate their understanding in adult terms. Cognitive development is how a person perceives, thinks, and again understanding of their world through the relation of genetic and learning factors. According to Schader DL (2007), there are four stages to cognitive, information development. They are reasoning, intelligence, language and memory. These stages start when the baby is about 18 months old, they play with toys, listen to their parents speak, and they watch television, anything that catches their attention helps build their cognitive development. Jean Piaget was a major force

establishing this field, forming his "theory of cognitive development. Piaget proposed four stages of cognitive development: the sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational period. However, many of Piaget's theoretical claims have been abandoned while some are still relevant. His postulation on the most prominent changes in cognition with age such as how early perception moves from being dependent on concrete external actions is still very useful today.

Language Development

Malmkjar (1991) has it that it was from the work of Stern C. and Stern W. (1907) that the notion of language acquisition derives. The preferred data collect method during this period was the parental diary in which a linguist or psychologist would record their own child's development. The diarist's main aim was to describe the child's language and other development and this emphasized the child's 'genius', an in-built language faculty which, according to Taine (1977) enable the child to adapt to the language which others presented it with, and which would, had no language been available already, have enabled a child to create one.

Linguistic Basis for Children's Language

The establishment of stages of acquisition is probably the best known outcome of research on children's language. Ingram (1989) describes the sets of stage proposed by Stern W. (1924), Nice, M. (1925) and Brown, (1973). The first year of a child's life may be referred to as the period of pre-linguistic development, since children do not normally begin to produce word's until they are a year old. The only sound a new born baby makes apart from possible sneezes, coughs et cetera are crying sounds which communicates one thing or the other and these sounds are nevertheless linguistic.

Infants begin making cooing sounds around their third month and babbling sounds by the sixth month. In cooing, babies make squealing-gurgling noises, which they sustain for about fifteen to twenty seconds. In babbling, they produce sequences of alternating vowels and consonants that resemble one syllable utterances, for example, "dada-da" (Lenneberg, 1967). Zanden, (1978) also points out that deaf infants also go through this phase of babbling. This suggests that a hereditary mechanism underlies the early cooing and babbling process.

Holophrastic speech

During the latter babbling stage from around nine to twelve months, intonation patterns and some imitation of others' speech are present, and the infant's sound production at this stage is often referred to as sound play. Most developmental psychologists believe that children speak their first word at about ten to thirteen months, however, the precise time of attaining this ability is often difficult to determine but gradually the factual and emotional components of the infant's early word become clearer and more precise in their discriminatory power.

Two-Word Sentences

At eighteen to twenty-two months, children begin to use two-word sentences. For example, "more page", a request to an adult to continue reading aloud.

Three-Word Sentences

In three-word phrases, children use the third word to frequently fill in part that was implied in the two-word statement (Slobin, 1972)

Telegraphic Speech

Psycholinguistic Roger Brown, (1973) characterizes the language of the two-year old children as telegraphic speech. It involves the omission of some word class (such as prepositions, conjunctions, articles, et cetera). He states:

The curious fact is that the sentences the Child makes are like adult telegrams in that they are largely made up of nouns and Verbs... they generally do not use prepositions, conjunctions, articles, et cetera.

Babies are not born producing and understanding utterances yet adults possess remarkable complex psychological systems for dealing with speech. The child develops an internal representation of the grammar of his language that eventually allows him to make the kind of linguistic judgements an adult can make. Research have shown that children at certain age cannot understand sentences in the passive voice. Their number concepts are limited to simple counting and so incapable of assimilating a definition. The child say three-year-old who does not understand some passivation may understand others despite the lack of full competence with its syntax may be as a result of his knowledge about the world. Children develop performance skills as well as formal grammatical knowledge (Cairns H. and Cairns C. (1994).

Acquisition and Communication of Language by Children

Craig G.T. (1972) maintains that even new born infants can communicate. It does not take long for them to discover how to let their parents know that they are hungry, wet or bored. By about one year of age, most children begin to talk, by four and half, most of them develop amazing verbal competence. Their vocabulary may be limited and their grammar far from perfect, but their implicit grasp of language structure is remarkable. They not only know the words with which to designate things but the rules that govern the combinations and uses of these words. They speak in full sentences with phrases, clauses, and appropriate grammatical constructions. To manipulate the symbols properly, a child must first master basic cognitive concepts, the complexity and the originality of their speech can be illustrated by the tag question which is a direct statement followed by a tag, or request to confirm the statement: "Maria broke the toy, didn't she" "I am a good boy amn't I. This apparent simple question actually involves a number of grammatical processes.

In order to form the tag "didn't she?", Jason had to understand several different rules. He had to know how to copy, or supply the correct subject pronoun for "Maria", how to supply

the auxiliary verb (the proper form of “do”), how to negate the auxiliary verb and how to invert the word order of the auxiliary verb and pronoun. Somewhat younger children may have the general idea of the tag question but may not yet be able to master all of the grammatical processes. Thus, they might say “Maria broke the toy, Unh? Language development is more than purely cognitive achievement however. Language acquisition involves both cognitive and social development; it is a bridge between infancy and childhood since children must learn a specific language with all its cultural ramifications. Two factors could be employed in explaining the social development likely to take place in children:

Imitation

This plays a large part in language learning. Children’s first words, usually simple labels are obviously learnt by hearing, and imitating. In fact, most early vocabulary must be learned in this way: Children cannot invent words and make themselves understand. However, the development of syntax is not so easily explained. No doubt some phrases result from imitation, but a form such as “amn’t I” is clearly original. It is unlikely that children have heard anyone speak this way. Even when people use baby talk or attempt to correct children’s errors, the children tend to adhere to their own consistent speech patterns for which there are no immediate models.

Reinforcement

Reinforcement is a powerful learning device, and this probably holds true for certain aspects of language acquisition. Certain children are influenced by reactions to their speech. When word produce favourable results, children are likely to repeat them. But reinforcement does not seem sufficient to explain the acquisition of syntax. As we know, much of children’s speech is original and has never been reinforced. Even if some forms are encouraged and others discouraged, it simply would not be possible to reinforce all correct forms and extinguish all incorrect ones (Craig op cit).

According to Child Development Institute (2004) under the Pre-school age, three to four-year olds usually can do the following:

- understands most of what they hear.
- converse
- have 900 to 1,000- word vocabularies, with verbs starting to predominate.
- usually talk without repeating syllables or words
- use pronoun correctly
- use three to six-word sentences
- ask questions
- relate experiences and activities
- tell stories (occasional stuttering and stammering is normal in preschoolers)

Language skills usually blossom between four and five years of age. Children of this age can do the following:

- verbalise extensively
- communicate easily with other children and adults
- articulate most English sounds correctly
- know 1,500 to 2,500 words
- use detailed six to eight-word sentences
- can repeat four-syllable words
- use at least four prepositions
- tell stories that stay on topic
- can answer questions about stories

School age:

At age five, most children can do the following:

- follow three consecutive commands
- talk constantly
- ask innumerable questions
- use descriptive words and compound and complex sentences
- know all the vowels and consonants
- use generally correct grammar (Buckley, B. 2003)

Language Development

The Encyclopedia of children's health defines language development as the process by which children come to understand and communicate language during early childhood.

Description

From birth up to the age of five, children development is universal among humans. However, the age and the pace at which a child reaches each milestone of language development vary greatly among children. Thus, language development in an individual child must be compared with norms rather than with other individual children. In general, girls develop language at a faster rate than boys. More than any other aspect of development, language development reflects the growth and maturation of the brain. After the age of five, it becomes much more difficult for most children to learn language (Child Development Institute, 2004).

Jean Piaget (1954), a Swiss developmental psychologist has contributed a great deal to our understanding of how children think, reason, and solve problems. Piaget charts a developmental sequence of stages during which the child constructs increasingly complex notions of the world. He provides an account of how the child acts at each level and how this activity leads to the next level. Vickers J (2003) identified the stages to include Sensory-

motor period, pre-operational period, Animism and Egocentrism and the Operational period.

Sensory – Motor Period

According to Piaget's theory, children are born with basic "action schemas", such as sucking and grasping. He described the sensory-motor period (from birth to 2 years) as the time when children use action schemas to "assimilate" information about the world. In his book "The Language and Thought of the Child", Piaget describes two functions of children's language: the "egocentric" and the "socialized". During the sensory-motor period, children's language is "egocentric": they talk either for themselves or "for the pleasure of associating anyone who happens to be there with the activity of the moment".

Pre-Operational Period

Piaget observed that during this period, (between the ages of 2 and 7 years), children's language makes rapid progress. The development of their mental schemas lets them quickly "accommodate" new words and situations. From using single words (for example "milk"), they begin to construct simple sentences (for example, "mommy go out"). Piaget's theory describes children's language as "symbolic" allowing them to venture beyond the "here and now" and to talk about such things as the past, the future, people, feelings and events. During this time, children's language often shows instances of what Piaget termed "animism" and "egocentrism".

Animism and Egocentrism

"Animism" refers to young children's tendency to consider everything including inanimate objects to be alive. Since they see things purely from their own perspective, children's language also reflects their "egocentrism", whereby they attribute phenomena with the same feelings and intentions as their own. Piaget's theory also describes "moral realism" as a characteristic of children's language development at this stage, since young children tend to focus on the extent of any damage caused by a person's actions, without taking into account whether that person had good or bad intentions.

The Operational Period

Piaget's theory divides this period into two parts: the "period of concrete operations" (7 to 11 years) and the "period of formal operations" (11 years to adulthood). According to Piaget, children language development at this stage reveals the movement of their thinking from immature to mature and from illogical to logical. Children's language...to become "socialized", showing characteristics such as questions, answers, criticisms and commands

Expert Insight

Some experts, such as Margaret Donaldson, Professor of Developmental Psychology, have argued that the clear-cut ages and stages forming the basis of Piaget's theory are actually

quite blurred and blend into each other. In her book, *Children's Minds*, Donaldson suggests that Piaget may have underestimated children's language and thinking abilities by not giving enough consideration to the contexts he provided for children when conducting his research. (Vickers 2023).

Phonology

The gurgling, spitting and burping noises infants first make are caused by air passing through the vocal apparatus. Their vocalization become more varied and frequent during their first twelve months. Eventually, infants can combine sounds into pronounceable units. One of such unit is phoneme. Phonemes are the basic units of sound that make up a language. In English, phonemes are sounds of single letters such as p, b, f, v, m, j, n et cetera.

At about one year of age, children make the first sounds that psychologists classify as real speech. Initially, they utter only one word. But soon they are saying as many as four or five words. Words consist of morphemes, which are the basic units of meaning in a language.

Psychological Basis for Children's Language

Children do not use constructive language the first day they are born but as they grow up, they acquire language. "Biological factors alone have not been known to account for child's capacity for language because of certain stage of development, say around nine to twelve months, some imitation of others speech are present" (Ingram 1989). This paper will look at three aspects of psychological basis for children's language. They are:

- i. The "tabula rasa" hypothesis
- ii. The Behaviourist/Innateness/Nativistic hypothesis
- iii. The environmentalist/Learning Theory

Tabula Rasa

The phrase 'tabula rasa' means blank slate – a kind of white paper where nothing is written. This has a close relation with the notion of nature and nurture. The nature-nurture controversy has its beginnings in the classical Greek era (See Zanden, 1978) when the Greek philosophers asked the question, "are ideas innate in human beings, or do human acquire ideas through the experience of their senses? Plato (in Zanden 1978) says that "a soul enters or is trapped by the body at birth. He believes that the soul provides each individual with pre-established ideas and knowledge about the world. Zanden (op cit) points out that by emphasizing the part played in life by innate ideas, Plato essentially took the position that nature determines behavior".

Aristotle (in Zanden 1978), Plato's student views the part played by innate ideas differently. He argued that "the mind is nothing until it has thought; it is simply a writing-tablet". John Lock (cited in Zanden) portrays the mind at birth as a white paper or blank-slate. Viewed from this perspective, the source of all knowledge is experience – nurture or environmental stimulation.

Considering the first sub-classification of the sensory-motor stage of Piaget (1954), one finds out that the neonate engages in reflex acts which are involuntary. It is not the environment or rather experience that informs the neonate that it is hungry. Once the neonate is hungry, it cries for food. Hunger is an internal instinct which the neonate feels. So also, the early vocalization in the neonate such as cries, thwarted noises, hiccups are not experiences from the environment (Zanden, op cit).

Osakwe (1999), quoting Noam Chomsky (1972) who is rationalist oriented says that the mind is not simply "tabula rasa" or blank slate upon which experience leaves its imprint but ought to be viewed as a block of marble whose structure imposes constraints upon the creativity of the sculptor who may hew it to different shapes.

Empiricism holds that the human mind is blank at birth, and all ideas and knowledge subsequently developed in them are initially derived from experience obtained through the senses (Malmkjær 1991).

The Environmentalist Hypothesis

The environmentalist theories of language acquisition hold that an organism's nurture, or experience, are of more significance to development than its nature or inborn contributions. Yet they do not completely reject the innate factors. Behaviourist and neo-behaviourist stimulus-response learning theories (S-R) – are the best known examples. Even though such theories have lost their effect partially because of Chomsky's intelligent review of Skinner's Verbal Behaviour (Chomsky, 1959), their effect has not been so little when we consider the present cognitive approach as an offshoot of behaviourism.

The nativist theories, on the other hand, assert that much of the capacity for language learning in human is 'innate'. It is part of the genetic make-up of human species and is nearly independent of any particular experience which may occur after birth. Thus, the nativists claim that language acquisition is innately determined and that we are born with a built-in device which predisposes us to a systematic perception of language around us. Eric Lenneberg (cited in Brown, 1987:19), in his attempt to explain language development in the child, assumed that language is a species-specific behavior and it is 'biologically determined'. Another important point as regards the innatist account as Kiyamazarslan (2002) puts it is that nativists do not deny the importance of environmental factors only. They agree that there must be some innate guide to achieve this end.

From the foregoing, one could assert that both hereditary and environmental factor must be taken into account. The observation that Heubz Werner and Bernard Kaplan (1963) made nearly two decades ago still holds today:

There are multiple approaches to the problems of Language.....each of which probes into these problems with its own pre-suppositions, its specific concern.... Each approach yields some information on the complex and many-sided problems and none can claim reasonably to be the only avenue of truth.

According to Zanden (1978) language acquisition cannot be understood by examining learning or genetic factors in isolation from one another. Rather, complex and dynamic

interactions take place between biochemical processes, maturational factors, learning strategies, and the social environment. No aspect by itself can produce a language-using human. Instead of asking which factor is most important, we need to study the on-going process by which the factors dynamically come together. We must understand both learning and genetic components in order to understand either. Simply because a biological pre-disposition for the development of the language may be anchored in the human brain does not mean that environmental factors play no part in language acquisition.

Research Methods

Informants for this study were children under five years of age. The compass of this research is geared towards the psycholinguistic analysis of the language of the Nigerian under five users of English, with specific attention on their phonology. Data was collected from informants between the ages of 1 and 5 years from Delta State University Staff School, Abraka and Awaiké Primary School, Abraka where English language is spoken. These nursery school children were grouped into two. That is 1 – 2 years and 3 – 5 years.

Instrumentation

In the course of information and data collection, the two basic instruments that became indispensable are spontaneous speeches and personal interview which was recorded with a micro recorder.

Data Analysis

Here, the following hypotheses are tested using the responses collected from the children.

Hypothetical Statement 1

Under-five children may not be phonologically competent even though they possess an innate capacity for language:

TEXT A: Phonology of 1 – 2 years

<u>Adult</u>		<u>Under-five</u>
My	-	Ma
Name	-	yame
Emmanuela	-	Emmanela
School	-	Schu
DELSU	-	DESU
I	-	a
love	-	yove
Jesus	-	yizos
his	-	is
friend	-	fend
aunty	-	ati

want	-	wan
play	-	pia
with	-	wit
them	-	dem
all over	-	oyover
spirit	-	pirit
world	-	worl
moving	-	uving
revelation	-	yeelation
glory	-	gory
Lord	-	yord
mineral	-	minias
fridge	-	fij
bread	-	bued
block	-	byock
brush	-	biosh
teeth	-	teet
God	-	Gor
serve	-	ser
heaven	-	ewn
earth	-	eart
adore	-	aro
him	-	im
angel	-	ange
bow	-	bar
rice	-	rase
went	-	wen
not	-	no
don't	-	don
allow	-	alla
house	-	ase
will	-	wi
staying	-	taying
mouth	-	mat

Source: Field Work (Spontaneous speeches), 2023.

Results

The phonology of 1-2 years is significant in many respects when compared with that of an adult. The table below is a summary of the degree of phonological competence exhibited by the first group of the under-five children which is from 1-2 years:

Table 1: Degree of phonological competence exhibited by under-five

Linguistic item	No. of Respondents		Correct responses		Incorrect responses	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
my	40	100	2	5	38	95
moving	40	100	1	2.5	39	97.5
revelation	40	100	1	2.5	39	97.5
want	40	100	1	2.5	39	97.5
will	40	100	1	2.5	39	97.5
him	40	100	1	2.5	39	97.5
them	40	100	1	2.5	39	97.5

Source: Field Work (Spontaneous speeches), 2023.

The table shows that only one child was able to articulate all the items listed except for “my” where two children managed to produce it. This shows that though children possess an innate capacity for language, the under-five children from 1-2 years are not phonologically competent at this age of their language development.

Aspects of significance of the children’s utterances in spontaneous speeches as recorded by the researcher is discussed below:

- (1) Inability to articulate diphthongs. It is not easy for these children to glide from one vowel to another. This is why the child finds it difficult to articulate the vowels /a/ and /i/ together. So /a/ and /i/ in “rice”, “my” and “I” is realized for the under five children as /a/ as in “rase”, “ma” and “a”. In text A, (see appendix). Emmanuela finds it quite difficult to produce the glide in her name /uə/. This is therefore, realized for her as /e/ as in /imanela/. The diphthong in “moving” is difficult for the child to articulate, so she realizes the /eu/ as /u/ as in u /uvin/, she also finds it difficult to articulate the bilabial nasal /m/ and the glottal nasal /ŋ/, so she elides them. It is difficult for the children to articulate the diphthongs in “bow”, “house”, “allow” and “mouth”,. That is the /a/ and /u/ in “bow” is realized as /a/ as in /ba/; the /a/ and /i/ in “rice” as /æ/ as in /ræs/; the /a/ and /u/ in “allow” as /æ/ as in /ælæ/; the /a/ and /u/ in “mouth” as /æ/ as in /mæt/. There are two aspects of significance in ‘mouth’. The first deals with not being able to articulation the diphthong /au/, the second is with the child’s inability to articulate the dental fricative /θ/.
- (2) The under-five children find it difficult to master consonant clusters. So when there is more than one consonant within neighbouring sounds, the children tend to elide one of the consonants. Thus, the labio dental fricative /f/ and the post alveolar fricative /r/ (in friend and fridge) are elided. What is realized for both lexemes are /fend/ and /fij/. (See text in Appendix). Similarly, the alveolar nasal /n/ and the alveolar plosive /t/ (in “aunty”, “don’t”, “what”) are realized as /æti/, /don/, and /wan/. The same is applicable in the case of the bilabial plosive /p/ and the alveolar

approximant /l/ (in "play") as in /pia/. The alveolar lateral /l/ and the alveolar plosive /d/ (in "world") is realized as "worl". The child realizes the alveolar fricative /s/ and the bilabial plosive /p/ (in spirit) as in /pirit/. The bilabial plosive /b/ and the post alveolar fricative /r/ (in "bread") is also realized as /bued/ by the child. The bilabial plosive /b/ and the alveolar lateral /l/ (in "block") is realized by the child as /byock/. For the child, the velar plosive /g/ and the alveolar lateral /l/ (in "glory") is realized as /gori/. The same is also applicable to the alveolar fricative /s/ and the alveolar plosive /t/ (in "staying") which is realized as "taying". In addition, the child produces the velar plosive /g/ and the alveolar lateral /l/ at final position (in "angel") as in "ange"; the alveolar lateral /l/ and the alveolar fricative /s/ (in "DELSU") is realized as /desu/.

- (3) Inability to articulate nasal sounds: The alveolar nasal /n/ (in "name") is realized by the child as /y/ as in "yame" and the bilabial nasal /m/ in "moving" is elided.
- (4) Difficulty in pronouncing any lexical item that has more than one syllable. The under five children cannot cope with too many syllables so the child shortens them. This is why "all over", "moving", "adore", "heaven" which have two syllables each and "revelation", "minerals" which have three each are shortened to realise odd forms like "uving", "aro", "ewn", "yeelation" and minias.
- (5) Children find it difficult to articulate voiced sounds. The voiceless sounds are much easier for them to articulate as a result of the breath force that is involved. The child therefore, finds it difficult to pronounce the lateral /l/ (in "love", "Lord", "all over", "will" which are realized respectively as "yove", "yord", "Oyover", while in "will" the consonant cluster is deleted to realise "wi". These children find it difficult to produce the palato alveolar /dʒ/, the voiced and voiceless dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/. In ability to articulate these sounds may be a result of the fact that these sounds are not found in the child's first language (L₁) – where his/her first language is not English. The /ʌ/ (in Jesus) is produced as /yizɔs/ while the /θ/ (in "with", "earth", "teeth" and "mouth") are articulated as /wit/, ə:t/ and /ma:t/.

The /ð/ in "the", then and "there's" are produced as /d/. There are two aspects of significance in "there's". The child cannot articulate the possessive morpheme in "there's". All vowel sounds are voiced and the fact that the vowels /ə:/ in "serve", /e/ in "send" and /ʌ/ in "God" occur before labio-dental fricative /v/, alveolar nasal /n/ and central back vowel /ɔ/ make it difficult for the child to produce the vowels in "serve", send and "God". So, what the child articulates is /se:/, /sen/ and /gɔ:/.

Judging from the above, the under-five children cannot be said to be absolutely phonologically competent even though they possess an innate capacity for language. If they are such oddities found in their speech would not have come up. Nevertheless, some children from 3-5 years of age were able to articulate properly some of the words that those within the age-range of 1-2 years could not pronounce correctly.

They are the phonological items under Text B as follows:

Phonology of 3 – 5 years

Adult		Under-five
Emmanuela	-	Emmanuela
DELSU	-	DESU
I	-	I
Love	-	love
Play	-	Play
Fridge	-	fridge
Bread	-	bread
Block	-	block
God	-	God
Heaven	-	heaven
Adore	-	adore
Angel	-	angel

Source: Field Work (Spontaneous speeches), 2023.

Hypothetical Statement II

Under-five children acquire language through imitation of adult speech and correction by the adult use of the language.

There is a great deal of variability in the language of the under-five children. The individual children may produce 'good' forms one day and 'odd' forms the next. A good example is when the child uses "wan" for "want" and later uses "wat" when corrected. This is especially so for those under 2 years. The child also uses 'pamary' for "primary" and later uses "primary" when corrected. But when the child repeats the same utterance, she still sticks to her former way of articulating it. The researcher also corrected the child when she said "yame" but the child finds it quite difficult to pronounce it as 'name'. It was assumed before that children merely use an imperfect version of adult language but it is now generally accepted that children speak their own language with a characteristic pattern that develop through a series of stages.

Below is a table reflecting the hypothetical statement above:

Text	Items	Total respondent		Correct responses		Incorrect responses	
		No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Imitation and Correction	Wan Primary name	40	100	2	5	38	95
		40	100	1	2.5	39	97.5
		40	100	2	5	38	95

Source: Field Work (Spontaneous speeches), 2023.

From the table above, it is clear that children do not acquire language mainly through imitation of adult speech and correction by him/her (adult). This is why the researcher's

attempts to correct the child succeeded to a very little extent as the child uses the same odd forms, he/she has adopted.

Recommendations

1. There should be innovative proposals for the development of syllabus and instructional design systems, procedures and techniques in the language classroom.
2. More investigation should be carried out in the area of language acquisition in order to help linguists determine the areas of grammatical overgeneralization found in children at particular stages of development.
3. The study of language is particularly important for sociolinguists because it will help them in arriving at useful information as regards the effect of multilingual environment in child's language acquisition.

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