

PATTERN OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION OF AN IGALA CHILD

BISONG M. TABANG, ONUCHEYO, A FRIDAY & ABDULMALIK, MOHAMMED DANRUKAYAT

Abstract

This study, entitled 'Patterns of language acquisition of an Igala child' was designed to find out how an Igala child acquire language (ie Igala). The theoretical framework adopted for the study is Behaviourism as propounded by Jean Piaget. There are many theories or models that explain how children learn language. But, hitherto, no single theory has been able to explain satisfactorily this wonderful phenomenon of the pre-school child. This becomes one of the reasons we have to study some language learning theories that can effectively aid the Igala child in language learning tasks. As discovered, the Igala child first learn the Igala language as mother tongue (MT) and second as language of his immediate environment which is purely a matter of imitation model

through the help of adults who shape sounds that children make during babbling stage to words. The child is reinforced by parents and siblings to produce more of acceptable words, expressions and sounds, and to develop a rule test via cognitivism. The patterns of language acquisition of an Igala child, according to this study, are imitation, practice and reinforcement. The main stay of this paper, therefore, is the development of Igala child language acquisition patterns based on the prescription of the theory of behaviourism

Keywords: Language, Acquisition, Behaviorism, Language acquisition pattern

Introduction

Behaviourism or environmentalism as a theory of language acquisition helps in the explication of a child's capacity in speedy language development through what he sees in the practical world by a way of imitation and modeling. A pattern language is an organized and coherent set of patterns, each of which describes a problem and the solution (Alexander, 2006). An Igala child, like every other human child, is found to acquire language naturally and effortlessly through the aid of Language Acquisition Device (LAD) Chomsky (1997). Children acquire the L1 (ie Igala) implicitly, whereas patterns in language may potentially be learnt by adult either implicitly or explicitly. The stages of language acquisition by an Igala child can be broken down into listening, pre-production, early production, speech emergent, pre-fluency, intermediate fluency and advanced fluency (Peters, 2007)

Department of English and Literary Studies Bingham University Abuja, Department of English and Literary Studies Kogi State University Anyigba

Corresponding Author
BISONG M. TABANG
E-mail: tabangmt@gmail.com

Theoretical Framework

Behaviourism, the theoretical base of this paper, has been defined in different ways by different scholars. Encarta, (2009) defines it as “an approach to the study of psychology that concentrates exclusively on observing, measuring and modifying behaviour. Matthews (2007:30) sees it as “a movement in psychology which sought to eliminate all reference to subjective concepts or experience. The data were accordingly restricted to the observable reactions of subjects to observable stimuli. Also, Crystal (2008:51) considers it as the Bloomfield insistence on rigorous discovery procedures, and most notably in his behaviourist account of meaning in terms of observable stimuli and responses made by the participants in specific situations.

Behaviourism also known as environmentalism, itself discredited and displaced Introspectionism. This school of thought emphasises the publicly observable aspects of human behaviour and is informed by the need for a vigorous scientific investigation. To them, a neonate or new-born child is portrayed as a blank slate or “tabula-rasa”. This neonate is perceived as a “pure mind” which has not been influenced by any external impression or whatsoever. However, as

the child grows and matures with age, environmental stimuli prevail on him and he begins to respond and form his own perceptions and impressions about the world. This is because the need to interact with the environment, communicate and relate with the people around him, who are already organized into the superstructure called society, becomes pertinent. What drives the infant to utter sounds in the first place and later to master progressively more complex structures is what the behaviourist term stimulus and response. (Ivor 1967, 206).

The notion of stimulus and response as propounded by Skinner (1957) can be extended and applied to the Igala child in accordance with the conclusion that environment is the major determinant of behaviour, learning and acquisition of language. Ivor's (1967) formula of "input = output" or i/o can be interpreted to mean that the linguistic codes fed into the child generates a corresponding output. By implication, this means that what the child hears is the same as what he reproduces. Therefore, behaviourism affirms strongly that what a child internalizes is the result of his environmental exposure or experiences.

The theory identified some crucial factors necessary in language acquisition or learning. These are imitation, practice and reinforcement. Imitation is considered as an attempt by the child to model after the target language to which he has been exposed. Practice on the other hand implies that the child constantly repeats to himself what he hears around him, and this repetition enables him to firmly store the linguistic code in his memory for later use. Reinforcement is essentially the positive or negative encouragement that the child receives. In essence, behaviourism perceives language development within the context of reward and punishment, positive/negative sanctions.

This school of thought posits that humans learn languages through general learning principles, which are assumed to be the same for many species of organisms. This means that very little psychological structure is innately specified and that children have no special ability for language, other than that derived from general learning principles.

The main contribution that the people in the child's environment can make towards his language

development, is to encourage and reward him by initiating interchanges and responding to his initiatives. Early experiences of a reasonable measure of success encourages the child to continue to expand his efforts while lack of experience or success for whatever reason, seems in many cases to put a brake on the child's language development.

Behaviourism is rooted in psycholinguistics. The word "psychology" is gotten from the Greek word (Psyche), meaning "mind" or "soul" that is why Ray and Knight (1998) define psychology as "the systematic study of thought and behaviour – human and animal, normal, individual and social".

There is a great need for parents to monitor, correct wrong language behavioural pattern among children if at all they are to transmit genuinely unadulterated language and culture, because when the rudiment is lost there will be a mammoth chasm between the obtainable and the obtained. Bukar (2018:16) submits that "when a language is lost without being recorded, its unique linguistic features are also lost". From the above definitions, it is clear that psychology is concerned with the nature and the working of the mind and its aberrations and behaviour generally. Adoye (1964) maintains, however, that psychologists themselves prefer to avoid any assumption about the nature of the mind, and that most of them could prefer a definition in terms of behaviour rather than minds.

In psychology and children, Lowell (1960) observes that psychology may be defined as a branch of science "which studies the activities of the organism (human and animal)". But since activities also include the thinking process which distinguish man from the other lower animal because is factored into the centre of linguistic behaviour (cf Vgotsky, 1975) Due to certain reasons, evidentially, of course, this definition seems far less objectionable than many other which concentrate exclusively on overt behaviour or, on the other side of it, on the process of mental readiness. The psychology of the unconscious, or subconscious, is certainly older than the work of Freud, or of the other psycholanalytical schools of Adler and Jung. Essentially, it was the use of hypnotism which first revealed mental process below the level of consciousness.

Behavioural pattern of the Igala child

An Igala child after birth appears in his world of emptiness the brain equal to 'Tabularasa' (ie an empty vessel), but as he develops, he becomes aware of his environment and he listens, hears, speaks and write about things in his environment which include among others – Names of people which he applies them wrongly at the initial stage. Such linguistic exercise could be in form of:

Ojonugwa	- Jogwa	(Glory be to God)
Ojochogwu	- Jogwu	(God is medicine)
Maria	- Marera	(Mary)
Baba	- Bao	(Father)
Untewuajo	- Tewu	(Left for God)
Iko	- Duko	(Time/Period)
Uncle	- Oku	(Boniface)
Aunty	- Ati	(Aunt Female)
Ladi	- Adi	(Child born on Sunday)
Ewo	- Ewo	(Goat)

There are some words which Igala finds difficult to pronounce easily, because they lack some of the required alphabets. For instance letter “s” for example, the word Sule is pronounced as 'Echule'. Linguist like Armstrong (1955) maintains that the similarities between Igala and Yoruba language as experience today probably dated back from this period in history. The similarities could not have been acquired merely by a way of trade contacts for many names referring to parts of the body and not only objects of trade sounds but are similar both in meaning and sound, Example:

<u>English</u>	<u>Igala</u>	<u>Yoruba</u>
Hand	Owo	Owo
Ear	eti	eti
Get	gba	gba
Hear	gbo	gbo
Farm	oko	oko
Leg	ere	ese
Eye	eju	eju
Die	kwu	ku
Three days	ojometa	ojometa
Come and eat	ewajenwu	ewajenu
Water	omi	omi
Leave	kwo	kwuro
Fish	eja	eja
Husband	oko	oko

Yam	uchu	isu
Come	wa	wa
White	efufu	fufun
Red	ekpikpa	kpikpa
Black	edudu	dudu
Dance	ido	ijo
Hen	ajuwe	ajiye

Adapted from Agih (2019:29).

Linguistically, Igala and Yoruba shared certain degree of similarities. According to Agih (2019:29) “The belief is that Yoruba invaders came in the early prehistoric period of Igala land. Oral tradition among the ruling class in Igala, thus have traces of the origin of Achadu throne to Oyo and not Igbo as generally and erroneously believed. That the leader of the said invaders was the Asiwaju or Asaju (both mean leader) which name the Igala tongue roll as “Achadu”. The unconscious mind which took a stage further into the realms of the collective unconscious mind.

Spearman (1904) produced evidence of mathematical nature which demonstrates mental abilities that correlated in a positive way. On this, Spearman argued that if an individual possesses one type of mental ability, then there is a degree of probability that he possesses another; and that this probability demonstrated by his experiments, statistically analyses and correlation factors. For instance, when an Igala child says: Baba (possessive Babami), mama (possessive mamai). It can equally be said as Baba kpai mama, which means father and mother. Spearman's theory was termed the “Two factor theory”, and the “g” (or general factor) was regarded as the capacity for relational thinking. Spearman evolved what he termed “neogenetic principles”, for example, the principles upon which the human mind works are:

1. The Apprehension of Experience: this was the ability to observe one's own mental processes, and to grasp quickly any situation, or human set of actions, which eventually became part of one's experience.
2. The Educational Relations: this was the ability to discover essential relationship between different data or items of knowledge. Thus the relation between “left and right”, all black balls and the white ones, go and come are opposites.

Igala	English interpretations
A. Boluu Edudu (ele)4	Black balls (four) 4
Boluu Efufu (efa) 6	White balls (six) 6
	Total = 10 balls.
B. Ama – alemu Ekpikpa	
(egwaka) 11	red orange eleven (11)
Ama alemu odufa	
(ela) 9	green orange nine (9)
Ama alemu ogwu	total = 20 oranges
C. Time reference: Odudu (morning), Oroka (afternoon) Ane (evening) greetings.	
3. The Educational Correlates: This is purely the ability to discover a correlate when provides with a datum and relation. Thus, when given the word “left and the relation “opposite”, the correlation would be “right”. In the same way we have “olafia” (good health) and “oga” (sickness) as relational opposite in the Igala language. Others include:	
“tikii or ree” versus “nana or lile” (small versus big)	
“alee versus anana” (poverty versus richness)	
enefu kpai enedudu (white man versus black man)	
“ulakaa kpai ufedo” (hatred versus love)	
“akwu” (cry) “kpai anyi” (laugh)	
“oduu” (night) “kpai orokaa” (day)	
“elo kpe wa” = (go and come)	

In most cases, when a four-five year old Igala child is hurt and he/she retaliates in abusive words, what one normally hear is Atawe (ie) your father or Iyewe (i.e) your mother beyond this, sometimes it is done in borrowed language like Hausa e.g uwakaa = regarding ones mother wawa = mad person. Sometimes, the child says 'goat', 'sheep' meaning you are a goat or a sheep. They could also say – enidada. Enidada in Igala mean foolish person. All of the above responses by the Igala children are in accordance with the respective postulations of language development theories, as presented below.

Theories of Language Development

Children below the age of 0 – 7 are always inquisitive thus whatsoever their eyes capture or appeals to their senses and that arouse their attention become subject of questioning. It is

through this kind of inquisitiveness and high sense of interrogation that they become aware of several concepts in their environment. “In real world communication, there is always a context – a place where communication typically takes place, a subject, and people who talk”. According to Fulcher and Davidson (2007:16), Mastery of language creativity and development increases as practice continues unabatedly.

Tabang and Onucheyo (2018:259), Anagbogu, Mba and Eme (2010:162) all agreed that “Though language is known to be an aspect of culture (like religion, tradition), it contains and transmits culture; According to them, “all habits, ideas, behaviours, notions, believes, ethos, and other cultural patterns are virtually inconceivable without the instrumentality of language”. It is “a means by which elders in society teach the younger ones the culture of the society; it is a veritable instrument for socialising, a tool for thinking, for dreaming and for all human actions. The limit of a man's language is therefore the limit of his world” (Tabang and Onucheyo, 2018) “Words for concrete objects can be potentially acquired by hearing the objects named while it is being pointed out”. Jean (2006:16).

A four (4) year old child of the researcher Mr. Onucheyo by name ATAMA-OJO has this sample of speech development. Daddy (Mr Onucheyo) and Atama-ojo (Ata), through dialogue has this pattern of speech development:

Dialogue:

Ata: Daddy, what is this?
Daddy: It is hoe (Ukoche)
Ata: Daddy, what do they call shirt in Igala?
Daddy:
It is called Afe
Ata: What is the name of Snake in Igala?
Daddy: Snake is called Ejo
Ata: Daddy book is what?
Daddy: Book is called Otakada
Ata: Horse is what in Igala?
Daddy: Horse is called Anyela
Ata: Eye glass is what?
Daddy: Ogigo – eju
Ata: Bridge is called what?
Daddy: Ogolochi
Ata: This tree is called what?

Daddy: Omagolo (Mango)
 Ata: What is sand in Igala?
 Daddy: Eket
 Ata: eehh! Eket, Eket, Eket and he goes
 juggling, meeting his other
 playmates hilariously.

The Igala Child and Linguistic Monologism

In his description of egocentric speech and its developmental fate, Piaget (1948) states that it does not fulfill any realistically useful function in the child's behaviour, and that it simply manifests as the child approaches school age. It is strongly held that egocentric speech early assumes a very definite and important role in the activity of the child as it controls his world to learn the language of his immediate environment. To support this, Votsky (1962) mentions some experiments in which he organized children's activities in much the same way as Piaget did but many obstacles, frustrations and difficulties were presented to the child at the same time. Votsky later found that in difficult situations "the co-efficient of egocentric speech almost doubled". The child would find that he/she had no pencil for the task he was given to perform or it was the wrong colour, or it was an oversized pencil that he was given by his teacher, with all these, his monologism would increased. "where is the pencil? Oh, this is not the colour I want, or the pencil is too big or the pencil is too small, I can't use this, where is the black one, where do you keep the one that is not cut?" see also Piaget (1926), from the experiment, Gotsky gathered that a disruption in the smooth flow of activity is "an important stimulus for egocentric speech", and that it demonstrates the general awareness of the child, and the fact that speech is an expression of the process of becoming aware, and becoming an instrument of thought itself in seeking and planning solutions to existing problems. On the work, however, the inner speech of the adult represents his 'thinking for himself rather than social adaptation; i.e it has the same function that egocentric speech has in the child. Conclusively, it is true that the primary functions of both the child and the adult's speech is communication and social contact. This means that the earliest speech of the child is essentially social; at first, multifunctional, but later undifferentiated.

Language Application

In applying the theory of behaviourism to language acquisition, which is a sub-field in developmental psycholinguistics, one would find out that credence is given to child language development (CLD) which deals with how children acquire or learn a language. The emphasis here is on the environment in which a child grows. For example, if a child happens to be born in a Hausa speaking community, the child will grow up to use the language behaviour of the environment same applies to a child born either in an Igbo speaking region or Yoruba as the case may be. These three major factors – Imitation, Practice and Reinforcement combine with the environment to influence on the Igala child. For example, Atama-ojo, who is now four years old, a son to Mr. Onucheyo (the researcher) sometimes mimic adult's speech especially what his father says to him in a particular way. Over time he tends to reproduce replica of such utterances, example

English	-	Igala emi
Sit down here	-	gwane
Hello	-	allo
Stand up	-	kwane
Drink	-	nmuo

and so on. Sometimes when he wrongly pronounces certain words, his father tries to correct him by pronouncing the same word correctly over and over again as Atama repeats after him. Such practice helps the child to become better and as well internalise the correct forms of such expressions. Sometimes he is rewarded for properly calling or pronouncing certain expression, while at other times the reverse is the case.

Another good example is the work done on Code-Mixing in the language development of a Bilingual Nigeria Child by Surakat (2001). Based on this concept, one can apply the theory to play acting or the film industry where actors mimic other character and personalities other than theirs. The constant practices or rehearsal sessions they hold, enable them to be able to produce overtime a replica of the personalities they intend to enact or represent. During such sessions of rehearsals, the Director sometimes commends or makes positive remarks or otherwise. This may encourage or challenge the actors as the case may be. Such remarks are considered as reinforcements. Other

areas where one can apply the theory of behaviorism include our every day experiences as well as our mundane experiences.

Critique of Behaviourism

The behaviourist, efforts are commendable since they made useful contributions to the study of language, however, they faced a lot of criticism which lead to the unpopularity of the theory. They were criticised by the rationalist that the three factors – imitation, practice and reinforcement in language acquisition were necessary but not sufficient conditions for speech development in childhood.

They dealt with performance because it was what the child produced at the expense of competence of what the child knows. The innatist argues that reinforcement plays just a mere passive role in speech development because what is being corrected by the parents is either pronunciation or content of the utterance of their children. Furthermore, they were accused that language acquisition cannot be reduced to a reward and punishment phenomenon. They were mediumistic and at best only contributed to explaining the development of surface structure of language. See Tomori (2004:111), Onucheyo (2015:57), Ubahakwe & Sogbesan (2001:141). Finally, they placed emphasis on observable behaviour and nothing was said to account for the unobservable and the role of the brain. In many ways, the theory cannot adequately account for man's capacity to acquire language, or the development of language itself.

Conclusion

In conclusion, language learning and its development for the behaviourist is environmentally determined by the three important factors of imitation, practice and reinforcement. For the above reason, their contributions to the study of language development are of immense importance, though the shortcomings faced a lot of criticisms, it can be concluded that the learning process is a behaviouristic process – a verbal behaviour.

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