

Blindness and Language Learning

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According to WHO (1980), "impairments, concerned with abnormalities of body structure and appearance and with organ or system function, resulting from any cause; in principle, impairments represent disturbances at the organ level. Disabilities, reflecting the consequences of impairment in terms of functional performance and activity by the individual; disabilities thus represent disturbances at the level of the person"; if this disability is more than forty percent in case of any individual, the person is called handicapped in medical term. "Handicaps, concerned with the disadvantages experienced by the individual as a result of impairments and disabilities; handicaps thus reflect interaction with and adaptation to the individual's surroundings".¹

We will endorse the motion of our discussion with visual handicapped. Several institutions are practising about detecting the various aspects of visual handicaps. According to American Medical Association (1934), if the visual acuity is 20/200 with normal eyes but the visual range is not more than 20., they are suffering from complete visual impairment. Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992) has approved this opinion of American Medical Association from the perspective of Medical Science.

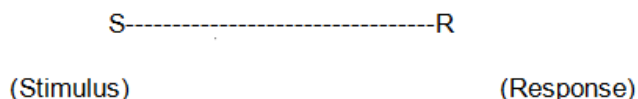
Now we will discuss about the speculation and thought of the visually impaired people regarding language. Apparently there is no connection between language and vision but as vision is connected with brain, language is also connected with brain. The visually impaired children are deprived of the experience that the children with normal vision grow for themselves about the materials and environment. Now the question arises whether the language acquisition skills of the visually impaired children are different from that of the children with normal vision or whether the techniques of language acquisition of the visually impaired children are different?

Definition and nature of language: Lacan accounts for the foreignness as follows: we are born into a world of discourse, a discourse or language that precedes our birth and that will live on after our death. Long before a child is born, a place is prepared for it in its parents' linguistic universe: the parents speak of the child yet to be born, try to select the perfect name for it, prepare a room for it, and begin imagining what their lives will be like with an additional member of the household. The words they use to talk about the child have often been in use for decades, if not centuries, and the parents have generally neither defined nor redefined them despite many years of use. Those words are handed down to them by centuries of tradition: they constitute the Other of language, as Lacan can call it in French (L' Autre du language), but which we may try to render as the linguistic Other, or the Other as language.² According to famous linguistic, Suniti kumar

chattopadhyaya language is sounds produces through the organs of speech as words while they are used in sentences. Generally language is a medium to express our mental quest.³

There are many opinions among the language researches as to how a child acquires their language. The language acquisition and comprehension skill of a visually impaired child is slightly different from that of a child with normal vision. This will be clearly understood if and when the models of language acquisition are discussed.

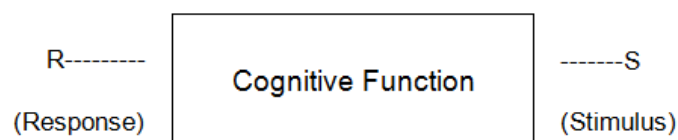
Behaviourist model: Propagated by Skinner this theory holds that language is a behaviour. A child learns language as behaviour like the other behaviours like crawling, walking, etc.⁴ The language acquisition of a child depends on the stimulus that he receives from environment. They believe that a child comes with a clean slate. Behaviour leads to habit formation and these habits gradually develop as language. According to the behaviourists, where 'S' stands for stimulus and 'R' stands for response the model of language acquisition will be as given below-



Behaviourist Model

[vasha ayottkoran, 2007]⁵

Cognitive Model: The propagators of cognitive theory hold that the brain of a human child is biologically pre-programmed. Every human child follows similar learning patterns irrespective of any language. The human child possesses and inbuilt grammar in its brain so language is an innate faculty not acquired. The cognitive model is given below-



[vasha ayttokoran, 2007]⁶

Language Acquisition Process: Though there is no problem in listening but there may arise difficulties in saying, writing, understanding a language among the visually impaired children. There may have a complex inter relationship between saying/ hearing/ understanding centre and hearing/ visual psychology centre. All these centres constitute LAD or Language Acquisition Devise. Now we will have a brief idea of

the concept of LAD as propagated by Noam Chomsky in 19727 -- a) A child is genetically facilitated in language acquisition. b) Every child creates an abstract field regarding the rules of language. c) The child receives elements of language from his surroundings. d) Language is a normal behaviour for a child. e) The child through several stages learns the grammatical structures of language. f) Thus language efficiency develops in a child.

This system is not violated in case of the visually impaired children. Though they take time to comprehend the meaning of some words Susane langer puts more emphasis on sense perceptibility than speculation for a child's language acquiring skill.⁸ Jean Piaget shows in his cognitive development model that the language skill of a child is connected with the different stages of cognition.⁹

Another propagation of language acquisition process is the Data theory. The researches known as 'Motherese' came into vogue in the seventies of the twentieth century.¹⁰ This research holds that the elements and information that the child gets from his mother plays a very pivotal role in the language acquisition of the child.

To conclude Chomsky in 1986 established the innate faculty of a human child in language acquisition.¹¹ To him, language learning is not possible without any innate medium of

knowledge. Innate wisdom is connected with the sense and at the same time it transcends the senses. Some congenial process like memory, hearing, pronunciation and comprehension are important constituents of innate wisdom. That's why children can imitate words and expression. This principle functions in the same way in cases of the visually impaired people. Initially a child learns through imitation. As a child grows up his imitation gets connected with mental image. So a change can be noticed in the language learning of the visually impaired people. A visually impaired child prefers to use onomatopoeic words than picturesque words.

Impairment is either a mental or a physical problem or both. Since time immemorial the evil practice of castigating a group of people has been going on by attaching the label 'handicapped' on them to marginalize them from the mainstream of the society through they left their mark of excellence in the various fields of life. Almost every one of us has heard the names of Nicholas Sanderson, Didimas, Homar, Milton in the pages of European history as persons with exceptional creative power and talent. Louis Brail and Helen Keller have changed the definition of 'handicap'. World famous musician, Beethoven and eminent scientist Steven Hawkins were so-called handicaps. We also know of Sudha Chandran, Masud-Ur-Rahaman as renowned persons with their distinguished skills.

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