

Term Paper: Language Development Hypotheses



The language development is a complicated process that has linguistic, social and psychological aspects. The language develops all the time during communication between people. As the language development is complicated, it is open to different interpretations. Various theories aim at explaining it at the present day. Since there is no scientific agreement on the language development, the scholars are free to choose the approach they like best. One of the theories that offer a good explanation of the language development is the social interactionist theory from the works of L. Vygotsky. The social interactionist theory lays emphasis on the social background of the language development, which is one of the essential elements of other language development theories. Nonetheless, the social interactionist theory suggests its own interpretation of the influence social interactions have on the language development.

The social interactionist theory is centered over an idea that the language development occurs when people interact with their social environment. People initiate contacts with their social environment from the early childhood. Babies interact with their parents and progressively acquire learning language from them. As they get used to saying their first words, they receive a positive feedback from their fathers and mothers. It inspires them to use these words more often and learn more new words from their parents. Gradually, the social interaction opportunities

increase. At first, children go to kindergarten. There, they first meet other children and adults with whom they need to communicate. Furthermore, sometimes children who have a delay in language development start speaking in the kindergarten. There, they realize they have no other choice. If they speak, their needs will be heard and if they do not they will remain unsatisfied. Next, children receive a new social interaction opportunity at schools. There, they can learn new vocabulary from each other, and it stimulates all the participants of the communication to choose proper words and to improve in communication. Hence, children start interaction with other significant adults and their children of their age. In the course of their social interactions, they start learning new language models and words from other people. In such manner, children develop their language skills. During their further development and education, people improve their language abilities and skills. For instance, during professional training they learn special medical terms, in order to use in their work. Especially, health care professionals learn professional terms and medical concepts to use in their work. Hence, they develop their language skills and abilities during their training by interactions with educators and other students.

From the social interactionist perspective, people need language to have successful interactions. In everyday life, they use language to communicate with each other. Furthermore, the social interaction occurs in the natural way since humans are social beings, and they regularly interact with each other. According to the social interactionist theory, the language is a tool that helps different people communicate effectively. The better their language skills are, the more effectively they communicate. This is why people never stop developing their language

skills to have effective communication with each other. It means that language development is inevitable. In such a way, language development is an integral part of the development of human social relations.

In this regard, the social interactionist theory explains how language development depends on the social environment. It is logical since people cannot develop their language skills and abilities without the interaction with other people. Supporters of the social interactionist theory often defend it with the following examples. They point to the children who grew up in isolation from society. Usually, children who are deprived of the possibility to communicate and interact with other people have problems with language development. Some of the children growing up outside society cannot speak at all. These cases prove the vital role of the social environment and social interaction in the language development. From another point, language development does not depend on the social environment exclusively. Language development also depends on the social interaction. Through social interaction, people learn and create new language patterns that help them to interact with others. Furthermore, if the vocabulary of their surrounding is limited people are likely to speak the same. The differences are seen even in the classroom because children from the well-educated families have more developed language than their counterparts from working class. Thus, the social environment sets the standards of language necessary for effective communication.

The social interactionist theory has several strengths apart from the demonstration of the social background of the language development. Its

first strength consists in the display of the progress of individual language development through communication with other people. The social interactionist theory is grounded in the premise that complex social interactions lead to the development of complex language skills and abilities. As a result, social interactions encourage the improvement of individual language skills and abilities. In such a way, individuals can accelerate their language development through the development of their social interactions.

The second strength of the social interactionist theory is that it shows how children acquire language from parents. The theory pays a lot of attention to learning language at the very early age. Then, children feel an unfulfilled need to interact with parents and other people and be understood by them. Language usage will help them to express their ideas and desires to their social environment. Even more, the theory of language acquisition and development influenced by the need of communication explains the further language development perfectly. As human needs grow more and more complicated in the course of time, and children develop more complex social interactions, it stimulates their further language development. In such a way, the social interactionist theory offers the basic model of the language development through the social interaction.

On the one hand, the theory shows that children work on definite language skills to reach the target social interaction. If children manage to use the appropriate language pattern, they remember it and use it again in their adult life. It all reminds some kind of training based on repetition. On the other hand, children develop their language expecting receiving a

positive feedback from others. All the children want is approval that stimulates them to enhance their vocabulary. The reverse side is true, as well. If they do not receive the desired feedback in return for some language pattern, they dump this language pattern and do not return to it any longer. They may forget about certain pattern unless they find it effective in another social environment. Explanation of children's language patterns shows how the language development evolves in the course of social interactions. Tracking the language development from this perspective is what makes social interactionist theory so attractive to many.

While social interactionist theory is good at explaining how the language develops, it has some limitations. First, it does not provide the adequate explanation of the steady progress of the language development. Rather, the social interactionist theory links the language development to the next advance of human social relations during their development. That is why their communication skills and their language development become more complicated. In such a way, the social interactionist theory does not explain how different stages of the language development relate to the cognitive development. In turn, the language development appears to be the result of the individual social experience. Hence, the poor social experiences result in the poor language development, and the rich social experiences bring the rich language development.

Second limitation of the social interactionist theory is that it ignores psychological differences between people. On the one hand, the theory is unable to explain the natural ability of people to use language for communication. On the other hand, the theory fails to explain why

people differ in their language skills and language development. Rather, the theory explains only variations in the language development by differences in every given social relations and interaction. Meanwhile, these things cannot be ignored. Fairly enough, some scholars point out that the language development depends not only on the individual social experience, but also on their unique psychological peculiarities and traits of character. That is why the social interactionist theory requires critical approach when applying to the language development.

To conclude, social interactionist theory is one of the theories that attempt to explain the language development. Keeping in mind all above mentioned, it is important to highlight the fact that the social interactionist theory adds to the socially-oriented perspective of the language development. In fact, this theory contributed to the socially-oriented perspective on language as the result of the social interaction between people. According to the social interactionist theory, the language development happens through the social interaction between people and heavily relies on such interaction. Any hindrances to one's interactions with the social environment may result in serious problems in the language development. Cases of children, who grew up outside the society or had not sufficient amount of human communication and interaction, prove it. One of the strengths of the theory consists in the display of the progress of individual language development through communication with other people. Besides, it shows how children acquire language from parents. At the same time, social interactionist theory fails to explain the steady progress of language development and ignores psychological differences between people. With all its, strengths and weaknesses, given theory has the right

for existence due to its own interpretation of language development.

Appendix

This research required thorough examination of the sources in the field. In the course of the given exploration, ProQuest and Jstore were used as the main databases to locate each source in this research. The search strategy consisted in online search of the target sources on the basis of key terms, such as “language development theories” and “language development hypothesis”. These databases served for the location the most appropriate sources among others alike. Both primary and secondary sources were successfully used in the given research. The primary source includes the book, which was written by Vygotsky, one of the founders of the social interactionist theory. Secondary sources cover the sources that are related to the language development and relevant theories. All sources constitute books that can be found in print.