Abstract. This paper is psycholinguistic review on language development and acquisition describing how the children acquire languages. The focus of discussion throughout the paper is how a child becomes competent to produce and understand language. There are a range of theories of language acquisition that have been created but most of the theories cannot agree on the role that both nature and nurture play in language acquisition. The theories do have one thing in common though, and that is the fact that they all believe that language acquisition is the key aspect that distinguishes humans from other organisms and by understanding how different aspects of language are acquired we can better understand the main vehicle by which we communicate. In addition, this paper also describes the development of children’s language acquisition including: pre-linguistic stage, babbling, one-word utterances, two-word utterances, telegraph speech, language learning during pre-school, and critical period.

Keywords: language development, acquisition, childhood stage.

Children’s acquisition of language has been considered one of uniquely defining characteristics of human behaviour. Still today, it is the commonly held belief that children acquire their languages in the same way, regardless of what language they use or the number of languages they acquire. It was also commonly believed that the children acquire languages through imitation of parents, caregivers or the people in their environment. Linguists too had the same conviction until 1957, when a then relatively unknown man, A. Noam Chomsky, propounded his theory that the capacity to acquire language is in fact innate. This revolutionized the study of language acquisition, and after a brief period of controversy upon the publication of his book, entitled: Aspects of the Theory of Syntax, in 1964, his theories are now generally accepted as largely true. As a consequence, he was responsible for the emergence of a new field during the 1960s, Developmental of psycholinguistics, which deals with children’s first language acquisition. He was not the first to question our hitherto mute acceptance of a debatable concept – long before, Plato wondered how children could possibly acquire so complex a skill as language with so little experience of life. Experiments have clearly identified an ability to discern syntactical nuance in very young infants, although they are still at the pre-linguistic stage. Children of three, however, are able to manipulate very complicated syntactical sentences, although they are unable to tie their own shoelaces, for example.
Indeed, language is not skill such as many others, like learning to drive or perform mathematical operations – it cannot be taught as such in these early stages. Rather, it is the acquisition of language which fascinates linguists today, and how it is possible. Noam Chomsky turned to the world’s eyes to this enigmatic question at a time when it was assumed to have a deceptively simple explanation.

**DISCUSSION**

1. **Language Acquisition**

   Language acquisition is the process by which humans acquire the capacity to perceive, produce and use words to understand and communicate. It involves the picking up of diverse capacities including syntax, phonetics, and an extensive vocabulary. However, learning a first language is something that every normal child does successfully without much need for formal lessons. Language development is a complex and unique human quality but yet children seem to acquire language at a very rapid rate with most children's speech being relatively grammatical by age three (Crain & Lillo-Martin, 1999). Grammar, which is a set of mental rules that characterizes all of the sentences of a language, must be mastered in order to learn a language. Most children in a linguistic community seem to succeed in converging on a grammatical system equivalent to everyone else in the community with few wrong turns, which is quite remarkable considering the pitfalls and complexity of the system. By the time a child utters a first word, according to the Linguistic Society of America, he or she has already spent many months playing around with the sounds and intonations of language, but there is still no one point at which all children learn to talk. Children acquire language in stages and different children reach various stages at different times, although they have one thing in common and that is that children learning the same language will follow an almost identical pattern in the sequence of stages they go through. The stages usually consist of: (i) cooing - 6 months - use phonemes from every language; (ii) babbling - 9 months- selectively use phonemes from their native language; (iii) one word utterances - 12 months- start using single words; (iv) telegraphic speech - 2 years - multi-word utterances that lack in function; (v) normal speech - 5 years - almost normal developed speech.

   There are many facts that are intriguing about the language. The fact that all humans have it, and all non-humans do not. The fact that children are able to learn it very quickly. The fact that there exist so many languages and children of all countries are able to acquire them at the same speed. This list can go on and on, and I am sure that the reader can think of many other fascinating features of language. As stated by cognitive researches “Language is paramount among the capacities that characterize humans, setting us off from even the most perfectly formed and functioning of the other beasts on earth so. As a matter of species pride – if nothing else – we would hold up language as a marker of our humanity and thus a focus of our scientific interests. By understanding language, we understand something important about ourselves.”
The way in which children acquire language is at the centre of a debate. Learning theorists such as Skinner maintained that language is acquired through reinforcement. Chomsky argued that language was far too complex to be learned so competently in such a short space of time, by cognitively immature toddlers, merely by reinforcement. He argued that the neonate arrives equipped with a language acquisition device. This contains a set of rules common to all languages and allows children to learn any language which they are exposed to. Slobin (1995) suggested a similar innate device the language-making capacity. The interactionist perspective suggests that a combination of biological and cognitive factors plus the linguistic environment are all necessary for the acquisition of language.

There are many distinctions between the processes of learning and acquisition. For instance, the terms are generally used to separate first language acquisition from second language learning, and implied within this distinction is the gap between children of 0-5 years learning their mother tongue, and those beyond puberty who may begin at this stage to learn a second language, or more. The process is a conscious one in learning whereas it is subconscious in acquisition and in language acquisition the focus is on communication or reception of a message as opposed to syntax and grammar as is the case in language learning. Moreover, the context is usually crucial and meaningful in language acquisition, but need not be important to the same extent in language learning. Motivation, too, is a factor that may broaden the gulf between learning and acquisition, but need not be factor that may broaden the gulf between learning and acquisition, as for the latter the language is a matter of urgent necessity. Most importantly, however, the usual outcome of language acquisition is fluency, which is by no means guaranteed in language learning.

We often ask questions such as, do you remember when you learned to tie your shoes, ride a bike, and eat with a fork. Sometimes we can remember because a parent helped us learn how to do these things. So, since we always speak the language of our parents, they must have helped us learn to speak our first language. But do you remember when your mother taught you the past tense? When your father laid down the rules for passive sentences? We do not remember these important moments of our childhood because they never occurred. Our parents did not teach us how to walk and they did not teach us how to talk. Yet, we learned from them. How can this be? Certainly there must have been a subtle, perhaps intuitive teaching process that neither our parents nor we were aware of. We begin by imitating what we hear our parents say as best as we can, repeating random phrases. Our parents in subtle ways punish us for the childish speech errors we make and reward correct phrases. As our speech improves, our parents respond more positively and less negatively. The evidence then indicates that children do, in fact, absorb a massive number of sentences and phrases but rather than parrot them back, they abstract rules from them and create their own grammar which they then apply to create new utterances they have never heard before. Despite the fact that children don’t know when their parents are speaking grammatically and when they are making errors, all children grow up knowing the language perfectly.
2. **Historical Theories and Model of Language Acquisition**

   a. **Behaviorist Theory**

      In 1957 a piece of literature appeared that would come to affect how we view language, human behaviour and language learning. B.F Skinner's *Verbal Behaviour* applied a functional analysis approach to analyze language behaviour in terms of their natural occurrence in response to environmental circumstances and the effects they have on human interactions. Skinner's behaviour learning approach relies on the components of classical, which involves unconditioned and conditioned stimuli, and operant conditioning but particularly the elements of operational conditioning. Operational conditioning refers to a method of learning that occurs through rewards and punishments for behaviour. Behaviour operates on the environment to bring about favorable consequences or avoid adverse ones. These same ideas of operant conditioning can also be applied to language acquisition because Skinner believed that language could be treated like any other kind of cognitive behaviour. According to the behaviourist theory, language learning is a process of habit formation that involves a period of trial and error where the child tries and fails to use correct language until it succeeds. Infants also have human role models in their environment that provide the stimuli and rewards required for operant conditioning. For example, if a child starts babbling, which resembles appropriate words, then his or her babbling will be rewarded by a parent or loved one by positive reinforcement such as a smile or clap. Since the babblings were rewarded, this reward reinforces further articulations of the same sort into groupings of syllables and words in a similar situation (Demirezen, 1998). Children also utter words because they cause adults to give them the things they want and they will only be given what they want once the adult has trained or shaped the child through reinforcement and rewards speech close to that of adult speech. Before long children will take on the imitation or modeling component of Skinner's theory of language acquisition in which children learn to speak by copying the utterances heard around them and by having their responses strengthened by the repetitions, corrections and other reactions that adults provide. However, before a child can begin to speak, they first start by listening to the sounds in their environment for the first years of their life. Gradually, the child learns to associate certain sounds with certain situations such as the sound of endearment a mother produces when feeding her child. These sounds then become pleasurable for the child on their own without being accompanied by food and eventually the child will attempt to imitate these sounds to invite the attention of his mother or another adult. If these sounds resemble that of adult language the mother will respond with reward and the operant conditioning process begins.

   b. **Innateness Theory**

      Noam Chomsky's innateness or nativist theory proposes that children have an inborn or innate faculty for language acquisition that is biologically determined. According to Goodluck (1991), nativists view language as a fundamental part of the human genome, as a trait that makes humans human, and its acquisition is a natural
It seems that the human species has evolved a brain whose neural circuits contain linguistic information at birth and this natural predisposition to learn language is triggered by hearing speech. The child's brain is then able to interpret what she or he hears according to the underlying principles or structures it already contains (Linden, 2007). Chomsky has determined that being biologically prepared to acquire language regardless of setting is due to the child's language acquisition device (LAD), which is used as a mechanism for working out the rules of language. Chomsky believed that all human languages share common principles, such as all languages have verbs and nouns, and it was the child's task to establish how the specific language she or he hears expresses these underlying principles. For example, the LAD already contains the concept of verb tense and so by listening to word forms such as "worked" or "played". The child will then form a hypothesis that the past tense of verbs are formed by adding the sound /d/, /t/ or /id/ to the base form. Yang (2006) also believes that children also initially possess, then subsequently develop, an innate understanding or hypothesis about grammar regardless of where they are raised. According to Chomsky, infants acquire grammar because it is a universal property of language, an inborn development, and has coined these fundamental grammatical ideas that all humans have as universal grammar (UG). Children under the age of three usually don't speak in full sentences and instead say things like "want cookie" but yet you would still not hear them say things like "want my" or "I cookie" because statements like this would break the syntactic structure of the phrase, a component of universal grammar. Another argument of the nativist or innate theory is that there is a critical period for language acquisition, which is a time frame during which environmental exposure is needed to stimulate an innate trait. Linguist Eric Lenneberg in 1964 postulated that the critical period of language acquisition ends around the age of 12 years. He believed that if no language was learned before then, it could never be learned in a normal and functional sense. It was termed the critical period hypothesis and since then there has been a few case examples of individuals being subject to such circumstances such as the girl known as Genie who was imposed to an abusive environment, which didn't allow her to develop language skills.

c. Cognitive Theory

Jean Piaget was a Swiss psychologist that was famous for his four stages of cognitive development for children, which included the development of language. However, children do not think like adults and so before they can begin to develop language they must first actively construct their own understanding of the world through their interactions with their environment. A child has to understand a concept before he or she can acquire the particular language which expresses that concept. For example, a child first becomes aware of a concept such as relative size and only afterward do they acquire the words and patterns to convey that concept. Essentially it is impossible for a young child to voice concepts that are unknown to them and therefore once a child learns about their environment then they can map language
onto their prior experience. An infant's experience of a cat is that it meows, is furry and eats from a bowl in the kitchen; hence they develop the concept of cat first and then learns to map the word "kitty" onto that concept. Language is only one of the many human mental or cognitive activities and many cognitivists believe that language emerges within the context of other general cognitive abilities like memory, attention and problem solving because it is a part of their broader intellectual development. However, according to Goodluck (1991), once language does emerge it is usually within certain stages and children go through these stages in a fixed order that is universal in all children. There is a consistent order of mastery of the most common function morphemes in a language and simple ideas are expressed earlier than more complex ones even if they are more grammatically complicated. Piaget's cognitive theory states that, children's language reflects the development of their logical thinking and reasoning skills in stages, with each period having a specific name and age reference. There are four stages of Piaget's cognitive development theory, each involving a different aspect of language acquisition:

1. Sensory-Motor Period - (birth to 2 years) Children are born with "action schemas" to "assimilate" information about the world such as sucking or grasping. During the sensory-motor period, children's language is "egocentric" and they talk either for themselves or for the pleasure of associating anyone who happens to be there with the activity of the moment.

2. Pre-Operational Period - (2 years to 7) Children's language makes rapid progress and the development of there "mental schema" lets them quickly "accommodate" new words and situations. Children's language becomes "symbolic" allowing them to talk beyond the "here and now" and to talk about things such as the past, future and feelings.

3. Egocentrism - Involves "animism" which refers to young children's tendency to consider everything, including inanimate objects, as being alive. Language is considered egocentric because they see things purely from their own perspective.

4. Operational Period - (7 to 11 years) and (11 years to adulthood) Piaget divides this period into two parts: the period of concrete operations and the period of formal operations. Language at this stage reveals the movement of their thinking from immature to mature and from illogical to logical. They are also able to "de-center" or view things from a perspective other than their own. It is at this point that children's language becomes "socialized" and includes things such as questions, answers, commands and criticisms.

d. Social Interactionist Theory

Vygotsky's social interaction theory incorporates nurture arguments in that children can be influenced by their environment as well as the language input children receive from their care-givers. Although the theories of Skinner, Chomsky and Piaget are all very different and very important in their own contexts, they don't necessarily take into account the fact that children don't encounter language in isolation. The child is a little linguist analyzing language from randomly encountered
adult utterances. The interaction theory proposes that language exists for the purpose of communication and can only be learned in the context of interaction with adults and older children. It stresses the importance of the environment and culture in which the language is being learned during early childhood development because this social interaction is what first provides the child with the means of making sense of their own behaviour and how they think about the surrounding world. According to Williamson (2008), children can eventually use their own internal speech to direct their own behaviour in much the same way that their parents' speech once directed their behaviour. Speech to infants is marked by a slower rate, exaggerated intonation, high frequency, repetition, simple syntax and concrete vocabulary. This tailored articulation used by caregivers to young children to maximize phonemic contrasts and pronunciation of correct forms is known as child-directed speech (CDS). Vygotsky also developed the concepts of private speech which is when children must speak to themselves in a self-guiding and directing way—initially out loud and later internally and the zone of proximal development which refers to the tasks a child is unable to complete alone but is able to complete with the assistance of an adult. The attention and time that a mother spends talking about topics that the child is already focused on highly correlates with early vocabulary size. In the early stages of a child's life this is usually done through motherese or “baby talk” which may allow children to “bootstrap” their progress in language acquisition (Williamson, 2008). The mother and father also provide ritualized scenarios, such as having a bath or getting dressed, in which the phases of interaction are rapidly recognized and predicted by the infant. The utterances of the mother and father during the activities are ritualized and predictable so that the child is gradually moved to an active position where they take over the movements of the care-taker and eventually the ritualized language as well. Basically the care-giver is providing comprehensible contexts in which the child can acquire language (Mason, 2002). Another influential researcher of the interaction theory is Jerome Bruner who elaborated and revised the details of the theory over a number of years and also introduced the term Language Acquisition Support System (LASS), which refers to the child’s immediate adult entourage but in the fuller sense points to the child’s culture as a whole in which they are born. Adults adapt their behaviour towards children to construct a protected world in which the child is gradually inclined to take part in a growing number of scenarios and scripts and in this way the child is lead gradually further and further into language. However, one must remember that although our social context provides support for language acquisition, it does not directly provide the knowledge that is necessary to acquire language and this perhaps where a child’s innate abilities come into play.

e. Usage-Based Theory

The usage-based theory of language suggests that children initially build up their language through very concrete constructions based around individual words or frames on the basis of the speech they hear and use. Basically this means, according
to Tomasello (2003) the developer of the theory, that children learn language from their language experiences and a language structure emerges from language use. The usage-based theory takes constructions, which are direct form meaning pairings, to be the basic units of grammar and believe that children learn constructions by first mastering specific instances before going on to generalize and use the constructions productively with other lexical items. Constructions gradually become more general and more abstract during the third and fourth years of life and grammar emerges as the speakers of a language create linguistic constructions out of recurring sequences of symbols (Tomasello, 2003). Tomasello (2003) also emphasizes the effects of frequency of use on cognitive representations, as patterns that are repeated for communicative reasons seem to become automated and conventionalized. Research by Saxton (2010) indicates that, the more often a linguistic form occurs in the input, the more often it is experienced by the child and the stronger the child's representation of it becomes. It will then be activated more easily when using it themselves on subsequent occasions. Therefore the child's mental representation is reinforced or increasingly entrenched and the more deeply entrenched a structure is, the more likely it becomes that this will form the basis of the child's speech output. Usage-based linguistics holds that language use shapes entrenchment through frequency repetitions of usage, but there are separable effects of token frequency and type frequency (Doughty & Long, 2003). According to Doughty and Long (2003), token frequency is how often in the input particular words or specific phrases appear and type frequency counts how many different lexical items a certain pattern or construction is applicable to. Linguistic forms with high token frequency will be learned early and lead to more strongly entrenched linguistic representations and seems to protect the child from error. Token frequency also has a strong influence on child learning and you often see a close relationship between adult input and child output (Saxton, 2010). Type frequency determines productivity because high type frequency ensures that a construction is used frequently, thus strengthening its representational schema and making it more accessible for further use with new items. Also the more items the category must cover, the more general are its criteria features, and the more likely it is to extend to new items (Doughty & Long, 2003). Another term coined in the usage-based theory is pre-emption which is an anti-frequency mechanism that suggests that children who experiences a verb in a rare construction this will cause the child to avoid using that verb in a more common structure.

f. Optimality Theory

Optimality Theory (OT) was originally proposed by Prince and Smolensky (1993) and has subsequently been further developed by other researchers. OT suggests that the observed forms of language arise from the interaction between conflicting constraints and like other models of linguistics, contain an input and an output and a relation between the two. A constraint is a structural requirement that may be either satisfied or violated by an output form and a surface form. A constraint
is considered optimal if it incurs the least serious violations of a set of constraints, taking into account their hierarchical ranking. In optimality theory, the essence of both language learning in general (learnability) and language acquisition (actual development children go through) entails the rankings of constraints from an initial state of the grammar to the language specific ranking of the target grammar. OT is a development of generative grammar, a theory sharing the quest for universal principles such as universal grammar but differs from the theory proposed by Chomsky because optimality theory believes that these universal constraints are violable (Kager, 1999). Languages are able to differ in their ranking of constraints by giving priorities to some constraints over others. Language acquisition can be described as the process of adjusting the ranking of these constraints that are considered universal.

According to Archangeli & Langendon (1997) these constraints include constraints governing aspects of phonology, such as syllabification constraints, constraints governing morphology and constraints that determine the correct syntactic properties of a language. There is also one family of constraints whose properties cut across all subdisciplinary domains, called the faithfulness constraints, which say that input and output are identical. Faithfulness is the general requirement for linguistic forms to be realized as close as possible to their lexical “basic forms” and violations of faithfulness lead to differences between input and output (Archangeli & Langendon, 1997). Another term coined by the optimality theory is markedness, which refers to the continuum that language-universal and language-specific properties rest on, with completely unmarked properties being those found in virtually all languages and extremely marked properties being found quite rarely. However markedness embodies universality in a "soft" sense, with violations of universality existing between languages.

g. Native Language Magnet Theory

Young children learn their mother tongue rapidly and effortlessly, following similar developmental paths regardless of culture. How infants accomplish this task has become the focus of debate especially for Patricia Kuhl who has developed the Native Language Magnet Model to help explain how infants at birth can hear all the phonetic distinctions used in the world's languages. According to Kuhl and colleagues (2005), to acquire a language, infants have to discover which phonetic distinctions will be utilized in the language of their culture and do so by discriminating among virtually all the phonetic units of the world's languages. During the first year of life, prior to the acquisition of word meaning, infants begin to perceive speech by forming perceptual maps of the speech they hear in their environment. Kuhl's (2005) research focused on the mechanism underlying the development transition from an infants' universal phonetic capacity to native phonetic discrimination. They used ERP brain measure of infants' native and non-native speech perception in infancy to predict language in 2nd and 3rd years of life. Although we still remain capable of discriminating non native phonetic contrasts as
we age, it is at a reduced level when compared with native contrasts. The idea that more than selection is involved in development phonetic perception has been clearly demonstrated by experimental findings showing that native language phonetic perception shows a significant improvement between 6 and 12 months of age. Previous studies had shown native language improvement after 12 months of age and before adulthood but newer studies such as Kuhl's and colleagues has gone beyond selection in explaining developmental change in infants' perception of speech. The Native Language Magnet Model (NLM) proposed by Kuhl (1994) focuses on infants' native phonetic categories and how they could be structured through ambient language experience. The NLM specified three phases in development: (1) Phase 1 - infants are capable of differentiating all the sounds of human speech and abilities are derived from their general auditory processing mechanisms rather than from a speech-specific mechanism; (2) Phase 2 - infants' sensitivity to the distributional properties of linguistic input produces phonetic representations. Experience accumulates and the representations most often activated begin to function as perceptual magnets for other members of the category; (3) Phase 3 - The perception termed perceptual magnet effect produces facilitation in native and a reduction in foreign language phonetic abilities.

Recently Kuhl's research has initiated the revision of the NLM and expanded the model to include native language neural commitment, which explains effects of language experience on the brain. Native language neural commitment describes the brain's early coding of language and how it affects our subsequent abilities to learn the phonetic scheme of a new language. This is due to the fact that initial language exposure causes physical changes in neural tissue that reflects the statistical perceptual properties of language input (Kuhl 2005). The neural networks then become committed to the patterns of native language speech. Another finding by Kuhl (2005) that has expanded the Native Language Magnet Model has been the research indicating that both native and non-native performances at 7 months of age predicted future language abilities but in opposite directions. Better native phonetic perception at 7 months of age predicted accelerated language development at between 14 and 30 months whereas better non-native performance at 7 months predicted slower language development at 14 and 30 months. Results supported the view that the ability to discriminate non-native phonetic contrasts reflects the degree to which the brain remains in the initial state, open and uncommitted to native language speech patterns.

3. The Stage of Language Acquisition

Children with normal hearing develop speech and language in predictable stages. While there may be variation in the times of onset, and length of time of each of these stages, they are always present. Should this pattern not develop normally, the child may face a lifelong communication handicap. Normal hearing is crucial for this development and thus deviation from this pattern of development is often a sign that the child has a hearing loss. There exist a crucial time period in which a child must be exposed to the linguistic environment or any form of communication. The time of language acquisition...
can be described by the following timeline: Shortly before their first birthday, babies begin to understand words, and around that birthday, they start to produce them. This one-word can last from two months to a year. Around 18 months of age, language changes in two ways. Vocabulary growth increases; the child begins to learn words at a rate of one every two waking hours and will keep learning at that rate of faster throughout adolescence. Primitive syntax emerges, including two-word strings like “papa away” or “see pretty”. By the time they are two “many children speak in complex sentences”. It is safe to way that except for constructions that are rare, predominantly used in written language, or mentally taxing even to an adult, all parts of all languages are acquired before the child turns 4. It is worth mentioning that continuous tracking of language acquisition is a difficult task: Between the late 2s and mid-3s, children’s language blooms into fluent grammatical conversation so rapidly that it overwhelms the researchers who study it; no one has worked out the exact sequence. Sentence length increases steadily and, because grammar is a combinatorial system, reaching thousands before the third birthday. An interesting task would be to find out if this growth depends on culture or environment. Amazingly, children do not seem to favour any language. They swiftly acquire free word order, rich systems of case and agreement, strings of agglutinated suffixes, ergative case marking, all languages are acquired before the child turns 4. Babies start acquiring communication skills as soon as they are born. Luckily they are equipped with one of the most effective tools for communicating - their cry. And they make good use of this tool, as any sleep deprived parent can attest! Pretty quickly, babies are able to produce different cries; one for hunger; one for fatigue; one for fright. Since babies learn to differentiate their cries without any adult intervention, I think many parents assume that their baby will learn language just by hearing other people talk. While, it is true that babies will pick up some language, inflection and other conversational skills from what they hear, and the most effective method to insure that a child will acquire language is to talk directly to them, early and often. That is because babies are born imitators. The language learning process goes through several stages, among others: (1) Prelinguistic stage (from birthday till around 6 months of age) – crying, cooing, vocal play; (2) Babbling (starts around 6 months of age) – consists in the seemingly random production of sounds; (3) One-word utterances (12-15 months) – the child starts to say the words of the parents’ language; (4) Two-word utterances (beginning at approximately 1-2 years old) – the child begins to form two-word utterances; (5) Telegraphic speech (2-3 years) - Full sentences with syntactic structure appear.

**a. Prelinguistic Stage**

0 – 1 month (new-born stage): Reflexive behaviour, suck-swallow patterns, nondifferentiated crying, vegetative sounds. New-borns prefer the sound of speech to other rhythmic sounds. DeCasper & Fifer (1980) find out that by 3 days of age new-born babies can recognize their mothers' voices. They can also discriminate consonant sounds such as ‘ba’ and ‘pa’. 2-3 months (cooing stage): Definite stop and start to oral movement. By 2 months they can discriminate the vowel sounds ‘a’ and ‘i’. Three months – gurgles and makes more vowel sounds. 4-6 months (babbling): Greater
independent control of tongue, prolonged strings of sounds, experiments with sounds, sound play (da, ma, di, du ...). Five months – imitates sounds. Six months – babbles, using first single and then double syllables, combines vowels and consonants and talks to himself in a singsong. Deaf infants will babble manually at around the same age. Gestures and other non-verbal responses start at around 8 - 10 months.

b. Babbling

6-10 months (reduplication babbling): Repetitive syllable production, increased lip control, incompletely formed plosives (p,b,t,d) and nasals. Seven to nine months – babbling rises and falls and sounds more like real conversation; baby imitates adult noises like a shout or cough, shouts to get attention. The child produces the full range of possible speech sounds – even those which do not occur in speech heard in immediate environment, and which she or he may later find “impossible” to reproduce when learning a foreign language. Thus, this does not occur by imitating the sounds in the parents’ language, since phonemes from other languages occur, and the frequency of phoneme production matches the frequency in the world’s languages rather than in the parents’ language. Also, infants at this age can tell sounds apart that are not distinguished by older members of the child’s linguistic community. Around the age of 9 months, children usually begin to experiment with the early developing sounds such as p, m and b. These may consist of consonant-vowel (CV) combinations, such as ma or ba, and can increase to CVC mom or CVCV mama strings. Because these sounds are relatively visible, parent modelling can play an important role in a child’s acquisition of consonants. Oviatt (1980) found that infants of 12-17 months can understand the meaning of many words before they can use them in their own speech. This is called ‘receptive language’. If you introduce language and communication to a young baby in a responsive and caring manner, the baby will reciprocate with sounds, sound combinations and later with word approximations and eventually words. Here are three simple ideas to help babies of varying ages learn to communicate: (1) A simple method with very young infants is to hold them close, make eye contact, exaggerate your smile and talk with a lilting voice. Within minutes, you have an infant “talking” back to you trying to imitate your facial and mouth movements. Since most babies are sensitive to sound and can pick up tension or upset in a person’s voice, it is important to remember to modulate your voice when speaking to them; (2) By about four months, a baby will squeal with delight, coo, laugh and make sounds when looking at toys or familiar people. One of the best methods to elicit those responses is to read to a baby. People may kid you when you begin reading to your child when he/she is only three months old. It is for sure that exposing them to language at such an early age is one of the reasons, those teenagers devours books now, loves writing and will talk endlessly on the phone. Not only do books encourage language and communication but they also help to increase baby’s attention span; (3) By about eight months, babies usually are making two letter sound productions such as “ga”, “da”, “ka” or “ba”. When a little one makes these sounds, it is a good idea to copy him or her and make the exact sounds back. Most times, a baby will figure out the “game”.

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c. One-Word Utterances

Shortly before their first birthday, babies begin to understand words, and around that time, they start to produce them. Altogether, it is between ten and twenty months the child finally begins to produce recognizable single words, and we say at this point that it is beginning to speak. The child starts to say the words of the parents’ language. This one-word stage continues for concrete time, as the child slowly adds new words to its vocabulary. That vocabulary does not grow rapidly. It includes several different kinds of words, but does not include any grammatical words, nor does the child use any grammatical endings such as past tenses or plurals. The words are often pronounced differently (probably because the child’s hearing hasn’t developed fully yet); for example, children tend to delete parts of hard-to-pronounce consonant clusters (such as the “str” in “string”), sometimes producing words with sounds that aren’t part of the parents’ language (such as “sring” - “sr” is not a permitted consonant cluster in English); finally, the errors the child makes often result from under – or overgeneralization (the proverbial case of calling every four-legged creature “doggie”).

The words produced in one-word stage (or holophrastic stage) are not just any words. For example you get: cookie, drink, bad, fast, go, yes/no. But never: in, the and a. It looks as though the distinction between Open class and Closed class words (open-class words are "context" words like nouns, verbs, and adjectives, while closed-class words are "function" words such as articles, conjunctions, and auxiliaries) come into play. This then is further evidence to the Psychological reality of that division. These single words may even function as illocutionary acts: may assert, command or question. Single words represent an entire sentence, i.e. “Milk” spoken by a toddler at this stage of language development, may be used to represent the sentence, 'Please may I have some milk'. Scientists have discovered that infants’ first words, and the lists are almost identical all over the world. Children differ only in how much they name objects or engage in social interaction using memorized routines. Presumably children record some words parents use in isolation, or in stressed final positions. Then they look for matches to these words in longer stretches of speech, and find other words by extracting these residues in between the matched portions.

d. Two–Word Utterances

This stage begins at approximately at the age of one year to one and half. The child begins to form two-word utterances, of a sort that look like edited versions of grammatically correct, complete sentences. Vocabulary growth humps to a new word every two hours minimum rate that the child will maintain through adolescence. Syntax begins, with strings of the minimum length that allows it, namely, two. These two-word sentences already reflect the language being acquired – in ninety five percent of them, the words are properly ordered. Importantly, a child at this stage hardly ever says anything with non-adult word order. Still, however, there are no grammatical words or endings. There is more going on in children’s minds than in what comes out of their mouths. Even before they put two words together, babies can comprehend a sentence using its syntax. At this stage some pronouns, especially “me/you” appear. Also appears
the intonation and a structure of a sentence (often N V). Children at this stage might say “doggie gone” – an edited or telescoped version of “The doggie is gone” This shows grasp of phrase structure rules. Combinations of words into short sentences, which tend to leave out articles and prepositions, start at around 18-24 months. These sentences demonstrate that children use syntactically correct word orders. The short sentences which children utter at this stage usually omit words such as a, on, and the, Gerken et. al (1990) suggest that this may be because they see these function words as 'spacers' between the more heavily stressed content words. At this stage the great development of language can be observed, and it is very interesting to record baby’s each word, at what age and how did it produce. As language learning proceeds, the pace quickens and by 18-24 months infants may add up to 40 new words a week to their vocabulary. In total at age of 18 months: Vocabulary of a baby may be of 20-100 words including nouns and verbs and other parts of speech and single word sentences.

e. Telegraph Speech

This stage begins at age of 2-3 years. At the age of 36 months vocabulary of a baby has grown to 900 words including nouns, verbs, pronouns, and adjectives. They produce three words sentences. About 90% of the child’s speech is intelligible. Full sentences with syntactic structure appear – the child speaks his or her fisrt full, simple sentence and then engages in explosive growth in syntatctic complexity so that by the child’s third birthday very complex statements are formed. Children two- and three – word utterances look like sample drawn from longer potential sentences expressing a complete and more complicated idea. Children, though not producing complicated sentences, do produce strings containing all of its components, and in the correct order. This is still without closed class items, some affixes (past tense marker, plural) SVO word order (almost invariable), constant changing and adding of rules. For example, Labov and Labov studied their daughter Jessie’s acquisition of inversion in WH-question: Adults’ rule of inversion: What do you want? Where have you been? Why are you crying? Who did you see? How will you do that? That is, Modal/have /be inverts with subject. Child speech is more likely to contain: What you want? Where you have been? Why you are crying? Who you saw? The two-word stage lasts for several months, and then, in the words of the linguist Steven Pinker, ‘all hell breaks loose’. Utterances suddenly become much longer: four, five, six, seven, ten words and more. Grammatical words and endings appear and, in a matter of months, the child is using almost the whole range of adult grammatical forms of words. All kinds of new constructions appear – negation, subordinate clauses, and questions – and are quickly used with increasing accuracy and confidence. Waxman & Senghas (1992) researches has shown that 2 year olds use strategies to enable them to find out the meaning of new words. According to Chomsky, sentence length increases steadily, and because grammar is a discrete combinatorial system, the number of syntactic types increases exponentially, doubling every month, and reaching the thousands.
f. Language Learning during the Pre-School Period

By around 3 years children are inserting the 'spacers' which they previously omitted. They are also capable of asking well-formed questions. Grammatical morphemes i.e. suffixes, prefixes and auxiliary verbs which modify the meanings of words and sentences are tried to be produced. There is evidence to suggest that these grammatical morphemes are learnt in a particular order. This may be because the morphemes children learn first are not as complex as those learnt later. Rules of grammar at this stage are often over regularized. i.e. "I brushed my teeth", and "It runned away". This is strange as children have often aware of the correct forms of many verbs before they learn grammatical morphemes. Transformational rules begin to be acquired around the ages of 2 - 2.5 years. These rules enable children to produce negative sentences i.e. "I was not eating pizza", and also to change declarative sentences to questions. This compares with the child's earlier questions that were usually declarative sentences spoken with a rising intonation that inferred a question. i.e. "Where doggie going?". Merken & Wootten (1982) found that children at this age begin to ask 'what', 'when', and 'how' questions before they are actually requesting information. At first negative sentences are produced by simply putting a negative word in front of a statement. Later children learn to negate sentences in the same way as adults. Between 2.5 - 5 years children begin to express relational concepts. Big/little are usually the first to appear, by 2.5 years these can be used to express relative sizes.

Researchers have found that children acquire spatial contrasts in a particular order. Telegraphic speech was thought to be universal to all cultures, but research by de Villiers & de Villiers (1992) has shown that children from Russia and Turkey produce grammatical speech from the beginning. This may be because there are less rigid syntactic rules and more stress is put on 'spacers', than in other languages. At the telegraphic stage, children often use context to convey meaning. The same two-word utterance therefore may be used to mean different things. Non-verbal gestures start playing a part at around 2 years of age when children realize more fully that conversation involves turn taking. The need (or benefits) of politeness when making requests is also being incorporated into their language skills. At the age of 48 months vocabulary of a child is now at about 1500 words. Flavell et. al. (1993) found that although parents don't consciously teach their children grammar, they do teach them the etiquettes of conversation. There are two explanations for this particular order of learning: The adjectives learned first - big/little are used more commonly by adults than those learned later i.e. wide/narrow. They are also less semantically precise, big/little apply to more situations than wide/narrow or deep/shallow. Pragmatics (treating points from a practical point of view) and Conversational skills 3-year-old children are starting to realize that not everything that is said, has a literal meaning. They also adjust their speech when communicating with either younger children or adults. By the time they go to school around 5 years of age, children have learned a lot about spoken language in a very short space of time, and are able to communicate in effective fairly complex sentences. During the next 3 - 4 years they will refine their speech and add many new
words to their vocabularies. The period between 6 years and adolescence is not covered in this section.

g. The Critical Period

Related to the idea of ‘language genes’ is the hypotheses of a genetically based developmental schedule determining a critical period for language acquisition. Since Lenneberg (1987), the notion that first language acquisition can only be normal if it occurs during a critical period (from age two until the onset of puberty, according to him) has been generally accepted. Often, this critical period has been assumed to be a specific feature of language acquisition, and not one of learning in general. Lenneberg cited four aspects of brain development related to these hypotheses: (1) pronounced morphological development with growth coming to a halt at the end of the period; (2) steady and orderly histological development (of dendritic arbors in particular) during the period; (3) high levels of cholesterol and cerebrosides related to myelination; and (4) changes in brain electrophysiology. Over the years from 2 - 7, when language is mastered, children constantly adjust their grammar until it matches that of the adult speaker population. This critical period between the ages of 2 - 7 suggests that first language learning, like walking, is an innate capacity of human beings triggered by a level of development more than feedback from the environment. That is, so long as a child hears a language – any language – when they reach this critical period they will learn it perfectly. If this is true, any child not hearing language during this period not only should not learn to speak but also should not be able to learn to speak. Evidence for a critical period of language acquisition is abundant and the ethical implications of research on this question are obvious. However, there have been a few tragic non-scientific bits of evidence that supports the innateness + critical period hypothesis and there are cases of ‘feral’ and deprived children, who receive language stimulation only after the onset of puberty and do not acquire language normally. The evidence is not conclusive but all of it suggests that language is an innate capacity of human beings, which is acquired during a critical period between 2 -7. After that period, it becomes increasingly more difficult for humans to learn languages, which explains why learning a second language is more difficult than learning a first one (or two or even three).

CONCLUSION

Language acquisition refers to the process where a normally developed child is able to become a proficient language user without having to make seemingly difficult efforts. Acquisition, therefore, is in contrast with ‘learning’ which refers to the processes where deliberate efforts have to be made in order to become proficient with the use of language, for instance, the ability to write and read. Children seem to be able to acquire a language at a speed no adults can match. By the age of three, a child is able to communicate with adults as well as with peers for his/her needs. From the analysis of the child’s acquisition process of a language, it seems that the child is a ‘linguist’ him/herself in that the child is able to construct his/her ‘grammar’ of the language, hence the ‘little linguist’ theory. Each
child goes through several stages before he/she starts talking. The acquisition of language starts as soon as a child is born. From birthday till around six months of age is the prelinguistic stage, when a child is crying and cooing. Then comes the stage of babbling that lasts from about seven to nine months, the child then produces the full range of possible speech sounds - even those which do not occur in speech heard in immediate environment. One-word utterances start from twelve until fifteen month of age. The child's vocabulary includes some several different kinds of words, but does not include any grammatical words, nor grammatical endings. The child's vocabulary in this stage does not grow rapidly. But the rapidity of growth of vocabulary starts at the stage of two-word utterances. Here the intonation and a structure of a sentence appear. However, there are no grammatical words or endings. At the age of three the child starts to pronouns the full sentences with syntactic structure and the vocabulary has grown to almost one thousand of words including nouns, verbs, pronouns and adjectives. However, what a child does when she or he learns language: what exactly does a child do? Whatever it is, it is universal – it is acquired regardless of culture, language, class, etc.–it is effortless.

REFERENCES
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