



## FACTORS AFFECTING LANGUAGE ACQUISITION OF THE BLIND CHILDREN AND REMEDIAL MEASURES

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### ABSTRACT

*In this paper we are likely to direct the focus of our argument towards seeking answers to two of the very essential questions concerning language acquisition of the blind people –a) What are the lacks that a visually impaired child is confronted with in the process of language acquisition and b) Are the techniques and measures of language acquisition of the blind children different from that of the children with normal vision?*



**KEYWORDS:** communication , learning , exchange information.

### INTRODUCTION

But before probing into the several factors that affect the language acquisition system of the blind people let us just take into account the concepts “communication” and “learning”, which are of ample importance to set our argument in motion.

The act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviours to express or exchange information or to express your ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc., to someone else is called communication. People communicate with each other by speaking, through body language, using signs, pictures or symbols and in writing. Learning is the relatively permanent change in a person’s knowledge or behaviour due to experience. Learning is used to refer to (1) the acquisition and mastery of what is already known about something, (2) the extension and clarification of meaning of one’s experience, or (3) an organized, intentional process of testing ideas relevant to problems. In other words, it is used to describe a product, a process, or a function. (From Learning How to Learn: Applied Theory for Adults by R.M. Smith).

What is the relation of people to language? In Lacan’s theory the subject is divided, above all, by language. Language, as we have seen, fails each of us, and constitutes our subjectivity, that is what makes us human. Through language we misunderstand and are misunderstood.

The only way in which a subject can be undivided or ‘whole’, is for a very short time, by having jouissance, and we have seen that jouissance always comes in a package with problems, with suffering, conflicts and subjectivity.

In exactly what ways is the subject divided by language or discourse. Lacan believed that there are at least four different ways of being with language, four kinds of relation or discourse- the slave-master discourse, the hysteric’s discourse, the university or academic discourse, the discourse of the analyst.<sup>1</sup>

**Problem of visually impaired people in language acquisition:** The language acquisition and cognition of the visually impaired children are affected by several factors of the society. A child with normal vision can follow the oral movements and gestures of his parents and neighbours in the initial stage of language learning. So, language learning becomes much more easier for them. But a visually impaired child is barred to learn from the gestures of his parents and others. He fails to perceive that he hears from his mother who plays the most

important role for the language acquisition of the child in the initial stage, as the words of his mother hardly create any mental image for him. Consequently, the child fails to respond. The parents of the child often become disappointed with the child's inefficiency in speaking. The visually impaired child (three month old) lack in spontaneity in pronouncing sounds and there is no remedy to solve this issue except having vision.<sup>2</sup>The impressions of visible objects are store in the lexical faculty of our brain. Illustration will make this clear. To explain the reason of this phenomenon paiget opines when we get acquainted with any object of the environment the cognition stored in our sensory motor which is specially connected to visual information help us to do so.<sup>3</sup> The schema of the brain helps a child to comprehend the relation between a person and an object.<sup>4</sup> It also helps the child to perceive the movements of the objects. The schema is also connected to visual information so the visually impaired people feel a lack to acquire information from both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Besides the parents having normal vision find it difficult to make their visually impaired children understand the concepts like motion, colour, length, breadth, largeness, smallness, etc. It happens because the parents also acquire the impression from the objects through their vision.<sup>5,6,7.</sup>

The visually impaired children perceive the objects by touching them but a normal child can apply both touch and vision to do so. Different models are used for visually impaired children so that they can distinguish different objects by touching them.<sup>8</sup>

It often becomes problematic for the instructor to make a visually impaired child aware about location or direction. When the mother tries to convince her visually impaired child about the relation between sound and meaning for detecting the location of an object, she finds it very much difficult. The visually impaired children often fail to acknowledge the meaning of such sentences like "the cat is on the mat" whereas it becomes very easy for a child with normal vision to do so.<sup>9</sup>

We can observe the variety to use language in a methodical way of both visually impaired child and normal child by considering their efficiency to imbibe the meaning from the elements of language. A born-blind child finds it hard to comprehend analogy, similarity, shape, colour, light etc as he perceives only by listening to other's conversations. When a visually impaired child commences his study he often fails to understand the analogies and figures implied in the text. In that case he tries to make a kind of speculation of his own. Perhaps this speculation may lead the child in future to guess about the accurate notion of such concepts. A probable remedy for these kinds of problems perhaps lies in an explanation from the illustrator/instructor who may facilitate the visually impaired child to have a proper understanding of the object.

#### **There are some other problems that affect the language acquisition of the visually impaired children:**

**a) Echolalia:** This phenomenon is very common among the visually impaired children. Echolalia refers to the repetition of a particular word, expression or sentence. Echolalia causes greater intricacy among the grown up children and if also affects the community of other visually impaired people.<sup>10</sup>

**b) Verbalism:** It refers to the acquaintance of the objects from verbal expression, which a visually impaired child has not yet imbibed through touch. Alternatively it can be said when words and expressions are uttered without comprehension it is called verbalism. To perceive an object only from the name and not to verify it with touch are two tendencies which are often observed among the visually impaired children.<sup>11</sup>

**c) Speech Development:** the visually impaired children find difficulty in speech development. The movement of the muscles and organs (like the position of the tongue, gap between the lips etc) is closely connected with the learning of pronunciation. So, the visually impaired children fail to understand the process of acoustic imitation and they usually take much time to articulate words clearly and prominently.<sup>12</sup>

**d) Excessive Questions:** To visually impaired children often take recourse to excessive questioning. Perhaps their motive is to get a much clear idea about any object or concept; sometimes they want to verify whether the listeners are paying heed to his entreaties.

***Measures to be taken by parents and caretakers in language acquisition of the visually impaired children:***

There are some fundamental differences in the language acquisition process of the visually impaired children and children with normal vision. Physical movements like clapping or dancing along with recitation of poems may prove beneficial for the visually impaired children to help them increase or control their concentration level. They are greatly facilitated while indulging themselves in such practices.<sup>13</sup> This helps them in participating in games and sports and they even show greater ability to communicate with others.

To take part in various games and sports with the visually impaired children is not just a way to get familiar with the children, but it repeatedly encourages them to take active part in conversation. After arriving at the age of one and a half years the visually impaired children starts learning language by enacting the sounds they hear and by mimicking the voices of their parents. Thus, by taking part in such self representative games the visually impaired children begin to acquire language though they lack accuracy in their pronunciation. These games also facilitated them in the formation and expansion of their vocabulary when they reach at the age of eighteen months.<sup>14</sup>

***Verbal Role Play:*** One characteristic of the word mimicry of the visually impaired children is delayed echolalia. It means to divide the sentences in to fragmented words and reconstruct them.<sup>15</sup>

The measures taken by parents and facilitators of the visually impaired children are as follow:

- a) First Stage: the parents and the facilitators should allow the children to touch their lips while speaking so that they can identify and acknowledge the words and the corresponding movements of the lips. As far as possible the visually impaired children should be provided with the soap to touch and at the same time they should also be taught to recognize the voice and the smell of the parents or facilitators. In doing so the sound and touch ought to be applied integratedly.
- b) Second Stage: The visually impaired children should be acquainted to identify the articles of daily use. Visually impaired children will learn about the organs of their body when they will be asked to touch the organs and utter the names of the organs.
- c) Third Stage: When a visually impaired child tells something or explains something we have to understand both the literal meaning and the intended meaning. Many of the visually impaired children have an incomplete notion about the articles for daily use because we often forget to make them understand that an article may take different forms in different conditions. So, to avoid confusion on the part of the visually impaired children in such cases they should be allowed to touch real objects instead of models.<sup>16</sup>

At first, the visually impaired children should be taught to use and apply and easy words, expressions and sentences and only after that they should learn the usage of long and complex sentences. Short expressions like 'go there', 'come here', 'sit on the chair', and 'bring the towel' etc will help them learn the surrounding objects very quickly.

We need four essential skills for language learning- i) Speaking skill, ii) Listening and comprehension skill, iii) Writing skill, and iv) Reading skill. By applying these four skills we should try to exhilarate the comprehension of meaning among the visually impaired children so far as it is practicable. There are some other factors which should be taken into account to facilitated language learning among the visually impaired children- 1) More importance should be given to verbal expression than writing, 2) Expression that are used on a regular basis should be chosen to teach in the preliminary level, 3) The structural arrangement of language has to be practised by the visually impaired children with utmost care, 4) They should be taught to distinguish between the sounds, 5) Precision of words has to be communicated among them, 6) They should be aware of speech and brail alphabet, 7) Various new language habits have to be inculcated among the learners, 8) The interrelation between listening and dictation should be clarified, 9) Learner should be conveyed how to compensate the apparent missing links in the language, 10) Last but not the list, positive vive, environment, mentality, and attitude should be created.

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