

## First Language Acquisition: A Qur'anic and Linguistic Perspective

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### **Biodata**

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### **Abstract**

The current study establishes the reliability of the Holy Qur'an as one of the earliest treatise on language acquisition by humans. This is not to say that it is a scientific treatise: Rather what we know as modern 'knowledge' finds mention in a book much older. This applies to many aspects of human life, whether they spring from scientific inquiry or social, political or linguistic facts. Children acquire language fast and efficiently. They become masters and handle the complexities of human language. This paper seeks to examine, on a Qur'anic and practical level, the first language learning and its various processes, finding parallels between the language learning process and Qur'anic verses on language. The study employed a qualitative research design. The process of language acquisition varies from the phase of language learning. This article explores the stages of children's language learning and the methods for analysis used in the linguistic development study by linguists, scientists, and psychologists. This paper explicitly demonstrates that children are inherent in their mother tongue. When the children start acquiring their mother

tongue, they learn the grammar, phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic rules. No one teaches these rules, but they are pre-programmed with innate capacity, a gift from Allah.

وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَنْشَأَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا

مَا تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

*"It is He Who has created for you (the sense of) hearing (ears), eyes (sight), feeling and (hearts) understanding; little thanks you give"*

Al-Qur'an - 23:78

*"We are designed to walk. That we are taught to walk is impossible. And pretty much the same is true of language. Nobody is taught language. In fact you can't prevent a child from learning it"*

Chomsky 1994

## Introduction

Children acquire language quickly and efficiently. In fact, looking at them acquiring language, it seems that this process is simple and straightforward. They master their mother tongue (and any other language that they are sufficiently exposed to), and handle the complexities of language in a few years. Adults, on the other hand, face many challenges in learning a new language. During the last few decades, developmental psycholinguistics in the field of child language, has attempted to address some fundamental questions: how can an infant speak in such a short period very clearly? And what's the course for language learning? These questions have provided us with information about how the first language was taught (Kess, 1993; Ali, Hasnain, & Beg, 2019). Stork and Widdowson (1974) stress that language learning requires two main factors: an inherent human capacity for language acquisition, and a language environment. In the theory of innateness Stork and Widdowson (1974), propose that: (1) all people have the facility to learn a language; (2) It is possible to know all human languages equally; (3) All human languages on the surface are different, but each has specific essential characteristics which make them "learnable"; (4) These fundamental aspects that hold good for all human beings are the secret of what is 'innate'.

Islam and Qur'an are an integral part of the Muslim people. The Holy Qur'an is an all-time guidebook for the Muslims in all matters of their lives. It is also a marker of their identity, both social and linguistic. Indeed the Qur'an elucidates on the origin, diversity and acquisition of

language. The very ability for humans to acquire and use language are an evidence of God's love and power.

### **Literature Review**

Human language production is a question of physical growth and conceptual development (Chomsky, Gallego & Ott, 2019; Mulyani, 2019). Therefore, this progression requires a cognitive disability or developmental delay that will impair physical growth or if their behavioral development is not the same as the physical development (Benati, 2020; Matthews & Krajewski, 2019; Ali, 2012; Ali, Hasnain & Beg, 2011). The analysis of language production can also be contrasted, for the most part, with that of the physical organs and this is evident since the Chomskian revolution. Noam Chomsky believed that in the human brain there is a language learning device, which expands and grows. This reality must also be taken into account in researching language production in infants. Therefore, language processing and language learning are distinguished.

Almakrob and Al-Ahdal (2020) explored whether two pairs of nearly equivalent words had related or different meanings in the Saudi context. A contemporary methodology has been employed in the assessment of corpus – collocational analysis – to examine the distinction between certain almost synonyms selected from many chapters in the Holy Qur'an, namely noun plus conjunction + noun (synonym). Discussions of the cases found that almost synonyms in the Qur'an have entirely different definitions. Their co-occurrence adjacency has demonstrated that each lexeme tends to have a distinct meaning. More explicitly, each word has its definition and characteristics according to its surrounding lexema. Each lexeme has its own meaning when the co-occurrence of nearly synonymous pairs in the Holy Qur'an is analyzed whether it can be used interchangeably with its neighbour. There are therefore no two lexemes in the Holy Qur'an, particularly those co-existing words, with the same meaning. Such an analysis would be helpful for translators who genuinely understand the real meaning of the words associated with it explicitly. Consequently, Al-Qunayeera, Al-Ahdal, and Shawosh (2020) from a Saussurian structuralist viewpoint, examine the meaning and the portrayal of the binary / spoken word in the Qur'an and reveal, through semi-dialectal analysis, that the ancient Arabic text is suitable for modern science reading. This is an important observation in the context of this research as it works on the premise that the Holy Qur'an is also a scientific treatise in many of its significant sections, one of them being language

acquisition, and that many of the facts related to it that are part of recent scientific discovery, are, in fact, 'revealed' therein.

The potential intrinsically perceived by the world is less and argues that linguistic development is attributed to environmental factors (Rahimpour, 2004). Children master their first language in a certain progression. Listening is the first language, and children start listening within their mothers' womb. Allah explains in many ways, the life of a person in the womb of his mother in the Qur'an. In all these literal verses, Allah addresses humanity to comprehend or respond first:

إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ  
سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا ﴿٦﴾

"Verily, We have created man from a drop of thickened fluid (semen) to test him; so We made him hearing, knowing." (Qur'an - 76:2)

وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُمْ مِنْ بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا  
وَ جَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ لَعَلَّكُمْ  
تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٥﴾

"It is He Who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when you knew nothing, and He gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affections; that you may give thanks to Allah." (Qur'an - 16:78)

ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ وَ جَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ  
وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٩﴾

"But He fashioned him in due proportion, and breathed into him the soul; And He gave you (the faculties of) hearing (ears), sight (eyes) and heart (feeling and understanding); little is the thanks you give!" (Qur'an - 32:9)

قُلْ هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْشَأَكُمْ وَ جَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ  
وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

"Say *It is He Who has created you (and made you grow), and made for you the faculties of hearing (ears), seeing (eyes), feeling and understanding (heart): little thanks you give.*" (Qur'an - 67:23)

Prenatal studies show that the infant registers and is influenced by what occurs about six months after its birth. As Allah notes in the Qur'an, the auditory structure is one of the first to function correctly. Unbelievably, unborn children can feel their hair or raise their pupils. Another point of concern is whether or not sounds are produced in wombs. It is believed that the mother's voice is heard by the embryo floating in the amniotic fluid in the womb.

The practice of performing Athan in a newly-born baby's ears is considered to be Sunnah when the child is born. The Qur'an guides that the first words that a child should hear are, *God is great, there is no God but Allah. Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. Come to prayer* (Gatrad & Sheikh, 2001; [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk), 2009) The children hear the first sentences, they say, they proclaim the beauty and supremacy of Allah. These are the phrases a man says as he embraces Islam. Satan stands out from the voice of Athan. Thus, the boy is called to Allah and glorifies Allah. New-borns are requested to listen to music as a calming device for their academic success or mental relaxation in many hospitals worldwide right after birth. This has been supported even on the official site of UNICEF ([www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)).

### **Language Development**

When we look at language development, we see that there are many different theories about how children acquire language, and we also see that there are many controversies that persist (Assaiqeli, 2013; Jayasundara, 2018). Even so, specialists as well as laymen are struck by the fantastic process itself. Following are some of the leading theories in the field:

#### **Social Cognitive Learning and Behaviourism**

It is widely said that children acquire repeated words, which is the central principle for learning social cognitive psychology. This theory demonstrates the value of social interaction for language learning. Here too, there are two possibilities. One, the focus is on the social-pragmatic aspects of the input (Akhtar & Tomasello, 2000; Bloom, 2000). Two, the indication that child language development is influenced by a 'complex set of relationships among several variables' that involve both the adult and the child (Chapman, 2000).

As the mother talks to her infant, she uses phrases to communicate, and the child can emulate her mother to carry on having fun. If we note that reinforcement happens, it is clear that we are developing baby language in many ways. This suggests that the more people respond to their children's vocalizations, the sooner they master the language (Tamis-LeMonda, Bornstein & Baumwell, 2001). This view of language learning suggests that **need** and **reward** (Ripolles, 2014) are the two prerequisites for language learning. Needs are products of internal and external stimuli and rewards may be in the form of word or gesture, but do play a significant role in the language learning experience of children.

### **Nativism**

Yule (2006) attempts to answer the puzzle of the basis of the existence of language in the human mind and suggests the idea of innateness as potentially a central mutation in human biology. This might not be a natural change, nor one that occurs very quickly. We may not know whether this genetic modification has existed or how it could lead to the physical modifications described previously. However if we take this hypothesis into account, we find our speculation that language origins go away from fossil facts or the physical basis of basic human sounds into analogies about how computers work (for example, they are pre-programming or hardwired) and the analysis of genetics takes ideas. However, this does not necessarily refer to a neuronal network that 'contains' as it were, language related genetic information. This is also **not** what is suggested by Chomsky (Blitman, 2014).

Chomsky (1968) suggests that the human brain is innately wired for language learning. He assumes that also there is a grammatical framework for children to understand the language. This is the universal grammar he calls. According to this hypothesis, listening to spoken language activates the triggering of this structure and encourages more than imitation. Chomsky argues that the vocabulary we typically understand is not sufficient to clarify how all the grammar laws are created that children easily acquire. Chomsky points to the evidence that babies will say things they have never heard, for example, "The cats eated the mouses" rather than "The cats ate the mice." It is assumed that babies have never heard adults saying "eated" or "mouses," and therefore, they could not just be imitating language they have listened to. Though, we can observe that, even if the first sentence is grammatically wrong, it could be correct in some respects. In English, we do add *-ed* for the past tense and *-s* for plurals. We have exceptions to this rule, however, called irregular verbs or nouns. This process is called

over-regulation, which acts as if irregular words follow the rules of the regular, which in fact, is not the case. Certain terms are produced only by children and Chomsky argues that the fundamental rules of grammar are inherent (Levine, 2010).

In the light of Chomsky's theory of the innateness of language, it is important to note what the Qur'an says

**Then Adam received from his Lord words...**

**(2-The Cow, 37)**

فَتَلَقَّى آدَمُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ ۗ إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٣٧﴾

Can we even begin to imagine how mankind would have survived had they been deprived of this unique ability to of speech. The Quran's states that the first human being was taught to speak, that Adam was given the gift of speech. Man is born equipped with the mental capacity, with an ear ready to hears, and a complex oral mechanism to express himself. Coincidences cannot account for the perfect and complex creation of our ear, mouth and tongue. To all these, however, has to be added the endowment by our Creator of the potential a priori faculty of speech.

### **Interactionism**

This hypothesis of the production of languages implies that the physical readiness of the infant combines with the interactions of the child in his community in order to improve his vocabulary. In other words, when the human mind meets with the right conditions of language acquisition, it acts like a trigger and the mind responds to the stimulus, leading to language production. Referring to the Holy Qur'an,

“O Adam, give them their names.” When he told them their names, He said: “Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of the heavens and the earth? I know whatever you reveal and whatever you conceal.”

**(2-The Cow, 33)**

قَالَ يَا آدَمُ أَنْبِئْهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ ۗ فَلَمَّا أَنْبَأَهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمَاوَاتِ

(33) وَالْأَرْضِ وَأَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ

So clearly, the Qur'an recognises the fact that interaction with real language is the means to ensure language acquisition.

### **Caretaker speech (Motherese)**

The characteristically simplistic way to communicate is known as caregiver's expression for someone who spends a lot of time engaging with a small child. The standard actions of adults in the home setting definitely encourages children to understand their language. Adults like mothers typically have a basic sentence form and repeat a lot. An example of caretaker speech is as follows;

Mother	:	dekho 'look'
Baby	:	touches the picture
Mother	:	ye kya hai? 'what is this?'
Baby	:	vocalizes a babble and smile
Mother	:	ye billi hai. 'this is cat'
Baby	:	vocalizes and smiles
Mother	:	han, billi hai. 'yes, this is cat'

### **Crying**

Babies start crying just after birth. As we hear babies crying, we begin to discover the reason and make attempts to stop it. Interestingly, communication starts when babies start learning that crying can do something as a signal that can provide them relief from hunger, discomfort, and loneliness.

### **Cooing**

Around two to four months after birth, children start producing happy noises (Menn and Stoel-Gammon 2005). Because of their physical background, the noise they make is limited, but it sounds like cooing doves. Children continue to participate with parents in the pre-language 'talk' (Tamis-LeMonda, Cristofaro, Rodriguez and Bornstein, 2006). The series of actions are as follows: the child, parents are talking; the kid is happy and laughing; parents are smiling and talking. In this way, long before they talk, infants begin to use vocabulary (Levine, 2010).

### **Babbling**

Typically infants begin babbling at six months and stir for a long time. It is made up of a long string of vowels and consonants. The babbling value is it is used primarily as a preparation for

corresponding expression. Secondly, mutual rewards or pure enjoyment for babble children (Jannedy et al. 1994:268). You build strings of pairs of consonants, such as:

Ma-ma-ma-ma

Ba-ba-ba-ba

Da-da-da-da

Sometimes these combinations are seen very long da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-da-

### **Gestures**

Children start using gestures, such as showing or pointing towards something, at about 8 to 12 months of age. They may tell or show something which they need.

### **One word or holophrastic stage**

Young children will be driven to their first vocabulary by babbling. Their first sentences are babbling (Menn & Stoel-Gammon, 2005). According to Stubbs, "Holophrases define early childhood terms" (1995:379). When babies communicate using isolated phrases, treating each phrase as a sentence (called Holophrastic communication), the words they use -are characteristic of people, objects, animals and other important and common locations. Very soon, their vocabulary expands, bringing in other useful words.

Following words have been observed as examples;

abba:, ba:ba: 'father'

amma: *or* ammi: 'mother'

da:da: 'grandfather'

du:dh 'milk'

pa:ni: 'water'

### **Two-word stage**

Children can produce two-word utterances around two years of age, but this can vary (earlier or later) in some children. This is a remarkable stage in the life of a child. During which the child acquisition begins quickly after the one-word stage. Now, the child can produce two-element utterances and makes the semantic relationship between them.

ammi: du: dh 'mummy milk'

da:da: acche 'grandfather good' grandfather is good

pa:pa: biskiT 'Papa biscuit'

There can be an absence of syntactic or morphological markers during this stage, that is, no derivation or inflection for number or person or tense or gender. The child may address a feminine gender as masculine or masculine as feminine.

### Telegraphic stage

There appears to be no triple-word sentence level (Jannedy et al. 1994:276). If a child attempts to string more than two sentences, the expressions maybe 3, 4, 5 or more. We say that infants employ telegraphic language as the notable feature of their language use at this stage is the selection of content words, dropping the function words, much like the language that was used in writing telegrams. In other words, children at this stage are already aware that only using content words can convey most of the message.

Telegraphic speech	Instead of saying	Gloss
me a:m kha:ya:	<i>mene</i> a:m kha:ya:	'I ate mango' -the absence of ergative - <i>ne</i>
du:dh frij me de do	du:dh frij me <i>se</i> de do	'Give me milk from the fridge' -the absence of postposition <i>se</i>

After two years of age children rapidly acquire words and develop other linguistic skills like; grammar, semantics, pragmatics etc. The process of learning begins at schools. Children start learning other language skills e.g. reading and writing.

The Holy Qur'an also talks of the 'names' as being the primary component of language. Indeed, the words that were taught to Adam were 'names' or content words, the very first words that are produced by young infants.

And He taught Adam all the names. Then presented them to the angels, saying: "Tell Me the names of these if you are truthful."

### (2- The Cow, 31)

(31) وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

### Conclusion

The query how the first man in this land learned a sentence. The Qur'an verse can be spoken about

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

And He taught Adam all the names (of everything), then He showed them to the angels and said, "Tell me the names of these if you are truthful." [Qur'an - 2:31]

When the children start acquiring their mother tongue, they learn the grammar and phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic rules. No one teaches these rules, but they are pre-programmed with innate capacity, a gift from Allah.

This paper has endeavored to establish the relevance of Qur'anic verses as parallels to modern ideas of early language acquisition. The Qur'an, as a fountainhead of knowledge, has enunciated on diverse subjects including astronomy, anatomy and geology. The current study establishes its relevance in linguistics and language learning as well. Religious philosophy is a reflection of human life, and nowhere is this more obvious than in the Holy Qur'an which offers answers to numerous questions that relate to mankind. It once again establishes the infallibility of the Qur'an as an immense ocean of knowledge.

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