

Reflections upon the Role of Input Prosody for Language Acquisition

Anne-Christine Bredvad-Jensen
Department of Linguistics and Phonetics
Helgonabacken 12, S-22362 Lund, Sweden

ABSTRACT

In my paper I will reflect upon the role of input language for the child's language acquisition and development. Tentative results will be presented at the symposium in May.

During the last three decades focus within the the child language area has shifted considerably, from analysis of syntax as such, to a more context and reference sensitive analysis. A result of this change in perspective is the growing interest in input language, the speech which the child hears, not only as a model for his own speech production but also as a tool for interaction between child and adult. This might reinforce the importance of communicative intent as a major trigger for the child who starts to use language. By using language he will find that he often may influence the world around him in an easier, more efficient and economical way than before.

Also, the child's need for a well defined and well known context as a facilitating means for language acquisition, will be supplied by contextually constrained play formats, such as peekaboo and nursery rhymes, or restricted routine procedures at home, such as changing nappies. Within these restricted formats it will be easier for the child to grasp the meaning from the situation directly and so connect it with language. The importance of these play/routine situations has been put forward by Bruner 1985, Söderbergh 1988 and Waterson 1991.

This view on child language acquisition will emphasize the role of the adult. It is important that the adult is an attentive and listening person, willing to negotiate with the child in order to help the child both to become clear as to his intents and to dress them in a suitable speech costume; a costume which will meet both the linguistic as well as the pragmatic and cultural requirements in the society.

The adult's support for language acquisition in a restricted format (book reading) is analyzed within the framework presented above, both verbally, prosodically and the way they are interrelated to each other. Special attention will be given to turn taking devices and attention getters.

REFERENCES

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