If You Want to Get Ahead, Get a Plausible Theory

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□ ABSTRACT □

The following paper addresses itself to one fundamental question, namely, mother—child prelinguistic interaction, and focuses on how this interactional process enables children to develop certain communicative skills that mill ultimately help them corns to grips with language proper. It is suggested that much can be gained from serious consideration of the true nature of mother-child interaction, and that understanding the prespeech procedures actively followed and the strategies adopted by both participants to meet the demands of successful communication will no doubt highlight certain areas of great relevance to teaching English as a second / foreign language.

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إذا أردت أن تتقدم، احصل على نظرية مقبولة

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□ الملخّص □

يطرح هذا البحث موضوعاً أساسياً ألا وهو التواصل ما قبل اللغوي بين الأم والطفل ويبين كيف تساعد هذه العملية التواصلية الأطفال على تطوير مهارات تواصلية معينة تؤدي بهم في نهاية المطاف إلى الإمساك بمفاتيح اللغة، لقد تمت الإشارة إلى أن الأخذ الجاد لطبيعة التواصل بين الأم والطفل بعين الاعتبار يحقق الكثير من النتائج الإيجابية، كما أن فهم الإجراءات والخطط ما قبل الكلامية التي يقوم بها الطرفان لتحقيق متطلبات التواصل الناجح سوف يسلط الضوء دون أي مجال للشك على بعض النقاط التي لها علاقة مباشرة بتعليم اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة ثانية أو كلغة أجنبية.

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Introduction:

There has recently been much talk by educationalists of teaching pre-school and elementary school children English as a foreign language. The aim of those educationalists is, we are repeatedly told, to create, for example, an English-speaking generation of children which will find it extremely helpful to use the target language in question in the future for different communicative needs. Yet, it is surprising to find, upon getting even a nodding acquaintance with pedagogic methods adopted to fulfil the-much-sought-after aim, that these methods are not only outdated but are not sufficiently informed by recent developments, both' in theory and practice, in language teaching in order to meet the child's or the adult's minimal social and linguistic requirements either.

This may very well be one to lack of interest in explaining the wide range of cognitive and social principles underlying language acquisition in general, and failure to grasp the skills, linguistic or otherwise, needed for learning a second language, in particular.

In this paper, the aim is to review different views of language in order to shed light on what is taken by the proponents of these theories to be the basic determinants of the development of language(first language) in the growing child. The particular approach adopted here is however informed by recent developments in the study of child language. In particular, a theoretical approach oriented to the pragmatic and communicative functions of language is advocated. But in order to set this approach in context, it is necessary to consider other approaches to the study of child language since these have had a marked influence on theories of first language acquisition and second language learning. In fact, most models of second language learning can be traced back to some implicit assumptions concerning points of commonalities or differences between acquisition of mother tongue and learning a second language. For example, Lado's (1957) contrastive analysis hypothesis claims that learning a second language makes it imperative on the part of the learner to substitute all linguistic skills developed during first language acquisition for new ones. In sharp contrast to Lado's hypothesis is the creative constructive hypothesis put forward and advocated by Dulay and Burt (1974). According to this hypothesis, second language learning is identical to mother-tongue acquisition.

There are three main theoretical approaches to consider in this context; syntactic semantic and pragmatic.

The Chomskyan Paradigm:

Chomsky's theory of language emphasises its formal properties and suggests that the child comes equipped with a genetically programmed language faculty endowed with knowledge of language universals.

The innate (genetically programmed) language faculty is known as LANGUAGE ACQUISITION DEVICE or LAD. Language universals, Chomsky (1965) suggests, consist of " Substantive Universals" and "Formal Universals" Substantive universals are the basic or primitive components that make up language, e.g. S (sentence), NP (noun phrase), VP(verb phrase) or sentence, subject, verb, object in traditional grammar!. These components are abstract grammatical categories of which any known language contains a subset. Thus, while a given language might lack one of the above components, it is out of these very same components that any known grammar is formed. Formal universals, on the other hand, constitute the shape of particular grammars, which in turn contain syntactic, semantic and phonological rules. According to Chomsky (1965), although these rules are specific to particular

languages, their formal and abstract properties are the same and governed by principles that are universal.

According to Chomsky, the aim of the linguistic theory is to account for the native speaker's knowledge of his language (competence). And the basic assumption with which Chomsky(1968) starts out is that anybody who acquires language is mastering a system of rules for forming speech patterns.

The set of rules internalized will enable the speaker of any natural language to encode an infinite number of novel grammatical utterances and to decode new utterances he has never heard or read anywhere before. This is what the term 'competence' refers to, and Chomsky lays great stress on this creative aspect of human language and claims that the theory of grammar should reflect this important feature of language.

The child who is acquiring language, therefore, has the task of internalizing a set of linguistic rules that will ultimately enable him to use language .creatively. The way the child discovers the regulaties underlying the linguistic data going on around him is by means of a hypothesizing process. In this, Chomsky compares the child to a linguistic working on an unknown language and whose goal is to specify the rules or the regularities controlling it. The child, like the linguist, begins the process of hypothesizing and testing his hypotheses against new linguistic data until he finally attains complex grammatical rules that will cover all potential utterances of the language to which he is exposed. The ability to formulate an indefinite number of hypotheses about the observed data is said to be innate and forms one constituent element of the LAD structure, the other constituents being language universals and "Evaluation Procedures". More importantly, the basis of the innate language-acquisition capacity is the knowledge of language universals(Chomsky 1976), Given such a prior knowledge, the child is capable, unconsciously, of hypothesizing about how the syntactic, phonological and semantic components of any language are to be organized. Guided by and framed in terms of these universals, the child will find out that some of his hypotheses fit the set of observed data of the target language (e.g. English, Arabic, Spanish or Japanese) whose rules he is internalizing, others do not. The compatible hypotheses will be the only ones adopted by the child, and these same ones will serve as the basis of his knowledge of language. Finally, the evaluation procedure will choose from these compatible hypotheses the simplest and best ones. At this point the child has internalized the rules of the target language, and has become a competent speaker of it.

In the final analysis, what the child, brings to the task of language acquisition is an inborn' faculty for language(LAD) which is not subject to any experiential modification. The structure of LAD is determined by the structure of the human mind and comprises knowledge of 'language universals', an hypothesis making device' and an 'evaluation procedure'. As can be seen, the basic assumption in this nativist view is that language acquisition is neither depedent on nor derived from the general cognitive developments and other social skills, but is primarily viewed as a process of internalizing a set of complex grammatical rules that relates sound to meaning,

The rise of Chomskyan -Generative Grammar set the pace for most work on language acqustion during the decade of the 1960's. This explains why most first language acquisition studies were primarily concerned with the internal body of the formal system of language: syntax, morphology and phonology, and little attention was paid to almost every other aspect of language acquisition in the process of the child's development. These early formal studies were carried out with the aim of "describing" the child's gradual development of the grammar of his language by

pinpointing the necessary underlying rules for generating the child's linguistic output at various stages of his development (e.g. Brain, 1963; Brown, Eraser and Beliugi, 1964; HcNeilL1966, 1970).

Similarly, in the field of teaching, the overemphasis by language teachers on structure(form) rather than on meaning or function is not more than a true reflection of similar tendencies and emphasis within linguistics. And although Chomsky's (1957) Syntactic Structures and his (1965) Aspects of the Theory of Syntax do indeed represent a revolution regarding the aims of linguistic theory, Transfomational Generative Grammar, like Bloomfieldian American Structuralism, has, as its main concern, syntax. This importance given to structure at the expense of other aspects has had an extremely unfortunate reperussion which, as commented by Brumfit and Johnson (1991), explains why

> ---- transformational grammar, so revolutionary in
> linguistics, has had such little effects on language
> teaching* After all, the most it can offer is alter-
> native strategies for teaching grammar- new ways of
> teaching the same thing,

Since language-teaching methods are inextricably linked to and firmly rooted in a specific theory of language or views held about its nature, on the one hand, and, therefore, about the way it is acquired, on the other, it comes as no surprise → to find the Chomskyan syntactically based approach directly reflected in language syllabus design. Thus, the organization of the content of our imported language syllabuses into purely grammatical units(sentences, clauses, phrases) with the necessary accompanying grammatical operations controlled by transformational rules is ultimately based, wittingly or unwittingly, on the assumption that the target of language tearing is to enable students to come to terms with the various syntactic units which make up the structure of the language system (see p.2). The commonly adhered to belief is that if we take care of the 'LEXICO-GRAIWTICAL' content of the target language, WANING' and 'FUNCTION' will take care of themselves. Brumfit and Johnson (1991) make the point just discussed above in relation to syllabus design very clear:

> We have come to see the task of syllabus design, for
> example, as very much one of selecting structural items
> and grading them in suitable order for teaching. Our
> syllabuses have often been little more than ordered lists
> of structures, which we have then proceeded to teach by
> means of a strategy that has become all but universal. The
> strategy works like this; we present a structure, drill it,
> practise it in context,....then move to the next
> structure,....... Success or failure in language learning, as
> interpreted both through examination results and through
> student or teacher judgement, has generally come to be
> assessed in terms of ability to manipulate the structure of
> the language (P. 1)

Perhaps, it is not too much an exaggeration to mention at this point that teachers actively involved in the field of language teaching often sense a feeling of disatisfaction and frustration on the part of students when they are introduced to , for instance, the grammatical categry of tense or when the issue of direct and indirect

speech is taken up as topic of interest. The problem becomes all the more serious and with more devastating effects, when the educational system demands are such that students be responsible for reading and evaluating different types of literature (prose fiction, poetry and drama) and expressing their critical views not only in grammatically acceptable forms, but also in commuinicatively significant social norms For example, university students can hardly conceptualize the relationship between the nonlinguistic concept of time and the language specific category of tense. Failure to grasp such a fundamental concept, which is indespensible to any meaningful and communicative use of language, seems to stem. by and large from an equal failure to include in our language syllabus other closely related 'SEMANTICOGRAMMATICAL' categories such as time, space, matter and deixis, on the one hand, and categories of communicative function such as modality, moral evaluation and discipline, interpersonal relations and agreement, on the other. These categories, in Wilkins' (1979) words, are

    ---- the very things we use language for and-
    yet they form the smallest part of either the
    grammatical or situational content of
    language course(p, 89).

  Clarifying the true picture of the relationship between the semantic and grammatical levels of language is directly relevant to language teaching. However, before we address ourselves to the relationship in hand, one may do well in looking closely into both LINGUISTIC and PSYCHOLOGICAL backgrounds to language teaching.

  Semantic Basis of Language The first step away from concentration on syntax was the realization that a two-word utterance produced by the child might be semantically ambiguous. In a famous example, Bloom(1970) pointed out that her subject, Kathryn, produced the utterance "Mommy sock" on two different occasions to convey two different meanings agent-object relation in one context, and agentive relation in another. This was cited by Bloom to demonstrate that describing early child's utterances in terms of purely grammatical relations runs the risk of obscuring the semantic relations expressed. Instead, an appeal should be made to the semantic relations between words of early utterances with due consideration of the context in which they occur. In the 1970's the result was a flurry of systematic studies of language acquisition, investigating the meanings expressed in children's speech by taking into account the SITUATIONAL CONTEXT of chat speech.

  In general, the late 1960's and early 1970's witnessed an upsurge in research in two areas of child languages the semantics of child language and the child's comprehension- of language.

  At the structural level, the new approach shifted from preoccupation with description of early utterances in terms of syntactic relations to analysing them in terms of a small but UNIVERSAL set of semantic relations. From linguistics, it was Fillmore's (1968) "case Grammar" that was taken to serve as a descriptive model for the semantically based approach to child language (e.g. Slobin, 1973; Schlesinger, 1971, 1974; Edwards, 1973; and Brwon, 1973).

  At the lexical level of language, other studies of language development (e.g. Donalsor and Balfour 1968; Donalson and Wales 1970, E. Clark 1972, 1973) looked into the semantic features characterizing individual lexical items in the child's vocabulary ..The notion of semantic features has guided much investigation into the development of word meaning in the child language. For example, E. Clark (1973) has elaborated a theory of semantic development based on the motion of semantic

features. The dark version of this theory is called the SEMANTIC FEATURE HYPOTHESIS (SFH) and has been applied in the study of language acquisition.

The conceptual basis of language development was first proposed by (Monamara(1972) and Slobin (1973) who developed the argument that it is precisely because of the cognitive-semantic knowledge, not the Chomskyan innate knowledge of linguistic universals, that children manage to acquire the language of their speech community. What is revealing in this context is that the antecedents of the semantic relations of utterances were sought in the PIAGETIAN theory of cognitive development, and this is "probably because of the similarity between the cases of CASE GRAITIAR and the categories employed by the GENEVAN SCHOOL of psychology in their account of cognitive development" (Wells 1980).

In addition to invoking the Piagetian theory in the study of the development of the semantic component of language at the structural level, similar arguments were developed in the study of the acquisition of single word meanings (e.g. Nelson, 1977).

The Geneva School of psychology stresses how COGNITIVE STRUCTURES make possible the acquisition of language by children. What is worth noting here is that although the Piagetian overemphasis on the role of cognitive structures in language acquisition does not go so far as adopting a "reductionist model" like that of Chomsky, the role of the social world (people world) in the onset of language is generally ignored. This has invited a number of criticisms particularly from "PRAGMATICALLY" oriented studies (e.g. Bruner 1975; Halliday 1975; Bates 1976 and Wells, 1981).

Piaget's main concern is with the way knowledge is constructed and organised in the growing child, on the one hand, and how mastery of nonlinguistic cognitive skills influences the child's acquisition of linguistic abilities, on the other. According to Piaget (1968, 1972), language and thought have common SENSORIMOTOR origins.

In the sensorimotor period (from birth to 18-24 months), the child actively interacts with its surrounding environment. Through this physical manipulation of objects(particularly inanimate objects) action schemata are built. These action schemata are later internalized by the child towards the end of the sensorimotor period to result in the emergence of symbolic function and mental representation which, according to Piaget, provide the the key to our understanding of what is important in human psychological development. The appearance of language, for example is attributed by Piaget to the emergence of symbolic function, and in talking of language, he attaches great importance to the dependence of the first verbal utterances on symbolic play, delayed immitation and mental images, Moreover, Piaget and Inhelder (1969) see nothing specific about language but, instead, they assert that all aspects of the symbolic functioning, including that of language, serve only a "representative" purpose. In other words, language is merely taken as a symbolic-system for representing the conceptual development which the child builds up through physical manipulations of objects and through his/her experience with particular events. In other words, language is a tool for representing intelligence. It is not a system for communicating and sharing knowledge, involving listeners and speakers and the relations between them in an intersubjective field of attention.

A different analysis was given to the role of language in the development of thinking by the great Russian psychologist Vygotsky, Language, according to Vygotsky (1962), is a particularly important feature of the human social environment which frees the organism from reliance on the here-and-now world and uhich functions as an instrument for mental planning and self-guidance of behaviour. In

fact, Vygotsky views both language and objective knowledge as social in origin arid, thus, the earliest speech of the child is necessarily OVERSOCIALIZED.

More recently, many researchers of language and cognitive development obtained more evidence in support of Vygotsky's conclusions regarding language and objective knowledge, In particular, the social and pragmatic approach to language acquisition shifts emphasis to language as a form of communication and gives the "PEOPLE WORLD" more prominence in cognitive growth than the "OBJECT WORLD".

The Functional Origin of Language:

The Piagetian Cognition Hypothesis was attacked for its failure to take into its account of language acquisition aspects of meaning other than the 'prepositional' or 'ideational' ones. And this is understandable since in the Piagetian model , language is the mirror of thinking and does not appear until around one and a half years of age. However, prepositional meaning is not the only kind of meaning and by no means the most important function of language (Palmer, 1976) or even the main one for the child in acquiring language (Halliday, 1975; Bruner, 1975; Wells, 1980). Language is also a system of communication and, taken as such, the fundamental aspect of *it* is its social or interpersonal function in which meaning is tied up to the context of situation and to the relations between speakers and listeners (Lyons 1977), And as shown by Halliday (1975), the earliest meanings served by his son's utterances are functional or pragmatic in origin and depend on dynamics of social or interpersonal interaction. According to both Halliday (1975) and Bruner(1975, 197d, 1983), language can be derived by the child from the structure of social interaction a question to which we turn now.

Mention was made to the direct relevance of understanding the relation between the semantic and grammatical levels to language teaching(see P.5). And it is not too much optimistic to claim at this point that any methodology pursued in teaching English as a foreign or second language should have, as its main concern, the aim of developing in learners mastery of certain interactional skills or conventions so that they can relate meaningfully and appropriately the target language to extalinguistic phenomena. The rationale for this here is not difficult to understands to engage successfully in a dialogue or conversation, a learner must have a mastery of a basic set of communicative acts.

According to Halliday (1973) and Hymes (1979), we can only understand language if we take the view that it is a semantic network(meaning potential) which is-the input to the grammar and, thus, bridges both participants' -behavioural formats (extralinguistic phenomena) and various grammatical forms available in the language. In other words, such a theoretical linguistic standpoint focuses on language as meaning potential (i.e. as meaning alternatives or options available to (addresser-addressee) and holds the view that learning language is basically learning its social functions and the meaning potential associated with these functions.. And the output of the semantic networks is realized by linguistic forms , Further, the-social functioning of language determines the pattern of language varieties. Three functions of language are distinguished by Halliday (1970, 1973; Kress, 1976); the 'ideational', the 'interpersonal' and the 'textual'. The ideational function is the propositional content of utterances the interpersonal function refers to the function of language which serves to structure and regulate the use of language in its social role; the 'textual' function is the one which relates the grammatical and intonational structure of utterances to each other and to the context in which they are produced.

In his book Learning how to Mean', Halliday (1975), demonstrates that the way the child uses language tends to determine its internal structure. But when the child begins the task of language acquisition, his language does not have all the levels of which language consists(i.e. sound, form, meaning). Rather, his early language lacks the 'form' level which forms the bridge between the semantic and the phonological levels characteristic of adults' linguistic system. It is a content-expression pair which has a particularly distinctive phonological feature neither related to nor derived from the adults' phonological system. However, semantically, the prelinguistic vocalizations are not random noises but are in fact produced systematically to achieve certain social goals. And this began in Halliday's son, Nigel, around nine months. From the beginning of the appearance of Nigel's interactional utterances and for some six months after is what Halliday refers to as 'proto-language' (phase 1) because Nigel's utterances were not intelligible to anyone but his parents. During this phase of language development, the meanings glossed to Nigel's utterances were based on the social or interpersonal purposes his parents assumed Nigel wanted to achieve; that is, the meanings attached to the child's vocalizations or utterances were 'pragmatically' or 'functionally' based.

Halliday (1975) postulates six distinct social functions served by the child's preverbal communicative system and makes predictions about the order in which these functions should appear in children. From the age of nine to sixteen and a half months, Nigel's preverbal communication comprised a system of six components, each component being "the grammar corresponding to just one function that the child has begun to control (Kress, 1976:10). The first interpersonal functions to appear were the INSTRUMENTAL (the 'I want' function), REGULATORY (the 'do as I tell you' function), INTERACTIONAL (the 'me and you' function), PERSONAL (the 'here I come' function), later followed by the HEURISTIC (the 'tell me why' function) and IMAGINITIVE (the 'let's pretend' function).

From sixteen and a half months the child begins a transition into the adult linguistic system inhere he has adult approximations and new meanings, Halliday refers to this phase of language development as phase 2. This phase is characterized by the child organising his language use into 'pragmatic' (consisting of instrumental and regulatory) functions and 'mathetic' (consisting of personal and heuristic) functions, The pragmatic function now is signalled by a rising intonation and is used to satisfy the child's needs and to interact with those surrounding him. The mathetic function is characterized by a falling intonation, in which language is used to learn about the environment, comment on objects, recall and predict them, and to learn about language itself. This results in a dramatic increase in the size of the child's lexicon and hence in his meaning potential, with pragmatic use leading to the 'interpersonal' functions and the 'methetic' to the 'ideational' function of the adult linguistic system. In the beginning of phase 2(16½-18 months) and up to the end of the second year, two major developmental achievements take place; first, the 'form' (lexicogrammar) level mediating between the content-expression system of phase 1 (protolanguage)5 and, second, the concept of dialogue, where the child learns how to exchange 'communicative roles' verbally. In the latter development, the child learns how to initiate a conversation and to keep the flow of verbal interaction by responding to a question or statement by adding his own contribution to the interactional process.

The last function to develop is the 'informative' function of language which enables the child, by means of prepositional-content utterances, to communicate information to others who do not already possess that information. Halliday refers to this function as the "I have got something to tell you" function and it appeared in the

case of Nigel towards the end of phase 2 at the age of 22 months. In other words, the only function which is purely intrinsic to language develops after the child has developed the interpersonal functions of language.

By the end of phase 2, which in the case of Halliday's son was at 22½ to 24 months, the child has mastered the adult linguistic system. From that point, **he** goes on to spend the rest of his life working to develop the language itself with a strong functional basis already built up.

Halliday's conclusion that the .earliest meanings to occur in early language are manifestations of the interpersonal function of language are supported by studies of Dore(1975) and Bates et al (1975), Bates (1976), who use 'speech act analysis. It is also reported in Griffiths (1979) and Carter (1979) that ideational-oriented utterances do not appear until considerably later than pragmatic-oriented vocalizations or utterances.

From the Hallidayan functional model then linguistic forms or structures are taken account of for their function in conversation. Children learn the linguistic forms, lexical or structural, because they want to convey social VMS- messages; that is to communicate, More importantly, from the functional point of view, language appears when the child can meaningfully convey messages. And this happens, as the above account has made clear, long before the child begins to produce the linguistic code that is usually used to realize formally (grammatically) the meaning intended. Put differently, the appearance of language at the syntactic level is not so much the onset of communication, but rather a development of a code by means of which the child can now express-his previously well-founded communicative competence in a more effective way with those around him who are using and sharing with him the knowledge of the same conventional interactional system.

In sum, the child's desire to communicate in addition to his development of the capacity to use and understand the meaning potential of language (semantic network or speech acts) leaves us with no doubt but to conclude that communication precedes language. Support for this conclusion, knowledge of communicative function preceding true language, has come from psycholinguistic studies.

From a psychological perspective, Brunei, one of the most brilliant scholars of our times, believes that language is learned in use and has given a convincing account of how in well-defined prelinguistic mother-child interactional formats (e.g. games and plays), children attain full mastery of the concept of dialogue, and how they later' learn to use language. But the development of. the capacity to use language meaningfully, necessitates that the child solve the problem of how to make his intentions known to others, how to convey messages he has in mind, how to rgulate and affect other people's behaviour so that they come to his aid and do things on his behalf, and how to relate to others 3runer, 1978, 1986).
These problem -solving demands seem well met long before the appearance of language in its adult form. For example, the concepts of 'intentionality', 'reciprocity' (turn-taking),'joint attention' to common referent are all firmly established in the first year of intellectual development; that is, in the prelinguistic stage of the child's cognitive growth. According to Bruner (1983) and Vygotsky (1978), the child comes, through these and other social exchanges, to grasp the cognitive processes (symbolic system), whose output language, when it appears, must reflect and encode, This/where dissecting the structure of social interaction into its component parts becomes particularly important for understanding how mastery of the syntax of action may lead the child into language proper at the lexico-grammatical level.

Equally important is the impressive body of evidence that has come from the work of other researchers of early communicative development (Trevarthen and hubley 1978, Newson and Nelson, 1979, Schaffer, 1977; Stern, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978) suggesting that the infant comes to the world 'innately' primed, to produce SPONTANEOUS BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS that are treated as communicative, and that, from a very early age he is able to participate in dialogue-like exchanges with other human beings.

The innately-primed status of children to produce spontaneous behavioural (extralinguistic) units seem to play , naturally, an important role in evolutionary terms, paving the way for catapulting the child to a new level of socialization. These patterns of behaviour may provide us with the answer to understanding how STRUCTURE and FUNCTION, be in language or cognition, may be linked.

The STRUCTURE-FUNCTION dichotomy poses an extremely serious problem in language teaching. Needed in this and other respects are some dovelopmentally bridging factors, be they ontogenetic or phylogenetic, to conceive of a specific human behaviour as arising out of an earlier pattern of behaviour rather than looking at it as coming from no where. From a social cognitve point of view, infants arrive in the world preadapted both structurally and functionally. They are born with a set of biologically determined structural mechanisms such as a visual-motor system with certain perceptual predilections, motor patterns, and sensitivity to stimulation proceedings from the human face and an auditory apparatus highly sensitive to speech-like sounds. All these structural mechanisms serve as a starting point for the infant's formation of his early social relateaness. Functional preadaptation or preparedness, on the other hand, refers to the uses which these structural mechanisms are put to serve in relation to adults social behaviour. In short, the two notions of social preadptation just referred to can be understood in the following manner; IT IS NOT ONLY WHAT THE CHILD HAS; IT IS ALSO WHAT HE DOES WITH WHAT HE HAS. What follows is a brief account of how certain interactional conventions(procedures) are learned by children very early. In particular, it will be argued that language proper evolves out of prelinguistic capacities for sharing attention and other interactional competences.

Early Social Activities of Infants:
Infant-Mother Interaction:

In its early manifestations, the preverbal communication takes the form of bodily movements, cries, touch, looks and other nonverbal means Werner and Kaplan, 1963).

Right from birth, the newborn's visual motor system comes into operation. Many infants, almost from the moment of birth, demonstrate an ability of alertly pursuing with coordinated eye-and-head movements a moving object across their visual field (Wolff, 1963). Further more, in their earliest perceptual experience, the infant's response to stationary objects is extremely limited when compared with their response to mobile stimuli (e.g. living creatures and other noise producing objects) (Schaffer, 1971). This is one reason why-an the first few weeks of life the caretaker's face exerts a compelling influence and facination for the human infant. Stern (1977) found that during normal bottle or breast feeding the mother spends about seventy per cent of the time facing the infant and gazing at his face. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the caretaker's eyes constitute the most important captivating and stimulus-eliciting element for the infant in the first two months (Schaffer, 1977).

The infant's response patterns demonstrating such sensitivity to those aspects of stimulation emanating from the mother's face are highly synchronized with one another, on the one hand, and, sequentially, occur in a definte temporal patterning compatible with those responses typical of the adult communication, on the other. Neuson (t977), and Trevarthen's (1977) studies of the social precocity of human infants draw attention to such exirtra ordinary behavioural feats which are important for communication. For example, when the mother initiates a social interaction by means of activities such as vocal utterances, the infant, in turn, responds to his mother by displaying gestural signals (e.g. facial and manual gestures) characteristic of an attentive listener. And when the mother pauses, the infant takes his turn by actively making a dialogue-like gesture or vocal response as if he/she were waiting for an appropriate gap to initiate an interaction.

The turn-taking nature in infancy is a wide-spread phenomenon of mother-infant interaction generally (Kaye, 1982, Karmiloff-Smith, 1995). At first, the infant's earliest turn-taking responses have no semantic contents, in the sense that they occur naturally and with no communicative intentionality, However, in the course of the first year of life, the infant achieves the concept of dialogue in action and emerges as a competent communicant capable of communicating with those around him about different objects and happenings in his here-and-now world. And this communicative achievement is made possible by the mother's initiative to make a great deal of use of the infant's spontaneous behaviour patterns and to treat them as being communicative; that is, purposeful and meaningful. This implies that the mother (caretaker) plays a crucial role in helping the child develop the ability to participate in sequences of interpersonal communication, master the deictic function (i.e. attention directing) of language and ultimately the act of reference (linguistic reference). The Question that arises now is "what are the components of intersubjective communication?".

Any interpersonal communication involves a tripartite relation between the two participants, who alternate in the roles of encoder (sender, speaker) and decoder (receiver, listener) and the common topic, which constitutes the subject matter of their interaction. And it is essential for the smoothness and success of the course of interaction that one participant at a time assume the role of the encoder while the other the role of the decoder. Most importantly, to avoid confusion and a frustrating interactive event, it is required that both participants "attend to the same referent-commom topic.

Thus, the ability to engage in an interpersonal communication demands that the child develop certain interactional procedures (skills). He has to attain the principle that interpersonal interaction is two sided, and that it is based on roles which are both reciprocal and interchangeable. Secondly, he needs to develop the capacity of drawing the addressee's attention to an object are activity in the environment so as to signal that he INTENDS to say something (comment) about that object or activity. Those two-concepts, expressed in the notions of RECIPROCITY and INTENTIONALITY, respectively, are essential prerequisites for the child's ability to conduct an effective social interaction (Bruner.1986). Moreover, these abilities are in essence social (Newson and Shottey 1974; Halliday, 1975) and require that the child be aware of his role in any interactional sequence (e.g. speaker-listener, agent-recipient, giver-taker) and to know when the addressee is attending to an object and when he is not.

In the first six months of life; the infant's behavioural units are not communicatively intentional, but in the second half of the first year there is a strong indication that he is well on his way toward conceptual mastery of the components of

dialogue; the differentiation of ego from objects of reference, from others and from his means of representing those objects.

For the preverbal infant with limited communicative channels, attending to an object is the same as looking at it. According to Bruner (1975). The act of directing the addressee's attention to an object is frequently accomplished by pointing. This is where gazing and pointing activities of both adult and infant in joint action enterprises in the first year of life become important for establishing a mutual attention to a particular referent, and hence to the development of reference in general.

GAZING and POINTING:

By five to six weeks eye-to-eye contact is established and, accordingly, the mother responds by actively adopting a more social attitude towards her infant— vocally and socially (Stern 1977). Studies by Collis and Schaffer (1975) demonstrate that during the first year of life mothers tend to follow their infants' line of regard so that mutual attention to a particular object or activity in the immediate perceptual world is largely a result of the mother's synchronizing her looks with those of the infant's. By the time the infant is six months old, the mother finds it not difficult to get the infant to focus on and receive the target abject, By this stage, the infant becomes consumed in his interest in static objects. In the first six months of life, the infant's spontaneous activitities are largely directed towards communication with people (Newson, 1977).

Now that objects have come to demand a greater degree of attention, the mother-infant interaction changes in character. It is no longer confined to an eye-to-eye contact and subsequently, joint smiling and occasional vocalisation, but rather the communication process adds another component to its dialogue-like structure (potential referent). The infant now begins to show some signs of active involvement as an agent in the interactional cycle. By the end of the first year, the concept of reciprocity and intentionality seem to be mastered by the child.

For example, the child begins to reciprocate by giving the mother an object or displaying it near her face or pointing to it• These gestural procedures on the part of the child do not, however, seem to be intentional and hence not communicative in nature At this stage, the infant does not check upon his mother(listener) to see whether she is attending to or looking at the object nor does he deliberately release the object into her hand (Bruner, 1983). This indicates that the infant does not yet have the concept of reciprocity and hence does not appreciate others as potential recipients in the dialogue-of-action. The mother tries to engage him ,in alternating-role sequences. For example, she may remove the object from his hand and treat his subsequent attempt to possess the object as an active turn-taking. In the early stages of such action patterns, the mother always initiates the activity and concentrates on trying to get the infant to take the object. The child never reciprocates at this stage and tries to keep hold of the object. But around 10 months, the child plays the game smoothly, adhering to its rules and getting pleasure out of the exchange itself. The ability to participate in this and similar social games (e.g. peepboo and pat-a-cake) clearly indicates that the child has mastered the idea of reciprocity, timing his contribution to take place in the right place in the sequence of the dialogue-of-act ion.

The related notion of intentionality is mastered once the child acts in full awareness that his actions have interactional value and that they can be used to affect others so that he can achieve his goals. The pointing gesture is one of the most effective means of interaction whereby the infant can register his interest and influence the behaviour of those surrounding him. Pointing develops after the ability

to reach for objects in the beginning of the second half of the first year. In the beginning, the child's pointing gesture is utilitarian aimed at grasping and possessing the object. This objective grasping gesture develops into a communicatively pointing gesture through the caretaker's interpretation of it as such dissociated from the child's immediate needs. By the age of nine months the child uses pointing gesture as a private activity, but not communicatively; he does not check whether the adult is looking in the same direction. By the age of one year, the child's pointing gesture becomes sensitive to the communicative rules themselves; the child first points at the object, then back at the adult and once again at the object. According to Bates(1976), pointing becomes communicatively significant when the child discovers that adults, a potential source of causality other than himself, could be used as intermediate means or "tools" to attain his goals. From that stage on he can combine pointing and vocalisations as a more efficient means of social interaction' e.g. when the mother is out of sight, he can intentionally cry to draw others' attention and raise his arms inviting others to lift him(Lock,, 1980). By 14 months, children not only use pointing communicatively, but they also seem to understand adults' pointing gestures as communicative as well (Murphy and Messer, 1977).

In sum, in the early forms of mother-infant interaction, the infant is not communicating messages but sharing experience(the object of reference). Thus, the " ability of the child to internalize and structure knowledge is derived initially from his preacapted social competencies and from the mother's natural inclination to treat her baby as if he already had communicative understanding, Vygotsky (1966) puts the above proposition that the child's knowledge is social in origin most effectively:

> "We might formulate the general genetic law of cultural development as follows; any function in the child's cultural development appears on the stage twice, on two planes, first on the social plane and then on the psychological, first among people as an intermental category and then on the psychological first among people as an intermental category and then within the child as an' intramental category' " (1966).

The question that arises now is" to what extent do the nature of the infant-mother interpersonal system developed in the first year of life, and the related concept evolved out of that system contribute to the later development of language?". Another related question is "what is the nature of early language(protolanguage) pointed out by Halliday (1975) as phase 1 and its relation to the conceptual development of the child in the first two years of life?".

Early Interactive Achievements:
Language and Development:

Many psycholinguists have claimed that language and action are closely associated. Developmental psychologists, in particular, have in recent years paid much attention to the early mother-infant interpersonal relationship, and focused their interest on the link between this two-way social exchange, later development of language proper and other higher psychological functions.

The significant role of play, for example, as a primary means of children's cultural development has long ago been emphasized by Vygotsky (1966,1978). And

in recent times Bruner (1975, 1983) argues extensively that the structure of language is not arbitrary but is matched with the structure of play or joint action. According to Bruner, language is acquired by the child as a. tool for regulating a 'joint activity and a 'joint attention'. He suggests that both the semantic structure of language and the pragmatic functions of language can be and are ultimately derived by the child from the structure of social interaction. what the child needs is to master the requirements of joint activities in such a way that these activitities. when externalized, share with other members of the child's group his/her comprehension of their common experience, Reference, for example, derives from 'joint attention' to objects by mother and child. As previously discussed, gazing and pointing behaviours of both mother and child are important for the development of reference. We also saw how the concepts of reciprocity and intentionality develop out of similar social exchanges, such as give-and-take and pat-a—cake. In line with Vygotsky and 6runer, it is plausible to conceive of the child coming, through these and other social exchanges, to grasp the cognitive processes whose output language proper must mirror and encode. That is to say, the syntax of action may lead the child into language at both the lexical and grammatical levels.

Looked at from the logical point of view, play has two constituent underlying elements: a "function and its arguments, an argument and the functions into which it can fit" (Bruner, 1978). Thus a child can apply the same 'action pattern to a variety of objects or entitities; in turn a 'book' is banged, then a spoon, then a toy etc. Or an object can be manipulated by the child for different purposes or action patterns; a toy is successfully banged , squeezed, offered, asked for, thrown or mouthed. The above structure of play is universal. Similarly, one of the universal features of language is 'predication', realized by two exponents; topic-comment in discourse analysis (e.g. the cat/ate the rat), subject-predicate in grammatical analysis (e.g. John/ate the choclate), or function and logical participants (i.e. arguments) in logical terminology (e.g. Fred/hit the boy).

If one thinks of the structure of utterances in terms of the above three-tier system of distinctions, then one can see how it is possible for the child to come to terms with the semantic structure of language (e,g. case categories and relations like 'agent' and 'experiencer, logical notion of predication, discourse structure of topic and comment) by virtue of the interpersonal relations in which his experience is embedded. Case relations, for instance, could be learned through ritualized interpersonal exchanges and games in which the child comes to learn the nature of a given role by actively taking that role in two-way interactions.

An example of interactions assembled by Bruner (1975) and his team will clarify the point that has just been made. In a set of episodes involving handing a small object back and forth between one child, Ann, and her mother which begins at nine months and goes on to thirteen months, one can note how AGENT-ACTION-OBJECT-RECIPIENT sequences are built up in joint-action formats, then in PROTOLANGUAGE and eventually in STANLARD LEXICAL items.

Before the child is nine months old, the mother is always the agent of the action with the child as recipient, Meanwhile, the child's mode of signalling or requesting that the action be repeated is usually a general form of vocative or showing some level of excitement in anticipation of response. In this *sense,* the agent (the mother) is dissociated from the act itself. By B-10 months, the exchange mode is well established, involving alters nations of roles(turn-taking); the child now becomes the agent in the reciprocal process and the mother the recipient. Moreover, the child's gaze orientation also undergoes change in a way union clearly suits the role assumed

and the activity undertaken by both participants. For example, when the mother is seen as the recipient of the action, the child's line of regard is directed to her hand, object rather than to her face. But when the mother is seen as the agent of giving, the child's line of regard is focused en her face rather than at her hand or object, what the development of this exchange process suggests is that the child is being helped attain the agent/recipient concepts; the mother is once the agent of giving with the child as recipient of action and vice versa.

At 13 months, Ann had already acquired a form of her mother's 'thank you' (Kew). She uttered her adopted form of 'thank you' (kew) both when offering and when taking an object. Two weeks later, Ann's (kew) disappeared in the offering position only and later was replaced by the demonstrative DEICTIC 'LOOK' when giving an object. At the end of the thirteen month, Ann's 'look' was replaced by the deictic form 'THERE'.

With respect to predication, Bruner suggests that the infant's management of gaze orientation in mutual action formats already forms a primitive predicational comment(quasi-comment), with these very same joint-action enterprises constituting implicit binding the discourse commuinicants together. These quasi-predicational comments moreover, seem to be supplemented at around nine months by a vocal accompaniment which clearly "involves affirming or asserting something" of or about the joint activity (subject matter). On the other hand, the child's action with objects also suggests a kind of separability of topic and comment. One act (e.g. banging) applied to different objects (e.g. book, toy) could serve as an organizing topic and the objects as comments. Or one object put to different activities could serve as the topic and the various actions as comments (see p. 16).

In sum, the cognitive competencies emerging from a long and very rich social experience and from actions with objects strongly suggest precursors that prepare the child to "crack the linguistic code",

IMPLICATIONS FOR SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING :

What general implications for second language learning/teaching can be drawn from the previous consideration of first language acquisition? More importantly, what relevance to language teaching can one derive from Halliday's and Hymes' linguistic perspective and that of Bruner's and Vygatsky's psychological and social line of argument particularly at the level of syllabus design?

First, if we adept the view that the capacity to use language competently lies in relating language to extralinguistic phenomena (see p.B), then one may conclude that it is a 'MUST' that, in teaching language, we introduce and practice it in relation to the social functions to which, as a means at maintaining intersubjective relations, it is used to serve.

Second, if one seriously believes that the precursors to language skills are to be found in earlier dialogic formats, and that the child is able to convey messages long before language proper develops (see p. B-9), then the problem posed by the form-function dichotomy in both language teaching and learning becomes one of understanding how the process of communication develops in general, with language learning being seen as but one derivative of this development.

Recognition of how important the development of communication to second. 'language is has already led prominent researchers (e.g. Richards and Rogers, 1985; Schmidt and Richards, 1985; Brumfit, 1979; Johnson,1979; Wilkins, 1979; Bialystok, 1990) in the field of language teaching to consider second language acquisition from similar perspectives to that advocated by Halliday, Hymes, Bruner and Vygotsky,

where the development of grammatical competence has been pushed to one side in favour of meaning potential and communicative fluency. The method followed is functionally orientated, and the materials to be taught are organized in such a way as to reflect the precedence of both semantic and functional categories over grammatical ones.

The above approach to language teaching/learning has also gained ground in analysis and evaluation of literary and non literary texts, where the emphasis is being laid on the discoursal nature of text and on linguistic indicators which are meant for the reader as clues revealing the writer's point of view; (Widdowson, 19B6; Short, 1994).

To conclude, it is on the conviction that the only way to teach language is by both introducing and practicing it in relation to the uses it is meant to serve that the COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH to LANGUAGE TEACHING IS BASED. So if you want to go ahead and never fall into a trap of your own making in teaching children and adults alike a foreign language, get a plausible theory.

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