



## Research on the Factors Influencing Hongkong Children’s Language Acquisition

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### Abstract

This paper carries on the analysis and comparison on the process of language acquisition of children in Hongkong who are unique cultural groups, points out and illustrates the internal and external factors that affect the Hongkong children’s language acquisition. Based on a clear understanding of these factors, this paper thinks that in the study of child language acquisition, can from this unique perspective in order to guide the process of HK children’s language acquisition better.

**Key words:** Children; Language acquisition; Hongkong; Factors

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### INTRODUCTION

Language, as a magnificent treasure of human civilization in the history, is an important symbol of human difference from other species. The formation and the process of language acquisition have aroused widespread concern in academic circles. Humans began to acquire language from the mother, to be able to use the language used in daily life and social communication, they master the language before puberty. So, how children acquire language? This subject not only carries on the research from linguistics, but also relates to the psychological

linguistics, psychology and language teaching research. Child language acquisition is a very complex process, this process is not only affected by internal factors, such as intelligence, innate language ability and thinking ability, but also has close relation with the external factors of children’s life, such as living environment, social cultures, etc.. Hongkong, as a former British colony, under the long-term influence of English and British culture, reflects the fusion of Chinese and western, the unique social and cultural atmosphere. Born and raised in Hongkong, children in this environment exhibit many unique properties in the aspects of language acquisition. The author analyzed and elaborated from the internal and external factors that influence the Hongkong children’s language acquisition.

### 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

So far the theories of child language acquisition research paradigm can be attributed to the universal grammar of generative linguistics and cognitive linguistics using the construction theory of language.

Generative linguists represented by Chomsky believed that language is of objectivity, should find a universal grammar for all people, but cannot explain how children with universal grammar solve specific problems. Chomsky holds the idea that whether the born background and language acquisition environment of a child are different, they can all achieve roughly the same final language proficiency. They are born with language learning potential. Although the children are in the period that intelligence has not developed mature situations, they can achieve language acquisition and their output is consistent with the laws of the language system of discourse. Although the children are exposed to poor native language stimulation, this does not prevent them from efficiently and successfully acquisition of the knowledge system of languages. They not only can be understood sentences

which they have never been heard of in native, but also can create sentences that they never heard, so children can grasp certain grammatical rules in a relatively short period of time.

The value of Chomsky's theory of language lies in the following:

First of all, he resolved the facts which have puzzled language scientists of children's easy acquisition of fact in the natural environment. If a child does not have the talent of language knowledge, they would learn the mother tongue like other languages, that is the acquisition of what they contact. When hearing wrong sentences they will produce the same. But the fact is not true. Children cannot learn a language according to the limited language input by induction, generalization, analogy, association or other common procedures to obtain all the knowledge of the language, that is to say, language is not to learn. Therefore, the problem of language acquisition of children was a natural linguist must be logic to explain the problems.

Second and the last, Chomsky thinks, man is born with the capacity for reasoning and rationality. In principle, both of the two capacities are endowment of human being, which potentially exist in the mind of human being, the ability and principle of potential is through external objects and acquired experience to "Wake up" and language learning is also a kind of talent and it is an inner function, The reason why people can fulfill the acquisition and use of language is a kind of ability of inherent, which is genetically determined. What's more, this ability needs to be acquired and triggered by something. Because of this, linguistics should eventually contribute to seek answers to the mysteries of human being and the human brains.

Based on the constructivism, cognitive linguists represented by Tomasello emphasise that language is based on the use of language knowledge which is the experience of the language, the general cognitive ability of language acquisition depends on human. Tomasello based on the absorption of many language acquisition research results, from a large number of empirical studies in the field of child language acquisition as a starting point, puts forward the use of the language acquisition theory based on constructivism. The theory mainly comes from the achievements of cognitive linguistics research; emphasis on children's language acquisition is based on the use of it. In Tomasello's view, language development is based on the use of language. Furthermore, all the language knowledge—whether it eventually becomes how abstract just comes from a particular sentence comprehension and production in a particular situation of children in a particular time. On the other hand, early syntactic development reflects these general cognitive structures, such as intention of reading and imitation study, analogy and structural mapping. Generally speaking, Tomasello

emphasizes the use, language environment and the general cognitive process of language acquisition in children's acquisition of languages.

This paper attempts to apply Chomsky's theory on language learning and use of the cognitive function of language acquisition to analyze Hongkong children's language acquisition process.

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## 2. INTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING HONGKONG CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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As early as in 1965, Chomsky proposed the logical problem of language acquisition; his explanation is that humans are born with a language acquisition mechanism. Pinker also noticed the ability of children's language acquisition and called it as "the language instinct". Children's language acquisition is as natural as a fish swimming in the water as easy as the birds learning to fly in the sky. According to the research, children's language acquisition even began with human fetal survival in the matrix. Through the experiment, the fetus has one's favorite sounds—the mother's voice. Furthermore, he can discriminate and memorize the mother's sounds, some names and music in the matrix. There are a large number of data to support these conclusions. For example, in the last century, 60 of the fetuses (mean age, 39 weeks) participate in some relevant experiments. The researchers asked half number of fetuses (30) to listen to a 95 dB, 2 minutes tape recording of their respective mother reading poetry by placing about 10 cm above in the mother's abdomen. Then in the same way that the extra 30 fetuses are asked to listen to the reading material which is the same poetry lasting two minutes by a stranger. The researchers used a monitor of fetal heart rate to record their heartbeat frequencies in the process of listening. They note that, when the fetus hears one's mother's voice, one's heart rates will accelerate while hearing the voice of the stranger the heartbeat will reduce. It seems that the accelerating of the heartbeat frequency may be explained by the excitement caused by mother's sounds. This study shows that, the baby can accurately distinguish the mother's voice and other voices even before birth. This is a strong evidence that as early as before the birth baby has the unbelievable ability. Ability of distinguishing the sound of mother, responding to mothers' voice and loving mothers' sounds better than any other sounds.

### 2.1 Influence of the Brain Language Control Central on Children's Language Acquisition

The left hemisphere of the human brain contains language center which is an indispensable condition of language acquisition. This conclusion can be proved from some counterexamples. For instance, if the left hemisphere of the brain is injured, it will not normally use, product and

comprehend language any longer, even some familiar names, places, names or songs may be difficult to speak or sing to. The data suggest that language acquisition ability controlled by the left hemisphere language centre in the human brain will gradually decline with age and after adolescence will be completely lost. Widespread reports about wolf children and pig children can make this conclusion evident. Similarly, a girl in America, who was imprisoned in a retire hut by her stepfather, who did not allow other people to communicate with her. At the age of 13, she was found and rescued but cannot master the language any more. Thus, the physiological development change of left hemisphere which controls human language acquisition decides the crucial period of language acquisition is the childhood. Once a child missed the critical period for language acquisition, he or she will find it rather difficult to achieve sustainable progress.

## **2.2 Intelligence Factors of Children's Language Acquisition**

As Chomsky said, humans are born with language acquisition ability. Therefore, whether it is normal intelligence or mentally subnormal children have a language acquisition ability. But with the development of intelligence, children also continue to enhance the use of language and ability. Normal children can understand and conduct more complex language activities. On the other hand, although subnormal intelligence children can acquire language and can express a simple expression of the basic meaning of their own, but due to the impact of intellectual factors, the complexity and the organization of their language activities have a big gap compared with normal children. This shows that although the intelligence factor does not affect language acquisition ability, but may hinder the further development of language ability.

## **3. INTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING HONGKONG CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

Children's language acquisition ability has also been involved in and controlled by the external cultural environment factors. From a general point of view, the external environment of language can be regarded as a kind of cultural environment. Different cultural communities' attitude to the language, the attitude to children language acquisition, and opinions about qualified members of society, will have an impact on various and delicate influences on children's language acquisition environment, thus affect children's language acquisition (Zuo, 2002).

### **3.1 Influence of Family Cultural Environment on Hongkong Children's Language Acquisition**

Thanks to the huge development of science, technology, economy, culture, and the leap of transportation, the

boundaries between countries have become increasingly blurred, the whole world has been integrated into the global village.

Under the impact of this world pluralism tide, people using different native languages exchange with increasingly frequency, aggravating the trend of intermarriages among people in different countries and with different cultural backgrounds. This trend may be more evident in Hongkong because it is a typical city in the fusion of Western and Eastern Cultures' meet-in. According to the 2011 census of Hongkong government, from 1995 to 2001, the number of Hongkong residents and mainland cross-borders' marriages or giving-birth soared to a total of 122,047 cases. East-and-West fused Hongkong families have produced a considerable number of bilingual or multilingual children. American University of Washington found this multilingual environment for the baby has many benefits from the data of brain activities recorded in the period of the growth of some children in a multilingual environment. "A baby's brain will produce two different circuits. One produces reaction to their mother tongue, while the other produces reactions to the second language." Many studies have shown that the multi language environment will be of great benefit to enhance the thinking ability of children. At the same time, because the parents are the earliest language materials provider for children and the main family cultures, its values, parents' education levels and language levels will directly affect the children's language acquisition. Studies have found that, the higher the education levels of parents, the stronger children' language ability. A child's language development is more advantageous. Data shows, in 2011 there were about 860,000 15 to 24 year old youth in the Hongkong community, accounted for 12.6% of the population. Because education (Education of the stage after middle school and high school) opportunity has soared in the past 10 years, therefore, the number of youth population who access to higher education also grew substantially in Hongkong. In 2001, about 173,000 Hongkong youth (youth population accounted for 19.5%) were the subjects of higher education. The figure in 2011 has reached about 338,000 people, accounted for 39.3%, an increase of about 95% (<http://www.chinanews.com/ga/2013/01-21/4507322.shtml>). The Hongkong children's parents are with higher levels of education, even quite a number of them have overseas education background. So Hongkong children in the same age learn the language more standardized and have more opportunities for richer language forms.

### **3.2 Influence of the Regional Culture Environment on Hongkong Children's Language Acquisition**

The regional cultures based on the different geographical environment and local customs also have some influence on children language acquisition. These unique regional

cultures also reflected in the process of language acquisition in children. Because Hongkong is located in the Pearl River mouth on the east side, facing the South China Sea, backed by the China and is the South China portal .Hongkong children know the words relating to fish, sea, beach, boat, etc. early to or better than the children of the same age. The prominent regional characteristics make the children have better vocabulary and master degree of sensitivity to these related words. At the same time, as a former British colony, English and British cultures are also reflected in the Hongkong cultural aspects, which have caused great impact on Hongkong children's language acquisition. Most of the kindergartens in Hongkong would teach children to learn Mandarin and English, both of which are the main languages of life.

Therefore, children in Hongkong than the mainland children have the opportunity to earlier use of English than the mainland children, whose oral English level are generally much better than average children. One distinguish feature of Hongkong children's Chinese learning is the mixing with Lots of English words, ma ma in Chinese is called as the ma mi, shu shu in Chinese is called an ko, yi ma in Chinese is called a ti, gong gong qi che in Chinese is called ba shi, chao mei in Chinese is called shi duo pi li in Hongkong, etc..

### 3.3 Influence of Educational Factor

Educational philosophy in different regions or countries is a deep effect on children language acquisition. Education is a reflection of national culture in different countries or regions. National culture makes the environment for children's language acquisition. Usually, every nation has its independent language system and national culture which will be fixed in the unique educational views. Children will inevitably be affected by the process of language acquisition by national culture effects of cultures of different nations idea affects the content and way of children's language acquisition. For example, Han nationality attached great importance to the child literacy, reading and writing education that is to pay attention to the written language learning. In history, Imperial examination system which was intended to choose talented persons is based on the writing tests of the contestants. However, in the West the system of national education pays more attention to verbal expression, which can be traced back to ancient Greece, the speech has become an important form of participation in political life and it is also the main way for the scholars 'debate form to explore the truth and art. The Western educational ideas make the Westerners pay more attention to children's oral English training. Hongkong, on the one hand, exists the influence of education idea of Chinese Han nationality for thousands of years. On the other hand, it was immersed in

western cultures for more than 100 years. Two different ideas of education complementarily form Hongkong children's acquisition in language. Parents of Hongkong also focus on spoken language in children language acquisition. However, in the Mainland of China, parents pay more emphasis on children's acquisition of written language, which leads to the fact that Chinese mainland children have better written language application ability but weaker oral expression ability. In addition, the Han people always expect their children to obey your parents due to the influence of the concept of patriarchal system, so commonly used "good", "obedient" to evaluate child's behaviors, so that Han children grasp the words like "good", "obedient" earlier. Thus, Hongkong children are both influenced by the East education ideas and the West ones in language acquisition.

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## CONCLUSION

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Children's language acquisition is a step-by-step complex process which depends on innate language ability with the help of many postnatal factors. In this process, the children's own internal factors, such as intelligence, interaction of thinking ability is equal to the external factors of the external environment. Hongkong children' language acquisition process is affected by the external environment under the influence of cultural diversity, showing some characteristics distinct from the other children of the same age. When we know clearly how these unique factors influence on the language acquisition, guidance on children language acquisition can be better.

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