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Alternative Paradigm for Language Acquisition

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Abstract

In order to have a balanced judgment on language process views, the research tries to explain the mental process connection in the language learning process. The deep structure and surface structure theory designation indicated that the learning process consists of two procedures: deep structure process, which is the essential part in absorbing and captivating activities and surface structure which concentrates on symbols and codes in expressing the mind's activities. These procedures have been emphasized by modern and traditional scholars in highlighting the concept of the language learning process.

Keywords

Learning Process, Acquired Knowledge, Mentalist, Surface Structure, Deep Structure

1. Introduction

To understand how knowledge is acquired, we have to uncover/understand the mysteries of the mental process when receiving a language. In exploring the organization of the mental process, we have to understand the acquired knowledge through the learning process and the inter-neutral connection strength that is used to store the knowledge. In order to signify the above discovery, Poersch (2005) suggested some questions that need to be taken into consideration. In the research analysis, these questions assist in explaining how knowledge that is coded in the brain (a physical substance) is transferred to the mind (a spiritual substance). What explanation can be given to that fact that speaking and writing are a serial sequence of sounds or letters? How does thought (an abstract part) become language? The linguistic sign results from the association of a concept and a sound representation, hence how do they activate one another in the mind? To answer these questions, we have to review

some language theories from Modern Sciences and early Islamic scholars. In Modern Sciences, the philosophical backgrounds on behaviorism and mentalism will be accounted. As for early Islamic Scholars, textual evidence will become the primary source of analysis for the research. However, to understand how knowledge is acquired we have to uncover the mysteries of admissible hypothesis (Chomsky, 2006). It seems that language is the method to explore the organization of mental process.

2. Modern Sciences Approaches

As mentioned above, modern sciences can be divided into two approaches; behaviorist and mentalist. Behaviorist paradigm is based on the empiricist philosophy, which emphasizes the senses and experience in order to approach the process of knowledge acquisition. It denies the existence of the mind as a mental activities, to them knowledge is learned through stimulus and response (Sapir, 1921; Bloomfield, 1933). If that is the case, then the brain is merely a blank box, denying the existence of the mind and its activities. So how is knowledge transferred to the brain? All knowledge that we acquire is learned, which means knowing how to acquire correctly responds to stimulus, such as in the case of Jack & Jill by Bloomfield, the dog by J. B. Watson and the cat by Thorndike.

The Mentalist paradigm emphasizes the role of the mind in the cognitive process (Chomsky, 1995: pp. 47-55). The mind and the brain are two realities of different substances, the first is spiritual and the second is physical. The cognition is processed through the inborn rules hypothesize through the representation of the world in the mind by serial processing of abstract and fixed symbols (Poersch, 2005: p. 165). Chomsky believes that this process proposes the inborn existence of the mind through the cognitive process that has been influenced by the surrounding. The brain contains thousands of neurons connected and constituted of a body and two kinds of filaments that are responsible for the net formation; the axon and the synapse. The axon is electrical transmitters connecting a neuron body to synapse and other neurons. When an axon reaches a dendrite, there is a space in which chemical reactions are processed. The synapse reactions are responsible for learning process (Poersch, 2005: p. 168). As a result of the above case, the synthesis of philosophical grammar and structural linguistics that were introduced by mentalist begin to refute the behavioral sciences that are not sciences of the mind, avoiding the metaphysics issues, but discover the procedures apparently. Language is the mirror of the mind, it constructs data with innate property, then called "universal grammar". Thus, Chomsky believed that to understand the deep structure in generative grammar, the mental process is needed in order to explain the evolution of human language (Chomsky, 2006: pp. 107-108).

3. Early Muslim Scholar

In discovery, what is language? Islamic Scholars discussed thoroughly. They can be divided into three groups. Firstly, Islamic linguists who adhered to the orthodox school who argued that the only authoritative source for Arabic language was Quranic text. Secondly, the rationalist school who claimed that the Arabic language was a result of cultural convention, meaning classical Arabic such as poetry founded as an authoritative source. Thirdly, the linguists' opinions not base on textual scriptural evidence, but on logic (Ibn Faris, 1997). Those who came from orthodox schools argued that human speech evolved from acts of mental activity. To them, language is inspired and thus preceded by thought and later acquired by convention (habit). However, Ar-Razi, in his *al-Mahsul* investigated the one who established speech. He explains that words can signify meanings either by themselves or by convention and in either case the act of institution maybe of human or divine origin or both (Versteegh, 1997). The question among them was, is the origin of speech revelation or convention? Abu Ali al-Farisi believed that it came from God's words. This idea has been supported by al-Akhfash and Ibn Jini. Ikhwan as-Safa, in their theory of sound and meaning, assume that speech is sounds produced in consonant; they articulate and signify intelligible meanings from different places of articulation. The lowest place of articulation of the consonants is the back of the throat, which is continuous to the top of the chest. The sound from the lungs is the home of the air. The origin of the sound is air in the lungs, which ascends until it reaches the throat and then it is turned around by the tongue. They assumed that if the sound came out in articulated and composed consonants then its meaning is recognized, but if the sound came out without consonants, it would not be understood (Versteegh, 1997). If we look at the different views between modern sciences and Ikhwan as-Safa about the production of sound or language, we find that they are similar; however, the sound station is different (Yaacob, 2013). The Ikhwan as-Safa alleged that it started from the lungs where the home of air is composed; whereas the modern views in behaviorism theory believed that the mechanical process in producing the sound

came from the articular of a human being, which is based on stimulus and response that is dependent on human behavior and his environment. However, the concept of language production theory by rationalist highlights the power of the mind in articulation of consonants and its meaning. The idea in connecting the sound of language and the brain compartments have been discussed by al-Farabi. For example, the word *mantiq* means logic, it is derived from word *nutq,* which means speaking/pronunciation; distinguishing between exterior and interior speech, which is a demand on the value of reasoning. He tried to build up the relevance of logic in grammar when he developed the logician's point of view towards studying Arabic grammar as mentioned in his book *Kitab al-Huruf* and *Ihsa' al-Ulum*, he explained that sounds are symbols of thought and the letters are symbols of sounds (al-Farabi, 1996).

4. The Arabic Language Transmission Process

In order to faithfully reflect the transmission language process of Arabic, in explaining the meaning of each word, language usage as reflected in the earliest manuscripts need to be thoroughly examined and analyzed. Sibawayh states in this respect (Sibawayh, 1999) that Classical Arabic possessed eight cases, namely the accusative (*nasab*), the genitive (*jar*), the nominative (*raf'*), the apocopate (*jazm*), the a-vowel (*fath*), the i-vowel (*kasr*), the u-vowel (*lam*) and the zero-vowel (*waqf*).

In other words, we need to synthesize these conceptsas formulated by Arab logicians and grammarians which emphasize the unique characteristics of the Arabic grammar. The originality of al-Jurjānī as a rhetorician is evidenced in the way he linked his view on meaning as the determining factor in the quality of a text to a linguist dimension by considering it not in isolation but always as realized within a coherent text composition or cohesive unit (*nazm*). This is a key notion found in both his works, *The Intimations of Inimitability* (*Dalā'ilal-'Ijāz*) and *Secrets of Eloquence* (*Asrār al-Balāghah*), where he defined this principle in purely linguistic terms (Versteegh, 1997).

In other words, even those who attained the highest level of eloquence in Arabic were bound in producing a coherent sentence by combining individual words in the correct sequence followed by establishing their meaning as part of the whole. Although the grammarians concentrated on the functions of the words, al-Jurjānī argued that it was meaning which determined the quality of style and observed that it would be absurd to attribute eloquence to expressions as such. He reasoned as follows (Al-Jurjānī, 1960):

Know that whenever you look into this (*corruption of taste and language*) *you find that there is one cause for incorrectness*, *namely their assumption of the expression which brought them to its attributes*, *these all being attributes of the expression and they were left* (*as such*) *without distinguishing between that which was self-descriptive and those attributes which are gained by the meaning* (*of the entire expression*)[1].

Al-Jurjānī maintained that there is a large semantic difference between sentences verbal sentences wherein the verb always expresses movement and the nominal form of the participle, which expresses a state (Al-Jurjānī, 1960):

The next division (*in the nuances of the predicate*) *is that between an assertion in the form of a noun and that in the form of a verb. This is a subtle distinction which is indispensable in the science of rhetoric. The explanation is that the semantic role of the noun is to assert a meaning about something without implying its constant renewal, whereas it is the verb's semantic role to imply the constant renewal of the meaning that is asserted of something. When you say "Zayd is leaving"* (*zaydunmuntaliqun*), *you assert his actual departure without making this departing something he constantly renews and produces. Its meaning is just like in the expression "Zayd is tall"* (*zayduntawīlun*) *and "Amr is short"* (*'Amrunqasīrun*). *You do not make length and shortness of stature something that is renewed and produced, but just assert these properties and imply their existence in general. In the same way you do not intend in the expression "Zayd is leaving" anything more than that this is asserted of Zayd*[2].

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[1]The original reads as follows:

واعلم أنّك كلما نظرت وجدت سبب الفساد واحدا وهو ظنهم الذي ظنوه في اللفظ وجعلهم الأوصاف التي تجري عليه كلها أوصافا في نفسه ومن حيث هو لفظ وتركهم أن يميّزوا بين ما كان وصفا له في نفسه وبين ما كانوا قد أكسبوه إياه من أجل أمر عرض في معناه

[2]The original reads as follows:

"وإذا قد عرفت هذا الفرق فالذي يليه من فروق الخبر بين الإثبات إذا كان بالاسم وبينه إذا كان بالفعل وهو فرق لطيف تمس الحجة في علم البلاغة إليه. وبيانه أن موضوع الاسم على أن يثبت به المعنى للشيء من غير أن يقتضي تجدده شيئا بعد شيء، وأما الفعل فموضوعه على أنه يقتضي تجدد المعنى المثبت به شيئا بعد شيء فإذا قلت: زيد منطلق. فقد أثبت الإنطلاق فعلا له من أن تجعله يتجدد ويحدث منه شيئا فشيئا بل يكون المعنى فيه كالمعنى في قولك: زيد طويل وعمرو قصير. فكما لا يقصد ههنا إلى أن تجعل الطول أو القصر يتجدد ويحدث بين توجيهما وتشبيهما فقط وتقضي بوجودهما على الإطلاق. كذلك لا تتعرض في قولك: زيد منطلق لا كثر من إثباته لزيد"

The importance of semantics as presented by al-Jurjānī was taken up by al-Sakkakī (d.1229C.E.) the author of *The Key of the Sciences* (*Miftāh al-'Ulūm*) in which he introduced the term of literary science ('*ilm al-adab*) consisting of syntax (*ṣarf*), grammar (*naḥw*) and rhetoric (*bayān*). He explained the importance of these three areas of linguistic study as follows (Al-Sakkaki, 1983):

Know that the science of meanings follows the properties of the constructions of the language in conveying information, *and the connected problem of approving and disapproving these*, *in order to avoid mistakes in the application of speech to what the situation dictates by paying close attention to this*.

Sakkakī defined rhetoric as "the knowledge of the expression of one meaning in different ways by referring to it more or less clearly which serves to avoid mistakes in the application of speech to the full expression of what one wishes to say" (Versteegh, 1997). In other words, the discussion of semantic elements needs to be related to the technical grammatical aspects of language.

The opinions of al-Jurjānī reflect his general dissatisfaction with the way linguistics were developing at the time. He appears to have been considerably critical of the traditional Arabic grammarians and their preoccupation with sentence structure (word order) and meaning. His opinion was shared by Ibn Maḍa' who lamented over the grammarians useless morphological exercises and theoretical discussions that had nothing to do with the living language (Ibn Maḍa', n.d.).

The importance of meaning can be easily demonstrated by way of relating it to the grammatical rules of declension and agency. The following number of examples taken from the most authoritative text of the Arabic language, the Qur'an, may suffice at this point. The first example is "If only You would give me respite for a little while, then I would give alms and be among the righteous" (*law la akhkhartanīilaajalinqarib fa-usaddiq-waakunmin al-sālihīn*)[3]. The word "be" (*akun*) signifies an expressed wish of a future state and not a state which has resulted by fulfilling a condition. As such, the determining agent is not related to speech (*lafẓi*) but to meaning (*ma'anawi*). This view was supported by al-Zamakhsharī (Hasan, n.d.).

Another example demonstrates the established rule of the accusative cause causing the removal of genitive (*al-hazf 'ala al-khāfiĺ*) which means the removal of the genitive as a result of the accusative case dominating the governee (*ma'mul*). According to Ibn Malik (Ibn 'Aqīl, 1998), the accusative case on the governee causes the removal the genitive in speech is based on the meaning as exemplified in "And Moses chose out of his people seventy men for our meeting" (*waikhtāramūsāqawmahusab'īnarajulan li-miqātinā*)[4]. *Ikhtāra* here governs *qawmahu* in terms of meaning, the original governor *min* having been left out. However, al-Akhfash al-Saghīr[5] argued that in such case "to remove the genitive is not a must but it permissible in order to avoid an ambiguity" (Ibn Aqil, 1998,). This argument was applied in the case of *baraytu al-qalama al-sikkīn*a which is correctly expressed *baraytu al-qalama bi-al-sikkīni*. The transitive verb *baraytu* is a governor, *al-qalama* a governeeof *baraytu* and *al-sikkīna* a governeeof the removed original governor in the genitive case. However, Sibawayh (1999) argued otherwise, namely that the cause of the removal of the genitive lay in the fact that the preceding verb acted as governor. This view was shared by Abu Hayyan (Al-Andalusī, 2001).

5. Conclusion

The article presents views on how language became the first data of human biology input as mentioned by Poersch. This means that the human biological capability is innate and inherits the possession of language intuitively and instinctively. In addition, Chomsky's theory on language mentioned that language acquisition can be divided into two: surface structure and deep structure. He believes that the deep structure process only covers the intuitively and instinctively process of the language process called universal. Whereas, the surface structure is only the paraphrase expressions that need to be well understood in order to symbolize the expression verbally. These views have been discussed by early Islamic scholars who categorized language as *malakah* (competence) and *Qudrat* (performance) in expressing deep structure process by using the method surface structure. This idea has been refined and revised by modern scholars in order to have concrete opinions toward the language process diagnosis.

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[3]*Al-Munāfiqūn*: 10.

[4]*Al-A'rāf*: 155.

[5]'Alī bin Sulayman al-Baghdādī.

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