

AN EXPERIMENT IN FIRST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION:-

A CASE STUDY OF A MALAYSIAN INDIAN

CHILD ACQUIRING ENGLISH.

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(i)

To little Jonathan.

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ABSTRACT

This academic exercise has been written in five chapters. Chapter one, the introduction, sets out to give the reader a brief outline on the aim of this study, the procedure used for data collection and an introductory account on the methodology used.

Chapter two provides a review of the literature of child language acquisition commencing from sources of interest in child language learning to the earliest stage - babbling, to the language comprehension stage (18 months). The chapter ends with a review of the theories of first language acquisition.

The Methodology used in my study is described in detail in Chapter Three. The data collection procedures are outlined and the background of the subject and his parents is given. The chapter ends with an account on parental guidance.

Chapter four can be said to form the bulk of this academic exercise for it is in this chapter that a detailed analysis of my subject's data is made. This analysis covers the following aspects;

- 1) Phonology,
- 2) Grammar, which includes syntactical aspects of my subject's utterances,

3) Semantics and

4) Comprehension and the directive function of  
speech in the development of the child.

My academic exercise concludes with Chapter  
five, which is the chapter that deals with some  
of the observations made and the conclusion.

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SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS.PHONOLOGY

p	voiceless bilabial plosive
b	voiced bilabial plosive
t	voiceless alveolar plosive
d	voiced alveolar plosive
k	voiceless velar plosive
g	voiced velar plosive
ʔ	voiceless glottal plosive
f	voiceless labio-dental fricative
v	voiced labio-dental fricative
θ	voiceless dental fricative
ð	voiced dental fricative
s	voiceless alveolar fricative
z	voiced alveolar fricative
ʃ	voiceless palato-alveolar fricative
ʒ	voiced palato-alveolar fricative
x	voiceless velar fricative
h	voiceless glottal fricative
c	voiceless palato-alveolar affricate
j	voiced palato-alveolar affricate
r	alveolar roll
l	lateral
m	bilabial nasal
n	alveolar nasal

ŋ	velar nasal
w	labio-velar semi-vowel
y	palatal semi-vowel
i	high front vowel
e	mid front vowel
a	low front vowel
o	mid back vowel
u	high back vowel
ə	central vowel
//	phonemic brackets
[ ]	phonetic brackets

ABBREVIATIONS

S	sentence
Nom.	nominal
N	noun
VP	verb phrase
V	verb
NP	noun phrase

CHAPTER ONE

1.0

INTRODUCTION

The mystery of how a child learns to speak has intrigued and puzzled adults since antiquity. W.F.Lepold (1937, 1949), claimed that the mental abilities of a little child seem to be rather limited in many ways, yet he masters the exceedingly complex structure of his native language in the course of a short three or four years. Furthermore, each child, exposed to a different sample of language, and generally with little or no conscious tuition on the part of his parents, arrives at the same grammar in this brief span of time. That is to say, each child rapidly becomes a member of his language community, being able to produce and comprehend a great variety of new yet meaningful utterances in the language he has mastered.

This academic exercise is a linguistic study of an Indian child's gradual acquisition of English observed over a eleven month period. This observation and recording of data commenced when the subject, Jonathan, was one year nine months old.

## 1.1

AIM OF THE STUDY

Of all the phases of a child's development, the learning of language has traditionally attracted most attention because of the complexity of language and the ease and swiftness of learning. Language is complex and the ease and swiftness of the child's learning of his native/first language may be more apparent than real.

This study has the underlying aim of trying to find out if the literature and theories of the foreign investigators of child language acquisition written on the universality of the process of first language acquisition really apply to a Malaysian Indian child who has been exposed to a multilingual environment. As such, I have attempted to make a detailed analysis on my subject (Jonathan), in the phonological, grammatical (including syntax) and semantical aspects of his language acquisition process. A discussion of the comprehension and the directive function of the speech in the development of the child will also be dealt with.

## 1.2 Procedure for Data Collection

Visits were made to the subject's home on a weekly basis for the entire study period. For every visit, almost every utterance the subject uttered and everything said to him was tape-recorded. Recordings were usually supplemented by written commentaries on the general situation in which the speech was uttered and also all other utterances which could not be tape-recorded.

## 1.3 Methodology

The methodology employed was based on a question-answer session on an informal basis between subject and myself. The session usually commenced with a question directed to the subject. For example, it could take the form of a question about what the subject had for breakfast/lunch/dinner or of the subject's visit to a place of interest, for example, the aquarium. The response of the subject to these questions formed the basis of the data collected.

On other occasions the methodology took the form of certain performance tasks the subject had to carry out together with the subject's response in the English Language.

Chapter two deals with the review of the related literature on child language acquisition. Chapter three outlines the design of the study, and the employment of the various instruments by which the data for the study were gathered. Chapter four deals with the analysis of the data. Chapter five summarises the findings of the data.