

In Children First Language Acquisition

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التطور الدلالي في اكتساب اللغة الأم

عند الأطفال

إعداد

المدرس المساعد

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الخلاصة

أن الدراسة الموسومة (التطور الدلالي في اكتساب اللغة الأم عند الأطفال) تهدف الى معرفة التقدم والتطور الدلالي في تشكيل الكلمة ثم الكلمتين ثم الجملة عند الطفل وحسب المراحل العمرية، ابتداءً من اليوم الاول من الولادة فصاعداً، وقد توصلت هذه الدراسة الى الآتي:

١- يبدأ التطور والتقدم الدلالي للطفل قبل عيد ميلاده الاول، ولكن ليس من اليوم الاول من عمره، وإنما بعد اجتيازه النصف الاول من السنة الاولى.

٢- التطور الدلالي عند الطفل يبدأ بعد التطور في الاصوات وفي معرفة المعاني، وذلك لأن التطور الدلالي يعتبر مرحلة متقدمة إذا ما قورنت بما سواها. حيث أن الطفل يحتاج أولاً احداث الصوت كي يعبر عن

- نفسه، ثم معرفة المعاني كي يعبر عما يريد، ثم بعد ذلك يحتاج الى ترتيب الكلمة او الكلمات لتكوين جملة مفيدة.
- ٣- التقليد والمحاكاة يتزامن مع التطور الدلالي للطفل، مما يجعله أن يعيد كل ما يسمعه من الآخرين البالغين ليتلفظ به.

Abstract

The current study comes to shed light on the process of rules of first language acquisition. The study is divided into six sections; section one deals with problem, value, aims, limits, and plan of the study. While section two deals with the syntactic rules of children language acquisition.

Section three concerns with the first children stage "Holophrastic" stage. Section four comes with the second stage "Joining" and section five comes with the third stage "Combining". Section six talks about recursive stage and reception of syntax test (ROST). Finally, the study concludes several results as are mentioned in the conclusion at the end of this study.

Section One

Introduction

1.1 Definition of The Problem

Every one at some times has witnessed the remarkable ability of children to communicate. As small babies, children babble, coo, cry, and vocally or no vocally send an extraordinary number of messages and receive even more messages. As they reach the end of their first year, children make specific attempts to imitate words and speech sounds they hear around them, and about this time, they utter their first "words" (Mason, 2005:56).

First language acquisition develops in several aspects, one of these aspects is the syntactic development, so worth of showing the process of the acquisition beginning with formulating the first meaningful sentence to the fluent level of production.

1.2 Value of The Study

First language acquisition is remarkable for the speed with which it takes place. Long before a child starts school, he or she has become an extremely sophisticated language-user, operating a system for self-expression and communication that no other creature, or computer, comes close to matching (Yule, 2006:149).

In addition to the speed of acquisition, the fact that is generally occurs, without overt instruction, for all children, regardless of great differences in their circumstances, provides

strong support for the idea that there is an innate predisposition in the human infant to acquire language. We can think of this as a special capacity for language with which each newborn child is endowed. By itself, however, this inborn language capacity is not enough (ibid).

1.3 Aims of The Study

This research tends to identify and clarify the process of first language acquisition, starting with the first birthday and progressive to the end.

1.4 Limits of The Study

The current research is limited to the first birthday babies, regardless the difference of the languages or the citizens, with using English as an example of representing the syntactic development.

1.5 Plan of The Study

This study intended to show the process of children syntactic development, concerning to their age progress, beginning of the first birthday to the next progressive years.

Section Two

Syntactic Rules of Children Language Acquisition

Learning syntactic rules of language is no less a remarkable achievement than learning its vocabulary. At the

age of eighteen-twenty months, the child creates his/her first two word utterances, and at 25 months two word utterances make up the majority of the child's speech. When the child is three years old, he/she is able to create three and four word utterances, and as the child grows, the syntactic rules grow too. Indeed, like vocabulary, needing of syntactic development never ends since people continue to learn the syntactic rules as they learn new styles of speech and writing, new way to express themselves with flair and emphasis. Many syntactic rules, particularly those involving coordinating and subordinating, are not fully mastered until adulthood (Bowerman, 1982:23).

Yet, as mentioned above, age is very underlined measure of language development. Different children, moths apart in age could both be using two utterances. Therefore, Brown (1958:24) devises a measure of grammatical development in children independent of chronological or mental age, the notion of **Mean Length Utterance** (MUL). MUL approximate of average length of the child's utterance measured in morphemes, (the smallest meaningful components words). e.g., **unhelpful** consists of three morphemes, **un** + **help** + **ful**, a base morpheme **help** and two lexical morphemes **un** and **ful**. Each morpheme contributes a meaningful component

to the whole word. **Dogs** consist of two morphemes, the base morpheme **dog** and the grammatical morpheme – s, meaning "more than one" (ibid). Brown (1958) devises a series of rules for collecting utterances to ensure that the only meaningful morphemes are collected; for instance, if a child says **doggies** for every canine he/she sees, singularly for in groups, there is no evidence to say that there are two morphemes in the child's word, and that word is counted as one morpheme. In addition, he defined the first stage of grammar development as the period from the appearance of the child's first utterance to an MUL. Brown simply defined the successive stages; second, third, fourth, and fifth as five increments of child's MUL (ibid).

In Russian, as in English, the subject and predicate constitute the largest units of the sentence; these in turn can be subdivided into smaller unit. There is an ingenious study on sentence analysis by Soviet preschool children. They had trained with pictures, then with isolated words, to list, count and then report, which were first, second and so on. Then sentences had presented. The majority of children five to seven tended to hear parts, a subject and predicate. When the hears more, they more often segregated a subject concrete nouns, less often verbs and adjectives, and least often, function words (Karpova, 2006:5).

Section Three

Holophrastic Stage

Holophrastic stage is the first stage, which begins (about ten-twelve months of age), the child speaks one word at a time, but by the end (about eighteen to twenty-four months), and he uses predominantly two words utterances. The one-word from the child early in this stage is often called **holophrases** since the child expresses meaning of an entire phrase, clause, or sentence in the one-word he/she utters. As mentioned above, the early **holophrases** consists primarily of nouns and verbs (words denoting more concrete physical and motor operations perhaps), while adjectives (words denoting more abstract attributes) are learned later (Clark & Clark, 1977:55).

From the perspective of the adult, there is enormous ambiguity in the child's **holophrases**. The child who says **milk**, e.g., may be requesting (**I want some milk**), announcing (**I see some milk**), or reporting that he/she has just spilled **the milk**. This ambiguity was lessened by the social and situational context, and adults use the context of speech situation to interpret the utterance. Thus, the child who toddles into the kitchen after playing outside saying milk properly is requesting

(I want some milk) and the adult will respond accordingly. This enormous ambiguity is true of first and second stage (ibid).

When a child can only say one word at a time to express what he/she wishes, which word will choose? There seem to be three answers, each valid from a different perspective, from a static perspective, simply listing all the overextended words in child's first stage speech, it seems that children speak about items of their environment that are perceptually salient appealing to their senses (ibid).

Clark (1973:35) could group overextended single word utterances by categories like movement, sharp, size, sound, taste and texture. From the dynamic perspective of dialogue, a different picture of one-word utterances appears. From most children, the crucial criterion for choosing a word in dialogue is formativeness. The child will utter one-word that introduces the greatest degree of new information into speech situation, information that is not known through either dialogue or the context of speaking. Consider this dialogue between Nigel (age eighteen-nineteen months) and his parents:

Father: you went on a train yesterday

Nigel: too-too, bah-bah = (when I got off, the train went away and I waved to it)

Father: and you said bye - bye to the train

Nigel: ahn = (another)

Father: and you saw another train?

Nigel: (long list of things seen then) wla (flag)

Mother: oh, you saw some flags.

Nigel: (holding out palm) gra (gravel)

Mother: and you had some gravel

Nigel: (touching palm, lips rounded, very quiet) ooh

Father: and you hurt your hand with the gravel?

Mother: no, that was with the stick, the on with prickles on

Nigel: blah (blood)

Mother: and there was blood on it, yes

Notice how Nigel drives the conversation round forward by choosing words conveying a relatively high degree of new information.

Another factor influencing word choice at this stage is the child's attempt to express multiword utterances by selecting one word at a time and uttering them sequentially a dialogue as in this exchange between Liz at 19 months and her mother:



Mother: (phone ring) I have to put you down to answer the phone. Liz: no

Mother: answers phone

Liz: (tugging on hand) dow (down)

Mother: (continues phone conversation; holds child's and; looks at child) shh.

Liz: up, up, up (Bloom, 1973:65)

It is not difficult, Bloom supposes that the child is uttering the multiword message no down; **up down; up** (do not put me down; I want up), one word at a time, spreading the message through the interaction. The same strategy will be used at the two word stage to express concepts that otherwise might need complex clause:

Liz (at 22 months): bring home

Father: what should I bring home?

Liz: read it (bring home the book I want so I can read it)

(ibid).

Section Four

Joining Stage

It is the second stage, where children are producing two and three word utterances, and are between eighteen to twenty-four months old, although there is great individual variation. Stage three often starts with two holophrases uttered in rapid succession, baby and after a short pause car, pointing to a toy. Soon, however, the child is uttering the two words as a single intonation unit (Clark & Clark, 1977:55).

In fact, prosody is a clear signal that the child has entered the second stage. Holophrases are articulated with an equal degree of stress on each word, as in **DADDY, GO** by contrast, multiword (stage two) utterances are articulated with main stress falling only one word that conveys the highest degree of new information, as in **daddy GO**. Thus, by stage two, children have learned one part of prosody found in the adult language: stress can make a meaningful difference in speech and usual falls on that element of the message that carries the greatest degree of new information (ibid).

BABY car, with stress on the first word, expresses "possessor + possession", while **baby CAR** expresses an "agent + object" relationship. (An agent is the conscious initiator of action, actor). Indeed, one could rank the elements of stage two

speeches according to their relative degree of information value and their relative degree of stress to see the correlation between the two:

Higher Information Value	new or contrastive information location possession noun object	MAMA go (not Dad) baby go HOME BABY car push CAR	higher degree of stress
Lower Information Value	action pronoun object agent	baby GO KISS 'em daddy KISS	lower degree of stress

(ibid)

At the top of the list are utterances like **MAMA** go as an answer to a question: *who went to the store?* **MAMA** represents the highest degree of new information in the utterance since the verb go was already available from the context, and **MAMA** is in contrast with others in the child

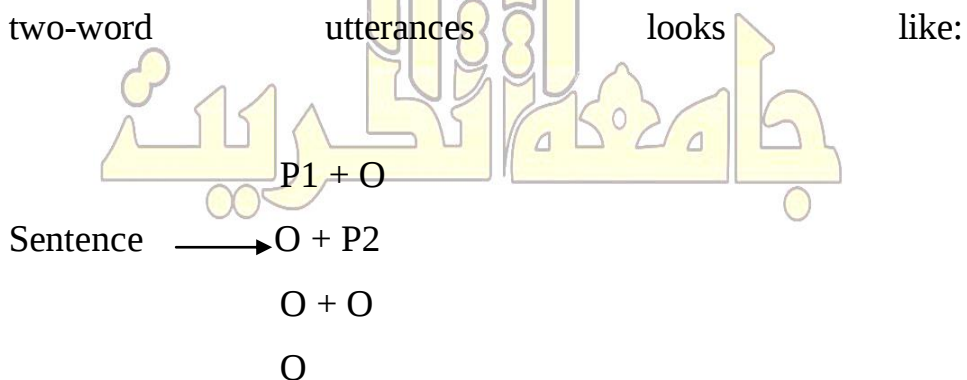
environment that may have gone to the store.

At the bottom of the list, the pronoun object '**em** conveys a low degree of new information. As in the language, pronouns in general refer to items already known to the conversationalists; either through previous dialogue (see puppies, kiss '**em**), or through the context of speaking (child walks into the room with a puppy and states "kiss '**em**"). In such an utterance, the main stress falls on the verb. Similarly, agents are usually known from the context of speaking. thus, daddy in "**daddy** kiss" will convey a low degree of new information, since daddy is known contextually, and the main stress will fall on the verb **kiss** (Bloom, 1973:22).

One rarely finds grammatical function words in stage two speech (words like prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, and articles), except for the first person singular pronoun in the objective case, **me**. The pronouns appear in the second stage speech, they are more frequently objectives (**me, him, her, them**) than subjective (**I, he, she, they**). In addition, the grammatical word endings do not occur at the second stage (word endings like – **ing**, – **ed**, – **s** endings on verbs or the – **s**, – 's endings on nouns). If those endings do occur at this stage,

there is no evidence that children know their functions; instead, the child seems to treat them as part of the word itself (ibid).

There are two major approaches to study child's grammatical starting in stage two, structural and functional. Early structural studies revealed that some words always appeared in a fixed position. The majority of fixed words occur in the first position of two-word utterance, the reminder always in the second position. Examples of those fixed words are; **that, there, all gone, my, dirty, and more.** Those fixed words were labelled **pivot** words, because they serve as a fulcrum, a point of departure, for the child's utterances. Dozens of open class words, frequently nouns at this stage, follow to from the two-word utterance. The words of the open class (but never the pivot class) may occur together or alone as holophrases. A schematic rule illustrating the pivot-open grammar of a child's two-word utterances looks like:



Where P1 represents pivot words that occur in first position only, P2 represents pivot words occurring in second

position only, and O represents the open class words. The rule states that the child's sentence has one of only four possible structures (Karpova, 2006:14).

Structural studies of children's early grammar created considerable excitement in the 1960s since those analysis suggested that children's early utterances are not random groupings of words. They also suggested that children aren't imitating the adult speech they hear around them. Finally, they also seemed to suggest that language learning follows a universal design: just as all children go through a babbling stage and holophrastic stage, so they go through a stage where their speech in constrained by the pivot-open grammar (ibid).

Continuing research quickly demonstrated, however, that structural description and (the pivot grammar above), were of limited value. First, those children who use pivot words alone as holophrases, they shift pivot words from first to second position and vice versa. They produce P + P utterances. In essence, adding those structures to the possible structure already outlined above, pivot grammars simply say:

Sentence $\xrightarrow{\text{word}}$ word + word

Where the parentheses indicate that the second word is optional such a structural description is worthless; it says

nothing – new (Bowerman, 1973:55). Secondly, structural description cannot capture the meaning of the expression, only its grammatical shapes. Therefore, several people began to explore the child's language from a functional perspective. Studying the functions and uses served by the child's utterances could be the key to understanding how the child is developing grammar from to express meaning, content (ibid).

Notice, if a child said **mommy sock** in two very different contexts, with two different meanings (possessor + possession) as in **mommy's sock**, and (agent + object) as in **mommy wears a sock**. A pivot grammar assigns the same structural description to both uses of **mommy sock**, missing the meaningful, functional differences between them. Likewise, expressions such as **mommy chair** and big **bird** have the same structural description of **mommy sock**, but the pivot grammar description misses the "agent + location" meaning of "**mommy is sitting in the chair**" and the "attribute + object" meaning of "a bird that is big" (Bloom, 1970:83).

Following along functional lines, there are seventy present of the utterances in the late first and second stage which can be described by a small set of functional relationship between words:

- 1- "agent + action" **baby kiss**
- 2- "action + object" **pull car**
- 3- "agent + object" **daddy ball**
- 4- "action + location" **sit chair**
- 5- "object + location" **cup table**
- 6- "possessor + possession" **mommy sock**
- 7- "object + attribute" **car red**
- 8- "demonstrative + object" **there car** (Blomm,

1973:42) In a cross-linguistic study of functional relationships, it was observed that children of approximately the same age from six different languages (English, German, Russian, Luo, and Samoan) expressed similar kinds of meaning at the second stage: utterances used:

- 1- to locate or name objects and people – **there book**
- 2- to request, demand, or indicate a desire for people, objects, or events- **more milk**
- 3- to negate or indicate refusal or rejection- **no wash**
- 4- to express situations or events- **kitty go**
- 5- to indicate possessions- **mama dress**
- 6- to describe- **doggy big**
- 7- to question with both **wh-** question and **yes/no** question- **where ball? Daddy go?** (ibid)

In the forth functions, one can see the child's earliest attempt to code the functional categories "agent", "action", and "object" into grammatical categories of subject, verb, and object.

Section Five

Combining Stage

The third stage of syntax acquisition is, the combining stage. Children make the shift from second stage to third varies greatly, some of them are well, but others will use two words utterances exclusively to age three and some times beyond.

At stage three, the structure of question and negation evolves. Stage two questions are articulated by rising intonation or by beginning a sentence a *wh* word, *mommy pinch* finger? or *where me sleep*? The third witnesses the emergence of grammatical morphemes as auxiliary verbs *do* and *should* (see the discussion below). The results can be seen in late stage three questions, *did mommy pinch finger*? *Where I should sleep*? Likewise, stage two negation simply add the negative words *no*, *not*, *never* to the beginning of utterance, *no sit there* or *no dog bite*. Stage three, the negative had evolved; *there no squirrels* or *dog no bits* (Bloom, 1973:19).

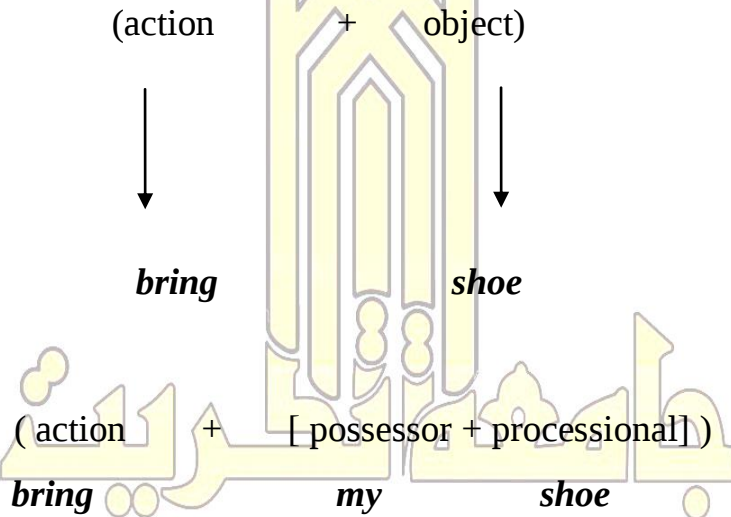
As one can see, children begin to master word order at stage three, although they still have much to learn, e.g., children commonly interpret in first noun phrase in an utterance as the "agent" and the second noun phrase as "object" (receiver of the action). If any sentence were to disrupt the order "agent + object", one would expect that children at this stage would misinterpret it. Not surprisingly, that is exactly what happens: "passive" sentences in English express the "object" before the "agent". As in *Liz was followed by the dog*, where *dog* is "agent", (the actor, the initiator or action) and *Liz* is the "object". Such passive sentences are routinely misinterpreted as "*Liz* followed *the dog*" by children at this stage, even if they understood some passive sentences correctly at an earlier stage (ibid).

At the beginning of stage two, children express "**agent + action**", "**action + object**", and "**action + location**". While at the three-word stage, children can express "**agent + action + object**" and "**agent + action location**". At the four-word stage, children can express "agent + action + object + location". It is as if some development limitation, on short memory perhaps, has been lifted so that the full from implicit in the early joining stage becomes at the combining. Bloom (1970:42) and Brown

(1958:32) have hypothesized that children's grammar develop either by combining the joining stage functional relations, as in: (agent + action) + (action + object) agent + action + object

(baby throw) (throw ball) → baby throw ball

By expanding one functional relation into new functional relation, as in the following where a single functional relation. "object", expands to express a new functional relationship, a new meaning, of "possessor + possession":



yet, despite these significant grammatical developments, the child's language at stage two and three is often described as "telegraphic speech", since so many of the words commonly omitted in telegrams aren't expressed

regularly, for instance ***put dolly table or there mommy shoe***. In fact, grammatical function words (auxiliaries, possessives, progressives, etc ...) are just beginning to appear systematically (ibid).

Brown (1958:55) studies the order in which children learn fourteen grammatical markers that first appear systematically in stage three speech: endings of the verb and noun, articles, prepositions, and auxiliary verbs. The patterns of development are remarkable consistent from child to child and even show consistency across languages. The list below ranks the grammatical morphemes in the average order in which they are learned (there is some small variation in this order from one child to the next, through the individual differences are slight):

Morpheme	Example
1- present progressive – <i>ing</i>	(mama <i>talk^{ing}</i>)
2- prepositions (<i>in , on</i>)	(<i>on</i> table)
3- plural – <i>s</i>	(shoes)
4- past irregular	(<i>went , broke</i>)
5- possessive – <i>'s</i>	(dad's hair)
6- uncontractible copula <i>is</i>	(this <i>is</i> late)
7- articles	(<i>a , an , the</i>)

- 8- past regular – **ed** (played)
- 9- third person singular – **s** (baby plays)
- 10- third person irregular – **s** (**does , has**)
- 11- uncontractible auxiliary **is** (Sis **is** working)
- 12- uncontractible copula – '**s** (dad's funny)
- 13- uncontractible auxiliary – '**s** (dad's going)

A common learning phenomenon appearing at this stage is overregularization. It seems that once a child learns a pattern, say that – **ed** marks the past tense on "regular" verbs like **walked** and **helped**. She applies that ending to all verbs "overregularization" the entire verb system by making all verbs regular verbs, as in **comed, doed, goed, putted, braked**. The process of overregularization occurs in a sequence of steps actually: first, the child uses the irregular forms correctly (**dada went**). That is not surprising as irregular verbs are the most common four times more common than regular form (ibid).

Second, the child learns the regular ending - **ed** in this example, after a few weeks or months as in (**dada helped**).

Third, the child overuses the regular ending (overregularization), and either abandons the irregular form or the irregular forms coexist with the overregular forms (*dada goed*). Fourth, the child eventually "discovers" the errors, slowly "relating" the irregular ending that seem to have been "forgotten" in the third step. This process of overregularization has been observed in many different speaking many different languages, and it occurs with many different word endings. The major point here is that children don't learn language simply by rote. Children attend to regularity; they are pattern learners and apply the pattern "creatively" (ibid).

Section Six

6.1 Recursive Stage

Recursive stage is the fourth stage. At MULs (which may occur anywhere between two and three, and one-half years), children develop their first complex sentences, which are consist of more than one clause (hence more than one set of grammatical subject and verb). The first complex sentences expand the grammatical object, as in (I see [you sit down]). Square brackets are used here to mark the boundaries of each

clause in these examples. There is not one example of expansion in the grammatical subject as in ([to play a clarinet] is hard) until age three. The significance of the complex sentence is its flexibility to package one clause (***you sit down***) within another clause (***I see some thing***). That packaging of one clause within another is a property of grammar called recursion – the basis of subordination (Bowerman, 1982:56).

The second type of complex sentence to appear expands the grammatical object with a ***wh*** – clause, as in (I know [***where he is***]) or (I saw [***what you did***]). Relative clauses are third and far less frequent. Early relative clauses always modify nouns functioning as grammatical objects, as in (see the ball [***that I got***]) or (I know the boy [***who broke it***]). Expansion of the grammatical subject occurs after expansion of the grammatical object is learned. Soon children are also saying:

([***scraping my knee***] hurts) - ing clause expanding
subject

([***what you did***] is bad) wh – clause expanding
subject

(my toy [**that broke**] stopped) relative clause expanding
subject noun phrase

Many psycholinguists speculate that early complex sentence do not involve grammatical subjects of the main clause, because doing so beaks the continuity of the main clause and increases the burden on short-term memory. Alternatively, many grammatical subjects in children utterances are pronoun or proper nouns, which cannot be modified by relative clauses. Grammatical objects, on the other hand are more frequently common nouns, which can be modified. Therefore, in the case of relative clauses at least, the difference in development may simply reflect differences in grammar (ibid).

Coordination (two or more elements joined by a conjunction like **and, but, or**) appears more frequently at this stage. The earliest coordinated structures imply condition, as in this **tik-tik, lau-lau, too-too, ka-ka, ba-ba**, bow-bow (sticks, holes, trains, cars, buses, and dogs) and implied coordination is first to appear at the sentence level as well, **you lookit book; I lookit pictures**. By stage three, the child is rapidly learns grammatical morphemes, including conjunctions, so it is not long into stage four that the child is coordinating word, phrases, and clauses explicitly, **gimme cookies and milk, and I**

give

you

a

kiss.

6.2 Reception of Syntax Test (ROST)

Reception of Syntax Test, (ROST), is a test for syntax reception. Currently, is considered the widely test which is used to assess young children performance in English about ages four, somewhat above the ages to be tested here. Thus, a simpler receptive test is required. ROST meets this requirement. In ROST, a sentence is played from a laptop computer that displays two pictures. One of the pictures corresponds to the sentence and the other does not. A correct response is made when the image appropriate to the sentence is touched and incorrect response occurs when the inappropriate image is touched (these responses are detected by using a touch screen), (Clark, 1973:78).

Touching the picture that corresponds with the sentence appears to be natural response for a child to make, allowing the test to be used with the young children. The syntactic categories that are tested depend on a child's age (there are different forms for under – and over – fives). ROST checks that

the chosen level of difficulty is appropriate for a child based on the results of an on-going analysis of syntactic categories. The selection of syntactic categories is changed if a child fails easy (over five) or passes hard (under-five) syntactic categories appropriate to his/her age (ibid).

Although there is facility in ROST, in the current study, results are reported just on the children who performed on their age-respective test from (under-five on the under-five child language teaching and therapy from and over-fives on the over-five from). The reason for omitting the other children is that the under-fives who progressed was not necessarily tested on all under-five syntactic categories and the over-fives that regressed were not tested on all the over-five categories. Although the under-fives who progressed may have had a problem on syntactic categories on which they were not tested, this would not be apparent. This is not a problem in monolingual children when syntax is developing normally (ibid).

However, EAL children, e.g., may have a problem on simple syntactic but not complex ones because of carry-over effects from their native language. for instance, if the additional language has a different word order from English, this simple category might pose difficulties. Whereas, more complex

categories that correspond across the languages might not. All categories need to be tested to identify specific difficulties such as these. A similar argument applies to over-five EAL children.

Such children may have difficulties on their age respective test from with specific syntactic categories, which leads them to be tested on the under-five from, even though they may be able to process other difficult syntactic categories perfectly well. Measures of syntactic performance used with preschool and EAL children Mean Length of Utterance, (MLU), is probably the most widely used measures for assessing syntax in fluent monolingual children near language onset. The measures are based on the length of a child's spontaneous productions. MUL is used here as a measure of syntactic development for children under four, and ROST scores are obtained with the same children. Although ROST is a respective test and MLU a production measures, some relationships would be expected, because both assess general syntactic processing ability (ibid).

Conclusion

We can conclude from this study, that the syntactic development of children appears before the first birthday, not

in the first days from his/her birthday. Syntactic development comes after phonological and semantic development, so it is considered an advanced stage, because children want sounds to express themselves and after that, they want some words meaning to know what they say. Later on, they want to make sentences beginning from one word sentence, then two words sentence and so on.

Similar evidence against imitation as the basis of child speech production has been found in studies of the syntactic structure used by children. First-second year's child specially, asked to repeat what he/she heard, listening to adult speech forms, such as *the owl that eats candy runs fast*.

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